

Tribal leaders urge govt not to build Eco Park on their habitat

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Tribal leaders from Khasia and Garo hills met Dr S A Malek, political advisor to the Prime Minister yesterday in a bid to persuade the government to cancel building an Eco Park there.

The leaders expressed grave concern at the initiative by the government to set up the 'Eco Park' on their ancestral home land in the hills of Muraichhara and Madhabkunda, some 40 and 65 kilometers respectively from Moulvibazar district town. The park is being built by the forest department through a four year development project.

More than one thousand families will be affected if the government proceeds with plans to set up the Eco Park at the present site. The park is being built in the remote Khasi hills with the aim of protecting rare animals and plants species and facilitate tourism in the area.

The project will acquire private land owned by the tribal person that threatens existence of the tribal families who lead a peaceful and quiet life in the hills.

Among those who met Dr Malek were well-known Khasia writer Sanjib Drong, Khasia headman Anil Yang Yung, Advocate Karunamoy Chakma and Garo headman Jotish

Rangsha.

The leaders said that the government has thousands of acres of reserved forest land in the hills of Patharia and Langla, next to the place where the 'Eco Park' is being developed now.

"Then instead of building the 'Eco Park' in Patharia and Langla why target the Khasia and Garo lands?", they asked.

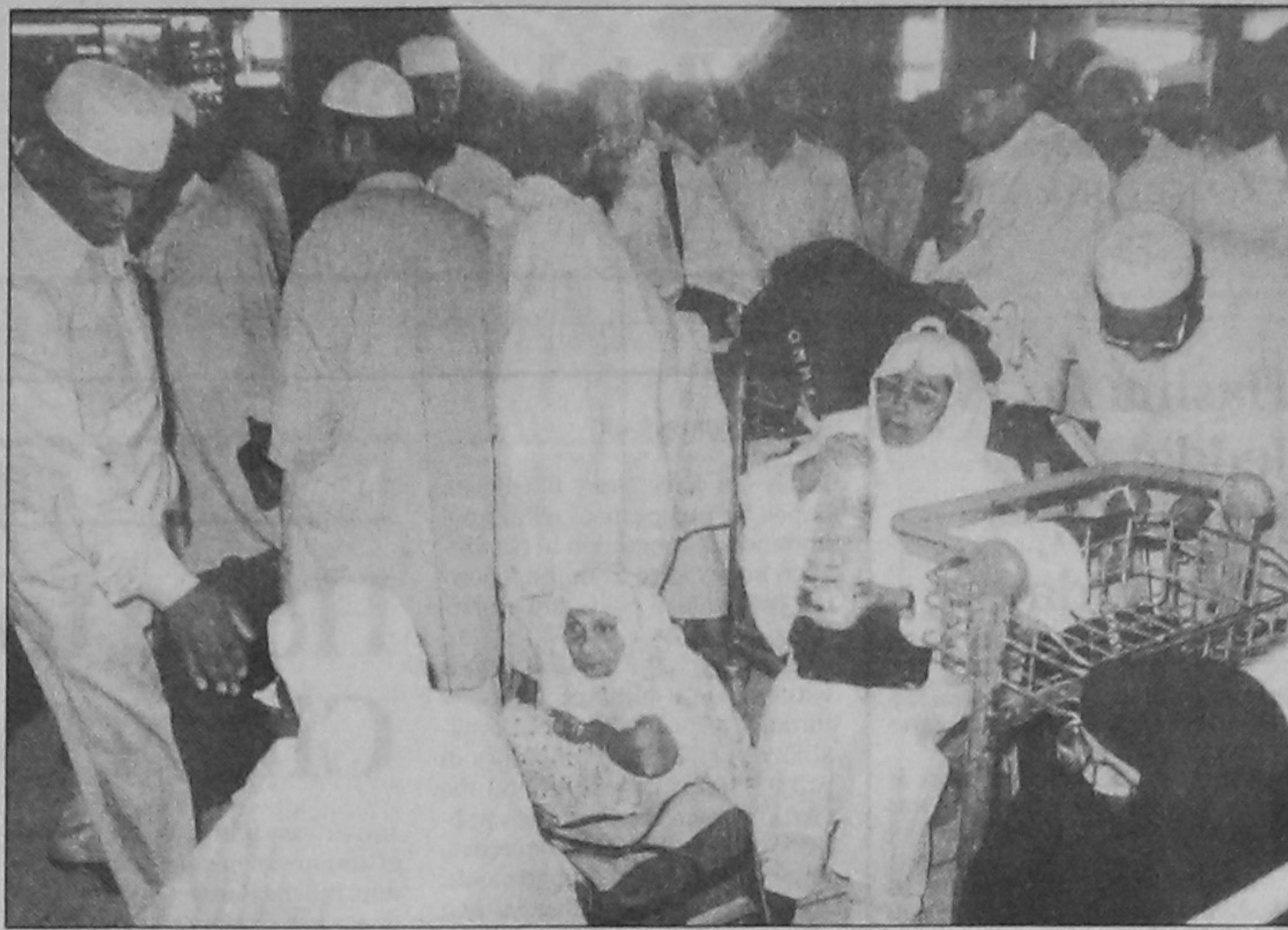
Dr Malek assured the leaders that they will maintain fairness in the decision regarding building development of the park. He asked the leaders to provide him with a map of the area so he can take it up with the Prime Minister.

