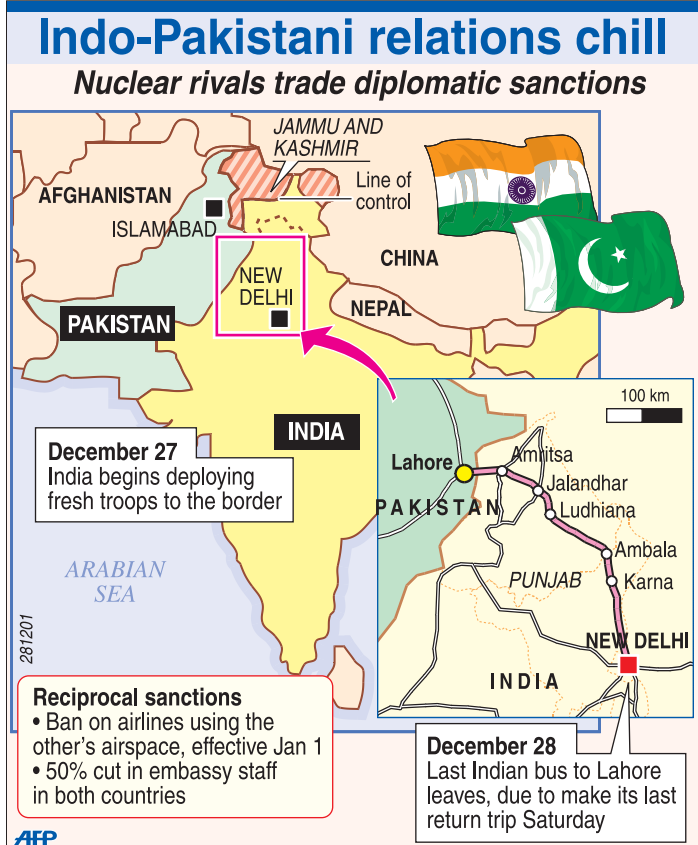


Pakistan proposes troops pullout, dialogue

US, G8 including Russia step up diplomatic efforts to defuse row



Musharraf can use Indian airspace to join summit

AP, New Delhi

The Indian government said yesterday it would make an exception to its ban on all Pakistani aircraft flying over its territory so that Pakistani President Gen. Pervez Musharraf can attend SAARC summit next week.

It would be normal practice for a request to be made for such a flight, and the request will be granted, India's External Affairs Ministry spokeswoman, Nirupama Rao, told a news conference.

"If a request is made seeking permission for the aircraft carrying

the Pakistani president to fly over, India would grant that," she said, adding that the permission would apply to the Jan. 4-6 summit in Nepal.

India on Thursday said it would ban all Pakistani aircraft from landing in India, or flying over it, as of Jan. 1, as part of stepped-up sanctions aimed at pressuring Pakistan to act against Islamic militants that carry out attacks in India.

Pakistan made a reciprocal ban. AFP adds: Musharraf will attend summit in Nepal even though India has closed its airspace to Pakistani

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Sajal murder near Science Lab: Solu arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Detective Branch (DB) of Police arrested Salimullah Solu, who is accused in several cases, including murder, from his Madrassah Road residence in the city's Mohammadpur area yesterday morning.

A team of DB police headed by Assistant Commissioner Mohammad Ali Hossain Fakir went to the house at about 1.00am and arrested Salimullah at about 7.00am.

Police said Salimullah was accused in six murder cases, including those of Sajal and BNP ward commissioner Shahbuddin.

The accused was also involved in

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Taj to take veil if war breaks out

AFP, Agra

India's monument to love, the Taj Mahal, could have its fabled marbled dome and minarets covered with dark cloth as a protection against possible bombing raids should war break out with Pakistan, official sources said yesterday.

The Taj was camouflaged during the 1971 Indo-Pakistan war, and sources at the Archeological Survey of India (ASI) office in Agra said arrangements were being made to repeat the exercise given the current

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AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan urged India yesterday to withdraw its troops so that Islamabad too could pull back its recent reinforcements, and to sit down for talks to defuse fears of war.

As India and Pakistan have traded fire across their border and imposed a range of political and economic sanctions on each other, frightened Pakistani villagers fled their homes -- again.

"We would like them to withdraw their forces to peacetime locations so that we can also withdraw our forces to peacetime locations," Foreign Ministry spokesman Aziz Ahmed Khan said in an interview with the BBC.

"There is no point in heating up the atmosphere,"

Tensions between the two nuclear-capable foes have mounted since the December 13 attack by armed men on India's parliament, prompting their biggest military build-up in 15 years and an increasingly bitter war of words that have sparked fears of war.

