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NEWS BRIEFS

Cold wave kills 13 in northern dists

PABNA, Dec 25: Cold wave claimed at least 13 lives in five northern districts during the last three days, unofficial sources said. Of the victims, three died in Pabna, three in Rangpur, two in Panchagarh, two in Dinajpur and three in Rajshahi district. It was learnt the victims were mostly hard-core poor and living in huts and slums without having adequate warm clothes, reports UNB.

BNP nomination seekers' interview

Persons who applied for BNP nomination for contesting the Jatiya Sangsad by-election to Dhaka-11 seat have been requested to be present at the central office of the party at 8-30 am Sunday for interview. Party Secretary General Barrister Abdus Salam Talukder has requested all the members of the National Standing Committee of BNP to be present at the board on due time, reports BSS.

Property worth Tk 5 lakh gutted

MANIKGANJ, Dec 25: Five people were injured and property worth about Tk five lakh gutted in a devastating fire at Radhakantapur village in Shibbaya thana today (Friday). Witnesses said the fire incident occurred at the house of Daiyal Chandra Dash (55) at about 2 am and gutted belongings including cash 30,000, paddy about 150 maunds, nine tolas of gold ornaments and 24 cattle heads. The cause of the fire could not be ascertained immediately, reports UNB.

71 arrested on various charges

Police rounded up 71 people from different parts of the city yesterday on various charges. The arrested include 10 wanted criminals, one charged under the Anti-terrorism Act, three accused of robbery and nine for stealing, reports UNB.

Rohingya repatriation US govt condemns Dhaka's "use of coercion"

Star Report

The United States Thursday condemned the Bangladesh Government for what it said forcing the Rohingya refugees to go back to their homeland, and accused the latter of denying the UNHCR an effective role in protecting the refugees. The US government claimed to have received "credible reports" indicating that "Bangladesh is coercing Rohingya refugees to return to Burma (Myanmar) and that the Government of Bangladesh is denying UNHCR staff free access to the Rohingya refugee camps, thereby preventing the UNHCR from fulfilling its international mandate to protect refugees."

The United States

Government deplors the use of coercion and deeply regrets that the Bangladesh Government and the UNHCR have not agreed on an effective role for the UNHCR to protect the Rohingyas both in the refugee camps in Bangladesh and during the repatriating process to Burma, the Department of State said in a statement.

The statement, made by spokesman Richard Boucher, went on to say: "The United States Government calls upon the Government of Bangladesh to refrain from coerced repatriation and to negotiate with the UNHCR as soon as possible an effective protection role for UNHCR."

UNB adds: Nearly 5,000 Rohingya refugees have so far been repatriated in 12 batches since the process got underway in September, and Bangladesh officials said the refugees had all returned voluntarily and on their own free will.

More than 2.65 lakh Rohingyas Muslims fled their homes in Burma's western Arakan province since December 1991 to escape persecution by the Myanmar authorities.

Their repatriation is taking place under a bilateral accord between Dhaka and Rangoon signed last April.

Our Staff Correspondent from Chittagong adds: Another

round of high level flag meeting between the border guard officials of Bangladesh and Myanmar is scheduled to be held Sunday at the country's southeastern frontier town Teknaf, officials sources here said.

The Sector Commander level flag meeting will discuss some measures to be taken by both the countries to check the infiltration and other border issues.

The two sides are also expected to exchange some nationals who suffered imprisonment in each other's country on charge of infiltration, the sources added.

Second round of CHT talks today

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Dec 25: The nine-member Bangladesh parliamentary team headed by the Communications Minister Col (Rtd) Oli Ahmed will hold second round of talks with the Shantibahini at Khagrachhari Circuit House tomorrow (Saturday) for a political solution to the 18-year-old Chittagong Hill Tracts problems.

In the talks, the Shantibahini delegation will be led by J B Larma, alias Shantu Larma, President of Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS), the mother organisation of Shantibahini, officials said.

The first round of talks was

held November 5 at the same venue.

Meanwhile, all preparations have been taken to hold tomorrow's talks.

In order to facilitate the arrival and departure of the Shantibahini team, the authorities have relaxed security in the Khagrachhari frontier areas. Eight security camps including seven BDR outposts have been withdrawn December 21, five days ahead of the talk, as demanded by Shantibahini in their preconditions. The withdrawal order would remain effective even after four days of the dialogue.

The Shantibahini delegation

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Hasina asks govt 'Stop illegal interference in admn'

Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina yesterday asked the BNP government to refrain from 'illegal interference' into the administrative affairs and round up identified terrorists to ensure security to public life, reports UNB.

"Rise above partisan outlook, stop interfering into administrative affairs illegally and nab identified hoodlums", said Hasina in a statement.

The Awami League President's statement came following alleged attack on teachers and students of Nandail Shaheed Smriti Adarsha College in Mymensingh by armed activists of JCD.

