Hartal in CHT ends quietly

STAR REPORT

A dawn-to-dusk hartal in the three districts of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) called by Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) was observed yesterday by and large peacefully. Reports received in Dhaka said

only in Khagrachhari some stray incidents of violence occurred leaving a child bullet-injured. The hartal passed off peacefully in

Rangamati and Bandarban.

Army and police were deployed across the CHT region to avert untoward incidents.

The PCJSS called the hartal to press its demands for removal of the chairman of the CHT Development Board, full implementation of the CHT peace accord, removal of tem-porary army camps from the CHT region and appointment of a full indigenous minister for the CHT affairs ministry.

Our Khagrachhari correspondent reported that activists of the PCJSS and United People's Democratic Front (UPDF) had gunfights at five places in the district.

A boy named Jewel Tripura at the district town was seriously injured as stray bullets hit him. The other incidents took place at

Giriful of Mahalchhari and Pankhaiyapara, Khagrapur and TokaichhariofRamgarh.

Hundreds of PCJSS activists picketed in support of the hartal on different roads in the district town.

Some shops remained open

BSS, Cox's Bazar during the hartal in Babuchhara, Kopakhali, Pujgang and Bizitali area A joint team of police and

as the UPDF is strong in those areas. Shops remained open in those areas in five upazilas including Matiranga, Ramgarh, Manikchhari and Panchhari and in Shapla Chattar area of the town, which have many Bangalee inhabitants.

hartal and asked the government to accept its demands

reported that hartal was observed ere without any violence.

Chandra Shekhar Chakma announced at a rally that they would go for a fresh programme in January if the government did not implement the peace accord by December

Meanwhile, the Parbatya Shantu Larma.



DHAKA TUESDAY DECEMBER 9, 2003

Shoib Chy sent Minister snubs capture the Nakhalpara

Ahmadiyya Mosque on November 20 and over 1,000 anti-Ahmadiyyas attacked policemen, guarding the mosque, the follow-ing day, injuring at least 50 people, including 18 law enforcers.

Mosharef told The Daily Star by telephone that the crisis must be ironed out through talks, adding: "I believe in tolerance and I am thinking of holding talks with leaders of the agitating anti-Ahmadiyya group soon."

Acknowledging the sect's right to religious practice, he said the Ahmadivvas, as citizens, are entitled to protection by the government from attackers.

"The government is providing them with round-the-clock protec-The defence lawyers moved a bail petition saying Shoib was tion," Mosharef said with a promise of taking more steps.

Tareq Mobasser, a spokesman r Ahmadiyyas, said, "Although The prosecution argued that Shoib was involved in anti-state for Ahmadiyyas, said, many of our people died, fled or were driven out of home and our mosques and property were damaged, we are grateful to the government for protection it gave us." Magistrate Shafiq Anwar rejected the bail petition and ordered that

"But police protection is not a ermanent solution. The problem should be resolved to the core," he said

Mobasser asked the government to identify the instigators of violence against Ahmadivvas and said: "Otherwise the situation will spiral out of control.'

Eight Ahmadiyyas were killed, hundreds were evicted from their lands and at least 15 of their mosques vandalised across the country since 1985.

Rail staff FROM PAGE 12

going to work. The mob also stopped a Santahar-bound train from leaving the station at 2:00pm. The DTS finally gave in to the hoodlums' demand and issued orders for reinstatement of the two suspended employees

Police and railway authorities assumed a passive role during the whole incident, sources said.

Major cabinet

FROM PAGE 1 sizing of the 53-strong council of ministers.

The council of ministers was trimmed down to 53 from 60 when three cabinet ministers and four state ministers were relieved on May 22.

"The sufferings of villagers hit the nadir at the beginning of rice harvest when the gangs forced them to pay Tk 800 to Tk 1,000 in cash an acre," the DC said. Some senior ministers even offered to resign from the cabinet to help the prime minister bring down the number of the council to 40 to 45, the PMO sources said.

"I told the prime minister that I am ready to volunteer my resignation should she feel shy to drop some cabinet members," a senior minister told The Daily Star on condition of anonymity yesterday.

