

Pakistan still views China as its trusted friend

Musharraf tells Jiang Zemin

AP, Beijing

Pakistan President Gen. Pervez Musharraf, trying to balance old allies with new responsibilities, said yesterday he still views China as "our trusted friend," even as Pakistan develops closer ties with Washington.

Making his first visit to China since he threw his support behind the US-led war against terrorism, Musharraf told Chinese President Jiang Zemin that close relations with Beijing are "the cornerstone of Pakistan's foreign policy."

"China has been our trusted friend and our relationship has remained time-tested," Mousharraf said. "We are very positive that in the future, also, this relationship, this strategic association and relationship will continue."

China has endorsed the US-led war against the Taliban in Afghanistan and the suspected terrorists they harboured. But Beijing also is uneasy about the sudden US military buildup on its western flank in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asian republics -- regions Beijing regards as key to its security.

Musharraf has helped the US-led international coalition with intelligence, military bases and other logistics support.

At the start of their talks, before reporters were ushered from the room, Jiang did not refer to Pakistan's role in the war but welcomed Musharraf as an "old friend."

"You've made positive contributions to the development of friendly relations and cooperation between our two countries and peoples. We highly appreciate that," Jiang said. "Your visit will serve to vigorously advance our comprehensive partnership."

Later, Jiang and Musharraf presided over the signing of seven economic agreements. They covered power projects, a joint research and development fund, and Chinese loans for copper and gold mining in Pakistan, and for a

Pakistani ministry that oversees affairs in the disputed Kashmir region.

Afghanistan's post-Taliban government was among regional issues that Musharraf also planned to discuss with Jiang, Premier Zhu Rongji and other Chinese leaders, according to Pakistan Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar.

Musharraf's visit to China, a key provider of military hardware and technology to Pakistan, comes amid renewed tensions between Pakistan and India following an attack on the Indian parliament last week.

Gunshots at DU halls

UNB, Dhaka

Cadres of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) fired at least 20 rounds of gunshot in some halls of Dhaka University Wednesday midnight.

Residential students said the firing started at about 2:00 am from Jashimuddin Hall breaking the midnight silence.

After that, more gunshots were heard from adjacent Ziaur Rahman Hall, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Hall and Suryasen Hall.

At present, rival activists and cadres of Monir group are staying at Jashimuddin, Mamun group at Suryasen, Asad group at Zia and Titu group at Bangabandhu halls. However, none was hurt in firing incident.

PM: SAARC

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The SAARC secretary-general congratulated Khaleda on her alliance's emphatic victory in the October 1 elections.

Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister Dr Kamal Siddiqui, Foreign Secretary Shamsher M Chowdhury and SAARC Director Masud Bin Momen were present.

India massing troops

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The latest incidents were reported after Pakistan warned it would take military action against border "misadventures" as India sent reinforcements to the frontier separating the nuclear rivals.

Tensions have risen steadily since the December 13 attack on the Indian parliament which left 14 dead. India has accused Pakistan-based militants of staging the New Delhi attack.

A senior police official said the Indian shelling critically wounded two civilians, including a boy, in their homes in Bandala Mera village in the Samahni sector.

Samahni faces Naushehra in India's part of the disputed Himalayan region, which is claimed by both neighbours.

Three civilians were wounded in the same sector on Tuesday, according to Pakistani authorities.

Sardar Faheem said Indian troops were also shelling villages in Khuratta and Naykali in the Kotli district of Pakistani Kashmir.

AP adds: Indian soldiers in Jammu said they fought and killed five Islamic militants in the disputed Kashmir province yesterday, preventing them from crossing over to India from Pakistan.

The militants tried to cross the cease-fire line between India and Pakistan in the Kerni sector of

Poonch district, 210 kilometers northwest of Jammu, an Indian army spokesman said.

Meanwhile, police and military officials in Muzaffarabad, in the Pakistan-controlled portion of the disputed Himalayan region, said Indian and Pakistani troops exchanged heavy artillery fire across the cease-fire line for several hours over night. They said Indian troops fired on Pakistan troop positions and villages and that three villagers were seriously wounded.

