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NEWS BRIEFS

Khulna Chamber EC dissolved

KHULNA, Dec 17: Government authorities today dissolved the executive committee of Khulna Chamber of Commerce and Industries, officials said. An official order issued from the Ministry of Commerce said the committee had been dissolved with immediate effect, reports UNB.

PM becomes member of FF Sangsad

The membership drive of Mukti Juddha Sangsad began Wednesday with the enlistment of Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, chief patron of the sangsad, as a member. Begum Zia bought a membership coupon to become a member when a delegation of the sangsad called on her at her Sugandha office in the evening, reports BSS.

Hasina leaves for Chittagong today

Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina leaves Dhaka today for Chittagong on a two-day tour. The Awami League President will address a public meeting at Banskhali today and another at Boakhal on Saturday. The opposition leader will attend the passing out parade of cadets at the Bangladesh Military Academy on Saturday, reports UNB.

B Chowdhury improving

The condition of Dr A Q M Badruddoza Chowdhury, Deputy Leader of the House who was admitted to the National Cardiovascular Diseases Hospital on Tuesday, has been improving. Attending doctors in the hospital said last night that his condition has improved considerably, reports BSS.

BJP denies responsibility No-confidence motion against Rao govt

NEW DELHI, Dec 17: India's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) denied responsibility today for plunging the country into turmoil and demanded the government quit for mismanaging a crisis started by the destruction of a mosque, reports Reuter.

The Hindu Nationalist BJP bringing a motion of no-confidence against the government of Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao it seemed certain to lose, said its leaders had tried to stop followers destroying the mosque on December 6.

A 'handful of people' stormed the mosque and pulled it down, said the BJP's Atal Behari Vajpayee.

Our leaders tried to control the crowds. We tried and we failed. If the Prime Minister was betrayed so were we.

Vajpayee alleged that the government was responsible for the situation which led to the demolition of the mosque that had become the symbol of India's commitment to secularism.

He said there was more violence afterwards in some states ruled by Rao's Congress Party than in those run by the BJP and complained bitterly that it was only the BJP administrations dismissed on charges of failing to control the carnage.

Human Resource Development Minister Arjun Singh loftily dismissed Vajpayee's

accusations as those of a good lawyer making a good representation of a bad case.

You have spoken of grief at the events but we need more proof from the people sitting behind you of your true intentions, Singh said, pointing to BJP members sitting behind Vajpayee who is regarded as a moderate in his party.

Others are closely linked to two Hindu nationalist organisations — one of them the driving force of a campaign for a Hindu theocratic state —

NEW DELHI, Dec 17: Narasimha Rao looked set to survive a no-confidence motion brought by the BJP. An inconclusive debate on the motion indicated a majority of the Lower House would back the government when voting takes place tomorrow (Friday), reports Reuter.

which Rao outlawed after the Ayodhya Mayhem.

Whatever the Prime Minister did was definitely for national well-being, Singh said, "I am fully behind the efforts of the Prime Minister to foil all your attempts to bring the nation to a boil."

The debate was conducted in rare calm in the Indian parliament, where angry members on both sides of the House have blocked proceedings since the mosque was destroyed.

A week's recess given to

cool passions proved unsuccessful on Wednesday, when parliament was again unable to function.

AFP adds: Parliament adjourned until Thursday after Pandemonium gripped its two houses Wednesday over the overnight dismissal by New Delhi of the pro-Hindu administrations of three states.

Business was repeatedly disrupted as angry opposition MPs from the pro-Hindu BJP yelled slogans and demanded the presence of their arrested leader Lal Krishna Advani in parliament's Lower House.

Speakers of both the houses tried to pacify the BJP MPs as they marched up and down and displayed posters flaying New Delhi for axing their party governments in Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan.

Indian newspapers today denounced the sacking of three governments controlled by Hindu revivalists, saying it will only embolden them to go on the offensive after the razing of the Babri mosque.

