

Steps to ensure security, smooth passenger service at ZIA

UNB, Dhaka

The government yesterday formed a high-powered committee and took a number of decisions to strengthen security and ensure smooth passenger services at the Zia International Airport. The seven-member coordination and monitoring committee comprises members of the home ministry, Civil Aviation Authority, Bangladesh (CAAB), immigration department, National Board of Revenue, NSI, DGI and expatriates welfare ministry.

An official announcement said the committee was formed at an inter-ministerial meeting with State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Mir Mohammad Nasiruddin presiding.

State Minister for Home Lutfuzzaman Babar, State Minister for Finance Shah M Abul Hossain and State Minister for Expatriates Welfare Minister M Kamrul Islam attended the meeting. The coordination and monitoring committee will sit on Sundays, review the situation at the airport and take decisions to resolve problems. "If necessary, the committee will talk to

the higher authorities for necessary suggestions".

The meeting also made a number of decisions to ensure passenger service and security at the ZIA:

- * Not allowing any rental car in the canopy area, other than those carrying stickers given by the CAAB.

- * Introducing four more conveyor-belts in the customs hall, increasing number of trolleys.

- * Making mandatory for all on-duty personnel at the ZIA to keep duty passes.

- * Establishing strong security chain on northwestern part of the airport.

The meeting was also attended by Home Secretary Dr Sa'dat Hossain, Civil Aviation and Tourism Secretary M Shafiqul Alam, and Employment Secretary Sirajul Islam, CAAB Chairman Air Commodore Lutfur Rahman, Biman Managing Director M Khasrul Alam and senior officials of NBR, NSI, DGI and Special Branch.

Publicity plan

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the responsibility of publishing the two brochures in Bangla and English.

Besides, the DFP at the 100 days' end will publish special supplements in national dailies and screen a short film.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia will address the nation over Bangladesh Betar and BTB on January 26 marking the completion of the 100-day programme.

Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister Dr Kamal Uddin Siddique in a letter issued on Thursday to all ministries asked for documents of their achievements and progresses as regards the Prime Minister announced programmes.

The sector-wise reports of progress are to be sent by January 15 to the Cabinet Secretary, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, Information Secretary and Press Secretary to the Prime Minister.

Secretaries, who on their own have included additional programmes into the 100-day action plan, have also been asked to send their reports by January 15. Besides, reports of all other public welfare programmes implemented since the government assumed power should have to be sent.

The letter has also sought proposals and suggestions for future programmes that could be included in the next phase.

Gas use

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ted a proposal to the government for pipeline export of gas to India.

The committee would also look into the government's liabilities and commitments to Unocal concerning the Bibiyana gas field.

b. The long-term energy security scenario of Bangladesh and when the existing gas reserve will be exhausted.

In this regard, the committee would rely on the findings of the Committee on Gas Reserve headed by BUET Vice-chancellor Dr Nuruddin.

c. Objectives of the Second Round Block Bidding under which four Production Sharing Contracts (PSCs) were signed.

d. The cash flow situation in the gas sector in the country.

e. Ways to reduce dependency on International Oil Companies (IOCs) in developing the country's gas sector.

The IOCs were invited to explore new gas and oil fields and develop those in the early nineties when the World Bank-led donor agencies decided to stop financing different energy sector projects.

f. Prospects of cross-border energy trading with India, Nepal and Bhutan.

The Committee has been given one month time to submit its report.

Taka devalued

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standard," said the economist.

Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya, executive director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said the devaluation was imperative because of export and reserve situations as well as to slow down import.

"But devaluation remains limited in its effect in short- and medium-term and space for impact for such adjustments is increasingly eroding given the long-deferred collateral changes particularly those which will improve both macroeconomic situation and micro efficiency," he said.

Dr Bhattacharya said adjustments come, once again, not as a part of an overall package to redress the situation, but as a discrete measure. This will not help reduce the uncertainty in the economy and may result in imported inflation as well as cost-pushed inflation.

