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The Daily Star

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NEWS BRIEFS

WHO DG thanks PM

The Director-General of World Health Organisation (WHO), Dr Hiroshi Nakajima, has congratulated Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia for declaring her secretariat tobacco-free from September 24 this year. In a letter to the Prime Minister recently, the WHO Director-General said, "This commitment from the highest level will serve as a great encouragement to health workers who are striving towards a tobacco-free society," reports BSS.

Hasina demands release of Bahar

Awami League President Sheikh Hasina yesterday demanded immediate release of Comilla AL leader A K M Bahauddin Bahar and six others of her party. In a statement, she condemned the arson at the residence of Bahar, a former chairman of Comilla pourashava allegedly by the government-backed hoodlums, reports UNB.

Capt (Retd) Mazed made OSD

Captain (Retd) Abdul Mazed, Director of the National Savings Directorate, has been made Officer-on-Special Duty (OSD) at the Ministry of Establishment, reports BSS.

DC's conference Dec 22-24

A three-day conference of Deputy Commissioners will be held on December 22-24 at the conference room of the cabinet. Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia will inaugurate the conference on December 22 at 10 am. All the Divisional Commissioners and Deputy Commissioners of the country will attend the conference, reports BSS.

No-confidence motion postponed

BJP apologises

NEW DELHI, Dec 18: India's parliament today postponed a vote of no-confidence against the government of Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao, under attack following the demolition of a mosque which triggered religious riots, reports Reuter.

The Speaker of the Lok Sabha (lower house) postponed the vote to next week after a second day of inconclusive debate on the motion proposed by the opposition Hindu revivalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Countering the motion, the ruling Congress Party hit out at the BJP in both houses of parliament, blaming it for the destruction of the mosque on December 6 by Hindu zealots which triggered Hindu-Muslim riots that left over 1,200 people dead.

AFP adds: India vowed today to rebuild Babri Mosque razed by Hindu zealots, as the BJP apologised to parliament for the first time for the desecration.

Home Minister Shankarrao Chavan told the Rajya Sabha, or upper house, that the government would also take steps to ensure the construction of a temple for Hindu warrior-god Rama in the town of Ayodhya.

He said the government was committed to protecting the rights of India's minorities, including Muslims, and it would reconstruct the 464-year-old mosque.

Chavan blamed the Bharatiya Janata Party for the demolition, saying its leaders had been busy spreading 'communal poison' in India.

The minister blamed the local police for failing to prevent Hindu mobs from raiding the dilapidated structure, and said the Hindus had blockaded roads in Ayodhya on December 6 to prevent federal troops from reaching the mosque site.

Chavan's comments came shortly after BJP leader Sankar Bakht expressed his party's apology for the razing of the mosque.

"We are extremely sorry for what happened in Ayodhya, said Bakht, the party's leader in the upper house, 'we have tendered an unconditional apology for what happened on December 6'.

Bakht, the party's only top Muslim leader, added that party president Murlidhar Joshi and his predecessor Lal Krishna Advani had made

numerous attempts to prevent the Hindu activists from tearing down the mosque but failed.

But Bakht said Prime Minister Narasimha Rao's government was also to blame for the mosque desecration, and indeed will have 'to take a major portion of the blame' as it had failed to protect it.

An ex-army officer spent a month training some 100 Hindu militants who took part in the destruction of the mosque in Ayodhya, an Indian cabinet minister told parliament today.

Rajesh Pilot, Communications Minister and close associate of Narasimha Rao, said the retired Brigadier taught the zealots how to ram through police cordons, and steel bars

BJC operations will be wound up by June 30, 1994

By S Y Bakht

All operations of the Bangladesh Jute Corporation (BJC) will be wound up by June 30, 1994, according to a government approved World Bank plan for restructuring the ailing jute sector.

The plan also calls for reducing the total manpower of the corporation by at least 50 per cent by June next year and to start selling the property immediately.

Proceeds from the sale would be used to repay about Taka 1200 crore in outstanding bank loans and arrears to jute traders, according to a Jute Ministry source.

The World Bank has also approved a Taka 15 crore voluntary retirement plan, of which 50 per cent has already been released.

The Jute Ministry has issued an order last month asking the corporation to utilise the Taka 7.5 crore funds for retirement benefits by the end of this year when the remaining amount would be released.

Corporation sources said that a total of 460 BJC employees had already opted for the voluntary retirement plan while another list of about 150 employees, who had completed 25 years of service, was in the process of being finalised.

The corporation currently employs about 2400 workers, employees and officers.

Set up in 1985 following the merger of five organisations, Jute Export Corporation, Jute Marketing Corporation, Special Jute Board, Jute Trading Corporation and the

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Keep away from unnecessary issue, PM asks students

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia yesterday reiterated her call for united and responsible efforts of all quarters in solving national problems to consolidate the democratic process, reports BSS.

