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The Daily Star

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NEWS BRIEFS
Japanese envoy holds reception
 Ambassador of Japan and Madame Saiki held a reception last evening at their residence in celebration of the birthday of the Emperor Akihito. The reception was attended, among others, by Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina, Home Minister Abdul Matin Chowdhury, parliament members, political leaders, editors, senior journalists and the elite of the city, reports BSS.

AL MP hospitalised
 Jatiya Sangsad member and Jessore District Awami League President Tabbar Rahman Sardar was admitted to the Suhrawardy Hospital yesterday morning with cardiac problems. Sardar is now at the intensive care unit of the hospital under Prof. Jalaluddin, reports BSS.

Proposed strike called off
 Bangladesh River Transport Workers and Employees Action Council yesterday called off the proposed strike following fulfillment of some of its demands, according to a reliable source, reports BSS.

Two killed in road mishap
 SIRAJGANJ, Dec 20: Two buses tumbled into roadside ditches in the district today, killing at least 2 people and injuring 50 others, 11 seriously. Police and witnesses said a speeding truck rammed a Rangpur-bound bus which crashed into a roadside ditch at Chandidashgati in the sadar thana at about 1 pm, killing two and injuring 35 people, reports UNB.

Police, BJP men clash: 200 rounded up

Vajpayee arrested

NEW DELHI, Dec 20: Some 200 members of the opposition Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, including one of its leaders Atal Behari Vajpayee, were arrested today for defying a police ban on public meetings, news agencies said, reports Reuters.

The United News of India reported that police arrested the BJP members as they were heading for a public meeting to protest against the arrest last week of party president Murli Manohar Joshi and parliamentary leader Lal Krishna Advani.

PTI said, as Vajpayee moved out of the BJP office in Pant Marg minutes after addressing a press conference, he was stopped by the police who asked him not to proceed further in view of the prohibitory orders enforced under Section 144.

Over 200 BJP supporters, led by Vajpayee and Khurana, were arrested as they trooped ahead chanting 'jai shri Ram' and 'har har Mahadev'.

Running battles erupted at several places in central New Delhi between BJP supporters and police, who fired warning shots and teargas to scatter crowds trying to converge on a sports stadium for the rally, according to AFP.

The violence occurred after police blocked roads leading to the Talkatora Stadium to prevent party workers from reaching the venue situated in a high-security area.

Police vehicles with smashed windcreens were seen driving away from the area carrying bleeding officers. No estimate of casualties in the violence were immediately available.

Police had refused permission to hold the meeting, fearing it could cause unrest, a senior police official said.

Vajpayee, a former Foreign Minister, began a hunger fast soon after his arrest and accused the ruling Congress Party of 'trying to throttle the BJP' UNB said.

The government arrested Joshi and Advani and dis-

missed four state governments ruled by the BJP after accusing the party of responsibility for an outbreak of Hindu-Muslim riots earlier this month in which at least 1,200 people were killed.

The riots were sparked by the destruction of a mosque in the northern town of Ayodhya by Hindu militants on December 6. The BJP had supported the campaign to replace the mosque with a Hindu temple, but says it could not control militants who stormed the shrine.

The BJP has brought a no-confidence motion against the government which is scheduled to be put to a vote on Monday. The government is expected to win the vote with its narrow majority in parliament and the promised backing of left-wing and centrist opposition parties.

Today's challenge day was being observed to protest a sweeping government crackdown on Hindu fundamentalist groups, three of which were banned after the mosques' razing. More than 5,000 of their activists have been held.

Three BJP state governments were dismissed by New Delhi because of their cabinets' connections with fundamentalist groups.

Meanwhile, AP says, evidence mounted that the demolition of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya had been organized and planned, and was not the spontaneous action of a frenzied mob as originally portrayed.

A six-hour video tape of the destruction showed that only 25 to 30 youths initially crossed police barricades to invade the mosque and began hammering at it with pickaxes and crowbars.

For the first 15 minutes, only a few dozen people scrambled onto the three domes of the 16th century building, but police made no attempt to block them or remove them.

Only then did thousands of

Debts obstacle to jute sector recasting

By S Y Bakht

The outstanding debt of the jute sector is the primary unresolved issue preventing the finalisation of the World Bank-proposed jute sector restructuring programme due to be initiated from the next fiscal year.

Representatives of the government and a World Bank mission from Washington held several rounds of talks last month to finalise the jute sector restructuring programme which calls for a drastic reduction in loans in operation and manpower to make the sector viable.

An authoritative source at the World Bank mission here also agreed that the outstanding debt was the 'key issue' preventing the finalisation of the programme.

