

Peres opposed to severing contacts with Arafat

AP, Jerusalem

Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres said in an interview published yesterday that he is opposed to the government's severing of contacts with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and that some of Israel's military strikes made him "shudder."

Peres told the daily Yediot Ahronot that in an emergency Security Cabinet meeting this week he tried to persuade Prime Minister Ariel Sharon that breaking off contact with Arafat would leave Israel with few options.

"I asked him (Sharon), 'Suppose Arafat disappears, what will happen then?'" Peres told the newspaper. "If we chase Arafat out of here, we will

get into problems with the Arab world, and Egypt and Jordan will sever ties with us."

The Israeli decision to cut ties came early Thursday, in response to a West Bank bus attack by the Islamic militant group Hamas that killed 10 Israelis.

The Security Cabinet said Arafat was directly responsible for the violence and "therefore is no longer relevant to Israel, and Israel will no longer have any connection with him."

Israeli Justice Minister Meir Sheerit explained that there would be no more contact with Palestinian Authority bodies, and meetings of Israeli and Palestinian security commanders under the mediation of US envoy Anthony Zinni would cease.

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Victory Day

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from tributes to the Liberation War martyrs by placing wreaths at the National Memorial at Savar at daybreak.

The President and the Prime Minister have already given separate messages on the occasion. Leader of the Opposition in Parliament and Awami League President Sheikh Hasina has also given a message.

Victory Day receptions will be held at the Bangabhaban and at Bangladesh missions abroad.

Different socio-cultural and political organisations have taken up special programmes to observe the day.

Awami League's programmes include hoisting the National Flag and party flags atop party offices, placing wreaths at the National Memorial and at the portrait of Bangabandhu. AL will also organise rallies and cultural programmes which will begin on December 24 and continue till the end of the month.

Bangladesh Betar and Television will broadcast special programmes. Newspapers will publish special supplements highlighting the significance of the day.

The government will also arrange special discussion meetings and symposiums on the occasion.

Bangla Academy and Shilpakala Academy will arrange cultural programmes. Documentary films will be screened for schoolchildren in different areas of the country.

Special diet will be served in hospitals, prisons, orphanages and vagrant centers. Special prayers held in all mosques, temples, churches and pagodas.

The government will also accord reception to freedom fighters and arrange Victory Fair at district and upazila levels.

Transport workers

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transporters (Dhaka-Khulna) and local minibuses.

The letter, signed by General Secretary of the Union Binoy Chandra Sen on December 8, requested the owners association to pay the amount by December 12.

Another union at Natun Shahar Bus Stand, Madaripur, demanded similar amounts of toll on the same plea.

A letter from it said the union leaders at a meeting decided to give 'allowances' to unemployed, disabled and other distressed members of the union.

For this, each inter-district transport has to pay Tk 200 to the union office at Sadhur Bridge by December 14, said the letter signed by General Secretary of the union Karim Hawlader on December 10.

When contacted, chairman of the owners association A S M Ali Khair Chand said they received such letters.

"We are harassed like this every year. We complained to the higher authorities, but no action has been taken so far."

He further said, "No buses are allowed to ply unless we make the payments in advance. In fact, we have already paid to Faridpur Union and we are preparing to pay the others."

Another leader of the association said, "There are at least 12 other points where we have to make payments. These include Talma in Rajbari, Jessore town, Khulna town, Satmatha in Bogra, Sirajganj and Naogaon."

He continued, "We have to make a separate budget of at least 10-15 lakh taka before each Eid for payment of illegal toll."

Meanwhile, transport owners are passing the cost on to passengers, charging them extra money on top of the regular ticket fares, sources in the transport owners association at Saidabad said.

Ticket prices at the terminal have been raised for all routes. Fare for buses bound for Sylhet, Chittagong, Comilla, Noakhali, Feni, Brahmanbaria, Narsingdi and other eastern districts have been raised without any announcement.

Thousands of passengers are

being forced to pay an additional Tk 50 to Tk 150 per ticket depending on the route.

"Why should I pay extra. I am not going a single extra mile?" asked an angry passenger heading for Comilla.

During a visit to Saidabad Bus Terminal Thursday, this correspondent found hundreds of buses being halted by a gang of toll collectors at different exit points.

The toll collectors refused to talk to The Daily Star and went about threatening bus drivers and helpers of grave consequences for non-payment.

One of the toll collectors Selim however said, "We are collecting the toll as Eid bonus for about 50 watchmen who work here in shifts."

On-duty police simply looked on as the illegal business went on openly and were reluctant to take any action despite requests from passengers.

