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Saarc FMs talk poverty, free trade, security

First Saarc Award conferred on late president Ziaur Rahman

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan pledged to live up to peace pledges with rival India as South Asian foreign ministers began talks yesterday on boosting trade and security to lift the region's 1.4 billion people out of poverty, seizing on the momentum of fresh dialogue

between the nuclear giants.

"I want to assure all members of Saarc and indeed the world that Pakistan is committed to pursuing peace with India," prime minister of Pakistan Chaudhry Shujaat said as he inaugurated the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation's (Saarc) 25th Council

of Ministers.

The Saarc heads of state summit seven months earlier, also in Islamabad, was the setting for a breakthrough agreement between Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf and then Indian premier Atal Behari Vajpayee to resume talks

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Bangladesh cricketers do stretching prior to a practice session in Colombo yesterday ahead of their second round Asia Cup clash with India today.

PHOTO: AFP

Palestinian PM agrees to stay on for now

Israel hits militants' safe house in Gaza

REUTERS, AP, Ramallah

Palestinian Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei agreed yesterday to stay in his post for now three days after tendering his resignation to President Yasser Arafat, Palestinian officials said.

A senior official said Qurei, at a meeting with Arafat, had withdrawn his resignation, which was prompted by a weekend of unprecedented unrest in Gaza spearheaded by gunmen demanding anti-corruption reforms.

But other officials at the meeting said Qurei had agreed only to serve as prime minister of a caretaker government, signaling that he may not stay on permanently.

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AL wants probe into Dhunat dam-cut

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The main opposition party Awami League (AL) asked the government yesterday to investigate the dam cutting incident in Dhunat of Bogra by experts and give exemplary punishment to those involved.

Deputy Leader in the House Abdul Hamid of AL said in a press conference, "Conflict between two local leaders of the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) over the repair work of the dam led to the crime".

The AL leader said the conflict was between a local BNP leader Nannu and Belal Hossain Babu who is the union parishad chairman and BNP president of Gosainbari union. "Neither Babu nor Nannu has claimed that the dam was damaged by them. Rather, they blamed each

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Filipino, Egyptian hostages freed

Gunmen kill Iraqi council member; 4 veterinarians die in bomb blast

AGENCIES, Baghdad

A Filipino truck driver held hostage in Iraq was handed over to the United Arab Emirates embassy in Baghdad yesterday and an Iraqi council member running for governor in Basra was killed as he left for work.

"He (the driver) has been handed over and we will hand him over to the Philippine authorities," an Emirates official told Reuters.

Manila ignored criticism from the United States and Iraq's interim

government, which accused it of bowing to terrorists, and completed the withdrawal of its humanitarian contingent of troops Monday in response to demands from the kidnappers.

The Philippine ambassador in Baghdad could not be reached, and a source at the embassy said he had heard nothing.

Militants threatening to behead Angelo de la Cruz had set a July 20 deadline for Philippine troops to leave Iraq.

Kidnappers have seized dozens

of foreigners since April to press demands for foreign troops to leave Iraq, to deter foreigners from working with US forces or to extract ransoms.

Many hostages have been freed, including an Egyptian released Monday, but at least four have been killed. An American and a South Korean were beheaded by a group led by Jordanian militant Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, accused by Washington of having links to Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda.

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SP Baten gets bail in bribe case

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court (HC) yesterday granted bail to sacked SP (Superintendent of Police) MA Baten for his alleged bribe offers to State Minister for Home Lutfuzzaman Babar.

An HC bench comprising Justices Nazrul Islam Chowdhury and Farid Ahmed ordered bail for Baten until charges are framed against him in the case.

On June 3, a Police Headquarters press release said Babar had informed Home Secretary Omar Farooq and Inspector General of Police Shahidul Haque of the bribe offer.

The SP was arrested the same evening and handed over to Ramna Police Station.

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5 policemen suspended in Jhenidah

UNB, Jhenidah

Five policemen, including the officer-in-charge (OC), of Kaliganj Police Station were yesterday suspended and closed to the district police lines for negligence of duty.

The suspended policemen are Officer-in-Charge Ishak Ali, ASI Sakawat Hossain and three constables.

Official sources said the action has been taken against them as on duty policemen did not take any action against the armed robbers who took away Tk 25,000 in cash and eight tolas of gold from a jewellery shop in the upazila headquarters at about 9:00pm on Monday.

Food crisis from flood ruled out

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday ruled out any possibility of food crisis stemmed from severe flooding that has already affected more than one crore people in 33 districts and continues to submerge new areas.

The officials at food and disaster management and relief ministry said all preparations have been made to tackle the flood and post-flood situations.

The government now has a stock of over two lakh metric tonnes of rice ready in case of any major disaster, they said.

With the current stock of relief supplies, they can carry out relief operations and feed flood affected people for several months, claimed a high official of the ministry.

Besides, the government has received letters from a number of donor agencies willing to provide assistance to the flood affected people. Saudi Arabia has already delivered 75,000 metric tonnes of rice for the flood victims, he said.

Ministry of Food and Disaster Management and Relief in a meeting today will decide on whether the government would formally request those agencies for assistance, the official said.

