

Vajpayee, Musharraf to attend NAM summit

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Islamabad

Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf may get another chance to meet at a summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in Kuala Lumpur this month.

But analysts here said that instead of shaking hands, as they had famously done in Kathmandu during a South Asian summit in January last year, Vajpayee and Musharraf might use the forum to castigate each other.

The 13th NAM summit will be held in the Malaysian capital on February 24-25.

A senior official of the foreign office Saturday confirmed that Musharraf would attend the summit instead of Prime Minister Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali, who is busy with the February 24-27 elections to the upper house of Parliament, the Senate.

The NAM meet comes on the heels of a new roadblock in the tense ties between the South Asian

Soft loan proposed to prop up exports

RAFIQ HASAN

A cabinet sub-committee meeting yesterday recommended soft loans to seven prominent export sectors at 7 percent interest rate.

The recommendation came to face any export disaster in the wake of a possible US-led war against Iraq, Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury told newsmen.

The new interest rate is meant for exporters of light engineering, agro-processing, information technology, jute goods, fish feeds, poultry and halal meat.

Readymade garments and frozen-food exporters are already getting the same rate.

The meeting also decided to formulate a new method to provide financial assistance to exporters instead of cash incentives.

A guideline will be laid out for commercial counsellors at

Bangladesh missions abroad and a high-powered committee will be formed to expedite services and reduce charges at the Chittagong seaport, according to the decision.

The commerce minister presided over the meeting attended by Shipping Minister Akbar Hossain, State Minister for Finance and Planning Anwarul Kabir Talukder and State Minister for Foreign Affairs Reaz Rahman at the commerce ministry.

The commerce ministry will find out the causes of misuse of cash incentives and formulate an alternative.

The commercial counsellors abroad will be instructed to send information about scopes for export for local entrepreneurs.

A separate cell at the commerce ministry will take charge of communication with local exporters and entrepreneurs, according to the decision.

Commerce Secretary Sohel Ahmed will be chairman of the committee on the Chittagong port, with the shipping secretary, the chairman of the National Board of Revenue and representatives of leading chamber bodies as members. The committee will submit its report in two weeks.

The local entrepreneurs have to explore markets in rich Asian countries, as their buying capacity has increased over the years, the commerce minister said.

The shipping minister ruled out the possibility of any export disaster, as Bangladesh adopted an eastbound foreign policy.

The exports in the first five months of the current fiscal year fell 6.59 percent behind the target. Exports earned US\$2.627 billion in July-November against the target of US\$2.812 billion.



PHOTO: STAR

More and more publishers are turning to children's literature to meet the growing demand. Here, some children flip through books at the Ekushey Book Fair yesterday.

493 promoted to deputy secretary

STAR REPORT

Two listed criminals of Rauzan were arrested in the city last evening. Police arrested the criminals identified as Badi and Seru from a shopping centre (Central Plaza) at the GEC intersection under Kotwali thana at around 6.00 pm.

They were arrested in connection with the lynching of Md. Farid, that took place at Kachukhain village under Rauzan upazila on Eid day.

Police acted on the information that the two terrorists with an AK-47 rifle were on their way to the city by an autorickshaw. A team of DB police led by SI Mohiuddin Salim laid an ambush at the GEC intersection, sources said.

As the criminals entered the shopping centre, police arrested them. However, police could not trace the AK-47 rifle or the autorickshaw that carried them to the city.

At least ten people were injured, in a clash between the supporters of two chairman candidates of the Union Parishad elections at Goalkandi crossing under Sreepur union of Bagmara upazila of the district last afternoon.

Of the ten five were seriously injured and were admitted to Bagmara Health complex. The five have been identified as Saiful Islam (25), Sohrab (23), Jalal (25), Asadul (22) and Moshin (35).

The clash allegedly erupted between a group of supporters of Awami League backed chairman candidate Moqbul Hossain and that of BNP backed candidate Akram Hossain, while each was campaigning for the election.

One Moqbul Hossain Mollah filed a case in this connection with the Bagmara Police Station. No one has so far been arrested.