"We are not a party to it so it is not our job to intervene in their business," said one police officer refusing to give his name.

Shajian Mia, another toll collector at the main exit said, "I have instructions from my bosses to collect the money and deposit the total amount everyday to the Samity (association) office."

Such illegal toll collection began Sunday at the terminal, the second biggest in the country handling more than 800 buses everyday.

But some Transport Owners Association leaders said they had no idea about the matter.

At the office of the Sramik Union of Saidabad Bus Terminal the General Secretary of the Sramik Union Md Alamgir Hossain said, "I have heard about the illegal toll collection but it is really not possible on our part to verify who are the elements involved."

"But as per decision of the Dhaka Sarak Malik Samity, we are realising Tk 50 for each of the long-distance buses as Eid bonus allowance. All bus helpers, bus conductors and other transport workers would be paid Tk 200 each from the collected money."

Bangladeshi battery

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Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury requested his Indian counterpart Murasoli Maran last month to drop anti-dumping case against lead acid battery import from Bangladesh and resolve the issue as per the provisions of SAPTA. Despite this, India finalised the notification.

When contacted, Commerce Secretary Suhel Ahmed Chowdhury said, "The move is confusing to us. We were expecting some positive gestures from India but they have given a totally wrong signal."

He went on, "We are working sincerely to improve our bilateral relations as far as trade is concerned. But now, the whole thing has become confusing."

The Indian authorities unilaterally decided to impose the anti-dumping duty citing alleged non-cooperation from the biggest battery manufacturer in Bangladesh—Rahimafrooz.

The Indian side alleged that the Bangladeshi battery exporter did

not comply with the anti-dumping investigation requirement. "The exporter also expressed reservation regarding giving consent for verification visit by the Indian investigation team to their premises for on the spot verification of the information submitted by them," Directorate General (DG) of Anti Dumping & Allied Duties of the Indian Ministry of Commerce and Industry informed Bangladesh High Commission in Delhi in a letter.

But Bangladeshi exporters bluntly rejected the allegations. Besides, the basis of non-cooperation charge is not covered by the anti-dumping investigation rules, local battery manufacturers said.

They also said the DG's attempt to impose anti-dumping duty will nullify the terms of preferential trade and tariff preference given under SAPTA and duly accommodated within the legal regime of WTO.

Two Indian companies demanded initiation of an anti-dumping investigation and imposi-

tion of anti-dumping duty on battery export to India from Bangladesh, based on which the investigation was launched.

Exide Industries and Amara Raja Batteries Limited filed the petition alleging that a large number of lead acid batteries were making their way into India from Bangladesh, Japan, Korea and China due to easing of import restrictions and bringing import of lead acid batteries under open general licence.

Young man murdered in Khulna

UNB, Khulna

An unidentified youth was murdered on Govt BL College campus in Daulatpur yesterday.

Police recovered the body from Dr Zoha Hall at about 11 am. The body bore marks of injury.

Police sent the body to hospital morgue for autopsy.

Pakistan-based militants

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since Islamic militant suicide fighters hijacked planes and crashed them into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on Sept 11.

Singh said India's demands of Pakistan "are in accordance with necessary international obligations and commitments in countering terrorism."

Pakistan yesterday demanded that India provide evidence to back up accusations that a Pakistan-based Islamic militant group staged the suicide attack.

Foreign ministry spokesman Aziz Ahmed Khan said the government couldn't act on the basis of accusations alone.

"Pakistan is against terrorism in all its forms and manifestations," Khan said. But, he said, "they have to provide us with some evidence. We will examine the evidence and then decide what should be the next step."

"President Musharraf and the government have already condemned the attack," Khan said.

Yahya Mujahid, spokesman for the Lashkar-e-Tayyaba, responded from Islamabad to Singh's comments, saying, "It's a pack of lies."

"The attack was sponsored by India itself," he said. "The whole drama was staged to malign Kashmir's Islamic groups and to involve Pakistan."

Singh would not reveal the evidence India claims to have against the militant organisations, but said it had been shared in consultations with the United States and other countries.

"There are obvious difficulties in revealing the evidence right now," he said. "The agencies of government have many means of obtaining intelligence."

US President George W Bush offered the use of FBI and State Department terrorism specialists to find those responsible when he telephoned Prime Minister Atal

Behari Vajpayee to express America's solidarity with India on Thursday night.