National dailies here dubbed the move undemocratic and a political blunder by Narasimha Rao, and at least one said fresh elections to the federal parliament were now inevitable.

It was the first time since the December 6 destruction of the mosque in Ayodhya that

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New Army Division raised Development, democracy inter-linked: Khaleda

MYMENSINGH, Dec 17: Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia today called for united efforts of all for national development and for the protection and preservation of democracy saying that development and democracy were inter-linked, reports BSS.

Addressing a function on the occasion of flag raising of a division of the Bangladesh Army at the Mymensingh Cantonment Begum Zia stressed the need for a well-organised and well-educated armed forces for the protection of country's sovereignty.

She said President Ziaur Rahman had undertaken efforts for building a strong de-

fence force. The Prime Minister who is also in charge of the Minister of Defence said the present government had raised the 19th Division with that objective.

Begum Zia described nineteen as a sacred and meaningful figure which was taken into consideration for naming the newly raised division.

The Prime Minister ceremonially unfurled the flag of the newly raised division and unveiled a plaque.

Earlier, on her arrival at the cantonment, the Prime Minister was received by the chief of Army Staff Lt General Mohammad Noor Uddin Khan and the General Officer Com-

manding of the newly raised division Major General Muhammad Anuddin, Bir Protik.

She was given guard of honour by a smart contingent of the army. She took salute and inspected the guard.

The ceremony was attended, among others, by ministers, chiefs of staff of the Navy and the Air Force, senior military officers and the local elite.

The Prime Minister described the army as a national pride. She said besides the sacred duty of safeguarding the country they had been playing a unique role in maintaining peace and facing natural calamities at home and abroad.

She recalled their services to the distressed people in the wake of last year's devastating cyclone. She said the nation would remember them with respect. She said the contingent of the armed forces had been earning name for the nation by their services in maintaining peace in different countries.

Dwelling at length the glorious tradition of Mymensingh she recalled the names of Isha Khan and Sakhina. She said courageous soldier of War of Independence Nazmul Ahsan, Bir Uttam was also born in Mymensingh. She described Mymensingh as an important place for various considerations.

The Prime Minister said the division had been created as the government attached importance to build a strong defence despite resource constraints. She expressed the hope that each and every member of the newly raised division would remain ever vigilant in the discharge of their sacred duty of safeguarding the country.

She hoped with the raising of the new division Mymensingh would gradually prosper.



Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia inaugurating the flag raising ceremony of a new division of the Bangladesh Army at the Mymensingh Cantonment. — PID photo.

Festivities mark Victory Day

The nation celebrated the 21st anniversary of Victory Day Wednesday with a renewed vow to consolidate the country's independence and sovereignty and establish an exploitation-free society removing poverty, disease and hunger, reports UNB.

Different political and socio-cultural organisations across the country held rallies, symposium, seminars and musical soiree expressing firm determination to establish a happy and prosperous Bangladesh through inculcating democracy in our art and literature.

