

India's presidential palace unfit to withstand quakes

Neither the Indian presidential palace nor Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's office are insulated from earthquakes, the chief of India's federal housing department warned Saturday.

N. Krishnamurthy, director-general of the Central Public Works Department, said a team of experts is to examine the British-built Rashtrapati Bhavan, the official home of Indian President K.R. Narayanan.

The team will also examine the structural strengths of the parliament house, Vajpayee's office, and other seats of the national government located in a complex near the red-stone palace, Krishnamurthy said.

"Although these stone structures are by and large safe, there is every possibility of the buildings getting

damaged as they do not follow the modern day safety norms," he said of the structures built in the 1930s.

Indian authorities are in a state of panic since January 26 when a tremor measuring 7.9 on the Richter scale killed 25,000 people in western India and flattened tens of thousands of modern buildings and apartment blocks.

According to the meteorological department, both the presidential palace and Vajpayee's office are sitting atop a earthquake-prone seismic fault.

Krishnamurthy, who is in charge of all state owned bungalows and houses here, said all buildings of national importance in New Delhi will be examined and strengthened if necessary.

Most Indian towns and cities are planning to start similar exercises on buildings of importance.

200 activists of radical Islamic group held in Pakistan

Police have arrested around 200 activists of a radical Islamic group, Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) ahead of next week's execution of one of its supporters over an Iranian diplomat's murder, officials said yesterday.

Police also detained SSP head Azam Tariq from the group's headquarters in the Punjab provincial town of Jhang, they said.

"The crackdown was launched on late Friday to preempt any unrest" over SSP activist Haq Nawaz's hanging, a senior police officer said.

The officer, who preferred anonymity, confirmed police conducted raids in key cities of Lahore, Gujranwala, Rawalpindi, Faisalabad, Multan and Bahawalpur.

"So far about 200 people have been detained" in central Punjab, he said.

Pullout from Eritrea is complete: Ethiopia

The United Nations said Saturday the Ethiopian government had reported the completion of its troop pullout from Eritrea, paving the way for the deployment of UN peacekeepers between the neighbouring states.

If confirmed, the completion of the withdrawal process would mark a major advance for peace in the Horn of Africa following the deaths of thousands of soldiers in last year's bitter border war.

"The United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea has received notification from the government of Ethiopia that it completed the redeployment of its troops on 22 February," UNMEE said in a statement.

The redeployment began on Tuesday when 1,000 troops accompanied by tanks and heavy artillery, constituting the bulk of the Ethiopian forces in the south-central Senafe region, began moving back towards the Ethiopian border.

The withdrawal is a key element of a peace accord between Eritrea and Ethiopia which was finalised in December following a ceasefire agreed to last June.

The pullout coincides with the setting up by UNMEE of a 25 kilometre (15.5 mile) wide buffer zone along the Eritrean side of the border designed to separate the two armies, which first went to war in May 1998.

UNMEE said it would seek to verify Ethiopia's claims on Monday, the deadline set under an agreement in Nairobi earlier this month for Addis Ababa to complete the withdrawal of its troops.

Ethiopian troops had been in the country since they launched a major offensive there in May 2000.

Under the agreement, Eritrea is slated to move its forces to the northern boundary of the buffer zone, known as the Temporary Security Zone (TSZ), by March 3.

Contact with abductors

firm three engineers of which are being held hostage for ransom, were seen waiting at the Betchhari army camp. The British High Commission representative reiterated his government's long standing policy not to submit to any ransom demands.

At the moment, all negotiations are being conducted by Kalparanjani Chakma and Archeamedis Chakma, Chairman of Mahalanchhari Union Parishad. The administration is supposed to provide the required logistics.

Earlier in the morning, GOC of Chittagong range Major General Abdul Matin held a meeting with the high officials of security forces at Guniapara Betchhari army camp.

Security personnel have been kept on high alert for intensified rescue operation and all possible escape routes sealed off, sources said.

D-8 summit

Istanbul on June 15, 1997.

The Cairo Summit, they said, will also focus on opportunities as well as risks of globalization. The D-8 leaders are expected to call upon developed world for a more equitable distribution of benefits of globalisation and addressing the needs of the people living in abject poverty.

The summit will also deal with reform of the international financial systems, open and equitable multilateral trading system, information and communication technology, reducing the economic and social disparity within the member states and adequate flow of ODA from the Developed to the Developing Countries.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the current Chairperson of the 3-year-old economic bloc, will deliver a statement at the inaugural session at Al-Tahrirya Palace.

She will also hand over the chair of the D-8 to Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. The one-day Summit will end today after adopting the Cairo Declaration.



Cabinet members saw Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina off at the Zia International Airport yesterday before her departure for Cairo. Hasina will attend the D-8 Summit in Cairo.

JP likely to pay fine

two lakh and the 66 members of the party secretariat were to pay Tk one lakh each.