The speculations over an Sardar, Nakul Sardar and Sahadev impending cabinet reshuffle have Sardar. They were living on a halfleft several ministers wary of losing acreplot. their portfolio. Some junior minis ters are also keeping their fingers tial person, claimed ownership of crossed.

Acid attacks may be tried in speedy tribunals

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

day.

vear

combat such crimes," he said. The government will consider Ferdous Ara Begum, joint secredealing with acid attacks under the Speedy Trial Tribunal for quick tary of women and children affairs, emphasised that a social move-ment was a must to build anti-acid disposal of the cases, said Law Minister Moudud Ahmed yesterviolence awareness.

Salma Khan, member of the Committee for Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, said a social change in attitude towards women is needed to stave off acid throwing.

'A social movement is needed to

Advocate UM Habibunnessa member of Naripakkho, described acid as a potent weapon and put an underscore on a strong role of media

Bangladeshi farmer at Shingnagar

border under the same upazila on

Thursday. The BSF returned his

body to local BDR personnel

through a flag meeting Sunday evening, the BDR sources added.

Thai Exim Bank

During the talks, they informed the meeting that the Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra is

Rally demands

BSF FROM PAGE 1

FROM PAGE 1

discussion.

FROM PAGE 12

ing cases of acid violence. The minister underscored Earlier, the BSF shot dead another collective efforts to build broad consciousness and effective roles of law enforcers as crucial to rolling back the incidence of acid violence.

The minister's statement came

as the Acid Survivors Foundation

(ASF) revealed data on 383 acid

victims, including 244 women and

25 children, in a string of incidents

from January 1 to December 3 this

Speaking at a discussion on "

Living with Acids" organised by the

ASF at BRAC Centre, Moudud said

a central monitoring cell of the

home and law ministries would be

tasked with monitoring the pend-

Some women among the acid survivors attended the discussion and told their stories of how they became victims and struggled to get back to normal life through tribulations.

Rupali Akhter of Manikganj was attacked with acid by her husband and in-laws for Tk 50,000 in dowry, but the attackers are still at large.

likely to visit Bangladesh in January Reba Yasmin, another acid next. survivor, came under attack for Communications Secretary Syed Rezaul Hayat, Chief Engineer of the Roads and Highways Department Sheikh Rabiul Islam and senior officials took part in discussion ditching a marriage proposition by a young man in a case still to be disposed of by court.

The ASF data show 114 men were among the acid victims in 312 incidents in January 1 to December 3. Abdul Quadir, as the representative of male acid victims, also told his harrowing story of near-death experience and relentless struggle for survival.

The affected families are of

Chiradhon Sardar, Khitish Sardar,

Bikas Sardar, Ramesh Sardar, Nishi

Pada Barman, Moniraj Barman,

Nal Babu Barman, Khagen

Barman, Santosh Barman, Kalipada Barman, Ganesh

Barman, Kalu Barman, Bhagirath

Barman, Kishor Sardar, Bhim

Brajen Barman, a local influen-

not end just by enacting laws, rather it should enforce it with utmost sincerity," added Shahjahan. Attorney General AF Hassan Ariff, attending the afternoon session of the discussion as chief Abu Naser Khan, Golam Kibria, Zahidur Rahman, Asharraf Amir Ullah, Dr Nur Uddin, Shahidul Islam and others spoke at the rally. guest, viewed the legal system as the last instrument to help the victims but said it was not enough.

Torched homes

his house

filed.

Officer-in-charge of Niamatpur Police Station Ali Ahmed Hasmi, citing official records of 1962, told reporters that nine acres of land at the place belonged to forefathers of

Brajen. But in 1972, somehow the land was recorded as khas land and Brajen filed a case in 1991 claim-ing owenership of the land. He appealed to higher court after a lower court verdict in 1998, he added.

On police presence at the spot, the OC said a sub-inspector and a constable in plainclothes were on

duty elsewhere. They went to the

spot on hearing about the incident

and then came to the police station

Niamatpur Upazila Nirbahi Officer Amjad Hossain Sardar said

the indigenous families turned

down a proposal from the deputy

commissioner of Naogaon to

rehabilitate them at the nearby

About this, Rabindranath Saren

general secretary of the Aboriginal

Council, said indigenous families

are accustomed to living separately

and not with other people.

