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## Saarc economic union may take shape at Dhaka summit

ASHFAQ WARES KHAN

The seven South Asian nations are likely to come up with more concrete steps for a Saarc (South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation) economic union during the 13th Saarc Summit set to take place in Dhaka from January 9 to 11.

The hosts' preparations are in full swing with all the 10 sub-committees formed by the government working hard to complete their tasks by December.

Sources said the issue of Saarc economic union would dominate the summit proceedings and four deals are likely to be signed aiming to proceed towards the economic integration of the seven member countries for their mutual benefits.

The three-day Dhaka summit is also being seen as the first opportunity of bilateral talks between Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf amid a thaw in the Indo-Pak relationship.

More aggressive steps are also likely in expediting the Saarc secretariat operations, circumventing political differences between the member nations, and significant improvement in transport and communication within the region, sources say.

A Saarc social charter and the additional protocol signed as part of the Islamabad declaration would also be consolidated with reviews on their progress and further implementation before and during the

summit in various working groups.

Negotiations are already underway with the Saarc commerce ministers' meeting held in Islamabad last week to thrash out possible differences between the seven states regarding a future economic union, consolidate economic agendas from the 12th summit in Islamabad and work out conditions for agreements in the 13th summit.

The four accords to be signed during the Dhaka Summit are on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Customs, Promotion and Protection of Investment, Establishment of Saarc Arbitration Council and Agreement on Avoidance of Double Taxation.

Highly placed government sources say a Saarc economic union

would be created following the European Union model and a concrete announcement on it is likely in the 13th summit as the past two summits in Kathmandu and Islamabad drew considerable attention of the member states on the vital issue.

The prospects for forming such a union would gain substantial grounds after implementation of the South Asian Free Trade Area (Safra) scheduled for January 2006 in line with the landmark Safra agreement signed in Islamabad this year.

Bangladesh will become the first member country to host the Saarc Summit and hold the chairmanship for the third time, as the summit cycle started off here back in 1985.

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## DU wakes up to prevent spread of jaundice

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The authorities of Dhaka University (DU) yesterday at an emergency meeting decided to take special move to prevent the outbreak of jaundice and other viral diseases on the campus.

The decision came after 350 students of three DU halls reportedly contracted jaundice and other viral infections due to poor sanitation and hygiene at the dormitories.

Most of the water tanks of the DU halls allegedly go on unchecked for years, allowing accumulation of

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## 5 Chuadanga outlaws die in gunfights with police

10 PBCP cadres, 2 cops injured: Khulna Rab hunts for PBCP men

OUR CORRESPONDENTS, Kushiya and Khulna

Five operatives of two outlawed political outfits were killed and at least 10 others wounded in two police operations yesterday in Alamdanga upazila of Chuadanga district.

Two policemen including a sub-inspector were also hurt during the shootouts with bands of Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP)

and Biplobi Communist Party (BCP).

Earlier, on Thursday evening, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) raided the houses of a journalist and three local political leaders in Dumuria upazila of Khulna searching for PBCP men on the run.

Of the five slain in Chuadanga, PBCP cadres Mabud Ali, 25, and Habibul Islam, 36, of Fatehpur village were in police custody and killed in 'crossfire' in the early hours

yesterday, police claimed.

The other three -- Khairul Islam, 32, Borhan Uddin, 39, and Gius Uddin Sentu, 41, of Parlaksmpur village -- were top-notch BCP cadres, who died in another gunfight with police in the afternoon.

Mabud was accused in seven criminal cases including four for murder and Habib in nine including three murder cases, said Alamdanga police. They arrested the duo in

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## Protests mount as Delhi plans to build Tipaimukh dam

REAZ AHMAD

Amidst mounting protests both at home and in lower-riparian Bangladesh, India is going ahead with the plan to construct its largest and most controversial 1500 mw hydro-electric dam project on the river Barak at Tipaimukh on the common borders of three north-eastern states of Assam, Manipur and Mizoram.

Officials and experts in Dhaka fear the unilateral Indian move to construct the massive dam and regulate water flow of the Barak, which feeds both the Surma and Kushiara rivers in Sylhet, will have lasting adverse effects on livelihoods, ecology and environment in a vast region of Bangladesh.

