## Kumaratunga for 3rd party mediation on Kashmir

Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga has supported third party mediation to resolve the Kashmir dispute, a local daily here reported Thursday, but her office said it was trying to ascertain whether the remarks attributed to her had truly been made.

"Of two parties involved cannot resolve it, then what to do?" she asked, in an interview with "The News" at the United Nations Correspondents' Association Club. 'The Daily Mirror' said in its report.

The report, datelined United Nations, was attributed to 'The News International,' a Pakistanbased news agency. It also carried a comment that her remarks were bound to trigger some angry reaction in India.

The President's Director General (Media), Janadasa Peiris, however, said he was not sure whether she had made those remarks.

Former Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar, who advises the President on Foreign Affairs, said he was also seeking to ascertain the veracity of the report. Kumaratunga is in Britain, while Foreign Minister Tyronne Fernando is away in the Maldives. Some Foreign Ministry officials here also expressed surprise at the remarks.

The report claimed that responding to a question on the Kashmir issue, the President "clearly said she supported its resolution through third party mediation, as both India and Pakistan had failed to resolve

If the report is true, this will be the first time that Sri Lanka has openly supported third party mediation on

However, Kumaratunga declined to play the mediator herself, even if she was invited by Pakistan or India, as the mediator should be someone from outside the South Asian region, the report said.

She conceded that Sri Lanka had internationalised its internal problem of Tamil militancy by accepting Norway as a mediator, it said.

India's was supportive of Norway's role, she added. At this point, the report adds a comment that Sri Lanka's decision to bring in a third party "has caused anger in New Delhi as Pakistan can be encouraged to demand international mediation (too)."

The report said she merely smiled when reminded about her "quiet diplomacy to bring Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf and Prime Minister AB Vajpayee to the dialogue table""(perhaps a reference to Kumaratunga's role in getting them to have a brief interaction in Kathmandu in January during the SAARC summit).

"She said she was willing to do more for a dialogue between India and Pakistan in the interest of peace in the South Asian region", it said.

treatment from political leaderships

Though the blowout took place

on the Magurchhara blowout issue.

back on June 14, 1997, Petrobangla

could not demand the compensa-

tion as the then Awami League

government shelved the official

probe report and kept it as a 'classi-

had adopted a policy to let

Occidental, the US oil company

responsible for the blowout, to work

Occidental was allowed to work

without any monetary penalty. It's

terminated Production Sharing

Contract (PSC) was extended,

it worked, sold its concerns in

In late 2000, the then

Parliamentary Standing Committee

on Energy asked the then energy

secretary Toufiq-e-Elahi

Chowdhury to submit the probe

committee report to the JS body. But

he did not submit it to the JS body.

The probe committee was formed

with officials of energy ministry and

not proceed in its work to claim

compensation as the then energy

secretary argued that Occidental

pay compensation through a

This claim is separate from the

Tk 612 crore environmental dam-

age claim raised by the environment

ministry in the past. But that was

Magurchhara on June 2, 1997. It

was its first drilling since it signed a

PSC on January 11, 1995. This PSC

months later, adding some new

When Unocal took over

Occidental's concerns, it auto-

matically inherited the latter's liabili-

Kashmir polls

in September

Elections in India's disputed

Kashmir state will be held in

September despite terrorism

attacks and fears of war between

India and Pakistan, the state's top

continue. I can tell you that the new

government will be in office by the

13th of October," Chief Minister

Faroog Abdullah, the top elected

official of northern Jammu-Kashmir

state, told Star News TV, "Why

challenged Islamic guerrillas and

separatist political leaders in

Kashmir to take part in the elections

for the State Assembly to prove

that the militants have public sup-

The All Parties Hurriyat

Conference, Kashmir's umbrella

organisation of political and reli-

gious groups, has declared its

members won't vote as they don't

recognize India's sovereignty over

the Himalayan state.

The federal government has

should they be postponed?"

"Democratic processes have to

AP, New Delhi

official said yesterday.

Occidental had started drilling at

supplementary agreement which

In the past, Petrobangla could

Petrobangla.

had agreed to

its PSC in 1998

never seriously pursued.

extended

Bangladesh to Unocal and finally

got out of the country in 1999.

in Bangladesh undisturbed.

In addition, the AL government

fied' document.

## Magurchhara

FROM PAGE 1

"further review"

Mosharraf Hossain however refused holding a meeting Wednesday with Scott Barber on this particular issue. He said the move was taken so that Petrobangla fine-tunes the claim, and when it

is filed, the compensation is actually recovered.

