

10-member CPC team arrives today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A 10-member delegation of the Communist Party of China (CPC) arrives in Dhaka tonight on a five-day visit to Bangladesh at the invitation of BNP.

Cai Wu, Vice Minister of CPC's International Division will lead the delegation.

BNP central leaders will receive the team members at the Zia International Airport at 10.30 pm, said a press release.

The delegation will call on BNP secretary general and LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan at party central office at 9.30 am tomorrow.

The members of the delegation will also meet the presidents and general secretaries of BNP's different front organisations at BNP central office.

Bangladesh, UK agree to strengthen economic ties

UNB, London

Bangladesh and Britain agreed to make renewed efforts to further expand and strengthen relations between the two countries, particularly through economic cooperation.

The agreement came when Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan met and discussed bilateral, regional and international issues of mutual interest with his British counterpart Jack Straw on the sidelines of the 18th meeting of Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) in London on Wednesday.

Morshed Khan had also opportunities to exchange views on issues of mutual interest with Foreign Ministers of Australia, Barbados, Botswana, Canada, Nigeria and Special Envoy of the Prime Minister of Malaysia.

The FM led the Bangladesh delegation at the meeting of CMAG.

Road accident

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where he was sent to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH). But Hossain died immediately after reaching the DMCH at 10:20 a.m.

As the news of his death went round, hundreds of angry students rushed to the University Dairy Farm Gate and damaged a number of vehicles, sources said.

Although teachers along with the proctor of the university tried to restrain the students, they refused to leave the area and blocked traffic at several points on the highway at around 11 a.m., which eventually prompted the police action later in the day.

Meanwhile, hundreds of students, university teachers and officials gathered at the residence of Kausar Hossain as his body was brought in the evening after completion of postmortem at the hospital.

His Namaz-e-Janaza was held at the university at 8:30 p.m. He will be buried at the university graveyard today morning.

Kausar Hossain completed his Honours and Masters from the JU English department and joined the same department as a teacher in 1989.

As a student, Hossain also worked as a correspondent of Bangladesh Times and was elected president of JU Journalists' Association in 1986-87.

He left behind two sons and his wife who is also a teacher of JU School and College.

JU authorities filed a case with the Savar thana in this connection.

DTM: tourist spot

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The DTM is open to visitors from 10 am to 7 pm with entry fee of Tk 20. Visitors can try their luck to win the lucky draw of Dhaka-London-Dhaka air ticket in 'World Traveller Plus' of British Airways, on the first two days.

There are three prizes on the concluding day. The first is a Dhaka-London-Dhaka air ticket in Club World with three-night stay in London Sheraton Hotel. The second and third prizes are Dhaka-London-Dhaka air ticket. British Airways is sponsor of all the prizes.

State Minister Mir Mohammad Nasiruddin said that in the past, effective steps were not taken to attract local tourists and develop proper infrastructure. He however assured that new avenues would be opened in this sector on the basis of public-private sector partnership.

Abdul Mannan said during his tenure, he had tried to develop domestic tourism but could not succeed.

Mahfuz Anam in his speech said there is immense opportunity of developing tourism in the country. "It should be based not on false image but on projection of the real picture, the natural beauty of the country," he added.

He said global lesson is that domestic tourism must grow first,

If war on terrorism expanded

US won't automatically get backing: NATO chief

AP, New York

The United States will not automatically get NATO backing if it seeks to expand its war on terrorism to Iraq, Iran or North Korea, the Western military alliance's chief has said.

NATO invoked Article 5 of its founding treaty after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, declaring that these should be treated as an attack on all 19 members of the alliance.

But NATO Secretary-General Lord Robertson said on Thursday the decision was related to the specific attacks on New York and Washington and NATO would have to decide what to do about any new attack -- so Article 5 wouldn't carry over.

"I think if the Americans could produce convincing evidence that there was a link between other countries and the attack that took place, then I think the allies would be seriously interested in that information," he said. "But that hasn't been forthcoming up to this moment."

"So it's a matter for the North Atlantic Council to decide what to do about an attack or any subsequent evidence," Robertson said, referring to NATO's governing body.

In his State of the Union address

on Tuesday, President George W. Bush accused North Korea, Iran and Iraq -- a trio he called an "axis of evil" -- of supporting terrorism. His hard-line stance, especially against North Korea and Iran, raised concerns in Asia and Europe that the US-led war on terrorism would be spread.

