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People's Right to Know

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India massing troops along Pak border

Exchange of artillery fire across Kashmir LOC

AFP, Jodhpur

Hundreds of tanks and other army vehicles have been moving towards India's western border with Pakistan, army officials and witnesses said yesterday.

An AFP reporter in Jodhpur in the border state of Rajasthan said more than 500 tanks, army jeeps, trucks and medical vans had been seen moving towards the border from Tuesday night to Wednesday night.

According to officials, the frontier with Pakistan has been put on "high alert" since the December 13 attack on Indian parliament by five armed gunmen, who India has identified as Pakistan-based militants backed by Pakistani military intelligence.

Late Wednesday evening, authorities in Jodhpur conducted a "mock blackout" exercise, cutting off electricity in the entire city and reviewing the response of the emergency services.

Officials also said the army has given instructions to the railway authorities that some local and long distance trains may be commandeered for troops movements. Leave for all railway employees has been cancelled.

The transport authorities have also begun impounding civilian trucks and other heavy vehicles.

The Border Security Force (BSF) and the Indian Air Force have been put on high alert and senior BSF officer B D Sharma said Pakistan Rangers had been taking up positions on the other side of the border.

On Wednesday, Indian Army Chief General S Padmanabhan said Pakistan was massing troops along the frontier.

"There is a buildup on the other side. They have moved certain forces in there. Certain forces which should have gone back have not gone back," Padmanabhan said.

Authorities in Pakistani-controlled Kashmir yesterday accused India of firing artillery shells across the tense border amid a dispute over an attack on the Indian parliament.



Indian soldiers stand guard in a trench following reports of movement of Pakistani troops yesterday near Kachriah border in Pallaanwalla sector, 85 kms west of Jammu. Indian and Pakistani troops traded fire over their disputed border in Kashmir overnight.

No post-quake disaster management plan yet

Repeated warnings fall on deaf ear

SHEHAB AHMED

A full fledged post-quake disaster management programme is yet to be developed in the country despite experts' repeated warnings of quake.

The country sits on a quake line, they warned earlier.

There could be an apocalyptic scenario in the event of a quake measuring around seven on the richter scale. The cities would be reduced to rubble, which would be fatal for survivors due to lack of adequate post-quake emergency services, one official told The Daily Star yesterday preferring anonymity.

He said Fire Service and Civil Defence authorities lack equipment to carry out rescue operations and fight big blazes from bursting gas pipes and electric short circuits.

Things will be particularly difficult in case of high rises as those are more vulnerable to quake because of faulty construction, he added.

The fire service in Dhaka city does not have any proper ladder to conduct rescue operation in high rises. It has one ladder which cannot reach beyond six stories. It does not have even a crane.

After a quake jolted parts of the country in which a five-storey building collapsed in Chittagong four years ago, the authorities took note of the situation and decided to make an inventory and draw a



This house (right) at 31 Court Street in Kotwali in the city slightly tilted during the mild tremor in the country on Wednesday.

Musharraf's stopover in Dhaka cancelled

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Pakistan President General Pervez Musharraf's planned stopover in Dhaka on Monday has been cancelled.

A one-line press release issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs late yesterday afternoon said, "Due to change in his travel plan, the President of Pakistan will not be able to make the stopover at Dhaka on December 24."

A high official of the ministry said no further information was available as to the reason for cancellation of the stopover.

Despite heightened tension between India and Pakistan over the

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Vajpayee, Musharraf to join summit, PM told

BSS, Dhaka

SAARC Secretary General Nihal Rodrigo called on Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in the city yesterday evening and apprised her of the preparations for the forthcoming SAARC summit to be held in Kathmandu from January 4-6.

Expressing satisfaction over the on-going preparations for SAARC summit, Rodrigo said he would be happy to welcome the prime minister to the coming summit.

Referring to his recent meetings with Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf, the SAARC secretary general told Khaleda that both the leaders had assured him of attending the summit.

While outlining the agenda of the coming summit, Rodrigo said the focus would be on women and children issues. Laying importance on the issue of poverty alleviation, the secretary-general said SAARC member countries need to work on poverty alleviation through national task force in their respective countries. He went on saying that the work on poverty alleviation could be monitored at the SAARC level.

Lauding "Dal-Bhat" (pulse-rice) programme as initiated by Khaleda Zia during her past tenure as prime minister, Rodrigo said her programme had received appreciation in the SAARC member countries and other nations.