Pakistan warned yesterday it would take military action against "misadventures" along its border as India sent reinforcements to the frontier separating the nuclear rivals.

Foreign ministry spokesman Aziz Ahmed Khan said in Islamabad any provocation or military attack across the border separating the Indian and Pakistani zones of Kashmir would be met with force.

"We are of the firm opinion that all bilateral disputes and differences should be resolved peacefully on the basis of justice and fair play," Khan told reporters.

"However, any misadventures on our eastern border in Kashmir along the Line of Control (LoC) would be met with full force."

India says it has evidence that the attack on its parliament was carried out by two Pakistan-based

militant groups -- Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad -- at the behest of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency.

Khan repeated Pakistan's denial of any involvement.

"The government of Pakistan categorically refutes the allegations made by the Indian Prime Minister (Atal Behari) Vajpayee Wednesday accusing elements in Pakistan of sponsoring the 13th December terrorist attacks on the Indian parliament," Khan said.

Pakistan was "itself ... a victim of terrorism (and) condemns terrorism in all its forms and manifestations," he said.

Xinhua says: The United States on Wednesday urged India to share any evidence it may have with Pakistan about a terrorist attack on the Indian parliament last week.

"We've seen statements by Indian authorities that two Pakistan-based groups, Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad, are responsible for this," State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said at a news briefing in Washington.

"We think, first of all, those two groups have engaged in terrorist activities, but the specific case here needs to be investigated. Indians, I'm sure, will do that," Boucher said.

2 DU students arrested with arms

BSS, Dhaka

Police arrested two students of Dhaka University from the campus and recovered a country-made revolver and five rounds of bullet from their possession on Wednesday night.

A team of Ramna police arrested Habibur Rahman alias Sumon, 25, a resident of Zia Hall and Mohammad Masud Rana alias Masud, 26, a resident of Mohsin Hall from near the University Laboratory School at about 8:45 pm.

Police said Masud is a student of MBA final year while Sumon is a student of BBA final year.

Ramna police yesterday produced them before the Court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate (CMM) and prayed for a five-day remand. The Court granted a one-day remand rejecting bail prayers after hearing both the sides.

A case was registered with Ramna thana in this connection.

Truck driver abducted in Rangamati

BSS, Rangamati

A gang of tribal terrorists kidnapped a truck driver yesterday from Sugarmill area in Kaukhali upazila of the district allegedly for ransom, police sources said.

According to the sources, the terrorists abducted truck driver Mintu Marna, 28, at noon when his truck was being loaded with firewood in a forest near Sugarmill.

The abductors reportedly asked the helper of the truck and labourers working there to pay Taka 50,000 as ransom for releasing the driver.

Shiblu murder 3 white youths in UK jailed

UNB, London

Three white youths have been sentenced to various jail terms for murdering Shiblu Rahman, a Bangladeshi living in the UK.

A gang of white youths stabbed Shiblu Rahman in front of his Rounton residence in London on March 31 this year. He succumbed to his injuries at a hospital on April 1.

The sensational killing created discontent all over Britain particularly among the Bangladeshi community living in Tower Hamlets who raised their voice against the brutal murder.

After eight months of hearing, the Old Bailey Court on Dec 14 sentenced the accused Stephen Hanson to 13 years prison terms and Terry Cooper and Iran Devlin each to nine years.

While pronouncing the judgment, the Judge said the attack on Shiblu Rahman was a hateful act of racists.

President visits

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needs more security and the hurried filing of cases against her.

Azad also pointed out what he said repressive measures and terrorist acts against Awami League leaders and workers as well as chaotic situation in the country due to breakdown of law and order.

The acting AL president said the opposition is an integral part of governance in a parliamentary democracy that cannot make progress if there be acts of repression or harassment on the opposition.

It was learnt that Azad was informed about the president's visit just an hour before he drove in.

