

SAARC summit put off

Islamabad accuses New Delhi of sabotaging the meet

AFP, Islamabad

Bickering between India and Pakistan forced the postponement of next month's seven-nation South Asian summit, with Islamabad accusing New Delhi of "sabotaging" the meeting by stalling on whether it would attend.

Pakistan set no new dates for the summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) but said it would be held after consultation with member-countries.

"Ever since the decision to hold the 12th SAARC summit in January 2003 in Islamabad, India has been looking for excuses to sabotage the event," foreign office spokesman Kamran Niaz told reporters.

"In view of the little time left to make formal preparations, and in the face of the continued Indian refusal to confirm its participation, the government of Pakistan is regretfully left with no alternative but to postpone the 12th SAARC summit."

India has offered mixed signals on whether it would attend the summit in its arch rival neighbour.

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee told reporters last week that he would only travel to Islamabad if Pakistan ends the "cross-border terrorism" he said Pakistan sponsored in the Indian zone of Kashmir.

Vajpayee had charged that Pakistan would try to turn the South Asian summit into a forum on Kashmir, which "is not a SAARC issue".

Yesterday, Indian foreign ministry spokesman Navtej Sarna charged that "every meaningful proposal" at SAARC "was being systematically sabo-

taged by Pakistan".

"India has always been committed to SAARC and its process, and it was precisely due to our commitment that we had suggested that substantive progress should take place on various trade and economic issues being discussed," Sarna said in New Delhi.

"In fact a situation had been reached when every meaningful proposal was being systematically sabotaged by Pakistan," Sarna said.

"Now that Pakistan has announced the postponement of the summit, then it is a choice that they have made," Sarna told a news conference in New Delhi.

Meanwhile, both Bangladesh and Nepal expressed disappointment over postponement of the summit.

In Dhaka, a foreign ministry spokesperson told reporters, "It is disappointing that the SAARC summit has been postponed, especially so for Bangladesh as it mooted the concept of regional cooperation for the betterment of South Asian people."

"Bangladesh hopes the summit will be reconvened at earliest possible time," he added.

In Kathmandu, Nepal Prime Minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand said he hoped the body would resume its work soon.

"I hope the postponement of the SAARC summit will be for a short period and I hope the new date will be announced soon," Chand said.

"There is no alternative to the regional cooperation in today's integrated

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4



PHOTO: STAR

Warrant officer of the army Golam Mostafa (C) and two others arrested on charge of spying for India.

AL calls hartal Army man, 2 others held for 'spying'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League (AL) has called a dawn-to-dusk hartal across the country on December 12 to protest the movie theatre blasts in Mymensingh and the subsequent arrests of a number of AL leaders and workers.

Following an extended meeting of the AL presidium at its Dhanmondi office in the city yesterday, the party announced the shut-down as part of a four-day programme.

The AL's hartal call is also to protest the government's failure to protect lives of the people, failure to arrest the bombers and also to protest propaganda against AL President Sheikh Hasina.

The AL programme also includes a protest rally in the city today and demonstrations and rallies across the country tomorrow.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A junior commissioned officer of the army, an former lance corporal and a civilian have been arrested on charge of spying for an Indian intelligence agency, defence sources said yesterday.

Golam Mostafa, a warrant officer stationed at the Bogra Cantonment, was arrested from Arani village in Rajshahi on November 24 midnight. He was on a two-day leave.

Important documents, including policy guidelines of the army, were seized from him.

"On the basis of specific information that we received on November 13, we decided to arrest Mostafa," said a source. "Later, on the basis of Mostafa's statements, we arrested former lance corporal Mozaffar and a civilian named Mohammad Arif."

"It appears that Mostafa was planning to smuggle out the documents which we seized from him," the source added.

The authorities have so far arrested five persons on charge of espionage over the last few weeks.

The army arrested one Akashuzzaman from Jalalabad Cantonment, Sylhet on November 18 and police arrested one Ratan Mia from Mymensingh on December 2.