At least 30 people were injured, nine of them seriously, in a clash between two rival groups at village Jagdal in Magura sadar upazila yesterday afternoon.

Witnesses said the two groups -- one led by Ali Ahmed and the other by Montazuddin -- clashed over possession of a disputed land. Both sides used lethal weapons during the clash.

The seriously injured, identified as Hannan, 16, Ali Ahmed, 44, Raihanuddin, 20, Montazuddin, 45, Amena Begum, 35, Monir, 35, Ariful, 25, Aziz, 45 and Khairel, 35, were admitted to Magura sadar hospital.

AFP, London

British Prime Minister Tony Blair is facing the biggest crisis of his political career after a record 750,000 people took to the streets of London to condemn a US-led war on Iraq.

No one is talking about regime change in Downing Street just yet, but political analysts agree that Washington's staunchest ally in the showdown with Saddam Hussein is walking a precarious tightrope.

"In the words of one ultra-loyal cabinet minister, 'Tony will be in deep trouble'."

Saturday's march on Hyde Park -- where speaker after speaker denounced US war plans, if not Saddam's dictatorship and pursuit

'Rajpunnah' festival begins

BSS, Rangamati

A three-day traditional 'Rajpunnah' festival began on the Rajbari premises here yesterday to celebrate the silver jubilee of the coronation of the Chakma circle chief Raja Devashish Roy.

At the festival, the Chakma Raja received taxes from the headmen of his 171 moujas yesterday. Kumar Tribhuban Arjadev Roy, the only son of the Raja, was also introduced as the Crown Prince through the coronation function.

Later, the Chakma Raja made an appeal to all to help restore peace in the hill region.

Peace didn't return to hill region though the peace accord was signed in 1997, he said. But, he admitted some development in health and education sectors in the area.

The government will be hard put to place the just-promoted officials, as there are now 379 vacancies at the deputy secretary level.

However, the establishment

sources say that more positions will be vacant by the year-end, with many officials going into retirement.

The government picked the 493 officials from a list of 1,620 prepared by the seven-member selection body.

Of them 411 are from the administration cadre -- 259 of the 1982 special batch, 139 of the 1984 BCS batch and the rest of earlier batches.

At the meeting on Saturday evening, senior cabinet members requested the prime minister to approve the promotions in view of a stagnant situation in the administration.

If eligible officials were not promoted, it would create problem in

First private industrial bond planned

ZAHIDUL HAQUE

The Dutch-Bangla Bank Limited (DBBL) plans Tk 50 crore industrial bond issue in March -- the first of its kind in the private sector.

The fund would be utilised to provide long-term industrial finance, bank officials said.

Bondholders would get 10 per cent annual interest. They would also receive a 0.25 per cent bonus on maturity of the bonds after five years.

The Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) has approved the bond. It is now waiting for approval from the Bangladesh Bank.

The bond would be freely transferable.

A bondholder would be entitled to loans from the DBBL of up to 90 per cent of the bond value at 12.50 per cent interest rate.

Saifur violating election code, Sylhet AL leaders allege

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Local Awami League leaders and the City Corporation mayor yesterday alleged that Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman was violating the electoral code of conduct ahead of the city corporation polls.

They alleged that Saifur was publicly campaigning for a candidate and announcing fresh allotments for development projects ahead of the polls, scheduled for March 20.

Saifur is saying in public meetings that if the minister's candidate is not voted, there would be no development work in Sylhet, they alleged at a press conference.

President of Sylhet district AL ANM Shaifque read out a written statement at the press conference, held at Sylhet Press Club. It was also addressed by Mayor Badar Uddin.

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Museum dedicated to rice gets 1 lakh visitors a year

REAZ AHMAD, back from the Philippines

From plowing gadgets to rice pests, from farmers' hats to mannequins, anything that is linked to rice cultivation has got a place in the Riceworld.

Riceworld, a unique repository of artifacts representing the world's number one staple, is located at the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in Los Banos, Laguna, 65-km south of Manila.

Courtesy of the German government, Riceworld was created in 1994 to serve as a museum/learning center and has no known match of its kind anywhere in the world.