Political observers consider the president's visit to Azad's house as a good gesture and it might mark a new beginning in ending the hostile relation between the government and the main opposition party.

It remains to be seen whether the new president takes any follow-up initiatives to narrow the gap between the two sides.

Public places

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increasing air and noise pollution by stagnant vehicles, most of which are faulty and spew poisonous gas.

Officials of the DCC's Traffic Engineering Division say unless the authorities ensure proper use of footpaths and other thoroughfares, the city dwellers would always face traffic congestion that can only get worse.

Ashiqur Rahman, executive engineer of the DCC's Traffic Division, told The Daily Star that the improvement of traffic management in the city depended on how efficiently proper use of footpaths and thoroughfares could be ensured.

He said one of the major causes behind traffic jams in the city is encroachment on footpaths and thoroughfares. The long distance bus services defying all rules and regulations operate from the busiest city centers, blocking roads and streets with huge vehicles for hours together, he added.

Moreover, Rahman said unplanned construction of footbridges should be stopped as they hinder movement of pedestrians as well as other road users at many different city points.

"We have official plans for traffic management in the city but it needs to be implemented for bringing about some discipline on the streets of Dhaka," Rahman said.

In the past, Dhaka City Corporation's various moves to rehabilitate hundreds of hawkers failed miserably, and amidst all these hullabaloo more public places

were requisitioned in the name of hawkers' rehabilitation.

Kader Siddiqui

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ing Kader Siddiqui for taking Tk 15,53,115 as loan from Uttara Bank by submitting 'forged' documents in favour of M/s Sonar Bangla Prokaushal Ltd Company he owned.

Mohammad Ismail Khan, Assistant Inspector of the Bureau of Anti-corruption, Tangail, submitted a charge sheet against Kader Siddiqui on January 25, 1998. The IO also prayed for issuing a warrant of arrest against him and attachment of his moveable property.

Three other accused were dropped from the charge sheet as the allegations brought against them were not proved.

Kader Siddiqui appeared before the CMM's Court, Dhaka on July 19, 1999 after warrant of arrest was issued against him. Since then he never appeared before the court.

AL interviews

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the last date for withdrawal of candidature is December 31.

The ALCWC meeting also discussed preparations for holding the party's planned national convention styled 'Crimes against Humanity' in mid-January.

The meeting was also attended by convener of the convention steering committee Justice KM Sobhan.

FM in London to attend C'wealth meeting

BSS, London

Bangladesh Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan arrived here yesterday to attend the seventeenth meeting of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG).

Besides Bangladesh, the eight-member CMAG include United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Malaysia, Botswana, Nigeria and Barbados.

The day-long meeting is expected to review the recent developments in Fiji Islands and Pakistan. The Gambia and Solomon Islands and other issues of interest to the ministers.

The Foreign Minister will also attend a luncheon to be hosted by Commonwealth Secretary General McKinnon.

Bangladesh High Commissioner to the UK Gyas Uddin and DG (Europe) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Shahed Akhter are the other members of Bangladesh delegation to CMAG meeting.

The Foreign Minister is scheduled to leave London this afternoon for home.

New ministry

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State Minister Major (ret'd) Quamrul Islam who was not allocated portfolio earlier was given charge of the new ministry.

Abdullah Al Noman retained the Ministry of Labour and Employment, according to an official handout.

Earlier, the government as per its election pledge formed the Ministry of Liberation War Affairs and placed it under the disposal of State Minister Redwan Ahmed.

The government earlier named Harunur Rashid Khan Munnu a minister. But he is yet to get any portfolio.

Forced retirement

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forced retirement would be given in phases.

The government is currently examining whether the persons included in the lists had truly joined the Janatar Mancha or are "highly biased" towards the Awami League, the source added.

Sources said a group of officials, including two senior secretaries of the government, are preparing the lists. However, they suspected that some "innocent" officials are being victimised despite the fact that they had not joined the Janatar Mancha.

