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NEWS BRIEFS

UK Home Minister arrives today

British Home Minister Kenneth Clarke arrives in Dhaka today on a 4-day official visit. Clarke will call on Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, Foreign Minister A S M Mostafizur Rahman and Home Minister Abdul Matin Chowdhury and exchange views with them on issues of mutual interest including immigration and narcotics control, reports UNB.

Hasina protests Rahman's killing

Awami League President Sheikh Hasina yesterday registered her strong protest against the killing of her party's Awyongar thana leader Siddique Rahman. She demanded immediate arrest of the killers of Rahman, reports UNB.

RU subsidiary exams postponed

RAJSHAHI, Dec 28: The subsidiary examinations part 1 and part 2 under Rajshahi University (RU) scheduled to be held on December 29, 30 and 31 have been postponed for unavoidable circumstances. Controller of Examinations of RU said the other examinations scheduled to be held from January 2 will be held as usual, reports BSS.

Jamaat Rukon confere today

Jamaat-e-Islami will hold its Rukon (Member) conference today at Jamea Islamia at Tongi. Acting Amec of Jamaat-e-Islami Abbas Ali Khan will inaugurate the conference at 10 am, reports UNB.

Repatriation of stranded Pakistanis hits snag

By Toufique Imrose Khalidi

With only three days to the end of the year, the agreed deadline for start to the stranded Pakistanis' repatriation, the home-going of even a token 50 families is clearly uncertain, leading to frustration among the hopefuls living in shanties for 21 years.

Officials at the Bangladesh Foreign Ministry and the Pakistan High Commission here yesterday gave ample indications that the symbolic repatriation of 282 people of the 50 families by December 31 was far from a possibility.

The leaders of the refugees who wore black badges Sunday fearing a setback said yesterday that they were still hoping for the best.

"I won't say that there is no

uncertainty," said a Bangladesh official.

"We are waiting for word from Islamabad," said High Commissioner Anwar Kemal, who refused to confirm last night that the repatriation would not take place.

Kemal, reached by phone, however, sounded noncommittal as he said that with only three days left "we have logistical problems".

"I don't say that it will not take place (by the stipulated December 31)", the High Commissioner evaded a direct reply but said that the reported visit of Punjab Chief Minister Golam Hyder Wynec was unlikely within the next two days.

Wynec, whose province would be home to the returnees, told a delegation of the stranded Pakistanis December 12 that he would be in Dhaka to witness the symbolic repatriation of the 50 families.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif also said the same day that the process would start by this year end as promised earlier.

Because of what Pak authorities termed domestic problems, the first batch of would-be returnees was reduced to a token 50 families from 3000 families, as announced during Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia's visit to Pakistan of a total 238000 refugees staying in 66 camps across Bangladesh.

The token repatriation was planned to give credence to the commitment by Pakistan's highest political leadership that the process of taking the refugees to their cherished homeland would start by this year.

Islamabad said in August that 3000 families would be taken initially for whom housing facilities were being made in selected areas of the Punjab province.

Pakistan officials now say extensive floods in the province have delayed the completion of housing settlements and therefore the repatriation in full swing would be deferred by a few months.

Such an announcement in Islamabad by a Pakistani minister. See Page 12 Col 6

Hindus, Muslims reject Rao formula Ayodhya admn allows puja at makeshift temple

NEW DELHI, Dec 28: Hindu protesters clashed with police here today as Hindu and Muslim leaders rejected an attempt by Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao to forge a compromise over a toppled mosque in Ayodhya, reports AFP.

The Press Trust of India (PTI) reported meanwhile that the authorities in Ayodhya had allowed a first batch of Hindu holy men to pray today at a makeshift Hindu temple erected on the rubble of the Babri Mosque.

Police arrested some 2,000 activists of the pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People's Party) as the protesters turned a New Delhi district into a virtual battlefield

to step up their anti-mosque campaign.

Nine BJP activists and several officers were injured in the two-hour clash during which police used water cannons and tear gas to disperse the protesters.

