

Saarc Summit postponed as India pulls out

Delhi cites Nepalese political turmoil, law and order in Bangladesh; Dhaka reacts angrily, calls it 'unacceptable'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The 13th Saarc Summit was postponed yesterday for the second time after India pulled out at the last moment citing the Nepalese political turmoil and 'deterioration of law and order' in Bangladesh following the January 27 grenade attack. Dhaka outright rejected such views, terming the reasons for India's withdrawal 'unacceptable' and 'unwarranted.' "We see no logic in questioning the security situation here," Foreign Secretary Shamsheer Mobin Chowdhury said. The two-day summit, which was

deferred for about a month after a devastating tsunami hit three Saarc member countries, was scheduled to begin in Dhaka on Sunday. Dhaka has almost completed the preparation for hosting the meet.

"We have formally communicated to the government of Bangladesh that India would not be able to attend the forthcoming Saarc summit in Dhaka on the scheduled dates," said Indian Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran at a press conference in New Delhi yesterday. Pakistan, as the current Saarc chair, announced the postponement



A grim-faced Foreign Secretary Shamsheer Mobin Chowdhury ponders his reply to a question while talking to reporters at his office yesterday.

immediately after the Indian announcement. "The summit has been cancelled and fresh dates will be worked out after consultation," Pakistani Information Minister Sheikh Rashid said in Islamabad.

Under the South Asian Association for Regional Association (Saarc) charter, the summit cannot be held without the presence of all the leaders of the member states.

The Saarc summits were postponed on eight occasions in the past due to the withdrawal of either Pakistan or India, whose rivalry has long overshadowed the spirit of the seven-nation regional organisation.

The 13th summit was originally scheduled for January 11-13 this year but was postponed after the Asian Tsunami ravaged Saarc member countries -- Sri Lanka, India

and the Maldives -- on December 26 last year.

"This decision has been taken against the background of recent developments in our neighbourhood, which have caused us grave concern," the Indian foreign secretary said. "The security situation in Dhaka has deteriorated in recent days following the fatal attack on the former finance minister of Bangladesh SAMS Kibria."

Giving Dhaka's reaction to reporters an hour after the Indian announcement, Foreign Secretary Shamsheer Mobin Chowdhury said the reasons given by India as far as it relates to the 'security situation in Dhaka' are unacceptable and rejected outright.

"We are shocked and dismayed at the unwarranted and unexpected

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India points at developments in Kathmandu, Dhaka

AGENCIES, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh yesterday decided not to attend the Saarc Summit in Dhaka "against the background of recent developments in our neighbourhood which has caused us grave concern."

India said the security situation in

Dhaka had worsened recently after a grenade attack which killed five people including former finance minister SAMS Kibria and sparked a general strike.

"The security situation in Dhaka has deteriorated in recent days following the fatal attack on the

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Blanket security withdrawn

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The security blanket thrown around the capital was withdrawn after postponement of the 13th Saarc summit yesterday.

The security men deployed at eight venues and four hotels where Saarc leaders and other guests were to stay and attend programmes began retreating after the announcement came in the afternoon.

"We started to pull out forces of strategic venues in the evening," Commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police SM Mizanur Rahman confirmed last night.

The city went through unprecedented security measures as members of various law enforcement agencies were working round the clock to check violence and crimes.

Around 7,000 policemen, over

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Countrywide dawn-to-dusk hartal today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League (AL) and left-leaning 11-Party enforce a nationwide dawn-to-dusk hartal today to protest the killing of AL lawmaker and former finance minister Shah AMS Kibria and four others in the January 27 grenade attack in Habiganj.

Ambulances, newspaper vehicles, drug stores, garbage carrying vehicles and other emergency vehicles will remain outside the

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Pak PM phones Khaleda, tells of dissatisfaction

UNB, Dhaka

Saarc Chairperson and Pakistan Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz yesterday expressed disappointments having to postpone the 13th regional summit after India expressed its inability to come over to Dhaka.

Expressing his sentiment while talking over telephone with

Bangladesh Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, the Pakistan Prime Minister termed it 'unfortunate' and 'upsetting'.

Shaukat Aziz said Pakistan, as chairperson of the seven-nation forum, was totally satisfied with the preparations for the Summit, scheduled for Feb 6-7.

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Asma Kibria calls for movement to nab killers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Asma Kibria, widow of former finance minister Shah AMS Kibria, yesterday urged people from all walks of life to join the movement demanding punishment of her husband's killers and an end to such killings.

"I am seeking support and cooperation of all in the movement I will continue till the criminals are punished," Asma said at a rally at the Central Shaheed Minar in the capital.

The rally was organised by Sammilita Peshajibi Parishad, a forum of professional bodies, to protest the killing of Kibria in a grenade attack in Habiganj on January 27.

Lawyers, former diplomats, women's rights activists, physicians, cultural activists, university teachers and opposition politicians also addressed the rally and expressed solidarity with her movement.

