

Saarc nations

FROM PAGE 1

He said the charter aims at protecting human rights, gender equality, women empowerment and social security.

Motorcades of black armoured Limousines ferried leaders of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives to the Jinnah Convention Centre where the three-day summit will unfold.

Outside, 10,000 police and commandos enforced a near lockdown on the deserted streets. All shops in a so-called "red zone" around the convention centre were shut.

The summit will start breaking down regional trade frontiers from 2006 to create a free trade zone in one of the world's most populous and poorest regions.

"This indeed is a landmark decision," Pakistan's Foreign Minister Khurshid Mahmood Kasuri said as he announced agreement on a framework for the South Asia Free Trade Agreement (Safta).

The Safta agreement will take effect from January 1, 2006 once it is approved during the summit.

Implementation of the new tariff regime offers three sets of deadlines according to member states' varying economic prowess.

"Pakistan and India will complete Safta implementation by the year 2009 whereas Sri Lanka will take another year (2010) to bring its tariff down to five to zero percent," Pakistani commerce ministry spokesman Zafar Qadir said.

Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Maldives, and Nepal, with weaker economies, have received concessions to avail of a longer deadline that would end by 2013.

Kasuri said each member state would be allowed to maintain a sensitive list of products on which tariff would not be reduced.

Sri Lanka President Chandrika Kumaratunga described the treaty as a "historic step for regional economic cooperation."

"As the pioneer South Asian state to undertake economic liberalisation, Sri Lanka welcomes the conclusion of Safta, even though we possess a small and vulnerable economy," Kumaratunga said in her address to the opening of the South Asia summit.

"It is necessary that we keep in mind that short term losses would be compensated by the opportunities gained from trade expansion under Safta."

Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia proposed compensation for the smaller economies and a separate timeframe for them.

Khaleda told the summit's

One shot dead at Agargaon

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Assailants shot dead a young man in front of his wife near the Passport Office at Agargaon in Moham-madpur last night.

The victim Khalil, 35, while taking his meal with his wife in a hotel near the Passport Office last night was called out by a gang of armed attackers who gunned him down on the spot.

Khalil collapsed on the ground in a pool of blood. Relatives rushed him to orthopaedic hospital where the on-duty doctors declared him dead.

The reason behind the murder could not be known.

The duty officer of Moham-madpur Police Station said a police officer went there for spot investigation but could not give any further details.

US mission lands

FROM PAGE 12

of man's missions there have ended in failure.

"The images are outstanding," Mars Exploration Rover science manager John Callas said as the pictures from Spirit began to appear on a giant screen at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California.

"The quality (is) the best that have been taken. This is incredible. This could not be better."

The scientists said the pictures captured Mars for the first time in stereoscopic -- giving them unprecedented depth of field that will allow them to more accurately pinpoint areas of exploration.

Earlier, the spacecraft made what NASA officials called a textbook touch-down in a huge impact crater, prompting project scientists to cheer wildly when the lander sent a signal back to Earth telling them it had survived a final six-minute plummet to the surface.

Nasa Administrator Sean O'Keefe, on hand for what was a critical moment for the agency, popped champagne at a post-landing press briefing. Mars claimed two spacecraft in 1998 and 1999.

"This is a big night for Nasa -- we're back," O'Keefe declared. "I'm very, very proud of this team and we're on Mars. This is an absolutely incredible accomplishment."

O'Keefe's presence made clear that the \$820 million mission's success was of utmost importance to the US space program and he

opening that the new trade regime could include "special measures for the least developed countries" like an adequate timeframe for freeing trade; compensatory financing for revenue loss and the concept of early harvest.

The Saarc leaders will also update a decades-old agreement to combat international terrorism, bringing it into line with United Nations resolutions to choke off terrorist financing.

But the chief focus will be outside the summit's official multilateral agenda -- the steadily improving relations between India and Pakistan, whose hostility ran so deep a year ago that the scheduled summit then was cancelled. Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee arrived on Pakistani soil for the first time in nearly five years Saturday and was greeted with exceptional warmth at the airport -- closed to commercial flights for security reasons -- by his Pakistani counterpart, Zafarullah Khan Jamali.

Jamali and Vajpayee entered the convention center side by side and jointly took their seats.