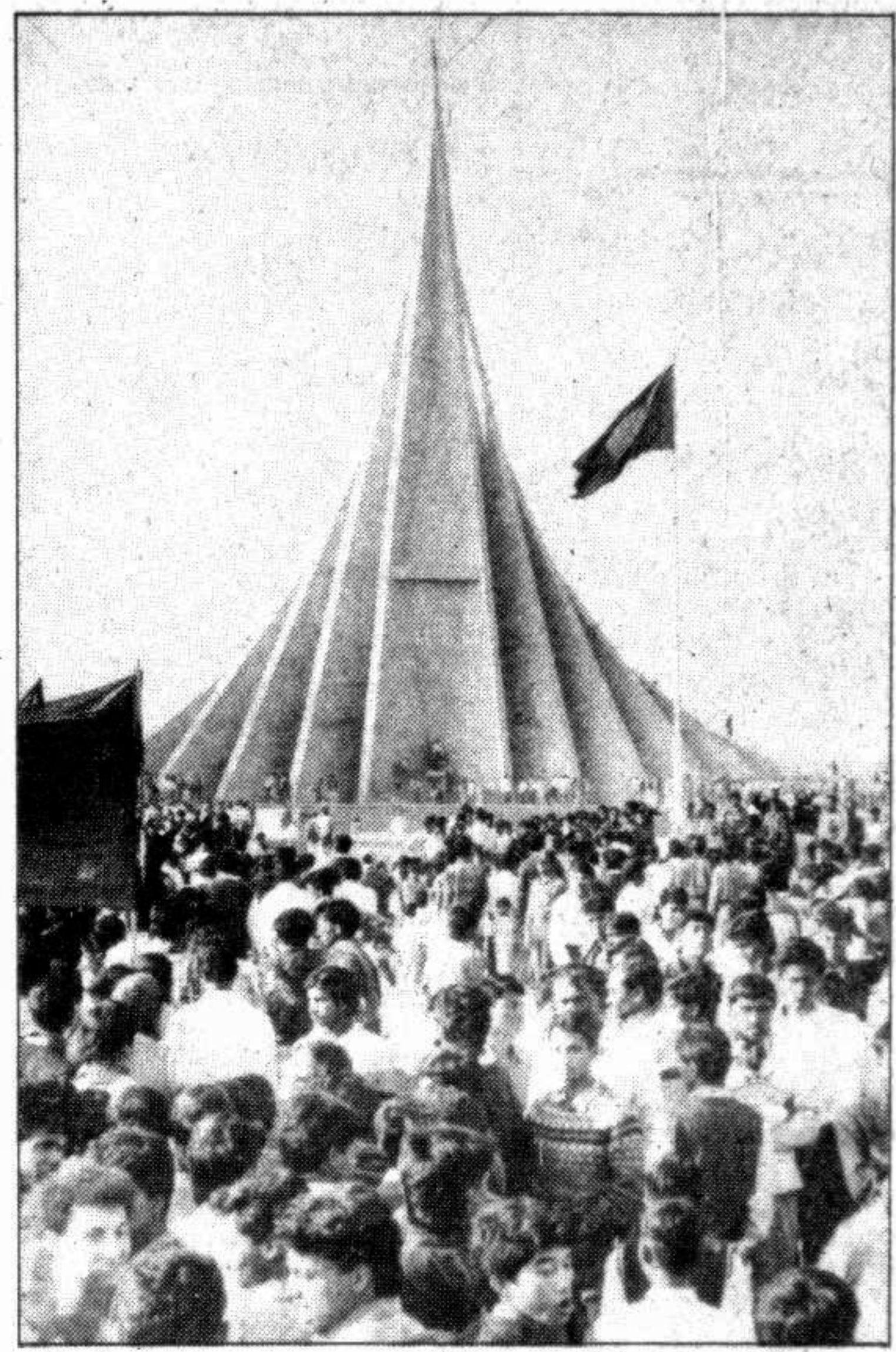
Special munajat was offered in mosques and prayer in temples, churches and other places of worship for the continued progress and welfare of the country.

On this day in 1971, the country won the final victory and emerged as an independent nation after a nine-month bloody guerrilla warfare against the Pakistani occupation army.

Thousands of men, women and school children placed wreaths at the national mausoleum at Savar, about 35 kms from the city, to show their glowing tribute to the memories of the valiant freedom fighters who laid down their lives for the cause of their motherland.

President Abdur Rahman Biswas, Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia and the Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina and other political leaders placed wreaths separately at the National mausoleum to pay glowing tributes to the martyrs of the Liberation War.

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People paying respects to the Martyrs of the Liberation War at the National Memorial at Savar on the Victory Day Wednesday. — Star photo

Traders in religion again resorting to dirty policy

Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina yesterday said the "identified 'traders in religion' were again resorting to a dirty policy of using religion to serve their heinous politics, reports UNB.

