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US ambassador surprised at summit call-off

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

US Ambassador Harry K Thomas said he was surprised at the postponement of the 13th South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) Summit in Dhaka.

The ambassador said he expected the Saarc summit would lead to the implementation of a South Asian Free Trade Area (Safta). "The Saarc countries could have been benefited from Safta. We thought it would be a copy of Nafta, extending cooperation in the region," he said.

The ambassador's remarks came during a face-to-face with women journalists organised in the city yesterday by the Bangladesh Centre for Development of Journalism and Communication (BCDJC).

During the occasion the ambassador also discussed freedom of the

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Alliance to face AL in streets

Blames opposition for 'foiling' Saarc Summit

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP-led ruling alliance yesterday blamed the Awami League for foiling the Saarc Summit and has decided to take to the streets to face the opposition agitation.

It castigated the opposition for calling frequent hartals and damaging the image of the country.

To face the situation, the BNP will hold rallies across the country on February 7. Then they will jointly hold grand public meetings in different parts of the country, meeting sources said.

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The coalition also decided that its component parties -- BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami, Bangladesh Jatiya Party (BJP) and Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ) -- will announce and observe their political programmes separately.

"We have decided to observe programmes individually first and then go for united programmes," said BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan at a press briefing after a meeting of top leaders of the four-parties.

Chaired by BNP chief and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, the meeting

deeply regretted the postponement of the Saarc summit, and blamed the main opposition Awami League (AL) for launching a campaign against holding of the summit in Bangladesh and calling hartal coinciding with it.

Most of the alliance leaders attending the meeting held at the Prime Minister's Office accused the AL of persuading the Indian leadership into not attending the Saarc summit in Dhaka.

They expressed dissatisfaction at the Indian refusal to attend the

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Pak PM looks for new date
Says postponement to have negative impact

XINHUA, Islamabad

Pakistani Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz yesterday described as unfortunate the postponement of the 13th summit of the seven-nation South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the official Associated Press of Pakistan (APP) reported.

The February 6-7 SAARC summit in Dhaka was postponed after India said it would not attend, citing security situation in Bangladesh and political developments in Nepal.

Bangladesh strongly reacted to the Indian decision, terming it unwarranted and unexpected. Before the abrupt Indian move, Nepalese monarch had said he would personally attend the conference.

Shaukat Aziz, current SAARC

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HABIGANJ GRENADE ATTACK

Police arrest 3, get important clue

JULFIKAR ALI MANIK, Baidderbazar, Habiganj

Police have arrested three BNP activists and picked up 18 people for questioning from Habiganj and Sylhet in connection with the Habiganj carnage that left former finance minister SAMS Kibria and four others dead.

But police declined to divulge political identity of the three persons arrested under Section 54 of the CrPC on Wednesday.

Their family members however told The Daily Star they are involved with the BNP and its affiliates.

Two of the arrestees -- Shah Alam and Jinal Abedin Jalal -- have been

placed on an eight-day remand and are being questioned in the custody of the local detective branch. The other -- Abdul Wahed Sohel -- was sent to jail on Wednesday as police did not seek his remand.

Another BNP activist, Jinal Abedin Momin, was picked up on Monday from Baidderbazar. He is still in police custody.

Investigators are tight-lipped about the outcome their quizzing Shah Alam and Jinal so far.

"We have arrested these three persons under Section 54 for suspicious movement, and not in connection with the two cases (on the Habiganj carnage)," says Deputy Inspector General of Police of Sylhet

Range AKM Mahfuzul Haq. "We have got a lot of information about those involved in the incident. We are now verifying the information," he adds without elaborating.

The law enforcing and intelligence authorities declined to give the number of people picked up for questioning since the January 27 grenade attack. But one source said 18 people have been picked up so far.

The families of the three arrestees are in the dark about their whereabouts. They did not know till last night that one of the three was sent to jail and two others were placed on remand.

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Tough cops foil attempt for street protests

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The police foiled every attempt to assemble on the streets and bring out processions in the capital yesterday during the opposition-sponsored dawn-to-dusk hartal sending most pickets off the roads.

The law-enforcers kept vigil on every sensitive point in the city and clubbed the opposition activists whenever they tried to stage demonstration.

The 6:00am to 6:00pm shutdown that followed a 60-hour hartal from Saturday through Monday, disrupted normal life and economic

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Awami League leader Matia Chowdhury lies on the ground, falling down from a police van while trying to get into the vehicle to protest the arrest of her party colleagues near Paltan crossing in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Bangla Bhai's men to keep bombing cinema

Arrested operative tells Bogra police; Natore militants tell of plan to attack NGOs

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

Operatives of the Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB) plan to continue bomb attacks on movie theatres all over the country, said police, adding that they suspect JMJB was involved in the Mymensingh movie theatre attacks that killed 21 in 2002.

