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Summit to focus on poverty, economy, terrorism: FM

the Saarc response to address this major problem.

"Combating terrorism is a task that South Asia needs to pursue relentlessly. This issue has been in the international and regional spotlight for very understandable compelling reasons," Morshed Khan said at a press briefing at the foreign ministry ahead of the Saarc Summit.

He said the Dhaka summit will finalise the modality for implementing the additional protocol to combat terrorism being faced by the South Asian nations.

Citing the examples of the USA, European countries, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, he said, "Every country in the world is facing terrorism."

"No country can tackle it individually and it needs collective efforts regionally and internationally to combat terrorism," Khan said, adding that Bangladesh has



M Morshed Khan

Asia today is not only necessary to safeguard the South Asian interests in an intensely competitive globalised world, but also to address the challenges internal to South Asia.

The foreign minister called for collective actions to address the internal challenges of regional dimensions. He said the summit will allow the leaders of the Saarc countries to have a fresh look at the rich and comprehensive Saarc agenda and to initiate actions for tangible improvement in the life of 1.5 billion South Asians.

On the implementation of South Asian Free Trade Area (Safta) signed at the 12th summit in Islamabad last year, he said some outstanding issues still need to be sorted out and the summit will be an important occasion to have concrete guidance to satisfactorily address these issues.

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Foreign secys start arriving

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

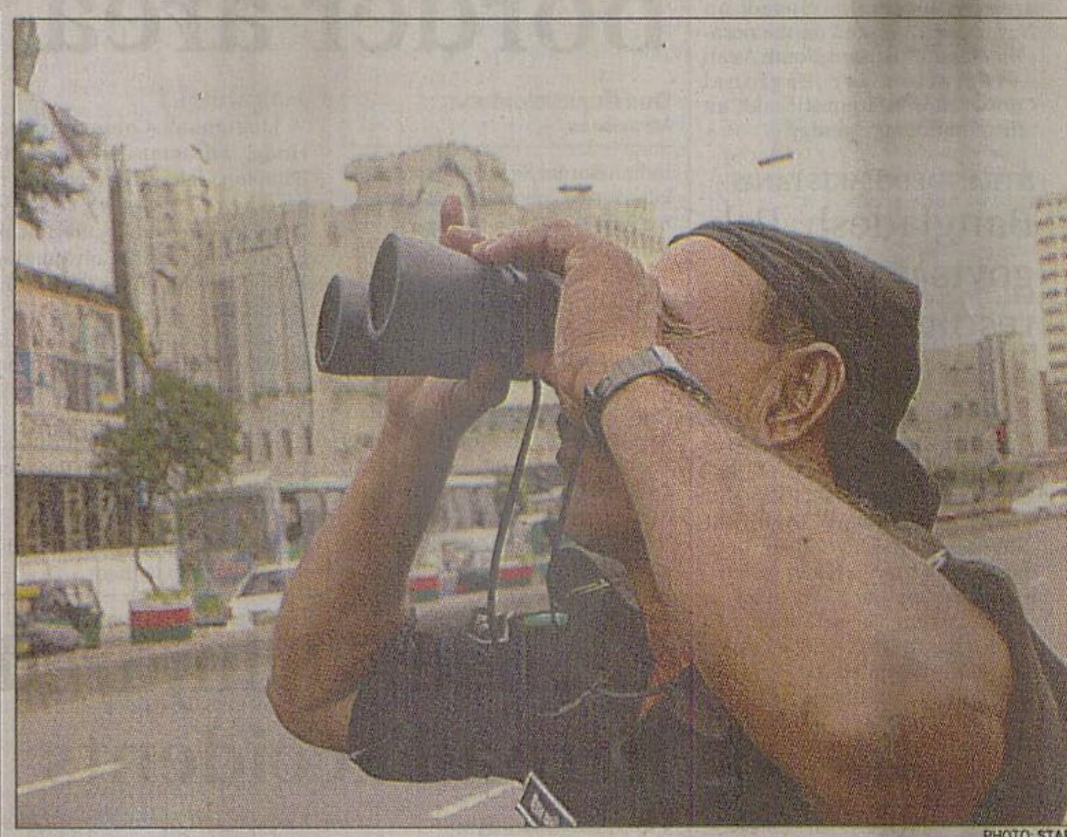
Ahead of the 13th Saarc Summit, foreign secretaries of the Saarc member countries have started arriving in Dhaka to attend the two-day 31st Session of the Saarc Standing Committee beginning this afternoon.

