

# Dhaka, Jakarta

FROM PAGE 1  
views on post-war Iraq.

Issues of terrorism also came up for discussion and Khaleda and Megawati emphasized sharing of information and intelligence among the Asian countries for effectively combating the problem in the respective countries.

Briefing newsmen on the outcome of the talks, Foreign Secretary Shamsher Mobin Chowdhury termed the meeting 'very fruitful'.

On exploration and extraction of natural resources, the two sides agreed that Patronex and Bapex, the public companies of the two countries, can enter into an effective cooperation and share their experiences.

Indonesia reaffirmed its support to Bangladesh's candidature for the post of secretary general of the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC) and assured that Jakarta would also discuss the matter with other OIC countries.

Megawati expressed her hope to see Bangladesh's representation in the next Non-Aligned Movement (Nam) Summit which will also mark the 50th anniversary of the Afro-Asian Conference that led to the formation of the Nam.

The Indonesian president assured the prime minister of her

country's support for Bangladesh's membership in the Asean Regional Forum (ARF).

About bilateral trade, Megawati said her government will encourage more Indonesian businessmen to import from Bangladesh to reduce the huge trade gap, with the balance tilted towards Indonesia.

In 2001-2002 fiscal year, Dhaka's exports to Jakarta stood at \$5.6 million, while imports were worth \$173.6 million.

After official talks, the two countries struck two agreements and two memoranda of understanding (MoU) to boost trade, economic and cultural ties.

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan and his Indonesian counterpart N Hassan Wirayuda signed the MoUs on establishment of joint commission on trade and on comprehensive trade and economic partnership.

Morshed Khan and Indonesian Trade Minister Rini M.S. Soewandi signed an agreement on trade while another agreement was signed by Morshed Khan and Indonesian minister Igeda Ardika on cultural exchange programme.

Megawati and Khaleda witnessed the signing ceremony at Istana Merdeka Palace.

# Move to increase JS seats

FROM PAGE 12  
said Mayeen Uddin Khan, executive president of Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) while reading out statement.

He said amendment to the constitution is of very high public interest and should be carried out after political consensus, not unilaterally.

It's an undemocratic and unconstitutional attempt of the ruling coalition government to divert people's attention from Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)'s failure to honour its election pledges including separation of judiciary, formation of an anti-corruption body and electoral reform, said speakers at the roundtable.

Prof Shamsul Huda Harun of Dhaka University said the grounds of population increase, demographic change and urbanisation put forward by the government to justify its move are not applicable to the present context of the country.

"The arrangement will put a heavy financial burden on the common people who are not in a position to shoulder any more taxes," said Avami League (AL) lawmaker and Deputy Leader of the Opposition AbdulHamid.

He said salary, allowances and other unseen benefits for each lawmaker will amount to Tk 10,00,000 a year.

The government is contemplating increasing the number of parliamentary seats from 300 to 450.

In this context, Hamid said the 542 seats in Indian Lok Sabha were not increased although the population has shot up to over 100 crore.

He said the constitution does not provide any ground for the ruling party's justification to increase the seats on the pretext of population rise.

Journalist Ataus Samad urged the government not to rush through matters like constitutional amendment by dint of its two-thirds majority in parliament and thus avoid straying into the "dangerous path" of political highhandedness.

AL lawmaker Suranjit Sengupta termed the move undemocratic and unconstitutional.

Economist Kazi Kholiqzaman stressed reforming the present political system which he said failed

to fulfil the constitutional obligation of creating equal opportunities for all. "The system benefits a minority group of people in the upper echelons of the society, deprives the majority and widens discrimination."

Harun-Ur-Rashid, a political science professor of Dhaka University, questioned the contextual relevance of the government's move ignoring the burning issues of price hike of essentials, insecurity in public life, electoral reform, separation of judiciary, forming anti-corruption body and parliament's effectiveness.