"Such a decision should not be treated as a big event in the management of an externally liberalised economy," said Dr Mahmud. "Rather, it should be seen as part of a continuing process of realignment of the exchange rate in response to the external balance situation. It is not possible to defend the domestic currency indefinitely in the face of an adverse international trade situa-

tion."

He said he had been informed over telephone by the BB governor as it is now customary to inform immediately the members of the BB board of directors whenever a devaluation decision is made.

Ward commissioners

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competition. Few of them even sell out their contracts to sub-contractors at the Nagar Bahabon," said another official.

The ward commissioners never think about development activities in their areas. Rather, they indulge their own interests, mostly money-oriented.

Many are involved in multiple terrorist activities, including killing, toll collection, blackmailing and property-grabbing.

"Each ward commissioner is a godfather in his area and well-aware of the happenings around him. In fact, nothing can be done without his knowledge," said a ward commissioner loyal to the ruling BNP.

The sources said many ward commissioners got off scot-free, being blessed by the past Awami League government, although there were criminal charges against them.

Haji Selim gets bail in cement adulteration case

BSS, Dhaka

The High Court yesterday granted anticipatory bail to former Awami League lawyer Haji Mohammad Selim in cement adulteration case.

A High Court bench comprising Justice MA Aziz and Justice Nazrul Islam issued a rule asking the government not to arrest the former MP until the filing of the police report in the case or hearing on the bail petition.

The court also asked police not to harass Selim, who appeared in person before the bench along with his lawyer Dr MA Zahir.

Fatullah police on January 1 allegedly seized 180 bags of adulterated cement from a warehouse of the Madina Trading Corporation, owned by Haji Selim and lodged a case in this connection.



The seven leaders at the SAARC summit in Kathmandu are (from left to right) Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, Bhutanese Prime Minister Lyonpo Khandu Wangchuk, Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, Nepal's Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, Maldives President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf, and Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga. The summit will conclude today.

Dhaka places 8-pt plan

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Progress in establishing a preferential trade agreement was slow and concessions granted under the process were grossly inadequate, Khaleda said.

"Negotiations for tariff reduction under the SAPTA (South Asian Preferential Trade Agreement) have taught us some lessons," she said.

"We are now aware how inadequate they are, if we exclude commodities of interest to all countries and if tariff concessions do not extend to actively traded commodities."

Khaleda made a strong pitch for greater trade cooperation among the private sectors of the region where trade between member states stands at just four percent of the trade with the rest of the world.

She also called for more regional efforts to address the scourge of poverty in South Asia where out of the 1.3 billion population nearly half are officially listed as living below the poverty line.

Bangladesh believes that all future SAARC trade initiatives should reduce bilateral trade imbalances and this calls for decisive steps to encourage trade where

opportunities already exist, especially to promote trade creating investments and other facilitating measures. Khaleda suggested greater interactions among business people and investors and cooperation among financial institutions.

"As part of poverty alleviation, special emphasis should be laid on ensuring the rights of women and children," she said, adding that SAARC had failed to make a dent in reducing poverty.

She said the decision making process in SAARC was also preventing the regional body from pressing ahead with its agenda to improve living standards in the region, the poorest in the world.

The charter of SAARC requires that all member states must be represented by their respective heads of state or government for a summit to go ahead. The strict requirement prevented the holding of the latest summit as originally scheduled in November 1999.

Speaking on globalisation, she said, "Our efforts should be directed towards an inclusive globalisation from below, which will benefit common people through new ideas,

opportunities and technologies as globalisation entails greater mobility of capital, labour and technology that transcends national frontiers."

She said though the benefits are obvious, the downside is that the benefits are unequally distributed and ignore social objectives. They also involve dangers of drugs, terrorism, pollution, diseases and arms and movements of people that invade all societies and respect no border.

The Bangladesh prime minister extended her warm greetings to President Pervez Musharraf saying it is time to welcome new faces and renew old ties. She also paid tributes to President Chandrika Kumaratunga for steering the course of SAARC in such challenging times.

She congratulated the chairman and had words of praise for the outgoing secretary general, Nehal Rodrigo of Sri Lanka, for completing his term with dedication and distinction, and welcomed his successor QAMA Rahim of Bangladesh. She thanked the government and the people of Nepal for the gracious hospitality.