Bangladesh Foreign Secretary and Chairman of the 31st Session of the Standing Committee Hemayetuddin will chair the meeting to be held at Sheraton Hotel, which will review the agenda and reports approved by the Programming Committee.

Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Maldives Ms Aminath Mohamed Didi, Foreign Secretary of Pakistan Riaz Mohammed Khan, Acting Foreign Secretary of Nepal Nabin Bahadur Shrestha and Foreign Secretary of Bhutan Ms Neten Zangmo arrived in Dhaka yesterday, foreign ministry sources said.

Foreign secretaries of India and Sri Lanka Shyam Saran and HMGS Palihakkara will arrive today to attend the Saarc Standing Committee meeting.

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A Rab member looks through binoculars to scan the high-rises near Dhaka Sheraton Hotel yesterday as part of the stepped up security for the 13th Saarc Summit.

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan yesterday said the much-awaited 13th Saarc Summit in Dhaka will deliberate on how to inject impetus to poverty alleviation, promoting cooperation in hard core economic areas and combating terrorism.

Describing terrorism as a new challenge for the South Asian nations, he said the Dhaka summit will provide a very timely opportunity to "revisit the issue to fine tune

E Ahamed to replace Natwar at Saarc meet

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Minister of State for External Affairs E Ahamed will head the Indian delegation at the Saarc foreign ministers' meeting in Dhaka on November 11, a day ahead of the 13th Saarc summit.

Ahamed, a senior leader of Indian Union of Muslim League who hails from Kerala, replaces K Natwar Singh who was relieved of his portfolio of External Affairs Minister on Monday, official sources said yesterday.

Sources said Ahamed was chosen for the Dhaka meeting following a top-level consultation with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

Ahamed undertook key diplomatic assignments before including the negotiations to secure the release of three Indians who were kidnapped in Iraq while working

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India for economic union, Kabul's induction

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

India yesterday said it favoured a South Asian Economic Union and would back Afghanistan's induction as a member of Saarc at the summit of the seven-nation regional group in Dhaka later this week.

"We will welcome Afghanistan as a member of Saarc," Minister of State for External Affairs E Ahamed, who will represent India at the Saarc Ministerial meeting on November 11, said in New Delhi.

The issue of Afghanistan's entry into Saarc is expected to be taken up during the Dhaka meet. Ahamed, who will fly to Dhaka tomorrow, said, "Saarc should be strengthened and also developed as an economically integrated community in South Asia."

Observing that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh himself is a great proponent of economic integration of the countries in the region so that all can reap the benefits, he said, "All our neighbours can become partners in India's prosperity."

"We also wish that all our neighbours should look upon India as an opportunity in terms of economic benefit and also as a country having scientific and technological advancement with a robust economy and a very large investment possibility."

This will certainly throw up opportunities to the neighbouring countries to develop their own economies with India's partnership, Ahamed said.

"Therefore, a South Asia

Economic Union envisaging integration of these countries will always be helpful to Saarc member countries," he added.

He said when South Asian countries become dynamic in their development and economic advancement, only then these countries could be part of the larger Asian development community.

Meantime, external affairs ministry sources said India would table a slew of new proposals in textile, civil aviation, healthcare and sports sectors to give a new impetus to Saarc at the Dhaka summit.

The proposals would also cover education and handicraft as areas for cooperation among seven

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Programming body begins consultation

UNB, Dhaka

The Saarc Programming Committee comprising senior officials of the forum's seven member states yesterday began a two-day consultation to arrange the business to be transacted by the South Asian leaders in their Dhaka meet.

On the first day, they reviewed progress in activities and implementation of programmes under the Regional Integrated Programme of Action (Ripa).

The committee also considered reports of four technical committees and five working groups that met in 2004 and 05 in areas of socioeconomic cooperation, related to women, youth and children, health and population, transport, agriculture and rural development, tourism, telecommunications and ICT.