"The unnecessary issues which hamper the development and progress of the nation will have to be avoided to attain goals of uplift cherished under the present system of democracy," Begum Zia said this while speaking to the newly elected office-bearers of Dhaka Medical College Central Students Union when they met her at her Sugandha office.

The function was also attended by the teachers and general students of Dhaka Medical College.

Congratulating the newly elected office-bearers of the union the Prime Minister called upon the students to unitedly resist terrorism on the campuses to make democracy meaningful.

She said, the government gives equal consideration and cooperation to all the student organisations whatever their party affiliation is in their efforts to create congenial atmosphere in the educational arena.

Out of the total 20 posts 17 candidates from Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal won in the recently held election of the DMC Central Student Union. All the 20 elected members attended the function.



Is instant justice always just?: An enforcer meting out punishment to a rickshaw puller for violating traffic rules the city yesterday. — Star photo

CHT Local Govt Council elections postponed

BAGACHHARI (Rangamati), Dec 18: The government has decided to postpone for the time being the elections to the Local Government Councils in the Chittagong Hill Tract districts and the land survey programme there, reports BSS.

Stating this at a public meeting here in connection with the inauguration of Bagachhari Canal Project, Communications Minister Oli Ahmed said that the government took the decisions at the request of 'Parbatya Chhatra Dal' (government) did not want to impose any ex-parte decision.

Oli Ahmed who is also the Chairman of the National Committee for the Chittagong Hill Tracts, said the government led by Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia had started open dialogue for the first time with the Janasanghati Samity, Shantibahini and people of all the spheres of the hill tracts region.

He said the government viewed that the hill tracts problems should be solved on the basis of opinions shared by all.

The Communications Minister stressed the need for taking realistic measures by all concerned for solving the hill tracts problems.

He said the government is determined to solve the problem accumulated over last 21 years. However, he said, the persons for whom the initiatives are aimed must perceive the government's sincerity.

Presided over by Nazimuddin Ahmed, Rangamati district BNP president, the meeting was also addressed by Chakma tribal chief Raja Devashish Roy, Rangamati Local Government Council Chairman Parijat Kusum Chakma, Syed Wahidul Alam MP, Sirajul Islam Chowdhury MP and Milton Chakma on behalf of the persons who have joined Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal

PM's India visit, Babri Mosque demolition may have link: Hasina

CHITTAGONG, Dec 18: Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina today said indecision and wrong policy of the ruling BNP had plunged the country into a total stagnation, reports UNB.

"Inefficiency and ineptitude of the government not only failed to salvage the national economy but also posed a threat to hard-won democracy," she told a big rally at Baskhali Jaladee High School ground this afternoon.

The Awami League President launched a double-pronged attack on the ruling party and Jamaat-e-Islami for the violence in different parts of the country on the issue of Babri Mosque in India.

"We condemn the demolition of the historic mosque and demand its reconstruction, but at the same time we protest the communal strife by identified traders in religion," she said.

In this context, the opposition leader mentioned the

meeting between Bangladesh Jamaat leaders and Indian BJP leader L K Advani in New Delhi as well as Prime Minister Begum Zia's recent visit to India.

It remains a mystery that the 'push-back' drive by India and demolition of Babri Mosque took place after the Prime Minister's visit to New Delhi and Jamaat-BJP meeting in the Indian capital, Hasina wondered.

Hasina accused the government of its failure in ensuring security to life and property of the minority people. On the contrary, she alleged that the ruling BNP-backed the fundamentalist elements of anti-liberation Jamaat-Shibir in fanning communal violence.

She criticised arson, loot and destruction of the property and places of worship of minority groups by the fundamentalist elements in the country and said even a copy of holy Quran hand written by emperor Aurangzeb was set

afire in Sylhet by the fanatics.

The Awami League leader called for maintaining peace and communal harmony and said that if the security for the minority community was not ensured, the security of 14 crore Muslims who are the minority in India, might be threatened.

"Islam is the religion of peace and we will have to maintain communal harmony foiling heinous politics of the fundamentalist forces," she said, adding that her party formed an All-Party Committee for Communal Harmony with other opposition groups.

Responding to the Bangladesh government's demand for the trial of mass killing of Muslims in Bosnia by a special tribunal, Hasina questioned why the government does not concede to the popular demand for the trial of 'war criminal' Golam Azam by a special tribunal.

The opposition leader said

25 children suffer burn injuries at National Stadium

By DMCH Correspondent

At least 25 children watching the inaugural ceremony of the Fifth Bangladesh Games at the Dhaka National Stadium suffered burn injuries as fire spread at the north gallery Friday.

