

SAARC summit will be held on schedule

Foreign Secretary tells press

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Secretary Shamsher Mabin Chowdhury yesterday said preparations are afoot to hold the forthcoming SAARC Summit on schedule.

The summit will be held on time (Jan 4 to 6) with participation of all seven nations, he assured.

The schedule of the three-day summit will include a retreat at Nagorcot, 30 kilometres off Katmandu.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia will lead the Bangladesh team, Chowdhury said.

President of the Maldives Mamun Abdul Gayoom on Tuesday night told the Bangladesh prime minister on the telephone that it was important to make the SAARC Summit a success for regional cooperation.

Foreign Minister Morshed Khan exchanged courtesies with the foreign ministers of Sri Lanka, India and Pakistan through telephonic conversations yesterday.

The foreign secretary informed that the telephone calls were made as a gesture of courtesy to his counterparts in those countries. Earlier, Morshed Khan intended

Release of Shahriar not possible right now, PM tells AI

UNB, Dhaka

Amnesty International will send a mission to Bangladesh soon to see human rights situation in the country following allegations of violence against women and minority.

"I informed Prime Minister Khaleda Zia about the mission and she welcomed it," Amnesty International Secretary General Irene Z Khan, after a meeting with the prime minister yesterday, told UNB.

The 45-year-old Irene, a first woman and first Asian to hold the top office of the world human-rights watchdog, said they already had published a report on repression on minority in Bangladesh and the mission would further investigate their condition.

"The Prime Minister assured me that she will take action according to report of the mission," she said.

"She is keen to ensure human rights in the country. But, she told me that it would take a bit time to ensure it everywhere as many things and machinery are related to it," said Amnesty Secretary General about the PM's determination.

Irene Z Khan said she also drew attention of Prime Minister Khaleda to the detention of journalist-writer Shahriar Kabir by the Amnesty International dubbed as "imprisoned conscience".

"I told her we consider Shahriar as imprisoned conscience and demanded his release. The Prime Minister told me that it is a complicated case and his release right now is not possible," she said.

However, the top rights activist said she would continue campaign for his release and talk to ministers. She informed that she already sought an appointment with the Home Minister to discuss the matter.

taking a one-day shuttle trip to the three capitals to be familiar on a one-on-one basis with the foreign ministers of those neighbouring countries before the commencement of the SAARC Summit.

Visit of Chinese PM

The foreign secretary yesterday formally announced the forthcoming three-day visit of Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji, beginning on January 11. The premier will lead a large, high-powered delegation of more than 120 members, including a 20-plus media team.

Two Chinese ministers -- the minister for Economic Cooperation and Development and the minister for Labour and Social Services -- will accompany Premier Zhu Rongji.

The itinerary will include official talks with the Bangladesh prime minister and the handing-over of the International Conference Centre. He will pay a courtesy call on the President and will meet the Speaker.

The two leaders will discuss all issues of bilateral interest and concern.

The foreign secretary said some MOUs and some agreements now under negotiation are likely to be signed during the visit.

