

Inside Today

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Cooperation among South Asian Nations Development and Changes Foster New Climate

In the decade of the 90s, we are witnessing strong winds of change sweeping through the entire world, generally exerting a positive influence, but not in every case and everywhere....

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NEWS BRIEFS

India wants more UK investment

NEW DELHI, Jan 17: India told Britain's Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd today it wants to encourage more British investment in India and welcomes next month's visit by British business leaders. The message was delivered by Indian Commerce Minister P Chidambaram in talks with Hurd on Friday morning and by Finance Minister Manmohan Singh on Thursday, reports Reuters.

Cop injured in cracker blast

A police constable was injured in cracker explosions at Sayedabad Bus Terminal Friday afternoon. A group of miscreants who reportedly extort tolls at the bus terminal allegedly hurled crackers at the on-duty police constable Shrajuddin, 32, bus terminal sources said.

BFTA strike begins today

Bangladesh Federation of Teachers' Association (BFTA) will start strike for an indefinite period from today to press home their 15-point demand. BFTA at press conference Thursday held at the National Press Club announced its strike programme.

Substantial relief for HBFC loanees soon

By S Y Bakht

The government has decided to ease the burden of outstanding loans of the borrowers of House Building Finance Corporation (HBFC).

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman told The Daily Star on Friday a 'significant relief' for borrowers of HBFC loans would be announced by the end of this month.

He added that the move would be aimed at inducing borrowers to repay outstanding loans so that funds could be generated to enable the resumption of loan operations.

"We want to resume providing house-building loans in the cities and in the districts as soon as possible."

Loan operations of HBFC were suspended earlier on May 1989 because of a poor loan recovery rate and lack of fresh funds. About 48,000 borrowers owe more than Taka 12,00 crore in outstanding loans to HBFC.

The lone housing sector funding agency in the country, HBFC was set up in 1982 and has a paid-up capital of about Taka 10 crore. The lending

operations were funded by selling debentures to various commercial banks and to the Bangladesh Bank.

According to a Finance Ministry source, the total outstanding amount owed by HBFC in debenture loan principal and interest stood at Taka 1503.98 crore as of December 1991.

The total financial loss of the institution stands at over Taka 350 crore. "This amount will increase further unless the recovery situation improves soon," the source added.

Loans recovered by HBFC every year cannot even pay for the annual interest and principal amount repayment of its debenture loans. Currently the principal and interest payments of debenture loans total about Taka 108 crore per year while the recovery of outstanding loans per year is about Taka 105 crore.

Furthermore, the "mismatch" between the interest rate charged to the borrowers and what the HBFC has to pay for debenture loans is also adding to the financial loss of

the institution. HBFC charges borrowers at a simple interest rate while banks charge the corporation at a compound interest rate for the debenture loans.

Earlier, the previous government had approved a plan to convert HBFC into a bank but the plan was later shelved by the care taker government.

In October last year, representatives of the Bangladesh House Building Borrowers Association met with the Finance Minister.

According to Fazlul Haque, General Secretary of the association, a number of demands of the borrowers were placed before the minister including cancellation of court cases against defaulters, withdrawal of lump sum and penalty interests, extension of the deadline for the payment of outstanding loans in installments implementation of simple interest system as practiced in banks and formation of a committee to solve the problems of this sector.

Haque said according to as- See Page 12 Col 8

Tinbigha transfer to be delayed

From Munir U Ahmed

KHULNA, Jan 17: The transfer of Tinbigha corridor to Bangladesh may be delayed.

The possibility has emerged as the Indian government is learnt to be contemplating some development work at Kuchlibari of West Bengal prior to the transfer.

News items published in several Calcutta dailies and reports reaching here from across the border say the West Bengal government put forward 11 project proposals to the central government for implementation before the transfer. The proposals were made to diffuse tension instigated by some political organisations, according to the reports.

The Chief Minister of West Bengal Government, it is learnt, has already talked to the Home Minister of India in this regard. The Chief Secretary of West Bengal also flew to Delhi thrice last month, reports say.

The eleven development projects which were chalked out by the West Bengal Government are as follows: a concrete bridge on the river Shati, construction of few pucca roads, a new branch of the State Bank, a few secondary standard schools, a ten-bed hospital, irrigation network, a police station, completion of Teesta Barrage Project, development of hats, bazars and roads of Kuchlibari Union Parishad.

