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# Manmohan's move for peace in northeast states

Ulfa ready for dialogue

AFP, Guwahati

Fresh from a visit to restive Kashmir where he wooed Kashmiris with promises of jobs and development, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh heads this weekend to the country's insurgency-racked northeast with similar offers, officials said yesterday.

Singh, whose three-day visit begins today, is to criss-cross the region and attend a host of functions, besides meeting civil, police

and army officers, the officials said.

On Monday he is to flag off a historic Southeast Asian car rally from Guwahati, the main city of Assam. The rally covers 10 countries and is ultimately aimed at fostering better trade ties in Southeast Asia.

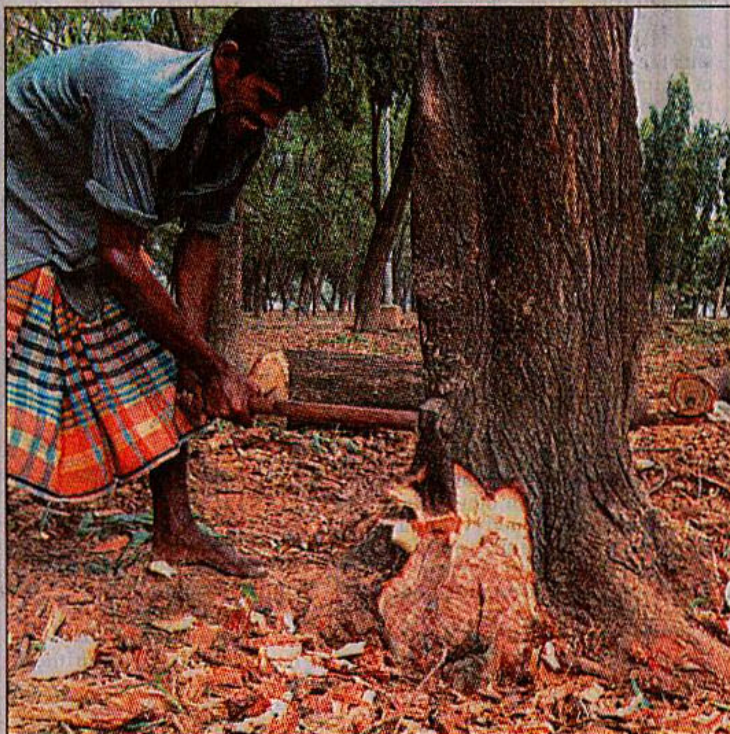
Singh is also expected to announce a financial package for the volatile region, besides making peace overtures to end long years of strife that has left over 50,000 dead since India's independence from Britain in 1947, according to official

figures.

"We are expecting to get some big financial incentives from the prime minister," Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi told AFP.

On Wednesday and Thursday, Singh visited troubled Kashmir where he announced a whopping 5.3-billion dollar development plan besides holding out a hand of peace to Kashmiris and announcing the end to a ban on recruitment to government jobs.

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A lumberjack axes a tree, left, yesterday at Zia Uddin in the capital where more than 100 trees have been felled and log-piled, right, in the last few days to make a 'garden' beside the grave of president Ziaur Rahman.



PHOTO: SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

# Indian signals on Kashmir disappoint Musharraf

AFP, Islamabad

President Pervez Musharraf said he was dismayed by India's response to his efforts to bring peace to Kashmir, and vowed to save Pakistan from the clutches of Islamic extremism in an interview with AFP.

Speaking for 40 minutes at his plush Army House residence late Thursday near Islamabad, Musharraf -- also Pakistan's army chief -- expressed disappointment that his offers to wind back Pakistan's long-held demands on the divided territory were unmatched by any flexibility from India.

"I'm saying that there's light at the end of the tunnel. Should we put that light off?"

The Pakistani leader's dismay

came after Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh publicly ruled out considering dramatic new options aired by Musharraf for debate.

They included carving up Kashmir, a scenic region of Himalayan mountains and rivers straddling India and Pakistan's northern corners, into seven regions, demilitarising them, and placing them under either joint control, United Nations mandate or full independence.

When he outlined the options as "food for thought" at a fast-breaking dinner in October, Musharraf proclaimed optimism, and spoke of seeing "a light at the end of the tunnel" for the first time.