A source justified the fear that the claim process might be shelved. He said that after a long delay, when Petrobangla was given the Magurchhara Blowout Probe Committee Report last year at the fag end of Awami League rule, it proceeded methodically and there was no reason to withhold it for further scrutiny. The blowout took place in 1997.

Though Petrobangla could file a compensation claim, it involved the ministry considering that there might be diplomatic and political pressure over the issue in future, the

After the ministry approved it once earlier this year, Petrobangla Board sent the file back to the ministry, clearly pointing out the amount

claim and the gas reserve damage assessment.

The energy ministry approved the final version of the claim of Tk 3900 crore compensation for damaging 245 bcf gas reserve in

Magurchhara and sent it back to Petrobangla early last week. At that time, the state minister was away from Dhaka, sources said.

Petrobangla was ready with the letter on Wednesday and asked

Unocal to send a staff to take it Traditionally Petrobangla does not deliver letters

to offices of oil companies and asks them to take letters

terminated in January 11, 1998 from its office as the company failed to fulfil the But the Unocal staff never came. minimum commitment. However Therefore, the letter was 'not delivthe government 'extended' the ered' or 'rejected' by the US comcontract eight

In the past, Unocal and its prede-

cessor Occidental always got soft

#### Mullah Omar

FROM PAGE 12

any legitimate justification, and I am confident that God (will grant Muslims) victory," Omar was quoted as saying.

Asked if he stuck to his past view that bin Laden was not behind last September's attacks in New York and Washington, Omar said: "The attacks that occurred in America are undoubtedly important events in history and played a major role in reshuffling the cards of international politics ..

"There are reasons behind these great actions, and America. which knows these reasons full well, should strive to eliminate them, so that (such attacks) do not

The Taliban leader vowed that the United States would encounter "hell and a resounding defeat" in Afghanistan, "as happened to the Soviet Union and British colonialism before that.'

He said the Taliban had pulled back to the mountains "to start a guerilla war" there and thus spare the lives of the Afghan people, but "our jihad (holy war) will continue

... until victory.' Omar urged the Palestinians too to carry on their "blessed jihad," which would end in "victory, God willing."

### Nepal to extend emergency

AP, Katmandu

The government, fighting a fierce campaign against Maoist rebels, decided yesterday to extend the sixmonth-old state of emergency until late November.

King Gyanendra called a Parliament session for May 23, state radio reported.

A two-thirds vote of Parliament is required to extend the emergency, which Gyanendra imposed on Nov 26 after the guerillas withdrew from stalemated peace talks and renewed their six-year war against government forces.

To decide on an extension of emergency rule, Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba returned home early from a trip to the United States and Britain, where he sought money for more modern weapons to fight the Maoists.

His Cabinet decided yesterday afternoon "to extend the state of emergency by another six months to deal with the Maoists." Land Reform Minister Ram Janam Chaudhury told The Associated Press.

#### Political shelter FROM PAGE 12

criminals in the city have been

He said steps have been taken to introduce community police units in

A large huge number of business leaders including CCCI Senior Vicepresident SM Nurul Haq and Vicepresident Abdul Latif attended the

It was addressed by, among others, C&F Association President M Salimullah, Chaktai Banik Samity leader Hazi Mad Yunus, elderly businessman Taher Sobhan, women entrepreneurs Monowara Hakim Ali and Tanzila Farug, Anwarul Islam Chowdhury of Freight Forwarding Association and Nazrul Islam Manik of Shop Owners Association.

#### Shibir cadres

FROM PAGE 1 remained suspended since April 2001 as proctor Nurul Absar and advisor Abdur Rahman have twice foiled the bid for holding the election by using their authoritative

Both Absar and Rahman want to see Quamruzzaman Korban as president of the club.

But club members have protested the move arguing that it would be a violation of the club's constitution since Korban is no more a student of the RU nor is he its member.

The ICS cadres are now trying to hold the election with participation of some outsiders and progovernment but non-member

#### Titas vehicles

FROM PAGE 1

Karmachari Union, Md Shah Noor Ali, yesterday took his family to Tangail in a Paiero (Dhaka Metro-Gha-113036) allotted for deputy general manager (Administration) of TGTDCL, sources said.

The union leader has for some time been using the Pajero and also spent Tk. 35.000 to install a cooling system in the vehicle. Name of the vehicle's driver is Saiful Alam

On the same day, a fourth class employee of Titas Gas, Bachchu Sheikh, who is a nephew of Habibur Rahman, the president of the Jatiyatabadi Sramik Karmachari Union, took an office pick-up (Dhaka Metro-Tha-112335) to go to Chandpur on a private visit. Dulal Chandra Biswas was the driver of the pick-up.