Of the wounded 20 children aged between 7 to 12 were rushed to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) where 15 got admitted and five others were released after first aid. Most of the wounded children were street urchins.

Witnesses said that gas-balloons carrying festoons released on the eve of the inauguration caught fire when they were flying over the flame of the game-torch lighted on the occasion at the north gate of the stadium at around 4:45 pm Friday.

As hundreds of children were running to catch the falling balloons burning festoons fell on them, witnesses said.

Malaysia enforces new visa rules for Bangladeshis

The new visa regulations to enter Malaysia have come into effect since Wednesday under which Bangladeshis visitors will have to obtain visas in advance.

The Malaysian High Commission in Dhaka has already started receiving applications for visas that will be issued only after approval of the authorities in Kuala Lumpur, said a High Commission spokesman.

So long, Bangladeshi citizens could obtain visas on arrival in Malaysia. But the system was revoked through the new ruling of the Malaysian government that will also be applicable for the citizens of India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

According to the new ruling, the citizens of these four South Asian countries will need local sponsors to enter Malaysia. The sponsor will have to pay a deposit of 750 Malaysian dollar (300 US dollar) for each visa applicant which will be refunded if the visitor leaves the country

within the stipulated time. The money would be confiscated if the person overstayed or broke any law of the land.

The regulation for sponsorship will, however, take effect from January 1, 1993," the spokesman of Malaysian High Commission told The Daily Star while clarifying the new visa arrangements.

He said that Bangladeshi citizens could now apply for visas with passports bearing endorsement of a minimum 300 US dollar and return air ticket.

The applications would be forwarded to authorities in Kuala Lumpur and visas would be given only after their approval," the spokesman said noting that the applications for visas irrespective of length of stay or reason for entry would require approval of the Malaysian authorities in Kuala Lumpur.

Explaining the reason for adopting the new measures,

Expelled Palestinians vow to stay in no-man's land

MARJ AZ-ZOHOUR (Lebanon), Dec 18: More than 400 Palestinians expelled by Israel vowed today to stay in a fog-shrouded South Lebanon no-man's land between Israeli and Lebanese troops, reports Reuter.

Dumped on the edge of Israel's security zone in the Jewish state's biggest peace-time Arab expulsion and turned back by Lebanese troops at the point of a tank gun, the Palestinians swiftly saw their plight could become a cause to campaign for their return home.

"God take our revenge on Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin," declared a prayer leader when the whole group of about 418 knelt on the freezing ground for their first Friday prayers in exile.

"America chorused the Muslim fundamentalists arrested in the occupied Gaza

Strip and West Bank and accused by Israel of being linked to the Islamic Jihad in Palestine and Hamas movements.

Even stuck in limbo between two armies and away from home their mood was more of defiance than fear.

"We tell Rabin this deportation is the first nail in the coffin of the Jewish state," said prayer leader Dr Abdel-Aziz al-Retaisi from Gaza who thanked Lebanon for barring them all.

He demanded Arab delegations withdraw from Middle East peace talks immediately and support the deportees. This is the peace Rabin seeks. The peace of deportation ... of emptying the land."

The PLO, which unlike Hamas and Islamic Jihad backed the talks which began 14 months ago, announced on Thursday it would suspend Palestinian participation until

the 400 returned.

"We urge (Lebanese) President Elias Hrawi not to bow to American or Israeli pressure to allow us into Lebanon," said deportee Samir Salameh from the Islamic University in Gaza.

The Lebanese government, anxious not to turn the civil war-ravaged country into a dumping ground for Israel and urged on by the Islamic Jihad, Hamas and a message from PLO chief Yasser Arafat on Thursday, decided to keep the Palestinians out.

The deportees, blindfolded, bound and some clutching copies of the Muslim holy book the Koran, were expelled from Israel's 'security zone' in the south on trucks before dawn on Friday.

But Lebanese troops moved up a tank and armoured vehicles. After a heated argument



Palestinians, expelled by Israel for their links to the radical fundamentalist Hamas and Islamic Jihad organisations, wait in a no-man's land — AFP photo

Iodized salt can help boost national IQ

Star Report

Had all salts been iodized and if each citizen spent the cost of a cup of tea each year towards consuming iodized salts, the national intelligence quotient (IQ) would have been on the rise. The price of a cup of tea comes to about Tk 2.

Perplexing though it may sound, it is true.

Iodine deficiency leads to poor IQ, gutter mild to severe mental retardation, dwarfism and many other mental maladies. The more people suffer from iodine deficiency problems, the lower is the IQ.

In Bangladesh, lakhs of people are victims of Iodine Deficiency Disorders (IDD) while about one billion people in the world are at risk, many of them living out their lives with reduced mental and