

## Khaleda for Indo-Pak dialogue

BSS, Kathmandu

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, now attending the 11th SAARC summit in the Nepalese capital of Kathmandu, yesterday underscored the need for holding dialogue between Pakistan and India to defuse prevailing tensions between the two countries.

The Bangladesh leader made the request at a meeting between her and Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf at her suite at Hotel Soaltee Crown Plaza.

Briefing newsmen after the 45-minute long discussion, a spokesman of the Prime Minister said the meeting was held in a friendly and cordial atmosphere during which the two leaders focussed on a host of issues including the trade imbalance, enhancement of exports, stranded Pakistanis in Bangladesh and the Afghan situation.

On the question of trade imbalance...  
SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

## Chittagong Port 50 pc cut in container loading charge likely

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chittagong

The container loading charge for exportable goods at the Chittagong Port is likely to decline by almost 50 per cent.

With the decision taking effect from February 1, it will bring the loading charge from Tk 920 down to Tk 500 and almost halve the expenditure of about Tk 6 crore a year, sources said.

The decision was made at an hour-long meeting of the Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) with different port users, including Bangladesh Steamer Agents' Association (BSAA) and C and F Association, which was held at Bandar Bhaban here yesterday afternoon.

Presided over by CPA Chairman Commodore Golam Robbani, the...  
SEE PAGE 11 COL 8

## 'It's undignified to place local problem to a foreign guest'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

While Awami League (AL) thinks it fair to introduce two of the Cabinet members as Taliban supporters, some leading intellectuals think it 'undignified' to place a local 'problem' to a visiting foreign dignitary.

Main opposition party AL on Friday told British Prime Minister Tony Blair during his visit that the present government is a "fascist and communal" one with two of its Cabinet members having "links" with Taliban.

Asked why AL mentioned the two Cabinet members as Taliban supporters, the party President member and former commerce minister Abdul Jalil said yesterday, "Since Tony Blair has been campaigning against terrorism and crating aware-...  
SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

## INSIDE TODAY

Article 4

State of primary education: How to salvage it  
Manzoor Ahmed

Law and Our Rights 6

System of appointment to constitutional posts: Need for review; and Bangladesh -- Attacks on members of the Hindu minority

Business 7&8

Govt stays order to annul agents' commission, irks insurance cos  
DSE, CSE price quotations

	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Jan 6	5-30	6-00
Jan 7	6-43 am	

## Prayer Timings

Jan 6		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-30	6-00
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	3-45	4-00
Maghrib	5-34	5-39
Esha	7-05	7-30

Source: Islamic Foundation

## Reactivate SADF with a capital of \$500m

Dhaka places 8-pt plan at SAARC Summit

AFP, Kathmandu

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday proposed the reactivation of the South Asian Development Fund with a minimum capital of 500

million dollars to boost regional trade and commerce.

Khaleda proposed an eight-point plan to galvanise the seven-member South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC),

which is holding its 11th summit after a delay of over two years.

The eight-point specific proposals include utilisation of new ideas and techniques generated by information technology, implementation of studies by South Asian think-tanks leading to concrete action and the plan of Action of the Male Environment Ministers Meeting and recommendations of the two SAARC studies on environment, implementation of the SAARC agenda on poverty eradication without any further loss of time, strengthening social issues, encouraging greater involvement of non-state actors and adoption of a Regional Investment Agreement.

The prime minister said the impact of events of September 11, 2001 has effectively demonstrated that no country can live in isolation. "Real security for all of us lies in promoting sustainable growth, reform and development. That is what SAARC really stands for."

Tensions between India and Pakistan have drastically slowed progress within the regional body, which was initiated by Bangladesh and held its first summit in Dhaka in December 1985.

"SAARC has a special place in my heart," she told the summit. "Its guiding motivation is rooted in the wisdom of its founding and chief architect, late president Ziaur Rahman."