Dr Malek also said that if necessary he will visit Khasia and Garo hills to see for himself the problems arising out of developing the park at the site.

The park, work on which is already underway, will be completed in 2004. The cabinet in July last year approved the 'bio-diversity' conservation project after the prime minister's consent on March 6.

The cabinet later rejected the Tk 82 lakh acquisition proposal.

A public gathering has been organised by the Khasia leaders in Moulvibazar district on March 10 to build public support against the decision of setting up of the Eco Park in the area.



The cheated pilgrims left for Makkah yesterday to perform holy Hajj under a special arrangement following personal intervention by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Kibria tells DRU workshop Foreign exchange reserves rose to \$1558m till Feb 25

UNB, Dhaka

Country's foreign exchange reserves rose to US\$ 1558.60 million, as of February 25, while government's net borrowings from banking system reduced to half following some fiscal measures.

Giving the figure at a workshop Finance Minister Shah A M S Kibria yesterday felt the reserve position should have been much higher when economy is on a growth track and exports increasing.

He thanked the Bangladesh Bank for its stern measures to check currency trade in informal market, resulting in recent turnaround of the emaciated foreign currency reserve.

The finance minister's remark came in the inaugural session of the two-day workshop on financial reporting, organised by Dhaka Reporters' Unity (DRU) at the Bangladesh Institute of Administration and Management (BIAM) auditorium.

Kibria gave words of advice to economic reporters to uphold their moral values and improve the quality of reporting economic affairs.

Bangladesh Bank governor Dr Mohammad Farashuddin, Finance Secretary Dr Akbar Ali Khan and Economic Relations Division (ERD) secretary Dr Masihur Rahman also

spoke at the function attended by chairmen and chief executives of some commercial banks.

DRU president M Anwarul Haq welcomed the guests while its vice president Abul Bashar gave vote of thanks and general secretary Motahar Hossain Masum moderated.

The government borrowed Tk 1535.33 crore till February 25 compared to Tk 3321.60 crore in January last year. Instead of borrowing from the central bank, the government rather repaid Tk 1205.46 crore to Bangladesh Bank this year.

The finance minister said all indicators of the economy moved positive with revenue growing 22 per cent, export 23-14 per cent and imports 21 per cent. Import duties, VAT at both import and domestic levels, supplementary duties all exceeded their respective targets in July-January period, he told the reporters.

Inflation remained as low as 0.76 per cent on point-to-point basis while the running average for 12 months is 2.58.

He gave credit to farmers, added to Almighty's blessings and government's bold decisions to withdraw import duties from agricultural machinery and expansion of agricultural credits for continued

growth in farm output.

ERD Secretary Dr Masihur Rahman said local press gives too much importance to whatever the development partners say without evaluating their remarks in real perspectives.