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23 top terrorists

FROM PAGE 1

Gate, Gulshan thana; Prokash Kumar Biswas, son of Bimol Chandra Biswas of 417/3 South Paikpara, Mirpur; Jabbar Munna, son of Abdus Sobhan of Alpara of Hetakona district, at present 18, Raza Sultana Road of Mohammadpur; Abbas alias Killer Abbas, son of Shahabuddin of 188 Ibrahimpur under Kafurla thana; Kamal Pasha alias Pasha, 30, son of Liaquat Ali Miah of Jabrajon village under Kalihati thana of Tangail district, present address C/O Intiaz Khan Babul, D-3 Housing Quarter, Kazi Nazrul Islam Road, Mohammadpur thana; Arman, son of SM Ainul of 603 Bara Moghbazar, Ramna thana; Molla Masud, 30, son of Amjad Hossain of Mohadevpur village under Jhalakathi sadar, at present 14 Mirbagh, Ramna thana; Moshiur Rahman Kochi, son of Moklesur Rahman of DMC-261, Malancha (third floor), Ibrahimpur under Kafurla thana; Trimoti Subrata Bain, 35, son of Bipul Bain of Sutarpar village under Gournadi thana in Barisal district, at present 1/77 Mirbag and 186 Nayatola, Bara Moghbazar under Ramna thana; Imamul Hossain alias Helal alias Pichhi Helal, son of Abdul Jabbar alias Shaquie Ahmed of Dash Ani village under Motlob thana of Chandpur district, at present PC Culture Housing of Mohammadpur thana; Mohammad Hannan alias Pichchi Hannan, son of late Waqee Ullah of Santoshpur village under Faridganj thana of Chandpur district, at present C-40 Arsin Gate under Shyampur thana and Motmirar Tinsed Basti at Free School Street under Dhanmondi thana; Mohammad Alauddin, son of Tara Miah of 29 Uttarbari under Tajgonj thana; Liaquat, son of late Momin Uddin Hawlader of Crokerchar village under Shibchar thana of Madaripur district, at present 14/C Mona Tower, Eskaton; Shamim Ahmed alias Aga Shamim, son of Dr Shamsuddin of 41 Abdul Hadi Lane under Kotwali thana; Zafar Ahmed alias Manik, son of Abdul Halim of 271 North Shahjahanpur and Aminur Rasul Sagar alias Tokai Sagar, son of Abu Bakar Siddiq of Bawria village under Sandwip thana of Chittagong district, at present house-29, Road-39 of Gulshan.

BSF hands over bodies of three Bangladeshis

UNB, Thakurgaon

The Indian Border Security Force (BSF) handed over the bodies of three Bangladeshis to BDR after a flag meeting yesterday evening.

Kamaluddin and Monwar were shot dead at Haripur border while Mohammad Khusiaru was killed at Shantibhita frontier on Tuesday.

Another young boy, Doyal (18), son of Nasiruddin of Minapur village in the same upazila was reportedly picked up by BSF Jawans from the zero point and handed over to the Indian police.

The flag meeting was held Balihara-Hotathpara in Haripur frontier.

SUST VC resigns

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Vice Chancellor of Shahjalal University of Science & Technology (SUST) Prof Saleh Ahmed resigned yesterday on personal ground.

He sent the resignation letter to the President, also Chancellor of the university in the morning.

JCD activist shot dead in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Unidentified assailants shot dead an activist of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) at east-Shewrapara in the city's Kafurla area yesterday evening.

The deceased was identified as Mohammad Manik, 25, a student of vocational institute at Faridpur. The victim came to the city to celebrate Eid with his family.

Police and local people said Babu, Milon, Rabiul and two others of infamous 'Bhutto group' called him out of the residence and shot in the chest at about 5:30 pm.

Hearing gunshots, the family members came out of the residence and found Manik lying in a pool of blood. They rushed him to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital where the doctors declared him dead. The body was sent to the hospital morgue for autopsy.

Sources said Manik might have been killed by his rivals in the student organisation. They are also the students of the same vocational institute.

When contacted, the duty officer of Kafurla police station said that they were aware of the incident.

AL-sponsored nat'l convention deferred

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League-sponsored national convention on 'Crimes against Humanity' has been deferred.

The two-day convention, aimed at projecting incidents of human rights violation since the coalition government took over, was scheduled for a January-19 start but has been deferred due to Biswa Jiteam.

The AL leaders said yesterday that a fresh schedule for the convention would be announced soon and added that the new date is likely to be at the end of January.

Graft cases

FROM PAGE 1

BAC has brought charges against Mohammad Nasim for allegedly obtaining personal benefits by illegally influencing the tender procedure for installation of 300,000 digital telephones.

It has been alleged that Asfaruddin became owner of many undeclared property through illegal means.

Director General of BAC MA Zabbar yesterday met Khaleda with the files on the graft charges. Sources said the prime minister might give the green signal for filing the cases today or on Saturday.