Panishail Asrayan project houses.

The OC denied that a case was

to return there with more forces.

6 journos hurt ist. The local journalists also sought police protection during the at the entry points to prevent journalists from other parts of the region ogramme

said.

alleged.

from entering the club premises, the The BNP cadres of Mizan, infasources added mously known as 'Mizan Bahini' The BNP activists also vandamoved to foil the programme and threw up check posts at different lised and hijacked the microbus used to carry senior journalists from entry points to the town. The cadres threw brickbats at the

Barisal from in front of the press club, wounding the driver. press club Sunday night and Monday morning and cordoned off Barisal Reporters Unity (BRU) and Jhalakathi Press Club conthe venue. The riling party activists also held gatherings around the demned the attack and inaction of police during the mayhem. press club and delivered provoca-

The BRU members and other professionals of the region gathered at the press club from early morning to protest the attack on the journal-

Hajj flight from Dec 31

UNB, Dhaka

FROM PAGE 12

The hajj flight will start from December 31. A total of 12 flights will also operate from Chittagong to carry pilgrims to Saudi Arabia.

attacked by the cadres. The decisions were taken in an The ruling party activists also inter-ministerial meeting on hajj assaulted and injured Barisal management and haji camp main tenance at Askona Hajj Camp in Correspondent of daily Sangbad Azad Alauddin and President of the city yesterday. Barisal Bar Association Mominul

Chaired by State Minister for Religious Affairs Mosharraf

non-governmental organisation (NGO) from a deep forest in Naikhyanchhari upazila of Bandarban district after seven

PCISS leaders held a rally after the

Our Rangamati correspondent

General Secretary of the PCJSS

The rally was held at the Court building premises. The PCJSS' student wing Pahari Chhatra Parishad and Hill Women's Federation also took part in the hartal. Bangladesh Students Union and the Original and Old Bangalee Velfare Association also supported witnesses give deposition in

Bangalee Students Organisation held a rally protesting the hartal and demanded removal of PCJSS chief

Our Bandarban correspondent also reported that the hartal was peaceful

The PCJSS and Parbatya Bangalee Gana Parishad held separate rallies.

tive and indecent speeches, sources

Assistant Superintendent of Police, Sadar Circle, Abu Sufian asked the press club authorities to

cancel their programme and leave

the premises instead of dispersing the cadres and removing the cor-

don, sources and journalists

But the besieged journalists refused to leave the club premises

before meeting fellow journalists from Barisal. At around noon, a

group of journalists from Barisal

reached the press club entrance

by passing the check posts only to be

COURT CORRESPONDENT the US military said Five metropolitan magistrates of The attack on the soldier from the Dhaka, prosecution witnesses in US Army's 101st Airborne Division former BNP lawmaker Shahjahan occurred in the city of Mosul, Brig. Howlader Sujan murder case, gave Gen. Mark Kimmitt said at a news their depositions before a court briefing in Baghdad. Earlier Monday, witnesses in

Jahangir Alam Mollah of the Speedy Trial Tribunal-4, Dhaka Division, recorded the statements of Shafiq Anwar, Abdul Haq, JagannathDasKhokan,Khondaker Fatema Begum and Quamrunnahar for about two hours. They were also cross-examined by defence lawyers.

During the hearing, the wit-nesses told the court that they recorded statements of five witnesses on different days when the case was being probed.

Three female

NGO workers

rescued after

seven hours

hours of their abduction.

about 9:00am.

about 4:00pm.

BDR custody.

vesterday

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) yesterday

rescued three female workers of a

Police and locals said a gang of

about 12 tribal miscreants abducted

the three from Ghumdum area at

The gang picked up them at gunpoint while they were going to a

school, run by Ganoswasthya,

during hartal in the hill district

enforced by Parbatya Chattagram

Being informed, the joint team of

police and BDR started operation in the area and rescued the three at

The NGO workers are now in

Jana Sanghati Samity (PCISS).

