

South Asian rivals restart peace talks

Aziz says Indo-Pak peace to change fate of S Asia

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz said the peace process with India could "change the destiny of South Asia" as the nuclear-armed rivals launched a new round of talks here on Tuesday.

The two-day talks between Indian foreign secretary Shiv Shankar Menon and his Pakistani counterpart Riaz Mohammed Khan mark the fourth round since a January 2004 deal to resume negotiations after a tense military stand-off.

A Pakistani foreign office official said the negotiations focusing on the six-decade dispute over Kashmir and on limiting nuclear and conventional arsenals on the sub-continent were held in a "cordial atmosphere".

"The two sides will meet again on Wednesday and a joint statement would be issued after the meeting," the official said on condition of anonymity.

Menon, who was ambassador to Islamabad from 2003 to 2006, later met Aziz and told him Tuesday's talks had been "useful and moving in the right direction," the premier's office said in a statement.

He assured Aziz that India would share with Pakistan the results of its inquiry into the last month's firebombing of a train between the two countries which killed 69 people, most of them Pakistanis returning home, it said.

"The ongoing interaction between Pakistan and India can result in (the) resolution of outstanding disputes between the two countries and change the destiny of South Asia," Aziz said.

India and Pakistan have fought three wars since independence in 1947, two over the Himalayan territory of Kashmir. They each hold part of the region but claim it in its entirety.

They also massed hundreds of thousands of troops along the border after militants attacked the Indian parliament in December 2001. New Delhi blamed Pakistan-backed militants.

The three-year-old peace process has reduced mutual suspicion through a series of "confidence-building measures" including transport links, but it has made little progress on core issues including Kashmir.

It suffered a near-fatal blow in July 2006 when India accused Pakistan's military spy agency and Pakistan-based Islamic militants of involvement in train blasts in the Indian commercial hub of Mumbai which killed 186 people.

Rab catches

FROM PAGE 1 he had been transferred recently," a Rab official quoted Nital as saying.

Nital also alleged that Harun took Tk 40,000 from him on March 1 saying that he would use the money to build a mosque in his home village.

Advocate Mafizul said Harun asked for money from him to meet the cost of moving.

Captain Syed Mohammad As-sazid and Captain Yasir Sarwat led the operation. Captain As-sazid said they were earlier informed through a source that Harun does not release any file without a bribe.

Following the information, they set up a net of surveillance to catch Harun red-handed and as part of that plan some plainclothesmen took position just outside his office around 2:00pm yesterday.

The elite force members stopped Nital as soon as he came out of Harun's office and started questioning him. As he admitted to

Yet India and Pakistan pushed ahead with a meeting of their foreign ministers last month after the deadly bombing of the "Friendship Express".

The countries are also expected to finalise agreements on the rapid return of inadvertent border crossers, the relaxation of visa rules and meetings between border officials, officials said.

Foreign office officials said Pakistan had made proposals concerning the nuclear and conventional military balance between the neighbours, who conducted tit-for-tat atomic weapon tests in May 1998 and still test-fire missiles.

The two countries earlier this month held their first meeting of a panel set up to fight terrorism jointly and agreed to share information.

Political parties

FROM PAGE 1 Party and Jamaat-e-Islami will have to be registered and will be forced to disclose the sources of their incomes and report their expenditures to the EC.

The EC believes total absence of any regulation allows political parties to use their influence unrestrictedly in raising funds and to indulge in using the funds in any manner they deem fit, sources close to the EC said explaining the commission's move.

Affluent persons and business firms contribute large sums of money to political parties hoping that if elected the parties will squarely return such favours, the sources added.

Meanwhile the EC plans to ask the government to prepare national identification cards dropping the idea of voter ID cards.

The EC now believes that the government is actively considering the preparation of multipurpose national ID cards, the sources said.

"The election commission will send a proposal to the government in this regard," said a source close to the EC.

The EC yesterday at a meeting with Bangladesh Human Rights Commission (BHRIC) also disclosed the plan.

"The Election Commission informed us that it is giving importance to the idea of national ID cards," former chief election commissioner KM Sadek, who led the delegation of BHRIC, told reporters after the meeting.