Sources in the party said their leaders and workers across the country have so far contributed more than Tk one core for Ershad's release but the top leaders are yet to contribute.

Meanwhile, JP Secretary General Nazim Rahman Manzur is due to have a meeting with party leaders from all the districts on February 27 to coordinate the funding.

According to some insiders, there is widespread dissatisfaction among the party men over the 'mysterious role' of a section of party central leaders as regards the move for Ershad's release. These leaders now play 'effective role' in the opposition movement and are unwilling to see Ershad getting back his influence in opposition politics, they said.

Three woman traffickers, notorious criminal held in city

Police arrested three woman traffickers and a criminal in the city yesterday.

Detective Branch of police, acting on a tip-off, raided a hotel in Fakirerpool at about 10:30 am and arrested the three traffickers. They are M Anwar, Swapan and Bacchu.

Police also rescued a woman from the hotel and recovered some fake passports and important documents.

A case has been filed with Motijheel thana in this connection.

Kamruzzaman alias Himel, a notorious criminal, was arrested from Dhalpur under Demra thana at about 11:30 am.

He was wanted in a number of cases, including murder, filed with Demra thana.

Truck owners reject hartal

Bangladesh Truck Malik Samity (BTMS) and Bangladesh Autorickshaw Sramik League (BARSLS) rejected the opposition called countrywide hartal on Sunday and Monday.

They also urged the opposition parties to withdraw hartal for the sake of people's interest.

Leaders of the two organisations in separate press releases said the hartal would only increase the sufferings of the common people before Eid.

Tiny Nayeem

The left-right combination of Patel and Sachin gave India an ideal launching pad, putting on 97 runs in 17.2 overs.

At that crucial stage of the game, Bangladesh however staged a dramatic turnaround with Ashrafal dismissing both openers on the same score.

The star Bangladesh opener, who notched a superb 89, also showed his athleticism in the field by running Sachin out for 50 with an accurate throw from point at the bowler's end. Ashrafal then took an outstanding catch at the opposite side of the field to dismiss left-handed Patel amidst deafening applause from the stands.

But the soaring spirit of the home supporters nose-dived after India found the match-winning third wicket stand of 93 runs between Monish Mishra and Deepak Chawgle.

Deepak, showing his unmistakable ability to punish any loose delivery, scored 46 off 64 balls. A more aggressive Mishra hammered a 61-ball 51.

ASK Varma, who hit the winning runs, remained 21 not out off 26 balls.

Most of the Bangladesh bowlers failed to maintain line and length. Among them was tall right-arm seamer Kowshik, who conceded 40 runs in his first six overs including 14 runs in the second over of the

Seasoned student politicians!

terrorist in the old part of the city Pintu is long past his student life, his academic record shrouded in mystery. There are a number of leaders in the JCD like Pintu.

Other student organisations are not free from this 'ageless leader' syndrome either.

Bahadur Bepari, currently president of the ruling Awami League's student front Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), got admitted to the Department of Pharmacy, Dhaka University in 1985. Fifteen years on, he is still a student, now doing his MBA.

Bahadur has been actively involved in politics from the very beginning of his university days. He started off as a sports secretary of Shahidullah Hall unit of BCL. He was the general secretary candidate of the hall in the last Dhaka University Central Students' Union (DUCSU) election.

He held the post of president of DU unit BCL for about four years before being selected for the top post of the ruling party-backed student body in 1998.

Most members of the central unit of BCL, including its general secretary Ajay Kar Khokon and the vice presidents, have had a similar rise to the top as Bahadur.

JSD-backed Bangladesh Chhatra League leader Karim Sikder has been involved in student politics for well over 20 years now. Sikder's political career kicked off while he was in school. He entered active politics after getting admitted at Rajshahi University (RU) in 1981.

He held some important posts, including that of the RU unit president during his student life.

Now Sikder is the joint convenor of the convening committee of the JSD-backed BCL.

Trees along the Sundarbans

Environmentalists allege that natural collection of shrimp fries causes damage to the fishery resources because the shrimp collectors use net and destroy other fries.

But, there is little campaign against shrimp cultivation in the district now although there was a time when efforts were made to stop shrimp cultivation. Some elite of the district town told The Daily Star that they had initiated a movement but are not getting support from the general people.

People have accepted it (shrimp cultivation) and do not pay heed to any campaign opposing the act, they said.

Police Superintendent of Sathkira Aminul Islam also said that there was hardly any opposition to shrimp cultivation in the district.

Shrimp cultivation also has pushed the price of land up in the coastal areas. Earlier, one bigha of land was sold between Tk 10,000 and Tk 12,000, but now the price has increased to Tk 40,000 to 50,000.

Shrimp is being cultivated more or less in five Upazilas of the district out of total six. According to district fisheries office, a total of 48,000 hectares of land are under shrimp cultivation.

