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# The Daily Star

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## Saarc nations ink social charter

FTA treaty waits to be penned as summit begins amid wind of change

AGENCIES, Islamabad

The Saarc (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) member countries yesterday signed a landmark agreement on social charter in a bid to improve the socio-economic condition of the region's populace.

The charter, signed at the end of the opening session of the three-day 12th summit, "reflects the commitment of states to pool efforts at national and regional levels to improve the social and economic conditions of the people", the new Saarc Chairman and Pakistan Prime Minister Zafarullah Khan Jamali

said. A framework for South Asia Free Trade Area (Safra) will also be signed during the meet. The summit opened in Islamabad yesterday with a call from host Pakistan for overcoming of political differences for economic growth in the South Asian region

and amid calls for unity and promises of a better relationship between India and Pakistan. Jamali said inking of the charter by the seven member states was a concrete step towards assuring the people a life of dignity, security and self-esteem.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1



The seven South Asian heads of state and government, from left to right, Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, Bangladeshi Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, Pakistani Prime Minister Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali, Nepalese Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa, Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga, Bhutanese Prime Minister Jigmi Thinley and Maldivian President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom at the opening of the 12th Saarc Summit in Islamabad yesterday.

## HC stays execution of govt order lifting ban on TU in EPZs

UNB, Dhaka

The High Court (HC) yesterday stayed for five weeks execution of the latest government notification that said trade unionism (TU) may be allowed in the EPZs (export processing zones) when it deemed necessary.

An HC Division bench of Justice Shah Abu Nayeem Mominur Rahman and Justice Abdus Salam Mamun issued a rule upon the government to show cause why a direction should not be passed that it has no lawful authority to introduce trade unionism in the EPZs.

The rule, returnable in six weeks, was issued upon a writ challenging the latest notification and filed by Youngone Corporation of South Korea and 21 others who have their industrial units in Chittagong EPZs.

The HC also stayed the operation of modified instructions applicable to the foreign investors by Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (BEPZA).

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

## Rivals kill 3 outlaws in Pabna

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Outlaws murdered three in separate incidents in Santhia and Chalmohor late Saturday night, police said.

They are Rafiq Hasan, 32, and Siddiq Rahman, 35, of Char Kalagari village under Santhia upazila and Omar Ali, 45, of Kuabashi village of Chalmohor thana.

Police said the victims - also members of different outlawed groups - were called out of their houses by their rivals.

Police found them dead in open fields Sunday morning.

Several cases including murder charges were filed against Rafiq and Siddiq, said police.

Extra police forces have been deployed in the areas and separate cases were filed with police stations.

## Tea in a new brew

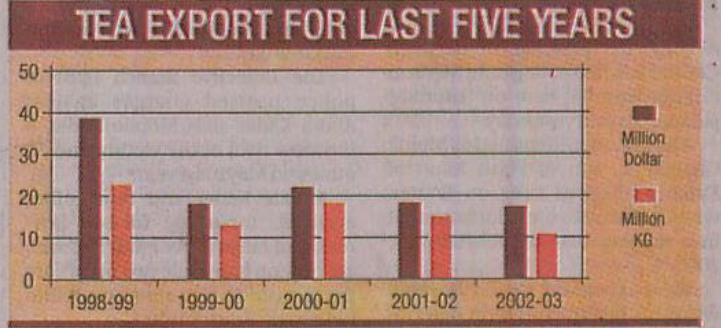
Export earnings fall by 60pc, spiking local demand may turn country into an importer

MONJUR MAHMUD

An increasing local demand has resulted in a steep drop in tea exports sparking fears that Bangladesh may soon become a tea importer unless production is enhanced proportionately.

The country's foreign exchange income from tea exports has registered as much as 60 per cent decline over the last five years - from \$38.6 million in financial year (FY) 1998-99

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4



## Home ministry orders watch on borders to stop Indian insurgents

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The home ministry at a high level meeting with paramilitary BDR and intelligence agencies yesterday asked them to step up border security and watch on Dhaka to stem infiltration of Indian terrorists.

The ministry officially denied discussion on steps to tackle infiltration of the operatives of the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) and other outfits, but meeting sources confirmed the agenda.

They said Home Minister Atif Hossain Chowdhury and State Minister Lutfozzaman Babar asked the DGF and NSI agencies to keep an eye on suspicious people in hotels and resthouses in Dhaka.

The ministers also asked the agencies to strengthen vigilance in the porous bordering areas of Cox's Bazar, Bandarban, Rangamati, Khagrachhari and Sylhet.

They also touched on the agenda

of Bangladesh-India border talks slated for New Delhi on Tuesday with BDR officials.