Unionists seem oblivious to the actions being taken by authorities following reports of irregularities within Titas Gas.

Following heavy pressure from the Ministry of Energy and Petrobangla, the Jatiyatabadi Sramik Dal, labour wing of ruling BNP, on Thursday restricted for three months the activities of its affiliated unions at TGTDCL. Though it was decided earlier to slap the restriction for six months, Sramik Dal later reconsidered the time span and curtailed it to three months.

An earlier Daily Star report on another trade union leader of Titas Gas, Mahbubur Rahman, prompted authorities to order the seizure of an office vehicle Rahman was using without sanction.

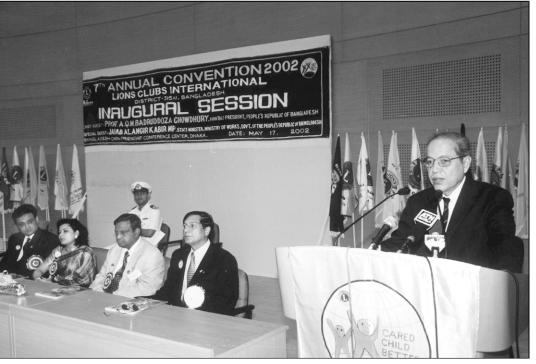
#### layebur

will support me in my efforts".

Tayebur Rahman has appealed to prime minister Khaleda Zia to give special attention to Khulna city from where she was elected in the October 1 general election.

The mayor said he is giving top priority to solution of the water scarcity problem. Fifteen lakh citizens need three crore gallons of water a day. But KCC can not supply more than one crore gallons, he

World Bank assistance has been sought for setting up of a surface water treatment plant to solve the problem, he said.



President A Q M Badruddoza Chowdhury addressing the annual convention of Lions Club International District 315 A1 at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in the city yesterday.

## Saifur for drastic cut

such a situation is embarrassing for the country when investors in EPZs do not get phone connections even in six months

Over 2 lakh applications seeking phone lines have long been pending with the telephone authorities, the function was told to portray their incapacity to cater growing needs of the people.

Post and Telecommunications Minister Barrister Aminul Hoque, Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone (T&T) Board Chairman SATM Badrul Hoque, secretary of the ministry and high officials of both the ministry and the board were present when the finance minister was speaking about the state of telephone services.

T&T organised the programme on the occasion of World Telecommunications Day commemorating the foundation of International Telegraphic Union on this day in 1865. This year's theme of the day is "ICT for all-empowering people to cross the digital divide."

Saifur referred to Thursday's meeting of ECNEC that approved three development projects involving Tk 4,017.64 crore for upgrading country's telecommunications

Of the telecom projects. Greater Dhaka Telecommunications System Development (2nd Phase-3rd revised) will be completed in June this year involving Tk 788.86 crore with a project aid of Tk 562.71 crore. The project was kicked off in July 1990 and expected to complete

Saifur attached BNP govern-

ment's priority to telecommunications development to make latest advancement available in all district and thana towns, saying that funds would not be a constraint in this

The minister was critical of the performance of the private sector in mobile telephone business and found them not much dynamic, excepting one. Despite the sector having been opened to private sector, they have not turned out satisfactorily so far, he said. He hoped the state-owned

telephone agency would be able to appear in mobile phone operations

The minister voiced his concern over massive misuse of V-Sat and unabated voice transfers, depriving the exchequer of huge revenues. This malpractice must be stopped, said the keeper of exchequer. The finance minister admitted

that the previous BNP government could not implement the optic-fibre project for 'some reason or other despite his personal initiatives. But the country will have it soon along with some other countries still sidelined on the information superhighway.

He also felt the need for much more deregulation in the telecommunications sector and advised the telephone-agency people to get adequately trained up and mentally prepared to accept the changes in the telecom technology

Saifur questioned the justifica-

tion of having expensive missions abroad in countries like Brazil in the present era of information technology when anybody can be contacted anywhere by various means within a very short time

Telecom experts and officials at a seminar later in the day observed that poor telecommunications infrastructure retarded the growth of information communication technology in the country. Density of telephone, mobile and

Internet access in Bangladesh is one of the lowest in the world. Only 5 persons in 1000 have access to fixed phone and another 5 per thousand have mobile phones.

Since the introduction of Internet in Bangladesh in 1996, the number of users has reached roughly 150,000 and the number of ISPs up to 90 in last five years. The country has had only 250,000 personal computers by 2001, despite ICTfriendly taxation measures that kept the prices of ICT equipment lower. So far, 43 district towns and

some upazila towns have been brought under Internet services through BTTB and steps are underway to bring some more districts and upazilas by the end of the year. An independent Telecom

Regulatory Commission has been set up this year and an updated Telecom Act also enacted, officials said, giving an account of recent progress in the sector.

