

SAARC pledges to tackle terrorism, poverty

Leaders for expeditious trade

AFP, Kathmandu

South Asian leaders agreed to devote more resources to battle the scourges of terrorism and poverty in a declaration from a summit.

The seven members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) said they were "convinced that terrorism is a crime against humanity and there could be no justification for deliberate taking of innocent civilian life."

Calling terrorism a threat to the "security, stability and development of the region," the declaration called on the member countries to speed up the enactment of a 1987 convention against terrorism.

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee in his opening remarks Saturday made a veiled swipe at Pakistan, saying "some countries" in SAARC had not fulfilled their obligation to stop terrorism.

New Delhi accuses Islamabad of sponsoring "cross-border terrorism" in disputed Kashmir and has blamed Pakistani elements for a deadly December 13 attack on the Indian parliament.

The leaders, whose countries represent one-fifth of the world's population living in one of its poorest regions, expressed "firm resolve to confront the problem of poverty with a new sense of urgency" and to achieve "a minimum level of economic and social development."

They agreed to "accelerate cooperation

in areas of trade, finance ... to maximise the benefits of globalisation and liberalisation."

The SAARC declaration also called for measures to stop the trafficking of women and children for prostitution within the region, urging "social development through women empowerment and their participation at all levels."

The statement also encouraged the developed world to adopt "more liberal trade and aid policies towards the least developed countries," including debt relief.

BSS adds: The eleventh summit of the seven-member regional forum SAARC ended here this morning with the leaders agreeing to accelerate economic cooperation to realize the goal of a South Asian Economic Union (SAEU) "to give effect to the shared aspirations of a more prosperous South Asia."

In the declaration, the seven heads of state and government renewed their pledge to strengthen the regional association to make it "more cohesive, result-oriented and forward looking."

Bangladesh Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, Bhutanese Prime Minister Lyonpo Khandu Wangchuk, Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Maldives President Maumoom Abdul Gayoom, Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf, Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga

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Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee looks down at Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf walks by after taking the stand at the end of the 11th SAARC Summit yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

India downs Pak spy plane

AP, Jammu

Indian soldiers shot down an unmanned Pakistani aircraft that intruded into Indian air space in the northern Indian state of Jammu-Kashmir on Sunday, military officials said.

The unmanned drone, which takes aerial photographs, was flying nearly 4 kilometers (2.5 miles) inside Indian territory in the Poonch sector along the India-Pakistan border when troops fired at it, an army spokesman told the AP on customary condition of anonymity.

Poonch is about 240 kilometers (150 miles) northwest of Jammu, the winter capital of the disputed

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India, Pakistan hold 'bilateral chat'

AFP, Kathmandu

Indian and Pakistani leaders held their first direct talks in more than six months Sunday when South Asian leaders organised an impromptu summit between the rivals to help defuse a three-week military and diplomatic standoff.

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf and Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee held a "bilateral chat" of at least 10 to 15 minutes at the convention center where a seven-nation regional summit had just ended, Sri Lanka's

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Telecom deals cost country over 7 lakh dollars

ABU SAEED KHAN

The country incurred a loss of more than US\$700,000 in two telephone exchange expansion deals sealed last year.

The Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB) submitted two proposals to the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications (MoPT) for expansion of its telephone exchanges in Dhaka city in June and December last year. Alcatel CIT of France quoted 1,735, 686 euro (US\$ 1,756,036) for 27,500 lines and Nortel Networks of Canada offered \$ 1,705,225 for 29,341 telephone lines.

According to the proposals, per line costs of Alcatel and Nortel were \$ 63.86 and \$ 58.11 respectively. Although Alcatel's unit price was \$ 5.75 higher than Nortel's, the MoPT approved the former's 10 per cent overpriced quotation with 1841 less telephones than Nortel's offer.

The BTTB issued the purchase order to Alcatel on December 27, 2001 at a whopping \$ 158,000 higher rate than Nortel's following a ministerial order.

Sources in the BTTB are perplexed over another overpayment of \$ 100,000 to Alcatel. On June 28, 2001, the French vendor was awarded a \$ 1.62 million contract for 24,000 lines. In this case, the BTTB paid \$ 67.50 per line, about \$ 3.94 higher than its rate quoted two months back.