The NATO chief said there are threats from countries that now have missiles to deliver weapons of mass destruction. He didn't name any nation.

US National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice on Thursday called North Korea the world's No. 1 seller of ballistic missiles. The Pentagon accuses the North Koreans of selling missiles to Iran and Pakistan. Iraq has barred UN weapons inspectors for over three years, and is believed to be trying to rebuild its banned weapons programmes.

In a wide-ranging question-and-answer session with journalists at the World Economic Forum, an annual gathering of global leaders in many fields, Robertson said NATO was moving in the direction of dealing with terrorist threats.

This meant the alliance was becoming a forum for intelligence

gathering and sharing, and for bringing together information on nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, he said.

NATO did not directly participate in the US-led campaign that routed the former Taliban rulers from Afghanistan. But Robertson said the United States could not have won the war "without coalition support."

Crime curve

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or didn't charge them under proper section of the penal code.

Sources however countered the home minister's remark by saying that police's utter failure in arresting criminals is causing the serious law and order situation. The same set of criminals is repeating their crimes as they go unchallenged, they said.

Police on the other hand claimed that they could not take proper action against criminals as they belonged to either of the two major political parties.

The Cabinet Committee on Law and Order in its eighth meeting on December 26 announced rewards for the arrest of 23 top terrorists of the capital. But no arrests have yet been made.

Buddhadev

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rounded by Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar and China and home to more than 200 ethnic and tribal groups.

Local people accuse the national government of plundering the region's wealth and giving little in return.

India and Pakistan are locked in a tense military stand-off, fuelling fears of war, over New Delhi's charge that Islamabad sponsors "cross-border terrorism" by training and arming rebels fighting Indian rule in the Himalayan region of Kashmir.

Both sides have massed about a million men along their border, but New Delhi says it will not pull back until Islamabad proves it has ended support for the militants, closed down their groups and surrenders 20 alleged criminals and terrorists.

The issue came to a head after a December 13 attack on India's parliament New Delhi blamed on two Pakistan-based groups -- including the one it says was involved in the Calcutta raid.

11-party

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at the Muktagong on Thursday to garner support for the hartal programme.

Many other socio-cultural and political organisations have also supported the hartal programme and called upon people to observe it.

Acting president of Bangladesh Krishok Federation Zobeda Sattar Khan, General Secretary Badrul Alam and President of Bangladesh Kishani Shabha Dr. Samsunnahar Khan Dolly in a joint statement last night called upon the people to observe the hartal.

The other organisations which supported the hartal programme include Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Mukti Andolon, Bangladesh Bhashoman Sramik Union, Bangladesh Bhashoman Nari Sramik Union, Bangladesh Grameen Buddhijibi Front and Gonochhaya Sangskritik Kendra.

Businessman

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him in the last Union Parishad election. He was a probable contestant in the next UP election.

Police suspected that the killing might have link with the coming election.

No case was filed in this regard till the writing of this report last night.

Gardez

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council which opposes Khan's appointment, said the fighting killed 20 fighters on the Shura side and 30 civilians. He claimed Khan's force lost 50 men, but a Khan aide put their deaths at 11.

The Khan spokesman, Jilani, contacted by satellite telephone from a district of the town of 40,000 people, said the halt in fighting was a cease-fire, called to make prisoner exchanges and treat the wounded. Both sides claimed to have taken dozens of prisoners.

Saifullah said a government delegation was arriving from Kabul, the capital, to try to negotiate a solution to the dispute.

There were fears that conflict could boil over again. The Shura sides' intelligence chief, Allahmohammed Yari, said he was hearing reports that Khan's forces had set up roadblocks south of Gardez and were confiscating cars from townspeople.

"We have no trust in Bacha Khan's people," said a police officer, Abdul Malek.

The factional fighting was heaviest in Afghanistan since the interim government of Hamid Karzai was installed Dec. 22. The battle added urgency to Karzai's appeals for a multinational peacekeeping force to expand its deployment to outside Kabul to stop violent squabbling between powerful local warlords.

DCC election

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he is now giving priority to availing himself of the ticket than doing his job at the ministry. They said his supporters at policy-making level have already started lobbying for him.