Referring to a recent remark by the representative of an international agency on higher education, he said the development partners had not been extending any help to the country's technical and vocational education while the government has long been emphasising such education.

He also contradicted an observation that 7 per cent of the aid money is drained. Whether the money was utilised properly and what results it yielded were not looked into, he viewed.

The Finance Secretary said private sector should be focussed more in economic reports on the media.

He advised the economic reporters to refrain from spreading apprehensions.

The central bank governor said financial reporting gained maturity over the years. He said finding out the reliable source remained the main hurdles for economic reporters.

Far-right parties to join Sharon govt

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel's two far-right parties will join Ariel Sharon's government under an accord giving them three ministerial posts between them, army radio reported Friday.

Sharon's Likud party will hand the post of infrastructure minister to hardliner Avigdor Lieberman of Israel Beitenu, a right-wing Russian party with four seats in parliament.

The ministry of tourism will go to the National Union party with four seats, led by Rehavam Zeevi, a right-winger who has advocated expelling Palestinians from the occupied territories.

These two parties will also share the post of minister without portfolio as well as the presidency of the parliament's law committee, the radio said.

Seven killed

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dead. Firoz, 35, was crushed under the wheels of a speeding truck in front of the Engineer Institution at Ramna at about 2.30 am.

An auto-tempo driver, identified as Jahurul Islam, was hit by a speeding truck in front of Rural Electrification office at Khilkhet in Cantonment police station at about 6 am.

Islam was rushed to the DMCH where the doctors declared him dead.

The bodies of the victims were sent to DMCH morgue for autopsy.

PCP blasts

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Parishad (PCP) in a statement here yesterday.

The Parishad strongly protested the minister's ultimatum to the abductors: free hostages by Sunday morning or face military offensive.

"The statement of the CHT Affairs Minister is undemocratic as it made clear that if necessary, the army would repress or harass all hill people," the student alliance said.

In the press statement, signed by PCP vice-president Elira Dewan and general secretary Champanon Chakma, the Parishad deplored the fact that in last few days army personnel launched operations in different hill villages.

One tribal youth, Jibanmadi Chakma, was also arrested during the raids.

"Panic-stricken hill people are fleeing homes and taking shelter in deep forests, fearing army operation," the PCP said.

They urged the government to solve the problem through negotiation with the abductors not by launching crackdown.

Hajj tomorrow

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authorities have closed off roads leading to holy sites outside the city in a bid to facilitate the movement of pilgrims.

The water department in Makkah began Thursday to pump fresh water to the main sites of the Hajj.

Ten million cubic metres of water, mainly for sanitation, will be supplied over the coming week. Authorities are also planning to distribute more than 10 million bottles of drinking water.

Today, the Hajj which every able-bodied Muslim with the means must carry out at least once in a lifetime moves to Mina, a valley outside Makkah where the pilgrims will be housed in fire-proof tents.

The pilgrims will keep an all-night vigil in Mina, and tomorrow, they will gather at Mount Arafat, 12 kilometres away, to pray until sunset for forgiveness at the site of Prophet Mohammad (SM)'s last sermon.

On Monday, the start of the Al-Adha (sacrifice) feast, the faithful will sacrifice a sheep and start to stone three pillars that symbolise Satan. The "Stoning of Satan" continues for three days.

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3 fish

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According to Shrimp Hatcheries Association Bangladesh (SHAB), the minimum demand for shrimp fry is 300 crore. We won't be able to produce more than 200 crore fries, said a spokesman of the SHAB's Khulna Regional Office.

Rationing system has been introduced only for some selected agents, the spokesman said.

SHAB is supplying fries through their agents. The agents are delivering those at the factory gate, it is learnt.

Mortality rate of fry has also increased due to delay in transportation from Cox's Bazar to shrimp farms in Khulna region, causing financial loss to the farms.

A local agent of SHAB complained against some of its leaders for cheating the government through different tactics and fraudulent means.

SHAB is not utilising Tk 50 crore loan given for increasing production of better quality of fry, some local agents alleged.