The former CEC said they placed a set of recommendations for a free and fair election.

the Rab members of having bribed Harun, the elite force entered Harun's room with Nital.

Then they searched the office room thoroughly and retrieved Tk 20,000 from Harun's desk drawer and Tk 5,000 from the pocket of Dutch Bangla Bank official Hasanuzzaman.

Besides, the Rab members seized six income tax files, two mobile phone sets, and Harun's money deposit book of AB Bank Ltd.

Rab sources said the deposit book shows that Harun deposited Tk 75,000 on May 17, 2006, Tk 90,000 on July 13, 2006, Tk 26,000 on May 9, 2006 and Tk 13,000 on March 10, 2006.

The Rab officials suspect that Harun has accounts in multiple banks.

At the time of filing this report last night Rab was searching through Harun's residence for further evidence of his bribe taking.

BDR to set up 25

FROM PAGE 16 shelter in different parts of India. Talking to senior journalists at BDR headquarters on the recently held BDR-BSF meeting in New Delhi, he said a list of 170 Bangladeshi criminals was handed over to the Indian side while it (India) also gave them a list of 70 Indian criminals hiding in Bangladesh.

"They've assured that they will look into the matter," General Shakil said.

As the Indian side raised the deportation of Ulfa leader Anup Chetia, the BDR chief told them since it's a sensitive matter, the Bangladesh government cannot take any sudden decision about it.

However, General Shakil said Dhaka emphasised sharing of intelligence to detect and arrest the criminals hiding in the two neighbouring countries.

Asked if the handover of criminals is possible in the absence of an extradition treaty, he said it is possible if goodwill exists between the two countries.

The Bangladesh delegation, he

Tarique

FROM PAGE 1 High Court.

Azizur Rahman Dulu, a lawyer of the Supreme Court, yesterday filed a writ petition challenging the legality of the remand, granted by the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka, on March 8, according to the UNB.

The writ petition is likely to be moved before a regular High Court division bench on Sunday (Mar 18), court sources said.

The law enforcers secured a four-day remand for interrogation in an extortion case when Tarique, senior joint-secretary general of BNP, was produced in the CMM's Court on March 8. He was arrested on March 7 midnight from his mother's cantonment residence.

The home secretary, the inspector general of police (IGP), the DMP commissioner, the officer-in-charge of Gulshan Police Station and the investigation officer (IO) of the case have been made respondents.

When contacted, a senior counsel for the BNP told the news agency that they knew nothing about the move.

Dubai accident

FROM PAGE 1 forcing Dubai International Airport, the busiest in the Middle East, to suspend its operations for about eight hours. The Airbus is lying idle at the Dubai Airport at present awaiting investigation, Biman sources said.

Meanwhile, Managing Director (MD) of Bangladesh Biman MA Momen ruled out the possibility to compensate Dubai International Airport authorities for occupying their airport for a long time.

"The Dhaka-bound Airbus safely landed at Dubai Airport from the Heathrow," Biman MD told The Daily Star adding, "Dubai Airport also showed green signal to the aircraft for take-off."

The Airbus of the national flag carrier, worth \$90 million, was bought in 1996.

"If the insurance company found that the aircraft is Beyond Economic Repair (BER), they will pay Biman Bangladesh the insurance money, otherwise they will pay for repairing the damaged aircraft," he added.

Meanwhile, out of the two probe committees, the one led by Capt Ismail, Chief of Flight Safety, has reached Dubai to investigate the cause of the accident and to assess losses, Biman sources said.

Ctg port

FROM PAGE 16 of meeting the need for power at the port for the next 20 years. The plants would be installed within the port area to reduce the dependence on power supplied by the Power Development Board.

According to its decisions, entry of export containers to the CCT would be allowed 48 hours before the berthing of a ship. Such containers would be allowed to enter the port for 48 hours since the arrival of the ship at New Mooring Container Terminal (NCT) and General Container Berth (GCB).

These would be allowed to enter the port only against an anchored ship. Loading of containers in other ships would not be allowed. If shipping agents violate this, the port authorities would fine them at a very high rate, the meeting decided.