The prime minister called for the establishment of a regional investment agreement with a minimum capital of 500 million dollars that diplomats said could help guarantee the security of capital inflows within the region.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3



Prime Minister Khaleda Zia addressing the inaugural session of the 11th Summit of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in Kathmandu yesterday.

## Taka dips further by 1.58pc

STAR REPORT

Taka was given another large dose of devaluation yesterday, this time by 1.58 per cent, making a US dollar dearer by Tk 0.90.

The devaluation, first time this fiscal, came in the teeth of falling exports and worsening balance of payment (BoP) situation.

From now on, the Bangladesh Bank's spot US dollar buying and selling transactions with authorised dealers will take place within the band of Tk 57.40 to Tk 58.40 against the previous Tk 56.50 to Tk 57.50 per dollar.

The mid-rate has been fixed at Tk 57.90 instead of the previous Tk 57.

Taka was devalued last time drastically by 5.5 per cent in April 2000.

Immediately after the devaluation, economists said

it alone would help little to improve the situation, but said the move was imperative.

On the other hand, the banking circle anticipated the move, but felt that since export-fall is more demand induced and cost driven, the move would help little to attain goals. They felt the decision will deal a big blow to local industries, which came hot on the heels of enhanced gas and fuel prices. In balance, growth would be hit.

Dr Wahiduddin Mahmud said the devaluation decision has been taken in view of the ongoing export debacle and the risk of a further deterioration in the external reserve situation.

"But I don't think that devaluation alone will be enough. It must be seen as part of a well-coordinated policy package to minimise the effect of the adverse trade situation on growth, employment and living

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

## Most city ward commissioners allegedly patronise gangs

ABUL KALAM AZAD

Ward commissioners of the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), responsible for social welfare and development work, are allegedly indulging in criminal activities in their areas. Sources said most of the ward commissioners patronise separate gangs to unleash criminal offences.

Besides firearms dealing and drug trafficking, the ward commissioners have also close links with killers, land-grabbers, muggers and extortionists.

Sheltered by the commissioners, a large number of criminals have carried out criminal activities over the years. Several criminals were arrested and punished in some cases, but their godfathers always got off scot-free.

At least five ward commissioners have been killed by their rivals since the last DCC election, and several other DCC election hopefuls were killed in the last few years.

The most recent victim was Khaled Imam, a BNP leader and former commissioner of Moghbazar and Nayatala. With good prospects

for election, Imam started campaigning much ahead of the DCC election.

But his rivals envious of his popularity conspired to kill him to cleanse the contender, both police and his family members believe. They also believe the intra-party rivalry might have led to his murder.

Another ward commissioner and BNP leader Shaikat Ali Mistry was gunned down in front of his Mirpur residence three months ago, following a brawl with some local miscreants over the share of money.

Nowadays, the position of ward commissioner holds allurements to the DCC election aspirants because of its money-spinning advantage. The affiliation with the ruling party can also make a ward commissioner even more powerful.

With the exception of issuance of character certificates, ward commissioners have virtually no official task.

Since the last election to the DCC on 30 January in 1994, most of the commissioners did a little for their voters. Although their tenure

prepare a fresh report combining the two.

Presided over by LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, yesterday's meeting was attended by Law Minister Moudud Ahmed, Communications Minister Nazmul Huda, Industries Minister MK Anwar and Information Minister Dr Abdul Moyeen Khan.

Health and Family Welfare Minister Dr Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, another member of the sub-committee, could not attend the meeting as he was outside Dhaka.

Officials said the BNP government in its previous tenure had formed a local government commission headed by Barrister Nazmul Huda, which after 8 months

## Musharraf shakes hand but fails to break the ice



Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf (L) extends his hand to Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee at SAARC Summit in Kathmandu yesterday. The dramatic gesture came amidst tension between the two South Asian countries.

REUTERS, Kathmandu

Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf shook the hand of Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee at the SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) Summit yesterday, but the gesture has done little to break the ice between the countries whose armies are massing along the border.

