

Israelis round up 22 Hamas activists

JERUSALEM, Jan 6: Israeli security officials said Wednesday they had arrested 22 alleged members of a Muslim fundamentalist hit squad blamed for the shooting to death of an Israeli soldier.

Two of the 415 Palestinians deported to Lebanon as alleged Muslim extremists also were involved in the squad which operated in the occupied West Bank town of Hebron, Defense Ministry spokesman Oded Ben-Ami told a news conference.

The investigation started five weeks ago and has not been completed, Ben-Ami said.

The arrest announcement appeared timed to counter world criticism of the deportations. It came a day after UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros Ghali hinted at possible sanctions against Israel and a day before a UN envoy was to arrive to try to resolve the standoff over the deportees.

The UN Security Council condemned the deportations as a violation of international law. Israel claims the expulsions were necessary to battle the radical Muslim groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad, which have been blamed for killing seven Israeli soldiers and a secret agent since Oct 25.

Ben-Ami said Wednesday that the 22 arrested Palestinians belonged to the Hebron branch of the Izzidin el-Gassem brigade, the military wing of Hamas. He said several members of the group were still at large. The group is named for an Arab revolutionary killed by the British in the 1930s.

Ben-Ami said the detainees were involved in three attacks on Israeli soldiers — an Oct 21 shooting at an army car that wounded two soldiers; an Oct 25 shooting at a post in which reserve soldier Shmuel Gersh was killed; and an early November grenade attack on an army vehicle in which the grenades failed to go off.

Members of the squad also were believed involved in the Dec 12 shooting attack on an army jeep in which a soldier was killed but that investigation has not been completed, Ben-Ami said.

Ben-Ami said all 22 would be put on trial, and ruled out any possibility they could be deported.

The Hebron squad's operations were bankrolled by Hamas in the Gaza Strip, and several Islamic preachers in the Hebron area provided logistical support, he said.

Ben-Ami said the deportations and last month's arrests of more than 1,500 Hamas and Islamic Jihad activists have thrown the two groups into chaos.

Officials said the killers of the five other Israeli troopers and an agent of Israel's Shin Bet internal security service were still at large. The Shin Bet agent was slain last Sunday.



Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia addressing a public meeting at Haragovinda High School ground in Biani Bazar, Sylhet yesterday. Story on Page 1 — PID photo

Contraband worth Taka 15 lakh seized at ZIA

By Staff Correspondent

Customs officials seized contraband items worth about Taka 15 lakh from some passengers of two flights at the Zia International Airport (ZIA) in Dhaka Wednesday.

The officials seized the items from a number of passengers of a Bangladesh Biman flight (BG 032) which arrived in Dhaka from Karachi, Pakistan, and of an Emirates flight (EK 610) which arrived from Dubai via Karachi, customs sources said.

The items seized from 9 am to 9 pm yesterday included warm clothes, motorparts and other clothes.

Suu Kyi donates award money for prostitutes

BANGKOK, Jan 6: Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi, the detained leader of Myanmar's democracy movement, has donated money from her awards to help Myanmar prostitutes in Thailand, a Thai official said Wednesday, reports AP.

Saisuree Chutikul, an adviser on women and children's issues in the Prime Minister's office, said Suu Kyi's husband, Michael Aris, had sent her a check for 10,000 pounds (dhs 15,200) last October.

Saisuree had not publicized it until now because she wanted to clear the donation with Thailand's new government.

Aris, in a statement provided with the check, said: "Aung San Suu Kyi, recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, who is now in the fourth year of her detention in Myanmar, ... wishes to make a financial contribution toward the vocational training and medical care of Myanmar girls and women who have been rescued from brothels along the Thai Myanmar border."

He said the donation came from the Myanmar Trust for Health and Education of Mrs Suu Kyi, comprising money from her 1991 Nobel Prize and other awards.

Prospect of trade with France bright: Khaleda

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia yesterday (Wednesday) said there is wide scope of strengthening economic and trade ties between Bangladesh and France, reports UNB.

High quality tea and leather goods are among the items which can be exported to France, Begum Zia told the newly appointed French Ambassador Jean Michel Lacombe who made his first call on the Prime Minister at her office in the afternoon.

Begum Zia recalled with gratitude the generosity of France at times of crises in Bangladesh, particularly after the devastating floods in 1988 and the cyclone in 1991.

She also thanked France for substantially increasing the commitment of development aid to Bangladesh.

The Prime Minister mentioned different development programmes of her government, including privatisation policy, economic reforms, poverty alleviation, women uplift, education and tree plantation.