The port authorities would give a notice for auction of import cargo after 20 days of arrival, and after 30 days, the cargo would be handed over to the customs authorities.

The port authorities would also send a proposal to the government to reduce the auction time to 30 days from 45 days now.

Berthing quota for container ships would be increased to 11 from nine. The port authorities would not take any storage charge for containers bound for the Inland Container Depot (ICD) until those reach the destination.

The meeting also decided to continue operation of the CCT by Saif Powertec till expiry of its contract with the CPA for operating gantry cranes. It also decided to allow back up operation at the NCT by Saif Powertec until a new operator is appointed.

The meeting was attended by CPA Chairman Mohammad Moslehuddin, Task Force Commander Brigadier General Hasan Naser, high military officials and members of the CPA.

CG okays

FROM PAGE 16 The meeting also approved the Criminal Procedure Code (second amendment) Ordinance 2007 in compliance with the Supreme Court directives for separation of the judiciary from the executive.

Briefing newsmen about the outcome of the meeting, Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Syed Fahim Munaim, said the council of advisers examined a feasibility study report of PricewaterhouseCoopers on captive power, which says about 600 megawatts of power can be received from captive power system.

The company submitted the report in 2005.

Replying to a question, the press secretary said the Power Development Board in the guideline proposed to buy electricity from captive power plants at the maximum rate of Tk 2.12 as per present gas price.

He said 18 captive power providers have expressed interest in providing power.

Nepali King must go, says Koirala

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal has moved a step closer to ditching its monarchy with the Himalayan nation's premier turning on embattled King Gyanendra and calling for him to quit, analysts and officials said yesterday.

Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, the respected octogenarian architect of Nepal's peace process, on Monday said King Gyanendra should abdicate -- a major about-turn for a politician previously seen as sympathetic to the throne.

"The prime minister was the only man in the ruling parties who supported the monarchy and now he has given it up," Rabindra Khanal, a political analyst and professor from Nepal's Tribhuvan University, told AFP.

Koirala had argued Monday that the king, viewed by his supporters as a god-like figure, was trying to undermine a peace deal between the government and the fiercely republican Maoist rebels.

Politicians have already accused the king's allies of stirring a recent wave of deadly ethnic unrest in the south of the country.

The prime minister also said Gyanendra, 59, should have quit last year after protests forced him to relinquish dictatorial powers, state-run Nepal Television reported.

"Even now a new environment would be created if the king abdicates voluntarily," said the prime minister, who has in the past extolled the virtues of a constitutional monarchy, preferring the system to more radical change.

Gunaraj Luitel, a senior editor from the Kantipur media group, said Koirala's damning comments simply reflected the increasing desire in impoverished Nepal for a republic -- or at least a significant rolling back of royal powers.

"He (Koirala) wants to give a clear indication to the king that he needs to remain outside politics and that if he takes part in political activities his future will be very dark," said Luitel.

"There is a slim chance this monarchy can survive, but there are a vast amount of people who are not in favour of monarchy," the editors said.

According to Khanal, the prime minister and the Nepali Congress Party can also not afford to be out of

step with the electorate during an election year.

"There is massive demand for a republic," said the professor. "It could be a move to protect his political party because the Nepali Congress cannot be seen to go against the sentiments of the people."

Local media ran front-page stories about the premier's comments, with the English language Kathmandu Post reporting "Nation on republican path: PM," and the Himalayan Times reporting "Time he gave up the throne, says Koirala."

King Gyanendra's Shah dynasty has a 238-year history, and Nepal's kings have for centuries been revered as incarnations of the Hindu Lord Vishnu, the god of protection.

But the rotund Gyanendra has had a tough five years as king since he was vaulted to the throne by the massacre of his brother and most of the royal family, staged by a drink-and-drug fuelled crown prince who later killed himself.

Since the king abandoned his ill-fated attempt at direct rule aimed at crushing the Maoists, he has been accused of abuse of power and has been stripped of his status as head of state.

Even the state bank has decided to remove images of the king from banknotes.

His ultimate fate will soon be decided. In June the country is scheduled to vote in a body that will permanently rewrite the constitution.

