

## Blair seeks troops

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ing him on his current tour that will take him to India and Pakistan, too. Earlier, Blair accompanied by his wife Cherie Blair arrived in Dhaka at 7:15pm yesterday on a one-and-a-half-day "working visit" to Bangladesh amid an evolving peace process in Afghanistan and mounting tension in South Asia.

Blair's entourage includes some senior officials and 36 British journalists. Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia received the British prime minister and his wife at the Zia International Airport after his special flight of British Airways touched down. Blair was taken to the presentation line where he was introduced to ministers, the Dhaka city mayor, the dean of the diplomatic corps and high civil and military officials.

The British prime minister within an hour of his arrival held crucial talks with Khaleda on bilateral, regional and international issues. The two sides also discussed the establishment of peace in South Asia.

Britain is organising and leading the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), set up under a Security Council Resolution passed last month.

"We would like to see (Bangladesh) as part of the stabilisation force in Afghanistan."

"Having led this mission (in Afghanistan), as far as we are concerned, it is important to have regional partners to take a share of the burden sharing in the future," Blair told the foreign reporters.

He added, "I am sure it is right to have Muslim countries involved."

The talks between Blair and Khaleda were held for over half an hour after the arrival of the British prime minister at the Prime Minister's Office.

The local media was denied the professional privilege of having any access to the visiting British dignitary at the Prime Minister's Office, where the talks took place. They had to depend on sources to learn about the talks.

Tony Blair also appreciated Bangladesh as a moderate Muslim democratic country, according to sources.

Both Khaleda and Blair said the two countries will expand trade, business and cultural ties.

The Bangladesh PM said the government was trying to bring the opposition back to parliament.

Both Bangladesh and Britain expressed grave concern over the prevailing situation in the sub-continent with mounting tensions between nuclear rivals India and Pakistan.

The International Security Force created under Chapter VII of the UN charter is different from the traditional Peacekeeping Force formed under Chapter VI of the same.

Chapter VII calls for Enforcement Action involving high-risk exposure and action while

Chapter VI deals with routine peacekeeping work.

Despite the late evening arrival, most of Blair's official programmes were stacked for yesterday since Khaleda Zia will depart for the SAARC Summit this morning.

The British prime minister will stay in the city until this afternoon. The Blairs will visit the National Memorial at Savar today to lay wreaths for the independence martyrs.

Senior Awami League leaders will meet him at his Sheraton Hotel suite.

Cherie Blair will meet members of the Acid Survivors Foundation and of a BRAC project in West Kellia village at Joyapura in Savar.

The British Prime Minister and his entourage will leave Dhaka at 3pm today.

Blair will also be visiting India and Pakistan during his current South Asian tour.

From Dhaka, he will fly to the Indian city of Bangalore. He will hold official talks in New Delhi on Sunday with Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee shortly after the Vajpayee returns from the SAARC Summit in Kathmandu. Blair is scheduled to fly to Pakistan the following day.

The British Prime Minister is expected to urge both India and Pakistan to exercise restraint during the current tension prevailing between the two countries that has brought the two nuclear neighbours on the brink of a war.

### Blair Calls On Badruddoza

Immediately after his arrival in Dhaka, the British Prime Minister Tony Blair made a courtesy call on President AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury at Bangabhaban yesterday evening.

Welcoming Blair, the President said Bangladesh and the United Kingdom have historical and traditional ties that developed steadily over the years.

The President appreciated the priority given by the British government in the socioeconomic development of the Bangladeshi community in Britain. Bangladesh, the President said, is an important trading partner of Britain.

Reciprocating similar sentiments, the visiting British Prime Minister noted with satisfaction that the United Kingdom and Bangladesh have cordial relations. He expressed the hope that "democracy would flourish in Bangladesh and that minor political problems will be eased."

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Reaz Rahman, British High Commissioner in Bangladesh Dr David Carter, Secretary to the President Abdul Huq and Foreign Secretary Shamsheer Mobin Chowdhury were present on the occasion.

## Mockbul

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Later, it was alleged that Mockbul was involved in criminal activities and had a plan to make attacks on government, semi-government and non-government organisations during the hartal in the city on December 2 last year.

Mockbul was given one month's detention under the Special Powers Act (SPA).

Meanwhile, the High Court on December 10 last year issued a rule nisi upon the government to show cause within seven days why detention of Mockbul Hossain should not be declared illegal and without lawful authority.

