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 VOL. II NO. 338 REGD. NO. DA 781

The Daily Star



BATUL ABEEN SHOPPING CENTRE, 01 NEW BAY ROAD, DHAKA - 1000
 12 PAGES : PRICE TAKA 4.00

POUSH 20, 1399 BS,

DHAKA SUNDAY JANUARY 3, 1993

RAJAB 9, 1413 HIJRI

12 PAGES : PRICE TAKA 4.00

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NEWS BRIEFS

BNPPP meets today

A meeting of the Parliamentary Party of BNP will be held at 4 pm at room 932, west block 8th floor of the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban today. The meeting will be presided over by Leader of the House and Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia. The meeting of the BNP Parliamentary Party will discuss the current political situation and other issues related to the winter session of parliament. All members of parliament belonging to BNP have been requested to attend the meeting, reports BSS.

RU authorities reopen offices

RAJSHAHI, Jan 2: Authorities today reopened the offices of Rajshahi University put under lock and key by a faction of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) on December 28. Supporters of the JCD faction led by Babul Akhter Bablu called an indefinite strike and locked up the administration building demanding his release, reports UNB.

Cold wave claims three in Faridpur

FARIDPUR, Jan 2: Cold wave claimed three lives — two old women and a kid — in the town today. Witnesses said Jinnatunnessa (105) of Kamalapur, Maleka Khatun (90) of Nimatali and a three-year-old girl of Alipur succumbed to a shivering cold, reports UNB.

Hindu zealots begin prayers at temple built on Babri rubble

AYODHYA, India, Jan 2: Hindus began praying Saturday at a makeshift temple built on the rubble of the ancient Babri Mosque, after a court ruled they had the right to do so despite Muslim protests, reports AFP.

Hindu holy men in groups of 10 were allowed to walk up to a platform of sand bags erected 20 feet (six meters) from the temple to Lord Rama after being frisked by police and walking through a heavily barricaded narrow path.

Security personnel, who were deployed in thousands in the area, allowed the first group to reach the platform just before 10.00 am (0430

GMT) and gave the holy men less than a minute to gaze at the shrine and pray.

The saffron-robed holy men, their bodies smeared with holy ash, chanted "Hail Lord Rama" as they inched their way towards the temple hastily built by Hindu zealots after razing the Babri Mosque on December 6.

Hundreds of other faithful waited in a serpentine queue for their turn, while a procession of more than 3,000 cheering and jubilant Hindus began walking to the shrine from near the Sarayu river here.

A band played music and young boys and girls danced at the head of the procession

comprising scores of holymen and Hindu residents of Ayodhya and neighbouring Faizabad town.

"We are happy this has come about," said Mahant Avaidyanath, a Hindu religious leader who is also an MP from the Hindu-revivalist Bharatiya Janata Party, which spearheaded the campaign to build a temple at the mosque site.

On Friday, the High Court of Uttar Pradesh state, where Ayodhya is located, lifted a ban on Hindus praying at the temple built on the site which Hindus say is the birthplace of the warrior-god Rama.

"Prayers could be allowed from a reasonable distance,"

the court ruled in a surprise judgement condemned by Muslim leaders and secular Indian political parties.

The verdict came in the wake of new year's eve violence in Faizabad, when policemen and Hindus prevented some 400 angry Muslims from marching to Ayodhya to pray at the site of the fallen mosque.

The Indian government allowed Hindus to pray there Monday, but had reversed the decision following protests from the secular opposition as well as Muslims, who from the country's largest minority.

The Ayodhya sacrilege, widely condemned in India

AL, allies to boycott President's speech JS winter session begins today

By Nurul Kabir

Parliament goes into its eighth session this morning with President Abdur Rahman Biswas addressing the House and the Awami League (AL)-led Opposition, along with the Jatiya Party (JP) boycotting the presidential speech.

The AL-led Opposition, however, goes to the House on its next working day while the JP is yet to decide its next course of action.

The Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB), on the other hand, will attend the opening session but most likely stay absent in the House while the President delivers his speech,

sources in the CPB parliamentary group told The Daily Star last night.

The Opposition decision to boycott the opening session came following a joint meeting of the leaders of the AL, the JP and the Ganatantri Party yesterday evening.

Leader of the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD), Shahjahan Siraj MP, and the sole MP of the National Awami Party (NAP) Abdul Hafiz were not present at the opposition meeting yesterday. But they would also boycott the opening session of Parliament to

Govt to review 197 drug licences

The government would review soon the drug licences issued to 197 drug manufacturers in the country, Director of Drug Administration Brig (Dr) Mukhlisur Rahman Khan said here yesterday, reports BSS.

He said that the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare was actively considering formation of a review committee to take up this gigantic task.