Saying that handling the debt problem was 'tricky and hard to disentangle as to who is liable for the debt', he noted that it was difficult for the government to take a sound decision around which a consensus could be formed.

The International Development Agency (IDA),

Communal harmony

All-party body's call to form countrywide units

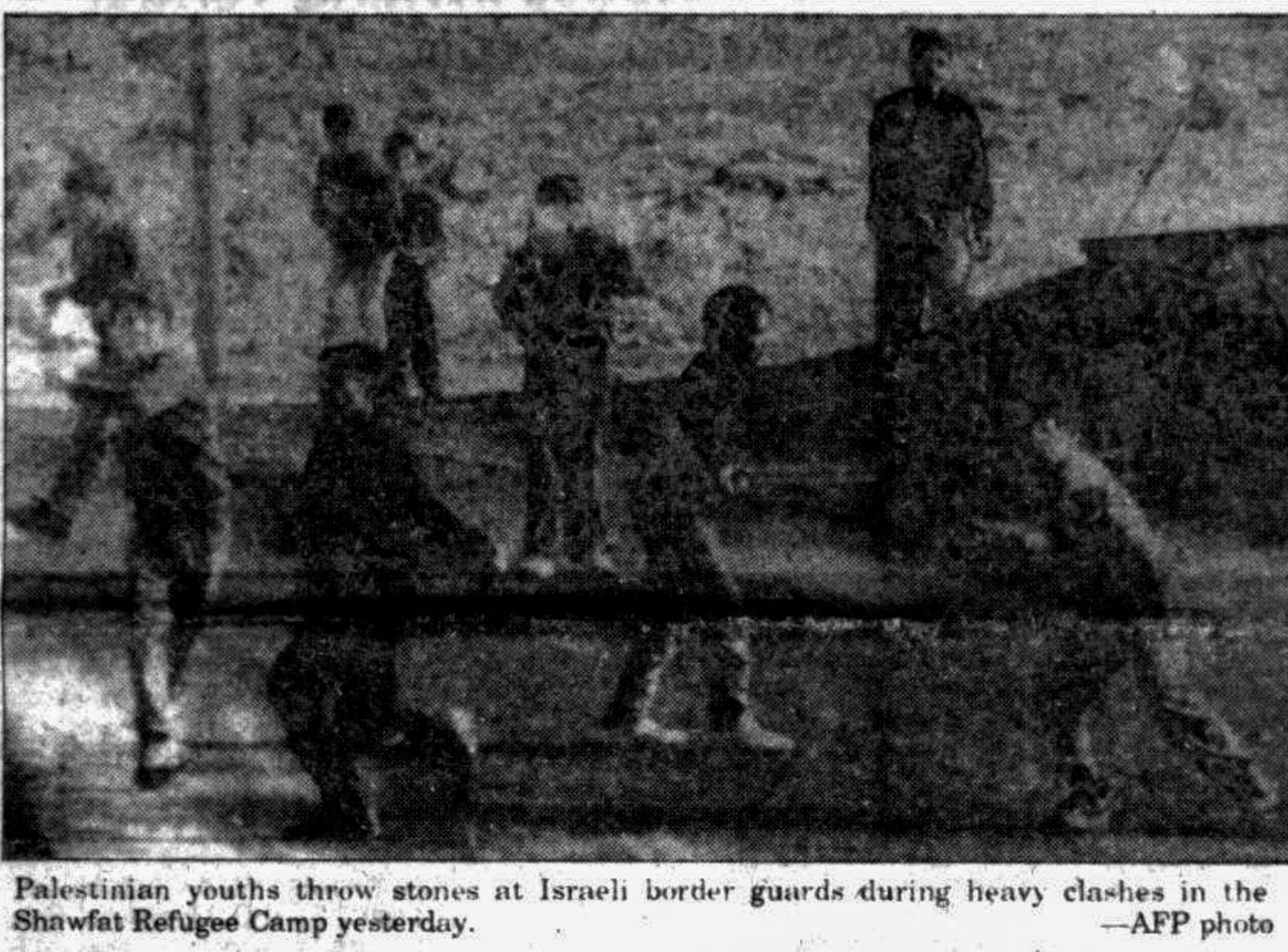
All party Committee for Communal Harmony yesterday called for immediate formation of its units at district, thana, union and ward levels to maintain peace and communal harmony at any cost, reports UNB.

The committee asked its units to assess the extent of damages caused by recent communal violence in different parts of the country.

It also asked the units to identify those guilty of attack on places of worship and the property of the people and file specific cases with their respective police stations.

The directives came from a meeting of the Committee held at the Awami League office with opposition leader Sheikh Hasina in the chair.