The BJP said today's action was also to protest the arrest of party leader Lal Krishna Advani, who had been in custody since the Moghul-built mosque was toppled on December 6.

The clashes came in the wake of a government announcement Sunday that it was taking over the disputed site in Ayodhya and that two trusts would be set up shortly to build a mosque and a temple. See Page 12 Col 2

7 hurt as rival Rohingya groups clash

COX'S BAZAR, Dec 28: At least seven Rohingya refugees were injured, two seriously, in a clash between rival groups at Maricha Palong camp in Ukhiya thana here this afternoon, reports UNB.

Police and the camp-in-charge said the clash ensued when a group of refugees attacked another group willing to go back to their homeland in Myanmar was on its way to the transit camp. Both the groups used lethal weapons during the clash.

Of the injured, Abul Kashem (28) and Abu Siddique (25) were admitted to Ukhiya Sadar Hospital in critical condition. The rest were given first aid. They included Nazir Hossain (50) and Mir Ahmad (35).

Our Correspondent adds: Another batch of Rohingya refugees was repatriated yesterday. A total of 618 people from 132 families were sent home putting the total of the repatriated so far 5968.

Nirmul body's 'hatred day' today

By Staff Correspondent

The Ekattorer Ghatak Dal Nirmul Committee observes 'National Hatred Day' today to protest the declaration of Pakistan national Golan Azam Amcer (Chief) of the Jamaat-e-Islami in violation of the country's constitution on this day a year ago.

The day will be observed across the country through the burning effigies of Golan Azam. Demonstrations will also be organised by the committee's branches throughout the country.

In the capital, the central committee of the Nirmul Body will arrange a rally in front of the Jatya Press Club at 3 in the afternoon.

The committee has in- See Page 12 Col 3

Saifur sees investment climate excellent

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday said, excellent investment climate has been created to which the banking sector should respond to create growth in the real sectors, reports BSS.

Nationalised Commercial Banks (NCBs) and Development Financial Institutions (DFIs) have been advised to reduce further their lending rates commensurate with the needs of the economy.

The Finance Minister was presiding over a review meeting on overall investment situation of the country with concerned secretaries, members of the Planning Commission, Chairman and Managing Directors of banks and high officials at the conference room of the finance division. L K Siddique, MP, A T M Alamgir, MP, Amir Khashru Mahmud Chowdhury, MP and Governor, Bangladesh Bank, were among others present.

The meeting had an in-depth discussion on the prevailing investment situation of the country and noted with satisfaction that export and import had registered significant growth over corresponding period of last year. It was also noted that remarkable success had been achieved in containing inflation (CPI) at 5 per cent, sizeable surpluses are expected in support of development expenditure and the structural benchmarks for revenue collection, both tax and non-tax, had been achieved.

The meeting noted that growth of current expenditure has been contained to less than growth of nominal Gross Development Product (GDP) and external current account deficit has been reduced to 3 per cent of the GDP.

The Finance Minister directed the banks to shun old See Page 12 Col 6



Dhaka city under the blanket of thick fog yesterday morning.

— Star photo

Major parties bracing themselves for pourasava polls

By Nazmul Ashraf

Major political parties including the BNP and the Awami League (AL) are attaching special importance to the forthcoming elections to the country's pourasavas (municipalities) that the Jatiya Sangsad has recognised as administrative units.

The JS in its last session passed a bill making each of the municipalities and the union parishads of the country administrative units of the government.

With the boost to the status and authority of the pourasavas, the mainstream political parties have meantime stepped up efforts aimed at gaining political advantage by participating in the polls, scheduled to be held January 30 next year.

According to sources, both the BNP and the AL have already begun frantic searches to find suitable candidates for the elections with a view to establishing their dominance over the urban-based local government units as well as testing their popularity in the municipal areas.

According to reports received in Dhaka, electioneering is going on in 92 of the 106 pourasavas where balloting is scheduled for January 30. Intending candidates for the posts of Chairmen and Commissioners are campaigning in their respective areas.