S Asian leaders

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removed there could be no improvement in trade volumes.

"Trade promotion calls for dismantling of non-tariff barriers. It must also reduce value added requirements under the rules of origin. Failure to redress these impediments will affect the creation of region-wide trading space," she said.

Khaleda also called for greater interaction among businessmen and investors and cooperation among financial institutions.

Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf urged for the need for greater peace and cooperation saying the world would otherwise lose faith in South Asia as an investment destination.

He highlighted that South Asia's share of capital inflows to the developing world declined from seven percent in the 1980s to three percent in the late decade.

Musharraf, however, cautioned that a common market should only be established once it was certain that the interests of the smaller countries were completely protected.

SAARC was originally expected to establish a framework treaty for a free trade area by the end of last year. However, bilateral bickering between India and Pakistan held up the process.

The regional body was due to hold its 11th summit November 1999, but Indo-Pakistan tensions stalled the meeting which finally opened here yesterday and is set to end today.

Khaleda: Indo-Pak

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to restore democratic administration in Pakistan.

On this issue, the Pakistan President said the process of democratisation has started in his country referring to the elections of local and provincial bodies.

The Pakistan President invited Khaleda Zia to visit Pakistan at a mutually convenient time.

Accepting the invitation, the Bangladesh Prime Minister also invited Pakistan President to visit Bangladesh.

Responding to Bangladesh's request, Pakistan President Musharraf said the request would be duly addressed and added that the matter could be discussed when the Pakistan Commerce Minister visits Bangladesh later this month.

When Khaleda Zia raised the question of long-standing problem of stranded Pakistanis in Bangladesh and underlined the need for resolving the problem, the Pakistan President said his country would consider the problems with due importance.

When wanted to know about the Afghan situation Musharraf briefed the Bangladesh Prime Minister on the issue.

Khaleda urged the Pakistani side

AL meets

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ment was widely discussed by political circles and people in general yesterday. Activists and supporters of the AL were found unhappy about it while their political opponents hailed it.

Shahabuddin was president during the fiveyear tenure of the immediate past AL government.

Pakistan has rounded up scores of militants over the last several days and arrested the leaders of two Kashmiri separatist groups -- the Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed.

Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh told reporters at the South Asia summit India welcomed the crackdown but more steps were needed to create a climate conducive to peace talks.

Islamabad insists the crackdown is for internal security reasons and not at India's behest. Musharraf has said he has wanted to arrest extremists for some time but was deterred by concerns of a violent backlash.

"It is a continuing process," a Pakistan interior ministry official said. "Our crackdown on religious extremists and terrorists will continue."

But Islamabad has said it wants evidence from India before acting on a list of 20 people New Delhi has demanded be handed over as "terrorists".

India has refused to supply evidence, saying that Pakistan for

125 shanties gutted in Pallabi

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 125 shanties were gutted in a fire at Shialbari slum in the city's Pallabi area yesterday afternoon.

Sources said the fire originated from a shanty of one Shahjahan Mia at about 3:40pm and soon engulfed the entire slum.

Seven fire fighting units from different fire stations in the city rushed to the spot and extinguished the blaze at about 6pm.

BNP men lay siege to thana in Noakhali

UNB, Noakhali

BNP leaders and activists laid a siege to Companiganj police station for 6 hours yesterday demanding release of one of their party activists arrested on charge of abducting a BCL leader.

Police said Selim and his associates kidnapped Amal Majumder, student and BCL leader of Comilla Law College, from his house on Friday night and demanded ransom.

In a pre-dawn raid, police rescued Amal and arrested Selim, an accused in five criminal cases including murder.

District administration brought Selim to Noakhali under heavy police escort and produced before the court that sent him to jail hajot.

Extortionists ransack house

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A gang of extortionists ransacked a house and beat up two inmates at Kalabagan in the city yesterday as they refused to pay toll.

Sources said the gang led by one Rustam demanded Tk 20,000 from the house owner, Yakub Ali, a few days ago. The gang is involved in various criminal activities in Kalabagan and Green Road areas.