New e-mail virus

UNB, Dhaka

A new wild email virus, MYBABYPIC.A, is spreading rapidly through the Internet, according to the Virus Emergency Response Team at Proland Software.

They said the new worm is spreading through MS-Outlook and infects Windows 98 and Windows 2000 systems. Windows 95 and Windows NT users also can be affected if the Visual Basic scripting is enabled.

The worm arrives with the subject: My baby pic!!! the body of the message reads: It's my animated baby picture!!! Infected email carries an attachment called MYBABYPIC.EXE.

When the attachment is executed it displays a picture of a child. On closing this, it drops itself into WINDOWS\SYSTEM directory in various names.

It also modifies Registry entries at: HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\Soft

ware\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Run

HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\RunServices

HKEY_CURRENT_USER\Software\Bugger

Due to this registry modification, worm will be loaded during next windows startup. After this, the worm emails itself to everyone in Microsoft Outlook address book. Sometimes this worm also overwrites files with certain extensions.

The worm is also known as I-Worm.Myba.Backdoor.MyBabyPic.

One can remove this worm from his/her computer by using Protector Plus anti-virus software, developed by Proland Software. The anti-virus can be downloaded.

http://www.protectorplus.com/download/database.htm

One can also download a 30-day evaluation copy from http://www.protectorplus.com/download

Opposition demands Koirala's resignation

AP, Kathmandu

More than 10,000 supporters of Nepal's major opposition parties marched through the streets of Kathmandu yesterday demanding Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala's resignation.

The opposition parties have been demanding Koirala's resignation since one of his Cabinet members was named in a bribery scandal involving lease of an aircraft for the state-owned Royal Nepal Airlines. Tarini Dutta Chataut, the civil aviation minister, resigned from his job in January.

Supporters of the main opposition United Marxist Leninist Communist Party of Nepal, National Democratic Party, Nepal Workers' and Peasants' Party, United People's Front and National People's Front demonstrated through the main streets of the capital, blocking traffic for hours.

Since the winter session of Parliament was convened in the first week of February, the opposition has blocked business in the legislature, pressing its demands for the prime minister's resignation.

Koirala leaves for France Monday on an official visit.

He met opposition leaders on Friday in an attempt to break the deadlock, but no agreement was reached.

"We told the opposition parties that seeking the prime minister's resignation was a political issue and they should not block the Parliament making such demands," Defence Minister Mahesh Acharya told reporters after the failed meeting.

Acharya said the government suggested that the opposition follow parliamentary procedure, such as filing a no-confidence motion.

"It is not only the opposition parties, but members of his own party want the prime minister out of office," said Madhav Kumar Nepal, general secretary of the United Marxist Leninist Party. He referred to an attempt by rebels in Koirala's party who tried to force him to step down, accusing him of incompetence. Koirala has been prime minister for most of the 10 years since democracy was introduced in Nepal under a constitutional monarch.

Drug may have stimulated Shakespeare's genius!

AFP, Johannesburg

Drugs may have stimulated Shakespeare's genius or inspired his contemporaries as they all had access to cannabis and cocaine, a South African scientist suggested yesterday.

Francis Thackeray, a palaeontologist at the Transvaal Museum in Pretoria, led a study which uncovered "suggestive evidence" of cannabis, cocaine and tobacco in fragments of 17th century clay pipes found on and near the site of Shakespeare's Stratford-Upon-Avon home.

"His contemporaries, if not Shakespeare himself, may have used the hallucinogenic substances. They were accessible to them," Thackeray told the news agency.

"Eight of the 24 pipes contained strongly suggestive evidence of cannabis, though this does not constitute proof. The traces of cocaine were a complete surprise."

The findings are only suggestive as substances like cannabis decay with age, he said.

Thackeray said he first developed the hypothesis that Shakespeare

may have been aware of the effects of hallucinogenic drugs while reading Sonnet 76 a few years ago and observing his reference to "noted weed" and "strange compounds."

Last August, Thackeray collected broken pipe bowls and stems, excavated from the foundation of Shakespeare's house and the environs, for analysis in Pretoria.

The fragments were part of the museum collection of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust.