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Asma Kibria, wife of slain lawmaker Shah AMS Kibria, is seen in a gloomy mood at a rally organised by Peshajibi Samannoy Parishad at the Central Shahid Minar in Dhaka yesterday.

Pay Commission submits report, proposes up to 90pc salary hike

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Pay Commission yesterday submitted its report to Prime Minister (PM) Khaleda Zia outlining up to 90 percent salary increase for government employees under 20 grades.

The recommended pay structure puts the highest basic pay at Tk 27500 and the lowest at Tk 2800.

Since the last pay structure was announced in 1997, there has been an inflation of 31.76 percent, the commission report said.

The commission also recommended two weekly holidays on Saturday and Sunday and 9am to 5pm office hours.

The 15-member delegation led by Chairman of the commission M Mujibul Huq submitted the report with nearly 200 recommendations to the PM.

The government will soon form a secretary level committee to

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6TH PAY COMMISSION		
GRADE COMMISSION	PRESENT PAY STRUCTURE	6TH PAY (RECOMMENDED)
Grade-I	15000(fixed)	27500(fixed)
Grade-II	12900-14300	23000-26680
Grade-III	11700-13500	20230-25900
Grade-IV	10700-13100	18200-25490
Grade-V	9500-12100	16150-24435
Grade-VI	7200-12100	12500-20160
Grade-VII	6150-9750	10770-18595
Grade-VIII	4800-8160	8975-16740
Grade-IX	4300-7740	8160-15780
Grade-X	3400-6625	5970-12445
Grade-XI	2550-5505	4865-10090
Grade-XII	2375-5130	4510-9335
Grade-XIII	2250-4735	4260-8835
Grade-XIV	2100-4315	4020-8345
Grade-XV	1975-3920	3785-7860
Grade-XVI	1875-3605	3560-7385
Grade-XVII	1750-3300	3340-6940
Grade-XVIII	1625-2905	3150-6525
Grade-XIX	1560-2695	2970-6170
Grade-XX	1500-2400	2800-5800

Alliance sits today to fix action plan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Against the backdrop of the postponement of Saarc summit and opposition's wildcat hartals, the ruling 4-party alliance and BNP will hold crucial meetings today to discuss the current political situation as well as taking up of future course of action to face the opposition movement.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia has called an urgent meeting of top leaders of the alliance BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami, Islami Oikya Jote and Bangladesh Jatiya Party, at her office at 1:30pm today, highly placed sources said.

Khaleda, who is also the chairperson of BNP, will preside over the meeting to be participated by chiefs and secretary generals of the four parties.

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan has also called an emergency meeting of BNP and its front organisations at his official residence at 5pm today.

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3 outlaws killed in 'crossfire'

One slaughtered by rivals

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Three outlaws were killed in 'crossfire' during police actions in Kushtia and Pabna while another outlaw was slaughtered by his rivals in Pabna yesterday.

At least six policemen, two from Kushtia and four from Pabna, were injured in the 'shootouts' between the police and the outlaws, police said.

Saleh Uddin and Shariful Islam, cadres of Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP), were killed in Santhia of Pabna district while Abdul Malek, a top leader of New Biplobi Communist Party (NBCP) was killed at Kumarkhali in Kushtia.

Besides, Ansar Uddin Manik, another cadre of PBCP (Red Flag), was slaughtered by his rivals at village Dhalaura in Santhia upazila. The police seized three firearms from the spots of Santhia and Kumarkhali shootouts.

PABNA SHOOTOUT Santhia police said they arrested Saleh and Shariful from Bilchalandi

village in the upazila on Tuesday evening. During interrogation, they confessed to their involvement in the underground party -- PBCP-Red Flag.

Following their confessional statement, the police yesterday took the two to Bichalandi village to seize their firearms hidden there. When they reached the village at about 4:00am, the PBCP cadres opened fire on the policemen.

As the police made a counter attack on the criminals, a gunfight ensued between the law-enforcers and the outlaws. Saleh and Shariful tried to escape during the shootout and died when they were caught in crossfire, the police said.

Sub-Inspector Asif Uddin and three constables of Santhia Police Station were also injured in the half-and-hour gunfight, the police claimed.

The police retrieved two shotguns and five bullets from the spot.

Saleh was accused in 12 criminal cases while Shariful in four. They were charged with murder and other

crimes in Santhia and Sujanager, the police said.

KUSHTIA CROSSFIRE Kumarkhali police said they raided village Lakshampur in the upazila at about 3:00am yesterday when some 30 NBCP cadres were holding a secret meeting there.

As the police team surrounded the NBCP men, they opened fire on the law-enforcers who retaliated with gunshots resulting in a two-hour shootout. Abdul Malek, 46, a top leader of the extremist outfit, died on the spot, the police said.

