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Delhi asked to show restraint on borders

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka has asked Delhi to stop indiscriminate killing of Bangladeshis by its border forces and open the Tin Bigha corridor fully to Bangladeshis at the just concluded home secretary-level meeting in New Delhi.

Bangladesh demanded immediate ratification of the Land Border Agreement of 1974 and demarcation of 6.5km bordering area, Home Secretary Safar Raj Hossain, who led a 10-member Bangladesh team during October 27-28 talks, said on his return yesterday.

"When we requested them not to open fire, they agreed and said they will ask their forces for restraint."

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HAJJ FLIGHT

Biman too asks for fare over fixed rate

REAZ AHMAD

Uncertainty over Hajj by thousands of people took a turn for the worse yesterday with the state-run Biman Bangladesh Airlines too now calling for the government to raise the cabinet-fixed Hajj fare from \$950 to \$1,250.

Foreign and private airlines have already declined to operate Hajj flights in less than \$ 1250 for a pilgrim.

Five foreign and nine private

airlines in their quotations submitted on October 30 for Hajj flights quoted fares as high as \$1,250 to \$1,360.

If the Wednesday's cabinet meeting agrees to increase the fare, pilgrims from Bangladesh would have to count an extra cost to make the pilgrimage to Mecca.

After a meeting with the representatives of foreign and private airlines at his ministry yesterday, State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Mir Mohammad Nasir

Uddin told The Daily Star, "We'll ask the cabinet for upward revision of Hajj fare, otherwise Biman will have to absorb a loss of Tk 20 crore, ferrying 4,000 ballotee pilgrims to Jeddah."

The weekly cabinet meeting, usually held on every Monday, has been rescheduled for Wednesday, as Prime Minister Khaleda Zia was away to perform Umrah.

Mir Nasir, who also accompanied the premier during her Saudi

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PHOTO: STAR

Clients crowd the counters at Agrani Bank's Jatiya Press Club branch yesterday for drawing money ahead of the Eid-ul-Fitr.

Banks face heavy rush ahead of long Eid holiday

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bankers spent a hectic day yesterday as drawing of cash by their clients rose sharply with Eid-ul-Fitr only a few days away.

Bangladesh Bank officials faced tremendous pressure working until night to clear around 7,000 cheques, the number generally ranging between three and four thousand on normal working days.

According to sources, around Tk 2,000 crore was drawn from the banks yesterday with higher rushes to the Motijheel branches of most banks.

"Most of the corporate houses drew a huge cash (yesterday) to pay their employees' salaries. The banks will face the rushes of

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Nepal king to attend Saarc summit for the first time

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

King Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev of Nepal will attend the 13th South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) Summit for the first time scheduled for November 12-13 in Dhaka.

This is also the first time a king is attending the summit after the restoration of democracy in Nepal. The king's visit is amid mounting pressures from within and beyond the country against his direct rule, according to a report of News Line Nepal yesterday.

India postponed the summit.

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SAARC SUMMIT

Dhaka to propose fund raising to fight regional poverty

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

As Bangladesh will be in the Saarc chair during the November 12-13 summit, Dhaka will propose substantial fundraising for implementation of Saarc projects, mainly to take measures for poverty alleviation in the South Asian region.

The forthcoming summit will also take initiative to streamline various proposed funds into a single fund with an initial capital of

US \$300 million, a senior official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs told diplomatic correspondents yesterday.

The proposed "South Asian Poverty Alleviation Fund" will have different wings like economic wing, social wing and infrastructure wing.

South Asian Development Fund with only US\$ 6 million in the coffers has so far financed about 10

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Three killed in 'crossfire'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, KUSHITIA

Three criminals including a Jubo Dal activist and a top cadre of an outlawed party were killed in police and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) actions in Kushtia, Faridpur and Sherpur early yesterday.

Biswajit Biswas alias Bishu alias Bashudeb, a worker of Jubo Dal, the youth front of ruling BNP, died in 'crossfire' with Rab in Faridpur while Abdul Mazed, an operative of Janajudho faction of Purbo Banglar Communist Party, and Badar Uddin alias Badu Dakat died in separate incidents of shootings involving police in Kushtia and Sherpur.

FARIDPUR

According to Faridpur police, Rab-3 in Dhaka arrested Biswajit in

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Cops in extortionist's role on streets

Regular thugs stay at bay in fear of Rab

SHAHEEN MOLLAH

Heavy presence of plainclothes and uniformed Rab personnel at the markets and on the streets of the capital in this Eid shopping season have kept the usual extortionists away from street vendors at more than a hundred spots, but the police however have filled in the gap.

Disgruntled vendors at different spots in the city told The Daily Star that right before the Eid the police seem to have an open season on

them as they are being extorted by almost all tiers of the police department including the sub-inspectors, traffic sergeants, patrol police, local police camps and even by the cashiers of police stations besides the "linemen" (designated toll collectors for the police).

Shyampur, Jatrabari, Motijheel, Gulistan, Baitul Muqarram, Purana Paltan, Sadarghat, New Market, Malibagh, Karwan Bazar, Farm Gate, and Mirpur are some of the spots where thousands of

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ZIA, SAYEM, MUSTAQUE REGIMES HC verdict stayed for 3 more months

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court yesterday extended for three more months the stay order on the High Court judgement that declared the fifth amendment to the constitution illegal.

The Chamber Judge of the Appellate Division Justice MM Ruhul Amin passed the order on a petition filed by the government.

Attorney General AJ Mohammad Ali and Additional Attorney General Abdur Razzak Khan who moved for the government told journalists yesterday that they filed

the petition for time extension as the government is yet to get the copy of the High Court judgement.

In a historic verdict on August 29 this year, the High Court also declared illegal the rules of Khandker Mushtaque Ahmed, Abu Sadaat Mohammad Sayem, and Maj Gen Ziaur Rahman from August 15, 1975 to April 9, 1979.

The High Court judgement came as a consequence of a decades-old writ petition filed challenging the Martial Law Regulation 7 of 1977 that was

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REPORT CARD ON MINISTERS 4 years in office

Altaf proves failure both in home, commerce

MONJUR MAHMUD

On March 25, 2004, when his home portfolio was unceremoniously replaced by that of commerce, Altaf Hossain Choudhury, who already had outdone his cabinet colleagues in blurring out ridiculous and insensible remarks, boasted, "I have not been removed but promoted."

Standing at the entrance to the parliament building, he declared to the press, "Very soon, I will pull down the prices of essential commodities to the zero-level."

But what he has really accomplished is to pull down his own success count to zero by letting the essentials prices skyrocket virtually unchecked and extortion to continue in trade, especially in the supply chain from rural areas to the capital.

The former air vice marshal can hardly be credited with marshalling adequately the staff and commerce forces under his new ministry, which in the last 19 months has been behaving in a confused manner and without any apparent coherent direction.

Yet, unlike his predecessor, Altaf has been stubbornly denying any essentials price spiral. Many a time, when the government-run Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) reported of a substantial price hike in essentials in a short span of time, the commerce ministry meetings chaired by Altaf often found the price situation not as 'exorbitant as reflected in the media'.

However, even the most obstinate

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