Prosecution

Sujan murder

The court earlier recorded statements of 48 prosecution witnesses, including Hena Akhter, mother of the victim.

Sujan, 35, lawmaker for Brahmanbaria-6 and former vice-Mohammad Mohammad Mohsin Hall Students Union of Dhaka University (DU), was abducted by his rivals He was found dead near Doyel

Chattar on the DU campus on July 3,2001.

Sujon's mother filed an abduction case with Motijheel Police Station accusing BNP leader Rausan Alam and four others the same day.

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) pressed charges against Rausan and 11 others on July 9 this year.

Accused Alam and six others are now out on bail and five are at large since the killing. The court adjourned the hear-

Mosul, about 250 miles north of Baghdad, said dozens of US troops cordoned off the city's central neighbourhood of al-Muthana, inspecting cars and searching people walking in the streets. At least three helicopters flew overhead at low altitude.

> "We are looking for bad guys," a soldier said without elaborating.

to jail

COURT CORRESPONDENT

tion of a seven-day remand.

with a forwarding report.

state activities for long.

US soldier

AP, Baghdad

killed in Iraq

Salauddin Shoib Chowdhury,

arrested from Zia International Airport (ZIA) November 29 for his

alleged Mossad connection was

sent to jail yesterday on comple-

The airport police produced

Shoib before the Court of Chief

Metropolitan Magistrate at 3:30pm

In the report, police said the written speech that Shoib was

supposed to read out at a seminar in Tel Aviv proved beyond doubt

that he has been involved in anti-

Police also said different faxed

and e-mailed messages seized

from Shoib's possession con-firmed that he passed sensitive information out of the country.

A project profile, seeking a fund of Tk 12 crore from Jews in Israel, was also seized from him. He sought the fund to publish three

In Mosul yesterday, a soldier from the 101st Airborne Division died and two others in his unit were wounded when rebels detonated a bomb as their convoy drove by.

The US military said troops north of Baghdad on Also Monday seized \$1.9 million in cash and false identification documents in a raid targeting the suspected financier of insurgents.

US troops in Samarra seized the cash and arrested one person in the operation Sunday, said Maj. Josslyn Aberle, spokeswoman for the 4th Infantry Division.

"They didn't catch the original arget but they detained one of his relatives and seized the money, Aberle said.

Samarra, some 70 miles north of Baghdad, was the site of heavy fighting Nov. 30 between Iraqi guerrillas and US soldiers who were delivering newIragi currency to local banks.

FROM PAGE 1 A US soldier was killed Monday BNP, was on his way home from a local market when a group of unidentified men stabbed him at outside a gas station in an apparent drive-by shooting in northern Iraq, Shat Matha Road. He was rushed to the hospital in

AL leader

a critical condition where he died in the early hours of yesterday. A case was filed with the local police station. No-one was arrested.

dailies -- Dainik Sonali Din, Dainik

Shoib was trying to portray

Police are in the process of filing

Rupantar and Dainik Paribartan.

Bangladesh as a fundamentalis

and an extremist nation abroad

said police, claiming that he has hot links with the international

three cases on charge of sedition, violation of the Official Secrecy Act

and obtaining of forbidden visa of

being charged with sedition as part

activities and trying to portray

Bangladesh a fundamentalist and

Upon hearing both sides

Shoib be sent to Dhaka Central Jail. The court also asked the investiga-

tion officer to submit a report within seven days after filing the regular cases against Shoib.

of a conspiracy to harass him.

an extremist nation.

criminals.

Israel.

19 more robbers FROM PAGE 1 Chora and Jahangir Dakat gangs still holed up in their forest dens

would come out soon as their supply lines were cut. Police seized two locally made

guns and a huge cache of lethal weapons from Urir Char and other areas yesterday.

valuables.

forest.

Locals said villagers in the area were incensed as robbers often raided their houses at night and picked up young women or raped them in front of their relatives alongside looting their cash and

He said that the gangs also felled

The home ministry last night

said police reinforcements were

Law enforcers in nearby dis-

tricts were put on alert, a home ministry official said.

Yemen supports

The Republic of Yemen has offered

its support to Bangladesh's candi-

dature for the post of secretary

general of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC).