BAC took the move yesterday as part of its preparations to file 43 more graft cases against AL chief and former prime minister Sheikh Hasina, some of her ex-cabinet members and Dhaka city Mayor Mohammad Hanif.

Earlier on December 11, BAC filed a dozen graft cases with different police stations of the city against Hasina, six former ministers and 47 former and serving bureaucrats and businessmen.

These cases have been linked to purchase of Mig-29s, printing of passport books, preparation of the site of Meghnath power plant, selling of property of Bangladesh Jute Corporation (BJC), 'irregularities' in Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authorities (BEPZA), 'misappropriation' of abandoned property under the Public Works Department, 'corruption' in the Public Service Commission, 'irregularities' in the Food-for-Work project and allocation of public land.

All the cases were filed under Article 5(2) of the Anti-corruption Act, 1947.

Petrol pumps

FROM PAGE 1

Autocrickets in the city were asking for higher than usual fares.

State Minister for Energy AKM Mosharraf Hossain was quoted by different newspapers Wednesday as saying that the decision to increase prices of petroleum products 'might' be implemented from yesterday. On Tuesday, different newspapers reported that prices of fuel, power and gas would go up from January 1.

Meanwhile, many fuel consumers complained to The Daily Star that unscrupulous owners of filling station were demanding higher prices from consumers apparently giving the impression that the price hike had already become effective. There were reports of altercations between filling station operators and vehicle owners over the price.

Pintu continued to allegedly indulge in terrorism on the Dhaka University campus and in the old part of the city in defiance of the repeated warnings.

The final warning came when he and his associates occupied some rooms of the MP Hostel in the city's Sher-e-Bangla Nagar. He was told that he would be sent abroad and expelled from the party should he go ahead with alleged criminal activities.

Sources said party leaders and activists, individuals, businessmen as well as the police lodged the highest number of complaints with ministers and quarters concerned against Pintu for his alleged involvement in terrorism, extortion and snatching of bidding documents and manipulating the tender process in the city. Newspapers

A fall from grace

FROM PAGE 1

President of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), about his direct and indirect involvement in terrorism, extortion and snatching of bidding documents.

He said the PM first asked the lawmaker to refrain from such alleged criminal activities through his well-wishers, but he did not pay heed to the warnings.

Sources said the arrest reflects the government's decision to take a hardline against criminals, especially those in the party engaged in terrorism and extortion and that it would soon launch a massive drive to nab such elements irrespective of their party affiliations.

Pintu's arrest is the first step towards the launch of the anti-terrorism drive, said a highly placed source at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

He was first warned to dissociate himself from criminal activities when he became General Secretary of the JCD, the student front of BNP, in 1999. The warning came when two outsiders loyal to his faction were shot dead during a gunfight on Dhaka University in July 1999.

He was again warned before being made President of JCD in December last year and then before being given party nomination to contest the parliamentary polls, to distance himself from terrorism and extortion. And, every time he promised to oblige but in reality did not stop pursuing alleged criminal activities.

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also ran a series of reports about Pintu's alleged involvement in crimes almost everyday.

They said the home ministry had long been seeking permission from the highest office to take action against Pintu and his associates. But, some BNP leaders holding vital ministries and positions at the PMO continued to lobby for him. Pintu is said to be a young leader of the party hardliners.

At long last, the prime minister was convinced that now was the time to arrest Pintu to save the government from severe criticism in and outside the party after the latest allegation of trying to snatch auction documents against him. She instructed the home ministry to take immediate action against Pintu and the authorities consented swung into action instantly, the source said.

The source said the information cell at the BNP's Hawa Bhaban office played a vital role in helping the authorities to act against Pintu by supplying accurate information to PMO and home ministry.

