

India, Pakistan rush troops to border

Indian elite military force moved to the border; Advani urges US to declare Pakistan a "terrorist" state

AGENCIES, Islamabad

India and Pakistan rushed troops and military hardware to their tense frontier where India said on Sunday three of its border guards were killed in the latest exchange of fire between the nuclear rivals.

The Pakistani army spokesman said its deployment was a response to Indian moves while India's defence minister said its reinforcements were to counter a Pakistani build-up.

"Pakistan is taking appropriate measures to strengthen its defence along the line of control (ceasefire line in Kashmir) and the international border," Pakistani army spokesman Brigadier Saulat Raza told Reuters.

Tensions have mounted between the two countries since a bloody suicide attack on the Indian parliament on December 13 that killed 14 people, including the five

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Indian army tanks being moved by rail from their base in Bathinda in Punjab state towards the Indo-Pak border area in the eastern state of Rajasthan on Saturday.

Dhaka, Yangon to open coastal shipping line

Agreement likely next month

M ANWARUL HAQ

Bangladesh and Myanmar will open a regular coastal shipping service to boost bilateral trade.

An agreement to this effect is likely to be concluded next month during the visit of Commerce Minister Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury to Myanmar, sources said.

Opening of a coastal shipping line will increase trade volume and business avenues between the two neighbours.

The coastal shipping line will

provide sea links between Bangladeshi ports of Chittagong, Cox's Bazar, Teknaf and Myanmar ports of Yangon, Akyub and Maungdaw.

"Bangladeshi business can make a quantum leap if the coastal shipping line is started," said Rashed Maksud Khan, President of Bangladesh-Myanmar Business Promotion Council.

He said there is scope for bulk export of toiletries, medicine, pharmaceuticals, cables and bottled products like Pran and other juices to the ever growing Myanmar

market. A border agreement currently in place between Bangladesh and Myanmar enables trade between the two countries.

Two Bangladesh banks are functioning in Myanmar. Bangladeshi businessmen feel that more favourable trading links can be established to the mutual benefit of the countries by opening up shipping links for bulk movement of cargo.

The two countries had traditional coastal shipping links for

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Cabinet okays ban on polythene bags

REZAUL KARIM

In a major pro-environment move, the cabinet yesterday approved the decision to ban the use and marketing of polythene bags in Dhaka city from January 1, 2002.

The approval came at the weekly meeting of the cabinet with Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in the chair.

The ban is being implemented under the Environment Preservation Law, 1995.

Earlier, two separate moves to stop use of polythene bags -- one by the BNP regime in 1994 and the other by the Awami League government -- failed due to internal and external pressure.

While approving the decision, the cabinet observed

that excessive use of thin polythene bags is seriously polluting the soil and water and adversely affecting the environment and the bio-diversity.

Cabinet sources said plans are in place to phase out the use, marketing and production of polythene bags (20 micron thick) across the country.

Although there has been tremendous pressure on the environment ministry not to go for such an action, the decision received an overwhelming endorsement by the cabinet members.

A cabinet minister said some of his colleagues and party lawmakers were dead against the ban, but none in the cabinet advocated for the harmful polythene bags.

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Holidays on Aug 15, Mar 17 cancelled

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has cancelled two public holidays on March 17 and August 15 introduced during the previous Awami League (AL) regime.

The AL government introduced March 17 as public holiday marking the birth anniversary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and August 15 as the national mourning day to mark the assassination of Bangabandhu.

The decision to cancel the two holidays was taken at the regular weekly meeting of the Cabinet held yesterday with Prime Minister

Khaleda Zia in the chair. Held at the Prime Minister's Office, the cabinet after lengthy discussion endorsed the list of public holidays for the

coming year 2002.

As per the cabinet decision, there will be holidays in 2002 on February

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23 candidates submit nomination papers for by-elections

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A total of 23 candidates yesterday submitted nomination papers to contest the ensuing January 17 by-elections for five vacant parliamentary seats, Election Commission (EC) sources said.

Yesterday was the last day for filing nomination.

The constituencies are Munshiganj-1, Narail-1 and 2, Barguna-3 and Faridpur-4.

The returning officers (ROs) concerned will scrutinise the nomination papers today and publish a draft candidates' list.

According to the sources, five candidates submitted nomination papers in Munshiganj-1, three in Narail-1, six in Narail-2, five in Barguna-3 and four in Faridpur-4 constituencies.

As in the general election, the ruling coalition is taking part in the by-elections. The alliance candidates will contest with BNP's election symbol 'Sheaf of Paddy'.

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Govt devises ways for speedy trial of cases

UNB, Dhaka

The government yesterday devised ways for speedy disposal of pending cases through combined efforts of six important ministries.