At least 100 shots were exchanged during the gunfight. The police said the other outlaws managed to escape but at least 10 of them sustained injuries.

Officer-in-Charge of Kumarkhali Police Station Nasir Uddin and Sub-Inspector Manir Uddin were also wounded in the incident.

The police retrieved a rifle and four bullets from the spot.

According to the police, Malek was a close aide of NBCP leader

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ADP sees 29pc implementation in first half

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The half-yearly implementation of the projects under the current Annual Development Programme (ADP) stands at 29 percent.

The ADP implementation rate was 28 percent during the corresponding period last year.

Different ministries spent about Tk 6,451 crore against projects under Tk 22,000-crore budget. The local component in it was Tk 4,100 crore or 28 percent of allocation and the project aid was Tk 2,351 crore or 32 percent.

These figures were presented at a meeting between officials of 20 ministries and the finance minister where they discussed various aspects of the ADP implementation.

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman at the meeting criticised the ministries that had lower ADP implementation rate against the amount of money released.

For instance, the finance ministry

released 55 percent of allocated funds for projects under the communications ministry that could utilise 28 percent.

The health ministry was given 40 percent of its allocated funds, but it utilised only 13 percent.

Saifur told these ministries that while they complain to the prime minister about non-release of funds, they cannot utilise the money when available, meeting sources said.

After the meeting, the minister told reporters, "The ADP implementation rate should have been higher. But it did not match the expectations due to floods and political unrest."

"Much of our funds remain unutilised," he added, "but still, it's better than that of last year."

"If political programmes like hartal and strike and violence did not occur, our implementation would have been better," he pointed out.

Interpol men meet IGP

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two visiting Interpol members met the inspector general of police (IGP) yesterday.

During about an hour-long meeting began at 1:00pm, they mainly discussed the August 21 grenade attack on an Awami League rally last year.

The meeting also discussed how the Interpol could help investigate other grenade attacks including the January 27 carnage in Habiganj that killed Shah AMS Kibria and four

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Govt to take action against propoganda thru' internet

UNB, Dhaka

The government is going to take necessary steps to prevent 'malicious' propoganda against Bangladesh that blights image of the country at home and abroad.

"We've a lot of information that vested quarters, taking advantage of internet, are engaged in propoganda campaigns against the country, tarnishing the country's image. And

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Nepal king unveils new cabinet

Phone still cut off, opposition leaders believed to be under house arrest

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's King Gyanendra swore in a new 10-member cabinet heavily dominated by royalists, a day after firing the government and seizing power in a move that sparked international condemnation.

Members of the new cabinet arrived at the royal palace in black official cars for the brief oath-of-office ceremony that followed Gyanendra's dismissal of Prime Minister Shah Bahadur Deuba and his government yesterday.

Gyanendra said the sacking of the ruling coalition was necessary to crush an increasingly bloody Maoist revolt.

The new cabinet was mainly made up of pro-monarchists, including foreign minister Ramesh Nath Pandey, finance minister Madhukar Shumsher Rana and Dan Bahadur Shahi as home minister.

Security was tight on the streets of Kathmandu which were jammed as usual with traffic, while shops and businesses and schools were open.

But land and mobile phone networks and Internet links were still

not working after being shut down yesterday. The international airport was functioning.

Gyanendra, vaulted to the throne four years ago by a palace massacre that wiped out most of the royal family, said he fired the multi-party government for failing to hold elections and bring peace to the country. He pledged to "restore democracy and law and order in the country in the next three years."

Security forces in the scenic mountain kingdom known as the Land of Everest have been battling for nine years to stamp out the revolt by Maoists seeking to topple the monarchy and install a communist republic.

The conflict has claimed over 11,000 lives.

Newspapers, operating under new state of emergency rules suspending press freedom, used neutral language to announce the news.

"His Majesty Dissolves Deuba government," said the state-run Rising Nepal. "Deuba cabinet

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KIBRIA KILLING

Rice offers condolence to Hasina

UNB, Dhaka

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice yesterday offered her deep condolence on the death of former Finance Minister Shah AMS Kibria and other individuals in a bomb attack in Habiganj.

In a letter to Leader of the Opposition and Sheikh Hasina, Rice said it would be an especially difficult time for the Awami League chief for her long association with Kibria.

"Please be assured that we're urging the Bangladesh government to apprehend and prosecute the perpetrators of these attacks," Rice was quoted by Saker Hossain Chowdhury as saying.

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Trade bodies say strikes to spike problems

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In the wake of the latest political unrest leading trade bodies yesterday once again urged the parties to resolve differences in the parliament, saying street agitation and strikes only aggravate problems.

Hartal and political confrontations on the streets do not help in bringing culprits to book rather they only deteriorate the country's image problem and hinder economic growth, said a statement signed by chiefs of Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI), Bangladesh Textile Mills Association (BTMA), Bangladesh Employers' Federation (BEF) and Foreign Investors Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FICCI).

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