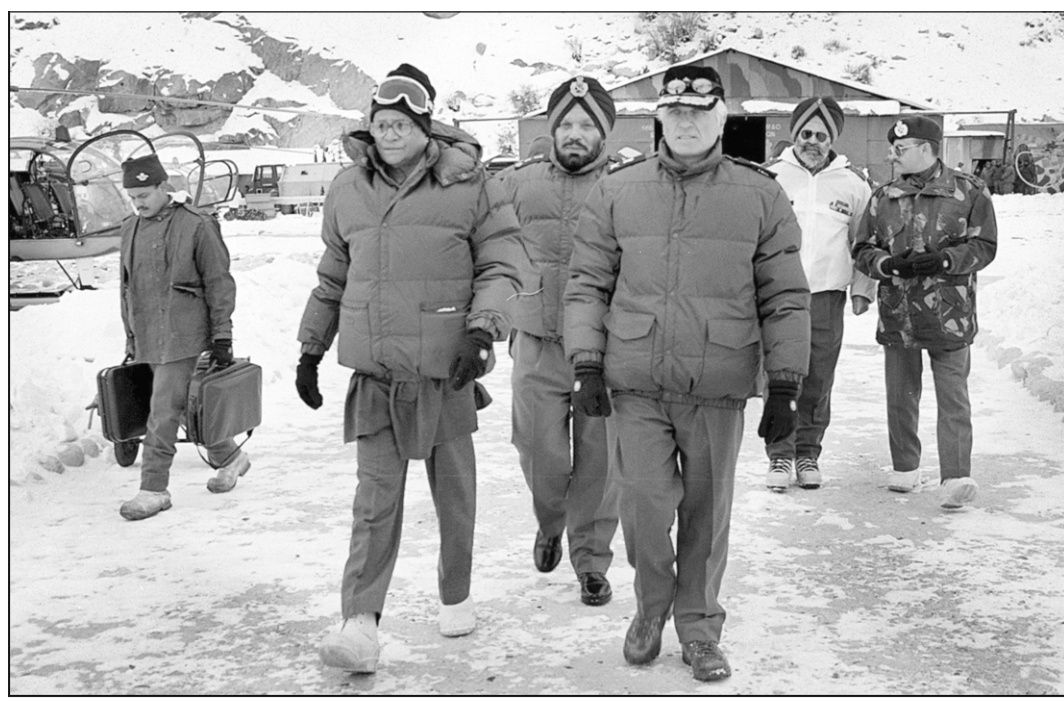
Sources said most of the party leaders, activists, MPs and ministers have expressed satisfaction at arrest of Pintu. A number of ministers said decisions to arrest Pintu and ban use of polybags are the two most important ones the government has taken. They felt that the decisions would enhance the government's image and added that the party may expel him for crossing all limits.

A senior cabinet minister told The Daily Star yesterday that the prime minister has given the home ministry the nod to take action against the party leaders and activists engaged in crime.

Pintu allegedly heads a terrorist ring in the city's Labagh area and allegedly masterminded many terrorist activities in old part of the city and on Dhaka University campus in the last decade.

He started his career in student politics way back in 1980 as President of Hazaribagh ward unit of JCD. Later, he became President of a Labagh thana unit of JCD in 1982-83 before becoming Sports Secretary of the JCD city unit.

After becoming vice-president and general secretary, Pintu was made President of city unit of JCD. He was also made the organising



Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes (2nd from L) is accompanied by Corp Commander Lt. General Arjun Ray (3rd from R) as he arrived at Siachen near the Indo-Pakistan border, at over 7,000 meters of altitude on 25 December. India and Pakistan have been massing troops and armour on their borders.

Indian missiles

FROM PAGE 1

moved toward the border.

Both sides' missile systems can be converted to deliver nuclear warheads, but it is not clear whether such steps have been taken.

Army spokesman on both sides of the border reported the daily exchange of gunfire was at a much calmer level yesterday.

Xinhua quoting PTI said, Indian troops killed 13 Pakistani soldiers and destroyed 18 of their bunkers Tuesday in "retaliatory" strikes along the line of control in south Kashmir.

For the fourth consecutive day on Tuesday, Indian defense sources in the area claimed, Pakistani troops shelled Indian positions in several sectors in Kashmir.