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Orange alert at ZIA on Nov 11-14

Foreign security teams express satisfaction at arrangements

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Zia International Airport (ZIA) will remain under 'orange' security alert, one notch down the top, for four days from Friday when leaders of the South Asian countries participating in the 13th Saarc Summit will be flying in and out of the city.

Incoming and outgoing flight schedules will remain mostly unchanged excepting for 45 minutes when a Saarc leader arrives and 30 minutes when one departs to make the security foolproof, officials concerned said.

As part of a massive security

build-up, some 40,000 security men drawn from police, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), army, Bangladesh Rifles, Armed Police Battalion, Ansar, Special Security Force (SSF), President's Guard Regiment (PGR) and intelligence agencies along with plainclothesmen are keeping a sharp vigilance on the city hosting the summit.

Advance security teams from the Saarc countries are also now in Dhaka to look after the security of their respective heads of state and government. Sources said they have expressed satisfaction over the security arrangements made by

the Bangladesh authorities for the November 12-13 summit of the South Asian Association for regional Cooperation.

The authorities have declared several city streets and two parks off-limits to public. Sources said security at the country's border has also been stepped up.

"For the upcoming Saarc Summit, it has been decided by the authorities that from 00:01 hours on November 11 to 24:00 hours on November 14, 2005 the security alert state at Zia International Airport will be kept at orange," a

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Traffic restricted on certain city roads till Nov 14

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With the 13th Saarc Summit due from Saturday, Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) has restricted traffic movement on certain city roads from November 7 to 14 as part of the unprecedented security measures for the seven-nation meet.

Streets adjacent to the summit venues and places of accommodation of the Saarc delegates and the streets of their movement will come under the restriction. The Special Branch, however, will issue special passes for some vehicles to ply these streets.

The Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) restricted the vehicular movement on the roads west and north to the Hotel Sheraton from November 7 to November 14, on the roads passing Bangladesh-China Friendship Centre, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Lake Road, and Zia Uddyan crossing to Agargaon Light Crossing from November 7 to November 11 and on the roads of

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TOWARD A MORE MEANINGFUL SAARC

Political will needed to cut differences
Kholiquzzaman Ahmad
RAFIQ HASAN
Renowned economist and President of Bangladesh Economic Association (BEA) Dr Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad has stressed the need for
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Regional co-op to fight 2-headed dragon of poverty, terrorism
Debapriya Bhattacharya
STAFF CORRESPONDENT
Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) Executive Director Debapriya Bhattacharya stresses that Saarc has to
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Saarc parliament vital to fostering cooperation
Ziaur Rahman Khan
SHAKHAWAT LITON
Stressing the need for creation of a Saarc parliament, Barrister Ziaur Rahman Khan, chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on foreign ministry,
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Effective co-op to help enhance intra-regional trade, integration
Mustafizur Rahman
STAFF CORRESPONDENT
Research Director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) Mustafizur Rahman finds substantial potential for making
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Gayoom the lone participant of all summits

UNB, Dhaka

President of the Maldives Maumoon Abdul Gayoom has made a new history by making his presence in all the Saarc summits since its launching in Dhaka in 1985.

He attended the first summit along with six other heads of state and government President HM Ershad of Bangladesh, King Jigme Singhe Wangchuk of Bhutan, Prime Minister Rajiv Ghandhi of India, King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev of Nepal, President Gen Ziaul Huq of Pakistan and President Jayawardene of Sri Lanka.

In the last two decades, some of the founding leaders of the Saarc either passed away, assassinated or ousted from power.

The 68-year-old President Gayoom attended all the 12 Saarc summits and is scheduled to attend the 13th summit in Dhaka on November 12-13.

Inflation eases, but forex reserve drops

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Though pressure from different sides continues to build up on the country's economy, its inflation rate has slowed down in recent months.

Bangladesh Bank's latest data also shows that the foreign exchange reserves have declined sharply due to higher spending for oil imports, despite higher remittance inflow.

Taka continued to depreciate against the dollar. In the last one year till October 6, the taka lost by 6.67 percent its value against the dollar.

The government has outpaced the private sector in borrowing while its revenue collection has increased compared to that of the last year.

The economy started to be under strain from the outset of the last fiscal, which began with two rounds of flooding. The pressure on the economy continued as the country stepped onto the new fiscal.