Excepting for the 'spy' arrested from Mymensingh last week, the four others are being questioned by the highest level of the army intelligence.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

Govt order Arrest suspects irrespective of affiliation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has ordered troops and law enforcers to arrest any suspect irrespective of political affiliation and position.

The order came on Sunday after a string of bomb blasts left at least 17 people killed and another 200 injured in Mymensingh town on Saturday.

The government has taken a hard line on a number of people, including opposition leaders, cultural and NGO activists and professionals.

Highly placed sources in the ruling alliance believe several Awami League (AL) leaders and some intellectuals, cultural and NGO activists and professionals have long been dispatching information to various foreign agencies, seriously denting the image of the government and the country as well.

After tapping telephonic conversations and following movement of

Anxiety grips AL rank & file

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Panic has gripped the Awami League rank and file, following arrest of several influential party leaders, and increased surveillance on Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina.

Plainclothes police in increased numbers kept vigilance on Hasina's residence at Dhanmondi until last night. This has mounted apprehension among the AL people that the party chief might be kept under house arrest, insiders said.

AL units in all the districts have been alerted about the possibility of Hasina being arrested, party sources said, referring to widespread rumours about the possible government action against the opposition leader.

The district leaders have been advised to remain prepared for all-out protests if the opposition leader comes under any kind of oppression, said a member of the AL central working committee. "Consequences of arresting the opposition leader would be serious for the government," he said.

According to party sources, most of the central AL leaders have left

SEE PAGE 11 COL 8

Rejoinder and our reply

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare clarified some points of a news item titled "Community clinics in cold water" published in The Daily Star on November 24.

In its clarification the ministry said the government is not 'abandoning' works on community clinics (CCs) but is providing staff and logistic support to keep the CCs functional and intends to run 12 such clinics by NGOs on pilot basis. It also said constructing CCs before completing the large number of union health and family welfare centers (UHFWC) was a 'misstep' and thereby decided not to construct any more community clinics.

Our reply

We agree that Health Secretary M Fazlur Rahman never used the word 'abandon' during his discussion with The Daily Star correspondent but our investigation shows that it is practically true.



PHOTO: STAR

Police and army personnel run checks on a cinema hall in the capital yesterday as part of beefed-up security measures after a string of bomb blasts killed at least 17 moviegoers in Mymensingh on Saturday.

'Striking similarity'

MORSHED ALI KHAN and REZAUL KARIM, from Gaibandha

The bomb found in a movie house here on Saturday had 'striking similarity' with the ones going off at Mymensingh cinema halls on the same day, top police officials said.

Quoting army bomb disposal unit, they said the bomb was so powerful that had it gone off inside the movie house, the whole building would have caved in.

When the army experts 'control blasted' the bomb on the bank of the Gaghota river, shrapnel flew across the river. "It was an assembly of various deadly shrapnel and was supposed to go off with the slightest contact," said one of the police officials. "We are now sure that

SEE PAGE 11 COL 5

Mymensingh cinema blasts Army picks up top AL, JP leaders, 32 others

ABUL KALAM AZAD and AMINUL ISLAM, from Mymensingh

The army picked up 34 people, including two top leaders of the Awami League (AL) and the Jatiya Party (Monju) from Mymensingh town on Sunday, following a string of bomb blasts in four cinema halls Saturday that killed at least 17 people.

An army team picked up Mymensingh district unit president of the AL, Alhaj Md. Motiur Rahman and his son Mohit-ur-Rahman

Shanta from their residence in the early hours of Sunday. They were taken to an army camp and are being interrogated.

The army also picked up Anil Bandhu Das, president of the JP (Monju) district unit, Titu, commissioner of the Mymensingh Municipality, and Bazur Rahman Tuhin, student affairs secretary of the district BNP, from their respective residences. Das and Tuhin were released later.

Of the 34 persons, the army

handed over 25 persons to the Kotwali Police Station. Sources said the army has not yet taken any decision about others.

