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Regional Cooperation may elude South Asia

South Asia is one of the world's most populous regions and also one of its poorest. Rivalry between India and Pakistan, its two most important countries, have thwarted moves towards greater regional economic cooperation
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NEWS BRIEFS

Students ransack college office

SIRAJGONJ, Jan 5: A group of students Sunday ransacked the offices of Hajj Wahed-Mariam College at Chandakona in Rajshahi upazila and set fire to valuable documents and furniture. College sources said the Chhatra League (A-A) activists also beat up the college employees demanding correction of voter list and to defer the college student union elections. The election is scheduled for January 12, reports UNB.

DU reschedules exam dates

Dhaka University authorities have rescheduled the date for the ensuing degree and master's (Traditional) examination. Degree examinations of 1991 (Pass and Subsidiary) scheduled to begin on January 30 will now be held on February 10. Master's degree examination under traditional system will begin from January 10 instead of earlier date of January 15, reports UNB.

Hasina returns home tomorrow

Awami League President and Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina will return Dhaka tomorrow (Tuesday). Hasina, now in Singapore, was earlier scheduled to come back on Friday. She left for Brunei on November 26 to see the ailing brother-in-law Prof Shafiqul Siddique, reports UNB.

No alternative to science, PM tells engineers

Economic uplift 'safety valve' for democracy

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia yesterday called for participation by all in economic development with equal sincerity in keeping with the spirit of participatory democracy, reports UNB.

"Democracy and development are synonymous, and economic development is the 'safety valve' of democracy," the Prime Minister said while inaugurating the 36th convention of the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh, Sunday morning.

Chaired by IEB President Prof. Mohammad Anwar Hossain, the function in the Institute premises, was also addressed by IEB General Secretary Mohammad Ruhul Matin and IEB Dhaka Centre Chairman MA K Azad.

Theme of this year's convention is: The call for UN International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction be a great success. The Prime

Minister said in the present decade, there was no alternative to science, technology and engineering for achieving development and progress.

More prosperous and advanced are the countries which are more developed in science, technology and engineering, she said urging the engineers to innovate appropriate technology based on local materials for the development of the country.

Terming the engineers as the pivotal force of development, Begum Zia asked them to come forward with suggestions for disaster mitigation and management.

"Bangladesh is identified as a disaster-prone country. We are poor because of calamities and we can not effectively face the calamities also because of poverty."

Lack of an effective technology of our own had led to the failure of development ef-

forts in the past, the Prime Minister said, calling on the engineers to play a leading role in developing an indigenous technology.

She regretted that the country had lost the legacy of its glorious past when it was the most prosperous land in South Asia and had reached the threshold of industrial revolution much ahead of Japan.

The Prime Minister said the hard-earned democracy has created equal opportunities for all "and what is needed now is to change the mentality".

Referring to the problems of engineers, the Prime Minister assured that discrepancies among professionals would be removed in phases but sought cooperation of all concerned in this regard.

IEB President Prof. Mohammad Anwar Hossain in his speech held the bureau-

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55,000 refugees enter so far

Directive to ready list of Rohingyas

From Our Correspondent

COX'S BAZAR, Jan 5: A meeting of high government officials yesterday directed the local administration to prepare a list of Rohingyas Muslims who entered Bangladesh from the Myanmar province of Arakan.

The directive was issued to the Deputy Commissioner of Cox's Bazar and the UNOs of the bordering upazilas to take action within the shortest possible time.

The decision followed the continued entry of Rohingyas Muslims, being repressed by the Myanmar military junta, which aggravated the refugee crisis in the district.

According to unofficial statistics, nearly 55,000 Rohingyas Muslims have entered Bangladesh since December 21 last year.

Held at the Cox's Bazar district headquarters, the meeting was attended by the Additional Secretary of the Ministry of Home Affairs Abdul Hamid Choudhury, Director of the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) Colonel Shamsuzzaman Choud-

hury, Deputy Commissioners of Cox's Bazar, Bandarban and Rangamati districts and the Additional Superintendent of Police of Cox's Bazar.

Meanwhile, tension along the Bangladesh-Myanmar border was prevailing as security forces of Myanmar were being reinforced in the border areas of Arakan, officials here said.

They said that no response was received from Myanmar regarding the January 7 proposed flag meeting between the two countries regarding the border crisis.

Although the Myanmar government ordered opening of three transit routes at Teknaf, Nila and Goondum points along the Bangladesh-Myanmar border Thursday, entry into the Mongdu township of Myanmar was being prevented by that country's security forces.

Some Bangladesh nationals who managed to enter Mongdu told this correspondent that arms and food were being stocked by Myanmar troops.

They alleged that Myanmar

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Jail wardens demand revision of pay-structure

By Staff Correspondent

Jail wardens Sunday demonstrated inside the barracks demanding removal of anomaly in their pay structure.