Talking to The Daily Star, a number of BNP policymaker said recently that the party had yet not changed decision regarding the mayoral candidate. They also ruled out any such possibility saying that Khoka is way ahead of "other aspirants" in terms of performance and image.

Frontline party leaders said being the president of city unit Khoka has been in close contact with the city dwellers since he was declared the mayor candidate.

Meanwhile, sources said the government is planning to hold the mayoral polls in Dhaka, Rajshahi and Khulna soon. Accordingly, it has decided to pass a new law providing dissolution of elected local government bodies on completion of their tenure. A bill in this regard will be placed in the ongoing parliament session and the law will be made effective immediately after the bill's passage.

BNP sources said the mayors of the three city corporations have been holding their office although their tenure expired in 1999.

News Analysis

Sonia-Singh meeting: More than just warming up ties

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

The political grapevine in the Indian capital hardly ceases to be without a buzz. And the latest one is a meeting between top opposition leader Sonia Gandhi and former Prime Minister V P Singh here on Thursday.

This was the first meeting Singh had with the Congress chief since he left the party 15 years back following differences with Sonia's husband and former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi following controversies over some defence deals.

The ostensible and innocuous reason for Singh's calling on Sonia at her residence here was his crusade for bringing probity in the utilisation of government funds allotted to each member of parliament, according to sources close to him.

Singh had recently staged a sit-in demonstration in Lucknow, the capital of his home state of Uttar Pradesh, to further his mission. He has written letters to heads of various political parties to direct their lawmakers to submit a statement of expenditures of the funds they got from government for their local area development.

But the deeper political signifi-

cance of the Sonia-Singh meeting was not lost on observers.

First, it came at a time when assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh, politically a key state, are around the corner and Congress is trying to bring back its long-lost dominance there in the face of stiff competition from BJP, Samajwadi Party led by Mulayam Singh Yadav and Bahujan Samaj Party headed by Kanshi Ram.

Secondly, analysts feel V P Singh's meeting with Sonia might help her to further wear thin her "foreigner" image, an issue to press for which at least three senior leaders of Congress Sharad Pawar, P A Sangma and Tariq Anwar had quit and formed a separate party three years ago.

It could, the analysts feel, could be a sign of Sonia's growing acceptance to other opposition parties, especially after warming up of relations between Congress and Samajwadi Party in recent months.

Interestingly, V P Singh, all through his years of anti-Congressism, had not said anything against Sonia since she assumed Congress Presidency in 1997.

After quitting Congress, V P Singh had become a bete-noire of

India rejects Pak talks offer: Troops trade border fire

REUTERS, Jammu

India on Friday rejected calls by Pakistan to hold talks to end their dangerous military stand-off after troops traded heavy fire across the disputed region of Kashmir.

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, who has ordered the biggest military build-up on the border since the last war with Pakistan in 1971, said talks with its neighbor had proved futile in the past.

"They (Pakistan) keep saying the leaders of the two countries should meet. Meet for what? Do we meet for discussing the weather or some business?" he said in a speech at a party conference.

Vajpayee's remarks came as troops exchanged mortar and heavy machine gun fire at several points along the control line that divides Kashmir between the nuclear rivals.

An Indian defense official said three civilians, including a four-year-old child, had died in Poonch district in overnight cross-border firing by Pakistani soldiers.

"Stocks of fodder of some border families in the area caught fire due to enemy mortar fire," he added.

Iranian FM likely to visit Dhaka this month

UNB, Dhaka

Iranian Foreign Minister Dr Kamal Kharazi is likely to visit Dhaka this month to discuss bilateral, regional and international issues with the Bangladeshi leaders.

Kharazi's visit is seen important by diplomatic circles in the wake of new developments in the Middle East, new interim government in Afghanistan and persisting tensions between nuclear rivals India and Pakistan.

Although a firm date has not yet been worked out, diplomatic sources told UNB that the Iranian Foreign Minister might come to Dhaka around February 15.

He will hold talks with his

added it was not significant and New Delhi would not withdraw its troops from the border until infiltration ended fully, UNI said.

Indian officials and military analysts also point out that numbers traditionally drop off at this time of year when winter snows close mountain passes and make conditions harsh.