The meeting decided that Bangladesh would spell out its position that no Indian terrorists operated in its territory and it would not allow any outfit to use its land for activities against any country if the issue figured in the border talks beyond agenda.

The home ministry denied some newspapers reports on Saturday that 34 ULFA operatives were arrested from different parts of Dhaka.

ULFA top leader Anup Chetia was arrested and convicted in Bangladesh.

India alleges that Bangladesh provides shelters for ULFA and other Indian separatist groups - a charge Bangladesh denies vehemently.

Bangladesh shares about 4,000 kilometres of borders with India, the northeastern states of which is rife with separatism.

## 242 Bangladeshis killed by BSF in 3 years: Report

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Indian Border Security Force (BSF) and armed Indian attackers have 'killed 242 Bangladeshis and injured 380 people in the last three years'.

Revealing the data, Odhakar, a coalition for human rights, issued a press release yesterday saying that BSF members and Indian hoodlums also abducted 283 Bangladeshis, raped three women, held 191 people and were involved in 30 incidents of dacoity and snatching since 2001.

The report, based upon newspaper reports, said 37 Bangladeshis also went missing during the period.

Last year the BSF and Indian miscreants murdered 43 Bangladeshis, wounded 83 people, kidnapped 120 while seven went missing, it said.

Two including a physically challenged woman were raped, 21 were arrested and eight incidents of dacoity took place at different border-points in 2003, it added.

In 2002, 104 people were killed, 54 got injured, 118 were abducted and 30 went missing. Besides, 110

SEE PAGE 11 COL 2

## Khaleda for win-win trade option for all

AGENCIES, Islamabad

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday called upon South Asian nations to devise trade promotion so that it becomes a 'win-win situation for all'.

"Trade promotion critically calls for reducing tariffs, dismantling non-tariff barriers and impediments of an institutional and attitudinal nature affecting exports from smaller to larger Saarc countries," she told the opening of the 12th summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc), a grouping of seven nations.

Top leaders of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and the Maldives sat for summit talks in the Pakistan capital on some major topics, including establishing a South Asian Free

Trade Area (Safra) encompassing the seven Saarc countries.

"Trade liberalisation should lead to a win-win situation for all... In other words, it needs to be approached with a more open mind," Khaleda said.

She said the new trade regime could include reduction of the content of value-addition requirements, special measures for the LDCs (least developed countries), adequate timeframe for freeing trade, compensatory financing for revenue loss and the concept of an early harvest.

On finalisation of the Saarc Social Charter, the prime minister said by signing the Charter, the Saarc leaders demonstrated their commitment to give it a social dimension.

The prime minister recommended six potential sectors for

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

## Vajpayee-Musharraf landmark meet today

PMs of nuke rivals hold first bilateral session

AFP, Islamabad

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf will meet today on the sidelines of a regional summit, a Pakistani official announced.

"The meeting will take place sometime tomorrow (Monday)," foreign ministry spokesman Masood Khan told a press briefing last night, after Vajpayee issued a request to meet the Pakistani President.

Vajpayee earlier held ice-breaking talks with Pakistani Prime Minister Zafarullah Khan Jamali after the opening of the 12th summit of the South Asian Association for

Regional Cooperation (Saarc).

Vajpayee and Musharraf have not spoken formally since July 2001 when they attended a bilateral summit in the Indian city of Agra.

They shook hands two years ago at the last SAARC summit in Kathmandu.

The talks between Vajpayee and Jamali were the first between the bitter nuclear rivals since they came to the brink of war in 2002.

"The meeting has taken place. It was a good meeting," Pakistani Foreign Minister Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri told reporters.

