

## Tanks roll into Bethlehem

### Sharon calls it a war; Israeli troops build bunkers around Arafat's headquarters

AFP, AP, Jerusalem

Israeli forces widened their offensive into the West Bank yesterday, briefly entering Bethlehem, occupying several other towns and continuing sweep for militants in fully occupied Ramallah.

The tanks rolled into southern Bethlehem just before sunrise, witnesses said, stopping about 500 metres from the Church of the Nativity, built over the traditional birthplace of Jesus. Forces also moved into the surrounding villages of Al Khader and Beit Jalla, witnesses said.

A few hours after the incursion, the tanks left Al Khader but they returned again in the afternoon.

Israelis also pulled back from Bethlehem to patrol the edge of the town. But witnesses said about 40 Israeli tanks and armoured personnel carriers on the northern edge of Bethlehem. Several buses carrying Israeli troops had also arrived.

Israeli forces imposed a curfew in Beit Jalla and occupied buildings that gave them views into Bethlehem.

The latest military actions came a day after Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon declared the nation at war.

In the major West Bank town of Ramallah, Israeli soldiers refused to let Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat leave his office for a fourth day. Israeli troops were using bulldozers to build an embankment of dirt around the compound.

Fifteen separate explosions were heard in Ramallah yesterday afternoon, but the source of the noise wasn't immediately clear.

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PHOTO: AFP

Israeli troops take positions in the outskirts of the West Bank town of Bethlehem. Arab countries, spearheaded by Israel's peace partner Jordan, considered measures to end Israel's three-day siege of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and furiously condemned Washington's inaction.

## Home ministry sounds alarm

STAR REPORT

The Ministry of Home Affairs informed by an unnamed intelligence agency has recently issued a classified circular saying that different quarters are trying to portray Bangladesh as a nation sheltering terrorists and fundamentalists.

Some anti-Bangladesh organisations based in different parts of India are actively working on spreading chaos and creating a crisis in Bangladesh to damage its image internationally, according to the unnamed intelligence agency.

In such a situation, the country should make maximum efforts to improve its law and order and curb the activities of hardline fundamentalist groups, observed the home ministry's classified circular issued on March 11.

The ministry issued a set of instructions for all government agencies to beef up security, ensure safety of the minorities, handle power and water crisis efficiently and even refrain from taking any political or administrative decisions that may trigger unrest.

However, it said decisions about export of gas and other crucial issues could be taken only after proper scrutiny.

"An intelligence agency informed this ministry that the anti-terrorism drive in Afghanistan which strengthened the strategic presence of the United States of America in this region, India's strategic stand against the militants in Kashmir and current situation in central Asia are having a negative impact on Bangladesh also" the classified circular said.

The ministry is also contemplating to take other necessary measures perceiving a chaotic situation in

the future, according to sources in the home ministry.

The circular also asked different related departments to seriously consider few other suggestions forwarded by the unnamed intelligence agency. These suggestions include improving law and order situation as per the people's aspiration and taking realistic steps to establish rule of law.

"The government should be alerted against taking any decision that could trigger unrest among the people and undermine the government's popularity," it also recommended. "Any administrative steps that draw negative reaction from the people should not be taken."

The proposed precautionary measures also include taking necessary security measures in and around different religious places of the minority community and ensuring security of the minorities. "All should see to it that the members of the minority community are not deprived of taking recourse to law," the circular added.

The intelligence agency's recommendations also include taking necessary steps to stop trafficking of illegal arms and drugs through borders. Security of foreign missions and organisations and also of foreign diplomats and foreigners should be beefed up.

The circular further suggested ensuring security of different important installations and supply of agricultural inputs according to demand.

Neither the home minister, nor the state minister for home affairs, nor the home secretary could be reached for comments.

## Canada mulls free market access

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Canada considers offering free market access to all but a few agricultural products of Bangladesh in line with the declaration of WTO ministerial meet in Doha.

The Canadian International Trade Committee will recommend that the Canadian parliament eliminate tariff and quota restriction on everything with the exception of a few agricultural products of LDCs, including Bangladesh, by the end-April.

"Our government is committed to give free market access to the products of LDCs including Bangladesh. Hopefully by the end of April there will be some positive developments. And after that all of your (Bangladeshi) products excepting eggs, milk and a few other firm produces will enjoy the facility," Mac Harb, chairman of the Canadian International Trade Committee, disclosed at an elite's gathering in the city yesterday.