The tension in Mymensingh town over the bomb blasts is easing up. However, police and army personnel still mount guard at the cinema halls and other points of the town.

Five young men arrested within half an hour of the powerful bomb explosions in four cinema halls in

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1



PHOTO: STAR

Homemade bombs found at HC premises

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Nine homemade explosives were found at the High Court premises yesterday morning, two days after the serial blasts at four cinemas in Mymensingh.

A security guard spotted nine red-taped small canisters in the garden in front of the Law Commission office at around 11:00am and informed the court keeper, AK Das, who telephoned the Ramna police.

Later, Sub-inspector Mohsin of the Ramna Police Station rushed to the spot and recovered the explosives.

Mohsin told The Daily Star the criminal elements might have left behind the explosives to avoid arrest.

He also ruled out the possibility of the explosives being planted, saying these would only go off if thrown at anyone or anything.

A general diary was filed with the Ramna police station.

DB gets no clue to back charges

Saber, Shafi, Muntasir quizzed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League leaders Saber Hossain Chowdhury and Shafi Ahmed and columnist Muntasir Mamun were interrogated by the Detective Branch (DB) of police on the first day of their three-day remand.

But investigators did not get any information from them that confirms police suspicion against them.

The DB interrogated them separately in three sessions. They were asked similar questions, but the three gave different answers.

DB Deputy Commissioner AKM Mahfuzul Haque told journalists that the police did not get any significant evidence to support the charges brought against the three.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Sarwan comes of age

SPORTS REPORTER

Ramnaresh Sarwan's quest for his maiden Test hundred ended at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

The right-hander scored 119 as the West Indies piled up a commanding 400-5 at stumps on the second day of the first Test.

Darren Ganga, who is desperately trying to cement his place in the team, was batting on 43 along with his skipper Ridley Jacobs on 12.

It was a delightful double for the 22-year-old batsman from Guyana at the big bowl, where he also scored his first hundred in the abridged version of the game on December 2.

The exploits of the extremely talented batsman in his 28th Test appearance gave the visitors a lead of 261 runs against a battered Bangladesh, who managed only 139 in their first innings before being bowled out 25 minutes after the tea break on the opening day.

Sarwan and Marlon Samuels, another young gun in the impressive Caribbean batting line-up, continued from where the left-handed openers Chris Gayle and Wavell Hinds had left off early in the morning.

Hinds and Gayle added nine runs to the overnight total of 118 before both were dismissed by right-arm pacesman Taposh Baishya in the

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7



PHOTO: AFP

West Indian Ramnaresh Sarwan sends one down to the fine-leg boundary past Bangladesh wicketkeeper-captain Khaled Mashud on the second day of the first Test at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

WB hints at up to \$200m in aid without strings

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The World Bank (WB) yesterday said it may provide \$150-\$200 million in assistance this fiscal year without attaching any conditions, but there are a number of issues to be resolved before the fund is committed.

The assistance will depend on the completion of the poverty reduction strategy paper (PRSP) and the government's commitment to carry out reforms.

Moreover, the bank's credit will depend on the government's negotiation with the IMF regarding the PRSP for financial assistance.

"The assistance will depend on how fast the government prepares the PRSP and wraps up negotiations with the IMF," said Frederick T Temple, World Bank country director.

Temple was discussing the country's economic situation with the members of the Economic Reporters' Forum (ERF) at the WB office in the city.

The government has been seeking the International Development Association's (IDA) Development Support Credit to bolster fragile balance of payment situation and for the structural adjustment programme.

Temple said the issues still under scrutiny are ensuring the quality of annual development programmes, the government's strategy to deal with the nationalised commercial banks (NCBs), energy pricing policy and the establishment of an independent anti-corruption commission.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 8

Notice

Today's issue of The Daily Star does not include this week's Star Lifestyle due to Eid holidays and other unavoidable reasons. We regret the inconvenience, if any, to our valued readers.