## **Bush may ask Putin** for joint projects on missile defence

AP, Washington

US President George W. Bush intends to ask Russian President Vladimir Putin next week to cooperate with the United States in joint projects to defend against missile

If the Russian leader accepts the offer it would mean a turnabout in Putin's skepticism about missile defenses while accelerating cooperation between Washington and Moscow on a number of fronts.

According to a senior US official, Bush also will offer to share American technology with Russia, a move first proposed by President Ronald Reagan two decades ago as part of his space-defense dream.

Bush's intention is to enshrine anti-missile cooperation in a document of strategic cooperation that will be issued when he meets Putin in Moscow. The move would be parallel to the treaty the two leaders. have approved to slash US and Russian long-range nuclear weap-

Putin had opposed the US missile defense program as apt to reignite a dangerous arms race by encouraging potential aggressors to develop better nuclear weapons to

overcome an anti-missile shield. Bush is proposing cooperation in so-called theater missile defenses regional systems designed to guard against terrorist groups and so-

called rogue regimes. National missile defenses were banned in a 1972 treaty that Bush has canceled because it stood in the way of his ambitious US testing program. One June 14, the first day the US government is freed from the treaty's strictures, work on underground silos for missile interceptors

will begin in Alaska. Cooperation between the United States and Russia is surging.

Russia has strengthened ties with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, backed the United States in revising sanctions on exports to Iraq and reached agreement on nuclear weapons reduc-

At the same time. Bush has abandoned the 1993 START II weapons reduction treaty his father signed a week before leaving office.

It would have banned Russia's multi-warhead SS18 missiles.

## Hamas tells Saudis it will halt suicide bombings

AFP, Ramallah

The radical Palestinian movement Hamas has told Saudi Arabia that it is willing to stop suicide bombings on Israeli territory, a Palestinian official said late Thursday.

A member of the group -- blamed for many bloody attacks in Israel -made the commitment to the Saudis during a meeting in the Western Saudi city of Jeddah, the Palestinian official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

He also refused to identify the Hamas official involved in the talks. However a senior Hamas leader

denied the claims. "This information is false. Hamas' choice remains one of resistance in all forms while Palestinian territory is under occupation," Ismael Abu Shanab, one of the top leaders of the radical Islamic

group in the Gaza strip said. "Hamas has not been contacted by anyone on the issue," he added.

The Palestinian official, mean-

while said that the reported Hamas commitment was aimed at "allowing the peace process kicked off by the Saudis to run its course and to give it "The Hamas promise is the fruit

of dialogue recently opened between Saudi Arabia and the movement, while Riyadh is making efforts to relaunch Middle East peace negotiations," he added.

The Saudi initiative, unveiled in March offers Arab peace with Israel in exchange for the Jewish state's withdrawal from all Arab territories seized in the 1967 Middle East war and a "just solution" for Palestinian

## Wanted criminals

are carried out from 9 in the morning till 12 midnight. The checkpoints are subject to change as and when

Eight rapid action teams operating from 10pm to 6am have also been commissioned at seven entryand exit-points of the city and are looking out for the notorious criminals as well as arms and explosives coming into and leaving the Mobile teams of difference police

stations will raid different areas as well as drug dens in the city during the anti-crime drive kicked off five days ago to arrest the culprits and wanted criminals. "The law and order scenario has

improved after the drive started. said the commissioner adding that the drive will continue. "The number of policemen with

the DMP is inadequate. An additional 2.000 policemen is absolutely necessary to meet the present requirement," opined the commis-

"We are also not happy with the fact that the most wanted criminals are still at large." the commissioner answered in reply to a question why

the police was failing to net the most

method of keeping track of criminals without proper documentation, the commissioner said the Detectives Branch office has started developing a database of criminals and that similar programmes in thanas would also begin as funds become avail-

The commissioner said the police department has already submitted a proposal to the government for setting up two separate units -- one for law and order and the other for investigation. The officerin-charge of the police station would be an assistant commissioner while two inspectors would be heading the two units.

About reports of innocent people on the street being harassed by police since the anti-crime drive started, the commissioner said. "Senior police officials have been asked to check and see if any innocent people were being harassed by policemen.'

Meanwhile, the DMP on the fifth day of its anti-crime drive arrested 18 listed criminals, 337 people accused in regular cases, two wanted criminals and 37 others. It also seized 11 revolvers, two guns. 28 rounds of ammunition, 23 cocktails and 5143 bottles of phensidyl.