The West Bengal Government also suggested that, before the transfer of the Tinbigha, it was essential to get the confidence of the people of the area so that they are not misguided by some communal political elements. Simultaneously, it is also necessary to convince the people that, after leasing out the land, the sovereignty of the land would not be lost, the WB government said. The law-enforcing agencies of both the governments, which will be deployed after the transfer, will

be solely responsible for their respective people.

The central government did not comment on this proposal, it was learnt.

But one of the high-ups of the central government is reported to have said the issue involves the two countries — Bangladesh and India.

Bangladesh signed an agreement with India in 1974 to link Dahagram and Angapota enclaves by leasing out Tinbigha corridor, a 178 x 85 metre land. The Bangladesh Government handed over the Berubari in 1974 to India. The gesture was not reciprocated. Forward Bloc, BJP, Bishwa Hindu Parishad and even local Congress leaders are opposing the transfer.

A local body, the Kuchlibari Sangram Parishad, is agitating against the transfer.

The Supreme Court of India has already given verdict in favour of the transfer in line with the 1974 agreement.



MANY FACES OF A WINTER: Kamalapur Station gives them little warmth at winter nights to keep going. —Star photo

Transport workers assault Star man

By Staff Correspondent

Transport workers at a ferry ghat near Dhaka severely beat up a private taxi driver and a Daily Star photographer on Friday and held up traffic for over an hour.

AKM Moinin, the Star's chief photographer, was seriously manhandled by the transport workers, after he tried to take a photo of an incident at the Kuchlamara ferry ghat in Sirajdikhan upazila of Munshiganj on the river Dhaleshwari.

Moinin, after having been beaten to the ground, had his camera snatched by the gang who appeared to have weapons concealed under their clothes.

According to Moinin, a high speed passenger-laden bus nearly collided with a private taxi while trying to jump the queue at the ghat in an effort to board the ferry ahead of those waiting patiently in line.

The taxi driver, obviously ignorant of the dangers that lurked at these ghats, got out of his car and protested to the bus driver who replied with a barrage of abuse.

"At that point, dozens of transport workers came charging in, and started beating the taxi driver mercilessly. They pulled out pieces of glass from the bus windows and attacked the unfortunate taxi driver, leaving him bloodied and pleading for mercy," Moinin said after returning to Dhaka.

As part of his professional duty, Moinin tried to take a few snaps of the ugly scene unfolding before him, only to be set upon by the workers himself.

He managed to attract the attention of some policemen who were at the ghat on special duty at the time (State Minister for Health, Abdul Hye, was in the vicinity). The police arrested one of the workers and retrieved Moinin's camera, but the arrest triggered an

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Prime Minister hosts dinner Friendship covers all areas : Vajiralongkorn

Thai Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn Friday expressed the hope that the existing friendly relations and close cooperation between the two countries will lead to further progress and prosperity, reports UNB.

The friendship between Bangladesh and Thailand has now grown and expanded widely in all the political, economic, technological and cultural areas," the Crown Prince said at a dinner hosted in his honour by Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia in Dhaka Friday evening.

Bangladesh and Thailand have had long-established friendly relationship, beginning even before their formal establishment of diplomatic relations," Prince Vajiralongkorn said.

Situated in the same continental area and having similar as well as compatible customs, the people of the two countries

enjoyed close ties of amity and coordination of mutual benefits, he added.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia recalled the Thai royal hospitality during her visit with Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman in 1979 which she said is a shining symbol of the close friendship between the two countries.

She hoped that the visit of the Thai Crown Prince will give him an opportunity to see some of the on-going development activities in Bangladesh.

Begum Zia lauded the role and contribution of King Bhumibol and the Thai royal family in achieving economic development and progress of Thailand.

She wished continued peace, progress and prosperity of the friendly people of Thailand and everlasting friendship and cooperation
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Dhaka-CIS economic commission likely

By Inam Ahmed

Bangladesh plans to set up a joint economic co-operation commission with the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) very soon, concerned sources said.

The Economic Relations Division (ERD) has already sent a draft to Russia in this regard. The report will be finalised after proper scrutiny by both the sides.

