



The Daily Star



REGD. NO. DA 781

VOL. XIII No. 343

DHAKA SATURDAY JANUARY 3, 2004

COMMITTED TO People's Right to Know

POUSH 20, 1410 BS

ZILKAD 10, 1424 HIJRI

16 PAGES PRICE: Tk 7.00

www.thedailystar.net

Accord on three pacts before Saarc summit

REUTERS, AFP, Islamabad

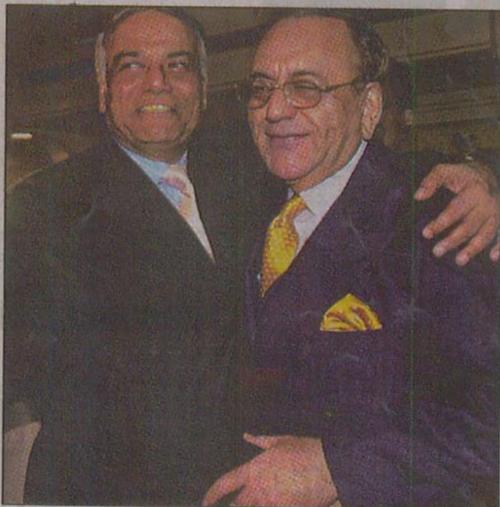
South Asia's foreign ministers have agreed on three key pacts to be signed at a landmark regional summit opening in Islamabad this weekend, India's Foreign Secretary Shashank said yesterday.

"This development (agreement on three documents) would contribute in achieving even bilateral progress," Shashank told a briefing in the capital, striking a positive note on the eve of the seven-nation summit.

The accords were reached during meetings that began on a high note when Indian and Pakistani foreign ministers Yashwant Sinha and Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri publicly embraced, raising hopes for cordiality between the rival states' leaders at their first encounter since near-war in 2002.

Agreements on free trade, terrorism and a social charter top the agenda of the 12th summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc), which groups Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Three documents have been



Indian Foreign Minister Yashwant Sinha (L) embraces his Pakistani counterpart Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri in Islamabad yesterday.

PM leaves today for Islamabad

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia leaves Dhaka today to lead the Bangladesh delegation to the 12th Saarc Summit beginning in Islamabad tomorrow.

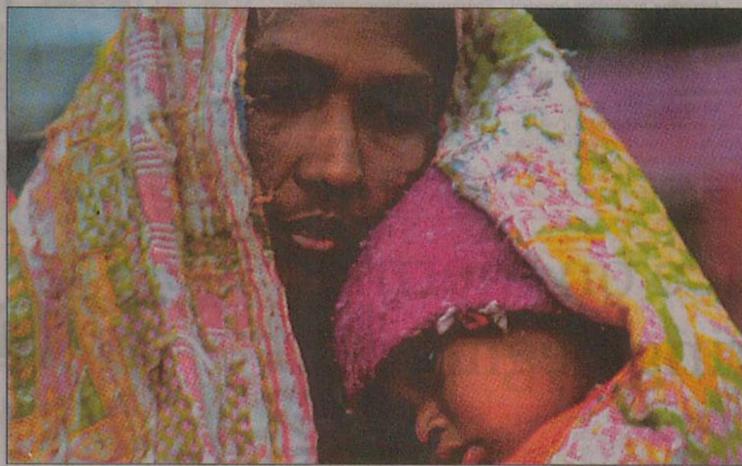
Dhaka looks forward to the establishment of a South Asian Free Trade Area (Safra) in 2006, a framework for which will be finalised at the Islamabad summit, being held after a gap of two years.

Khaleda will address the inaugural session of the three-day summit. Apart from the other major issues to come up at the summit, Bangladesh will focus on issues like trade, investment, information and communication technology, environment and harnessing common natural resources.

Foreign ministry sources said, Khaleda will also meet other Saarc leaders on the sidelines of the summit to discuss bilateral, regional and

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Cold front kills 51 in 3 days



STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 51 people, mostly children and the elderly, died in the last three days from the cold front that swept much of Bangladesh with chill wind and heavy fog amid overcast conditions.

The blanket of fog that wrapped itself across the sky delayed overland, river and air travels amid the cold snap that pushed this winter's lowest temperature in Bangladesh to 9 degrees Celsius in Jessore yesterday, down from Thursday's 9.2 in the same district.

Flights of Biman Bangladesh, Gulf, Emirates and Kuwait airlines from Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Karachi, Kuwait, London, Riyadh and Rome arrived two to 19 hours late at Zia International Airport because of dense fog, the flight operation wing of the airport said.

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Bush hopes Indo-Pak dialogue at summit

PTI, Washington

US President George W Bush has expressed the hope that India and Pakistan will initiate a dialogue on a variety of issues during the Saarc summit beginning tomorrow.