During the recent communal trouble on the Babri Mosque issue, Hasina alleged, they set afire a copy of holy Quran hand written by Emperor Aurangzeb and other rare documents preserved in the library section of Sylhet Bandar Bazar Brahman Mandir (Temple).

The library, which was also burnt down, was inaugurated by poet Rabindranath Tagore, the Awami League President said while talking to office-bearers of the Kaptipur Mansur Ali College student union at 29 Minto Road yesterday evening.

These brutes had killed Muslims at prayers in mosques and burnt houses and property of Muslim families during the 1971 Liberation War," she said. They took recourse to destruction of property of innocent people and religious places capitalising on the demolition of Babri Mosque at Ayodhya in India.

Hasina accused the BNP government of patronising terrorism, corruption and politicisation. The government has totally failed to fulfill people's democratic aspiration.

Referring to unrest in different educational institutions, Hasina said the ruling party had not only failed to ensure academic atmosphere but also failed to implement the 10-point demand of student community.

The Leader of the Opposition in Parliament said students should discharge their due responsibility for establishing a violence-free campus by unitedly resisting government-backed terrorists.

Opposition Chief Whip Mohammad Nasim, K M Jahangir, MP and AL Assistant Publicity Secretary Abdul Mannan were among others present.

Tk 2000 cr interest on loans to jute mills exempted

By Nurul Kabir

The government has decided to exempt about Taka 2000 crore of the total interests on the outstanding loans incurred by the public and private sector jute mills during the period of 1972 to 1992, an authoritative source said.

According to the source, the exemption of Taka 2000 crore covered penalty interest on the loans by per cent and normal interest by 66 per cent.

According to the government decision, the payment of the unexempted interest (34

per cent) and repayment of the original loan itself would be kept frozen for two years from January 1993, sources added.

The Jute Minister Brig (Retd) Hannan Shah, confirming the decision, said that the government had decided to do so with a view to giving a thrust to the country's jute sector that was playing a vital role in earning foreign exchange for the nation.

Under the government decision, the concerned jute

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Stranded Pakistanis Repatriation begins this month, iterates Rabiat

Star Report

The Secretary General of Rabiat al-Alam al-Islami, Dr Abdullah Omar Naseef yesterday reaffirmed that the repatriation of the stranded Pakistanis would begin by the end of this month and said that the process would take about two years to complete.

Briefing newsmen at a local hotel, Dr Naseef said: "Repatriation of the stranded Pakistanis would begin before the end of this month, inshallah". However, he hastened to add that depending on the amount of financial help offered from other sources, specially for transportation by the governments of Bangladesh and Pakistan, the whole process would take a "maximum of two years".

Replying to a question, Dr Naseef said that registration of the stranded Pakistanis had



Dr Abdullah Omar Naseef speaking at the dinner. — Star photo

Rohingyas: Dhaka risks losing international support

By Farid Hossain

News Analysis

Bangladesh risks losing international support for the Rohingya refugees if the government goes ahead with its current repatriation policy. Though the authorities here insist that no one is being sent home forcibly, the Western donors are not happy with the way the repatriation is going on. International relief work-

ers say they have "concrete evidence" that the government is forcing many refugees to return home.

More than 2,000 refugees have gone back to Myanmar since the controversial repatriation of an estimated 250,000 Rohingya Muslims began in September under a Dhaka-Yangon pact signed in April. According to the government, all of them returned home willingly, an assertion the international relief workers challenge, claiming they

have evidences that more than 150 of them had gone back having no other choice.

The allegations have prompted the Geneva-based United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to send to Dhaka its director at Asia Bureau Werner Blatter to hold talks with Bangladesh government officials for a fresh assessment of the situation. Blatter, who arrived in Dhaka last weekend, is waiting to meet the officials.