One truck and 11 houses were damaged and an ex-serviceman was critically wounded on the Indian side, the sources told PTI.

The Hindu daily reported that a total of 40 Pakistani bunkers had been destroyed by the Indian army and 22 Pakistani soldiers were killed in just two days from Sunday when Indian troops opened retaliatory fire on Pakistani frontier position in the Karmara and Keni areas across the line of control in Kashmir.

Indian defense officials in Kashmir claimed Pakistan had deployed medium range ballistic missile batteries along the line of control in Kashmir.

Some of the missiles were shifted from other sectors and deployed in strategically vulnerable areas in Jammu-Ponch sector of Kashmir, they said.

The Indian army cancelled its Jan. 15 Army Day celebrations and parades because of the mobilization of troops and weapons along the border, but Fernandes said annual exercises would take place, as scheduled, in the border states of Rajasthan and Punjab in early January.

District officials in India's Western desert state of Rajasthan -- which shares a 1,035 km border with Pakistan -- said blackout

exercises were being held in the border districts at night to prepare civilians ahead of a possible war.

"Entire districts are being blacked out for 15 minutes (at a time) since Tuesday night," a Bikaner district official told Reuters.

"Sirens are sounded, air force planes will fly over the cities and no power generator sets will be allowed to function."

Trains were full of soldiers headed to the border in Rajasthan yesterday and air force jets flew over the frontier town of Jaisalmer every seven minutes. The road trip to the frontier took 10 hours, twice as long as normal, because of military checkpoints.

However, despite anti-aircraft batteries posted at airports and the army turning schools into bunkers, there were signs that war was not the first priority.

"I don't think anyone in India wants war and I don't think anyone in the subcontinent wants war," former Indian prime minister I.K. Gujral said on independent Star News television yesterday.

Tensions have increased since a Dec. 13 suicide attack on Parliament that India blames on Pakistan-based militants. India says Pakistan's spy agency sponsored the attack with the help of two Islamic militant groups -- the Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed -- which are battling to end Indian rule in Kashmir.

Pakistan has frozen the assets of the two groups and the leader of the Jaish-e-Mohammed was detained briefly on Tuesday, but New Delhi said this falls far short of its demand that the groups' activities be halted and their leaders arrested and handed over to India.

"We do not want war, but war is being thrust on us and we will have to face it," Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee said at a public address at his residence on Tuesday, celebrating his 77th birthday.

Gas reserve

FROM PAGE 12

reserves of gas after updating proven, probable and possible reserves of the existing fields.

Other members of the committee are BUET Professors Ijaz Hossain, Nurul Islam, M Tamim and Edmund Gomes, head of the department of geology of Dhaka University, Dr Khalilur Rahman Chowdhury of Jahangirnagar University, director general of Geological Survey of Bangladesh and Petrobangla Director Dr M Ismail.

The committee will also forecast a future demand scenario analysing the past and present use of gas.

The other committee will be headed by Azim Uddin Ahmed. This committee will determine the areas of the best social and economic alternatives of gas use, forecast the future use patterns, and present a real picture of foreign currency cash flow in the backdrop of possible foreign currency earnings from gas and paying IOCs in foreign currency.

Besides, the committee will analyse the economic benefits of the proposed cross border energy trade involving Nepal, Bhutan and India and make recommendations.

It will also commend measures for the best economic use of gas purchased from IOCs under production sharing contracts (PSCs).

The committee includes BUET Professors M Tamim and Ijaz Hossain, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) executive Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya, MA Hafiz FCA, BIDS researcher KAS Murshid, Prof Mamtaz Uddin Ahmed, and Petrobangla directors for operation and finance.

Both the committees have been formed following the decision of a November 10 meeting on natural gas issues at Prime Minister's office. Formation of the committees was decided amidst strong opposition and criticism against gas export issue.

300 partymen killed

FROM PAGE 12

Some top terrorists including Tokai Sagar were released, he claimed. "Ershad Shikdar in Khulna is getting bail by chanting slogans 'Khaleda Zia Zindabad'."