Voters are being approached and graffiti appearing in favour of candidates belonging to different political parties and also the independent candidates.

The ruling BNP, sources said, had asked its local units at the pourasavas to list prospective candidates.

A meeting of the BNP central leaders recently empowered the MPs and local leaders to finalise the list of candidates. The meeting also discussed disciplinary action against the violators of party decision. BNP will adopt measures for a widespread campaign at the January 20 meeting of its central committee, party sources said and added that ministers, MPs and other leaders of the party would visit the municipalities soon.

As per instruction of the central committee, district-level leaders of the AL have meantime selected their candidates in many places, sources said adding that the task would be completed soon.

The AL has placed utmost importance to the pourasava polls to maintain its previous records in such elections. Having won back seats that fell vacant following deaths of some party MPs, AL is now confident of winning public support. Central leaders and MPs have decided to tour the pourasavas soon, sources said. Jatiya Party is also choosing

candidates for the elections with a view to reactivating the party and strengthening it. Jamaat-e-Islami may also field candidates for the pourasava polls where the party has reasonable strength.

The Election Commission has drafted a set of proposals for the government to ensure free and fair elections, EC sources said adding that the proposals would be submitted to the higher authorities after the Chief Election Commissioner returns home January 4.

The proposals include: ensuring adequate security at the polling centres, keeping the administration neutral and free from political influence and strict implementation of the code of conduct.

Out of the 106 pourasavas, elections will be held in 92 January 30. Polls in the remaining 14 pourasavas are not being held due to disputes over area-selection and ward-division.

This will be the fifth pourasava polls in the country, the last being held January 3, 1989.

January 6 has been fixed for submission of nomination papers that will be scrutinised the following day.

According to the election schedule announced by the Election Commission, candidates can be withdrawn January 13 at the latest.

Maintain campus peace, PM asks RU teachers

The Syndicate members and teachers of Rajshahi University called on Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia at her office Monday evening, reports UNB.

Led by Vice-Chancellor Prof Anisur Rahman, the delegation apprised the Prime Minister of different problems of the university.

Begum Zia assured that the problems will be solved in phases and sought cooperation of the teachers in implementing different development programmes of the government.

She urged them to maintain congenial and peaceful atmosphere on the campus.

The Prime Minister also announced that an ambulance will be provided for the university.

Education Minister Barrister Jamir Uddin Sircar was present during the meeting.

Mongla port strike called off

From Staff Correspondent

KHULNA, Dec 28: Loading and unloading of goods resumed this morning at Mongla Port here after a six-day strike.

The union leaders called off the strike following assurance by the authorities to meet the workers demands, according to sources.

Dhaka to set up int'l science centre

By Staff Correspondent

The International Centre of Science, Technology and Environment for Densely Populated Region (ICSTED) will be set up in the capital next year.

This was disclosed yesterday by Prof Nascem Rahman, coordinator of the International Centre of Science and Technology (UNIDO), Trieste, Italy, at a press briefing at the Sheraton Hotel.

"Bangladesh has been selected as one of the site for setting up 20 such centres around the world," he said "and the preparatory work is ahead of schedule."

The government has agreed to provide land and building to house the centre in Dhaka and the foundation stone will be laid sometime in February, he said.

Two possible sites have been offered to house the centre, one in Sher-e-Bangla Nagar while the other in Uttara, by Works Minister Rafiqul Islam Mian, he added.

"The Prime Minister will likely lay the foundation stone and Professor Salam has promised that he would be present," he added.

Terminating his current visit to finalise the formalities to set up the centre as a "very successful experience", he lauded the government support provided for it.

Prime Minister Begum

Khaleda Zia expressed Bangladesh's interest in hosting the centre in letters to Prof Abdus Salam, director of the centre in Trieste, he said.

The Minister for Energy and Mineral Resources Dr Mosharraf Hossain personally attended the last meeting of the centre in Kuwait, chaired a session and strongly presented Bangladesh's case.