The meeting was attended by Abdul Mannan, Zillur Rahman, Amir Hossain Amu, Abdur Razzak MP, Tofael Ahmed MP, Mohammad Nasim MP, Mozaffar Hossain Paltu,



Palestinian youths throw stones at Israeli border guards during heavy clashes in the Shawfat Refugee Camp yesterday. —AFP photo

Israel remains unmoved

JERUSALEM, Dec 20: Israel's Cabinet on Sunday closed ranks against worldwide condemnation and reaffirmed its decision to report 415 suspected Muslim fundamentalists from the occupied lands, reports AP.

Palestinians staged a general strike for a third day to protest the expulsions, and Israeli troops patrolling the West Bank and Gaza Strip were on alert following bloody weekend riots.

Israel's Supreme Court began hearing appeals by civil rights activists who demanded the deportees be returned to their homes.

The court last Thursday permitted the men to be expelled to Lebanon, but has not ruled on the legality of the action.

Pictures of the deportees who were left in a no man's land tent camp in southern

Govt to dig well for gas, oil every year: PM

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia on Sunday said her government has decided to reduce dependence on foreign assistance and utilise domestic resources for exploitation of country's mineral resources, reports UNB.

"We have decided to dig at least one well every year for exploration of gas and oil even at our own investment if necessary," she said, while inaugurating the 8th Geological Conference organised by Bangladesh Geological Society at the Engineers Institution Sunday morning. "Geology and Economic Development" was the theme of the day-long conference.

She said development and prosperity is possible if we properly exploit and use our resources lying beneath the ground.

"We have to ensure 'dai-

Kamal calls on Alliances to reunite

By Staff Correspondent

Leaders of the Bangladesh Democratic Forum yesterday called upon the component parties of the three alliances that fought against autocracy in the eighties to come forward again with a view to combating the country's communal forces unitedly.

Addressing a press conference at the forum office, Dr. Kamal Hossain, Convenor of the Forum, said that the communal forces had resorted to find 7 in the people's solidarity in consolidating democracy, by patronising communal conflicts. He said that communal and fundamentalist forces served neither religion nor society in any positive way.

Dr Kamal Hossain, though vocal against 'communal forces', in general, expressed a

Repatriation of Rohingyas

UNHCR wants full partnership

By Farid Hossain

A UN official left Dhaka on Sunday after crucial talks with a top Foreign Ministry official on the repatriation of 250,000 Rohingya refugees camped in Bangladesh.

Werner Blatter, Director at Asia Bureau of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) met Foreign Secretary Reaz Rahman for the second time on Sunday morning before leaving for Geneva. His first meeting with the Foreign Secretary took place on Thursday.

"We had a full-length discussion on various points of the repatriation," Blatter told The Daily Star as he was checking out from his hotel.

Blatter said he had explained to the Foreign Secretary the UNHCR's position on the repatriation that began in September. "What we want is a full partnership in the process of repatriation," he said adding

"the UNHCR's main task is to provide assistance, security and protection to the refugees and also to verify their voluntary return."

Blatter was unwilling to give details, but said he will report the visit's outcome to the High Commissioner Sadako Ogata in Geneva.

Blatter's unannounced visit came amidst allegations by some refugees that the government is sending them home forcibly. The government has denied that any one is being sent home against his will.

Reaz Rahman said none of the more than 2,400 refugees so far repatriated was sent forcibly. "We are committed to voluntary repatriation of the refugees," he told a reporter describing his talks with Blatter as 'frank and open.'

(Rahman said the UNHCR

Next round of talks with Myanmar

Dec 29

COX'S BAZAR, Dec 20: The 11th round of Bangladesh-Myanmar official level meeting on Rohingya repatriation issue will be held at Chittagong from December 29 to December 31, reports BSS.

The Bangladesh side will be led by Chittagong Divisional Commissioner Omar Faruk while Maung Aung — Myanmar, Director General of Immigration will be at the head of his country's delegation.

Our Correspondent adds: A total of 545 refugees were sent back home in Myanmar yesterday morning from Nayapara and Rangkhali transit camps, officials said.

With this, the total number of repatriated refugees stands at 4028, they said.

The officials said that the today's batch of 118 families was received by the Myanmar authorities in Kuninggang and Pimpive reception centres.

District relief and repatriation officials were present to oversee the return.

Riyadh, Doha agree to settle dispute

MEDINA, Dec 20: Saudi Arabia and Qatar reached an agreement Sunday for settling their border dispute after three days of mediation by Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, reports AP.

Mubarak has been locked in talks with Saudi Arabian King Fahd and the emir of Qatar, Sheik Khalifa bin Hamad Al Thani, for the past two days in the holy city of Medina.

The agreement follows a three-month rift between the Arab nations that opened after a Sept. 30 border clash killed two people.