Reuters says, India was preparing its response yesterday to an unprecedented guerrilla attack on its parliament, having vowed to "liquidate the terrorists and their sponsors, whoever they are, wherever they are"

The ruling BJP party pushed Vajpayee yesterday to follow the lead of the US strikes on Afghanistan in responding to the suicide attack on Indian parliament.

In a clear reference to possible counter-insurgency raids across the disputed Kashmir border with Pakistan, BJP spokesman VK Malhotra said India should adopt a "pro-active and hot-pursuit policy" in Kashmir.

"The way the United States went into Afghanistan, the government should also take similar steps," Malhotra said.

"These views were expressed by a majority of BJP MPs when they met the prime minister this morning," he added.

AFF says Indian police yesterday were checking all entry points into New Delhi and frisking some people entering the capital.

"More police personnel have been deputed to all entry points into the city to check incoming and outgoing traffic," said a police official.

People coming into the city were being frisked "at times" and their vehicles and some registration numbers were being noted and checked, the official said. "We are on red alert and checks are being carried out to ensure such incidents do not happen again," he said.

Security was also stepped up around key buildings in New Delhi.

A defence ministry official said the Indian army was providing security cover to the official residences of the president, prime minister, home and defence minis-

ters and the leader of India's main opposition party.

Police in India's border state of Rajasthan said Friday they had arrested two Pakistanis on charges of spying this week, according to AP.

The men—both of whom possessed Indian passports had been in the country for 18 months and were accused of using the Internet to pass information about military installations to Pakistan's intelligence agency, Rajasthan's director-general of police, Shantanu Kumar, said yesterday.

Dacoity at a house in Ctg

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Dacoits looted money in cash and gold ornaments worth a total value of around Tk five lakh from a house in Roomghata area under Kotoali thana yesterday.

Witnesses said, a gang of five armed dacoits entered the house of Dr. Milton Chowdhury at Sirajuddoula Road at around 1pm. Chowdhury is the director of Laxmi Narayan Cotton Mills.

Keeping the inmates of the house hostage at gunpoint, the gang looted Tk. 4.5 lakh in cash, reportedly the share money of the cotton mills, and gold ornaments weighing about 8 tolas.

The dacoits fled the scene in an autorickshaw. The inmates were able to get the registration number of the three-wheeler and informed the police of it.

When contacted, Kotoali thana police said they knew nothing about the incident.

Shahriar on fresh remand

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hell again."

Kabir said, "I was interrogated in the JIC for about eight hours. I was kept in a dark and cold room. It was an inhuman psychological torture. I am very sick and may die if I am placed on remand again."

Kabir further told the court that a freedom fighter could never be involved in anti-state activities.

Upon completion of the four-day remand for interrogation, Shahriar Kabir, accused in sedition case, was produced before the CMM's court, Dhaka at 3pm yesterday.

Metropolitan Public Prosecutor Golam Mostafa Khan prayed for a

three-day fresh remand but the court granted only one day. Metropolitan Magistrate Mohamad Siddiq Rahman Patwary passed the order.

Meanwhile, despite a court order Shahriar was not allowed to meet anybody during the four-day remand. The court ordered authorities concerned to allow Barrister Amirul Islam and Advocate Zoyad-AL-Malium to meet Shahriar at the JIC.

Shahriar Kabir, the acting president of Ekattorer Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Committee was placed on four-remand for interrogation on Monday. The JIC comprising DGF1,

NSI, CID, SB and DB interrogated him.

Sources in JIC said he was interrogated for further information regarding video footages seized from him on Bangladeshi Hindus people who claim they were forced to cross into India after October 1 general election.

Shahriar Kabir was detained by the Special Branch of police at the Immigration Desk of Zia International Airport on November 22 on his arrival at the airport from Kolkata. Later, he was shown arrested under the Section 54 of the CrPC.

Nation pays tribute to martyrs

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socio-political, cultural and professional organisations were among the visitors.

President AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury was the first to place wreath at the Mirpur memorial at 5:30 am. He stood there for some time in solemn silence to pay respect to the martyrs.

LGRD Minister and BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan placed wreath at the memorial on behalf Prime Minister and BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia, who is now in Saudi Arabia to perform umrah.

BNP leaders and ministers including Textile Minister Abdul Matin Chowdhury, Food Minister Tariquul Islam, Forest and Environment Minister Shahjahan Siraj, Home Minister Air Vice Marshal (ret'd) Altaf Hossain Chowdhury, Education Minister M Osman Faruk, State Minister for Youth and Sports Fazlur Rahman, State Minister for Science and Technology Lutfur Rahman Khan Azad, State Minister for Cultural Affairs Selima Rahman were also present.