For Nepal's Maoists, who have agreed to end their 10-year "People's War" in exchange for a place in government, Koirala's comments have been taken as yet another nail in the coffin of a king they want to see the back of.

"The prime minister's change in stance is very progressive," top Maoist official Dinanath Sharma told AFP, adding that the king should sit up and listen.

"Now it would be wise decision on the king's part if he abdicates from the throne. There should not be any form of monarchy in the country," Sharma said.

Orion on Hawa clouts

FROM PAGE 1

In the past, Orion chief Obaidul Karim's close ties with BNP earned him acquisition of Kohinoor Chemical Company Ltd in 1993 through a tendering process. Kohinoor was a profitable state-owned enterprise that was already listed in the securities market and giving dividends to its shareholders.

Obaidul Karim's only other venture that is enlisted in the share market (from 1994) is the Orion Infusion Ltd (as Mala Chemical Industries), which he acquired in the nineties.

In 1996, when the share market of the country fell prey to big-time financial predators, Orion Infusion announced large dividends and bonus shares to its shareholders. This pushed the price of Orion shares up by many times. After the share market crashed, Orion did not offer any dividend or bonus share -- prompting the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to file an ineffective case against the company.

Nobody was punished for deliberate market manipulation after the share market crash while Orion shareholders counted huge loss. It was not until 2005 that Orion Infusion shareholders would receive any dividend. Orion also offered dividends by 10 percent in 2006.

Obaidul Karim's fortunes magnified significantly when the BNP-led alliance government returned to power in October 2001. Being close to the then prime minister's son Tarique Rahman, all Karim needed was to pick a project, sources said.

Using Tarique's influence, Orion got the Gultistan-Jatrabari Flyover project in a tender through manipulation and side-tracking a better offer. Back in January, during the meeting with this correspondent, Obaidul Karim tried to explain how difficult it was for him to persuade the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) that the flyover project would be a beneficial project for the country.

In recent reports, it has been alleged that Karim gave an expensive Infinity sport utility vehicle to Harris Chowdhury, former political secretary to the then prime minister to win the flyover deal. Sources said Karim also gave a top BNP politician a house in the US for helping him get the project on very favourable terms by compromising national interest.

Bagging the City Centre deal was another example of blatant favouritism where the DCC awarded the 37-storey commercial building project at a nominal price to Belhassa Accom JV. This building will house 10 floors of free car parking, a convention centre, a restaurant, a business lounge, a gymnasium, a helipad and roads on all four sides of the building.

The Meghnaghat-2 power project was awarded to BON Consortium, where BON represented a joint venture of Belhassa, Orion and Nissioiwi -- with Japanese Nissioiwi leading the bid. However, the Japanese company was replaced by STEAG as the lead bidder after the bid was won by using Nissioiwi's experience. This unheard of practice was allowed just because of Hawa Bhaban's influence.

While STEAG actually remains out of the picture, the power project is already facing uncertainty after Karim went into hiding in January. To save the project, Karim has deployed his Belhassa counterpart who has recently met the government promising that they can continue the project without Orion. Neither Orion nor Belhassa has any prior experience in the field of power plants.

"Entertaining this power deal any longer is a full-scale folly for Bangladesh. Experience tells us BON Consortium will be unable to push this project through and has already breached several contractual terms," said a power board source.

Orion's air deal is yet another questionable deal. In 2005, it brought Malaysian private airliner Air Asia to Bangladesh as its partner and obtained a temporary air licence in March 2006 under the banner of Air East Asia (AEA).

Aviation sector sources said that through the AEA licence, Air Asia is planning to operate as a local airliner and devour the market of the ailing national flag carrier Biman. Local airliners get certain operational advantages that foreign airliners do not get.

If the AEA can meet certain requirements dictated in this temporary licence within this month, it will obtain the final licence -- Air Transport Operating Licence (Atol). The AEA is seeking to operate on both domestic and international routes.

The AEA will emerge as a Bangladeshi company and therefore, if allowed, would gradually take over various country-to-country air quotas of Bangladesh known as Air Services Agreement (ASA). Biman presently uses these ASAs and it has been resisting giving shares of any of its profitable international routes to GMG, the country's first and lone private airlines.