Fifteen people including three children, died in separate incidents of violence elsewhere in Indian Kashmir over the past day. Police said three children had died on Thursday playing with a grenade they found in a meadow in Udhampur district.

An activist of the pro-India People's Democratic Party was among those killed by suspected guerrillas along with his bodyguard in Baramulla district.

Four militants of the Lashkar-e-Taiba, one of the two separatist groups blamed by India for the December 13 attacks on its parliament, were shot dead by security forces at Surankote in the state's Poonch district, UNI said.

"There is no other reason (for the firing) unless they have ammunition which they want to burn. Knowing their financial situation, they are not in a position to burn ammunition," the United News of India quoted him as saying in New Delhi.

Fernandes said there had been a slight fall in the number of rebels crossing into Indian Kashmir, but

Bangladeshi counterpart Morshed Khan on bilateral and international issues. He will also call on Prime Minister Khaleda Zia.

"The planned visit is aimed at further improving Dhaka-Tehran bilateral relations, particularly after the take over of new government of Khaleda Zia," a senior Foreign Ministry official said.

An Iranian diplomat said it is a routine visit to a Muslim country to strengthen bilateral ties.

Dr Kamal Kharazi earlier came here in connection with the second D-8 summit held in Dhaka in 2000.

In October 1995, then Iranian President Rafsanjani paid a state visit to Bangladesh. Former prime minister Sheikh Hasina also visited

Rajiv Gandhi and the bitterness of the circumstances in which Singh had left the party lingered for more than a decade. Can Singh and Congress make a new beginning?

Even if the possibility of Singh's return to Congress is ruled out for the present, it certainly was a sort of "home-coming" for Akbar Ahmed, a known politician from Uttar Pradesh whose rise to prominence owed more to his proximity to Rajiv's brother Sanjay Gandhi and his wife Maneka, now a minister in Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's government.

Given the extremely strained ties between Sonia and Maneka, the two daughters-in-law of Indira Gandhi, the return of Akbar Ahmed, popularly known as "Dumpy," to Congress is significant.

At the Congress party headquarters here Thursday announcing Ahmed's rejoining the party, Congress General Secretary Ghulam Nabi Azad made it a point to recall that "Dumpy" was a close associate of Sanjay Gandhi. After quitting Congress, Akbar Ahmed was for a long time with Bahujan Samaj Party.

India cracks down on abortion of female foetuses

REUTERS, New Delhi

India's Supreme Court on Tuesday ordered a crackdown on unregistered clinics and diagnostic laboratories that are misusing ultrasound technology for determining the sex of foetuses.

Over the past several years, a greater-than-expected birth rate for boys has occurred in several Indian states because such technologies have led to an increase in the abortion of female foetuses. Such activities were banned under the Prenatal Diagnostic Technique (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act, promulgated a few years back, but some clinics have continued the practice.

Doctor's organisations and other groups estimate that some 5 million

female foetuses or infants are killed in India every year.

Such practices have been fuelled by the preference of families to have a male child. Female children are considered a financial liability in several Indian states, as parents have to spend huge amounts as "dowry" given during their marriage. While the daughters leave the house when they get married, the sons are supposed to stay with their parents and earn "dowry" when they get married, making them richer.

"Almost 99% of private diagnostic labs use ultrasound for determining the sex of the foetus as it is a source of fast bucks for them," said independent gynaecologist and public health expert Dr. Puneet Bedi. "Abuse of ultrasound for such tests goes on even in government hospitals where such illegal tests are performed unofficially to oblige big bureaucrats or senior doctors or to make money surreptitiously," he added.

Bedi contends that very few clinics in Delhi do not do such illegal tests. "A vast majority of clinics performing such tests have remained unregistered," he added.

The Supreme Court order came in response to a public interest writ petition filed 2 years ago by the Mumbai-based non-governmental organisation, Centre for Enquiry into Health and Allied Themes (CEHAT). CEHAT contended that despite the law banning abuse of such technologies, female infanticide, sex-selective abortions and sex-selection of embryos were rising due to lack of enforcement.

In the ongoing case, Justices M. B. Shah, B. N. Agrawal and Arijit Pasayat ordered the state governments to impound the ultrasound machines in unregistered clinics.

"The state governments are directed to take immediate action if such machines are being used in clinics without licenses. The machines are to be seized and sealed for the time being," they stated.