Museum curator Ann Donnelly refuses to accept that the Bard may have been inspired by drugs, reports the British Press Association.

"People love to come up with reasons for saying Shakespeare was not a genius. I don't think there's any proof that he was helped in any way by taking narcotic substances," she said.

The findings of Thackeray and his team Nikolaas van der Merwe from Harvard University and Tommy van der Merwe from the South African Police's forensic science laboratory have been published in the latest issue of the South African Journal of Science.

Lanka hopes for SAARC summit this year

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka Friday said it hoped it could hold a summit of the seven-nation South Asian group that is plagued by squabbling between two arch rival member states, India and Pakistan.

Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar said he was hopeful that a summit could take place anytime before the end of this year as all member states had agreed to the first step of an official level meet.

The South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) Foreign Secretary-level meet should be held by May, Kadirgamar told reporters here Friday.

Sri Lanka which currently holds the rotating presidency of the SAARC has been trying to get India to agree to an early summit. The last summit was in July 1998.

A summit was due to be held in the Nepalese capital Kathmandu in November 1999, but India has opposed it in protest at Pakistan's

military ruler General Pervez Musharraf's seizure of power in October 1999 in a coup.

SAARC groups Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Factory fire hurts 15 in Indian

AFP, New Delhi

At least 15 workers were injured Friday when a fire broke out in a chemical factory in the western Indian state of Gujarat, the United News of India reported.

The news agency quoted Tata Chemicals Limited company officials as saying that a fire reduced a "major portion" of its factory in Meethapur to ashes.

According to the report, the fire was sparked by a blast in the factory's power generation boiler room.

The Tata Chemicals is the largest producer of soda ash in India.

VHP for armed resistance Against ISI, missionaries

AFP, Guwahati

A radical Hindu group called Friday for the formation of armed resistance groups to counter the twin threats of Christian missionaries and Pakistani intelligence operatives in northeast India.

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council) said Hindus in the region were threatened by an influx of Bangladeshi migrants, militant groups backed by Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI), and the spread of Christian missionaries.

"It is high time for the Hindus to arm themselves in self-defence against the evil designs of the ISI and the Church", VHP president Ashok Singhal told journalists in Silchar, 340 km south of the Assam state capital Guwahati.

The VHP leader claimed that alleged intimidation by ISI operatives and persecution by missionaries in the predominantly Christian northeastern states had forced some 1.57 million Hindus to leave the region out of fear and settle elsewhere in India.

"The demographic profile of the northeastern states has been altered with the influx of migrants from Bangladesh, besides both the church and the ISI aiding and abetting secessionist militancy in the region," Singhal said.

More than 30 per cent of the total 30 million population in the seven northeastern states are Christians.

"The northeast could become another Kashmir or Chechnya if harsh action against the militant-church nexus is not taken immediately", Singhal said.

They oppose force

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have condemned abduction of the foreigners who came here to help development of the area.

"Applying force could cause harm to the hostages. Local leaders must be involved in the process of reaching a negotiated settlement for release of the three engineers," he said.

Tripura said more than three years after the signing of peace accord, peace is yet to be established in the CHT region.

A number of people said the Rangamati-Khagrachhari road has been a den for criminals for more than three years.

They mentioned that the Deputy Commissioner of Khagrachhari was stopped by gunmen on his way to Rangamati and local MP Dipankar Talukdar was stopped by some miscreants on the same road last year. Both the DC and the MP were allowed to go unharmed but ordinary citizens are frequently subjected to various terrorist activities. They further said that since long, they were apprehending "something serious" such as the abduction of foreigners.

Charu Bikash Chakma, a 73-year-old tribal leader and former convener of Tribal Convention, said that Chairman of the CHT Regional

Council Shantu Larma should have been involved in the process of negotiations for release of the hostages.

He thought that confrontation between the Jana Sanghati Samity (JSS) led by Larma and the United People's Democratic Front (UPDF) has taken a serious turn since the peace accord was signed. UPDF opposes the accord.

Charu Bikash went on, "If there is an army action, it would endanger the lives of not only the hostages but also of innocent tribal people."