The rule was issued upon a writ petition challenging the legality of the detention order.

## Ex AL MP

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"We have searched for the two in all possible places but couldn't find them," a police officer at Pallabi thana said last night.

Another source said that the police under pressure from high-ups to investigate the case quickly and submit the charge sheet against the former MP.

Yasmeen in her FIR stated that the former lawmaker had threatened her after he was released on bail on December 29 last following a case she had filed against him earlier.

On the day following his release, eight men forcibly took her to Kamal's political office at Mohana where Kamal tried to rape her, but she resisted and somehow managed to flee, alleged Yasmeen. Kamal's defence lawyers have alleged that he has been framed by his political enemies who used Yasmeen as their agent.

## 10 killed

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Food Department were killed in a road accident on Thakurgaon-Ruhia road in front of Gobindanagar BRAC office, 1 km off the town yesterday evening, according to UNB.

Police and witnesses said, Food Inspector Samsuddin Ahmed, 46, and ASI Nazrul Islam, 45, were killed when their motorbike was hit from behind by a truck.

Samsuddin Ahmed died on the spot while Nazrul was taken to hospital.

They were returning to the town from their workplace at Atowari upazila.

Agitated people brought out a procession in the town and demanded arrest of the killer driver.

## Alam murder

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daughter, were born of his first wife, Rizia Sultana. He also had four daughters with his second wife Hasina Alam.

Badrul Alam alias Labu, the youngest son of Alam, went to India a few days ago.

Relatives said Alam's sons started quarrelling with their father as he had been giving more importance to his son-in-laws.

Meanwhile, Demra police and Shyampur police yesterday said that Khokon is an accused in a number of criminal cases, including cases filed on charges of extortion with both the thanas.

The Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's (CMM) Court yesterday placed the arrested four on a five-day remand following a prayer for a seven-day remand by police. No bail petition was moved in the court on behalf of the arrested.

Misceants killed the industrialist along with his three maidservants, Rahima, Sakhina and Kamla, inside his Alambagh residence Tuesday night.

They are also said to have looted cash and gold ornaments worth about Tk four crore from the house, which the DB however could not confirm yet, sources close to the DB said yesterday.

Two others maids, Pamela and Jarina, and Farida's parent's, who were held Wednesday night for interrogation, were later released by police. Pamela and Jarina were on the ground floor of the two-storey building at the time of the murders Tuesday night.

Meanwhile, the four dead bodies were handed over to the relatives of the victims after autopsy at the Mitford Hospital morgue yesterday.

## JS session

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Hasina returns home.

In the coming session, the government is likely to place a number of bills in the House to fulfill its election pledges. It would place a bill seeking repeal of the Public Safety Act, introduced by the immediate past Awami League government.

Another bill seeking formation of an independent Human Rights Commission to monitor human rights situation in the country is likely to be placed, ruling party sources said.

The coming session, expected to be a lengthy one, would form standing committees on different ministries and other important committees of the House.

The committees would have representation of opposition parties as per their seats in the House, Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar said.

Asked whether the Opposition would head any of the committees, the Speaker replied in positive. "If they join parliament, then it would be considered".



Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal held an agitation programme in the city yesterday demanding cancellation of production sharing contract for oil and gas.

# Omar to be surrendered if US stops bombing: Official

AFP, Kabul

Supporters of Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar have agreed to hand him over to Afghan authorities if the US bombing campaign is halted, an intelligence official said yesterday.

Taliban commander Abdul Ahad, better known as Rayes Baghran, said he would also surrender along with his force of up to 1,500 men, said Nasratullah Nasrat from Kandahar's provincial intelligence services.

"Rayes Baghran promised today that he will hand over Mullah Omar (his fighters) will lay down their weapons if the aerial bombardment is halted," Nasrat told AFP by telephone.

The commander, who is based in the mountainous Baghran district of southern Afghanistan, made the offer at a shura, or meeting of tribal elders, in Helmand province Thursday, Nasrat said.

Baghran told the shura that his fighters included Taliban militiamen who have fled from other parts of Afghanistan, as well as some members of the al-Qaeda terrorist network of Saudi dissident Osama bin Laden.

"Baghran district had been heavily bombed, which is why they are talking of the surrender of their weapons and the handover of Mullah Omar," Nasrat said.

"Inshallah (God willing) we may get to an agreement because they have no other way. They have been absolutely blockaded and besieged."