A number of officials and employees, who suspect that they are also in the list, blamed a former secretary-turned-state minister, who himself was one of the forerunners in the "Janatar Mancha" movement for this.

Talking to The Daily Star, a minister, who did not want to be named, yesterday said none of the official or the employees to be sent on forced retirement are victimised because they had a "highly political outlook" and were biased towards a particular party.

"We want to set an example so that the government servants do not get directly involved in politics and discharge their duties neutrally all the time," the minister added.

Musharraf

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recent terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament, the Pakistan President continued with his scheduled five-day visit to China, proceeding to Beijing yesterday. The major schedules have not been curtailed. Pervez Musharraf will hold talks with Chinese President Jiang Zemin and Prime Minister Zhu Rongji.

The visit takes place marking the 50th anniversary of establishing China-Pakistan diplomatic ties.

It was learnt that an official of the Pakistan High Commission in Dhaka informed the foreign ministry yesterday afternoon about change in Musharraf's travel plan. The Bangladesh mission in Islamabad was also informed of it almost simultaneously.

General Pervez Musharraf was scheduled to make a one hour 15 minute stopover in Dhaka on way back from China.

President Brudrizzo Chowdhury and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia were due to receive the Pakistan President and hold talks with him at the airport lounge.

Pervez Musharraf's brief halt would have been the first stopover by a foreign head of government in Dhaka after takeover by the new government. However, Foreign Secretary Shamsher Mobin Chowdhury told newsmen on Wednesday, "It's stopover visit. It's not a substantive visit."

BIMSTEC meet

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tourism among the member nations. BIMSTEC has also plans to encourage growth of private sector airlines in the region. The members are learnt to be willing to provide concessional air fare and other facilities by reducing "basic operational costs" of private airlines linking the member countries.

More regional travel at economic rates are seen by BIMSTEC members as a way of increasing people-to-people contact, growth of tourism industry with consequent increase in intra-country trade, the sources said.

Peacekeepers in Kabul

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them."

The government said the captured fighters commandeered a bus, one of a convoy transferring more than 150 detainees -- many from Yemen -- to a larger prison in the town of Kohar. But the prisoner who took the wheel lost control and overturned the vehicle.

Seven Arabs died in the initial struggle, and all six guards were killed, a government spokesman said. The Pakistani news agency Afghan Islamic Press reported three more Arabs later died from their wounds, but other sources in the area said only one died during the night.

One Arab and a sergeant of a local paramilitary force were killed in an exchange of fire in the morning.

Some of the dead were buried yesterday in the village of Bugzai, said Faiz Mohammed, a shopkeeper reached by telephone. He said the men still in hiding would be difficult to capture.

"I don't think they will surrender easily," he said.

The area, the domain of Pashtun

tribesmen who always have been outside Pakistan authority, bristled with military vehicles as the hunt intensified Thursday.

Trucks mounted with machine guns patrolled the roads and barren hills along the border, blocking the entry into Pakistan of al-Qaida fighters from Afghanistan.

The prisoners who revolted were among 156 captured earlier this week. They were driven out of cave hide-outs in the Tora Bora region after weeks of unrelenting US bombing and ground attacks by tribal Afghan fighters backed by US and British special forces.

US introduces interim visa procedures

UNB, Dhaka

The US Department of State has introduced interim visa procedures for non-immigrant visas with immediate effect.

The new procedures will delay the processing of some non-immigrant visa applications. As a result, applicants for business, tourist, temporary worker, exchange visitor and student visa will be affected.

Persons with expired non-immigrant visas planning a temporary visit to Bangladesh, particularly over the Eid and Christmas school break, and requiring a new visa to enter the US, may wish to defer their travel plans or should be ready for considerable delay in the processing of their non-immigrant visa, said a special release of US Embassy.

These procedures however apply only to new visa applications, and not to unexpired visas.

There is also no change in application requirements. The main consideration for applicants is to apply as far in advance of the travel date as possible.