Vajpayee used the opening ceremony to call for a "bold transition" to peace after a half-century of conflict and mistrust.

"We have to change South Asia's image and its standing in the world," Vajpayee said.

"We must make the bold transition from mistrust to trust, from discord to concord and from tension to peace," he continued, to applause.

Khaleda

FROM PAGE 12

indication with regard to further positive developments within the bloc.

"Advancement of Saarc in its way of 18 years also proved the maturity and contribution of both leaders and peoples of the Saarc countries," she said.

Briefing newsmen after the meet, Foreign Secretary Shamsheer Mobin Chowdhury, who was present at the meeting, said the two prime ministers agreed that Bangladesh and Pakistan have good bilateral relations beyond Saarc, which help them work together for the seven-nation forum.

Khaleda hoped that Pakistan would invest more in Bangladesh, particularly in the textile sector.

The Pakistan premier said that Bangladeshi students could avail the opportunity to study in Pakistan as "there are very good quality schools and colleges in Pakistan".

Prime Minister Khaleda thanked the host prime minister for conducting the Saarc summit.

The Pakistan premier said, "Credit for the regional cooperation that has been forged in last 18 years goes to Bangladesh, as President Ziaur Rahman mooted the concept of the Saarc."

Pakistan Foreign Minister Khurshid Mahmood Kasuri and its foreign secretary, Bangladesh Foreign Minister Morshed Khan and PM's Political Secretary Harris Chowdhury were also present.

242 Bangladeshis

FROM PAGE 1

people were arrested and 12 incidents of dacoit and snatching took place in different border areas, Dhikar's report said.

The BSF and Indian armed criminals killed 94 Bangladeshis, injured 244 villagers, abducted 45 people, raped a woman, nabbed 60 persons along border areas in 2001, it added.

It said 10 incidents of snatching and robbery also took place in 2001.

called it a "double-header" following the successful Stardust mission on Friday.

That craft intercepted a comet and gathered particles in a first that could offer clues about how Earth began.

The Spirit spacecraft entered Mars' atmosphere at about 7:29 p.m. PST 10:29 p.m. EST/03:29 GMT after an approach that took the spacecraft from a top speed of 12,000 mph to zero in six minutes.

"I said it would be six minutes of hell and in this case we said the right prayers and got up to heaven," Ed Weiler, Nasa associate administrator, said.

To arrive intact on the planet's surface, the spacecraft deployed a parachute, jettisoned its heat shield and fired retro rockets. The final drop of about four stories was cushioned by the airbags, which allowed the lander to bounce across the terrain for up to half a mile before coming to rest inside the giant Gusev crater.

The scientists adjusted the parachute deployment to accommodate a dust storm blowing on Mars, but found themselves on such a perfect course they could scrap more navigation maneuvers.

Project managers picked Gusev, an impact crater bigger than the US state of Connecticut, in part because they believed it may have once held a lake.

A second rover, nicknamed Opportunity, is expected to land on the other side of the red planet in three weeks.

Mob kills two robbers on Dhaka-Sylhet highway

UNB, Narsingdi

A mob killed two alleged highway robbers and injured eight others on Dhaka-Sylhet highway at Bhati Morjal in Raipur yesterday.

Police said a gang of about 12 robbers boarded a Dhaka-bound bus from Brahmanbaria in guise of passengers. They looted over Tk 1 lakh in cash and valuables when the vehicle neared Mahmudabad bridge at about 8:00am.

"The passengers cried out for help when the robbers were decamping at Bhati Morjal. Locals rushed to the spot and caught 10 of the robbers," said an eyewitness.

The mob beat up the robbers, leaving Monir Hossain, 30, and another unidentified dead on the spot.

Raipura police sent the injured - Olulul Islam, 20, Saiful Islam, 26, Sharifuddin, 30, Jamal, 25, Rafiq, 25, Mojibur Rahman, 29, Harun, 28, and Faruque, 25 -- to Narsingdi General Hospital and Raipura Health Complex.

Police also recovered Tk 40,000, four mobile phone sets, four wrist-watches and two knives.

Clarification

FROM PAGE 1

institutions."

"We have no outstanding/liability or default of any nature whatsoever. The CIB report of Bangladesh Bank on our Group is positive," it added.