The United States is stepping up

diplomatic efforts to defuse the row. The group of Eight also called on both nations to resume political dialogue to avoid war.

Having persuaded Islamabad to join its anti-terror coalition to drive the Taliban out of Afghanistan -- despite the fact that Pakistan was one of three states to recognise the radical Islamic movement -- the last thing Washington wants is for Pakistan to start a new war on the Afghan border.

"We are offering negotiations ... We offered a joint investigation," Khan said, adding that Islamabad had asked the United Nations and the Organisation of Islamic Conference to help to defuse the situation.

India, angry at what it says is Pakistan's failure to move against the anti-Indian militants it blames for the parliament attack, unveiled fresh sanctions against Islamabad, but said there was no need to worry about war between the bitter rivals.

"We are ready to exercise restraint and sit across the table and discuss the situation through peaceful means. And we would like

them to ask India to do the same," Khan said. "We were constrained to take the countermeasures because Indians started moving their forces to the borders, taking up offensive positions and we were left with no alternative but to respond for minimum defence," Khan said.

In Washington, the Bush administration urged the leaders of the two countries to come an understanding at a South Asia summit next week in Nepal. "They need to resolve their differences through dialogue," said Philip Reeker, a State Department spokesman.

Pakistan indicated Musharraf would be willing to sit down with Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee at the summit.

India has rejected any separate meeting between the two leaders.

US Secretary of State Colin Powell kept up intense telephone diplomacy aimed at stopping India and Pakistan from turning a war of words, tit-for-tat sanctions and military moves into a full-blown conflict.

Defense Secretary Donald

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Pakistani troops set in position anti-aircraft guns near an oil depot in Karachi yesterday as fear of an Indo-Pak war heightened.

Steps being taken to include IT in school curricula: PM

DU CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia has said her government is taking steps to include information technology (IT) in curricula for primary and secondary level students for rapid expansion of IT education in the country.

Steps are also being taken to set up an IT department in the education ministry and an IT institute to produce more IT professionals.

Incentives will be given to local and foreign investors in the IT sector, she said.

The prime minister was inaugurating a two-day International Conference on Computer and

Information Technology (ICCIT) - 2001 at the Teacher-Student Centre (TSC) of Dhaka University yesterday.

She said her government is determined to maintain congenial academic atmosphere in educational institutions and sought co-operation of all in this regard.

Steps have been taken to reopen all educational institutions as part of her government's first 100 days' programme, she said. She urged teachers to stay away from politics for the sake of maintaining good academic atmosphere on campuses.

In her first programme on the DU campus after taking office, Khaleda Zia said it is regrettable but true that the country's premier university has

lost its past glory and image.

Students and youths are the future of the nation and we will have kept it in mind always, she said.

LGRD Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, State Minister for Education ANM Ehsanul Haque Milon, DU Vice Chancellor Prof Anwarullah Chowdhury, Pro-Vice Chancellor Prof ZN Tahmidia Begum and Prof Lutfur Rahman also spoke on the occasion.

IT experts from Japan, USA, Australia and India are taking part in the conference, organised by some local public and private universities and organisations including Dhaka

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Crackdown on illegal drug trade from New Year's Day

80 pc of criminals in city are addicts: Survey

SHAIKH NAZRUL ISLAM

The Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) has decided to wage a "Jihad" (holy war) against illegal drug trading in the city, calling it is the root cause for rise in crimes.

Special drives will be launched from the New Year's Day to curb the scourge and OCs of all the thanas in the city have assured their high-ups to go all out to nab drug dealers and make the programme successful.

The decisions came at a meeting of police officials on Monday, chaired by DMP Commissioner Mohammad Abdul Qaiyum. Attended by over 100 police officials, the meeting was held at the Rajarbagh Telecommunication Conference Hall.

"Even if it causes problems to a few of our colleagues, we will do everything possible to curb the business, which is spreading in the society like cancer," an official who attended the meeting told this correspondent.

He said the meeting took note of the fact that the illegal drug businesses is mainly done in connivance with a few unscrupulous field-level policemen who give protection to drug dealers for money.

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DMP has expressed its determination to fight the illegal drug peddling, and a teenager takes a drag on heroin in the city.

City corporation polls likely in March

Aspirants lobbying to ensure candidature: Graffiti on walls

NAZRUL ISLAM

As the government is planning to hold the overdue elections to Dhaka, Rajshahi and Khulna city corporation in late March next year, aspirants from ruling BNP and opposition Awami League have already started lobbying at party hierarchy levels to ensure their candidature.

Graffiti have appeared on some city walls in favour of prospective ward commissioners from the ruling party.

The main opposition party Awami League is yet to announce its stance on the city polls.