President of Rangamati Chamber of Commerce Kazi Nazrul Islam said businessmen have been the worst sufferers due to deteriorating law and order in the region.

There are both political and economic reasons behind abduction of the foreigners, he said. "The incident is a threat to the peace accord and ransom should not be paid for release of the hostages."

Bhabo Shanti Khisha, a village leader of Nimra Kingal in Kalapahar area, where the abductors are believed to have kept the hostages, said the incident has created panic in the area. There was never any problem involving foreigners in this region and the kidnappers have caused a big damage to reputation of the tribal people, he added.

Bullet-injured truck driver dies at DMCH

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A truck driver, who received bullet wounds on Wednesday evening in front of Bangladesh Government press quarters at Tejgaon, died at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital on Thursday night.

Alamgir, 25, was shot allegedly by Kiron group while he was sitting at a teastall in front of BG press quarters. Local people took him to DMCH in a critical condition.

Alamgir died at about 8:30 pm on Thursday. The body was sent to the DMCH morgue for autopsy.

Jahangir, brother of the victim, filed a case with Tejgaon thana accusing Kiron and ten others.

Tremors jolt Gujarat again

XINHUA, Gujarat

Four tremors of varying magnitude, having epicenter in Bhuj, were experienced in parts of Gujarat yesterday.

According to the Meteorological Center in Ahmedabad, the first tremor with the highest magnitude, measuring 3.8 on the Richter scale, was recorded at 3:58 am.

Mine blast kills Bangladeshi near border with Myanmar

BSS, Bandarban

A woodcutter was killed and two others injured in a landmine explosion near the Bangladesh-Myanmar border yesterday, police said.

They said woodcutters Md Idris, 22, died and Sayed Hossain and Futia were seriously injured when the mine went off near Bangladesh-Myanmar border pillar no-53 in village Pairchari of Dochari union in Bandarban district.

Police said about ten woodcutters were killed in landmine explosions in the area over the last three months.

Withdraw PSA case against Patal, demands Khaleda

UNB, Dhaka

BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia has condemned the filing of case against her party's publicity secretary Fazlur Rahman Patal MP under the Public Safety Act.

In a statement yesterday, she demanded of the government to withdraw the case immediately.

Khaleda accused the government of unleashing repression on opposition leaders and workers by filing 'false cases' against them across the country.

Court allows Khol to pay fine to avoid trial

AP, Berlin

A Bonn state court has approved a deal allowing former Chancellor Helmut Kohl to pay a fine and avoid a criminal trial in his party's financial scandal, court spokeswoman Susanne Ulbert said yesterday.

Under the deal, an investigation into possible breach of trust charges will be closed as soon as Kohl pays a 300,000 mark (dollar 140,000) fine. Kohl's lawyers already have said Kohl would accept the deal.

The probe was launched by prosecutors in Bonn, the former German capital where Kohl governed for 16 years, in January 2000 after Kohl admitted accepting illegal campaign donations when he was chancellor and leader of the Christian Democratic Party.

A parliament committee is still looking into allegations that decisions in Kohl's government were bought, which he has denied.

Dacoits

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The gang also beat up members of the family and took the keys of almirahs at gunpoint. They then looted Tk 1.5 lakh and 206 tolas of gold ornaments worth Tk 14 lakh from the house.

A case was filed with Khilgaon police station in this regard. None was arrested in this connection till writing of this report last night.

Mahmud Ali

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Bangalee he fought for the Pakistan Army as one of its members against the country's War of Liberation.

He also confessed to being present at the Dhaka Radio Station on the fateful night of August 15, 1975, the day Bangabandhu was brutally killed.

Besides, he stated that as per the directives of Khandker Mustaque Ahmed he arrested Tajuddin Ahmed, the country's first prime minister who headed the Mujibnagar government. Tajuddin Ahmed was killed in Dhaka Central Jail along with three national leaders on November 3, 1975.

The Ministry of Information also urged the foreign ministry to pursue the matter with BBC and warned of terminating an agreement under which Bangladesh Betar regularly broadcasts 11 and a half hours of BBC programme everyday day on FM band.