Samad Azad said, the vested group that wanted export of country's gas without keeping 50 years' reserve made AL lose the October 1 polls. "The caretaker government of Latifur Rahman and the Election Commission led by MA Sayerd just worked as puppets of that group." He did not elaborate.

The acting AL president bitterly criticised what he called random transfers and forced retirements of government officials. "Everything is being controlled from Hawa Bhavan at Banani." The Hawa Bhavan is a BNP office in the city.

BY-POLLS

Asked whether AL candidates will join the January 17 parliamentary by-polls in five vacant seats, Samad Azad said, the party has nominated candidates and they will be in the fray only if a congenial polling atmosphere prevails.

About joining Upazila and city

corporation polls, AL Presidium member and former minister Tofail Ahmed said the Election Commission itself has backed out from its earlier position regarding this due to lack of a congenial atmosphere.

TRANS-SHIPMENT

Tofail said during the 1998 trade talks with India, there were two issues -- zero tariff facility for 25 categories of Bangladeshi items which the India Prime Minister had agreed to, and transshipment facility to India.

"Now this government is giving transshipment facility to India calling it in a different name."

Tofail also expressed concern at enhancement of fuel prices and imposition of regulatory import duties on some essentials. Enhanced fuel prices will be a heavy pressure on farmers and make the country a food-deficit one again, he said.

AL General Secretary Zillur Rahman, Presidium members Amir Hussain Amu, Abdul Jalil, Suranjit Sengupta, Motia Chowdhury and other leaders were also present at the press conference.

Female students

FROM PAGE 12

a cost of about Taka 23,690.50 crore along with several major decisions on the education sector.

The cost includes project assistance involving Taka 582.20 crore.

Under the ECN decision, from now on the students of all government and private primary schools will receive monthly stipend at the rate of Taka 100 per head instead of food to avoid "irregularities and anomalies" particularly linked to dealership.

If two students belong to one family they will get a total of Taka 125, the meeting decided.

The approved projects are: Carpeting of Tongi-Ashulia road, construction of Dhaur-Mirpur-Shah Ali mazar and construction of connecting road up to Mirpur bridge, upgradation of Zinzira-Keraniganj-Nowabganj-Dohar-Srinagar road into regional highway, expansion of Mukti Swarni, construction of Goainghat bridge on Chengkhal river, Karnaphuli bridge, Bhairab bridge, jute seed sub-project of BADC, stipend for higher secondary level female students, female secondary school assistance project (Second phase) and expansion of pisciculture at upazila level (Second phase).

Khatib

FROM PAGE 12

yesterday.

He said the US government has been conveyed of Bangladesh's position on the Khatib's statement.

Maulana Obaidul Haq in his Eid-ul-Fitr sermon lambasted the US and termed America and President George W Bush as the "number one terrorist" in the world. He said it was the sacred duty of all Muslim countries to untidely resist American terrorism.

The Eid congregation was attended by President AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury and other senior members of the cabinet.

The Khatib also spoke against the ritual of observing Pahela Baishak.

IMF team

FROM PAGE 12

Sources said Monday's announcement to increase prices of petroleum products, gas and electricity was made to satisfy the IMF, which earlier wanted administered prices raised.

But the IMF team would want to see what has happened in improvement of law and order situation and reform of the public administration. So far, these two areas remain mostly unattended.

Concrete actions on the loss-making state-owned enterprises are also yet to come.

Pintu arrested

FROM PAGE 1

Motijheel Police Station on late Tuesday night.

Four DB teams led by two additional deputy commissioners of DB - Kohinur Mia and Ruhul Amin -- went to Pintu's residence at Moneshwar Road in Old Dhaka at around 2.00am.

Police arrested Pintu half an hour later when he along with his family members came out of his six-storey building. He was then taken to the DB office at Minto Road.

On Thursday, Receiver of Bankruptcy Court Advocate Md. Jahangir Alam Khan filed a general diary with Motijheel Police Station accusing Pintu of intruding the office of Bengal Leather Industries and attempting to snatch auction documents.

