

Vajpayee circumspect on SAARC participation

'Agenda must not be held hostage to Kashmir dispute'

AFP, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee yesterday said his participation in a regional summit in Pakistan would depend on the agenda, which he said must not be "held hostage" to the Kashmir dispute.

Vajpayee, speaking in New Delhi to Indian military commanders, said the seven-member South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) had a "potentially historic role" to develop the region's economy but has been "systematically sabotaged on irrational fears and political considerations".

"We do not want to trivialise the association through a summit without substantive content. Let us therefore first talk of substance before we start focusing on dates," said Vajpayee, according to the official text.

Vajpayee said India has always believed that "regional cooperation in South Asia should not be held hostage to bilateral political differ-

ences between member countries".

"We have consistently advocated economic cooperation and cultural exchanges as a means of preparing a climate conducive for political reconciliation," he said.

Archivals India and Pakistan are the largest members of SAARC, and their half-century dispute over Kashmir tends to dominate conferences. SAARC heads of state and government are due to meet in January in Pakistan.

Pakistan has proposed January 11-13 for the summit. India has not yet approved the dates.

New Delhi has been insisting on concrete progress in the SAARC Preferential Trade Agreement and Free Trade Agreement.

India claims that progress on the two economic accords has been stalled due to Pakistan's insistence that SAARC first discuss political issues, such as Kashmir.

India insists the SAARC charter does not allow discussion of any bilateral and political issues, such as Kashmir.

SAARC's Committee on

Economic Cooperation met yesterday in Nepal's capital Kathmandu and Indian foreign ministry sources said Vajpayee's participation in the Pakistan summit could hinge on the outcome of those talks.

The last SAARC summit was held in January in Kathmandu, less than a month after a bloody attack on Indian parliament allegedly carried out by Pakistan-based Islamic militants.

At the summit, Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf spoke at length about Kashmir and then embarrassed Vajpayee by walking up to him on stage and shaking his hand, saying he sought "friendship". Indian officials fear Musharraf would leave no stone unturned in raising the Kashmir dispute at the summit he is hosting.

But Indian Foreign Minister Yashwant Sinha and Defence Minister George Fernandes had said over the past few weeks that Vajpayee would attend the summit if dates were finalised.



A small boy looks at the computer screen in amazement on the inaugural day of the BASIS SoftExpo Bangladesh 2002 at the Sheraton Hotel in the city yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Homegrown reforms Khaleda

FROM PAGE 1

has taken steps to set up 18 more BSCIC industrial estates to encourage more private entrepreneurs to set up industries, she mentioned. Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman, Industries Minister MK Anwar and Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury also spoke at the function chaired by President of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) Maitur Rahman.

Saifur Rahman said export earning is gradually going up. Local companies have to stand on their own as it is not possible to continue 25 per cent cash subsidy for years in any economy, he noted.

"Law and order has to be ensured and it is already improving. I hope business will boost up shortly," the finance minister said.

The industries minister said improvement of law and order will encourage the business community and 'unseen cost of business' will come down shortly.

The commerce minister called upon the entrepreneurs to maintain fair business practice. "As a private sector member, I feel embarrassed when I see that many business people are not paying tax properly. They should do not do anything that is embarrassing for others in the field," he added.

The DCCI president urged the policy makers to take steps so that entrepreneurs can get 'collateral free loans' at lower interest rates for the SMEs.

He also urged the government to sponsor a project for creating new entrepreneurs for the SMEs.

Nazmul Hoque, director of Janata Jute Mills and Quazi Salimul Hoque, chairman and managing director of GQ Ball Pen Industries received the awards on behalf of their respective companies.

Janata Jute Mills entered the export market in 1968 and it now exports to 29 countries in Asia, Europe and America. It employs about 5,000 workers and its export stood at around US\$14 million last fiscal year.

GQ Ball Pen Industries is a pioneer in producing disposable ball pen in the country. Its products - Econo and Econo DX- are sold at the same price since 1982 and 1992 respectively.

