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VOL. 1 NO. 324 REGD. NO. DA 781

POUSH 3, 1398 BS, DHAKA WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 18, 1991 JAMADIUS SANI 11, 1412 HIJRI

12 PAGES : PRICE TAKA 4.00

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NEWS BRIEFS

Aman production target

The government has set a target of aman production at 10 lakh tons this year as against last year's 7 lakh tons. Total production of foodgrain was nearly 1.92 crore tons last year. This was disclosed at the first meeting of the parliamentary standing committee on Agriculture and Irrigation, Water Development Minister Major General Majed-Ul-Haq (Rtd) in the chair yesterday, reports UNB.

JS body on Rules of Procedures meets

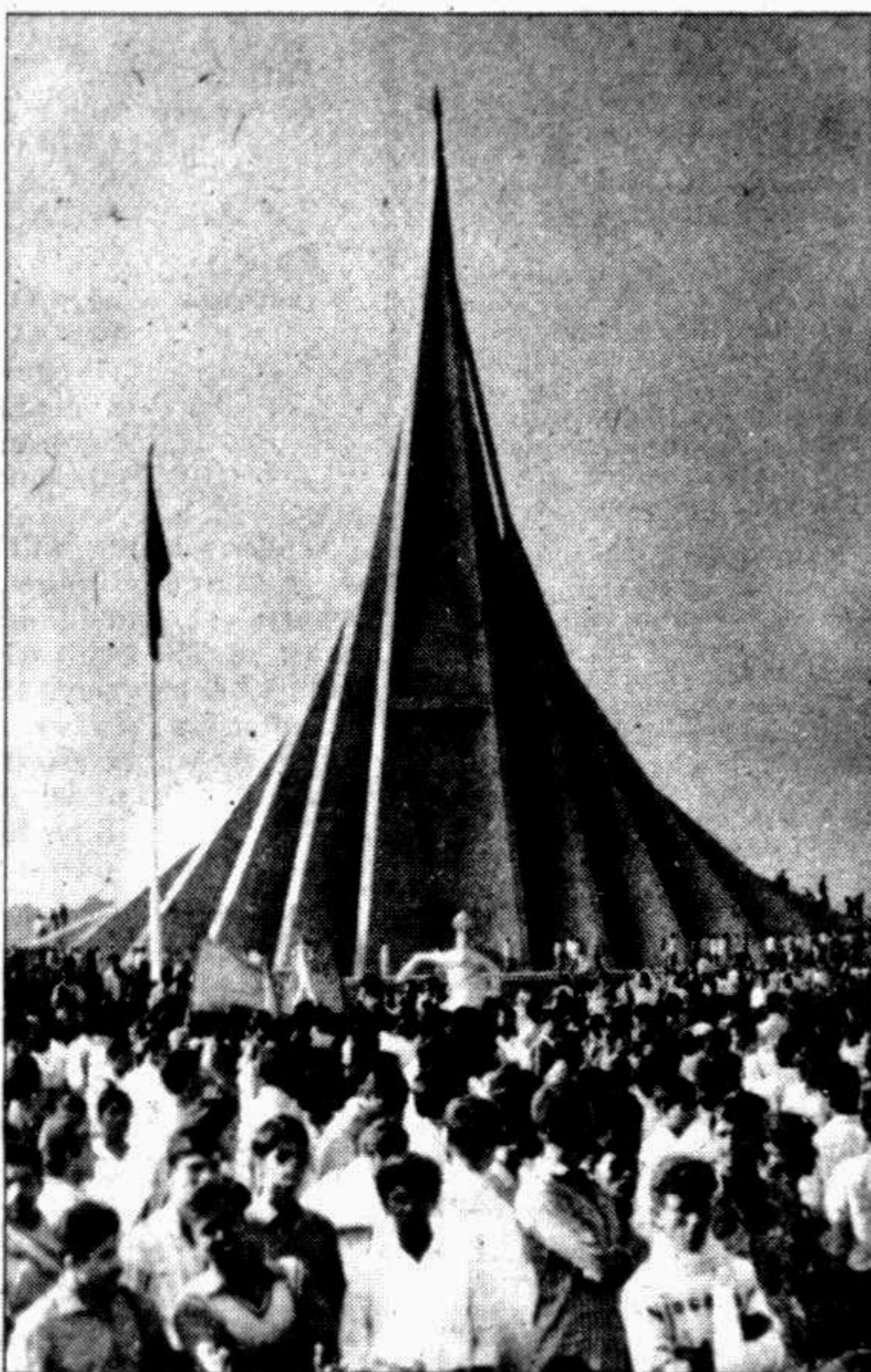
The third meeting of the Jointly Sponsored standing committee on Rules of Procedure was held last night with Speaker Sheikh Huzefa Ali in the chair. The committee examined some more proposals for amendment to the Rules of Procedure and took a number of decisions. The committee will meet again at 7 pm today (Wednesday), reports BSS.