In his presidential speech at a seminar on "Use of Safe Excipients and Additives in Pharmaceutical Products" held at Diabetic Hospital auditorium here, Dr Khan said the lost confidence of the people in the drug manufacturers must be restored and only those meeting the required manufac-



Muslim devotees yesterday began march to Ayodhya demanding reconstruction of Babri Mosque. — Star photo

Thousands start 'long march' towards Ayodhya

By Staff Correspondent

Thousands of Muslim devotees Saturday began a march towards Ayodhya, India from Dhaka to press for reconstruction of the historic Babri Mosque on its original site there.

The journey which started from the south gate of Baitul Mukarram Mosque in the capital Saturday noon is expected to reach the Jessore-Benapole border on January 4 on their way towards Ayodhya.

On the eve of the march yesterday morning the organizers announced that they would reach Jessore on January 4 via Mantikganj, Faridpur, Magura and Jhenidah districts.

Before crossing the border,

they will hold another rally at Jessore City College ground at 10 am on January 4, organizers said.

After a two-hour rally chaired by Shaikhul Hadis Maulana Azizul Haq, convener of the Long March Action Committee, thousands of devotees marched to Gabtolt Bus Terminal at around noon from where they started for Jessore by buses and trucks in the afternoon.

The rally was addressed by a number of maulanas including Maulana Habibullah Mispal, Maulana Abdul Latif, Maulana Nurul Islam, Kari Mohammad Obaydullah, Mufti Mansurul Haq, Prof Akhter Faruq, Obayedul Haq MP, and

Maulana Abul Kalam.

The speakers repeatedly condemned demolition of the historic Babri Mosque at Ayodhya in India and demanded reconstruction of the mosque on its original site.

Addressing the marchers, Shaikhul Hadis Maulana Azizul Haq called upon all to keep communal harmony and to ensure security of all minorities in the country.

He also urged the Muslim countries to suspend economic relations with India until its government complete reconstruction of the Babri Mosque and stop repression on the Muslim in India. He further called for OIC's intervention on the issue.

Hasina demands adequate loans for weavers

Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina yesterday demanded that the government should ensure supply of yarn in fair prices and disbursement of adequate loans for weavers for the growth of handloom industry in the country, reports UNB.

Speaking to the leaders of Bangladesh Tanti League, who met her at her Minto road residence, she stressed the need for flourishing the medium and small industries alongside the big industries for over all economic development.

The Awami League President said the problems of the weavers community were not isolated from those of other professional groups and called for proper planning, sincere works and concerted efforts to solve those.

Discard politics of destruction: PM

TAHIRPUR (Sunamganj), Jan 2: Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia today stressed the need for peace and discipline for the smooth implementation of development programmes, reports BSS.

Addressing a large public rally at the playground here, she said peace is precondition to steady development without which the fate of the teeming millions cannot be changed.

She said those, who disturb peace in the name of politics, are in reality causing harm to the people by disrupting productivity.

Begum Zia called upon the people, irrespective of caste and creed, to participate in the development process, inf-

ated by the present government to build the nation. She said the people have to joint politics of productivity discarding the politics of anarchy and destruction.

Presided over by local BNP leader Abdus Sahid, the meeting was also addressed by Finance Minister Saffur Rahman, Communications Minister Oli Ahmed, State Minister for Land Kabir Hossain, Communist Party (CPB) leader Nazir Hossain MP, Fatema Chowdhury MP, special assistant to BNP chairperson Haris Chowdhury, Advocate Fazul Huq, Rafiq Chowdhury, Abul Kalam Azad and a Qayyum Chowdhury — all local leaders.

US planning intervention in Bosnia

LONDON, Jan 2: The US Defence Department is drawing up plans for possible American military intervention in war-torn Bosnia-Herzegovina, according to a report published in the Times newspaper today, reports AFP.

Under the headline "Clinton clears way to strike at Serbs in his first week," the paper claims Pentagon plans "would allow Bill Clinton to order US forces to intervene in Bosnia-Herzegovina within a week of assuming the presidency."

The daily said ideas under consideration included "unilateral action by America to enforce the air exclusion zone

over the former Yugoslav republic, an option also being contemplated by president Bush."

The paper quotes a military planner, whom it did not name, as saying that if Clinton pledged to take action in Bosnia he could "fulfill it within a week." Clinton is due to be inaugurated as President on January 20.

There was no official confirmation of the report, which came as leaders of the three warring sides in Bosnia were gathering in Geneva for their first face-to-face meeting, under the auspices of the international peace conference on

the former Yugoslavia.

The talks, due to open later today, have been seen by observers as the last chance to reach a peaceful settlement before outside intervention.

Meanwhile AP adds from Geneva: International mediators and leaders of two of Bosnia's warring factions ended their first session of face-to-face talks on an upbeat note Saturday. But the government representative rejected a compromise plan to divide Bosnia into provinces.