It said its Highspeed Shipbuilding (HSHEC) was a public limited that had no floor share trade for many years at Dhaka Stock Exchange. "In fact, we the sponsors and directors hold more than 99.93 percent share of this company," it said.

Our reply: The Daily Star story was based on an order issued by the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) that mentioned the High Speed Ship Building and Heavy Engineering Ltd (HSHEC).

15 injured

FROM PAGE 12

Nazmul Alam Monju, 25, president of the BCL Sudharam upazila unit, Tajul Islam, 18, Amir Hossain Bahadur, 18, Ataur Rahman Sohad, 20, Rashed, 17, and Tuhin, 25. They received treatment at local hospitals.

District AL leaders and police brought the situation under control.

6 bandits held

Police in two separate drives recovered two pipe-guns and arrested six alleged bandits from the district's coastal forest area.

A team of police led by Additional Superintendent of Police (SP) Matiur Rahman during the early hours yesterday arrested four bandits at Taltola area of Char Clark union. They are Vulu Majhi, 50, Khalil, 22, Jamal Kerani, 45, and Selim, 20.

Another force led by SP Mezbahunnabi on Saturday arrested two more forest bandits Manik, 40, and Moseh Uddin, 28, at deep forest of the same union, known as the den of the notorious bandit Nobba Chora. Police also recovered two pipe-guns from them.

All the arrestees are now in the custody of Char Jabbar Police Station.

Black flags fly

FROM PAGE 12

their demonstration at Talki Bazaar for a quick end to the 3,000-acre project the forest department took up in 2000.

Garol leaders demanded a judicial probe into the incident and demanded immediate transfer of the deputy commissioner, superintendent of police and divisional forest officer.

Albert Mankin, frontline Garo community leader, and Ajay A Mri, convener of the "committee on movement against wall construction", addressed the Talki Bazaar rally.

"We will take a hard-line, forcing the government to stop the project for which one of us died," Ajay told The Daily Star.

DISCONSOLATE WITH GRIEF The tragedy left Shita with her 3-month daughter Ratri Nakrek and 3-year-old son Utsa Nakrek.

She did not know Piren, a banana plantation worker, joined Saturday's demonstration against the construction of the wall.

"Shita will have to struggle on with her children," said Sallo Slan, mother of Piren, tears welling up in her eyes.

Abu Jafar Alam, officer-in-charge of Modhupur Police Station, said police filed two cases - one against the forest guards who were present at the scene and fired and the other against the Garos for "unlawful assembly".

Additional Deputy Inspector General of Police visited Modhupur Police Station yesterday.

The 11-party left alliance, Workers Party of Bangladesh, Ain O Salish Kendro, Bangladesh Manobadhikar Bastobayon Sangstha, Bangladesh Christians Association, Sammilito Samajik Andolon and Bangladesh Chhatra Union protested the killing and attacks on the indigenous people.



PHOTO: AFP

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia delivers a speech at the launch of the 12th Saarc Summit in Islamabad yesterday.

Khaleda for win-win

FROM PAGE 1

economic development in South Asia including an exclusive regional centre for ICT (information communications technology), a regional energy grid and use of alternative energy sources, and early adoption of an inter-regional investment agreement to increase employment, reduce trade imbalance and promote South Asia as a common investment zone.

The three other recommendations were promotion of developments in line with recommendations and plan of action of the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development, increasing people-to-people contact, especially strong cultural and sports-exchange programmes, and enhancing cooperation to confront terrorism, organised crime and drug abuse.

She also urged the Saarc leaders to jointly face the challenges of heightening security concerns, donor fatigues and shrinking markets for the region's products.

Calling for a long-range vision for the Saarc, Khaleda said the organisation must concentrate on projects that have a regional focus and orientation.

Although poverty reduction is the foremost objective of the Saarc, she noted that the forum was yet to

successfully tackle this common foe. "South Asia remains the region with the largest concentration of absolute poverty."

About globalisation, the prime minister said its benefits have not accrued evenly, adding that economies of the South, especially the least developed countries, have been marginalised.

"Terrorism has further spread," the prime minister said and condemned the second attempt on the life of Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf.

Chaired by Pakistan Prime Minister and new Saarc chairperson Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali, the ceremonial opening session was also addressed by Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga, Maldives President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, Nepalese Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa, Bhutanese Prime Minister Jigmi Yoeser Thinley and host Pakistan Prime Minister Jamali.