But India has responded by criticising him for not raising the ideas formally and on Wednesday

Singh, during a landmark visit to Indian Kashmir's capital Srinagar to mark the start of a small troop pull-out, said any review of Kashmir's boundaries was unacceptable.

"The vibes that are now coming do not encourage a process of normalisation," Musharraf said.

"We met in New York (in September) and I think our interaction was very good, very fruitful and it raised a lot of hopes.

"But the vibes that we are getting now I would say are not very encouraging. Certainly the vibes should be much better than this... there ought to be a desire to move forward towards peace.

"While (from) there we get vibes in the opposite direction, they do not encourage peace."

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## EXPLOSIVES HAUL Arrested militant on fresh remand

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

A magistrate's court issued fresh remand for Amjad Hossain, arrested regional commander of Islamist outfit Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen, while the remand of his accomplice explosives carrier Anisur Rahman ended yesterday.

However, police could not gather any information from the militants and will hand them over to the Joint Interrogation Cell in the capital.

Railway police has meanwhile failed to trace any clue to the origin of explosives, as the detainees remained tight lipped, said a police official.

Bonarpara railway police seized 24 pieces of high-powered explosives with 124 electric detonators from the compartment of a Santahar-bound train on November 12.

Police are searching for more explosives, as they suspect each of

SEE PAGE 11 COL 5

# A shattering blow to pry education not far away

481 URCs face closure for lack of funds

AKBAR HOSSAIN

One hundred and sixty-eight Upazila Resource Centres (URC), set up to help primary school teachers maintain the academic standards, are barely functioning with over 650 employees going without salary for the last 10 months.

Many employees of these URCs, funded by Norwegian Agency for Development (Norad), have been absenting themselves from work while some have already quit the jobs for new ones, sources said.

Lack of funds may soon mean job losses for 1,250 people at 313 more URCs, financed by Swedish International Development Agency (Sida), as well, as funds for these

centres are set to phase out in December 2004.

A fall in standard of primary education is imminent, as the government is reluctant to fund as many as 481 URCs across the country for 'non-availability of donors' fund', Directorate of Primary Education officials said.

The URCs in crisis will jeopardise implementation of the Primary Education Development Project (PEDP-II), the country's biggest ever education programme, said an official.

So, in the best interests of the project, the URC staff should be brought under revenue budget, he added.

In 1996, the government started

setting up the URCs with funding from two donor agencies. The aim was to provide the primary school teachers with adequate training to cope with the changing syllabus at the primary level.

Sida provided the government with Tk 300 crore to set up 313 URCs under a project named Ideal Project while Norad provided funds of Tk 219 crore to another programme to set up 168 URCs.

Although the Ideal Project would be expired by the end of this year, Norad project ended abruptly in December last year. The project was slated to run till December 2005, says the project summary.

The employees of Norad

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

## Cops in Barisal foil condolence meet on Mehdi

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

The Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and police yesterday foiled a condolence meeting in remembrance of Jatiyatabadi Jubo Dal leader Mahbub Alam Mehdi.

Mehdi, also ward commissioner of Barisal City Corporation, was allegedly killed in a shootout with the Rab in front of his house on October 25.

Witnesses said the meeting was scheduled to be held on Nuria High School premises in the town at 3:00pm.

There was extensive publicity for the meeting for the last three days, but police raided different houses and threatened nearby residents not to join the meeting, locals alleged. A huge number of police were deployed in the area Thursday night, they said.