He sent some members of his gang to Yakub's house yesterday to realise the money. They beat up Yakub and his nephew Jasim with iron rod leaving them injured and damaged furniture and other things as they were not given the money.

Both were admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Rubel murder Hearing adjourned till Jan 22

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Metropolitan magistrate Mohammad Abdus Salam Miah, first witness for the accused in the Shamim Reza Rubel Murder Case, was cross-examined in the Third Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court, Dhaka yesterday.

Judge Mollah Mostafa Kamal adjourned the hearing till January 22.

In his statement, Abdus Salam told the court that he was a Metropolitan Magistrate in the CMM's Court, Dhaka on August 26, 1998.

The witness also told the court, he received judicial statements of Amir Hossain, the third prosecution witness, of the case on August 26, 1998.

Amir Hossain did not mention the name of AC Akram Hussain, the principal accused in the case, in the statements, Abdus Salam further told the court.

All the accused, including AC Akram Hussain and Mukul Begum, a local Awami League leader, were produced before the court during the hearing.

Earlier, 35 prosecution witnesses in the case were cross-examined.

Shamim Reza Rubel, 24, a BBA student of the Independent University, was picked up by a team of DB Police from in front of his Siddeswari residence under Ramna Thana on July 23, 1998 and was tortured to death in the custody the same day.

KNM may be privatised

Staff Correspondent, Khulna

Khulna Newsprint Mills (KNM) may be privatised as part of the government's denationalisation programme, highly placed sources said.

The government has refused to pay Tk 1,000 crore sought by the BCL for expansion and modernisation of KNM because it is reluctant to run the mills at a loss of Tk 30 crore a year.

KNM will be sold to the private sector. Its annual production must be raised to at least one lakh tonnes to make it economically viable, a high official of the mills told this correspondent.

At present, production capacity of the mills is 30,000 tonnes a year. But it could not produce more than 15,000 tonnes due to acute shortage of gewa wood, a major raw material for production of newsprint.

Production cost of newsprint is Tk 37,000 per tonne while imported

newsprint is available at a price of Tk 28,000 per tonne.

The recent price hike of petroleum products is another blow to the mills which is already beset with acute financial crisis, heavy debt burden and various other problems. The mills owe over Tk 80 crore to oil companies, sources said.

Chittagong Port

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meeting was attended by, among others, BSAA Chairman ASM Nayeem, C and F Association president, and M Salimullah.

The CPA will send the decision to the shipping ministry immediately for its approval.

The meeting also decided to decrease the loading charge for exportable garment products by 70 per cent and for other goods by 20 per cent.

Of relevance, around 13 lakh tons of goods are exported through the Chittagong port a year in containers.

10 Indians held in Satkhira

BSS, Satkhira

The members of Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) arrested ten Indian citizens from Keragochi Border area under Kalaroa Upazila on Wednesday while they were trying to enter Bangladesh territory without valid papers.

According to official sources, the BDR jawans of Keragochi Border Outpost (BOP) arrested four women and six children from Keragochi Border area under Kalaroa Upazila while they were illegally trying to enter Bangladesh territory.

The arrested are inhabitants of Hakimpur village under Sharupnagar Thana of North 24 Pargona district in West Bengal. They were handed over to Kalaroa Thana Police.

A case was filed with Kalaroa Thana police in this connection.

Terrorists beat chief of local anti-terrorism body at Syedabad

BSS, Dhaka

A gang of terrorists yesterday attacked the president of local anti-terrorism committee and two of his sons at Syedabad yesterday.

Police and hospital sources said the terrorists attacked Siddiqur Rahman, 65, and his two sons -- Swapan, 28, and Azizur Rahman alias Sumon, 24, -- at their residence at 43/C South Syedabad at about 4 pm. They beat up them mercilessly.

Police quoting local people said the gang attacked Siddique as he was elected president of a local anti-terrorism committee recently.

The injured persons were immediately taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

A case was registered with Demra thana in this connection.

'It's undignified

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ness for anti-terrorism, we have identified the terrorists to him."