Vacation bench for emergency cases

The Chief Justice has formed a vacation bench for hearing of emergency cases of High Court division during winter vacation of the Supreme Court from December 22 to December 31. Justice Mohammad Ismail Uddin Sarkar will hear most emergency cases at the chamber adjacent to court Room No 7 from 11 am during the vacation, reports BSS.

Savar to be made a municipality

Savar will be made a municipality for which an official announcement is expected soon. A senior official told UNB last night that the area under Savar police station will be brought under the municipality. The country's second EPZ (Export Processing Zone) is now being developed in Savar, about 30 km north-west of the capital.



People from all walks of life placing wreaths at the National Memorial (left) and Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia inaugurating a children's rally by releasing a replica of a pigeon at Dhaka Stadium on the Victory Day Monday.—Star photo



Festivity marks 20th anniversary of Victory Day Pledge to protect democracy

By Staff Correspondent

The nation Monday celebrated the 20th anniversary of the Victory Day in a festive mood and with the renewed pledge to uphold the spirit of the Liberation War and to protect the hard-earned democracy.

The day began with a 31-gun salute. Then all roads led to the National Memorial at Savar where people placed wreaths honouring the martyrs of the independence.

The President and the Prime Minister placed wreaths at the National Memorial soon after the day dawned.

Processions, rallies, symposiums and cultural shows across the country also marked the day, a public holiday.

The national flag was hoisted atop all government buildings, private houses and other places in the morning. Special prayers at places of

worship for the progress of the country were also offered. Different political and socio-cultural organisations in Dhaka city arranged elaborate programmes in celebration of the day.

A reception was hosted by President Abdur Rahman Biswas at Bangabhaban in the afternoon.

A children's and juvenile rally was held at the Dhaka Stadium in the morning. Young boys and girls from about eighty educational institutions and organisations took part in the parade and physical feats.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia attended the rally as the chief guest and took the salute. Army, Navy, Air Force and BDR played hands at different city centres on the day.

A large number of people including women and children thronged at the Central

Shaheed Minar, Doyel Square and the Dhaka University area where cultural functions and handiwork fair were arranged, by different organisations.

City streets were colourfully decorated with flags, banners and festoons. Major public and private buildings were brightly illuminated in the evening. Bangladesh Navy ships remained open for the members of the public from 2 pm to 5 pm on the day at Dhaka Sadar Ghat, Narayanganj, BIWTA Ghat, Barisal, BIWTA Ghat, Khulna, Mongla and Chittagong on the occasion of the Victory Day.

A set of commemorative one-taka silver coins minted was issued Monday to mark the day. Radio and television put up special programmes while newspapers brought out special supplements highlighting

the significance of the day. Leaders of various political, cultural and social organisations and individuals including women and children lined up since early morning to place wreaths at the altar of the "Jalya Smriti Shaudha", 25 kilometers north of the capital.

Traffic movements slowed down half a mile up from the memorial where hundreds of cars, buses and trucks were parked. Enthusiastic activists of different political organisations carrying banners and festoons paraded the ramps of the Smriti Shaudha and chanted full-throated slogans. Cultural organisations also performed street corner plays and musical soiree at the premises.