Meanwhile, the number of affected upazilas rose to 182 yesterday with another 18 upazilas in four

districts being hit by floods, said a government estimate.

The government yesterday allocated 3,950 metric tonnes of rice valued around Tk 5.93 crore as relief for the 24 flood affected districts. Besides, Tk 36.50 lakh in cash was allocated for relief and Tk 6 lakh for rehabilitating damaged houses.

The allocations were given at a flood situation monitoring and review meeting at the ministry yesterday morning. Presided over by Food and Disaster Management and Relief Minister Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf, the meeting was attended also by Deputy Minister for Food and Disaster Management and Relief Asadul Habib Dulu and Secretary Siddiqur Rahman Chowdhury.

The ministry has been allocating relief supplies on the basis of requirements and has been in round the clock contact with district administrations, said a meeting source.

The government's total allocation so far stands at 11,300 metric tonnes of rice valued Tk 16.95 crore and Tk 1.17 crore in cash as relief and Tk 45 lakh for reconstruction of the damaged houses, the source added.

According to a government estimate, 57 people died in the

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AL won't call off July 24 hartal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The main opposition Awami League (AL) will not withdraw its country-wide dawn-to-dusk hartal on July 24, the party said last night.

"We have come to know that the BNP secretary general has made a request to withdraw the hartal in view of the floods in most areas of the country. But we have already kept the flood-affected districts out of the purview of the hartal", AL Joint Secretary General Obaidul Kader told The Daily Star.

He recalled that during the 1998 floods, the AL government had made a similar request to the then opposition BNP which ignored it.

On July 17, the AL Central Working Committee called the 12-hour shutdown to protest the killing of Tongi Jubo League leader Sumon Ahmed Majumder allegedly by torture by Rab (Rapid Action Battalion) men.

Sumon was a key witness to the murder of AL lawmaker Ahsanullah Master.

The AL alleges that Rab men killed Sumon as part of a government plan to eliminate witnesses to the murder of the lawmaker. It also demanded a judicial probe into the 'killing' of Sumon.

Leader of the Opposition and AL President Sheikh Hasina will address a public rally at Tongi tomorrow in protest against the 'killing'.

Prayer Timing

July 21

	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-15	4-50
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	5-00	5-15
Maghrib	6-54	6-58
Esha	8-15	8-45

Source: Islamic Foundation

Bandarban mudslide kills 1, hurts 4

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

Landslides at Lama in Bandarban yesterday left a woman dead, four others injured while around 200 houses were buried under thick layers of mud after a heavy downpour lashed the southern district.

Heavy rain at Nayapara during the last 24 hours also swamped low-lying areas of Bandarban municipality, upazila headquarters and Lama municipal areas causing immense sufferings to the residents, sources said.

Mohammad Ismail, chairman of Lama Municipality, said the upazila office building, thana office building and the quarters of Union Nirbahi Officer went under two feet water following the shower.

Anwara Begum, 35, died on way to Chittagong Medical College Hospital where two other critically

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PHOTO: STAR

Dhaka University Teachers' Association takes out a silent procession on the campus, protesting death threats to teachers and demanding protection from Islamic fundamentalists yesterday.

Obituary

Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

Mahenoor Rahim, wife of Rashidur Rahim (Into), daughter of Sheikh Shamsur Ali and Asiya Khatun passed away on 11th July 2004 at 17:02 local time at the Institute d'Invalides in Paris (Inna Lillahi-Wa-Inna-Illaihe Rajeun). She left behind two daughters and a son, Moina, Chaman and Rumman.

Her body will be arriving today, Wednesday the 21st of July, 2004 by Emirates flight at 8:40 am and will be taken to House No. 8, Road No. 8, Dhanmandi Residential Area, Dhaka. Her Namaz-e-Janaza will be held today after Zohar prayers at Baitul Aman Mosque in Road No. 7 in Dhanmandi after which she will be buried in Azimpur graveyard.

A Dua Mahfil will be held on Friday, the 23rd of July at House No. 8, Road No. 8, Dhanmandi R/A, after Asr prayers.

Friends, well wishers and relatives are kindly requested to attend.

Members of the bereaved family.

Dengue spreads fast in capital

Three die in a week, 743 hospitalised so far

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dengue fever is spreading in the capital already claiming three lives in the last one week.

According to official sources, 191 dengue patients are now under treatment in different city hospitals and the number is on the rise. A total of 743 people with the mosquito-borne disease were hospitalised in the last months.

The three who died suffered from dengue haemorrhagic fever (DHF). Of them, Ambi, 56, died on July 16 at Holy Family Red Crescent Hospital, Humayun Kabir, 22, died on July 15 at Milford Hospital and Banu, 20, died on the same day at Shaheed

Suhrwardi Hospital.

Sources say the number of dengue attacks this season (from May) is at least 1500 and many of them did not come to hospitals for treatment of the viral fever.

"People who are not aware of the nature of Aedes mosquito that transmits the virus are common victims of the disease. One must keep in mind that Aedes mosquito lays eggs in fresh stagnant water in things like flower pots and empty plastic containers," said a physician.

Doctors have advised people to keep such things clean and mentioned Aedes mosquito bites people during daytime, mostly at dawn and dusk.

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