"People have no interest in the proposed move for seat increase," said Workers' Party leader Mujahidul Islam Selim. "It will only benefit the ruling class."

Ayesha Khanam of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad called on all political parties to promote gender equality by facilitating effective participation of women in mainstream politics through direct election instead of reserved seats in parliament.

The JSD demanded that all long-standing issues of political, economic, electoral and parliamentary reforms be carried out on the basis of political and national consensus and through public debate before the next general elections are held.

AL lawmaker Rahmat Ali, Rashed Khan Menon of Workers' Party, Saifuddin Ahmed Manik of Gonoforum were also present among others.

The JSD organised the roundtable chaired by its President Hasanul Haq Inu.

# Dhaka river

FROM PAGE 12  
between Dhaka city, Savar, Manikganj and other adjacent districts.

The Bangladesh Consultative Ltd will assist the Burger Group in conducting study on the project that will be implemented in phases over a period of 20 years.

The river route with the backup of circular land route, by-pass roads, improved existing inter-district routes and new transit routes will significantly reduce the traffic pressure on the city and make the inter-district commuting easier, meeting sources said.

Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman chaired the meeting, which was conceived as an extension to the World Bank-funded Dhaka Urban Transport Project (DUTP). The DUTP is expected to be complete by June and the river route study by October.

On the study, DUTP Executive Director Qamrul Islam Siddiqui said, "The American company will work on a long term transport plan and policy. It will suggest what steps should be taken after five years and then after 10 years and so on."

"The government expects foreign investment of Tk 4,000cr to 5,000cr for various components of this project. Besides, investment from private sector will also be encouraged," he added.

# BIMSTEC

FROM PAGE 12  
consent. "We hope the summit will now take place some time later this year at a mutually convenient date."

The special secretary said regional experts also anticipate the BIMSTEC's 'Open Sky' policy to further strengthen the region's tourism sector. Under this policy, private airlines operators will be allowed to operate flights to and from tourist spots in BIMSTEC countries.

India and Sri Lanka have already struck a deal to allow their private airlines to fly to and from each other's designated tourist sites.

BIMSTEC was formed in May 1997 comprising the Bay of Bengal Rim countries, in which India joined in August and Myanmar in December the same year.

# BTTB Cellphone

FROM PAGE 1  
The BNP-led coalition government however decided to implement the project on its own funding at a cost of Tk 594 crore by floating telecoms bonds on the capital market. As many as eight companies submitted bids in December 2002 after the BTTB floated an international tender and two of them were thrown into the rubbish basket on ground of gross discrepancies.

However, the BTTB took a year to process the remaining bids and finally selected Siemens and Huawei as the successful vendors amid allegations of gross irregularities in the evaluation process.

BTTB's technical evaluation committee was split into three groups and gave as many different opinions on the six bidders. They did not crosscheck the forged documents of some vendors. Allegations were also there that some committee members were biased to certain bidders.

Subsequently, BTTB qualified three bidders out of the already

controversial six and opened their financial bids.

The equivalent sum of Siemens and Huawei's quoted price in local currency (Tk 459.09 crore) was found to be Tk 151.62 crore higher than BTTB's estimated foreign exchange component (Tk 307.47 crore) of the approved budget.

Again, instead of bargaining the excess price, the BTTB asked the vendors to cut down on their proposed equipment, a move that would have shrunk network coverage, reduced call capacity and compromised the quality of the proposed mobile phone network.

But the state-owned telecoms monopoly did not state these possible consequences in its purchase proposal. The media yesterday reported BTTB's deliberate concealment of truth, which reportedly prompted the CCPP to nail the purchase proposal.

The telecoms minister, M Aminul Haque, refused to talk to the media after the CCPP meeting.

# Jayanti murder Shampa gets anticipatory bail

UNB, Dhaka

The High Court (HC) yesterday granted TV artiste Shampa Reza three months' anticipatory bail in connection with the killing of her sister-in-law Jayanti Reza.