The proposed centre's primary objective would be to deal with problems of densely populated countries through applied research, he said.

"The main concern will be specially geared towards the problems of the densely populated countries and it is only natural that such a centre is set up in Bangladesh, one of the most densely populated countries in the world."

No fundamental research would be done at the centre, he said, which is too expensive and would be impossible to sustain.

"However, results of advanced research done in developed countries would be applied here and we hope that not only Bangladesh will benefit from it but also other densely populated regions of the world."

Prof Rahman pointed out that initially five broad areas have been selected for research by the centre in See Page 12 Col 3

US sends warship to Gulf as Iraq vows to retaliate

WASHINGTON, Dec 28: The United States is dispatching the aircraft carrier Kitty Hawk from Somali coastal waters to the Gulf in response to Iraq's attempts to penetrate the no-fly zone over southern Iraq, Pentagon officials said Monday, reports AP.

Iraq, meanwhile, Monday vowed to retaliate for the downing of its jet and the government-controlled media termed US aggression as insolent aggression.

A US fighter plane shot down an Iraqi MiG which was flying below the 32nd parallel over Iraq on Sunday, the first

incident of its kind since the no-fly zone was established last August.

The United States normally has had a carrier stationed in the Gulf-Arabian Sea area but none has been present since the buildup of US forces in Somalia began earlier this month.

The Kitty Hawk was sent to Somali coastal waters recently and is returning to the Gulf area, with arrival expected in the next day or two, said the officials, asking not to be identified. The carrier normally has about 70 combat aircraft abroad along with 5,500

troops, they said.

Meanwhile, President Bush and President-elect Clinton say they are united in their determination to enforce the UN-imposed no-fly zone, and that it would be a mistake for Saddam Hussein to test their resolve.

"We are not threatening anybody, but we must enforce those resolutions. He (Saddam Hussein) must comply with the UN resolutions," Bush said Sunday after US F-16 jets shot down an Iraqi warplane in the restricted area.

The Pentagon said the incident was sparked when two

Iraqi planes "turned to confront" two US planes patrolling the area. The fate of the Iraqi pilot was not immediately known, but the Americans were not injured, US military officials said.

Clinton called the incident "Part of a series of tests" of the resolve of the international community to make Iraq comply with the UN resolution.

"Saddam Hussein is mistaken if he believes the United States or the United Nations lacks that resolve," Clinton said in Little Rock, Ark. "I support efforts to bring Iraq

into compliance."

It was the first Iraqi aircraft downed since an Aug. 27 UN resolution created a no-fly zone for Iraqi warplanes south of the 32nd parallel to protect Iraqi Shiite Muslims from repression by Saddam. There is a second no-fly zone in northern Iraq to protect the Kurdish minority.

Meanwhile, Iraq vowed Monday to retaliate for the downing of one of its military aircraft by US F-16 fighters.

Baghdad's government-controlled media denounced Sunday's interception as "insolent aggression."

But most Arab countries, which have been aligned against Iraq since Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in August 1990, were silent.

The official Iraqi News Agency, monitored in Nicosia, quoted Baghdad's state-run Al-Jumhuriya daily as saying, "This insolent aggression... was not justifiable because our aircraft attacked nobody."

The Iraqi army daily Al-Qadasiyah said the attack was "blatant aggression and a flagrant provocation" by the US-led allies.

Earlier Report on Page 5

Dhananjay dead

CALCUTTA, Dec 28: Noted Bengali singer, Dhananjay Bhattacharya, whose devotional songs enthralled hearts of many over the decades, died at a city nursing home yesterday after a protracted illness, according to his family. He was 70, reports PTI.

Elder brother of late Purnima Bhattacharya, a gifted singer of the 60s, Dhananjay Bhattacharya earned wide acclaim both as a musician and music director. He shot into fame with his golden voice as a playback singer in "Maharashtrianer Pathar", a Bengali film based on a travelogue.

See Page 12 Col 1