The meeting, which lasted about 90 minutes, was the first between the head of the

Extortionists ransack, loot shops in city

By Staff Correspondent

A group of armed extortionists ransacked 15 shops and damaged windowpanes of two houses at Shantibagh Saturday afternoon.

Witnesses said that the extortionists attacked the shops after they had been refused tolls by a dispensary owner at around noon.

The armedmen opened fire and exploded at least 20 crackers when they went on an hour long rampage that began at around 1.30 pm yesterday.

Fog stops ferries in Padma, Jamuna

MANIKGANJ, Jan 2: Thousands of passengers were stranded as road communications of north and northwestern districts with the capital remained disrupted till this noon since ferry services in all the Padma and Jamuna river routes snapped amidst heavy fog Friday midnight, reports UNB.

A Minister was reportedly among those stranded on a ferry that anchored mid-Jamuna last night.

BIWTA sources said launches and ferries with a total of more than 15,000 passengers were stranded at Aricha, Nagarbari and Daulatdia ghats and midstream Jamuna due to lack of visibility.

Nagarbari-bound MV Shahjalal with some 800 passengers aboard was forced to anchor near Khanpura char as dense fog blanketed the route. The ferry from Aricha was also carrying a coach, 21 trucks

Bush, Yeltsin sign START-II Treaty in Moscow today

WASHINGTON, Jan 2: The START-II treaty that Presidents George Bush and Boris Yeltsin will sign Sunday is designed to cut the US and former Soviet strategic nuclear arsenals back to their levels of the 1960s, reports AFP.

Hailed by Bush as "the most historic agreement arms control ever made" and by Yeltsin as the "document of the century," the treaty would eliminate the most dangerous weapons of the nuclear forces, land-based missiles with multiple warheads that would pose a tempting first target in the event of war.

In 10 years, US and Russian nuclear arsenals are to be reduced by two-thirds, cutting the number of strategic nuclear warheads from 10,000 to a maximum of 3,500 for the United States and 3,000 for Russia.

The deadline for the new levels — about the same as those of the 1960s before the advent of missiles with multiple warheads — could be moved up by three years if the United States offers Russia financial assistance to dismantle its weapons.

Bush and Yeltsin reached the basic agreement in June but it took another six months

of negotiations to hammer out a final draft. The precise terms of the pact, reached on Tuesday in Geneva, have not been released.

Under the terms of Start-II, Russia's powerful SS-18 missiles with 10 warheads each would be eliminated, Moscow has 308 of them, half of which were slated for destruction under the START-I agreement signed in July 1991.

The United States is to get rid of its 50 MX peacekeeper missiles, each fitted with 10 warheads, and to reduce the number of warheads on its Minuteman-111 missiles from three to one. Washington has

also agreed to halve the number of Trident I and II submarine-based missiles.

The accord eliminates all land-based multiple warhead missiles — the core of the former Soviet Union's nuclear arsenal — but retains most of the sea-based missiles which are a key element of the US firepower.

The details of the final version hammered out in Geneva focus on technical points, many of which are linked to Moscow's cost concerns.

To save money, Russia wants to modify rather than destroy the SS-18 silos so they can be used to house single-

warhead missiles. US officials speaking on condition of anonymity said START-II will allow Moscow to keep 90 SS-18 silos.

To guarantee the silos will not be used for the SS-18s, the sources said Moscow has agreed to pour five metres (15 feet) of cement into their bases and place a metal ring around the top which is narrower than the girth of the larger banned missiles.

Negotiators surmounted another hurdle when the United States agreed to let Moscow to keep some SS-19 missiles on condition the number of warheads are re-

duced from six to one. The rest are to be destroyed.

According to the latest figures from the Arms Control Association (ACA), a private think tank, after START-II is implemented Moscow and Washington will have 504 and 500 land-based missiles respectively, 1,728 and 1,744 sea-based missiles and 1,372, and 752 missiles aboard their bombers.

Signing the agreement does not mean nuclear disarmament is a done deal, and the pact must still be ratified, and while the US senate is expected to approve it, what the

Security forces gun down 2 rebel leaders in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, Jan 2: Security forces gunned down two top leaders of a Muslim militant group in Jammu-Kashmir state Saturday, government-owned radio reported, reports AP.

Troops in capital Srinagar raided a hideout of the Hizbul Mujahideen, one of the dozen guerrilla groups waging a decade-old battle against government forces, and shot them. All India Radio reported.

It said troops acting on a tip gunned down the militant organisation's district administrator, Nisar Ahmed, popularly known as "Gen Shoaib," and battalion commander Anwar-ul-Islam.

Police officials were not available for independent confirmation.

In another raid Saturday, troops dragged out three people from a house and shot them at point blank range after militants threw a grenade at soldiers, witnesses said.