Vajpayee accepted Musharraf's outstretched hand, but immediately repeated a demand that Pakistan halt what India calls "cross-border terrorism".

An Indian official dismissed the handshake as grandstanding for television.

Later, Pakistan officials sought to signal a diplomatic breakthrough by saying Pakistan and Indian foreign ministers were meeting on the sidelines of the summit. The United States has been pressing for high-level talks to resolve the crisis sparked by an attack on India's parliament on December 13.

India denied there was any bilateral meeting.

And adding to a sense of Indian frostiness, Vajpayee stayed away from an informal gathering of leaders at the summit in Nepal.

Musharraf concluded his summit speech by announcing he wanted "to extend a hand of genu-...  
SEE PAGE 11 COL 2

## Filing of graft cases against ex-AL ministers Resentment high in BAC as pvt lawyer scrutinises FIRs

ZAYADUL AHSAN

Dissatisfaction is running high among the Bureau of Anti-Corruption (BAC) officials after the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) unofficially engaged an independent lawyer to scrutinise First Information Reports (FIRs) regarding filing of graft cases against some former Awami League government ministers, party leaders and bureaucrats, according to sources.

A week ago, the PMO took the unusual move to scrutinise the First Information Reports (FIRs) of the cases to be filed by the BAC against them.

Accordingly, a senior lawyer of the Supreme Court has been unofficially engaged to scrutinise the FIRs at the PMO.

The sources at the PMO said the private legal practitioner has suggested correction, re-writing and changes in the drafting of some of the FIRs.

The decision to engage the lawyer has enraged the officials of BAC since it has a Director, Law.

The BAC has so far been preparing FIR on its own and only needed the PMO's approval before filing cases.

Some officials of the Bureau even feel insulted, the sources said. The officials are of the opinion that whatever the "hired" lawyer of the PMO recommends, they will prepare the FIRs as they deem fit.

They said the move goes against the government's own pledge to form an independent anti-corruption commission.

The BAC last week sent files of five graft cases to the PMO. Persuaded by some bureaucrats, the PMO verbally told the BAC that the FIRs needed to be scrutinised. Accordingly, it sent copies of the FIRs to the PMO, which is scrutinising those.

A senior lawyer of the Supreme Court scrutinised some of the FIRs at the PMO on Thursday and finished the rest on Saturday. The director general, director and deputy directors of the BAC were present during the scrutiny.

The BAC officials observed that the investigation officers (IO) prepared the FIRs with full responsibility on completion of investigations and getting approval of the prime minister. The IOs also give their...  
SEE PAGE 11 COL 5

## Blair pleads for clearing Shell-Cairn's dues

STAR REPORT

British Prime Minister Tony Blair has requested the government to clear the pending oil and gas bills against Anglo-Dutch oil giant Shell and its British partner Cairn.

Petrobangla owes Shell-Cairn an undisputed amount of US\$ 52 million as bills for purchasing offshore Sangu gas since May last year, sources said. Ironically, Petrobangla itself gets over Tk 1200 crore from its consumers and affiliates.

The British premier raised the issue of the pending bills during talks with Prime Minister Khaleda Zia last Thursday, sources said.

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman, present during the talks, tried to assure Blair of payment of the dues and said these have been left unattended by the previous government.

He also told the British premier that the government would honour its contractual obligations with the oil companies.

Meantime, Petrobangla sources said the payment has been deferred by the Bangladesh Bank because of the fragile foreign exchange reserves although all processes for releasing the money have been completed.

Shell-Cairn supplies around 140 million cubic feet a day (mmcf) of gas from Sangu to the national grid under a Production Sharing Contract (PSC) signed in

the mid-1990s.

Shell sources said Petrobangla owes Shell and Cairn an additional amount of around \$38 million. However, this claim is under dispute and the issue is at an international court in Washington. The hearing of the case will begin this month.