Begum Zia said decision of the Rio Summit should be followed up for conservation of the global environment. France can play an important role in this regard, she added.

The Prime Minister through the ambassador conveyed her good wishes and new year's greetings to President Mitterand of France and the French Prime Minister.

The ambassador hoped that the existing friendly and cordial relation between the two countries will deepen further.

The Midnight File

Panic will become 'roving ambassador of peace'

BELGRADE, Jan 6: Milan Panic, who failed in a bid to win the Serbian presidency from hard-line leader Slobodan Milosevic, will become "roving ambassador of peace," the Tanjug news agency reported Wednesday. The ousted Yugoslav premier, currently on a private visit to the United States, was reported as accepting the job offered to him by allied Yugoslav President Dobrica Cosic. Tanjug offered no details on the job, reports AP.

Mongolia launches anti-AIDS campaign

BEIJING, Jan 6: Mongolia has launched a nationwide campaign to fight AIDS after the remote Asian nation discovered its first case of the virus, a media report said. The Dec 29 Mongol Messenger, an English-language weekly based in Beijing on Wednesday, said Mongolia became the 165th nation in which the AIDS virus has appeared. A young homosexual who had an "intimate relationship" with a foreigner tested positive in August, and the news "shook the entire country," it said, reports AP.

Iraqi army ready

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with quest for a religious-based Muslim government.

The New York Times reported Wednesday that the United States is urging France, Britain and Saudi Arabia to join in an ultimatum to Iraq that it faces new allied military action unless the missiles are removed.

The newspaper, quoting unnamed diplomatic officials, said the allies may present the demand as early as Wednesday to the Iraqi Mission to the United Nations. Iraqi air bases could be targets of allied attacks if the missiles are not withdrawn, the newspaper reported.

Some US pilots have reported they have been targeted, but the incidents have not been confirmed, one military officer at the Pentagon told The Associated Press. "We have expressed our concerns" to the Iraqis, the officer said.

The Iraqis were warned that if the radar was turned on, it could be blasted away by US attack jets, said a second Pentagon source. Both officials spoke on condition of anonymity.

The warning was extended by the US military officers who periodically meet with Iraqi counterparts in northern Iraq to discuss security concerns.

President-elect Clinton's spokesman offered support for Bush's stand.

"I think Saddam Hussein should take no comfort in the fact that Bill Clinton is heading towards the presidency," spokesman George Stephanopoulos said in Little Rock, Ark.

He said Saddam "must abide by all UN resolutions. He must abide by the no-fly zone. And Bill Clinton supports President Bush in his efforts to enforce them, and he will continue to support them as president."

Pakistan dismisses India's refusal to cut consular staff

ISLAMABAD, Jan 6: Pakistan today dismissed India's refusal to cut back on the size of its Consulate General in Karachi, saying that Islamabad's order that the mission be reduced was backed by the Vienna Convention, reports AFP.

A Foreign Ministry spokesman said that according to the 1961 convention on diplomatic behaviour, Pakistan, as the receiving state, had a right to determine the size of a diplomatic mission.

A diplomatic code of conduct signed between the two governments recently also provided for balance in representation, he said.

Islamabad wants the Indian government to reduce the number of people at the consulate from 62 to 20, saying that its mission in Bombay is allowed to have only four members.

The spokesman emphasized that the reduced size "would not impair" the Kashmir consulate's ability to process visa applications.

The Indian government has said the demand was unacceptable as well as "illogical" because of the heavy consular workload in Karachi.

The two countries which have fought three wars since independence in 1947 from Britain, expelled several diplomats last year on charges of espionage and objectionable activities.

Somali factions agree to hold reconciliation conference

ADDIS ABABA, Jan 6: Somali factions agreed in principle Wednesday to hold a national reconciliation conference in their war-shattered capital in April, reports AP.

The rivals, meeting under United Nations auspices, also discussed a possible cease-fire in Somalia, where warfare, banditry and drought have killed at least 350,000 people.

The breakthrough came on the third day of meeting that had been marked by insults and shouting between the 14 invited groups. The original conference was only supposed to be two days.

UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali warned the factions Tuesday that international forces struggling to feed their starving people might give up and leave if an agreement was not reached.

Boutros-Ghali left early Wednesday for Ethiopia's breakaway northern republic Eritrea and then flew on to his native Egypt.

On Wednesday, the group supporting Somalia's most powerful warlord, Gen. Mohammed Farah Aidid, said the factions should reconvene here in one month, said conference sources.

BCU confce begins today

The 22nd central conference of pro-CPB Bangladesh Chhatra Union begins today, reports UNB.