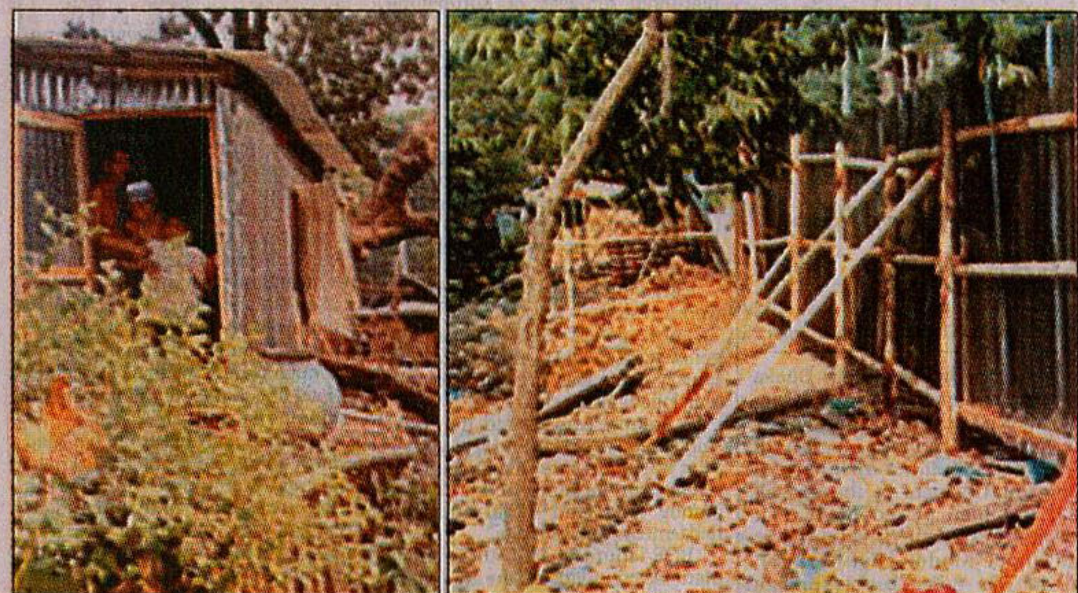
Police cordoned off the meeting venue and announced cancellation of the programme at 11:00am. The Rab joined the police at 12noon, prevented people and organisers from entering the venue and dispersed the crowd.

They also picked up four people including Atfal Hossain from the spot.

However, the officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station said the meeting was banned in a bid to maintain law and order in the city.

On the other hand, the organisers did not take permission from proper authorities and the school committee for holding the meeting.

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Construction of a house goes on, left, hidden by a tin-fence in the grabbed portion of Bhatar Khal, a major sewerage outlet of Barisal City.

## Ruling party men grab portion of Barisal canal

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Ruling party-backed cadres have illegally occupied a portion of Bhatar Khal, one of the major sewerage channels of Barisal city.

Taking the opportunity of long Eid-vacation, BNP activists Hanif and Shukur, two brothers backed allegedly by ward no 10 BNP President K M Shahidullah, started occupying a portion of the Bhatar Khal on November 12.

They filled the channel area with earth and constructed tin-fence and tin-shed houses there. Hanif also illegally occupied a portion of

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# Plan for deep sea port shelved for over a year

RAFIQ HASAN

The proposal for setting up a deep sea port in the country has been lying with the Planning Commission for more than one year, marking a stagnation in government initiative to open such a port.

Although a high-powered pre-feasibility study team submitted its report in October last year and recommended a year-long final feasibility study for site selection, the government is yet to start the study, according to sources.

Following the pre-feasibility study report, the Ministry of Shipping submitted a Technical

Assistance Project Pro-forma (TAPP) to the Planning Commission and Economic Relations Division for consulting with foreign donors for assistance, sources said.

Shipping Secretary Ismail Zabihullah, however, said the government did not abandon the plan of setting up a deep sea port and that they will consider going ahead with the proposal.

"We hope, the donors' assistance will be available within this year and the feasibility study can be started from early next year," he said.

For site, the government now prefer Kutubdia to Akram point near Mongla, shipping ministry sources

said.

Earlier, the government thought of setting up the port at Akram point which is nearer to neighbouring Nepal and Bhutan.

The shipping experts, however, favour Kutubdia for technical reasons.

"A deep sea port at Akram Point in Mongla will never be viable as the Pashur channel lacks sufficient depth," said Captain Muhammad E Sobhan, president of Bangladesh Society of Master Mariners.

He said mother vessels need over 50 to 60 feet draft for operation whereas the depth of Pashur channel

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Prayer Timing		
November 20		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fair	5-05	5-40
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	3-45	4-00
Maghrib	5-21	5-24
Esha	7-00	7-30

Source: Islamic Foundation

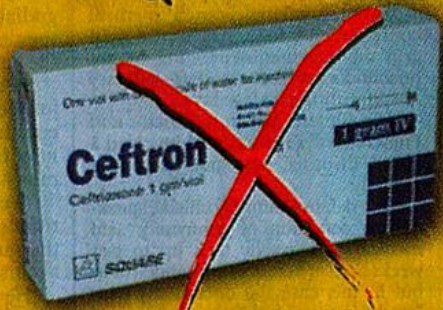
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