The UNHCR's Dhaka office

has confirmed Blatter's unannounced visit without releasing details. But a Western diplomat, who monitors the refugee situation at his embassy, told this correspondent that one of his objectives is to investigate the allegations of forced repatriation.

"The future of the UNCHR relief operation for the refugees will depend much on the outcome of Blatter's visit," said the diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The UNHCR has so far mo-

bilised more than 20 million US dollars from 13 countries in aid for the refugees who have fled to Bangladesh during past 1 1/2 years to escape a military crackdown in Myanmar's western Arakan province. When Bangladesh signed the repatriation agreement in April, the refugees rejected it saying, there was no guarantee that they would be safe back home. Though the donors were not totally happy with the agreement, they did not raise any objection adopting a wait-

and-see policy.

As a delayed repatriation finally got underway in September, the UNHCR had no participation in the process, in the face of protests from the refugees the government, at one stage, involved the UNCHR in the repatriation in the form of interviewing the would-be returnees in transit camps. But that fragile arrangement broke down on Nov 25 when the largest group of 932 refugees were sent home amidst allega-

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348 refugees return to Myanmar

From Our Correspondent

COX'S BAZAR, Dec 17: A total of 348 Rohingya refugees of 83 families have been sent back to their homes today from Nayapara and Rangkhali transit camps.

With this the number of returnees stands at 2955. Today's was the 11th batch of returnees and they were received by the Myanmar authorities in Kaningchang and Pimpiew reception centres.

Additional Relief and Repatriation Commissioner Fayezur Rahman and Executive Officer of Teknaf thana Mosharraf Hossain were present during the time of their return.

According to official sources, merely 500 more Rohingyas are likely to leave the refugee camp tomorrow.

A total of about 4,500 refugees are still staying at the refugee camps at Cox's Bazar and Bandarban districts of the country.

It may be mentioned that no UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees) officials are participating in the repatriation process since December 5 as the Bangladesh government has denied to agree with their demand that no government official would be present while interviewing the refugees.

Meanwhile, Prof UZU Ukata, Representative of United Nations Human Rights Commission, yesterday visited two Rohingya camps and discussed their problems. Relief and Repatriation Commissioner Golam Mortuza and some other government officials were present during the visit.

Nirmul body calls conference on February 4 for greater movement

By Staff Correspondent

The Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Samannya Committee has called a conference in the capital on February 4-5 to finalise its next course of action as its December 16 deadline to government passed yesterday.

Committee chief Jahannara Begum announced this while addressing a press conference yesterday in the city.

The deadline was set at the committee's October 14 grand rally in the capital to meet their four-point charter of demands.

Jahannara Imam in her speech announced that a conference of the committee's thana and district level representatives would be held in the capital February 4-5 next year when programmes for a greater movement would be finalised. Besides, she added, a month-long programme of workers' rallies and mass-contact would be held across the country with a view to intensifying the current movement.

Commenting on the governments failure to meet their demands, Mrs Imam regretted that it did not show respect to people's verdict on Golam Azam and his party, Jamaat-e-Islami. She also branded BNP government as an associate force of anti-liberation Jamaat-Shibir-Freedom Party circle.

Member-Secretary of the

5 hurt as AL, BNP clash in Khulna

From Staff Correspondent

KHULNA, Dec 17: Five persons were injured and BNP-backed Sramik Dal office here was ransacked when two rival groups of workers belongs to Awami League and BNP locked in a clash at Khulna railway station area yesterday night.

The two groups fought a three-hour long battle from about 8:45 pm. The clash was sparked off by a news that a worker of Sramik League had been beaten by workers of the rival group in the evening.

Both the groups used bombs, lethal weapons.

One injured person was shifted to Khulna hospital while four others were admitted to city clinics. Witnesses said police did not intervene during the clash but arrested two persons later. Both BNP and Awami League lodged separate cases accusing each other with the Khulna thana today. Tense situation was prevailing in the area. Special police pickets have been deployed in the area.