

Thaw in Indo-Pak relations to have positive impacts on Saarc region

Khaleda tells Jamali

UNB, Islamabad

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday said the present atmosphere of good understanding between India and Pakistan would not only benefit the two countries but also have positive impacts on other members of Saarc (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation).

During a courtesy call on Pakistan Premier Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali at the Prime Minister's House, Khaleda hoped that Bangladesh would have the opportunity to take over the forum's chair on a happy note after the pragmatic leadership of Pakistan over the next one year. Jamali yesterday was unanimously elected the Saarc chairman.

Saarc officials said the next Saarc summit would be held in Dhaka in 2005.

Khaleda also appreciated the speech of Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee in the inaugural session of the summit here yesterday, saying it carried a positive message.

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# Black flags fly amid outrage in Modhupur

PINAKI ROY, from Modhupur

The Garos of Modhupur forest yesterday flew black flags atop their houses to protest the killing of an indigenous youth in fire from police and forest guards, while Shita Nakrek was waiting in her basic hut for return of her husband's body after autopsy.

Thousands of incensed Garos demonstrated all day in the Modhupur forest area, protesting the killing of 25-year-old Piren Slan, who joined a group of protesters Saturday to resist the government's forest conservation and eco-tourism project.

"I want justice for my husband's death," Shita said, bursting into

sharp wails of grief. The 20-year-old woman was left on her own with two minor children to take care of in Jainagachha village, about 50 kilometres north of Tangail town.

The demonstrators carried the body of Piren in a procession and shouted slogans against the conservation plan that they fear will threaten their living.

The forest department has been building a wall to ring the Modhupur forest to save it from what officials said were wood theft and land grab in a plan the Garos described as destructive to their traditional lifestyle.

Locals alleged Joynal Abedin

Babul, the project contractor and local BNP leader, was present at the scene where police and forest rangers opened fire, killing Piren instantly and injuring 25 others including women and children in an incident that prompted protest from rights groups.

"The moment we reached the spot, the police and forest guards fired on us. We did nothing. We had no firearms. We were only shouting slogans," said Binita Mankin, a witness to the killing that created outrage in the locality.

Main opposition Awami League lawmaker Abdur Razzak Bhola threw his weight behind the Garos

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## Cop killed, in Ctg road accident

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A speeding bus knocked dead a sub-inspector and injured his colleague near Dampara Police Line in the port city Saturday.

A special city-service bus hit Sub-Inspector Abdul Aziz and Sub-Inspector Enamul Haq when they were going home on a motor-bike at around 9:00pm, police and witnesses said.

Aziz died on the spot while Enamul lost a leg and had a fractured arm, they added.

Enamul was undergoing treatment at Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH) in critical condition, doctors said.

High police officials visited the injured cop at the CMCH.

Aziz's namaz-e-janaza was held at Dampara Police Line ground yesterday afternoon after autopsy. Later, his body was sent to his village home in Barisal for burial.

Police seized the bus but the driver escaped arrest. A case was filed with Kotwali Police Station.



A row of shanties lines the rail tracks north of Khilgaon rail crossing, undermining Bangladesh Railway's directive that this narrow strip of land is off-limits to public use.

## Boy killed before mother

UNB, Kishoreganj

A nine-year-old boy was brutally murdered in front of his mother apparently out of revenge at Kamalpur village in Nikli upazila in the early hours of yesterday.

Police quoting villagers said a group of 5-6 men swooped on the house of Idris Ali, a farmer, at around 2:30am. Ali was however not home.

The attackers tied his wife Nuresa Banu to a pole and slit the throat of her son Julhas in front of her.

Police suspect the murder to be a sequel to previous enmity.

Police sent the body to sadar hospital for autopsy.

## Three killed in Comilla road accident

UNB, Comilla

The driver and two helpers of a bus were killed when another speeding bus knocked it from behind at Khadghar on Dhaka-Chittagong highway Sunday.

The Chittagong-bound bus fell into a roadside ditch after another passenger bus hit its rear when driver Abu Sayed, 35, helpers Russel, 32, and Hossain, 33, were repairing their vehicle at about 1:00am, police said.

All of them died on the spot, police added.

Police seized both buses.

## 15 injured in Noakhali BCL factional clash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali

Fifteen people including a child and a woman were injured yesterday in a clash between two rival factions of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) at the district headquarters.

The clash erupted when members of the BCL Flat Road unit tried to obstruct the BCL Majdeed Bazar unit members from taking the lead of a procession, carrying a banner of their own.

The district unit of BCL, the student wing of Awami League (AL), brought out the colourful procession to mark the organisation's 56th founding anniversary. The procession, starting from the Shaheed Minar, paraded the major streets of the town. The clash occurred in front of Grand Hotel at Flat Road when the procession was trailing back.