President Abdur Rahman Biswas placed wreaths at the altar at about 6-35 in the afternoon. Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia yesterday said the government would soon announce new health and drug policies aiming at ensuring proper medicine for the people, reports UNB. A proposal for establishing a research-based medical university is also under active consideration of her government, she added. The Prime Minister was speaking at the inaugural session of the three-day 3rd International Scientific Conference of the Society of Surgeons of Bangladesh (SOSB) at a local hotel. The government has also undertaken programmes to set up separate institutes for complicated diseases, like kidney ailments, she said. Begum Zia expressed her dismay that people of the third world countries like Bangladesh were yet to benefit from whatever advancement has

Sale of smuggled cigarettes goes unabated

By S Y Bakht

Foreign brand cigarettes are perhaps the single most widely available smuggled item in the country, market sources said.

From department stores to small cigarette stalls, foreign cigarettes are openly displayed and freely sold in almost every part of the country.

Despite a ban imposed since 1983, according to cigarette industry estimates, about 80 to 90 million sticks of foreign cigarettes are smuggled into the country every month. The cigarettes primarily originating from Singapore enter the country through the port city of Chittagong.

Market sources also pointed out that the main reason for the popularity of foreign brands are their quality, which is considered to be better than comparable local brands. Many smokers also attach a great deal of prestige or a sense of status in their consumption of foreign cigarettes, they added. Local cigarette manufacturers complain that they are unable to compete with the foreign brands as they have to pay a high rate of excise duty while smuggled cigarettes come in

'tax-free'. Cigarette manufacturing is an important industry in the country as it is one of the single biggest excise-tax payer to the government exchequer. About 7000 people are employed in the 25 units operating in the country producing about 14 billion sticks of cigarettes per year. Besides, thousands of farmers grow tobacco as a cash crop. The Bangladesh Tobacco Company (BTC), the largest manufacturer in the country, recently shut down its lone factory in Chittagong in the face of what it called continuing losses.

The BTC said the closure of the factory which retrenched 963 employees was necessitated by a 'drastic fall' in sales due to a high excise duty on the item and the wide availability of cheaper smuggled cigarettes. Annual sales of the company plummeted by about 30 per cent in fiscal 1990-91 compared to the previous year. Monthly sales of 930 million sticks in July '89 slumped to about 600 million sticks in

See Page 12 Col. 7

New health, drug policies soon : PM

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Begum Zia expressed her dismay that people of the third world countries like Bangladesh were yet to benefit from whatever advancement has

been made in medical science in the developed world.

About 18 surgeons from abroad and more than 300 from Bangladesh are participating in the conference split into 17 scientific and two plenary sessions.

Health Minister Chowdhury Kamal Hossain was special guest at the function which was attended, among others, by members of the cabinet, state ministers, deputy ministers and senior officials.

"Despite resource constraints, we have to enrich medical research by proper utilisation of available facilities," Begum Zia said.

Referring to the strong public opinion created in developed countries against complicated and incurable diseases like AIDS, she said opportunities for new research will also be created.

The Prime Minister said See Page 12 Col. 6

Soviet embassy closing down press section

Star Report

The Soviet Embassy in Dhaka is closing down its press section this month as part of trimming the mission's functions in Bangladesh following the near disintegration of the once mighty superpower.

About 22 Soviet staff at the Press Information Department are already set for returning home by December 30, a source at the Embassy said on Tuesday.

Operating in Dhaka since the Pakistan days the Soviet Press Information Department expanded to a 30-staff office after Bangladesh's independence in 1971. In recent months, the department cut its staff down to 22 because of lack of funds.

The press department also was not getting any function to perform following the political transformation in the Soviet Union that has swept away communism and is now about to send the superpower into history.

The press department is the second office of the Soviet Embassy after TASS to be shut down in Dhaka.

The source said the Soviet Cultural Department, whose large operation in Dhaka match the cultural wing of the See Page 12 Col. 1

SAARC summit : PM leaves for Colombo Friday

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia leaves here on Friday for Colombo to lead the country's delegation to the 6th SAARC summit scheduled to be held there on Saturday (December 21), reports UNB.