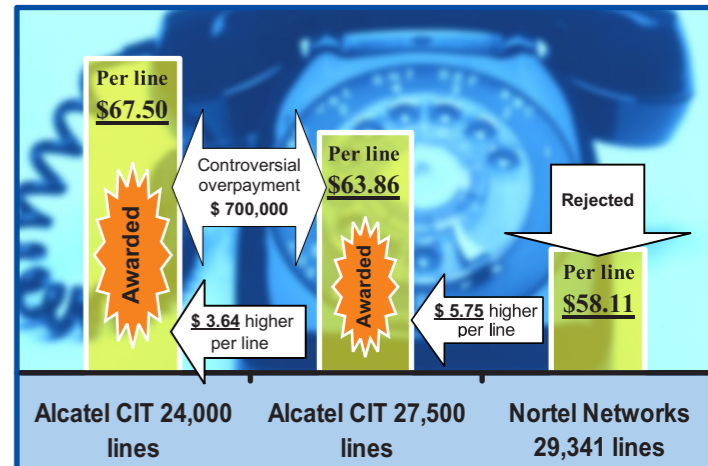
The BTTB is reportedly unhappy

with the higher payment to the French company. Alcatel in its first offer quoted \$ 32,483 as 'installation services' for 27,500 telephones. But in the deal, it charged \$ 218,127 as 'installation services' of 24,000 lines. Evidently Alcatel overcharged \$ 185,644 while installing 3500 less telephone lines. In fact, Alcatel

shows \$ 108,014 on this head.

This raises questions about the \$ 17,000 overpayment on account of airfreight.

Controversy also looms over Alcatel's charging \$ 182,757 for 'engineering in France' for 27,500 telephones. Interestingly, the vendor charged nothing of this kind in its



quoted \$ 138,726 for the 'installation services' for 24,000 lines. But the BTTB increased it to \$ 55,406 due to inexplicable reasons while issuing the purchase order.

Another dubious payment was made to Alcatel in the same deal. The vendor quoted \$ 91,120 airfreight for importing the equipment, but the BTTB's purchase order

sources allege that paying a total of \$ 226,615 for 'installation services' is inconsistent with the vendor's quotation and the payment of US\$ 182,757 for 'engineering in France' is not permissible in the

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Govt keeps pvt operators off international routes while dollars drain out

INAM AHMED

Anti-private airliner policies of the government on the pretext of protecting the Bangladesh Biman are depriving the country of nearly one billion US dollars a year to foreign carriers.

A look at the figures reveals that Biman's passenger volume recorded only a 1.38 times rise - from 634,169 in 1991 to 875,123 in 1999. On the other hand, foreign airlines started with a less than Biman volume in 1991 at 476,834 passengers and in 1999 they together carried 1,263,463 passengers. The growth was nearly three times.

With Biman dogged by countless malaise, the country could easily retain a chunk of this passenger share if it allowed the private sector to serve the international routes. And yet, that has remained low on the civil aviation authorities' agenda forever.

Even when the government is feeling a serious shortage of foreign exchange reserves to the extent of contemplating gas exports, it is still oblivious of the potential civil aviation sector, if it could just further open up international routes to private sector.

All this is being done on the pretext of shielding a perennially losing Biman. Paradoxically, the civil aviation authorities of Bangladesh (CAAB) are not hesitating to allow 'fifth freedom' the permission to a foreign carrier coming to Bangladesh to pick up passengers from a stop-over even though it is depriving the country of millions in dollars.

CAAB is also quick to entertain to frequency increase requests by foreign carriers even in destinations where Biman's existing market shares are extremely low, usually with the consent of Biman. Ironically, a representative of Biman usually is party to signing of most air service agree-

ments.

According to a Daily Star investigation, many of the fifth freedom permissions are given for beyond-any-logic trade-off that virtually makes no monetary gains for Biman other than a paltry sum coming as royalty per passenger. As an example, Bangladesh allows Dhaka-Katmandu a prime Biman route which is ostensibly being 'protected' from the Bangladeshi private sector, to be operated by Sri Lankan Airlines on the pretext that Colombo Male is an equally viable route for Biman. Many such examples exist. So, the question that now comes is why the government refuses private airlines to operate on routes which it opens up for foreign carriers? And all this is happening while Bangladesh Biman is steadily losing its market share in a burgeoning aviation sector, and foreign carriers are making

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Only EC, not president, can cancel election: AL

Shahabuddin's statement 'designed to divert public focus'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The main opposition Awami League (AL) has expressed surprise at the "unwarranted" statement issued by former president Shahabuddin Ahmad and said the statement seems to divert public attention from worsening law and order and wobbling economic situation.