Hasina said terrorists also ransacked the furniture of the college and looted shops in Nandail Bazar after JCD suffered defeat in the college union

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Faruk, Rashid dig at each other

By Staff Correspondent

Conflict over leadership has virtually divided the Freedom Party into two factions-one led by Col (ret'd) Syed Faruk Rahman and the other by Col (ret'd) Khandakar Abdur Rashid.

The split in the party became evident yesterday when each claimed his faction represented the party's mainstream and accused each other of attempting to capture the party's top position without any authority.

However, both the leaders denied having had any rift in the party structure.

Party Chairman Faruk, while talking to The Daily Star, challenged Rashid's authority of doing anything under the

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One murdered in city

By DMCH Correspondent

A restaurant manager, Mantu, 28, was murdered at Lal Kutir, Mirpur, in the capital Friday.

Mantu was fatally wounded when a group of miscreants hurled crackers at him near his residence at around 8 am. He succumbed to his injuries at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) after four hours of admission.

Relatives said that a group of extortionists who asked for tolls from Mantu but were re-

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JP Secy Gen sent to jail

By Staff Correspondent

Jatiya Party Secretary General Khaleedur Rahman Tito was sent to the Dhaka Central Jail Friday.

The Secretary General was arrested under the newly enacted Anti-terrorism Act while he along with some of his party members tried to enter into the locked party office at Kawan Bazar and detained in the Tejaon Police Station Thursday.

Khaleedur Rahman Tito was produced before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court yesterday from where he was sent to the jail, police said.



The Christian community in Dhaka visited the Kakrail Church on Christmas Day yesterday. — Star photo

Christmas celebrated

The Christian community of Bangladesh as elsewhere in the world yesterday celebrated Christmas — their greatest religious festival commemorating the holy birth of Jesus Christ, reports BSS.

The holy masses, however, began Thursday evening at different churches and Christmas eve parties were held at individual houses. The community members also decorated and illuminated their houses. They also adorned their homesteads with Christmas trees and cut the Christmas cakes amid carol singing.

In the capital yesterday morning holy masses were held at the St Mary's Cathedral at Kakrail. Holy Cross Church at Lakshibazar, Holy Rosary Church at Tejgaon, National

Mahor Seminary at Banani, St

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Opposition may join JS winter session

Star Report

The opposition parties which jointly boycotted most of the sittings of the autumn session of Parliament are now separately considering for joining the winter one scheduled for January 3, next year.

The Awami League (AL), largest opposition party in Parliament, the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB), the Ganatantri Party (GP), the National Awami Party (NAP), the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) boycotted the session protesting government indifference to the implementation

of the four-point accord signed between the AL-led opposition and the Treasury bench and the ruling party's move to pass the 'controversial' Anti-terror-

ism Act.

The four-point accord includes trial of the Jamaat chief Golam Azam as a war criminal and withdrawal of charges against 24 people involved with the Gano Adalat.

The Jatiya Party (JP), the second largest opposition party in Parliament, boycotted the session to registrar its protest against the Treasury bench attempt to pass the controversial law and the government's 'undemocratic attitude to the JP activists'.

The National Democratic Party (NDP) and the Islami Ojda Jate (IOJ) although walked out of the house under the leadership of the AL later

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World X-mas roundup

Pope anguished but worshippers see hope

VATICAN CITY, Dec 25: In an anguished Christmas message, Pope John Paul II, pleaded for peace in a world he said seems "deaf and impenetrable at times to a message of healing and hope, reports AP.

Concerns about violence dampened holiday observances at one of Christianity's most revered sites — Bethlehem, where Jesus Christ is said to have been born.

But worshippers worldwide also found reasons for optimism.

Cubans took advantage of a relaxed attitude toward religion, and Albanians celebrated the reopening of a church after decades of repression. In Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, Christmas carols and symbols such as Santa Claus were allowed to appear for the first time, the sign of liberalized attitudes toward Christianity in the Persian Gulf.

From the central balcony of St. Peter's Basilica, the Pope inveighed against those responsible for hostilities in the Mideast and the "planned and inhuman" ethnic war in

Bosnia-Herzegovina.

"Listen to the voice of love, both sweet and powerful, especially you who brandish violent and murderous arms," the Pope pleaded in a strong voice to a crowd of 15,000 people.

In Bethlehem on Christmas Eve, pilgrims and tourists packed the Church of the Nativity. Outside, hundreds of Israeli soldiers and police patrolled in a bone-chilling rain.

In the Somalia capital, Mogadishu, there were morning Catholic masses at the port and airport. Troops and American civilians were to eat a traditional Turkey dinner late in the afternoon, and others were to eat combat rations.

On Christmas Eve, there were Protestant Roman Catholic and Jewish services in Mogadishu. Some troops with M-16 rifles slung over their shoulders sang "Joy to the World" and "Silent Night" under a blistering afternoon sun.