In 2004, Orion Group was awarded another private airlines licence, but could not launch any service under that licence. Instead, Orion brought in Air Asia - an aggressive and rapidly expanding low cost private airliner.

Outlaw killed in 'crossfire'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushthia

A top cadre of the outlawed Biplobi Communist Party (BCP) was killed in 'crossfire' between police and his cohorts at Barbara under Mirpur upazila of the district early yesterday.

Mirpur police said a team raided the house of Rabiul Islam alias Rabi, 28, and arrested him at about 8:30pm on Monday.

During interrogation Rabiul admitted his involvement with the outfit and having firearms hidden in nooks and corners of Barbara village, sources said.

Police reached Barbara GK (Ganges-Kabadak) canal at about 3.30am yesterday with Rabiul to recover the firearms.

Sensing police presence, the BCP cadres opened fire on them. Police retaliated with fire resulting in an hour-long gun battle between them and the BCP cadres.

According to police, Rabiul got caught in the 'crossfire' when he tried to escape from police van during the shootout and died on the spot.

Police recovered a rifle and five bullets from the spot.

According to police, Rabiul was accused in ten cases including two for murder filed with Mirpur Police Station.

He was also a close accomplice of local top BNP cadre Tokon, sources said.

BB asks banks

FROM PAGE 16

"It has been noticed that some banks are not considering the borrower's capital size, business volume, financial requirements, ownership structure, and repayment capability before lending," the circular said.

"It appears that the banks are lending without properly maintaining the credit discipline and compliance policies," it added.

The central bank also said it observed that some of the loans lack necessary collateral and audited financial statements of the borrowers, making it difficult to monitor and recover the loans.

The central bank said in some cases multiple banks lend money to a single company. "Such a practice paves the way for loan diverting by borrowers," the circular said adding that such borrowers usually take new loans from another bank to repay previous loans.

The circular asked the banks to consider inter-bank consultation, examination of audited financial statements of borrowers, and borrowers' ratings issued by credit rating agencies before approving any new loan to large industries and groups of companies.

55 more deer

FROM PAGE 16

director of the safari park and divisional forest officer of Wildlife Management and Nature Conservation department, said both the animals are considered rare species and these are hardly found in Bangladesh.

He also said, "Ma Ma Ching herself had informed us on Monday night about the Goral being kept in her possession and requested us to take away the pet."

With these latest recovery, the number of additions to the safari park rose to 131.

Saarc Car Rally

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Saarc objectives and also act as a curtain raiser to the upcoming Saarc Summit in New Delhi on April 3-4, 2007, the district administration sources said.

The routes have been selected to highlight the places of major tourist attractions of the member countries and possibilities of trade by road among the constituent countries.

The jeeps would leave Bangladesh via Burimari (Lalmoirhat) on March 18 covering 1,323 kilometres before entering Bhutan through India. The rally then will leave Bhutan for Nepal through India, from where it would start for Pakistan through Uttar Pradesh in India.

The participants of the rally are expected to travel to Afghanistan, from where they would return to India via Pakistan. They will be received by the Saarc leaders in New Delhi on April 3.

Later, the participants of the rally would leave for Mumbai, from where they would arrive Colombo by sea. After that, the participants will reach the Maldives by ferry officially concluding the event.

The idea of organising the car rally was floated in the last Dhaka Saarc Summit in November, 2005.

Kader Siddiqui

FROM PAGE 16

Haque, upazila nirbahi officer of Sakhipur, told The Daily Star that they have recovered and regained control of the 21 acres of vested property that remained in Kader Siddiqui's possession for last few years.

This correspondent made repeated attempts over cellphone to reach Kader Siddiqui but without any success.

Kader Siddiqui won the last parliamentary election in 2001 from Tangail 5-Sakhipur-Basail. He defeated Awami League candidate Salam Khan by around 26,000 votes.

50 killed as snow blankets Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar, India

At least 50 people were killed as snow engulfed Kashmir and torrential rains pounded the rest of northern India, officials said yesterday.