An official announcement said the Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, Ministry of Finance and Planning, Ministry of Establishment, Cabinet Division and Ministry of Public Works would be involved in the bailout measure "to alleviate distress of the sufferers."

The decision was taken in a meeting held at the Ministry of Home Affairs to find the ways for disposal of the pending cases in keeping with the "hopes and aspirations of the people."

Home Minister Atif Hossain Chowdhury chaired the meeting. State Minister for Home Affairs M Lutfuzzaman Babar, Home Secretary Dr Sadaat Hossain, Attorney General M Hasan Arif, Police IG Modabbir Hossain Chowdhury, DMP Commission M

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BNP hardliners, liberals on collision course

STAR REPORT

The old conflict between 'hardliners' and 'liberals' within the ruling BNP is gradually surfacing again over vital issues including taking of policy decisions, dealing with the opposition and implementation of development programmes.

Sources said the 'hardliners' within the party are once again active to establish supremacy over the 'liberals' and keep party Chairperson and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in their grip.

They said the 'hardliners' are pursuing the party chief to be tough in dealing with the opposition Awami League (AL) without giving any concession and keeping the immediate past ruling party frenzy through filing of 'corruption cases' and other means.

While the 'liberals' are in favour of going slow in dealing with the AL and taking vital decisions through

consultations both in the cabinet and the party forum. They opined that it is the duty of the ruling party to make parliament effective by ensuring the participation of the opposition in its session.

Party insiders said the 'liberals' are in favour of initiating dialogue with the AL so that they join in the second session of parliament, but the 'hardliners' think as the BNP-led alliance has received over two-third seats in the Jatiya Sangsad, opposition's non-participation would not affect the house.

Talking to The Daily Star, a senior minister in the cabinet on condition of anonymity said his colleagues belonging to hardline-camp are showing "step-brotherly" attitude towards the liberals in taking up various development programmes.

He alleged that the ministers and MPs known as 'liberals' are being deprived of government's develop

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Panthapath road becomes offlimits for rickshaws from today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The entire stretch of Panthapath road will become off-limits to rickshaws from today to make this important thoroughfare free of traffic jam, police sources said.

The Traffic Department of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) will deploy a large number of personnel to make the move effective.

The move comes as a component of the Dhaka Urban Transport Project (DUTP) under which several busy thoroughfares of the capital would be converted into rickshaw-free zones.

Earlier, a similar move to make

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Careless bus sheds create traffic mess



Almost every city road corner now holds the prospect of a traffic nightmare due to haphazard parking of buses at unplanned sheds.

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A section of people, in connivance with Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) officials, are indiscriminately building roadside shops under cover of unplanned bus passenger sheds, contributing to further chaos in traffic on the city streets.

According to sources, most of these 100 DCC 'authorised' sheds were built hastily to allocate shops or kiosks at prime locations for huge amounts of money. A new breed of private enthusiasts have built as many as 50 unauthorised passenger sheds in the city, sometimes forcing or bribing transport associations to include these spots as "new bus stoppages". A section of officials at DCC's Estate Department and Mayor's office are involved in setting up the unauthorised sheds, according to more than two sources at the Nagar Bhaban.

As hectic commercial activities continue at the passenger sheds, about 1,500 buses and minibuses, more than 1,000 human haulers, and about 3,000

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Extra duty slapped on 30 items

SHAHRIAR KARIM

The National Board of Revenue (NBR) yesterday imposed additional duty on import of over 30 items to avoid "wastage" of foreign exchange and give protection to

country's nascent industries. As import of some non-essential items marked significant rise putting pressure on the dwindling foreign exchange reserve, the NBR through a statutory regulatory order (SRO) imposed regulatory duty on import

of different items in four slabs ranging between 10 and 25 per cent, according to sources.

This is the second such measure by the NBR. Earlier in August, the NBR imposed regulatory duty on import of different items in six slabs ranging from five per cent to 15.5 per cent in the wake of fast depleting foreign exchange reserve. Many of the items that came under additional duty in August are also in the latest list.

"This was a long pending issue as there were unnecessary imports which were not only putting pressure on the foreign exchange reserve but were also affecting our local industries," NBR Chairman Shoyeb Ahmed Chowdhury told The Daily Star yesterday.

Ten per cent regulatory duty has been imposed on import of powder

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5 victims of acid attacks

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Five victims of acid attacks, three of them of a family, were admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) in the last two days.

The three of a family -- Kajoli Khatun, her three-year-old daughter Rashida and husband Abdus Rahim -- were brought from Mymensingh and admitted to the hospital yesterday.

The rest two are Ibrahim and his grandmother Noor Jaham Bibi of Banaripara, Barisal. They were admitted on Saturday. The Acid Survivors Foundation brought all

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Sound bites can bite back
Column: Byline
M J Akbar

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Bush blasts Senate for failing to support stimulus package

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