OIC secy-gen

UNB, Dhaka

dispatched to the areas to ensure

the arrest of gangsters.

trees on 47,000 acres in the coastal

Hossain Shajahan, the meeting also discussed the security aspects and overall facilities for the hajj pilgrims.

The meeting decided not to allow any pilgrim to stay in Saudi Arabia for more than 35 days. Intending hajj pilgrims, who have not yet taken meningitis vaccines, have been advised to contact their respective district civil surgeon offices or the Hajj camp.

Those who were administered the vaccines last year are not required to take it again.

The meeting advised the hajj pilgrims under private manage ment to complete their medical test by December 30.

About 40,000 pilgrims are expected to perform hajj this year from Bangladesh. Of them, about 10,000 will be handled through official management.

FROM PAGE 1

March 1.

and the rest foreign nationals.

This team will start work from

The new chief executive officer

will be Kazi Abdul Mazid, who is

now an advisor to Premier Bank

and previously served Prime Bank,

National Bank and Pubali Bank as

are Robert Frank Sebastian (US

citizen), Prichya Prachong (Thai),

Keith Douglas Cundale (British),

Faruk Uddin Ahammed (expatriate

Bangladeshi), Dilip Ghosh and

Pradeep Kumar Sarkar (Indians),

and Shahadat Hossain and Sameer

Howell (South African), Nancy

Chan (Singaporean), Shane Darrel

Knowler (New Zealander) and

Robert McAllister Ross (British)

An accounting team of Craig

Other advisors of the new team

managing directors.

Ahmad (Bangladeshis).

will assist them.

Thailand

Price water house

onden of daily Dakkhinanchal Shamim Ahmed, Barisal Correspondent of daily Khabor Patra Akkas Sikder, JhalakathiCorrespondent of Bhorer Kagoj Shamim Azad JhalakathiCorrespondent of Dainik Arthaniti and the microbus driver,

Kamruzzaman Jewel.

The besieged journalists held a protest meeting indoors, which was presided over by Ittefac Correspondent Shamsul Islam Chand and addressed by BRU President and New Age and Holiday Correspondent Anisur Rahman wapan, Sangbad Correspondent

Manabendra Batobayal, Daily Dakkhinanchal Editor M A Matin, Bhorer Kagoj Correspondent Akkas Sikder and Jugantor Correspondent Hemayetuddin Himu.

They condemned the attack what they termed was on freedom of speech and the press and warned the ruling party of its consequences.

ing till today. Nepalese PM

FROM PAGE 12 hold meeting with Prime Minister Khaleda Zia on December 18.

"Apart from Saarc, bilateral issues, including trade and road transit between Dhaka and Kathmandu, might figure in the meeting of the two prime minis-ters", said Paudel.

Thapa will call on President. Iajuddin Ahmed. Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan may call on the Nepali prime minister during his stay.

The Saarc chairperson will leave Dhaka on December 19 for Singapore en route to the Maldives on the last leg of his visit to the capitals of the seven South Asian nations.

Earlier, he visited India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bhutan.

AL scans FROM PAGE 12

The ALCWC meeting amid rife intra-party feuds over committee formation in Laxmipur, Purbo Dhala in Netrakona and also in Netrakona Pourasabha, is likely to put emphasis on completion of all district and thana councils by mid-January despite the odds.

The AL wants to form all its units soon to put its own house in order ahead of its anti-government movement.

The price hike of Tk 50 was with-

the student wing of Awami League

Samajtantrik Chhatra Front (SCF) yesterday held separate programmes demanding immedi-

The BCL held a rally and laid siege to the vice-chancellor's

first vear Honours classes for 2003-

ate withdrawal of the price rise.

2003-4 session.

office.

campus.

DU admission Agrani, with 872 branches and FROM PAGE 12

the bank's operating losses, curtail new lending except for those to good borrowers and terminate waste, fraud and political influence on the bank affairs

Sources said most of the management team members have experience in banking reforms in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal and

They will be given quarterly targets while the Nationalised Commercial Bank (NCB) Reforms taskforce headed by Bangladesh Bank Deputy Governor Nazrul Huda who will be monitoring their performance.