Leaders of opposition Awami League, which led the country to independence, reached the Mirpur memorial at around 8-30 am and placed wreath on behalf of the Party Chief and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina who is now on a visit to the

United States. They later placed wreath at the Rayerbazar memorial.

In observance of the day, AL hoisted the National Flag at half-mast and black flags atop the Bangabandhu Bhaban and all of its party offices across the country. It also placed wreath at the portrait of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at the Bangabandhu Bhaban.

Dhaka University authorities hoisted black flags atop all the main buildings on the campus.

A silent procession of teachers, students, and officials of the university led by Vice Chancellor Prof Anwarullah Chowdhury went to the Mirpur memorial and placed wreath. The university authorities also organised a discussion meeting at the TSC auditorium.

Among others, wreaths were placed by Projanmo Ekathor, Dhaka Reporters Unity (DRU), Ganatantri Party, Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), Bangladesh Chhatra League, Jatiyatabadi Jubo Dal, Jasas, Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal, Communist Party of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Workers Party, Ekathoror Ghatok Dalal Nirul Committee.

Afghan forces say they found Laden's cave in Tora Bora

AP, Tora Bora (Afghanistan)

US-backed Afghan tribal fighters claimed yesterday they located a cave which a top commander said might be the personal shelter of Osama bin Laden and that the world's most wanted man could be inside.

Eastern alliance defense chief Hazrat Ali, also said his troops had surrounded a large number of bin Laden's al-Qaida guerrillas on a mountain ridge in the Tora Bora area in eastern Afghanistan.

He did not specify why he thought bin Laden might be inside the cave, one of several in a gorge where his tribesmen were fighting al-Qaida forces amid heavy US aerial bombing.

The claim could not be independently verified as journalists have been barred from the battle zone.

Bin Laden's location remains the focus of the fierce conflict near the Pakistan border. Some US officials believe he might be hiding there under siege. However, others say he is more likely holed up in another part of Afghanistan or may have even left the country.

A 25 million dollar bounty for bin Laden offered by Washington has heightened the hunt for him. There have been several unconfirmed sightings of the Saudi-born terrorist suspect in the Tora Bora area in recent days.

Earlier yesterday, Ali, relying on running radio reports from the battlefield, told reporters his men had captured, entered and searched the cave. However, later he said they only located it and were trying to capture it.

"There is one cave surrounded

by my forces ... I think there is one place inside where Osama is," he said. Ali gave no further details.

Ali said his forces had encircled al-Qaida loyalists in a small depression on the ridge. A battle for that position was ongoing, he said, and there were many al-Qaida dead and wounded.

"They are surrounded and they cannot escape," he said.

Said Mohammed Pahalawan, a deputy of Mohammed Zaman, who commands another alliance faction, said the depression contained about 100 to 120 al-Qaida fighters who were under attack from the ground and air.

"We have seen the place," Pahalawan said of bin Laden's cave. "The US is bombing the area, but the opening of the cave is safe

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from bombing. The bombs can't reach it."

He said Zaman also was sending forces toward Parachianar, on the nearby border with Pakistan, to search for another batch of al-Qaida forces.

Earlier yesterday, several alliance commanders said al-Qaida forces were falling back and abandoning heavy weaponry after days of intense fighting and devastating bombing.

US fighter jets swooped low over the battlefield and pummeled mountains that separate the Tora Bora and Milawa valleys, where bin Laden's loyalists had operated from a base of caves and tunnels. B-52s bombed from high above.

Alliance forces said four of their fighters were injured when one

bomb exploded too close to their front line.

Meanwhile, hard-line Islamic militants in Pakistan said yesterday that the videotape showing bin Laden chucking about the devastation of Sept. 11 was fabricated by the United States to justify the US military campaign in Afghanistan.

"This videotape is not authentic," said Riaz Durrani, a spokesman of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam, which spearheaded a series of violent pro-Taliban rallies in Pakistan. "Americans made it up after failing to get any evidence against Osama."

Ameeruddin Mughal, a spokesman for the outlawed Harkat-ul Mujahadeen, an Islamic militant group fighting in Indian Kashmir, said the tape showed somebody who resembles bin Laden — not the Saudi terrorist himself. In the age of computers and digital technology, it's not difficult to make a fake video, he said.

"The aim is to prolong the military operation in Afghanistan," he said.

Who did this?

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expressed strong resentment at not finding the flag at half-mast, which is done to show respect to the martyrs.