The official Qatar News Agency announced the agreement, but provided none of its details.

The agency said the agreement was signed by the foreign ministers of the three countries: Sheik Mohammed Bin Jasim al Thani of Qatar, Prince Saud al-Faisal of Saudi Arabia and Amr Moussa of Egypt.

It said the signing took place in the presence of the



Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia addressing the 8th conference of the Bangladesh Geological Society at Engineers Institution in city yesterday. —PID photo

T&T employees call off proposed strike

The CBA of T&T yesterday called off a countrywide non-stop strike, scheduled to begin tomorrow (Tuesday) following an agreement signed with the authorities for settling its demands, reports UNB.

The agreement was reached at a tripartite arbitration among the Labour Director, the Collective Bargaining Agent and the T&T Board at the Labour Directorate, meeting sources said.

According to the terms of the agreement, authorities will fulfil the demands in phases in two years, the Bangladesh Telecommunication Workers and Employees Council (CBA) told reporters at a press conference after the meeting.

CBA President Syed Kutub Rahman in a written statement said the authorities agreed not to turn T&T into a holding company, to ensure promotion in different cadres, bring necessary amendment to the 1984 employment rules, create new posts, take steps for welfare of the workers and to upgrade the standard of telecommuni-

Benazir launches fresh protest today

ISLAMABAD, Dec 20: Police jailed a senior leader of Benazir Bhutto's left-former party Sunday as the former premier prepared to launch another round of demonstrations against the conservative Islamic government, reports AP.

Ms Bhutto has called for more anti-government protests on Monday, the eve of the President's annual state of the nation address to a joint session of Parliament.

On Sunday, a special terrorist court revoked Salman Taseer's bail after President Ghulam Ishaq Khan imposed a law ending the Supreme Court's right to grant bail to a defendant.

Ms Bhutto called the new presidential ordinance, a "black law" aimed at keeping her husband, Asif Ali Zardari, in jail.

Zardari, 40, has been jailed

in Karachi since October 1990 on murder, extortion and kidnapping charges. He has yet to be convicted by the terrorist court and has asked for bail.

But many say the law will be used to stamp out political opposition, especially from Ms Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party.

"We're victims of the presidential ordinance," Taseer said as police led him and another party worker from the courtroom in the eastern city of Lahore. "This is a slap in the face by the president. We're being targeted for being political opponents."

Taseer was granted bail on November 28 after he was charged with advocating the overthrow of the democratically-elected government.

He was arrested on Nov 18 during Ms Bhutto's attempt to lead supporters on a protest

march from the neighboring city of Rawalpindi to Islamabad, the federal capital. Taseer accused the police of torturing him, hanging him upside down and pounding his body with iron batons while in custody.

Taseer was among thousands of Ms Bhutto's party workers who were arrested and jailed by the government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who claimed the former premier was trying to incite people to overthrow his administration.

Government officials so far have refused to comment on Ms Bhutto's planned rally Monday in Rawalpindi, but public gatherings of four people or more are banned. Sharif was scheduled to return late Sunday from a four-day trip to Japan.

Naheed Khan, Ms Bhutto's

Fake-flag carriers out to create chaos: BNP

A meeting of the National Executive Committee of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) yesterday resolved that BNP together with the people would foil all conspiracies in order to protect the country's democracy, sovereignty and independence, reports BSS.

Presided over by Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia who is also chairperson of BNP, the meeting called upon the people to remain vigilant against anti-democratic activities of the defeated forces of autocracy and fake flag-carrier of democracy.

The meeting which was participated by 70 speakers and attended by about 400 leaders was adjourned till 3 pm today.

The meeting regretted that a political party which was defeated in the last elections had been engaged in creating indiscipline joining hands with the rejected autocratic forces to embarrass and harass the elected BNP government, after making public announcement to that effect from the very beginning.

The same political party disregarding democratic norms and values, had been threatening to make the elected parliament ineffective, the meeting further observed.

That particular party had also welcomed the illegal imposition of martial law in 1982 and had participated in the blue-print election of 1986 betraying the people's democratic movement to prolong the stay of the military government, the meeting said.

Russian Deputy FM due today

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Georgiy Fridrikhovich Kunadze arrives here today (Monday) on a 4-day official visit to Bangladesh, reports UNB.

He will be accompanied by AF Chaykovskiy, People's Deputy, member of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation, officials said yesterday.

This will be the first high-level visit from Russia since the dissolution of USSR. The visit assumes an additional significance as it is taking place during the 20th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relation between the two countries.

During the tour, the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister will call on Speaker Shaikh Razzaka Ali, State Minister for Textile Abdul Mannan and the Secretary to the Ministry of Commerce.