As before, the consular section of the US Embassy in Dhaka requires a valid passport, complete application form, one photograph taken against a light background showing the entire face and full head of the applicant, and other necessary documents pertaining to temporary visitors to the US for work, business, pleasure, family visits, or studies.

Shahriar's bail prayer

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election on October 1 and he does not believe in the border between the two countries, the prosecutors said.

"Such activities might destroy the communal harmony and worsen the country's law and order. So we oppose granting him bail," the prosecutors said.

After hearing both sides, the court rejected the bail petition.

About 100 lawyers appeared at the court to assist Syed Rezaur Rahman, the chief defence counsel for the case.

A large number of people, including the family members of Shahriar Kabir crowded the courtroom since morning.

Family members and relatives burst into tears when he was brought to the court. Police were seen struggling to bring the huge crowd under control.

Shahriar was earlier placed on a five-day remand for interrogation in two phases.

Meanwhile, Shahriar Kabir on Saturday gave a judicial statement to the magistrate.

Shahriar was detained by the

Special Branch (SB) of police at Immigration Desk at Zia International Airport on his return from Kolkata on November 22 and later shown arrested under Section 54 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC). No specific case was filed against him till December 7.

Mohammad Shahadat Hossain, officer-in-charge of Airport thana, filed a complaint case on sedition charge against Shahriar with the CMM's Court, Dhaka on December 8.

Earlier, the District Magistrate gave one month's detention to Shahriar under the Special Powers Act (SPA).

Meanwhile, the High Court on December 1 issued a rule on the government asking it to show cause within a week why the detention of Shahriar Kabir under the SPA should not be declared to have been made without lawful authority.

The court issued the rule following a writ petition filed by the writer's brother Kaiandiar Kabir challenging the legality of the detention order.

Holiday hangover

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ters down. The inhabitants had a respite from the notorious traffic snarls in the last few days with the number of pedestrians, rickshaws, auto-rickshaws, minibuses and other modes of vehicles less than normal. The usually crammed buses had plenty of seats for passengers yesterday.

Attendance was thin yesterday at the Bangladesh Secretariat, the headquarters of all ministries and offices of the Republic. However, most of the ministers and top officials were present. Presence in other government offices in the capital was thin.

Sources said only a few staff turned up and stayed at their offices for some hours. However, they were busy exchanging Eid greetings and embracing each other. They also talked about their new clothes and how they celebrate the Eid.

Secretariat sources said there was virtually no wok at the offices. A good number of officers and employees are on an extended leave to spend more time with their village homes "as they find the three-day holiday far from being enough", the sources added.

Although all insurance companies, semi-government offices, autonomous bodies, multinational companies and the offices of local business complexes in Motijheel commercial area, the business hub of the country, opened to business, the staff seemed too inadequate to conduct the normal business.

Presence of officials and employees in state-run banks, post offices, and, in some cases, in private banks and commercial establishments also was less than normal. However, transactions in

banks did go as usual.

The Dhaka Stock Exchange was back in business from Wednesday as trading resumed, but the holiday hangover was very much evident with the thin attendance of brokers.

Though movement of rickshaws, auto-rickshaws and minibuses picked up yesterday, number of passengers was less. Rickshaw-pullers and auto-rickshaw drivers charged higher than usual in an attempt to offset the loss inflicted by the poor number of fares.

Most of the shopping malls, markets, barring those of essentials, remained closed.

There have however been allegations from different areas that the city corporation staffers did not clean the rubbish piled up in dustbins during the holidays.

The holidaymakers have started returning to the capital, though in fewer numbers. Officials and employees, who work in government and private offices, were seen coming back to the city -- some with family members and some others alone -- by train, bus and launch at Gatali, Mohakhali, Syedabad, Kamalapur, Sadarghat and other places in the city.

Vajpayee

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parliament attack "are not propitious to create the right climate for dialogue."

There had been hopes that Vajpayee and Musharraf might meet on the margins of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit being held in the Nepalese capital Kathmandu from January 4 to 6.