The shura has been meeting for the past three days in a bid to avert bloodshed as Afghan forces move to crush the remaining pockets of Taliban and al-Qaeda resistance in southern Afghanistan.

Haji Gulalai, chief of intelligence in Kandahar province, said earlier this week that Omar's fate was being negotiated with his supporters, but if the talks failed a massive raid by some 4,000 to 5,000 Afghan soldiers, backed by troops from the US-led coalition, would be launched.

Omar, who has been on the run since the Taliban were defeated on December 7, is wanted by US authorities for harbouring bin Laden, the alleged mastermind of the September 11 terrorist atrocities in the United States.

He has also been in hiding since the Taliban's defeat.

Earlier Thursday, some 800 Afghan troops launched an operation to hunt down al-Qaeda fighters in eastern Nangarhar province, and were meeting no resistance, the Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) said.

The Pentagon said Wednesday that rounding up al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders remained a primary goal in the US campaign.

"We'll use whatever resources -- in a very forward leaning manner -- whatever resources it takes to get them, including special operation forces," said Pentagon spokeswoman Victoria Clarke.

Afghan officials have said the Taliban's former intelligence chief, Qari Ahmadullah, was killed with up to 50 of his men in a US bombing raid Monday, but the Pentagon said it had no "proof positive" of his death.

The deployment of the international peacekeeping force for Afghanistan has begun in earnest, with the arrival Wednesday of the first French troops and an advance party of officers from 12 nations.

A further 60 British staff officers are scheduled to arrive in Kabul late Thursday, Britain's military spokesman Major Guy Richardson said.

# SAARC summit starts today

Asked how the SAFTA will work with continued tensions between India and Pakistan, a spokesman for Nepalese foreign ministry, Pushkar Rajbhandari, said: "There is a SAARC mechanism. We hope India and Pakistan will go with the spirit of SAARC."

He said the council of ministers in last two days also discussed the issue of financial sector reforms and procedural requirements and WTO issues.

In this business matter they agreed to involve the SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) and networks of researchers.

Apart from social issues like poverty alleviation, women and children, terrorism came more prominently in the context of 11th September attacks on the USA and Afghan war in a backlash.

He said they also discussed the energy issue and Bangladesh and Bhutan gave their statements.

The recommendations of the Council of Ministers will be placed before the Summit for consideration of the seven leaders of South Asia.

To another question he said foreign ministers of India and Pakistan were in the meeting in a cordial and good atmosphere.

The Nepalese government has taken extreme security measures amidst high tensions running between Pakistan and India and also of local Maoist guerilla group fighting to bring end to monarchy.

Public vehicles like electric buses and auto-rickshaws were driven out of the road to control traffic during the three-day Summit. Most of the city roads were closed to traffic or being allowed to be used on one side.

Armed police, army and militia are jointly patrolling the streets in the capital of the landlocked Himalayan Kingdom of Nepal where a terrible tragedy struck down King Birendra along with his family recently.

### Summit should resolve not to encourage terrorism: Vajpayee

Meanwhile, Xinhua reports from New Delhi:

Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee Thursday said that the SAARC Summit will have to resolve that they would do nothing to encourage terrorism of any manner.

The SAARC countries will have to resolve that they would not do anything that encourages terrorism

in any manner," Vajpayee told a news conference in Lucknow of north India's state of Uttar Pradesh.

He said that almost all SAARC countries were suffering from the menace of terrorism. He referred to the U.N. resolution on terrorism and said all countries were bound by that.

Asked whether India would raise the role of Pakistan in fomenting cross border terrorism, Vajpayee said terrorism would be discussed in its broader perspective. Besides terrorism, the summit would at length dwell on issues like poverty alleviation, which, he said, was the biggest problem of countries in the region.

Earlier, in a statement circulated at the news conference before his departure for Kathmandu, Vajpayee hoped that the summit would display a new resolve to tackle the scourge of terrorism which had pervaded the region.

The prime minister said the main message that he would carry to the SAARC meeting was that the people of our region were looking to their leaders to generate an environment of mutually beneficial cooperation which would promote their socio-economic aspirations.

# BCL siege at CU

**FROM PAGE 12**  
earlier.

The Central Library of the university remained closed. Meanwhile, a case has been filed with Hathazari thana against six Islamist Chhatra Shibir activists including Habib Khan, the main accused in the murder case.

The other accused are Baitta Alamgir, Saiful Islam, Gittu Nasir, Abdullah-Al-Mamun and Didarul Alam Majumder, general secretary of ICSCU unit.