Tenure of the corporations expired in 1999 and the Election Commission had announced a schedule for holding the polls in October that year.

But elections could not be held as several ward commissioners filed writs challenging delimitation of the corporations, done by the immediate past AL government.

To remove the legal barriers, the BNP-led coalition government in a recent notification reinstated the earlier delimitation of the three city corporations, nullifying those done by the AL government.

The Election Commission (EC) has also requested the law ministry and the Attorney General's office to produce the notification before the High Court for early disposal of the writs. The High Court reopens on January 2 after winter vacation.

According to ruling party insiders, the ruling coalition may fight the polls race jointly as in the October 1 general election.

BNP earlier unofficially named Fisheries and Livestock Minister Sadeq Hossain Khoka as its mayoral candidate in Dhaka. But Public Works Minister and former DCC Mayor Mirza Abbas and business leader Abdul Awal Mintoo who joined BNP ahead of the last general election are also vying for candidature, the sources said.

Aspirants from AL are also taking preparation for the polls. Insiders said the party may go for a change in its mayoral candidate in the capital.

Former Deputy Minister Saber Hossain Chowdhury may be the

number one choice although Mayor Mohammad Hanif wants to contest the polls, the sources said.

Prospective mayoral and ward commissioner candidates in Rajshahi and Khulna have also started public relations in their areas.

Advocate Qumrul Monir, Shafiqul Haq Milon, Aslam Sarker, Salehuddin Baby and Mossadeq Hossain are in the queue to contest the mayoral polls from BNP in Rajshahi. AL's aspirants are Masudul Haque, Omar Faruk

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Graffiti are appearing on city walls much ahead of the Dhaka City Corporation Election.

Bangla Academy AGM rejects resolution on Shahriar's release

A resolution condemning the arrest of Shahriar Kabir and demanding his immediate unconditional release was rejected outright in the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of Bangla Academy following protest from a large number of academy members yesterday.

Sources close to the meeting told BSS last night that Prof Muntasir Mamun of Dhaka University, supported by three others, moved the resolution for adoption at the AGM for immediate release of Shahriar Kabir, arrested under treason charge recently.

"Out of the 48 members who spoke at the AGM, 40 protested the proposal while three spoke in favour of it," a member of the academy attending the AGM said adding that the proposal was raised in violation of the existing rules.

"All of us raised our voice against the proposal saying this is an undertial case and the issue is completely irrelevant to the affairs of Bangla Academy," he said.

Neither Prof Muntasir Mamun nor the three supporters of his

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SAARC officials meet to set agenda

AP, Katmandu

Foreign ministry officials of seven South Asian countries, including rivals India and Pakistan, met yesterday to complete the agenda for a January 4-6 summit in the Nepalese capital.

The presence of officials from New Delhi and Islamabad raised hopes that the summit would go ahead as planned, despite mounting tension between the South Asian nuclear adversaries since a Dec. 13 gun and grenade attack on India's Parliament.

"There has been no change and the programme will continue as planned," Nepal's foreign ministry spokesman Pushkar Rajbhandari said as he confirmed participation of India and Pakistan at Friday's meeting.

The officials discussed measures for cooperation in agriculture, communications, science and technology, environment, human rights and social development. Their proposals would be taken up by the Standing Committee of the South Asian Association Regional Cooperation, or SAARC, at its meeting Sunday, Rajbhandari said.

The Standing Committee comprises the top bureaucrats in the foreign ministries of the SAARC countries -- India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Bhutan and the Maldives.

The meeting of the standing committee will be followed up by a meeting of the foreign ministers of the SAARC countries before their leaders begin to

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OPEC cuts output by 1.5m bpd

US grants China permanent normal trade status

Weekly stocks roundup

	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Dec 29		5-21 pm
Dec 30	6-40 am	

Prayer Timings		
Dec 29		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-30	6-00
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	3-45	4-00
Maghrib	5-25	5-30
Esha	7-15	7-45
Source: Islamic Foundation		



Officials of the Department of Environment check a passenger bus as part of its campaign to identify black smoke-spewing vehicles.

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Nearly 400 buses, 2,000 tempos and 50,000 auto-rickshaws are plying the city roads without any road permit whatsoever, sources in the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) said.

Out of 1,118 BRTA-registered buses in the city, 373 buses could not get their permits renewed because these vehicles are more than 20 years old. These rundown buses emit black smokes, create noise pollution and often are found denting other vehicles because "they have little to lose if any collision occurs", official sources said.

But thanks to the regular monetary deals with the police, these buses are still plying the 15 designated routes of the city.

Moreover, there are 346 additional buses plying the city streets, awaiting road permits. Most of them have necessary documents except the road permits. By the time the BRTA processes the road permits, these buses are illegally operating in

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