Moreover, people living in the vicinity of the hydro-electric project in Manipur, costing over 5,000 crore Indian rupee, fear submersion of vast areas on the Indian side too.

One of the largest river systems in Bangladesh -- the Meghna with its distributaries -- is fully dependent on the waters rolling down from the Surma and Kushiara. A massive construction on the Barak river will adversely affect the water flows of the Meghna and its distributaries.

Against this backdrop, tension is growing over reports that the Indian prime minister laid the foundation stone of the project recently.

Tawhidul Anwar, a senior member of Indo-Bangla Joint Rivers Commission (JRC), told The Daily Star yesterday, "We have no con-

firmed reports about Manmohan Singh (Indian premier) laying the foundation stone during his recent visit to northeastern India. But we have come to know for sure India has started updating the Tipaimukh DPR (Detailed Project Report)."

He went on, "Through diplomatic channel, we have sent 'note verbal' thrice in the past protesting the Indian move. We also informed the Indian side our reservations about the Tipaimukh dam at the last meeting of the JRC in New Delhi late last year."

Tawhidul, a seasoned negotiator on water issues, said Bangladesh will seize the first opportunity to voice its protest against any Indian move to divert water flow of the

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## 2 foreigners die from alcohol poisoning

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Ukrainian and a Russian engineer died apparently from alcohol poisoning yesterday at Siddhirganj in Narayanganj district.

Ukrainian Martinukh Buthan, 44, was found dead in his quarters at Siddhirganj Power Plant and the Russian, Mikhail Isaev, 57, died at Dhaka Medical College and Hospital (DMCH).

Some 12 to 15 staff of the 210-MW power plant under construction by a Russian company drank spirit Thursday night in a first-floor room of the company's staff quarters, doctors at the DMCH said quoting those who had brought Isaev to the hospital.

As some of them fell ill, staff

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## F-28 develops fault on air

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Biman F-28 plane yesterday developed technical problems in the air twice but landed safely at Zia International Airport (ZIA).

Soon after the Kolkata-bound aircraft took off from ZIA at 10:30am, the pilots found that its wheels were not folding. Then the pilots reverted the flight and landed it at the airport within a few minutes after take-off.

After two hours of repair works, the BG091 flight was able to leave for Kolkata.

On return flight from Kolkata, the F28 plane, bought from Indonesia early this year, again developed fault in its hydraulic system.

The pilots, however, decided to continue the flight to Dhaka and were able to land safely at ZIA.

The plane was then sent to hangar for repair.

The problem with the F28 aircraft caused delay to most of the domestic flights by two to four hours yesterday. Biman's Kathmandu flight was delayed by four hours.

A few months back, the engine of an F28, procured from Indonesia, broke down while another F-28 crashed in Sylhet last month.

Out of five F28s, which are usually used in domestic and regional flights, three are either grounded in hangar or declared abandoned. Consequently, Biman finds it difficult to maintain domestic and regional schedules.

JS session resumes tomorrow

UNB, Dhaka

After a long Eid holiday, the Jatiya Sangsad (JS) will resume its session tomorrow to deal with some important legislative businesses, including a bill relating to women's reserved seats.

The session, which began on October 28 and was adjourned on November 4 after holding a general discussion on the price hike of essentials, will continue till December 4.

Ruling party sources indicated that the government might move a bill for consideration of the House during the current session to induct 45 female members into parliament from reserved seats.

The Standing Committee on the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, chaired by Mahbubuddin Ahmed, has submitted its report on the bill to the House after scrutiny. Opposition Awami League lawmaker Suranjit Sengupta gave a note of dissent on the report.

## FIRE AT NEW BANGABAZAR

## Ploy to deprive many affected traders of compensation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Many affected traders of burnt down New Bangabazar Hawkers' Market who rented shops at the market temporarily ahead of the winter season for a booming business may not get compensation due to non-cooperation of the landlords.

Many affected traders said their landlords are denying that they had rented the shops, while many failed to contact the shop owners till yesterday, the last day of getting their names listed as victims.

In the last two days till yesterday,

the market committee asked the affected traders to contact the committee office with documents of their shop proprietors so a list could be made.

Around 100 affected traders who lost all their goods in the November 21 devastating fire could not get their names listed for compensation as the owners of their shops did not co-operate apparently to grab the compensation meant for them.