Khaleda suggested that SAARC member countries attach priority to poverty alleviation through enacting law in parliament in their respective countries. She also enquired of the secretary-general about SAFTA.

The prime minister thanked Rodrigo for successfully completing his three-year tenure.

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Tension in Kashmir

1947 Indian independence. Muslims break away to form Pakistan

1948 Indo-Pakistani war over Kashmir. Ceasefire on Jan. 1, 1949, divides it under India, Pakistan control

1965 Second war over Kashmir

1972 Accord to resolve differences without resorting to third party

1989 Muslim separatist rebellion launched in Indian Kashmir

1999 Pakistan-backed intrusion leads to 10-week conflict, taking 1,000 lives

2000 Militants and India attempt to promote unilateral ceasefires

2001 India withdraws ceasefire; near-daily confrontations, new diplomatic tension

At least 35,000 people have died since the start of the separatist rebellion

AFP 201201-klr

Vajpayee won't meet Musharraf during SAARC Summit

AFP, New Delhi

India said yesterday that Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee would not meet Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf next month on the sidelines of a regional summit in Nepal because of Islamabad's "unresponsiveness" on fighting terrorism.

"The question of talking to Pakistan given its attitude and unresponsiveness in taking action against terrorist groups operating from its soil against India really doesn't arise," foreign ministry spokeswoman Nirupama Rao told reporters.

India has demanded that Islamabad take action against two Pakistan-based Islamic militant groups it says were behind a deadly December 13 attack on the parliament in New Delhi.

Rao said incidents such as the

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JCD cadres at DU possess over 100 firearms

Police have a list but 'undone'

STAR REPORT

There are at least 100 firearms including some sophisticated ones under possession of activists of the ruling party backed Jatityabadi Chhatra Dal at the eleven dormitories for male students at Dhaka University, sources claimed.

Police on the campus say they have a list of possessors of the firearms but do not arrest them because of an 'unofficial directive' from higher officials not to nab pro-ruling party activists.

The firearms include Chinese rifle, stengun, shot gun, cut rifle, six shooters, nine MM pistol, point 32 revolver, point 38 revolver, point 22 pistol and pipe guns.

Besides, a huge number of lethal weapons like Chinese Axe,

Chapatee (chopper) and Raamda (machete) are also in their possession, the sources claimed.

The activists keep the firearms to remain dominant in the halls.

These activists are sheltered by their 'godfathers' in the ruling party. Some of them have also links with notorious terrorists in the city, the sources claimed.

Police and BDR raided some of the halls twice since the BNP government took office. But no firearm could be recovered or their possessors arrested. Information were leaked by some police officials who maintain links with the activists for personal gains, police sources said.

Talking to The Daily Star a high official of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) said as law enforcers went to the halls for raid, they found the main gates locked, presumably because the information were leaked. As the law enforcers waited outside the gates, the firearms were stashed at places inside or outside the halls, he said.

Sometimes firearms are taken outside the halls well in advance of the planned raid because their

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An opportunity to recover public places missed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With nearly half the population out of the city during the Eid holidays, authorities have done nothing to recover or properly designate the footpaths, parking area, intersections and other forms of road encroachments, which are now lying abandoned.

City planners and the public in general think that the authorities are missing out on an opportunity to recover these public places from the grip of street vendors and other unauthorised occupiers without having to embark on an eviction drive.

In the process of recovering the public places, the authorities could as well find alternative spaces for the rehabilitation of thousands of hawkers who encroach upon public thoroughfares, parks and footpaths to make a living.

Every ideal metropolis requires about 25 per cent road surfaces, including footpaths and pedestrian crossings, of its total area. But experts say Dhaka has around five per cent road surfaces and a 'substantial part' of these public places are constantly being encroached.

The indiscriminate encroachment is not only eating up thousands of working hours but also exposing the city inhabitants to

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New ministry & its minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has formed a new ministry styled the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, according to a gazette notification issued by the Cabinet Division yesterday.

Biman wakes up

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Biman authorities have asked its station manager at Jeddah, Saudi Arabia to give a report on the off-loading of 16 passengers from a Biman flight to Dhaka on Saturday to accommodate a minister, a state minister and their entourage.

Biman sources here said the manager had to act on a letter from

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