Barrister Sigma Huda criticised the government for lack of access to information among the people regarding the capacity, supply and demand of power.

Enayetullah Khan also observed that it was not possible for the government to reach power and gas to every household in the country. He suggested consolidation of power and optimum use of the existing capacity.

Amanullah Kabir said the PDB's existing manpower should be looked at as human resources instead of a burden. He observed the government should go for value addition to natural gas instead of exporting it through pipeline.

Kabir suggested development of power plants on the basis of domestic resources such as river current and wind power.

Trade union leader Zafrul Hasan said reform initiatives should be need-based and those can never be sustainable if workers' views were not accommodated.

Some of the speakers at the roundtable suggested that small power plants with localised system of distribution would be more practical for the country. They felt that local entrepreneurs should be given adequate incentives for investing in power sector.

Some of them feared that higher rates of the independent power producers (IPPs) may create problems in debt servicing in the near future. They suggested renegotiations of the agreements.

He also suggested formation of a consultative advisory committee for the power sector. The committee is to ensure continuity of the government policy and programme for development of the sector.

Motaur Rahman asked the government to act tough against corruption and mismanagement in power sector.

He suggested the ruling party discipline its own trade unions in power sector and completely close them down if need be.

Rahman stressed on an integrated approach involving the neighbouring countries for increasing the power generation capacity.

Mahfuz Anam emphasised internal resources management and efficient use of the existing power generation capacity. He observed that 30 per cent systems loss in the power sector is unacceptable to the people. Anam also suggested introduction of energy auditing concept in the country.

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Halliburton seeks lawsuit dismissal

AP, Dallas

Vice-president Dick Cheney and Halliburton Co have asked a federal judge to throw out a lawsuit accusing them of defrauding investors by changing accounting methods at the oilfield-services company.

Halliburton is a stakeholder in the Sangu gas field development in the Bay of Bengal. The company along with Brown and Roots invested \$200 million for development of the field for Shell, Cairn and Petrobranga. As chief of the company Cheney had visited Bangladesh several times in this connection during the late-1990s.

Cheney was chairman and chief executive of the Dallas-based company when it changed its accounting to recognise more revenue from construction projects that had cost overruns.

Judicial Watch, a self-described government-watchdog group, sued Cheney, the company, its directors and accountant Arthur Andersen in July in federal district court in Dallas.

The group charged that Halliburton's accounting change resulted in overstating revenue from 1999 through 2001 by \$445 million, which pumped up Halliburton's share price and cost investors millions when the stock declined this year.

The defendants met a Thursday deadline for responding to the lawsuit by filing a motion to dismiss the case. A copy of the motion was not available Friday.

In a prepared statement Friday, the company said the plaintiffs' complaints were "naked allegations" that are untrue and unsupported by facts. The company also argued that the federal court had no jurisdiction in the case.

Doug Foshee, Halliburton's chief financial officer, said in the statement that the company follows SEC guidelines.

A spokeswoman for Cheney referred inquiries to the vice president's private attorney, Terrence O'Donnell of the Washington law firm Williams & Connolly, who also declined to comment.

Judicial Watch president Tom Fitton defended the lawsuit.

"We will prove our case in court," he said. "The complaint's allegations are based in part on

Halliburton's own public filings. We look forward to the vice president's sworn testimony on the matter."

Judicial Watch has also sued Cheney in Washington, DC, federal court, for access to records of a taskforce he led that drafted the Bush administration's energy policy. The Justice Department said the deadline for responding to that lawsuit is Friday.

Cheney was chairman and chief executive of Halliburton from 1995 to mid-2000. The company provides equipment and services to oil and gas companies and also operates an engineering and construction business.

The Judicial Watch lawsuit focuses on a change in Halliburton's method of accounting for revenue on large construction projects. Beginning in 1998, Halliburton counted some of the cost overruns on large projects as revenue, although customers sometimes disputed the costs.