Many influential business magnates of Islampur and even some market committee executives have many shops in the market, though

small traders were supposed to own the shops, affected traders alleged.

"The shop owners hardly come to the market as they do not want their ownership to be known. Rather they prefer to rent their shops through brokers," said an affected cloth trader seeking anonymity.

"I could not record my name as a fire victim as my owner did not come with his shop's documents which was a prerequisite to enter my name," said blanket trader Fazlul Haque.

He said he invested his lifelong

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## David buried amid tight security

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

Top criminal and Jubo Dal leader Mominullah David was buried yesterday in Narayanganj amid strong police and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) watch.

David's brothers, close associates and most of the BNP front organisations' leaders did not take part in the janaza fearing arrest.

Seven platoons of police and Rab men were posted at Missionpara, Chashara, Donchamber, and Khanpur areas to check violence during the janaza.

BNP lawmaker Muhammad Giasuddin, district BNP General

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## Long arm of land grabbers

Powerful group attacks Hindus in Dhamrai village. Many flee homes as police, local leaders take no action

NAIMUL HAQ, Back From Dhamrai, Savar

More than 1,200 Hindus, including children, in a remote village in Dhamrai are living in fear following a recent attack by a powerful local group wanting to grab a small piece of their ancestral land.

The attackers raided the village early in the morning on November 2, severely injuring eight people and traumatising many more. Ever since, the villagers are living amid fears of a fresh attack at the Gopalpur village, Nannar union of

Dhamrai upazila in Savar-- some 60 km from the capital.

Local Hindu leaders and some of the injured people have gone into hiding fearing further attacks by the local thugs, dubbed as the 'five brothers group'. The group threatened to launch more assaults on them if the leaders sought legal support to counter their actions.

There was no action from the police to arrest the culprits or to give any form of assurance of safety. The local union parishad chairman and the local member of the parliament are also maintaining a mysterious

silence. Consequently instead of going to the law enforcers, the community has resorted to the Human Rights Congress for Bangladesh Minorities (HRCBM) for their safety.

"They want us to leave our remaining ancestral land so that they can grab it as they have been doing so over the decades. If such illegal acts are allowed to continue we would be left with no choice but to head somewhere else," cried out Lakshman Chandra Mondal, one of the leaders of the minority community.

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PHOTO: STAR

Goura Dashi and Hiralal, two of the eight Hindu villagers injured in a recent attack by an influential group in Dhamrai, Savar. After treatment, the two along with some local leaders of their community have gone into hiding fearing fresh assaults.

## Air raids planned to curb piracy around Ctg port

NURUL ALAM, Chittagong

A plan is underway to launch air raids to combat piracy at the outer anchorage of Chittagong port and adjoining coastal belts, port sources said.

Steps will also be taken to intensify Coast Guard and navy operations to curb piracy in foreign and local vessels.

Talking to The Daily Star, Chairman of Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) Shahadat Hossain said, "We have already requested the air force authorities to help Coast Guard and navy during anti-piracy operations in the sea and coastal belts. We want to step up the drive to ensure safety and security of foreign cargo vessels calling at the port."

Moreover, Chittagong port security committee has decided to provide VHF sets for independent port facilities of Karnaphuli Fertiliser Company Limited, Chittagong Urea Fertiliser Limited, TSP, silo and oil installations based around Chittagong port for quick communication on security in case of any attacks by pirates on the Karnaphuli river or port channel.

The decision was taken at a meeting last week at the CPA office

to review the security position in Chittagong port area with the implementation of ISPS (international ship and port facility security) code, port officials said.

The meeting organised by the security committee was attended by senior port officials and representatives from Coast Guard, navy, air force, police and some other related agencies.

The meeting asked local police to launch frequent raids at the hide-outs of pirates in the coastal villages of Patenga, Anwara and Banshkali.

A top official of Chittagong port said, "We are also sending a proposal to the Ministry of Port and Shipping to initiate formation of an inter-ministerial body involving the home and defence ministries to devise an effective way of combating piracy to ensure security of vessels arriving here."

The CPA will shortly hold a meeting on anti-piracy measures as some recent incidents of piracy have worried the authorities, he mentioned.

Pirates attacked a North Korean-flagged vessel at the outer anchorage and looted huge goods from it two weeks ago.

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