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NEWS BRIEFS

PM's directive on arable lands

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia has issued a strong instruction to the Ministry of Land to restrict the use of agricultural land for other purposes. State Minister for Land Kabir Hossain, told the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday. reports BSS.

SAARC Secy Gen meets PM

The visiting SAARC Secretary General, Ibrahim Hussain Zaki, called on Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia at her residence last evening. He spent sometime with the Prime Minister and discussed various issues related with SAARC. Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, Syed Hassan Ahmed, was also present. Zaki informed Begum Zia that the SAARC Secretariat had been trying to implement the decisions taken at the last Colombo summit. reports BSS.

Rickshaw strike on Sunday

Rickshawpullers have called for a day-long transport strike in the city on Sunday demanding that they be allowed to ply rickshaws on the VIP roads. Rickshaw Sramik Union brought out a procession in the city today chanting slogans in support of its 12-hour strike from 6 am. It said all modes of transport will be off the road during the strike. reports UNB.

SC hears Ershad's appeal today

The Supreme Court will hear today (Tuesday) for admission of an appeal filed against the conviction of former president Ershad in money case.

Acting leader of Jatiya Party Parliamentary Party Moudud Ahmed filed the appeal petition on Sunday on behalf of Ershad who is chairman of Jatiya Party. party sources said. reports UNB.

Compromise for sending it to special committee Furore over bill seeking death penalty for terrorists

By Mahfuz Ullah and Nurul Kabir

The introduction of a bill before the Jatiya Sangsad seeking death sentence for terrorism and speedy trial of terrorists was deferred yesterday following angry protests and walkout by all the opposition members.

The bill is expected to be re-introduced today only to be sent to a special committee for scrutiny. Sources close to both the Treasury Bench and the Opposition say it was negotiated by all parties in presence of the Speaker.

The objective of the Prevention of Terrorism Bill 1992 says with the alarming increase in the acts of terrorism, the existing laws are inadequate to deal with the terrorists.

In most cases punishment for such offence was inadequate. provisions of bail were

liberal and the trial was time-consuming. But it was essential to provide capital punishment, strictness in granting bail and summary trial along with other measures for checking terrorism, it added.

State Minister for Law Aminul Haq sought leave to introduce the bill within 15 minutes the House met. But the opposition leaders were yet to come in. By the time the minister finished his speech the Opposition rose to their feet and started shouting calling it another black law. Angry Awami League member A S M Piroz, tore a copy of the bill and threw the pieces on the floor, while the State Minister looked blankly.

The Opposition, losing temper, expressing anger and cat calling, staged a walkout en

masse protesting the introduction of the bill. The presiding Deputy Speaker then announced his decision of deferring the introduction of the bill.

The Leader of the Opposition, Sheikh Hasina, briefing newsmen late evening in her chamber, said though the title of the bill spoke of curbing terrorists in reality it had nothing to do with that but curbing fundamental rights.

Earlier, before the walkout, Begum Motia Chowdhury of Awami League, in brief speech said the bill proposed unlimited powers to police which would breed unlimited corruption.