Ever since Shell-Cairn started gas supply, Petrobangla have been deducting eight per cent from the oil companies' monthly bill as charge for supplying the gas using an eight-kilometre local gas pipeline. Originally, Shell and Cairn are contractually obligated to set up a new pipeline leading to the national grid. But to fulfil the prime obligation of meeting the deadline for Sangu gas production, the oil companies started using the local pipeline belonging to the Bakhrabad Gas Transmission Systems.

But Shell-Cairn had been arguing that deduction of eight per cent of the monthly billing was actually exorbitant and unacceptable. They pleaded with Petrobangla to rationalise the pipeline rental charges. But with Petrobangla stern on its stance, the oil companies sought international arbitration.

"As per our calculation, we will get around 38 million dollar from Petrobangla plus interests if we win the case," the Shell source said.

Previously, during the visit of former US president Bill Clinton, Petrobangla was asked to pay the dues of US oil company Unocal for purchase of Jalalabad gas.

## Bail petition of Kamal Majumder rejected

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The Special Court for Prevention of Women and Children Repression, Dhaka, yesterday rejected the bail petition of former MP and Awami League leader Kamal Ahmed Majumder, arrested on charge of attempted rape.

Judge Mohammad Shah Alam Miah passed the order following a criminal appeal, seeking bail by the defence lawyers.

In its order, the court mentioned that the charges brought against Kamal Majumder were primarily proved and the case was at a primary stage of investigation. So, the petition for bail is rejected.

Advocate Abdul Baset Majumder, Syed Rezaur Rahman, Kamrul Islam, Mohammad Abdullah Abu, Abdur Rahman Hawlader, Momtajuddin...  
SEE PAGE 11 COL 8

## AL meets today to review Shahabuddin's statement

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League will sit today to review and formally react to former president Shahabuddin Ahmad's statement bitterly criticising it, published and broadcast on Saturday.

"As the party's acting President was not in the city, we could not sit today (Saturday) to review the former president's statement. We will sit tomorrow (Sunday) and then give our reaction," a senior AL leader told this correspondent yesterday.

Shahabuddin was very critical of some recent statements by the AL chief and other party leaders at home and abroad.

The former president's state-...  
SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

## Fuel price hike AL agitation programme begins today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League starts its four-day agitation programme leading to the hartal on January 9 protesting price hike of fuel and electricity.

On the first day today, the main opposition party will organise demonstrations and protest rallies at upazila headquarters across the country.

On the second day, it will organise the same programmes at district headquarters. The party will organise protest rallies in each ward in the capital on the third day. A half-day countryside shutdown will be enforced on the concluding day.

## Debate over structure of UZ system drags on

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The debate in the cabinet sub-committee on local government over the structure of the upazila system dragged on.

The committee yesterday had a preliminary discussion about the entire structure of the local government system after a report on upazila it placed in the last cabinet meeting on December 31 last year was returned for further discussion, sources said.

The previous recommendation in this regard was placed in a report way back on July 30, 1992.

The committee decided to further examine the two separate recommendations and is now planning to

of exhaustive discussion, submitted a report suggesting a four-tier local government system comprising Gram Shava, Union Parishad, Thana Development Coordination Committee and Zila Parishad.

Briefing newsmen after the meeting, LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan said the 6-member Cabinet sub-committee would examine both the reports and submit a complete report for further strengthening the entire local government system.

"We are now discussing about the local government tiers and its structures," he added.

Communications Minister Nazmul Huda, who was included in the committee on December 31 last, said, "Our aim is to make the local government a more skilled,

effective and viable body and we will present a complete system to the nation as per the Prime Minister's order."

Huda said the Upazila system was introduced by the autocratic Ershad regime under the presidential form of government and was intended purely for voting purposes.

He said that under the present parliamentary form of government, reintroduction of Upazila system would definitely create a serious conflict between the MP and the Upazila Chairman.

Sources said the cabinet sub-committee in its December 31 report has recommended major changes to the upazila structure to narrow the scope for conflict between the MP, Upazila Chairman, Zila Parishad Chairman, and local and district administrations.