At a press conference on the campus, Shibir said it will launch a movement for removal of the Vice Chancellor if classes are not resumed immediately.

It said the case against its activists is false and demanded its withdrawal.

In the evening, over 300 local women brought out a procession at Madonhut near the university protesting "police excess" during a raid in the area to nab the persons who removed the fishplates.

A huge contingent of police led by Additional Police Super (North) conducted the raid.

Local people alleged that during the raid police nabbed innocent people and also harassed women.

About 150 local people also

staged a sit-in in front of Hathazari police station protesting the police action.

The sit-in was withdrawn after they were assured that the innocent people would be released.

## GQ Chy

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said the news is "false and motivated" and condemned the act.

The leaders threw a challenge to the dailies to prove authenticity of GQ Chowdhury's comment. His speech was distorted to create a division in the local unit of the ruling party and to sour its relations with the police administration, they said.

GQ Chowdhury never made such a provocative speech, the BNP leaders claimed.

They also called upon the authorities concerned to take legal action against those who sent the "false and imaginary" report.

The signatories to the statement include Raouzan BNP President Hasan Chowdhury, General Secretary Nasim Uddin Chowdhury, Jubo dal President Manjiri Md. Jahangir, General Secretary Rustom Ali Chowdhury, Ayub Mia, Rezaur Rahim Azam, Md Omar Faruq and Naser Ahmed Rana.

## Khaleda calls

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the Prime Minister's Bhaban here yesterday.

Blair arrived here in the evening on a short visit to Bangladesh.

Khaleda described Blair's visit to Dhaka as "yet another milestone" in the bilateral relations.

The prime minister pointed out that her government had assumed office at a crucial juncture of time. "We are faced with daunting challenges both in political and economic arena," she said and added that as a peace loving democratic and developing country, Bangladesh's efforts are focused on building a forward looking and prosperous country.

Mentioning Bangladesh's role in the regional and international organisations, the prime minister said Bangladesh is an active member of the United Nations and the Commonwealth. "We just completed our two-year term as a non-permanent member of the Security Council last December," she said adding "that capacity, we played a constructive role in ensuring peace in various parts of the world."

# India, Pakistan

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In past SAARC summits, however, heads of state and government have generally held an array of bilateral meetings on the sidelines of the conference.

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has already ruled out a two-way meeting with Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf in Nepal, insisting that Islamabad first do more to curb Islamic militants.

But Singh had earlier held out the possibility of a two-way meeting with Pakistani Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar.

Singh reaffirmed that India welcomed Pakistani moves against two Muslim militant outfits allegedly behind a deadly attack December 13 on the Indian parliament but said more action was needed.

"I did certainly say steps taken against Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad are welcome steps. But they need to be pursued because the dimensions of the problem are immense," Singh said.

"It is our hope that Pakistan will work seriously in what they themselves have announced is their intention," he said.

Escalating military tensions in the wake of the parliament attack have seen the two countries massing troops on their border, although both have repeatedly stressed they want to avoid an armed conflict.

Pakistani and Indian troops traded fire overnight in the hotly disputed Himalayan territory of Kashmir, where suspected Muslim militants Wednesday launched their second attack in three months on the Indian Kashmir state assembly in Srinagar, killing two.

Singh said that from 1994 onward India had been giving evidence to Pakistan that terrorists and wanted criminals were taking shelter in the country.

He confirmed that India has presented a list to Pakistan of known militants and criminals, including those involved in the 1999 hijacking of an Indian Airlines plane from Kathmandu and in the 1993 series of bombings in Bombay.

aim at the position, Singh said: "I am unable to understand how moral support can be provided to any immoral activity like terrorism."

A Pakistani official said President Pervez Musharraf is willing to meet with Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in Kathmandu but neither side has made a formal request for talks.

There has been no formal request from either side but we maintain that we are willing to meet, we are open for dialogue," said Rashid Saleem, a Pakistani foreign ministry official in Kathmandu.

We are not ruling out the possibility of a meeting, but it is not on the cards," he said.

he said there was "strong possibility" of informal interaction between the two delegations in the course of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit that opens here Friday.

Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar said recently: "We will not extend an invitation because we do not want to give India the satisfaction of saying that they have rejected it."