The court also served showcause notice on the government and asked as to why the petitioner should not be granted regular bail.

Earlier, Shampa filed a petition with the HC and sought anticipatory bail to evade arrest in connection with the killing, sources said.

Shampa, sister of Azam Reza, appeared before the court.

Seeking bail, Shampa's lawyer Khan Saifur Rahman told the court that the TV artiste's name was not mentioned in the FIR (first information report) lodged with Gulshan Police Station.

Despite his client's cooperation with the investigators, Detective Branch of police raided Shampa's residence twice, apparently to arrest her, he added.

On January 9, Gulshan police recovered the body of Jayanti, a teacher of Australian International School, from her Banani residence in the city. The next day, Jayanti's mother Lucille Sadekin lodged a case and accused victim's husband Azam, a banker, of the killing.

# 3 electrocuted in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Three construction workers died electrocuted while working atop a seven-storey building at Muradpur in Panchlaish yesterday.

One was Selim Hossain, 30, while the identity of others could not be known till 8:00 last night.

Police said the accident occurred at around 1:00pm on the roof of Chowdhury Centre, an under-construction shopping arcade, when the three were pulling an iron rod, which suddenly came in contact with live electric wire.

Two died on the spot, while Selim fell down on the ground and was seriously injured.

He was rushed to Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH) where he died in the afternoon, CMCH sources said.

# Bank directors

FROM PAGE 12  
The other banks also started discussing similar steps, banking sources said.

Meanwhile, the HC yesterday directed the government not to harass and evict 13,000 landless families from the 'khas' (government-owned) char land in Noakhali till they are rehabilitated.

The directive followed a writ petition filed against a land ministry order declaring more than 11,955 acres of khas char land as shrimp farms.

The HC order will protect the landless families comprising about 40,000 people, who are victims of rivererosion.

A Division Bench of the HC comprising Justice SAM Mominur Rahman and Justice Abdus Salam Mamun issued the order on the land secretary, the divisional commissioner of Chittagong, deputy commissioners of Noakhali and Chittagong and assistant commissioners (land) concerned.

The writ was filed by Khushi Kabir of Nijera Kori, an NGO, assisted by Bangladesh Environment Lawyers Association (Bela).

# PSI companies

FROM PAGE 12  
present PSI companies.

Leading businessmen, chambers and the World Bank meanwhile observed that the NBR was not skilled enough yet for the job and that there should be an evaluation of the system.

An NBR official however cited an unexplained obstacle in the Customs Act in defence of the extension decision.

"If we cancel the PSI companies, we have to amend the Customs Act. But it is not possible to amend the laws in such a short time. Besides, the NBR wants to discuss with businessmen before taking any final decision on the issue," he said.

# Tk 8 lakh stolen

FROM PAGE 1  
Had a key to the main entrance of the bank, was arrested along with peon Aftab. Both men lived on the bank premises. They are now being questioned by police.

"I came to the bank at about 8:30am as usual and sweeper Paribanu informed me that she could not clean the bank as guard Abul Kalam lost his key," said Manager Bishnupada Chowdhury.

"I opened the gate and entered the building with other officials. The phone on my desk was missing. Suspicious, I went to the strongroom and found that the vault was broken and the money gone," he said.

Guard Abul Kalam denied his involvement and said he was "sleeping during the incident".

Officer-in-charge of Motijheel Police Station said Kalam is suspected to have opened the three collapsible gates at the bank's main entrance to let the thieves in. "None of the locks of the three gates was broken."

Sources said bank authorities in a general diary with Motijheel police reported an abortive robbery bid only a few days ago.

Police are looking for two other men for their suspected involvement in the theft. A case was in the process of being filed.

# Kickback in Iraq work allegations Halliburton to repay \$6.3m to Pentagon

AP, Washington

Halliburton's problems deepened as Vice President Dick Cheney's former company fired two workers and pledged to repay the Pentagon \$6.3 million for possible kickbacks involving its work in Iraq.