Halliburton announced in May that the Securities and Exchange Commission was looking into the accounting change and whether the company adequately disclosed the practice to investors. The 1998 change was disclosed in a footnote to Halliburton's 1999 annual report, which was filed in March 2000.

On its Web site, Halliburton said it followed established accounting guidelines. Clients signed "cost-plus" contracts, the company said, because cost changes are common in large construction projects.

The Judicial Watch lawsuit was filed on behalf of shareholders Stephen S. Stephens of Indiana and Lyle and Deanna J. Lionbarger of New Mexico. It does not specify their hometowns or the number of shares they hold.

Besides Halliburton and Cheney, defendants in the lawsuit are accounting firm Andersen Worldwide and Arthur Andersen LLP, current Halliburton chairman David J. Lesar, 12 other Halliburton board members and Terrence Edward Hatchett, Halliburton's former managing partner for North America.

AL: Army drive

FROM PAGE 1

Alam Khoka and BNP ward commissioner Khwaja Habib.

"These identified BNP criminals arrested with huge quantities of arms and drugs were released within hours of their arrest," the Awami League presidium alleged.

"As a result, criminals belonging to the ruling party are being encouraged on the one hand and the army mission is failing on the other," the meeting said.

The Awami League presidium felt that image of the armed forces was being tarnished as it said almost all "the most wanted terrorists" went scot-free.

In a resolution the meeting said having miserably failed in controlling law and order and criminal acts, the government deployed the army across the country with a specific objective to curb criminality and improve law and order.

"But, despite army operation for last one week, the reign of terror has not come down up to the expecta-

"Hell-raiser" Harris dies

REUTERS, London

Hell-raising Irishman Richard Harris, for years one of the wild men of British acting along with Richard Burton and Peter O'Toole, died in a London hospital on Friday.

He had been suffering from Hodgkin's disease.

The 72-year-old Harris, who latterly developed a trademark shaggy white mane of hair, made his name with films like "Camelot", "This Sporting Life", and "A Man Called Horse" as he carved an unmistakable acting niche for himself.

But like Burton and O'Toole, his fame sprang as much from his undoubted acting talents as his hard drinking and womanising. He was known to go out for a packet of cigarettes and not return for a fortnight.

Harris, who was married twice, told Reuters in an interview last year: "I have made 72 movies in my life and been miscast twice -- as a husband."

The Limerick-born actor with a habitual twinkle in his eye endeared himself to a new generation of fans with his role as Professor Albus Dumbledore in last year's "Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone".

It as a role he initially turned down, but was then nagged into taking it on by his 11-year-old granddaughter Emily who threatened never to talk to him again if he refused.

Press briefing

FROM PAGE 1

However, they said that army was arresting many people outside the list on the basis of primary complaint. They are released after questioning, they said.

The officials could not say how many people picked up by army so far were handed over to police and how many of the recovered arms were licensed.

They said that since October 21, the Monitoring Cell at the home ministry received 505 complaints -- most of those regarding secret hideouts of criminals, their identities and extortion.

Most of the information on extortion are regarding extortionists at bus terminals and markets in Dhaka and outside and on roads, they said.

The home ministry started its 'daily briefing' through an announcement on October 20 but only four briefings were held in the last one week.

Tourism minister

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management handover ceremony of Hotel Probal, which has been incurring an annual loss of over Tk 5 lakh.

The minister said the handover would result in Tk 36 lakh in net profit for the government, adding tenders have already been floated for private-sector management of three other hotels.

tion of the people because of government interference."

The meeting also noted with concern that alongside the protection of "criminals of the government party, innocent leaders and workers and MPs of the opposition" were being arrested without any warrant and taken to unknown destinations for inhuman cruel torture in the name of police remand.

"They are being blindfolded, handcuffed and tortured in the darkness of night," the AL resolution said.

It further alleged that in the name of hunt for criminals, innocent citizens were being harassed in the middle of the night.