Deadline to free hostages

Khisa, convenor of the UPDF, in a statement yesterday expressed concern and condemned what he said an army raid on hill villages in the name of rescuing hostages.

"The raid points out the fact that the hostage drama is being played by a certain vested interest group in a planned manner to create ground for repression on the UPDF and ordinary people when the process of negotiations continued to rescue the foreigners bypassing local administration and elected representatives," Khisa said.

He demanded an end to army's attack and harassment, release of

villagers and freedom for the three foreigners through peaceful means and negotiations.

Prosit Khisa complained that during the army and police raid on the night of February 22 in some tribal villages of Naniarchar villagers were beaten, harassed and women were subjected to indecent behaviour.

He expressed concern that "such excesses by the army could threaten the lives of the hostages."

Army sources in Dhaka denied the allegation. They said it was a police operation.

In another development, the Bangladesh Society for Enforcement of Human Rights

(BSEHR) accused local public representatives of complicating the hostage rescue operation. They have either failed to negotiate with the real abductors for eight days or kept the administration, people and the press in the dark when they were in a position to quickly end the crisis, it said.

In the statement Advocate Alina Khan, who had conducted an investigation for three days with three other members of the organisation in Rangamati, said that the negotiators should involve the administration in the talks and bring into action government agencies to expedite resolution of the hostage crisis.

Bowlers let Bangladesh down

Although the bowlers eventually let the hosts down, the batting department showed a remarkable skill.

Ashrafal with a brilliant array of strokes enthralled the home crowd. In his enterprising 85-ball knock, the little right-hander clubbed eleven boundaries.

Hasibul Huk, the young wicketkeeper-batsman, also played a defiant knock of 52 not out.

Coming in to bat at number four, the diminutive right-hander shared 88 runs for the third wicket with Ashrafal after skipper Nafees Iqbal unnecessarily ran himself out for 12.

Hasibul struck a couple of boundaries in his workmanlike innings. On the other hand, Sharif smashed the only six in the innings.

State Minister for Youth and Sports Obaidul Quader presented the winner's trophy to Indian captain Parthiv Patel after the final. It was certainly a big prize for the boy from Gujarat, which has recently been rocked by a massive earthquake.

Meanwhile, former India Test player Roger Binny has developed a habit of winning an age-group tournament as a coach.

The hero of India's World Cup triumph in 1983, who last year inspired an Indian team to victory in the Youth World Cup in Sri Lanka, said that the reason behind his success was simple.

"I don't need to teach them about techniques because they are learning it from watching television nowadays. What I always say is be positive in your approach and build partnerships," said the former Indian paceman.

Mishra won the man-of-the-final award for his half-century and claiming the prized wicket of Ashrafal.

Ashrafal, who scored 303 runs in the 10-team meet, was adjudged player-of-the-tournament by the Bangladesh Sports Journalists Association (BSJA).

When contacted, Tejaon police said three organised gangs are involved in terrorist activities in Tejaon area for long. They are Selim group, Hannan group and Raza group.

Selim and four members of his group were arrested in connection with the killing of a policeman in Uttara recently.

Two separate cases were filed in Tejaon thana.

Pakistan discovers 1,500 more dinosaur fossils

Pakistan on Saturday announced the discovery of 1,500 fossilised dinosaur bones from 16 localities in the southwestern Baluchistan province.

The discovery is the "most important" made in the Barkhan area, 320 kilometres southeast of here, within a year, said Ghazanfar Abbas, spokesman for the Geological Survey of Pakistan (GSP).

The fossils have been collected by a senior GSP researcher Sadiq Malkani who discovered the area's first dinosaur fossils in 2000.

Believed to be around 65 to 72 million years old, the fossils were found in Barkhan district by a team of GSP experts, Abbas told a news conference.

The GSP said in December it had found 102 dinosaur bones during a study conducted in the area's Koh-

e-Salman mountain range.

Two experts from Michigan University in the United States visited the site in November and confirmed that the bones were of dinosaurs, the GSP spokesman said.

More bones discovered during three-weeks of excavations are mainly of locomotory limbs of the extinct reptile, he said.

"These discoveries have produced high interest in the local and global geoscientific community," Abbas said.

"With this discovery, Pakistan now stands among the very few countries of the world which have witnessed global events of dinosaur extinction around 65 million years ago," he said.

The fossils are now on display in the Quetta museum which is being thronged by a large number of visitors, he said.

Villagers clash in Sathkira: One shot dead

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sathkira

One person was shot dead and at least 25 people were injured in a clash over enjoying VCR show on Friday evening at Tarali Bazar in Kaliganj upazila under Sathkira district.

The victim was identified as Md Hannan, 20, son of Monsur Ali of village Noapara.