During the half-hour encounter, a car of a private bank and some shops were reportedly damaged and ransacked. Exchanges of brickbats also left a child and a housewife, who was standing at a window of her house, seriously injured.

The injured BCL activists

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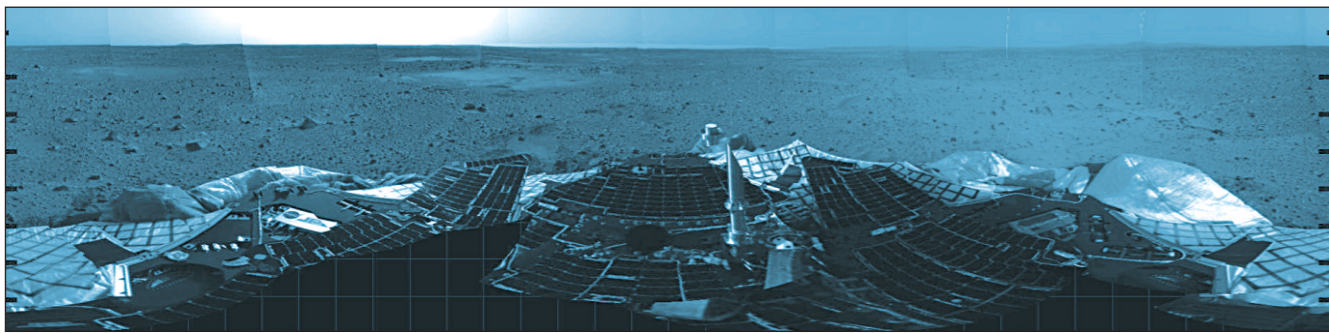


PHOTO: AFP

A panoramic image taken by Nasa's Mars Exploration Rover from the surface of Mars after the spacecraft touched down on the red planet Saturday.

# US mission lands safely on Mars

Beams home remarkable images

REUTERS, Pasadena

A robotic explorer beamed remarkable images of the bleak Martian surface back to scientists on Earth late Saturday just hours after its dramatic arrival on the red planet.

The pictures showed the barren, rock-strewn landscape surrounding the Spirit lander -- and a large, sharp-edged boulder that the airbag-cushioned spacecraft had narrowly missed while rolling to a stop.

The spacecraft sent the

images to the passing Odyssey orbiter during a 12-minute communications window and gave Nasa scientists a glimpse of the lander itself, which had traveled seven months through space to search for life on Mars.

The spacecraft survived what

one Nasa administrator called "six minutes of hell" -- the parachute and retro-rocket assisted descent through Mars' atmosphere. The planet has proven troublesome to Nasa and the space agency says more than

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# Visit to America gets tougher from today

US launches plan to fingerprint, photograph 23 million visitors

AFP, Washington

The US government's 2004 resolution is to fingerprint and photograph some 23 million foreign visitors including Bangladeshis arriving at 115 US airports -- without clogging the air transit system.

The photos and fingerprints will be required only of visitors with visas. Citizens from 27 countries, mostly in Europe, who enter for tourism or business for short periods without a visa are exempt, according to the Department of Homeland Security, which runs

the United States Visitor and Immigrant Status Indicator Technology, or US-VISIT.

Beginning January 5, immigration officials at all US international airports will vet visitors' passports and visas and pose the usual ques

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## Armed gang robs city bus passengers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An armed gang yesterday looted cash and valuables reportedly worth Tk 50,000 from passengers of a bus at Agargaon in Mohammadpur.

The gang of eight got on a Gabtoli-bound bus from Farmgate with as many passengers. They stopped the bus near BNP slum and robbed the passengers at gunpoint at about 12:45am, said Zahedur Rahman, a passenger of the bus.

The gang reportedly snatched Tk 30,000, six mobile phone sets from the passengers and forced them off the vehicle, he added.

# Major changes in admin on cards

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The civil administration braces for major changes this month when contractual service of over half a dozen senior secretaries expires and some others go on leave preparatory to retirement (LPR).

The government decided not to renew contracts of officials serving for one or more years and denied renewal to about two dozen top officials in the final two months of last year.

Sources at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) said renewal of contracts of serving officials was

remote.

Influential secretaries with close relations with the alliance government like Shah Mohammad Farid, Shahidul Alam and AYBI Siddique were refused fresh contracts despite hectic lobbying.

A record three dozen secretaries were on contractual service in the last two years.

Among top officials, contracts of Prime Minister's Principal Secretary Kamal Uddin Siddiqui expires on January 9, Communications

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Prayer Timings		
January 5		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-45	6-10
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-00	4-15
Maghrib	5-30	5-35
Esha	7-00	7-30

Source: Islamic Foundation