He said the two ministers from Jamaat-e-Islami acted against the people during the country's War of Liberation and killed an uncountable number of freedom loving Bangladeshis in collaboration with the Pakistani occupation forces.

Terming them as terrorists, the AL leader said razakars, al-badr and al-shams, under their auspicious, killed the country's most enlightened people to make the nation intellectually bankrupt.

Another AL leader, talking to The Daily Star over telephone last night, gave a different note.

Former state minister for foreign affairs and AL leader Abul Hassan Chowdhury said, "Generally speaking, it is unnecessary and ill-advised to discuss domestic issues with a visiting dignitary". He however did not elaborate.

Noted intellectual Prof Sirajul Islam Chowdhury also gave different views, saying it was not right to talk with a foreign statesman about a local problem. "By doing this we have been making ourselves funny and disrespected internationally. The problem should be resolved locally," said Chowdhury.

He said the 1971 perspective is different from now. The leaders of Jamaat-e-Islami, being branded as Taliban supporters by AL, were elected in a democratic system. "We can create public awareness to reject these elements."

Acting President of Awami

League Abdus Samad Azad and Secretary General Zillur Rahman were not available for their comment.

Kamal Majumder

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Ahmed Mehedi, Mizanur Rahman Mollah and Moklesur Rahman Badal submitted the appeal Thursday to the Special Court on against the rejection order of the CMM's Court, Dhaka.

The court heard the appeal yesterday and passed the order.

Special PP Abul Khair Arfan Uddin and inspector Alfa Zaman Nakkib opposed the petition.

Earlier, the CMM's court had rejected the bail petition of Kamal Ahmed Majumder.

Kamal Majumder was arrested on Wednesday from his Banani residence in the city following a case under the Prevention of Women and Children Repression Act 2000, filed with Pallabi police by a 35-year old woman Yasmeen Sultana where she accused the ex-MP of trying to rape her at his political office at Mohana in the city's Pallabi area on December 30, last year.

She also accused Kamal's brother Anwar Majumder and one Nazma Hossain in the same case.

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

On the following day, 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, Yasmeen alleged.

Musharraf shakes hand but fails to break the ice

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mine, sincere friendship to Prime Minister Vajpayee".

He then strode around the podium to face Vajpayee, sitting among a row of government leaders, and held out his hand to loud applause.

With a look of wry amusement, Vajpayee half rose to his feet and shook Musharraf's hand.

"I have shaken his hand in your presence," Vajpayee told the summit.

"Now President Musharraf must follow this gesture by not permitting any activity in Pakistan or any territory in its control today which enables terrorists to perpetrate mindless violence in India."

Kashmir tension
Vajpayee, in his own speech to the congregation, said that India needed to see more action from Pakistan in curbing Pakistan-based separatists it blames for fomenting a revolt against Indian rule in Jammu and Kashmir, its only Muslim-majority state.

India and Pakistan have

amassed troops, artillery and missiles along their borders in one of the most high-risk build-ups since they won independence from Britain in 1947.

The United States is pushing hard to end the stand-off, fearing it is distracting to its campaign in Afghanistan, but also concerned that conflict could lead to the world's first nuclear war.

U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell again urged both Vajpayee and Musharraf to resume dialogue.

"There are some encouraging signs out there but I don't want to overplay this," he said in an interview with the BBC. "This is still a very dangerous situation."

Prime Minister Tony Blair is also touring the region hoping to help calm the waters. He was due to meet Indian leaders on Sunday before going on to Pakistan.

India feels betrayed

But Vajpayee said India had felt betrayed in his previous peace talks with Pakistan.

His visit to the Pakistan city of Lahore in 1999 was followed, he

said, by the Kargil conflict, an outbreak of fighting in northern Kashmir which nearly brought India and Pakistan to their fourth war.

India accused Musharraf, a general who seized power in a bloodless coup in 1999, of masterminding the Kargil conflict.

Vajpayee then invited Musharraf for talks in the Indian city of Agra last July.

Those talks ended in failure, though Musharraf was seen as having won the media battle, a victory he may well be trying to repeat at the SAARC summit in the Nepalese capital Kathmandu.