The clash erupted on Thursday at Tarali Bazar between the supporters of Khairul of Tarali and Mithu of Noapara following dispute over sitting arrangement at the VCR show, police and witnesses said.

As a sequel to Thursday's clash, supporters of Khairul beat up two supporters of Mithu on Friday morning.

Later people of Noapara and Kazla villages equipped with deadly weapons attacked the people of Tarali. Both the groups used firearms and exploded hand bombs indiscriminately. One Md Hannan was shot dead during the clash.

Police rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control. Critically injured Arshad Ali and one unidentified person were rushed to Khulna Hospital.

The body of Hannan was sent to Sathkira Hospital for autopsy. A tense situation was prevailing in the area.

A heavy contingent of police was deployed to avoid fresh violence.

Local people said Md Hannan was killed during police firing which Kaliganj thana OC Abdur Rashid denied.

A case was filed with Kaliganj police in this connection.

Iraq can develop N-weapons in 3 yrs: German intelligence

A growing number of intelligence reports indicate Iraq has actively resumed efforts to develop nuclear weapons while the country's Al-Qaim nuclear plant, recently targeted by US and British warplanes, re-opened its doors a few months ago, the paper said, citing BND sources.

A spokesman for Germany's secret service confirmed the newspaper report and told AFP that its concern over the issue "is not new".

In particular, Iraq is seeking to acquire from abroad de-magnetisation material which is necessary in the making of a nuclear bomb.

With the help of imports from India, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia and Jordan, Iraq is re-building sites destroyed during the 1991 Gulf War and could also develop missiles with a 3,000-kilometre (1,900-mile) range by 2005, the report said.

Since mid-1999 Iraq has resumed efforts to build chemical and biological weapons, said the BND, though the country currently possesses only 10 to 20 percent of the conventional weapons arsenal it had during the Gulf War.

US Secretary of State Colin Powell, who arrived in Cairo Saturday on the first leg of a Middle East tour, was unrepentant about the air strikes on Iraq despite heavy Arab criticism.

The death toll from an unidentified disease in the east Indian town of Siliguri, rose to 20 people on Saturday following the deaths of four in hospital.

"We are worried about the situation and are expecting a report from expert teams which visited the place. Everything depends on the report," West Bengal Health Minister Partha De told AFP.

The disease was first detected in Siliguri, 580 kilometres north of the West Bengal state's capital Kolkata, in late January when it claimed a middle-aged man.

De said symptoms of the disease include a high fever which was apparently caused by a mosquito bite.

A 15-member medical team from the World Health Organisation, arrived in Siliguri on Friday.

Local authorities have ordered the clearing of pig and cowsheds from residential areas, drains cleared to destroy mosquito larvae, and all schools in the area have been closed for four days.

However, local residents were leaving Siliguri, witnesses said.

Hartal today, tomorrow

FROM PAGE 1

Bridge, Badda Hossain Market, Azampur bus stand at Uttara, Rokeya Sarani, Gabtali, New Market, Mohammadi Housing at Mohammadpur and Tejaon rail gate.

Its main procession was brought out from in front of the party's central office at Naya Paltan at 6:20 pm. BNP leaders Tariquul Islam, Shahjahan Omar, Gayeshwar Roy, Major Gen (Rtd) Anwarul Kabir Talukder and Abdus Salam led the procession that ended in front of the Jatiya Press Club.

Jatiya Party brought out a torch procession from Purana Paltan after a rally near Kastury restaurant. Jamaat and IOJ held separate rallies and brought out processions from Purana Paltan area in support of hartal.

The alliance has exempted vehicles carrying Hajj pilgrims from the purview of hartal and requested the pilgrims to hang big banners inscribed with "Haji Tariq Paribahan" on the vehicles.

BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan MP in a statement yesterday asked the opposition activists to take necessary measures and extend all-out cooperation to Hajj pilgrims.

Besides, hospital, ambulance, medicine shop, restaurant, emergency water-gas and electricity and vehicles carrying newsmen and law enforcing agencies' personnel will remain out of the purview of hartal.

SAARC Summit

FROM PAGE 12

here, is that India would like to watch Pakistan's response to Vajpayee's recent three-month extension of the cease-fire in Jammu and Kashmir. Interestingly, the three-month period ends in May.

India has consistently maintained that it is ready to resume dialogue with Pakistan if the latter stops aiding and abetting terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir.

If Islamabad demonstrates its capacity to do that in the coming days, the SAARC process, involving the top leaders of the member-countries, could be ready. This would not only give the much-needed impetus to regional economic co-operation but also an opportunity for an engagement between India and Pakistan on the sidelines of the summit, analysts say.

India will have time till May to assess Pakistan's response. Analysts here say a lot depends on whether those wanting an early SAARC summit can persuade Pakistan to help create a conducive climate for Indo-Pak talks and pave the way for a trust to regional economic co-operation from the highest political quarters.