Defence Department investigators already probing whether Halliburton overcharged for gaso-line delivered in Iraq now will look into the new charges, the first direct allegations of corruption involving the billions of dollars of private work in Iraq.

The revelation Friday set off another round of calls by Democrats for further investigations into Halliburton and other companies the Democrats accuse of "war profiteering" in Iraq.

"Some of our worst fears about corporate profiteering run amok in Iraq have been confirmed," said Sen. Joe Lieberman, D-Conn., a

presidential candidate.

Both Cheney and Halliburton say politics does not influence the Pentagon's oversight of the company's contracts. The Houston-based company has complained repeatedly that criticism of its work in Iraq is politically motivated.

Halliburton spokeswoman Wendy Hall said the company's auditors discovered \$6.3 million in possible overcharges by a Kuwaiti subcontractor helping to supply US soldiers in Iraq. She said the company was repaying the \$6.3 million to the Army Materiel Command to cover any possible overcharges while the Pentagon investigates.

"We reported it immediately and we are cutting a check to the government just in case the overbilling charge bears out," Hall said. "We will bear the cost of the overcharge not the federal government."

The Pentagon already has in progress a criminal inquiry into possible overcharging involving another Halliburton contract: the company's deal to supply gasoline to Iraqi civilians.

# Ex-army man's killers threaten widowed wife

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Killers of a retired army personnel have been threatening his widowed wife with death, while police have allegedly made no move to nab the prowling murderers.

"I don't feel safe, as the killers are roaming openly and threatening me with death over telephone," said Samsunnahar Ruma, wife of Ashek Ali and mother of a four-year-old son, at a press conference at Dhaka Reporters' Unity yesterday.

She accused police of not taking necessary action to nab the killers of her husband, who was shot dead at Agargaon in Mohammadpur on August 7 last year.

She filed a case with Mohammadpur Police Station the same day.

Ruma alleged that she accused several persons of the murder, whom police have never arrested. "They rather caught two others from different areas who are of no help to the probe."

"After waiting five months in vain, I sought help from the deputy commissioner (north) of police and then from Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI)," she said.

"I demand justice and want to see the killers punished," said Ruma in tears, holding her son Sadman.

# Hindu temple

FROM PAGE 12  
door-to-door search of houses of Hindus in the area to find out Shyamol Sadhu, who went into hiding.

The local authorities tried to mediate but the two contending sides refused to accept it, both claiming ownership of the land.

Police have cordoned off the temple premises to ward off further violence as tension gripped the area.

Jail Estate sources claimed they purchased the land in 1948 and only a small fraction of it is owned by the temple authorities.

Devotees at the temple will explain their views at a press conference today.

No case was filed. The officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station recorded a general diary.

# Explosions kill

FROM PAGE 12

convoy passed, the US Army said.

Both towns lie in an area known as the 'Sunni triangle', where much of the violence against US-led occupation forces and Iraqis seen as cooperating with them has taken place.

The Samarra blast, outside the courthouse and town council buildings and close to the main police headquarters, scattered wrecked cars and broken glass across a wide area.

Bob Silverman, head of governance for the US-led administration in the area, said the bomb went off shortly before councillors were due to elect representatives to the provincial council. The vote would now be delayed a few days.

"I am sure the bomb was meant to prevent the vote," he said.

Analysts have warned that insurgents would try to derail US-led efforts to hand over power to Iraqis.

The UN team in Iraq will assess the security situation amid calls from Washington for more involvement from the world body in Iraq, in particular to determine if the country is ready to hold early national elections.

Military Police officer First Lieutenant Alexis Marks was 100 metres (yards) away when the bomb exploded. "The blast knocked me off my feet," he said. "It shook all the vehicles and everyone nearby was thrown to the ground."

Since the invasion in March, 509 US soldiers have died in Iraq, at least 351 of them in action, according to the US military. On Friday evening, a US Kiowa helicopter crashed in northern Iraq, killing the two crew aboard.