On December 11, 2001, the court had sought from the equipment suppliers—which included international manufacturers such as

General Electric and others--the names and addresses of those who had been supplied the equipment but many states failed to do anything with the information.

"It is a small, but significant step, in the right direction," Bedi said. It means that such registered clinics will have to keep records of tests done, abortions or deliveries taken place etc., that can be verified. "Auditing the performance of such clinics will be the important second step," he added.

In Haryana state in North India, the overall sex ratio is 861 girls to 1,000 boys, while in neighbouring Punjab it is 874 females to 1,000 males. In 0-6 age group, the imbalance in the sex ratio is even more exaggerated. Haryana has 820 females per 1,000 males while Punjab has 793 females.

Although doctors' professional organisations such as the Indian Medical Association (IMA) have joined the chorus against abuse of sex-selection technologies, their action on the subject has disappointed activists. Bedi criticises the IMA for defending doctors arrested near Delhi for abuse of such technologies a few months ago.

"Unfortunately, the doctors have been hand in glove in such abuses, but if one doctor goes to jail on getting caught, hundreds of others will behave," he said.

Computer games

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syndrome, which is caused by using industrial tools for long periods of time.

The syndrome was classified as an industrial disease in 1985 and sufferers receive disability benefits and compensation.

The boy, who played computer games with a vibrating control device for up to seven hours a day, suffered pain and swelling in his hands.

"The seven hours a day that our patient reported is excessive and exceeds the manufacturer's recommendation, but we must assume that this is not an uncommon occurrence," said Cleary.

Awal murder Killers were armed cadres of PBCP

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Fourteen people mostly belonging to the ruling party have been named as masterminds behind the murder of MA Awal, senior vice president of Bagerhat district unit of BNP on December 5, 2001 at Jatrapur bazar under Sadar thana.

The killers hired by the masterminds were armed cadres of Purbo Banglar Communist Party, said Md Nizamuddin, one of the masterminds who made his judicial confession under 164 in the court of First Class Magistrate Harun-or-Rashid of Bagerhat Sadar Court on Wednesday afternoon.

Awal was killed just after one week of the final decision taken unanimously at a secret meeting in Bagerhat town where we all the 14 were present, Nizamuddin also an activist of Jubo Dal said in his judicial confession.

The masterminds included three top leaders of Krishak Dal and Jubo Dal and a top leader of Bagerhat city unit of Jubo League, said Nizamuddin who was quizzed in police remand three times before his statement was recorded in the court under 164.

Ekushey book fair

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will not be able to project our national thoughts to foreigners and on the other we would fall behind in different competitions in international arena."

She also stressed the importance of translating various Bengali books into other languages, including English, as well as translating repositories of knowledge in various languages into Bengali.

Assuring that her government will not hesitate to do whatever necessary for development and expansion of publication industry, the Prime Minister said, "We want the growth of indigenous publication industry -- not only in respect of quantity but also quality."

The Prime Minister said as a nation people we are proud as Amar Ekushey has now been recognised as International Mother Language Day by the world community, through a UNESCO declaration. "I congratulate the expatriate Bangladeshi youths in Canada who took the lead in getting international recognition of this great National Day of ours."

Paying high tributes to the immortal martyrs of language movement, including Barkat, Salam, Rafiq and Jabbar, as well as

martyrs of independence war and various movements, Khaleda said, "We have gained the independent Bangladesh as a result of supreme sacrifice of the valiant struggling heroes among our predecessors."

One-minute silence was observed at the outset of the inauguration of the book fair in memory of the martyrs of Language Movement 1952 and Independence War 1971. Munajat was also offered for the departed souls and progress and prosperity of the country.

Later, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia released a bunch of colourful balloons to open the Book Fair. Then she visited some book stalls and bought some books, including Biswa Kosh-Sahitya Sambhar, Bigyan Kosh, Nazrul's Dhumketu and a book on computer programming.

State Minister for Cultural Affairs Selima Rahman, Cultural Secretary Nazmul Hasan, secretary general of Bangladesh Book Publishers and Sellers Association Abdur Razzaq, managing director of Srijonshil Publisher Parishad Mojibur Rahman and acting DG of Bangla Academy Moinal Hasan attended the function.