Earlier, the taskforce had shortlisted five international consultancies for Agrani Bank Pricewaterhouse Coopers outscored others in the evaluation bagging 84 points.

The management team will look after credit, risk management, human resources, management information system, accounting, internal audit and other affairs.

over 12,000 staff, has been plagued by a host of problems including a non-performing asset of 51 percent, militant trade unionism and a top-heavy administration.

The team will work to minimise

The government is also processing appointment of private manement support teams to run Janata and Sonali banks. Each bank will have an eight-member team.

The NCB Reform taskforce has shortlisted six firms, two of which will start work from July 1.

The government has also decided to privatise Rupali Bank in 2004, an advisor will start work in May 1 to that end.

Sikder, 4 others

FROM PAGE 12

The accused prayed for bail saying they were supposed to leave for Dhaka by a GMG flight at 9:20am. But as they missed the flight, Zahedul, also the agent of Volvo cars, rang up his Dhaka office and asked for a

private chopper. They said they entered the restricted area while waiting for the chopper with permission from the

on-duty security personnel and that the firearms seized from them were **Bangladesh's** properlylicensed. candidature for Magistrate Shafiqul Islam

rejected their bail prayer and sent them to jail. He also turned down their request for return of the firearms seized from their vehicle.

Police and airport security seized a pistol, a gun, 20 pistol bullets and 80 gun cartridges from a bag found inside the Pajero jeep at the airport parkinglot.

Airport authorities suspended four security personnel who were on duty at the entry points of the restricted area during the security breach.

The court fixed December 18 as the next date for hearing of a case filed in connection with the incident. The magistrate also ordered for all the relevant documents of the firearms to be produced before the court for scrutiny on that day.

Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) formed a high-powered probe committee led by an official with the status of a joint secretary. The committee members are scheduled to arrive in Chittagong today to begin investigation into Sunday's incident.

Meanwhile, journalists waiting on the premises of the metropolitan magistrate's court to cover the

drawn, changing admission form prices from Tk 300 to Tk 250 for Govt's plea to This followed protests by various student organisations Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), newspapers

Progatishil Chhatra Jote, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) and the BSS, Dhaka

The Cabinet Division yesterday asked all dailies to publish con-firmed reports on decisions taken at cabinet meetings after the government issues press releases on the outcome of those meetings.

The DU authorities also decided Some newspapers are publishto allow admission seekers to sit for tests in maximum three units, ing unconfirmed reports on cabi-net meetings containing informaincluding the newly introduced 'Uma' unit. Admission forms for tion eluding the government press briefings, a press release of the Cabinet Division said. 04 will be available from today at different bank branches on DU

"As a result confusion is created in public mind," it added.

According to sources, the panicky ministers and state ministers are jockeying with the PMO, the Hawa Bhaban -- BNP's alternative arraignment of the five men were harassed and assaulted by muscle-

power centre -- senior ministers men allegedly loyal to Sikder. and influential party leaders. The musclemen reportedly stabbed photojournalist Sohel Rana of Ajker Kagoj. Photojournalist Zobaer Hossain of The Daily Star lost

Several BNP policymakers felt the need for an immediate reshuffle in the cabinet as the prime his mobile phone during the scuffle. minister has already received resignation letters of over a dozen ministers.

Housing ministry FROM PAGE 1

stay at the same office for years they strike roots and spread corruption. So, if we want to uproot corruption, the service rules must be observed."

"Some officials are staying at the same office for more than 20 years. If they are transferred, they come back after a few months 'manag-ing' their senior officials,'' BNP member of the committee Joynal Abedin told this correspondent.

Committee member Sultan Mahmud Babu of the BNP also expressed similar views.

Officials of the housing ministry told the meeting there are more than 800 engineers in the PWD across the country.

Baghdad mission FROM PAGE 1

embassies in Baghdad while some other missions have dropped their staff drastically, the state minister said quoting a recent message from Mollah.

Missions of Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam at ambassadorial level have not been reopened after the war. The embassies of Pakistan and the Philippines have been downsized to charge d' affaires level with minimum staff.

