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SAARC summit in Kathmandu Jan 4-6

REUTERS, Kathmandu

The 11th summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) will be held in Kathmandu from January 4 to 6, a Nepalese government official said yesterday.

The summit was due to be held in Nepal in November 1999, but postponed indefinitely at India's request after a military coup in Pakistan that brought General Pervez Musharraf to power.

"It (the summit) will be held in Kathmandu from January 4 to 6," a senior government official, who

asked not to be identified, told Reuters that a formal announcement was expected shortly.

Nepal had proposed the new dates for the summit at a meeting of the SAARC standing committee comprising foreign secretaries of the member nations in Colombo, Sri Lanka, earlier this year.

"All countries have now agreed to the dates proposed by us," the official said.

AP from Colombo adds: Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar told the Sunday Times that Colombo will

hand over the chairmanship of SAARC to Nepal at the summit to be held January 4-6.

Sri Lankan president Chandrika Kumaratunga has been chairwoman of the regional group since the last SAARC summit was held here in July 1998.

Foreign Ministers of SAARC nations are likely to meet in New York at the United Nations General Assembly session scheduled for later this month, the newspaper also said.

Founded in 1985, SAARC comprises India, Pakistan, Bangladesh,

Bhutan, the Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka, the group's current chairman, has been trying to revive the forum, which has been hamstrung by tensions between India and Pakistan over the disputed region of Kashmir.

SAARC plans to establish a free trade area in the region.

Currently under the South Asian Preferential Trading Arrangements (SAPTA), members provide between 20 and 100 per cent tariff cuts in regional trade on 5,550 products.

US showers over 100 bombs on Taliban frontlines

AFP, Islamabad

US warplanes yesterday launched the heaviest strikes of their four-week old Afghan campaign, showering northeastern frontline positions with more than 100 bombs.

US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, on a tour of the region, told reporters in the Uzbek capital Tashkent that "the effort to deal with terrorist networks is proceeding... at a pace that is showing measurable progress."

The raids came after Osama bin Laden, the chief target of the campaign to punish the September 11 attacks that killed some 5,000 people in the United States, lashed out at the United Nations as a "criminal" organisation.

Fierce fighting was reported in the seesawing

battle between bin Laden's Taliban protectors and opposition Northern Alliance for control of the key strategic city of Mazar-i-Sharif, in the north.

A new airstrip built by anti-Taliban forces with the aid of US military advisors near Gulbohar, north of Kabul, opened for business yesterday when a plane successfully landed and took off.

Military sources said the plane, which from a distance appeared to be an Antonov twin-prop light transport plane, landed at the dusty Sherkat airstrip at around 3:00 pm local time parked for around 15 minutes and took off.

Rumsfeld was speaking after meeting Uzbek President Islam Karimov, who is allowing US troops to run search-and-rescue and humanitarian missions from his country.

There is speculation the Pentagon may also want to run combat operations from there, but Rumsfeld refused comment, saying it was up to the Tashkent to disclose what assistance was being offered.

An AFP reporter in Dasht-i-Qalah reported at least 100 explosions on Taliban frontline positions near the border with Tajikistan.

B-52 heavy bombers, which first saw action in the current campaign on Tuesday, carpet bombed Taliban frontlines over a 50-kilometer stretch, he said.

The B-52s hammered hillsides where the Taliban were dug in, producing immense curtains of black and gray smoke and explosions that shook nearby villages.

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Zimbabwe arrive today

SPORTS REPORTER

A 14-member Zimbabwe team arrives in Bangladesh this morning to play two Tests and three one-day matches.

But the Southern African nation will be carrying a strikingly different team that toured this part of the world two years back.

They will be carrying a new captain in off-spinner Brian Murphy, a new coach in former Australian opener Geoff Marsh and some inexperienced cricketers.

However, the Zimbabweans will once again heavily rely on the batting brilliance of the Flower brothers - Andy and Grant - and a persevering Heath Streak, who has recently quit the captaincy.

The tourists will fly into the capital aboard an Emirates flight at around 9.30 am straight from

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Confidence building in S Asia needed to face terrorism

DIPLOMAT CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at an international conference yesterday called for confidence building measures (CBMs) to be shored up to enhance security and development of South Asian countries.

They suggested that all governments play a proactive role and that new confidence building measures be mapped out to rise against the new phenomenon of

terrorism fuelled by hatred, rivalry and arms race afoot for long in South Asia.

In the backdrop of a nuclearised South Asia, the confidence building measures have now become more important than ever.

Organised by the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) in collaboration with the German Embassy, the conference on its second day yesterday had three sessions.

In one session, Prof. M Shahiduzzaman of the Department of International Relations, Dhaka University, presented a paper titled "Building Confidence and Cooperation between Bangladesh and India in the Security Realm."

Prof. B Rahamathulla, of the Department of Political Science, the Aligarh Muslim University, presented another paper. Ambassador and Chairman of the BISS Shafi Sami moderated the session.

In an earlier session on the theme - "India and Pakistan: Confidence Building and Security Cooperation" - three papers were presented by Dr Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, president of the Islamabad Policy Research Institute, Dr SD Muni, professor of

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BIWTA yesterday demolished 23 illegal structures along the river Buriganga at Fatullah in Narayanganj. It could not demolish eight such structures due to court order to maintain status quo during the drive to recover foreshore of the river.

PM's directive Deploy Armed Police Battalion in city to curb terrorism

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday directed the Home Ministry to take necessary steps to combat terrorism across the country.

The prime minister also directed the ministry to Deploy Armed Police Battalion in Dhaka city and, if required, at night to contain terrorism.

The directives came when Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury and State Minister for Home Lutfuzzaman Babar called on the prime minister at her office. She also asked them to gear up police patrol.

IMF team due Nov 8 to talk bailout measures

Bangladesh Bank to defer payment to ACU

INAM AHMED

The Bangladesh Bank (BB) is going to defer payment to the Asia Clearing Union (ACU) due this month in view of the low foreign exchange reserve position.

The pause will provide a short breather for the time being, but in the process Bangladesh will have to make two payments at a time around January, sources said. It will also have to pay interests at LIBOR on the withheld tranche.

This is the second time that payments will be rolled over although many countries in the region, specially Pakistan, had opted for such deferment because of a low reserve. The foreign exchange reserve was barely US\$1.08 billion at the opening of yesterday's business.

Meantime, the government will sit with an IMF Article IV mission scheduled for November 8 to discuss the bailout measures. Luis Valdivieso, advisor of Asia Pacific

Department of the IMF, heads the mission.

During its 10-day visit, the IMF team will have intensive meetings with the ERD on debt and foreign aid issues, with almost all ministries including energy on gas export and subsidy issues, with the Privatisation Commission on the government's privatisation programme, with the IMED and

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