The jail employees consider their salary structure as inconsistent with that of their equivalents in other security forces.

Jail wardens in 56 jails all over the country did not draw their December salary till yesterday in protest against salary discrimination, jail sources said. Salary of police personnel of the same rank was raised last month.

Jail wardens and workers in Dhaka Central Jail demonstrated Sunday evening from 6 pm to 7:45 pm to press for their 18-point demand that includes removal of salary discrimination.

The jail wardens in Dhaka have planned to gherao the office of the Inspector General (IG) of Prisons at Dhaka Central Jail today (Monday) to press home their demands, jail wardens said.

About 750 wardens in Dhaka Central Jail did not draw their salaries of last month. They brought out procession inside the barracks

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BURNING BRIGHT: Though in different clime at Mirpur zoo the tigress from India and its cubs are hale and hearty.

—Star photo

Mistrust, conflicts cast shadow over S Asia

By Staff Correspondent

Abiding mistrust and conflicts have stymied South Asian nations to face the challenges of the post-Cold War era.

This was observed by speakers at a seminar on "South Asian Security and its Internal Dimensions" here on Saturday.

Organised by the Bangladesh Institute of Strategic Studies (BISS), the three-day seminar is being participated by scholars and experts from around the region.

The conflict scenario in the region remained "virtually unchanged" by the withdrawal of competitive involvement of extra-regional "great powers" from the region, pointed out A K M Abdus Sabur, a senior research fellow at BISS, in his fact-paper at the inaugural session of the seminar.

"The region remains bogged down in numerous intra-state and inter-state conflicts while the world has made a decisive shift away from conflict to a course of co-operation," he added.

The nations of the South Asian region draw many shared features and values from deep-rooted historical, ethnic, lin-

guistic, cultural and religious ties. These same reasons also contribute to the making of it as a region of "mutual distrust, endemic tension and occasional hostilities" experts opined.

The complex linkages, most prominent in South Asia than anywhere else in the world, of ethnic, religious and linguistic overlap has affected not only internal political developments, but also inter-state interactions in a profound manner, pointed out Professor Baladas Ghoshal, Chairman, Department of International Relations at Jadavpur University, at the seminar.

The asymmetrical character of the region is a source of both stability and tension, which is further complicated by the fact that while other South Asian states do not have a common border with each other, India alone is everyone's neighbour.

All seven South Asian states have always agreed on one thing — mutual distrust is the bane of their mutual relations," he added.

Inter-state relations in the region are characterized by

the existence of a number of bilateral disputes which proved to difficult to resolve in the past.

Abdus Sabur identified that the main issues over which South Asian states "quarrel" are territorial disputes and demarcation of land and maritime boundaries, the sharing of water resources of common rivers, conflict involving ethno-linguistic and religious groups with cross-border affiliation, conflicting economic interests and smuggling and illegal cross-border activities along with a number of other issues.

"One of the main characteristic features of bilateral disputes in South Asia is the fact that virtually all of them involve India or are Indo-centric," he pointed out. The only notable exceptions are the disputes between Bangladesh and Pakistan over the sharing of common assets and repatriation of stranded Pakistanis.

He noted that the transformation of intra-state conflicts into inter-state ones has always been and still remains the single-most dominant factor con-

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Wage commission likely today

By Nurul Kabir

The Wage Commission for the industrial workers is likely to be announced today, official sources said.

The Government-Workers Joint Committee to scrutinise the existing labour laws will meanwhile hold its first meeting tomorrow, the sources added.

The government signed two separate agreements with the leaders of the workers of jute and textile sectors in this regard on December 19 and a memorandum of understanding with the leaders of the Sramik Karmachari Ojka Parishad (SKOP) on December 21 last year.

Under the agreements and the MOU signed with the labour leaders the government was supposed to announce the Wage Commission for fixing up of new wage structure for the industrial workers by December 28, last year.

According to the sources, formation of the Wage Commission was delayed as the SKOP failed to submit the list of its 5 representatives on the Commission in due time.

The government, under the obligation of the agreements and the MOU was bound to in-

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Anti-smuggling measures reviewed

Govt to gear up drive

By Masud Hasan Khan

The government, reviewing the first five days' performance, has decided to continue and further intensify the nation-wide drive against smuggling, officials say.

At a high-level meeting in the capital Sunday morning, the authorities formed a cell to monitor the on-going drive against illegal cross-border trade and sale of smuggled commodities inside the country, they said.

The meeting of the National Anti-smuggling Committee (NAC), first under the present government, was chaired by Home Minister Abdul Matin Chowdhury at the Secretariat.

The three-hour-long meeting, which began at 11 am, was attended by the Chief of Naval Staff, secretaries of the concerned ministries, the BDR

chief, coordinators of the regional anti-smuggling task-forces and high officials of different law enforcing agencies.