Bangladesh Bank Governor Saleh Uddin Ahmed, however, says, "Compared to the economies of our neighbouring countries, our [economic] foundation is still strong. Therefore the problems we have now can be overcome."

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LOAN WITHDRAWAL LGED asks WB to review decision

STAR REPORT

The Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) yesterday asked the World Bank (WB) to review its decision to withdraw a part of its loans for eight contract packages on grounds of corruption as it contradicts the bank's previous decisions on these contracts.

In a letter to the WB, the LGED said that in June 2003, it detected identical rates and handwriting in the tender bids for these schemes and sought the WB's 'no-objection' for re-bidding. But the WB did not agree to treat those activities as proof of collusive bidding. Subsequently, those eight contract packages were implemented uninterrupted.

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PROPOSED PROCUREMENT LAW Polls spend exigency makes ministers go against it

WB's \$200m loans hang on cabinet clearance by Nov 17

STAR REPORT

As the draft Public Procurement Law (PPL) subsumes strict measures standing in the way of misappropriation of funds and implementation of irregular projects, a section of ministers, treasury bench members and bureaucrats do not want the legislation ahead of the next parliamentary election, as it would restrict their authority over projects involving billions of taka.

On the other hand, the World Bank (WB) wants the Cabinet at least to approve the draft before November 17 as a bill to be tabled before parliament. Otherwise, it will defer sanctioning the \$200 million third tranche of its Development Support Credit (DSC) to Bangladesh.

The government has already fulfilled nine of the 13 conditions

the WB attached to the DSC. Among the rest, the WB clips the highest importance to the PPL, as it believes the country must ensure a cost effective procurement system to ensure good governance.

But, most of the ministers and ruling coalition lawmakers as well as a quarter of bureaucrats do not want the legislation ahead of the next parliamentary election, as it would restrict their authority over projects involving billions of taka.

At present, they take project decisions under the Public Procurement Regulation (PPR), 2003, which was also pushed through by the WB. But, the PPR being not a law, they often bypass its provisions through administrative decisions.

For instance, if a PPR provision

is violated in implementation of a project -- the bureaucrats and ministers concerned get it cleared by obtaining the Cabinet's approval. Many projects have also been approved in violation of the PPR in this manner. Again, the PPR after its adoption in 2003 has been relaxed in many areas under pressure from different ministries, planning ministry sources said.

But, once the PPL is enacted, such irregularities and bypassing will become very difficult.

"For example, if a ministry wants to modify a project, it then will have to resort to parliament for approval or seek a presidential ordinance," a planning ministry source said. "On the other hand, we have seen in the past that the

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France declares state of emergency

AP, Paris

President Jacques Chirac declared a state of emergency yesterday, paving the way for curfews to be imposed on riot-hit cities and towns in an extraordinary measure to halt France's worst civil unrest in decades after 12 nights of violence.

Police, meanwhile, said overnight unrest Monday-Tuesday, while still widespread and destructive, was not as violent as previous nights.

"The intensity of this violence is on the way down," National Police Chief Michel Gaudin said, citing fewer attacks on public buildings and fewer direct clashes between youths and police. He said rioting was reported in 226 towns across

France, compared to nearly 300 the night before.

The state-of-emergency decree invoked under a 50-year-old law allows curfews where needed and will become effective at midnight Tuesday, with an initial 12-day limit. Police massively reinforced as the violence has fanned out from its initial flash point in the north-eastern suburbs of Paris were expected to enforce the curfews. The army has not been called in.

Nationwide, vandals burned 1,173 cars, compared to 1,408 vehicles Sunday-Monday, police said. A total of 330 people were arrested, down from 395 the night before.

Local officials "will be able to impose curfews on the areas where

this decision applies," Chirac said at a Cabinet meeting. "It is necessary to accelerate the return to calm."

The recourse to a 1955 state-of-emergency law that dates back to France's war in Algeria was a measure both of the gravity of mayhem that has spread to hundreds of French towns and cities and of the determination of Chirac's sorely tested government to quash it.

Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin said curfew violators could be sentenced to up to two months imprisonment, adding that restoring order "will take time."

"We are facing determined individuals, structured gangs," Villepin told parliament on

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