Although embassies, except for countries participating with the coalition forces, are not targets of attacks, there were some recent threats of attack on Bangladesh embassy, the faxed message sent from Baghdad said.

Recently, abduction incidents have also shot up in Baghdad. Rich businessmen, especially from the Christian community, appear to be the main targets. Availability of illegal arms has made the city virtually a haven for criminals and reports of secret killings have become a routine phenomenon, it added.

land and was threatening the families for long.

FROM PAGE 12

On December 2, a group of 30 hired people swooped on the families, demolished their houses and then set those afire in the presence of police, sources alleged.

"The miscreants came to the spot by three rickshaw vans and took away the corrugated tin roofs of houses and several maunds of aman paddy stored at the houses said Munmun Bala, a 50-year-old housewife.

The affected families said they filed a case on December 6 but Niamatpur police denied recording the case. None was arrested so

Brajen could not be contacted at

Blair said it was wrong to "mud-

dle" that issue with questions of

Zimbabwean democracy and

decided to extend Zimbabwe's

suspension, but opened the way

for a possible return if Harare

engaged in reconciliation with the

After a contentious debate, host

Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo said the suspension was

maintained to protect the Commonwealth's core pro-

democracy principles, but he put a positive face on the decision.

lifting of Zimbabwe's suspension

has started," he told a news confer-

ence, saying it was probably a

But Harare had stopped listen-

"President Mugabe indi-

cated...the decision was unaccept-

able, as the Republic of Zimbabwe

would settle for nothing short of its

removal from the Commonwealth

suspension and agenda," the

"This is unacceptable. This is it -

it's quits and quits it will be," the

statement quoted Mugabe as

Zimbabwe's main opposition

Commonwealth officials said

they were disappointed by

Movement for Democratic Change

(MDC) said Mugabe had no right to

quit the Commonwealth.

matter of months not years.

government said.

"The process that will lead to the

A divided Commonwealth had

FROM PAGE 12

other Africans.

rights violations.

opposition.

ing.

saying

Zimbabwe quits

Harare's reaction.

"Today's statement was about trying to re-engage Zimbabwe. It was not about pushing Zimbabwe away," said a spokesman.

Political analysts said Mugabe had isolated himself further, but Zimbabwe's withdrawal had also robbed the Commonwealth of a formal platform to influence Mugabe's government.

Ex-Nicaraguan president gets 20-yr jail for corruption

AFP, Managua

Former Nicaraguan president Arnoldo Aleman was sentenced Sunday to 20 years in prison on a series of corruption charges, the judge in charge of the case announced here.

"Doctor Arnoldo Aleman is sentenced to 20 years in prison for crimes of laundering of money from llegal activities, misappropriation of public funds, fraud, association to commit crimes and electoral crimes," Judge Juana Mendez said, reading the sentence in court Sunday

She also slapped Aleman, president from 1997 to 2002, with a fine worth twice the assets at issue in this trial," and barred him from taking public office during the period of his sentence.

The prime minister suggested that Yemen could import pharmaceutical products, leather and leather goods, ceramics, jute and jute goods from Bangladesh.

need for exchange of visit by private entrepreneurs to boost bilateral trade and commerce.

He conveyed greetings and invitation of President Ali Abdullah Saleh to Khaleda Zia to visit Yemen.

mnister also invited the Yemeni president, through the envoy, to visit Bangladesh.

The support was extended when Yemen's Ambassador to Bangladesh Ghaleb Saeed Al-Adoofi called on Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at her office yesterday. During the meeting, the prime

minister hoped for a wider role of the United Nations in reconstruction of Iraq and placed stress on solution to Iraq crisis reflecting aspirations of the Iraqi people.

She also reiterated Bangladesh's stand on Palestine issue and underscored the need for establishing an independent and sovereign Palestine state.

The envoy and the prime minister recalled the long historical relationship between Bangladesh and Yemen and underlined the

erly countries.

countries are hundreds of years old,

came here from Yemen.

need for enhancing trade and

commerce between the two broth-Trade ties between the two

they observed and said that many people, including Hazrat ShahJalal

The Yemeni envoy stressed the

Reciprocating, the prime