Later, they staged a demonstration in the area protesting the matter. Different organisations including Muktojodha Sangsad, Bangabandhu Sangskritik Jote and left-leaning Bangladesh Chhatra Union also staged demonstrations there.

Later, they lowered the flag to a half-mast.

One burnt to death

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yesterday morning.

The deceased was identified as Delware Hossain, son of Mohar Gazi of Bonogram under Gopalganj district. The injured, arrested by police, are Sahin, Jahangir and driver Hanif.

The incident took place when a rickshaw passenger Rozi Parveen was heading towards New Market for Eid-shopping at about 9:30am. As her rickshaw reached in front of the ENT hospital on Sat Masjid Road, some muggers snatched away her bag.

As she raised an alarm, local people and pedestrians chased the muggers and threw stones at the auto-rickshaw. As the vehicle tried to speed away it overturned at the Shankar end and caught fire following a spark.

"I heard a bang in front of the gate. I went there immediately and found an auto-rickshaw burning there" a security guard of the hospital said.

Another sources said when the vehicle overturned, angry mob rushed to the spot and set the vehicle on fire after opening the oil-tank.

PM returns today

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ernment at the Rawza Mubarak of Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (SM) in Medina on Thursday.

She prayed to Almighty for the welfare, progress and prosperity of Bangladesh and its people as well as the Muslim Ummah in the prayer session.

The prime minister along with her family members performed Umrah in Makkah early Tuesday and offered fateha at the Rawza Mubarak of Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (SM) in Medina the following day.

She offered special prayers on the holy night of Lailatul Qadr at Masjid-e-Nabbi in Medina on Wednesday.

The PM left for Saudi Arabia on Monday. State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Mir Muhammad Nasruddin and political secretary to the PM Mosaddek Ali accompanied her.

Eid moon sight

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their helping hand to the poor so that none is deprived of the Eid celebration. He also prayed for continued peace and progress of the country and happiness of the people.

While greeting the people, Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia also called upon them to devote to building the nation, being imbued with the spirit of equality and fraternity, the teachings of holy Eid-ul-Fitr.

The main Eid congregation in the city will be held at the National Eidgah Maidan at 8:30 am if the weather remains fair. In case of rough weather, it will be held at the Baitul Mukarram National Mosque at the same time.

Four Eid congregations will be held at Baitul Mukarram at 7:30 am, 8:30 am, 9:30 am and at 10:15 am, said a press release of Islamic Foundation.

Two Eid congregations will be held at the Dhaka University Central Mosque at 8 am and at 9 am. The Eid congregation at the BUET playground will be held at 8:45 am.

The Dhaka City Corporation has made arrangement for women to join the congregation at the Jatiya Eidgah Maidan.

32 murdered

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three in Uttara thanas.

In the wake of rise in the number of killings, the DMP has deployed 25 additional plainclothes police teams to improve the situation.

"Incidents of murder in the capital are rising alarmingly. But those involved in the crimes remain untouched due to their links with the high ups," a human rights lawyer said.

In most of the cases, police cannot make any headway in its action against criminals because of their 'connections' with political parties, police sources said.

There are instances where police officials have been punished for discharging their duty of nabbing culprits," a senior police official said seeking anonymity.

AL plans agitation

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tact with Sheikh Hasina over telephone, sources added.

AL acting president Abdus Samad Azad told The Daily Star yesterday, "we're in touch with our leader (Hasina) who is very worried at total break-down of law and order in the country."

In an impromptu meeting of the AL Central Working Committee (ALCWC) on Wednesday, it was decided that the party will announce its agitation programme after the ensuing Eid-ul-Fitr.

But sources said it is unlikely that AL decides the programme right after the Eid, rather the party will prefer to wait for its leader Sheikh Hasina to return home.

Upon her return, Sheikh Hasina might convene a joint meeting of the party's central committee as well as the presidium and the advisory council.

But until that time, AL leadership will remain busy with the process of nominating party candidates for five parliamentary seats where by-polls will be held on January 17. Besides, senior party leaders will remain preoccupied with the preparations for holding the national convention.

Though the AL contemplated to take other progressive political parties in its side in organising the convention, the plan hit a snag at the very nascent stage of preparatory works.

In separate dialogues with the AL chief, several left-leaning parties specifically regretted to join the proposed convention. They rather

went on with their independent programmes to denounce repression on the minority community in the country.

As the AL wants to project post-poll atrocities allegedly perpetrated by ruling alliance's goons on the opposition leaders and workers as well as the members of the minority community across the country, it formed a steering committee headed by former justice KM Sobhan for the preparations of the mid-January convention.