Without giving orders for depositing the legal arms, government-approved licensed arms are being collected from people without receipts and being shown as recovery of illegal arms, the meeting noted.

"As a result, the elite, including businessmen and industrialists, who procured legal arms for self-defense have become scared and their social image is being damaged."

The AL presidium expressed concern at the government decision for setting up Speedy Trial Tribunal. It decided to make Awami League's viewpoint known through a press conference at the party office today.

The meeting also discussed AL programme for observance of 'jail killing day' on November 3.

The authorities allegedly, over the last one year, have been providing various lame excuses against announcing the schedule of the VC panel election.

Meanwhile, defying the strike, 65 teachers attended their classes during the last four days. In a statement, the teachers said the agitation programme is a part of a conspiracy to make the campus atmosphere volatile.

The authorities have fixed schedules for only the syndicate, deans, academic council and finance committee elections, to be held on November 18.

The JU VC has called all the teachers to a meeting at the Senate Hall at 11:30 am today to discuss the existing campus situation and academic activities.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, JUTA President Prof Amin Muhammad Ali said, "We will attend tomorrow's meeting to answer any question regarding the ongoing strike".

When contacted over telephone yesterday, VC Prof. Jasim Uddin Ahmad was not available.

School teacher

FROM PAGE 1

According to students, teachers and the guardians, Swapan was a very gentle and polite man. "He used to talk little but he was probably the best teacher in the school," said a guardian at the school.

Talking to this correspondent, some of the guardians expressed deep frustration over what they said the BNP government's failure to improve the law and order situation.

Getting a telephone call from Rinku, Swapan's family, parents and relatives reached his Bhutergoi residence yesterday afternoon. Hardly any of the visitors and well-wishers could hold back tears, seeing the wailing scene there.

The Dhanmondi police picked up several persons from the spot and took them to the police station for interrogation.

Police said Swapan had sold a piece of land at his village. While at home during the Puja vacation, he wanted the money from the buyer. They suspected that a dispute over the money could be the reason for the killing.

In a statement, the school authorities said the teachers, students and guardians are very much concerned and astonished at the killing. They demanded arrest and punishment of the killers.

ADB president

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higher economic growth and thereby reduce poverty.

He is also to hold discussions with representatives of the private sector and non-government organisations (NGOs).

In his third visit to Bangladesh as the ADB President, Chino will lay the foundation stone for bank's new resident mission building at Agargaon in the city and attend the resident mission's 20th anniversary celebration, according to a press statement.

The ADB plans to provide over \$1 billion in loans and more than \$18 million in technical assistance to Bangladesh over the next three years.

Its operations will continue toward promoting private sector development and supporting socially marginalised women and children.

It will also enhance regional cooperation among Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal through its South Asia Sub-regional Economic programme.

JU deadlock persists

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The existing deadlock at the Jahangirnagar University (JU) shows no sign of breaking up, as neither the authorities nor the agitating teachers are ready to accept the other's offers.

Though the indefinite strike called by JU Teachers' Association (JUTA) enters its fifth day today, the university authorities has taken no initiatives towards negotiating with the JUTA.

The JUTA enforced the strike on October 23 demanding the holding of Vice-chancellor (VC) panel election within a month and the polls of the syndicate, academic council, deans of various faculties and the finance committee within November 5. They also demanded the postponing of all meetings of the JU syndicate.

Mahmud underscored the need for bringing transparency to every sector for curbing corruption and criminal activities. Instead of banning trade union activities, he observed that the government should only see to it that the TUs do not cross their limit.

He also suggested formation of a consultative advisory committee for the power sector. The committee is to ensure continuity of the government policy and programme for development of the sector.

Motaur Rahman asked the government to act tough against corruption and mismanagement in power sector.

He suggested the ruling party discipline its own trade unions in power sector and completely close them down if need be.

Rahman stressed on an integrated approach involving the neighbouring countries for increasing the power generation capacity.

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