An official announcement yesterday said Begum Zia will attend the SAARC summit at the invitation of President Ranasinghe Premadasa of Sri Lanka.

Of her entourage, Foreign Minister ASM Mostafizur Rahman, Foreign Secretary Reaz See Page 12 Col. 1

Gunshots on DU campus as BCL leader held

By DU Correspondent

Several rounds of gunshots were fired on the Dhaka University campus Tuesday night following the arrest of Mosharraf Hossain Raja, a Chhatra League (S-A) leader one of the accused in Mirza Galib and Liton murder case.

A former general secretary of Jahurul Haque Hall Students Union, Mosharraf Hossain Raja was nabbed by a special squad of the Detective Branch of DMP at about 8.30 pm from the Mymensingh Road near Shahbagh in the city.

He was wanted in a case lodged by DUCSU GS Khairul Kabir Khokon on the killing of Mirza Galib and Liton, workers See Page 12 Col. 2

Bank loans : No extension of repayment time

The overall loan recovery situation of banks and financial institutions were reviewed at a high level meeting yesterday with State Minister for Finance Majibur Rahman in the chair, reports UNB.

The meeting decided not to extend time limit facilities scheduled till December 31, 1991 for the repayment of punishment interest as well as regular interest.

It also decided to take stern measures against those who will not be able to repay their outstanding loan within the given time limit.

Order on Shyamoli's bail today

By Staff Correspondent

The Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Tuesday heard the bail prayer of Mary Janet Shyamoli and another prayer seeking CID's investigation into the mysterious death of Hafiz Mukhter Hossain.

On hearing the prayers, the CMM said that the order on the bail prayer would be given today (Wednesday).

Suu Kyi expelled from NLD ?

BANGKOK, Dec 17 : Burma's detained Nobel Peace Prize winner, Aung San Suu Kyi, has been expelled from her party, the National League for Democracy, the official Radio Rangoon reported in a dispatch monitored here, reports AFP.

Quoting a statement signed by NLD chairman Aung Shwe, the radio said Suu Kyi had been stripped of her party membership to "dispel misunderstandings between the NLD and the people, and between the NLD and the government".

It added that since the foreign media continued to refer to her as leader of the NLD the junta assumed that she was "indirectly receiving support from an organisation from a foreign country." It did not elaborate.

The radio also claimed that Aung San Suu Kyi had been in contact with insurgents but did not say when the supposed contacts had taken place.

"In order to continue to

pursue the noble national cause, the NLD central executive committee at its meeting on December 11 passed a resolution and has removed Aung San Suu Kyi as a member of the NLD," Radio Rangoon said. Since the NLD swept the elections early last year the junta has refused to hand over power, instead carrying out a series of purges on the party which have decimated the leadership.

Out of the original 12-strong committee only three members remain, the rest having been arrested or gone into hiding.

Aung Shwe, who took over as party chairman earlier this year, is reportedly under close surveillance from military intelligence and sources inside Burma report grave doubts over his freedom to make decisions.

Expulsion at gunpoint

Meanwhile, Burma's jungle-based opposition claimed today that Rangoon's ruling junta

forced the country's main democracy party to expel Suu Kyi at gunpoint.

In a statement issued here, Burma's parallel government, which was set up last year in the jungle near the Burmese border with Thailand, added that her expulsion from the National League for Democracy (NLD) was part of a policy by the military to "break the opposition."

"We believe the acting leadership of the NLD are faced with a crisis, and are threatened at gunpoint by the military regime," said the statement of the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB).

"We strongly denounce and decry" Aung San Suu Kyi's removal from the NLD, the statement said.

The NCGUB is formed of NLD politicians who fled Rangoon last year to form a parallel government after the military intensified its repression against the pro-democracy movement.

UN meet on environment : Dhaka planning strategy

By Mostafa Kamal Majumder

An initiative to firm up the Bangladesh strategy for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) is being taken by the Ministry of Environment and Forests very soon.