Earlier, outgoing Saarc chairman and Nepalese Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa formally declared the 12th Saarc summit open at 11:45pm (Bangladesh time). Host Prime Minister Jamali was later unanimously elected the new Saarc chairman.

Tea in a new brew

FROM PAGE 1

to only \$15.47 million in FY03, commerce ministry sources said.

Tea exports have always been falling far short of annual targets during the period, which in FY2000 was 56 percent less than the target of \$40 million.

In terms of quantity, the fall in exports was around 55 percent over the period. In FY1999, 22.68 million kgs were exported, while the figure went down to 10.35 million kgs in FY03.

"Internal consumption is going up 3.5 percent every year against 1 percent production growth," said SAHM Tauhid, chairman of Bangladesh Tea Board (BTB).

The rising demand for tea at home has triggered stiff competition at the weekly auctions, with local buyers often outbidding exporters and their foreign counterparts.

If the trend continues, Bangladesh which presently is the fifth largest tea exporter in the world may turn into a tea importing country by 2015, BTB officials said.

Portraying a gloomier picture, industry sources said demand for tea at home was going up 10 percent a year and it would not be possible for Bangladesh to have surplus tea for export within only a couple of years.

A multinational marketing company has already started marketing a brand imported from Kenya. "It's a premium brand and selling at Tk 75 per 100 grams," an official of the company said, declining to disclose the quantity of tea it is importing each year.

A local company has also launched another foreign brand, Tetley, in the market, setting up a joint venture between Bangladesh

and India.

"But, in our brand we are mostly using local tea, as the cost of the imported one is very high," said an official of the company.

Referring to the dismal in tea production, the BTB chairman said 30 percent of the tea plants were planted during the British regime, the production capacity of which now ranges between 500 and 800 kgs a hectare. "It pulls down the overall productivity."

"If those old plants are replaced by new saplings, the yield will be around 6,000 kg per hectare. That would push the national average level of productivity up to 1,800 kg from the present 1,170 kgs each hectare," he said.

Bangladesh produces about 55 million kgs of tea a year on 119,000 hectares (297,500 acres) of land.

Of the 160 tea estates, 36 are either sick or fall in the 'least developed garden' categories. Although these 36 gardens account for 17 percent of the total tea plantation area, their share in total national production is just 3 percent.

There are also a good number of tea estates that have considerable room for accommodating more plants, sources said.

In a bid to increase tea production, the BTB has been implementing a tea plantation extension programme based on the 'Small Grower Concept (SGC)' in Panchargarh district since 2001. The board is also trying to initiate similar projects in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Fatikchhari in Chittagong, Mymensingh and some other districts.

"But implementation of the SGC is being seriously hampered due to lack of funds," a BTB official said.

Sun shines

FROM PAGE 1

capital and its suburbs in the morning shutting off the sun but as cooler winds started blowing, the sun peeped through at about 12 noon. In Dhaka the lowest temperature was recorded yesterday at 12.8 degrees Celsius while the highest was 19.7 degrees, higher than 15.1 degrees recorded on Saturday, according to the Dhaka Met Office.

The country's south eastern region and some parts of the Khulna and Barisal division also experienced sunlight after four days but situation in the remaining parts of the country remained unchanged, according to the Met Office in Dhaka.

"With the appearance of the sun the maximum temperature in some parts of the country increased and the gap between the maximum and minimum temperatures will reduce," said a Deputy Forecast Officer (DFO) in Dhaka.

He added that it might take two-three more days for the situation to get to normal across the country.

The lowest temperature was recorded at 10.1 degrees Celsius in Rajshahi division while the highest was 26.2 degrees in Teknaf, according to the Met Office.

Meanwhile, our Barisal correspondent reported that the region also experienced sunshine after three days although the district is still experiencing bones chilling northeasterly cold wave.

Quoting the local met office, the correspondent also added that the highest temperature was recorded in Barisal at 17 degrees Celsius while the lowest was 12 degrees.

The cold wave claimed at least 11 lives across the district in the last seven days.

Our Pabna correspondent say 17 people have died in the cold wave in the district in the last three days.

People of the Chalanbil and Char areas are the worst sufferers as they do not have enough warm clothes and the government assistance is yet to reach them.