The AL reply came yesterday, a day after the former president came down heavily on the party and its chief Sheikh Hasina for making "irresponsible" remarks about him. The AL said it wants to set the matter to rest and 'move onto the more urgent and grave national issues'.

"History will judge how fairly and objectively he carried out the duties and responsibilities entrusted to him," said the AL release, approved by the Awami League Central Working Committee. It added that the AL had no desire

either to start a new debate or prolong a controversy that gives no pleasure to anybody in the country.

The three-page reply also clarified the former president's comment about an alleged request for re-elections, debate over the role of armed forces in the October 1 election and consultation with the then president by former prime minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

It also questioned the hasty promulgation of an ordinance bringing changes to the country's electoral laws by-passing the parliament. The party said it was not fair on the part of the former president to make the remark that in the eyes of Awami League "I am an angel if everything is done according to their desire, otherwise, I am a devil".

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Hearing of ETV case Jan 28

BSS, Dhaka

The High Court yesterday fixed the date of hearing of ETV case on January 28.

A division bench comprising Justice Mohammad Hamidul Haque and Justice Nazmun Ara Sultana passed the order upon a petition moved before the court by Barrister Abdur Razzak.

Dr Mahmud Hossain and Dr Mohammad Abdur Rab, teachers of the Departments of Pharmacy and Geography of Dhaka University and Gias Kamal Chowdhury, president of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ), filed a writ



An attendant carries his sick mother to a far away ward at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital yesterday in the absence of trolleys. Allegations are there that a section of the employees of the hospital rent the trolleys while the authorities close their eyes to the sufferings.

Shahbazpur gas field to start production from July

SHARIER KHAN

The Shahbazpur gas field that remained unutilised since its discovery by BAPEX in 1995, is likely to start production from July, supplying gas directly to energy-starved Bhola island.

However, beginning of this new age for the people of Bhola is unlikely to be smooth. Work on the 20 MW Bhola power plant project-- the first major consumer of the gas--remains suspended.

The government recently suspended the work on the ground that there were irregularities in the bidding process. The power project was approved at 15 million dollars. Sources said it should cost 12 million dollars.

To give the people of Bhola benefits of the Shahbazpur gas field, BAPEX initiated a three million dollar development work in June last year to feed the power plant and gradually supply gas to the south-western region of the country.

It is expected that initially the field would supply 20 million cubic feet gas per day (mmcf/d). Though the country consumes a little over 1000 mmcf/d gas, the south-western region does not have any gas supply.

In mid-2000, the then government took the move to assign BAPEX to prepare a development plan for Shahbazpur gas field, which was the centre of focus of the controversial Western Region Integrated Project (WRIP) of US oil company Unocal.

Development of Shahbazpur gas field remained a far cry when the government decided to award the work to Unocal.

After the discovery, BAPEX, Petrobangla's oil and gas exploration and production wing, had given a gas field development plan twice, outlining drilling of two appraisal wells. However, both these proposals were rejected by the ECNEC as BAPEX failed to show economic viability of its plan.

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Khaleda, Deuba talk bilateral trade

UNB, Kathmandu

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and Nepalese Premier Sher Bahadur Deuba yesterday held discussion on bilateral and possible regional cooperation in the fields of gas, flood control, water management and hydroelectricity.

During the nearly half-an-hour meeting held at the suite of Bangladesh Prime Minister, after the conclusion of the 11th SAARC Summit, Khaleda felicitated the Nepalese Prime Minister for successfully holding the regional conference.

During the meeting, the two leaders discussed trade between the two neighbouring countries. Khaleda suggested the Nepalese PM

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Ombudsman to be appointed soon

BSS, Dhaka

The government will soon appoint an ombudsman to ensure accountability and transparency in the administration.

The ombudsman will have a 26-member secretariat and a fully-fledged independent office.

"An announcement will be made to bring into effect from today the law relating to the appointment of the ombudsman in the light of the relevant constitutional provision," Minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Barrister Moudud Ahmed told newsmen at his secretariat office here yesterday.

He said Prime Minister Khaleda Zia had already given her approval to three important points: appointment of an ombudsman, gazette notification on it and any change, if necessary, in the relevant law. "This

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Argentine House passes urgent steps to battle economic crisis

DSE, CSE price quotations

	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Jan 7		5-27 pm
Jan 8	6-43 am	

Prayer Timings

Jan 7		
	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