Sources said that the NAC meeting reviewed the overall performance of the Anti-smuggling Task Force during its drive which was launched on January 1.

They said that the meeting decided to continue the cross-country campaign "until further order".

The meeting noted that the anti-smuggling drive was progressing satisfactorily and people's response to the move was "positive", the sources said.

They said the NAC meeting discussed construction of link roads between two border outposts to beef up the security along the country's border.

The roads would be built under the Food for Works Programme of the government, said one source.

It also considered rehabilitation of unemployed youths in the frontier areas so that they could stay away from the illegal trade, the sources said.

The NAC meeting also decided to sit at least once in every three months to review the progress of the anti-smuggling drive and suggest measures, the source added.

Earlier, government officials said, an amount of Taka five crore had been allocated to run the campaign for one year or more.

Adequate logistic support had also been ensured, they said.

"This time it is not easy for

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Govt restricts official meetings

The government has restricted official meetings, directing that no inter-ministerial or inter-departmental meeting, gathering or seminar shall be held during office hours on Saturdays, reports UNB.

According to a directive from the Cabinet Division, such meetings and seminars on other working days of the week, where presence of officials of other ministries will be required, shall not be held before 12:30 pm.

Important meetings of the council committees, ECNEC, Project Evaluation Committee, if need to be held urgently, will be allowed before 12:30 pm, but not before 10 am.

However, cabinet meetings and meetings to be convened by the Prime Minister or to be presided by her would not come under the new restriction.

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Writ challenging paurashava ordinance

A High Court Division bench of the Supreme Court Sunday issued rule upon the government to show cause within two weeks as to why the Paurashava (amendment) Ordinance 1991 should not be declared to have been done illegally and without lawful authority, reports ISS.

The bench comprised Justice Fazle Hussain, Mohammad Habibur Rahman and Justice K M Hasan.

A M Eyahiya Mujahid, Commissioner, Mouli Bazar

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Wardens of the Dhaka Central Jail demonstrating in city in support of their demands yesterday.

—Star photo

Palestinians likely to show up in tomorrow's talks

JERUSALEM, Jan 5: A PLO official was quoted Sunday as saying Palestinians would not boycott the Middle East peace talks in Washington this week, despite Israel's plans to deport 12 Arabs, reports AP.

To protest the expulsions, Palestinian delegates have put off leaving for Washington, where they were to meet Israeli negotiators Jan 7. Delegates from Syria, Lebanon and Jordan also put off their departures for Washington.

In an interview with the Haaretz newspaper, Nabil Shaath, a top political adviser to PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat,

did not say when or under what conditions the delegates would show up for the talks.

But he said, "Despite the severity with which we view the Israel government's decision to deport Palestinians, the Palestinian delegation will not boycott the Washington talks."

Israel ordered the Palestine Liberation Organization activists and Muslim fundamentalists expelled Thursday in response to the slaying of a Jewish settler in the Gaza Strip a day earlier.

Israeli delegates, meanwhile, planned to leave Sunday night for Washington, Israeli

media said.

Media reports also said Shaath had obtained a visa to attend the talks, despite previous U. S. refusals to admit PLO officials.

Meanwhile, Palestinians protested the expulsion orders with a commercial strike in parts of the occupied territories Sunday.

In the Gaza Strip on Saturday night, soldiers shot and killed a masked, axe-wielding Palestinian activist and wounded another, Arab reports said. The man killed was identified as Hussein Youssef Abu el Kheir 22.

The army had no immediate comment on the report.

A bomb exploded in a Jerusalem candy and nut store Sunday morning, causing some damage but no injuries, said police spokeswoman Anat Grant. She said police suspect the explosive was planted by Arabs.

Settlers, in turn, continued protests against an escalation in armed attacks that have claimed four Israeli lives in the occupied territories since October.

In Gaza, Jewish vigilantes erected two roadblocks, turning back Palestinians heading

to jobs in Israel Sunday morning, Israeli radios and Arab reports said.

Some Arabs were handed leaflets warning "if there is no quiet for us there won't be quiet for the Arabs," Israeli radio said.

Israel says that deportations are an effective means of deterring attacks. Critics argue that the Palestinian uprising has persisted four years despite expulsions of 67 leading activists.

The Yedioti Ahronoth daily accused the government of giving in to Jewish extremists.

"Shamir and (Defense Minister Moshe) Arens fear the settlers more than Bush, Baker and Mubarak," it wrote.

The conservative Maariv daily asked "whether among us as well (as the Arabs) there are not people who are trying to halt the wheels of peace?"

AFP from Paris says, former East German spy chief Markus Wolf has alleged that Israeli agents tried to persuade Palestinians jailed in West Germany to help kill the Palestine Liberation Organization's late second-in-command Abu Iyad.