The Army has said there was no indication it was shot down.

In Washington, the White House insisted the search would go on for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq,

# Bus collision kills five in Tangail

UNB, Tangail

Five people were killed and 30 others injured in a road accident on the Dhaka-Tangail Highway at Dolla in Mirzapur upazila yesterday morning.

Police said the mishap occurred at about 7:00am when a Dhaka-bound bus from Tangail collided with a Gaibandha-bound bus from Sylhet. Identity of the five, who died on the spot, could not be known.

Locals rescued the injured passengers and admitted them to Jamurki Hospital and Mirzapur Kumudini Hospital.

Doctors said condition of 12 injured passengers admitted to Kumudini Hospital was critical.

# Manik killing Khulna journo stop work for a day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Journalists and employees of all newspapers published from the city and different districts of Khulna Division observed a work stoppage yesterday to press the demand for immediate arrest of the killers of journalist Manik Chandra Saha.

The call for work stoppage was given by Khulna Press Club, Khulna Union of Journalists, Metropolitan Union of Journalists and local units of Bangladesh Sangbadpata Parishad and Photo Journalists' Association.

Newspaper hawkers have been requested not to distribute the dailies published from Dhaka till tomorrow noon to express their solidarity with the newsmen and newspaper employees.

Meanwhile, Janajuddha faction of outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) has again claimed responsibility for the murder of Manik Saha.

In leaflets circulated all over the city, Janajuddha branded Manik as a yellow journalist and said he used to share with police their ill-gotten money. He also used to receive money from smuggling syndicates and other illegal means and built up his fortune this way, it added.

The leaflets printed on January 17, two days after the brutal murder of Manik in front of the local press club, further said he was an agent of India's intelligence agency RAW. They contained details of why the 'class enemy' was killed.

"But all journalists are not our targets. Our targets are those who will follow the footsteps of Manik Saha," Janajuddha said in its leaflets.

# Sedition case

FROM PAGE 12  
November 29 last year for his alleged Mossad connection.

Shoib was supposed to present paper at a Tel Aviv seminar that proved beyond doubt that he had been involved in anti-state activities for a long time, he claimed.

Different fax and e-mail messages seized from Shoib also proved that he passed sensitive information out of the country, stated the complaint.

A project profile seeking a fund of Tk 12 crore from Jews in Israel was also seized from him. He sought the fund to publish three dailies -- the Dainik Sonali Din, Dainik Rupantar, Dainik Paribartan.

"As Shoib is engaged in spying and smuggling information out of the country for a long time to tarnish the image of Bangladesh, he should be charged with anti-state activities," read the complaint.

Earlier, a criminal case was filed against Shoib with the Airport Police Station for alleged violation of the Passport Act, 1973.

The inspector general of police (IGP) on December 24 last year got approval of the home ministry for filing of the sedition case.

# Poultry prices

FROM PAGE 12  
feed farms and related units," said an official of Paragon Poultry Limited.

It will be very difficult for small farms to survive as they are being forced to sell their products at prices much lower than production cost due to poor demand, he pointed out.

The annual growth rate of poultry sector in Bangladesh is around 20 per cent. Of the one-lakh poultry farms, 20 per cent rear 1,000 to 50,000 poultry birds each and the rest 100 to 1,000 birds each. Most of them do not have enough technical know-how to obtain maximum output from their investment, industry insiders said.

"We are going through a very bad time. Production cost of a broiler is more than Tk 50 as the usual price of a chick is Tk 25 and it consumes at least two kg of feed costing about Tk 30," said an official of Aftab Poultry Ltd.

The government has imposed a ban on import of poultry birds and day-old chicks from eight South-East and South Asian countries and some other countries to protect the local poultry industry from the bird flu.

Technical services for poultry industry from these countries will also remain banned for at least two months. Besides, steps have been taken to observe day-old chicks imported from these countries over the past two weeks, official sources said.