The bomb squad of JMJB will

continue such bomb attacks as JMJB treats movies, theatres and jatra (a local theatre form) as 'anti-Islamic' activities, said JMJB operative Shafiqullah while in police custody.

In Natore, the 12 militants of the Jama'atul Muhibbin Bangladesh, arrested from a mosque on Tuesday, told the police again that JMJB has also planned to carry on attacks on

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Saifur asks BB to tackle volatile call money, forex markets

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday asked the Bangladesh Bank (BB) to strengthen its monitoring system to stop volatility in the call money and foreign exchange markets.

As the money market continues to heat up, the minister sat with high officials of the central bank and nationalised commercial banks (NCBs).

If a bank borrows money at an interest rate of 70 percent, the central bank should look into the financial strength of that particular bank," Saifur said, according to meeting sources.

Taka continued to weaken yesterday with each US dollar selling at Tk 63.99.

The NCBs sold the greenback at Tk 63.46.

Meanwhile, the call money rate again shot up yesterday hitting 22 percent, which was 7 to 8 percent a few days back.

The rate soared as high as 75 percent after the Eid before going down to 5 percent.

At yesterday's meeting, central bank and NCB officials told Saifur that dollar shot up as banks are making payment of letters of credit (LCs) opened in September and October.

As oil and ship scrap prices shot up on the international market, the demand for dollar is rising, they said. The central bank and NCB officials said some small banks have weak fund management and lack proper assessment of demand and supply that also contributed to a costly dollar.

The officials apprised the minister that some banks borrowed money from the NCBs at lower interest rate and lent the same to small banks at higher rates taking advantage of the small banks' cash crunch.

This practice led to a volatile call money market, they said.

As the central bank cannot inter-

vene in a free market economy, Saifur advised the BB to sit with the commercial banks and help them efficiently manage funds. BB officials assured the minister that the money market will return to normal soon.

"It's not possible to reduce the interest rates by enforcing hartal," he told reporters later at his secretariat office.

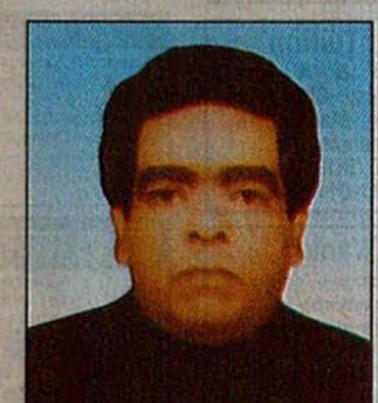
BB Governor Fakhrudin Ahmed, Deputy Governor Allah Malik Kazemi, MD of Sonali Bank Tahmildur Rahman, MD of Agrani Bank Syed Abu Naser Bukhtear Ahmed, MD of Janata Bank SM Aminur Rahman and MD of Rupali Bank Abdul Hamid Miah were present at the meeting.

"It's a temporary pressure of demand. It's now being adjusted," BB Governor Dr Fakhrudin Ahmed told reporters after the meeting, expecting that the price of the greenback would become normal within next week.

27th Death Anniversary

(Abul Company) The founder of Abul Khair Group noted industrialist and social worker

Late Janab ABUL KHAIR



Death: 4th February, 1978

In accordance with the will of almighty Allah the beneficent, you left this mundane world, leaving us and many of your relations overwhelmed by grief. In our everyday life your bright ideals serve as a beacon. You are immortal in your death. We pray to Almighty Allah for the salvation of your departed soul.

May Allah the beneficent bless you with the eternal bliss of paradise. Ameen.

Your loving
Son, Daughters and Relatives.

NARSINGDI HERITAGE SITE Excavation suffers for lack of funds

JU CORRESPONDENT

Fund crisis and rules imposed by the archaeological department are hampering the third phase of excavation at Wari-Bateswar in Narsingdi, the site of an ancient fort dating back to 450 BC.

An 18-member excavation team of Jahangirnagar University (JU) led by Shah Sufi Mustafizur Rahman, assistant professor of archaeology, on January 20 began the third-phase excavation of the fort city, considered one of the most ancient ones in the sub-continent.

The team started work with funds allocated for fieldwork of students of JU archaeology department, and money given by the Asiatic Society and Prof Mustafizur.

Sources in the excavation team said Minister for LGRD and Cooperatives Abdul Mannan

Bhuiyan in May last year assured of special allocation of funds for the work but the money is yet to be available due to bureaucratic tangles.

Against this backdrop, Mustafizur has urged the prime minister and minister for culture to ensure funds to continue excavation to unearth the ancient fort city, discovered last year.

During the third-phase excavation, a furnace has been found in a room inside a trench. Experts believe it might have been used in domestic work or to melt iron.

While excavating near a ditch at the site, Mustafizur claimed the road beside the ditch, discovered during the second phase of excavation last year, was the main road of the ancient city. He hopes to find a gateway somewhere around the ditch.

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STAR FILE PHOTO