"Our prime minister met prime minister Jamali at a courtesy call

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

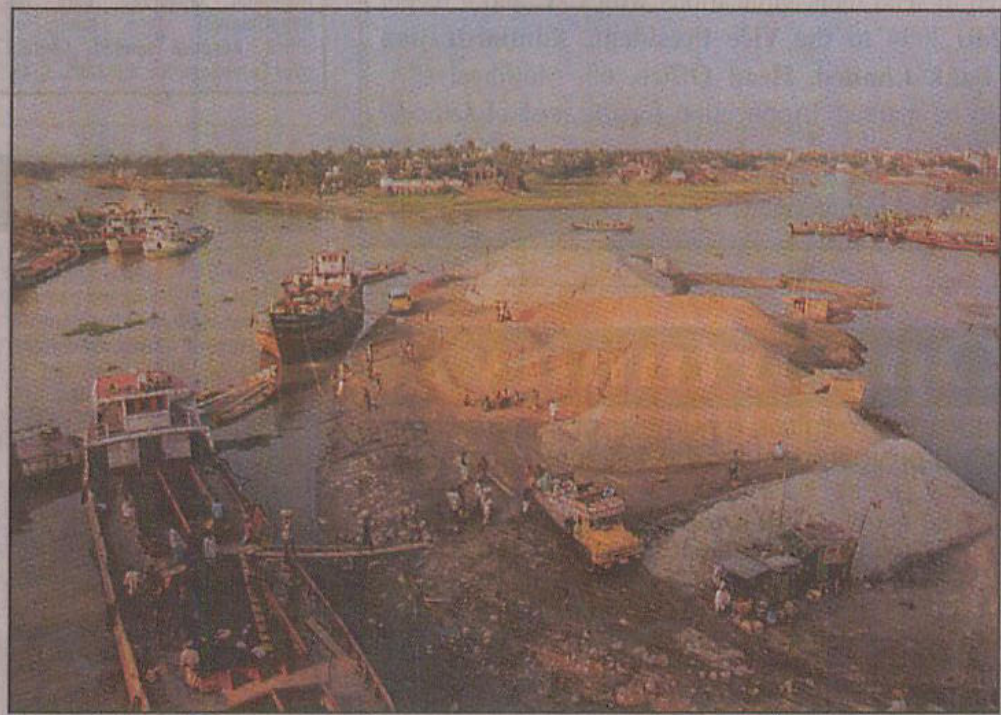


PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Sand traders have encroached on offshoots of Turag river at Amin Bazar to excavate the riverbed, diverting the course of the river.

## Gayoom slams South Asian military buildup

AFP, Islamabad

Maldives President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom yesterday called upon the leaders of heavily militarised South Asia to work for economic development instead of stockpiling weapons.

"Our people need food, not fighter aircraft, books not bombs, magazines not missiles," said Gayoom, 65, who is the longest-serving leader of Asia, as the seven-nation South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) summit opened here.

People need to protect the environment and their rich culture, he said, adding "that is the least they (leaders) can do for their successive generations."

"South Asia must boost its

SEE PAGE 11 COL 8

## Deaths mark Blair's surprise Basra visit

3 GIs killed, 4 Iraqis die as US soldiers open fire on civilian car



Tony Blair

AGENCIES, Baghdad

British Prime Minister Tony Blair made a surprise visit to Iraq yesterday, a day after US soldiers killed four Iraqis, including a woman and a nine-year-old child.

Iraqi police claimed a US convoy opened fire on a car in northern Iraq, while one US soldier died in a mortar strike and two more in a roadside bombing.

The Iraqis were killed Saturday when their car tried to pass a US

convoy and the soldiers opened fire on it in the area around former dictator Saddam Hussein's hometown of Tikrit, police said, but American troops in the area denied involvement.

"The car, a grey Chevrolet Caprice, was hit by 27 shots and skidded, resulting in the death of four people, including a woman and a nine-year-old child," Tikrit police chief Colonel Ussama Adham Abdel Ghaffer told AFP.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

## Sun shines, cold spell continues

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The icy grip over most parts of the country remained unchanged although some regions including the capital city yesterday experienced a welcome sunshine.

People in the northern and southwestern parts of the country are shivering in cold, as the weather chills with strong northerly winds blowing. The sky remains covered with fog and mist. At times the fog is so dense that drivers find it difficult to ply their vehicles.

Amid the cold spell sweeping over the capital since Thursday, Dhaka yesterday experienced a brief sunshine at noon and the daytime temperature increased slightly. Light to moderate fog engulfed the

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

## JS body for cutting ministry numbers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A parliamentary body yesterday pegged the current administration as 'top-heavy' and agreed with four separate reports that suggested downsizing the number of ministries.

The parliamentary standing committee on the establishment ministry discussed a ministry report that called for reducing the number of ministries to 20 to 22 from 39.

The committee decided to pore over three other reports that had made similar recommendations earlier.

"We will suggest the government

to reduce the number of ministries and departments," Sardar Shakhawat Hossain Bakul, chairman of the committee, told newsmen emerging from the meeting at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban.

"We have got the reports of all commissions on public administration and the committee members will come up with their opinion by February 28."

"We will review the reports and make a set of recommendations."

The reports of Muhi, Nurunnabi and Shamsul Haque commissions had observed that the giant public administration with a welter of

ministries and departments should be downsized.

The committee, which at its earlier meeting committed to publishing a list of officials who participated in the much-talked-about anti-government Janatar Manch platform in 1996, bought time.

"The establishment ministry is still reviewing the list and we hope to disclose it at the next meeting," Bakul said.

The committee recommended the introduction of the Employees' Welfare Board Bill to the Jatiya Sangsad.

The establishment ministry

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6