"The ban is for two months and the next decision will be taken after reviewing the situation," said an official of the Directorate of Livestock.

# Education reform body

FROM PAGE 1  
number of educational institutions across the country to reach a standard teachers-students ratio and suggests at least one model school in every town.

The commission underlines a stricter affiliation criteria for the colleges under the National University as it observed the current ones are too inadequate to ensure standard of the colleges.

English medium schools should have a special curriculum so that students can learn more about the country and culture since they do not follow any specific curriculum of the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB).

The commission, however, does not comment on the political involvement of teachers and students, blamed mainly for campus violence and session jams.

"We don't want to portray such negative aspects. Our focus is on corrective measures to get the education sector out of the trouble it is in," a commission member told The Daily Star seeking anonymity.

The commission has found that only 25 per cent students of class five appear at the primary scholarship examinations, of whom only 44 per cent come out successful.

Almost 64 per cent examinees of the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) tests failed in last year's exams and the pass percentage was 36.85 points. Worst even, not a single examinee from as many as 962 educational institutions passed the examinations.

The commission, headed by Professor Moniruzzaman Miah and formed in February last year, was scheduled to submit its report

# Five mugged after drugged

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Five people fell prey to two separate incidents of snatching-motivated sedation and lost over Tk 2.25 lakh in the city yesterday ahead of the Eid-ul-Azha.

Drugged unconscious, the five are undergoing treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

Abdul Hakim, Niazuddin, Shahjahan, Ismail and another unidentified man from Noakhali sold their animals at Gabtoli cattle market and had some halua (sweet-meat) at an adjacent makeshift restaurant at 2:00pm before they got in their return bus.

As all except Ismail fell unconscious, criminals involved with the incident took away Tk 1.6 lakh from Hakim and all the money Niazuddin and the unidentified man had from the sale.

However, doctors found Tk 99,000 with Shahjahan after the four were taken to the DMCH.

Meanwhile, Shamsul Alam, 35, and M Idris, 30, two iron traders of Comilla, were mugged on their way to English Road.

They fell unconscious after they ate pickles from a vendor in a bus of Utsab Enterprise at Demra at about 1:30pm.

The bus staff dropped them down at Sayedabad bus terminal at around 2:00pm, where English Road businessman Ratan identified them as his regular customers and admitted them to the DMCH.

Back to senses, Idris said he lost about Tk 1 lakh and Shamsul Tk 65,000.

# No WMDs in Iraq

FROM PAGE 1  
that unconventional arms would be found in Iraq, to replace Kay.

Kay said he believes most of what was going to be uncovered in Iraq had been found and that the weapons hunt would become more difficult once America returned control of the country to the Iraqis in June.

Top Democrats on the congressional intelligence committees seized on Kay's comments.

"It increasingly appears that our intelligence was wrong about Iraq's weapons, and the administration compounded that mistake by exaggerating the nuclear threat and Iraq's ties to al-Qaeda. As a result, the United States is paying a very heavy price," said Senator John Rockefeller of West Virginia, the senior Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee.

"Dr Kay's astonishing statement today cannot be ignored. It is increasingly clear that there has been a massive intelligence failure," said Republican Jane Harman of California, senior Democrat on the House of Representatives Intelligence Committee.

James Rubin, national security adviser for retired General Wesley Clark, a candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination, said Kay's comments meant "the major premise for urgent war in Iraq has been devastated by the administration's own findings."

No banned arms have been found

by May that year. But it is running behind schedule due to logistical and other inadequacies, sources said.

Of a dozen sub-committees of the commission, eleven have so far submitted recommendations to the commission chairman. The other one is scheduled to submit its suggestions in a week.

The commission also recommends introducing classes for infants to make them familiar with schooling; but there will be no books to follow.

"Students of the infant class will be acquainted with the schooling system and learn through verbal lessons," said another commission member.