"At least four hundred people have been hospitalised in the last four days and the situation might worsen if the cold wave continues for a few more days," said the district civil surgeons of Pabna.

Our Rajshahi correspondent added people of the division are still experiencing bitter cold with clouds cloaking the sun all day long.

According to the local met office, the lowest temperature in Rajshahi yesterday was recorded at 10.0 degrees Celsius while on Saturday it was 9.5 degrees.

TU in EPZs

FROM PAGE 1

The latest government notification of December 31, 2003, cancelled its earlier notification issued two years ago, lifting the ban on trade union activities in the EPZs from this month. The fresh notification however said the government may allow TU activities in the EPZs when it deemed necessary.

Dr M Zahir appeared for the petitioners while Assistant Attorney General Zaman Akhtar Bulbul stood for the government.

Vajpayee-Musharraf

FROM PAGE 1

which lasted for half an hour, including 15 minutes of one-on-one," Indian Foreign Minister Yashwant Sinha told reporters.

"It was a very warm and cordial call."

Yesterday's surprise talks came just ahead of a meeting between Kasuri and Sinha at Islamabad's Marriott Hotel.

Indian foreign ministry spokesman Navtej Sarna called the foreign ministers' meeting a "courtesy call".

"Both expressed satisfaction at the progress in bilateral relations and discussed ways to maintain the momentum," Sarna said.

State-run Pakistan Television (PTV) showed footage of Jamali, Vajpayee and senior officials sitting together.

It said the two met one-on-one for 16 minutes and with their aides for seven minutes.

The two premiers "began meeting soon after the inaugural session" of the 12th Saarc summit, PTV reported, describing the atmosphere as "friendly and cordial".

JS body

FROM PAGE 1

yesterday submitted a draft on the career planning of public servants, focussing on their recruitment, transfer, promotion and training.

The committee will thoroughly review the draft and ask the government to pass its recommendations as a law in parliament.

Deaths mark Blair

FROM PAGE 1

US Lieutenant Colonel Steve Russell, head of the 4th Infantry Division 1-22 battalion that patrols Tikrit, said he knew of a shooting incident with a civilian car, but emphasised that his men were not involved.

A fifth occupant of the car, who survived with chest injuries, also said the vehicle had come under fire from a US convoy.

A US soldier was killed Friday in an attack at Balad, 75 kilometres (45 miles) north of Baghdad, shortly after insurgents in the volatile nearby western town of Fallujah shot down a US helicopter killing one soldier.

However, Blair told British troops they had fought for a "noble and good cause" and that Iraq was a "test case" in the global fight against terror and repression.

The US President Bush's main ally in Iraq, whose political fortunes have wavered due to his backing of the US-led campaign to topple Saddam Hussein, flew into Iraq's second-largest city Basra by military aircraft from the Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheik, where he was on vacation with his family.

Visit to America

FROM PAGE 12

tions -- before taking their fingerprints and photographs.

This is phase one of US-VISIT, a 380-million-dollar effort to track down terrorists.

By 2005, every port of entry on land, sea and air will have the photographic and fingerprinting technology. All US visas and passports will eventually include photos and fingerprints -- called "biometric identifiers."

The program takes effect after the United States raised its terror alert to its next-to-highest level in December. Intelligence indicated that al-Qaeda was planning to hijack airliners for a repeat of its September 11 attacks, in which 3,000 people were killed.

The United States placed armed police on some airliners and in December said it may require foreign airliners in US airspace to do the same.

Inkless fingerprints and digital photos will add 10 to 15 seconds to the entry interview, which now takes 60 to 90 seconds, Kimberly Weissman, a Homeland Security spokeswoman, told the news agency.

US-VISIT will set up self-service kiosks at all US airports. There, visitors will "check out" of the country before stepping on the plane. Visitors overstaying their visas may not be let back in.

Two September 11 hijackers

Major changes

FROM PAGE 12

Secretary Syed Rezaul Hayat on January 26, Primary and Mass Education Secretary Tehmina Hussain on January 11, Housing and Public Works Secretary Aminur Rahman on January 18 and Environment and Forests Secretary Sabihuddin Ahmed on January 24.

Contracts of some officials of additional secretary rank also expires this month.

The