The visiting Canadian secretary of state (Asia-Pacific), David Kilgour also spoke at the reception accorded to the Canadian delegation by the Metropolitan Chamber of

Commerce and Industry (MCCI) at Hotel Sheraton.

David Kilgour and Mac Harb is leading a business delegation to Bangladesh.

Earlier, Kilgour showed a positive gesture to Bangladesh's proposal for free market access to Canada at a meeting with Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury. At the meeting, the commerce minister sought the EU-style free market access to Canada.

Bangladesh exported goods worth 198 million Canadian dollars last year and imported goods worth 117 million dollars, with the Canadian investment here amounting to around 45 million dollars.

At the reception, Kilgour praised Bangladesh for its success in making garment industry fully globalised and the entrepreneurial and dynamic spirit of its people.

"Indeed, what our delegation and I have seen so far has changed our early uniformed views about Bangladesh. Achievements in ceramics, pharmaceuticals and leather products belie the image of a land of floods and poverty," Kilgour said.

Canadian High Commission in

Dhaka David Preston, MCCI President Tapan Chowdhury and MCCI Vice-President Hafiz G Chowdhury also spoke on the occasion.

Kilgour mentioned 30 years of relationship between Bangladesh and Canada, which is based on developmental partnership and also mentioned that Canada's largest aid programme is in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh receives more than 50 million Canadian dollars a year and the amount is more than two billion Canadian dollars since the independence of Bangladesh in 1971.

"Our relationship, however, is today far from being purely 'aid'-based. Canadian companies are visible in Bangladesh, you may not recognise them," Kilgour told the gathering.

He named few Canadian companies working in Bangladesh, including Bata and also mentioned that local private airlines GMG uses Canadian-manufactured Dash 8 aircraft and local trains are pulled by

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## Abductors slash boy into pieces



PHOTO: STAR

It's all memory now... an undated photo shows Khandaker Shihab Ahmed (above) give his younger brother a piggyback ride at their central Bashabo residence in the city. Police arrested three alleged abductors of Shihab who was murdered and sliced into six pieces.

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Schoolboy Khandaker Shihab Ahmed, 13, was kidnapped for ransom but things turned worst for the boy as he recognised one of the culprits residing in his locality. And

the result -- he was sliced into six pieces.

The boy met the horrible fate 53 days ago but the incident came to light only yesterday when detective police recovered the decomposed pieces of the body of the Motijheel Model High School boy from three places in Bashabo and North Goran areas in the city.

The pieces were recovered as per statements of the culprits, arrested on Sunday night, police said.

The head along with a portion of the body in a plastic bag was recovered from Bashabo Jheel.

Some parts of body packed in another polybag were recovered from under a heap of sand near a house in North Goran.

Yet other organs, put in Shihab's school bag, were dug out near the wall of a house in North Goran.

The murder took place on February 7 within two hours of the

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## Waiting game

### AL, BNP await each other's response on talks

REZAUL KARIM and REAZ AHMAD

Who will respond first the Awami League or the BNP? And this simple question on the government's March 28 offer for a dialogue on the current confrontational politics and the subsequent opposition conditions for a 'meaningful dialogue' seems to have left the whole process in limbo.

On March 28, BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan phoned AL General Secretary Zillur Rahman and offered a dialogue for resolving some contentious political issues including Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's proposal for displaying portraits of both Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and late president Ziaur Rahman side by side in government offices.

In a prompt response to the government offer, the AL

put three conditions for 'creating a congenial atmosphere' for the dialogue.

These include revival of the law for preservation and display of Bangabandhu's portrait at all public offices, allowing the opposition to hold demonstrations and ending 'political persecution' of opposition activists.

BNP now believes that the conditions set by the Awami League (AL) for the proposed dialogue is not acceptable as 'a dialogue cannot be held with conditions imposed'.

Sources said although there has been no formal communication from the AL on the government offer for a dialogue, the BNP policymakers discussed the conditions set by the AL.

"It apparently seems that the AL is insincere about

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	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Apr 2		6-14 pm
Apr 3	5-49 am	

Prayer Timings		
Apr 2		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-00	5-30
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	5-00	5-15
Maghrib	6-20	6-25
Esha	7-45	8-15

Source: Islamic Foundation