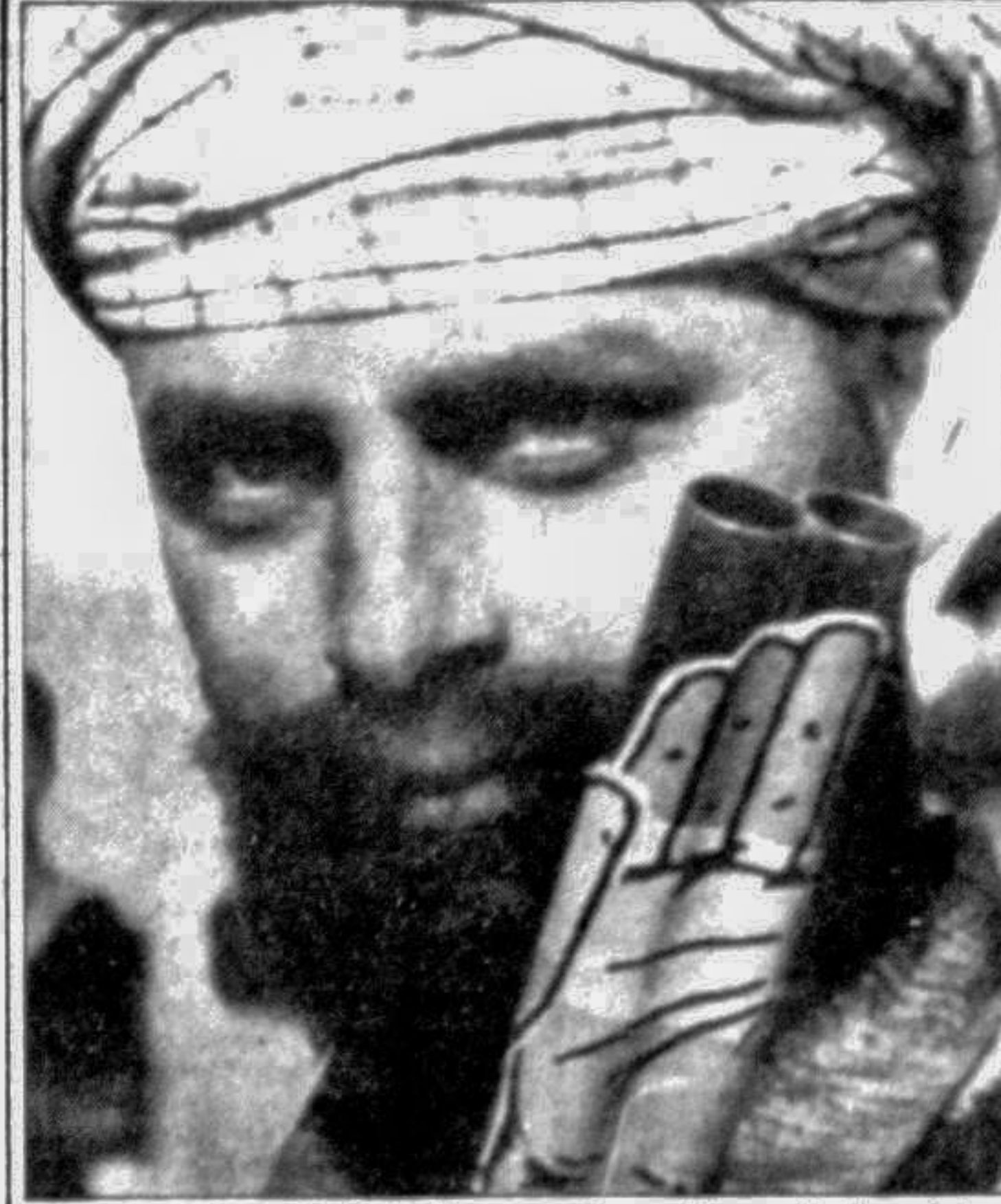
The Opposition, however, returned to the House after twenty minutes following a meeting in the chamber of the Deputy Leader of the

Opposition Abdus Samad Azad. Defending the bill as 'no violation of human rights' Information Minister Nazmul Huda told The Daily Star that an effective law to curb terrorists was necessary. Citing examples of the law providing deterrent punishment against acid throwing Nazmul Huda said such a bill would be a deterrent.

Nazmul Huda further said the government, under the present arrangement, was finding it inadequate to deal with terrorists.

Hitting back at Opposition criticism the Information Minister said if the bill was passed the Opposition will be affected because they patronise the terrorists.

Senior leaders of the ruling party, speaking on condition of See Page 12 Col 2



Sikh bodyguard of a Congress-I candidate displays his shotgun bearing the party logo in Kapurthala, Punjab yesterday. Security has been tightened as the militants Sikhs are boycotting tomorrow's polls. —AFP photo

Countdown to Shaheed Day

Star Report

Tamuddin Majlis's failure to lead the Language Movement after its initial positive role owed much to its lopsided ideological position from which it approached the question of language.