Reliable sources say the Ministry of Environment will consult other ministries, representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and experts to finalise the strategy.

It, however, appears that the ministry is yet to be aware of the agenda of the fourth and final UNCED preparatory meeting to be held in New York in March. Nor has it been invited by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to send a representa- See Page 12 Col. 1

Govt-workers talks in deadlock

By Nurul Kabir

A deadlock marked yesterday's negotiations between the government and workers.

Talks began last week as different trade union bodies threatened to go on work stoppage beginning December 22.

The meeting between the Labour and Manpower Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuyyan and the leaders of Sramik Karmachari Oikya Parishad (SKOP) ended yesterday with one party requesting the other to review its stance, said reliable sources.

The SKOP has been pressing for the implementation of its 5-point demand.

SKOP, earlier, announced a 48-hour country-wide work stoppage beginning from December 22.

At the discussion table, it is reliably learnt, government

showed strong reluctance in accepting major SKOP demands that includes government's commitment in writing that it would not privatise the public sector industries, fixing up of minimum wage for the industrial workers of both the private and public sectors at Taka 14 hundred and repeal of certain clause of the labour law which they say against the workers interests.

The labour leaders were bent on finalising all these issues in bilateral meeting between them and the government, while government preferred to take up these issues at different 'relevant' forums.

On the other hand, talks between the government and the leaders of the workers of jute and textile sectors yesterday See Page 12 Col. 6

UN repeals resolution equating Zionism with racism

UNITED NATIONS, Dec 17 : The UN General Assembly on Monday, in a move to heal a long-time rift with Israel, repealed its 1975 resolution equating Zionism with racism, reports AP.

The vote was 111-25 with 13 abstentions. It was only the second time in UN history that the assembly had overturned one of its own resolutions and it came at a time of unprecedented peace talks between Israel and Arab states.

Israel, the United States and the West have called the original resolution a stain on United Nations that under-

mined its credibility. "Now, after 16 years, this disgrace has been removed from the United Nations, thanks to an effort coordinated by a wide number of countries and headed by the United States," said Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's office.

Zionism is the ideology of reconstituting the Jewish nation in its biblical homeland, and Israel has used the 1975 resolution to back its claim that the United Nations is biased against the Jewish state and unfit as a peacemaker. Benjamin Netanyahu, spokesman for Israel's delega-

tion to the Middle East peace talks in Washington, said Israel viewed the votes of Arab states as a sign of their willingness to make peace.

"It is impossible to fully support peace with Israel and oppose rescinding this resolution," Netanyahu had told Israel radio from Washington, scene of an ongoing round of Middle East peace talks.

General Assembly resolutions are not legally binding, like Security Council decisions, but carry moral weight as the expression of the will of the international community. The 1975 resolution,

passed at the urging of the Arab states backed by the Soviet bloc, reinforced longstanding Israeli opinions that the United Nations was biased against it. Passage of the resolution had deepened the contempt of many Israelis for UN resolutions calling on Israel to relinquish territory occupied in the 1967 Middle East War.

Israeli President Chaim Herzog said Tuesday that the United Nations had removed a shameful blot upon its good name by voting to rescind the 1975 General Assembly resolution equating Zionism with racism.

Faisal Hussein, a Palestinian leader, said rescinding the resolution "is completely missing the point" since it does not address Israel's treatment of Palestinians under occupation.

"Israeli repression of the Palestinian people and (Israel's) denial of their national rights, foremost that of self-determination, is racism in essence," Hussein said in a written statement.

The White House has applauded repeal by the United Nations of its 1975 resolution equating Zionism with racism, saying the move enhanced

both UN credibility and the prospects for a Mideast peace.

President Bush received a phone call from Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir. Shamir thanked Bush for his role in engineering the repeal.

He said that "to equate Zionism with the intolerable sin of racism is to twist history and forget the terrible plight of Jews in World War II."

White House press secretary Martin Fitzwater said in a statement that Bush was "gratified that his call for repeal... has now received the overwhelming support of the international community."