"The Indians and Pakistanis in upcoming meetings will be able to begin a dialogue on a variety of issues," Bush said Thursday after a quail-hunting session near Texas.

"It looks like they are making progress towards reconciling differences. Slowly but surely positive things are taking place, and I commend the leaders of both countries for taking steps towards a peaceful reconciliation of major issues that

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AL enforces dawn-to-dusk hartal today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The main opposition Awami League (AL) is set to enforce a dawn-to-dusk countrywide hartal today to protest what it said was infringement on the opposition's democratic and political rights and killings of its leaders and activists by the ruling alliance, activists.

The decision to enforce the daylong shutdown, also to protest the deterioration of law and order and price hike of essentials, was taken at an emergency meeting of the AL presidium on December 22.

The AL will also hold a rally at Paltan Maidan in the city on January 10, from which its President and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina is expected to announce an out-governance programme.

Meanwhile, the AL and its front

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BRAC UNIVERSITY

Last date for application: January 21, 2004
Admission test: January 23, 2004

Admission for Spring, 2004

ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS:
At least one first division or GPA 3.0 and one second division or GPA 2.50 in HSC and SSC, with Mathematics in HSC for CSE & CS applicants; or O-level in five subjects and A-level in two subjects with a CGPA of 2.0 at each level. According to BRAC University scale: A=5, B=4, C=3, D=2 & E=1. Only one E is acceptable. For a USA High School Diploma, International Baccalaureate Diploma or equivalent certificates, minimum qualification requirements will be determined by the University for each case separately.

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BSc in Computer Science
BSc in Computer Science & Engineering
BSS in Economics
BA in English

Application Procedure
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Phone: 9881265, 8824180 Ext. 445
Email: info@bracuniversity.ac.bd
Web: www.bracuniversity.ac.bd

Candidates and their guardians are welcome to visit the campus.

Please Note

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Giant health plan, little success

NAIMUL HAQ

The giant Health and Population Sector Programme (HPSP) has fallen far short of achieving its major goals, including curbs on high rates of maternal and child mortality, in its five-year life-span.

Abating malnutrition also took centre stage in the Tk 11,419 crore programme the health ministry launched in July 1998.

The maternal mortality rate in Bangladesh is still the highest in the world with about 15,000 women dying annually during childbirth.

More than 95 percent of the deliveries still take place at home

aided only by untrained birth attendants. Safe delivery, especially in rural areas, is still a far cry.

Under-five child mortality rate also remains very high with an estimated 700 children dying a day, mostly from respiratory tract infections, diarrhoea and pneumonia.

The level of malnutrition in the country is also the most severe in the world, with 600 to 700 children dying from malnutrition-related causes every day. Close to 60 percent of the under-five children are underweight and more than half are stunted.

Of the pre-school-age children, more than 54 percent or about 95 lakh are stunted and 56 percent are underweight. Around 45 percent children are born with low birth weight (below 2.5kg).

Several studies also show that Bangladeshi children suffer from

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Positive Bangladesh
See our special story titled *the Strength within* on page 12.

Non-stop hartal if govt uses force, warns Jalil

REAZ AHMAD

Repeated infringement of organisational activities of the Awami League (AL) has forced the main opposition party to opt for a political hard line and an early showdown against the BNP-led alliance government, party sources said.

The recent attacks on several AL councils at thana and district levels allegedly by the BNP prompted the AL leadership to take such a stand to ventilate its wrath against the ruling coalition.

"The government has panicked as the Awami League is steadily gaining strength by revamping its the grassroots units. If the rulers dare to use force to foil the dawn-to-

dusk countrywide hartal tomorrow (today) called by our party, we'll go for continuous hartal," AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil told The Daily Star yesterday.

The AL called the hartal from a December 22 emergency meeting of the party presidium protesting what it said was the infringement of democratic and political rights of the opposition and killing of its leaders and activists by the ruling coalition loyalists.

The hartal call came earlier than initially planned in the wake of a series of attacks on the AL unit councils in Munshiganj, Noakhali, Feni, Jhenidah, Sirajganj, Bagerhat and Narayanganj.

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এক্সিম ব্যাংক ক্রেডিট কার্ড
নতুন বছরের পাসওয়ার্ড!



তরু হলেও নতুন বছর... এক নবজীবন। এই নতুন জীবনের গল্প শুরু হোক এক্সিম ব্যাংক ক্রেডিট কার্ড দিয়ে। ইলেক্ট্রনিক পয়সেবায় আপনার ব্যাংকিং কার্যক্রমে আসুক পতি, স্বাস্থ্যনা ও নিরাপত্তা... আধুনিকতার ছোয়া। এক্সিম ব্যাংক-এর সহযোগিতায় এক্সিম তার সম্বলিত গ্রাহক ও তরুণাধ্যায়ীদের জীবনে শুরু করতে চায় নতুন এক সফলতার গল্প।

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