Some 28 people were killed and 25 others received burn injuries in separate lightning strikes in Uttar Pradesh as rains crippled life in the populous northern Indian state, they said.

Seventeen people, including two children and a soldier died in landslides, cold and floods in Indian Kashmir and its summer capital Srinagar reported its heaviest March snowfall in 15 years, weather officials said.

Five other weather-related casualties were reported from other parts of northern India, lashed by rains since Friday.

In Kashmir, five Hindu pilgrims trekking to a snowbound shrine high in the Himalayas froze to death.

A police patrol discovered the five bodies huddled together Monday in a shelter built to protect travellers to the Vaishno Devi shrine.

"All five pilgrims died of hypothermia as they weren't wearing enough clothes and heavy snow had brought down temperatures," said Puneet Kumar, a senior official at the shrine.

Another 13 people suffered hypothermia injuries. Nine were in critical condition but were "recovering fast" in hospital, the official said.

The dead were all from Uttar Pradesh, and officials said they had underestimated the cold at that time of year in Kashmir where the mercury regularly falls below zero Celsius (32 Fahrenheit).

"Ten more people died due to hypothermia, landslides and caving in of structures across the state," a police officer said while rescue officials reported another two deaths in the snowbound region.

Snowstorms have paralysed life

Polluters

FROM PAGE 1

workshop on 'Industrial Pollution and Environment Compliance in the Greater Dhaka Watershed' at Sonargaon Hotel where a study by Institute of Water Modelling (IWM) claimed that dissolved oxygen level in the peripheral rivers fell below one mg/l during the last seven dry months.

Another study conducted by the World Bank showed that over 300 various outlets of around 7,000 industries in Dhaka Metropolitan area continue to discharge untreated effluent to the water bodies.

Adviser Iqbal said industrial growth and discharging of untreated wastewater within and outside Dhaka have further worsened the problem. He also pointed out that Saidabad water treatment plant is unable to treat the Stitalakkhya water due to massive pollution from surrounding industries. "Presence of higher levels of ammonia at Sarulia point has affected the treatment plant."

"All major surface water bodies including the main rivers -- Buriganga, Stitalakkhya, Turag and Balu -- are virtually dead, posing a serious threat to the source of water supply for the inhabitants," he said.

Dhaka WASA is heavily dependent on groundwater, which is depleting day by day, Adviser Iqbal said, adding, "Rapid fall of the water table and little or no recharge will soon exhaust the vital resource. Furthermore, seepage of industrial and solid wastes into the groundwater is likely to cause an irreversible contamination."

Leading environmental pollution specialist Adriana Damianova described the workshop's objectives, study overview and agenda while SM Mahbubur Rahman and Dr Nandini Dasgupta presented the draft technical report and the socio-economic analysis respectively at the inaugural function.

Chaired by LGRD Secretary Safar Raj Hossain, the workshop was also addressed by Environment and Forest Secretary SM Jahurul Islam.

Toxic waste

FROM PAGE 1

The factory officials claimed that the waste is treated before it is discharged. But the air was thick with the stench of chemicals.

The people living along the tank complain of stinks and menace of mosquitoes since the factory started discharging the toxic waste.

When this correspondent reached the Generation Next Fashion Ltd yesterday, the staff and officials were busy preparing themselves for a visit by a team from the World Bank.

"The World Bank wants to portray our factory as a model as we have a good effluent treatment plant," said Major (retired) Sharif.

He claimed that their treatment plant remains functioning round the clock. He also said that a group of technicians from the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) has already tested their treated liquid waste and found nothing harmful.

in revolt-hit Kashmir, shutting schools, knocking out power and telephone lines and closing the region's main highway, police said.

"The main highway has been shut due to heavy snow and nearly 800 vehicles are stranded," police officer Abdul Hameed told AFP.

Labourers were using bulldozers, snow removal machines and shovels to open up the 300 kilometre (186-mile) highway, the main route for supplies to the Kashmir valley from state winter capital Jammu and the rest of the subcontinent.

"It may take us a few days to restore power supply in the valley," senior engineer Nissar Ahmed said.

Offices in the