Since inception, it has steadily increased in popularity. Majority of the 100,000 people who visit this architectural beauty every year are Filipino schoolchildren, but because of IRRI's international reputation, other visitors range from heads of states and members of international and non-profit organisations to scientists and journalists.

Many dignitaries from Bangladesh, including two of our

former heads of government and the current agriculture minister, have visited IRRI but the poor representation of the country in the Riceworld appeared to have had no effect on them.

Talking to The Daily Star recently, IRRI Deputy Director General (Research) Dr Ren Wang said that the Institute is eager to have rice artifacts from Bangladesh given the important position rice holds in our agrarian economy.

IRRI Spokesperson Duncan Macintosh told this correspondent that the Institute will bear the transportation expenses involved provided the Bangladeshi government collects the artifacts.

Going a step further, Duncan suggested that Bangladesh can even replicate Riceworld. In justification, he said, "with the rapid urbanization and industrialization taking place in many of the rice-growing Asian nations, the younger generation becomes estranged from their rich rice heritage. A museum focusing on rice can be instrumental in their learning."

JS debates graft charges

UNB, Dhaka

The minister told the House. He said the press report was "baseless", but an investigation was initiated.

The state minister denied that money was allocated against people who are showing themselves as owners of khas lands and pointed his finger to the opposition bench to say: You people grabbed money (in) various ways.

"During our regime, no minister's wife is collecting money. There is no allegation against any of the ministers," he said, adding that the country witnessed such corruption during the past Awami League rule.

He alleged that officials of the Land Ministry, Dhaka district administration and the Prime Minister's Office were involved in the corruption, paying money against khas lands.

The young parliamentarian also criticised the present government, saying Bangladesh ranked number one in corruption during its rule.

State Minister for Housing and Public Works Alamgir Kabir stood to laugh off the Awami League's charges against the prime minister. "You called us corrupt. But the nation knows what sort of state corruption took place during our rule," he said.

"During the Awami League rule, even a class-seven student and housemaid got plots. A minister's son had grabbed a bazaar at Uttara. Even Gano Bhaban was grabbed,"

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CJA confce begins in city today

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia will open a five-day silver jubilee conference of Commonwealth Journalists Association (CJA) in the city today.

Journalists from the Commonwealth nations will attend the conference. The theme of the conference is 'Civil Society and Good Governance: The Journalists' Role.'

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman, Information Minister Tariqul Islam, Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan, Commonwealth

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Schoolteacher, U member killed in road mishap

UNB, Benapole

A schoolteacher and a newly elected Union Parishad member were killed in a road accident on the Jessor-Benapole Highway in Sharsha upazila yesterday morning.

Witnesses said a Jessor-bound bus hit the motorcycle on which schoolteacher Abu Zafar, 45, and UP member Ismail Hossain were travelling. Both died on the spot.

Police seized the bus, but its driver and helper managed to flee.

A case was filed with local police.



Iraq crisis puts Blair on political tightrope

AFP, London

British Prime Minister Tony Blair is facing the biggest crisis of his political career after a record 750,000 people took to the streets of London to condemn a US-led war on Iraq.

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"In the words of one ultra-loyal cabinet minister, 'Tony will be in deep trouble'."

Saturday's march on Hyde Park -- where speaker after speaker denounced US war plans, if not Saddam's dictatorship and pursuit

of weapons of mass destruction -- was confirmed by police as "the biggest ever held in London."

Organizers claimed the actual turnout was two million -- which, if correct, would be a staggering number in a capital that is home to more than seven million people.

"It is not too late to stop this war.

We must march until there is peace and reconciliation," said former US presidential candidate Jesse Jackson, the star turn at the Hyde Park podium.

Playwright Harold Pinter claimed US barbarism would "de

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	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Feb 17		5-55 pm
Feb 18	6-30 am	

Prayer Timings

Feb 17

Fajr 5-30, Zohr 12-15, Asr 4-15, Maghrib 6-00, Esha 7-15

6-45, 7-45

Source: Islamic Foundation