## **Squalid conditions**

river transport on the Buriganga

An important wholesale market is located at Shymbazar in the old part of the city. Another important centre in old Dhaka for wholesale business is located at Moulvibzar, which is a densely populated business district, supplying wholesale requirements of various consumer items from all

Mitford in old Dhaka also deserves mention. Requirements of supplies of medicines and medical drugs from within and outside the city are met here. However, there is a dark aspect of medicine trading at this centre. There are allegations of shady deals in spurious and substandard drugs and medicines and lately sales of such items pilfered from government medical stores are

All in all, the city's wholesale markets play an important role in the open market economy of the country, whatever may be the inadequacies in their number and locations and maintenance of proper working

#### Export target

to achieve the revised target. Earlier, hopes were there that after everything we would be able to maintain last fiscal's earning level. But we are now facing a lot of problems due to the ban on yarn import through land ports and it will take toll on our performance," said Monjurul Hog, president of the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and

According to exporters, frozen

## **Indian Parliament blames**

province since October. Indian and Pakistani soldiers

fired at one another across the border during the debate. Much of the firing across the border yesterday was in the Samba Ramgarh and RS Pura sectors

where Indian soldiers are trying to

build a fence along the frontier, army

officials told The Associated Press in Jammu. Two persons including a boy were killed by Pakistani morter fire in the RS Pura sector, about 25 kilometers west of Jammu, a senior police official said. Three civilians

were injured, and hundreds began

to flee border villages, he said. Small and medium weapons fire was also reported from the Poonch and Naushara areas, where Kashmir is divided between India and Pakistan by a 1972 cease-fire

The areas which came under Pak shelling and firing included Jallas, Khari-Karmara, Salotri, Shahpur, Sawiiwan, Boriwali, Laam Bhawani, Hoki Chora, Bhimber Gali, Krishna Gati, Balakote, Noushera, Kerni, Samba and Arnia areas of Jammu-Poonch sector, sources

A boy, Rinkoo Kumar died in a

forward village in Kanachek while

Rampaul, who was injured on

Thursday at Arnia died in govern

ment Medical College Hospital

yesterday, the sources added. Pakistan said four civilians were killed and 40 others wounded when Indian troops opened fire on villages border in Kashmir.

'The Pakistan armv retaliated

effectively and targeted the enemy's

After days of sultry weather, yesterday's shower in different parts of the city came as a welcome relief to

military positions causing considerable damage. The enemy was busy removing their dead and wounded soldiers when last reports came in. Pakistan army statement said. The Indian army alleges that Pakistani patrols frequently fire at

construction of the fence. "This is a routine exchange of fire. It does not warrant any serious concern at this moment," army spokesman Col. Shruti Kant told The Associated Press.

workmen and soldiers to hamper

The United States and other allies are gravely concerned that a fourth war between the South Asian nuclear-armed rivals could be imminent, as a million Pakistani and Indian troops are on war alert along their border. In New Delhi, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee was expected later

response to the attack by three militants in army uniforms on an army base in Kashmir. The ghastly incidents may tempt the government to indulge in

its customary rhetoric," Gandhi said. "If the government has a strategy, let it spell it out once and for all." New Delhi said Islamabad was

"directly responsible" for the attack. The call for tougher action against Islamabad and Islamic militants fighting for Kashmir's independence or merger with Pakistan has grown since a December militant attack on the Indian Parliament.

Meanwhile, at least six people were injured yesterday when a powerful explosion rocked the heart of Srinagar, police said. The impact of the blast was felt

up to two kilometres away, police and witnesses said. "We are trying to ascertain the details," a police Directive

and foot patrol from the thanas and police camps adjacent to highways to check crimes.

The IGP asked to open police check posts to make highway safe. If necessary, Dog Squad of police can be used to check trafficking of yesterday to announce India's drugs, he added.

He also instructed the police officers concerned to gear up the community policing to identify and arrest the highway dacoites and notorious criminals

# Because of the convenience of

wanted criminals.

river, importance of the market has been steadily growing, serving as retail sale outlets for city markets. Wholesale transactions in fish trading are also conducted early every morning at New Market through the system of open bidding.

over the country. The wholesale medicine market spreading over a large area at

reportedly conducted here.

Exporters Association (BKMEA).

food, leather and chemical products are also set to face major setbacks this fiscal. "I think frozen food sector is the worst victim of the present crisis. This fiscal's earning would be around \$100 million less than last fiscal's \$363.23 million, an outright 30 per cent dip," said Golam Mostafa, former president of the Bangladesh Frozen Food Exporters Association.