While the Majlis was ideologically committed to propagating Islam as the basis of the Bengalee people's cultural identity, time proved that once the issue of the mother tongue came to the forefront, the people's inherent nationalist feelings based on language, literature, folklore etc. triumphed over communal divisions.

The Majlis, in other words, tried to ride on two boats pulling in opposite directions at the same time, fell through the middle and disappeared without a trace.

In their jointly-authored book 'The History and Significance of the Language Movement', Abdul Matin who was the convener of the University State Language Action Committee (USLAC) in 1952, and Ahmed Rafiq, argued that the Majlis put undue See Page 12 Col 1

Goodwill team leaves for CIS

By Staff Correspondent

A 18-member high-powered delegation left for the newly-formed Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Monday.

The goodwill delegation first since the formation of CIS, headed by State Minister for Textile Maj (Retd) Abdul Mannan, will also do 'ground work' for establishing diplomatic relations with the states other than Russia.

The delegation will visit nine states of the commonwealth: Russia, Byelorussia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Mouldavia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

The delegation is expected to sign memorandum of understanding with the CIS on various issues.

Talking to the press before departure, the State Minister said he was carrying messages from Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia to the leaders of the CIS.

He said Bangladesh had bright prospects for exporting services in the fields of engineering workshop and hair-cutting saloon. If the states seek such services from Bangladesh, it could be pro- See Page 12 Col 1



Sophisticated rubber speedboats donated by foreign countries for relief work lying unutilized in the pond near the Red Crescent Society headquarters in the city. —Star photo

Tight security for Punjab elections

NEW DELHI, Feb 17: India today activated a complex security cover for Punjab which goes to the polls Wednesday amid fears of violence by Sikh militants opposing balloting in the turbulent northern Indian province. reports AFP.

The government, which administers Punjab directly, said on national radio today that the security arrangements were devised to conduct fair, free and peaceful elections as reports from the state said turnout was expected to be low.

A three-tier protection system was put into effect today, the last day of the campaign period for Punjab's 13 seats in the federal parliament and 115 in the state assembly, which has remained suspended for now almost five years, officials said.

Two candidates have already been elected unopposed to the 117-member provincial council, and 579 contestants, each with at least 10 official armed guards, remained in the fray for Wednesday's balloting.

Four mainstream Sikh parties are boycotting the election

on the grounds that polling under a military presence is unacceptable.

The federal Home Ministry has deployed 700 paramilitary companies, or 70,000 troopers armed with automatic rifles and bazookas, across Punjab's 12,000 villages to add teeth to the state's 45,000-man police force.

'Our men would be deployed mostly near polling stations and in terrorist-infested areas,' said a senior officer from the elite Border Security Force which guards India's frontiers with Pakistan, Bangladesh, China and Myanmar.

Other officials here said 28,000 voluntary home guards had been deployed in the pre-poll security operation in Punjab where hundreds of armed Sikh militants have reportedly vowed to enforce a boycott of the polls.

Special Police Officers (SPOs), mostly retired army soldiers recruited from 1989 to guard Punjab villages, have been called out and would form the last line of the three-tier security cover, they said. Editorial on Page 4

Govt doing all to resolve crisis: Sircar

Hasina blasts Khaleda for warning striking teachers

Opposition Leader Sheikh Hasina yesterday (Monday) renewed her call to the government for an immediate settlement of the problems of striking teachers to save the future of students. reports UNB.

Responding to a statement of the Education Minister in parliament, she expressed concern at what she called government's lack of effective initiative to bring an end to the deadlock in school and college education caused by indefinite strike of the non-government teachers.

'The BNP government is making commitment one after another but not implementing those', said Hasina, the Awami League President and Opposition Leader in Parliament.