Besides, the East European countries are now pressing for export-import business instead of the previous barter system. The state-owned trade agencies of the East Europe are now free to negotiate with individual countries on the goods they can offer. Sources said, with the new mode of business transaction, the balance of

trade between Bangladesh and the East European countries is likely to be unfavourable for Bangladesh unless strong search for markets in the republics is carried out.

The recently signed sixth unit agreement on Ghorashal power plant with Russia was also made under new conditionalities stipulating that 40 per cent of the 82 million US dollar loan would be paid in foreign currency.

The other portion would be repaid with commodities. Sources said the Russian side had been pressing for payment of 75 per cent of the loan in foreign currency. Russia had been pressing for converting entire dealings into foreign

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Bishwa Ijtema begins today

From Our Correspondent

GAZIPUR, Jan 17: Hundreds of thousands of devotees from all corners of the globe arrived here on the eastern bank of the river Turag at Tongi to attend the 'Bishwa Ijtema' which begins tomorrow (Saturday).

The three-day Bishwa Ijtema of Tablig Jamaat, one of the biggest religious congregation of the Muslim Community, is being held in the country since 1965.

People coming in buses, launches and by trains, are pouring in at the venue of the Ijtema where a mammoth pendal has been erected to accommodate the devotees. Organisers said people would still continue to arrive even on the last day of the Ijtema in which Akheri Munajat (final
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8 killed, 35 hurt in road accidents

By Staff Correspondent

Eight persons were killed and 35 others injured in separate road accidents yesterday.

SSMCH Correspondent says a rickshawpuller died on the spot as a truck knocked down his rickshaw at Tikatuli in the city early Friday.

The victim was identified as Ummat Ali, 45, and his body was sent to Sir Salmullah Memorial College Hospital (SSMCH) morgue.

After the accident at about 12:30 am, the driver escaped leaving the truck (Dhaka Metro Na-6752) near the spot.

Sutrapur police seized the truck.

Our Barisal Correspondent adds: Three people including a child were killed and another 30 injured in a bus accident at Rajoir upazila in Madaripur district on the Barisal-Faridpur Highway Friday.

Witnesses said the Khulna-bound bus (Dhaka Metro-8005) from Barisal hit a road-side tree near Shimultoli village at about 9:45 am after the driver lost control following a puncture in a front wheel.

Two unidentified male and a two-year-old boy Shaon died on the spot. Villagers rushed to the spot and rescued the injured from the heavily damaged bus.

The injured were admitted to the Rajoir Upazila Health Complex. Eighteen seriously injured passengers were shifted to the Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital.

UNB from Bogra adds: Four people were killed and five others injured when a truck rammed into a shop on Bogra-Nagarbari Highway at Sherpur bazar, 16 miles away from here yesterday afternoon, police said.

CIS armed forces' unity meet ends in disunity



Russian MP Vitaly Urragtsey waves his deputy's card during an exchange with officers about future of former Soviet military in Moscow yesterday. —AFP photo

MOSCOW, Jan 17: More than 5,000 officers of the former Soviet armed forces met in the Kremlin on Friday seeking unity, but began to quarrel immediately over the agenda and the question of TV coverage, reports AP.

Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev were the only two leaders of the former 11 Soviet republics to attend the meeting, and many officers were angered by the absence of the others — especially Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk.

Some officers demanded that another session be held Saturday so that the other presidents could hear their grievances in person. The officers oppose efforts by Ukraine and other republics that want

to divvy up the pieces of the former Soviet military.

Yevgeny Shaposhnikov, the commander of the armed forces, cautioned the officers about the danger of defying or lecturing presidents.

"Those who tried to stand against a president are in a Moscow jail now," he said, referring to the leaders of last August's coup attempt.

The presidents discussed military issues yesterday and agreed to hold another meeting in Minsk devoted entirely to military issues and to consider the results of this meeting of ours," he said.

Nazarbayev told the officers that the two main issues facing the new Commonwealth of Independent States are price reform and the future of the military.

"The army, whose duty is to defend nations, is itself in great need of protection. And it's our duty to provide for it," he said.

The officers had to take a 30-minute break early in their meeting to resolve their disputes over the agenda. Some of the officers had complained about the live TV coverage of the session, but Yeltsin insisted that it be shown.

Riot over prices

Meanwhile, thousands of students angered by soaring prices smashed shop windows and fought police in the Uzbek capital, leaving one student dead and several wounded, news agencies reported Friday.

It was the worst disturbance — and the first fatality —
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