## Buses stay off

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When contacted, President of Narayanganj Bus-Minibus Owners' Association Sabbir Ahmed said that although the vehicles on the Dhaka-Narayanganj routes have a registration of 20 years, the owners have recently renovated their buses for several times -- so, the buses cannot be said as 20-year old.

He said most of their buses have fitness certificates, and the association has suspended its bus service in protest at the new rule.

Meanwhile, BRTC Chairman Taimur Alam Khondokar said the BRTC is introducing five new double-deckers from Sunday to ease the ongoing crisis, with another five to be launched next.

Of relevance, there are 22 double-deckers operating on the two routes from Dhaka to Narayanganj. The operation of 100 vehicles of the Shetal bus service -- owned by former AL MP Shamim Osman -- came to a stop after the October 1 election, as some BNP activists demanded huge tolls from them.

## Pintu

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Metropolitan PP Abdullah Mahmud Hasan opposed the petition for bail.

After hearing both sides, the court rejected the petition and fixed January 16 for full hearing on the issue.

Detective Branch (DB) of police arrested Pintu, also president of the suspended central committee of BNP's student front, Jatiyatobadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), following a case filed against him with Motijheel thana.

Advocate Jahangir Alam Khan filed the case alleging that Pintu and his accomplices tried to grab bidding documents.

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

The High Court on Wednesday issued a rule nisi, asking the government why the detention order of Pintu should not be declared illegal.

The court issued the rule upon a writ petition challenging the legality of the detention order.

# Arsenic found

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arsenic was found.

Similarly, high concentration of arsenic was detected in Magura, Manikganj, Narail and Kushtia district towns.

A total of eight teams were deployed for collection of water samples and other data. People at risk from drinking arsenic at high concentration were informed in writing. The Department of Public Health and Engineering (DPHE) was also informed about the status of arsenic concentration.

However, according to sources, none of the deep tube wells with high

concentration of arsenic have so far been shut down.

The urban areas from where water samples were collected are: Barisal, Brahmanbaria, Chapainawabganj, Chittagong, Chuadanga, Cox's Bazar, Dhaka, Dinajpur, Habiganj, Jessore, Jhenidah, Khulna, Kishoreganj, Kushtia, Laxmipur, Magura, Manikganj, Moulvibazar, Munshiganj, Narail, Natore, Pabna, Rajshahi, Rangamati, Rangpur and Sylhet.

When contacted, Chief Engineer of DPHE Abu Muslim said, "We have tested water in almost all the 100 municipalities and found eight

of them to have contaminated water."

"Alternative measures like iron-arsenic removal plants (IARP) have been installed to remove arsenic and in some places we have also shut down pumps," he added.

"As soon as we learnt about contamination, we ordered for alternative measures," Muslim added.

The eight districts where DPHE has taken alternative measures to remove arsenic are Rajshahi, Chapainawabganj, Chuadanga, Satkhira, Meherpur, Faridpur, Noakhali and Goalganj.

Meanwhile, Gopalganj Pourashava Chairman Mohammad Ali Khan expressed surprise when told about the concentration levels of arsenic in his town.

"I am really surprised. We must take immediate measures to inform the people about the risks," Khan reacted.

Until recently, government and non-government agencies have tested water in rural areas. So far, 61 of 64 districts are found affected by arsenic.

According to the latest data, 85 million people in the affected areas are at risk of drinking arsenic contaminated water.

# Dhaka traffic

**FROM PAGE 12**  
"We appreciate the decision to ban rickshaws and put the old pollutant vehicles off the streets, but they have not thought much about how the poor people travel," said Mohammad Shamsu Mia, a chief security guard in Gulistan area, who commutes from his Mohammadpur residence everyday.

For the last three days, female commuters could hardly 'fight' their way into public transports with large crowds of male commuters waiting for the rare buses to arrive. The problem heightens during the rush hours in Motijheel, Karwan Bazar, Paltan, New Market areas, where many public and private offices are located.

"The problem is not for those who have private cars or who can afford an auto-rickshaw, but for us who have to depend on cheap public transports," said an employee at WASA at Karwan Bazar.

With the decision to ban rickshaws on Panthapath Road, Karwan Bazar has now become an isolated island inaccessible to people, especially to traders who

depend on rickshaws and rickshawvans for transporting their merchandise from the wholesale markets.

Rickshaw-van pullers working at furniture shops along Panthapath Road have also complained that the ban has impacted their livelihood. With every set of furniture sold, they must have a vehicle for its transportation. But due to the ban, they are not allowed