'Settle the demands immediately through negotiation

with the teachers of non-government schools and colleges', she asked the Education Minister.

The opposition leader suggested that the teachers' problem be referred to a parliamentary standing committee.

The government is holding the degree examination by police, she said, ignoring the just demands of the teachers.

Hasina was bitterly critical about the Prime Minister's warning that if necessary the government will appoint new teachers from the unemployed educated youth. 'This reminds us of the threats used by autocratic Ershad.'

Referring to the government's frank admission of inadequate fund, she said it is the responsibility of the government to arrange fund and solve the problems. 'You cannot just shrug off your re-

sponsibility merely on the excuse of lack of money.'

BSS adds: Earlier Jamburuddin Sircar yesterday told the Parliament that there was no lapse on the part of the Government to resolve the crisis arising out of the teachers' strike.

Replying to a point of order of Awami League leader Tofael Ahmed on the issue, the Education Minister said he and his cabinet colleagues had held several rounds of discussions with the representatives of the teachers association to arrive at a settlement in this regard.

'We tried to impress upon them, but in vain, that they should not resort to strike, at least when the Degree examination were taking place, he said.

Sircar said the Degree exam See Page 12 Col 4

UNHCR official in city, briefs ministries today

A top official of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) arrived in Dhaka Monday afternoon to prepare a comprehensive assistance programme for the thousands of Rohingyas who crossed into Bangladesh from Myanmar. reports BSS.

Patric de Souza, head of desk at the UN agency's headquarters in Geneva, joined two other UNHCR senior officials already in Bangladesh assessing the situation. UNHCR sources said.

The two senior officials of the UNHCR, S Wijeratne and Shamsul Bari, returned to the capital after staying three days in Cox's Bazar and nearby areas. Seeing the grave situation prevailing there, UNHCR senior officials pledged assistance to the Cox's Bazar Deputy Commissioner and accordingly reliefs are being despatched, they said.

Souza, who is scheduled to meet secretaries of the Ministries of Foreign, Home See Page 12 Col 1

Hezbollah gunners rocket Israel

BEIRUT, Feb 17: Muslim fighters and Israeli-allied forces traded rocket barrages Monday in southern Lebanon as Shiites vowed vengeance for a lightning air attack that left the leader of the pro-Iranian Hezbollah dead. reports AP.

In the artillery duels, rockets landed in northern Israel for the first time in nearly a year, Israeli media said, but no damage or injuries were reported.

The death of Sheikh Abbas Musawi, his wife, 5-year-old son and four bodyguards Sunday in a helicopter attack

on his motorcade has provoked fears of an acceleration in Arab-Israeli violence, that could cripple peace efforts.

The surge of violence came a week ahead of the fourth round of Arab-Israeli peace talks set for next Monday in Washington. Lebanon and its main power broker, Syria, announced they would attend the talks.

Hezbollah, or Party of God, opposes the talks and has called for escalating armed conflict with Israel. The organization was considered the umbrella group for Shiite Muslim factions that held

Western hostages in Lebanon. Police said 23 Katyusha rockets were fired Monday morning, after nighttime artillery duels between Hezbollah gunners and militiamen of the Israeli-backed South Lebanon Army in southern Lebanon. No casualties were reported.

Artillery battles raged as Israeli helicopters dropped more than 300 parachute flares over the SLA enclave and the adjoining zone policed by UN peacekeeping forces. Israeli jets also staged several overnight mock air raids, police said.

Artillery duels began

shortly after the killing of Musawi, leader of the vehemently anti-Israeli group Hezbollah, which was formed and principally financed by Iran.

Schools, banks and businesses were closed in Muslim areas throughout Lebanon as they mourned for Musawi, 39, his wife Shiam, 33, and his son Hussein, 5, the youngest of the couple's six children.

An estimated 50,000 male mourners, some wearing black headbands, took part in Musawi's three-hour funeral procession Monday, chanting 'you shall be avenged.'

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