Police arrested Pintu within three hours of transforming the GD into a regular case. The case was filed at 11:30pm Tuesday under sections 147, 148, 149, 323, 285 and 386 of the Penal Code against Pintu and his seven accomplices.

A large number of journalists and photographers flocked to the DB office in the early morning. But no journalist or photographer was allowed to meet Pintu. Also sighted were the DB officers about the arrest.

When the journalists scrambled to talk to or take snaps of him on his way to the court, Pintu shouted out "I've been arrested illegally."

Pintu was kept at the DB office until 1:45pm before DB personnel produced him before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's (CMM) Court at 2:30pm.

Advocate Masud Ahmed Talukder filed a petition for bail with the court, in which he stated that Pintu was implicated in the case as part of a political conspiracy to harass him.

"The case was filed two days after the incident. The case is fully false, baseless and fabricated. An elected MP can be arrested only on permission of the Speaker of the Jatiya Sangsad, but the permission was not added to the case. There is no distinction between the former and present governments. So I pray for his bail," the defence lawyer told the court.

Court Inspector Shah Alam opposing the bail petition stated that everybody knows Pintu very well.

"He was arrested and detained in jail before he was elected MP and there are many cases against him pending with different courts. Nobody is beyond the outreach of law. Before the October 1 election, the BNP pledged that no terrorist or extortionist would be spared if the party assumed power. All sections are non-bailable. So I oppose his bail prayer," he added.

After hearing both sides, Magistrate Sirajul Haider issued an

order sending Pintu to the Dhaka Central Jail, rejecting his bail petition.

The CMM's Court also directed the authorities concerned to send a copy of the order to the Dhaka District Magistrate's Court to take necessary steps to give Pintu the first class division in jail custody, as he is an elected MP.

The court further directed the authorities concerned to send a copy of the order to the private secretary to the Speaker of Jatiya Sangsad.

Meanwhile, the detention order from the District Magistrate's Court, Dhaka reached the CMM's Court during the hearing on the bail petition on behalf of Pintu.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Commissioner Mohammad Abdul Quaiyum told newsmen at his office that Pintu was arrested on specific charges against him. "We have investigated the allegation and he was arrested only when the allegation was found authentic," he said.

Asked whether the arrest was an eyewitness, the commissioner said they were serious about the case and anybody found guilty would face the same consequence.

He also said police are probing into other charges against Pintu.

To another question, the commissioner said police personnel had already been deployed at the office and the residence of the complainant, Jahangir Alam Khan.

Meanwhile, the receiver of the Bankruptcy Court Advocate Md. Jahangir Alam Khan yesterday categorically said the ruling BNP legislator, Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu, tried to snatch the bidding documents of a bankrupt company's property from his office to subvert the scheduled auction.

"Pintu and his accomplices tried to grab bidding documents and threatened to subvert the auction of property belonging to the Bengal Leather Industries," Jahangir Alam told reporters at a press conference at his office.

He said Pintu along with his armed men came to his office at about 4:30pm Monday and demanded bidding documents.

The receiver said the bidding procedure of Bengal Leather Industries had been done according to law. He said the auction scheduled for today will be held later.

Khan said some influential relatives of the owner of the bankrupt company have long been engaged in conspiracy to mar the auction bid, thus hindering his official activities.

Pintu is a close relative of the owner of Bengal Leather Industries.

Musharraf to join SAARC Summit despite tensions

AFP, Karachi

Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf will attend a regional summit in Kathmandu from January 4 to 6 despite high tensions with India, an official said yesterday.

"He is going to Kathmandu for the SAARC summit as per schedule and there is no change in his programme," secretary for information Anwar Mahmood told the wire service.

Mahmood downplayed the prospect of talks at the summit between Musharraf and Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee.

"A meeting can take place when there is a mutual desire," he said, adding that Pakistan is ready for talks.

This year's SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) meeting is being held amid growing tension between India and Pakistan after the attack on the Indian Parliament on December 13.