The outlawed Irish Republicans Army declared its

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Gorbachev's regret

MOSCOW, Dec 25: Mikhail S. Gorbachev regrets the demise of the Soviet Union but says it is "impossible to bring back the USSR," according to an interview published Friday, the first anniversary of his resignation, reports AP.

The last leader of the Soviet Union also continued his criticism of Boris Yeltsin, saying the Russian President has failed to come up with new ideas and has put politics above the national interest. But he acknowledged that Yeltsin "has not yet exhausted his potential."

Gorbachev resigned on December 25, 1991, following the collapse of seven decades of central Kremlin authority.

The 61 year old Gorbachev is widely despised at home. In his interview with the daily newspaper Trud, he spoke poignantly of those who de-

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3000 Hindu marchers arrested Babri mosque body threatens to offer namaz at Ayodhya

NEW DELHI, Dec 25: The All India Babri Masjid Action Committee (AIBMAC) today said the Muslims would be forced to offer namaz at the disputed Ayodhya site if the centre allowed worship or 'darshan' of the idols there and demanded immediate reconstruction of the mosque at that site, reports PTI.

Addressing a press conference after its meeting here, the AIBMAC leader, Zafaryab Jilani, also demanded the resignation of the Prime Minister, PV Narasimha Rao, owing moral responsibility of the demolition of the AIBMAC after the mosque was demolished by Karsevaks on December 6.

"An agitational programme will be chalked out if there was any further delay in the reconstruction of the mosque at that particular site where it existed," Jilani said.

The AIBMAC would meet again in January to finalise the action programme, another AIBMAC leader, Mohd Azam Khan, said.

Reuter adds: Indian police today arrested more than 3,000 Hindu devotees threat-

ening to march to Ayodhya.

Authorities in Lucknow, the capital of Uttar Pradesh state where Ayodhya is located, said 234 people were arrested near the site of the temple and 2,855 in the nearby town of Faizabad.

Paramilitary police have guarded the site since ejecting the Hindu militants on December 8. Entry is banned.

The devotees had planned to offer prayers at the shrine. The Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) said the marches were part of continuing pressure on the government to allow public worship there. The BJP supported the campaign to replace the Ayodhya mosque with a temple, but disclaims responsibility for the storming of the shrine.

PTI says, the BJP today reaffirmed that it did not believe in India becoming a 'theocratic state', saying the Ayodhya incident was a reaction to a 'grave historical wrong' and it was not intended to hurt the sentiments of anyone.

The party's political resolu-

tion adopted at the conclusion of the two-day national executive underlined the party's commitment and conviction about equal opportunities and equal rights to all citizens.

The national executive described as 'anti-democratic and lawless' the measures adopted by the ruling Congress(I) and said 'we will face this onslaught with courage and conviction.'

AFP from Delhi adds: Prime Minister Rao's ruling Congress(I) party approved Thursday a mass action plan to fight communalism.

The plan, approved by the party's policy-making working committee after deliberations lasting about 11 hours, is chiefly aimed at mobilising the party's student and youth wings in the campaign aimed primarily at Hindu fundamentalism.

Under the action plan, beginning Monday the ruling party will sponsor mass rallies, conferences, seminars and symposia, involving all major sectors of society.

It is also to include house-to-house visits by Congress(I)

Rabin orders army to block aid supply to deportees

JERUSALEM, Dec 25: Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin today ordered the army to block any attempts to send aid for more than 400 stranded Palestinian deportees in Lebanon through Israeli-controlled areas, reports AFP.

Rabin, who is also Defense Minister, rejected the request to deliver aid from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) as a political rather than a humanitarian effort, a Defense Ministry statement said.

Lebanon has also rejected sending aid to the deportees from areas under its control, arguing that Israel must take full responsibility for the 415 Palestinians it deported to Lebanon last week.

Rabin announced the decision at a special meeting of the government but Foreign Ministry sources said Foreign Minister Shimon Perez opposed the decision as harmful to Israel's image.

AP adds: Rabin and Peres were reportedly split Friday over whether to accept the Red Cross appeal with Peres in favour of allowing the supplies through, Israel army radio said. Government officials, speaking anonymously, confirmed there were differences of opinion.

Tourism Minister Uzi Baran, from the dovish wing of Rabin's Labor Party, said on Israel radio that "From a humanitarian standpoint, I see no grounds for strong opposition... I definitely do not rule out

humanitarian aid."

Environment Minister Ora Namir, another dove, has also called for Israeli flexibility.

In an interview published Friday in the daily Maariv, Rabin did not flatly rule out a compromise, but accused Arabs of creating hardships for the deportees to score propaganda points.

"It seems to me that this is a political trick by the Lebanese government and I am sorry that the International Red Cross has become partner to this trick," he said, adding:

News reports say dozens of the deported men will be allowed back into the Israeli occupied territories by a military appeals board. The first appeal

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