Eminent artist SM Sultan will inaugurate the two-day conference at the TSC auditorium of Dhaka University at 11 am.

Dr Muzaffar Ahmed will be the chief guest while Advocate AK Badrul Huq Bachchu will be the special guest at the inaugural function.

A total of 982 representatives from 72 organising districts of the organisation are expected to join the conference.

Different international student forums, including International Union of Students, World Federation of Democratic Youth, International Association of Agricultural Students, International Union of Socialist Union, Korean Students Committee, National Union of Iraqi Students, Youth Association Cambodia, Sri Lankan National Union of Students and Norwegian Union of Students have sent messages wishing the conference success.

Rudolf Nureyev dead

PARIS, Jan 6: Rudolf Nureyev, one of the greatest ballet dancers of the century, has died aged 54 after a long illness, French radio reported today, reports Reuter.

Hanging still form of execution in many states

LONDON, Jan 6: Hanging still awaits condemned criminals in many countries, including Albania, Iran, Iraq and Egypt as well as the United States, reports AP.

On Oct 9, India hanged two Sikhs who were convicted of killing a retired general who commanded the army's 1984 storming of the Sikhs' holiest shrine.

Although India's Supreme Court ruled in 1980 that capital punishment should apply only in the "rarest of rare cases," about 15 people have been hanged since then.

Turkey also uses hanging as its only method of execution, but no one has been executed there in the last decade.

Bangladesh hanged two convicts last year.

Albania in June held a public hanging of two brothers for multiple murder in the southwestern town of Fier. Their bodies were left dangling all day in the city's central square as a warning to others.

Zimbabwe has hanged about 30 murderers since independence from Britain in 1980. At least 15 prisoners are now on death row.

Egypt and Tanzania still use hanging.

Iran uses hanging, often in public, as its most common form of execution.

Iraq hangs condemned prisoners. In 1990 it executed London-based journalist Farzad Bazoft by that method.

10 hurt in clash during hartal in Mymensingh

From Our Correspondent

MYMENSINGH, Jan 6: At least 10 persons were injured, three of them seriously, when a procession was attacked at Charpara Crossing during a half-day hartal observed in the town today.

The Mymensingh Jute Mills (MJM) Workers and Employees Union called the hartal to press home its three-point charter of demands including reopening of the MJM.

According to witnesses, the pro-hartal procession came under attack after a section of the processionists ransacked some restaurants and medicine shops at the area. Setar and Malu Mia, the MJM workers and a passerby Alauddin were admitted to the Mymensingh Medical College Hospital (MMCH).

The agitated MJM workers later damaged two trucks and two minibuses at the Jute Godown crossing in the town. The MJM workers also held a rally at Ganginarpar after the hartal.

All kinds of vehicular traffic were off the road, business establishments were closed and there was no transaction in banks during the hartal hours.

Inter-district trains Jamuna, Teesta and Padma were stranded at Mymensingh railway station until 1 pm due to the hartal.

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Published by the Editor on behalf of Mediaworld Ltd., 52 Motijheel C/A, Dhaka-1000 and printed by him at The Sangbad Ltd., 36 Purana Paltan, Dhaka. Editorial, News & Commercial Offices: House No. 11, Road No. 3, Dhanmondi R/A, Dhaka-1205. PABX: 500091-4. Advertisement: 500091. Fax No. 88-02-863035. GPO Box No. 3257. GRAM: DAILY STAR DHAKA.

Take steps against Hindu militants, Iran to India

NICOSIA, Jan 6: Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati urged India on Tuesday to take tough steps against Hindu militants who destroyed a mosque and to allow Muslims to rebuild it, reports AP.

He also urged the Organisation of Islamic Conference to demand that Muslims be treated with fairness in India.

Velayati's statements were carried by the Islamic Republic News Agency, which is monitored in Cyprus.

The agency said that Velayati sent a message to his Indian counterpart, R L Bhatia, calling for legal steps against those who dismantled the mosque.

Yeltsin visits India Jan 27

MOSCOW, Jan 6: President Boris Yeltsin will pay an official visit to India January 27 to 29 for talks with Indian leaders, including Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao, his press office announced today, reports AFP.

During his stay, Yeltsin was to sign a friendship and cooperation treaty as well as several other accords.

Statistical year '92 published

Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics has published Pocket Statistical Year Book '92, an official release said today. The 13th issue of this yearly publication, which contains a brief picture of the socio-economic condition of the country, is expected to be greatly helpful to the general readers, reports BSS.

Halishahar

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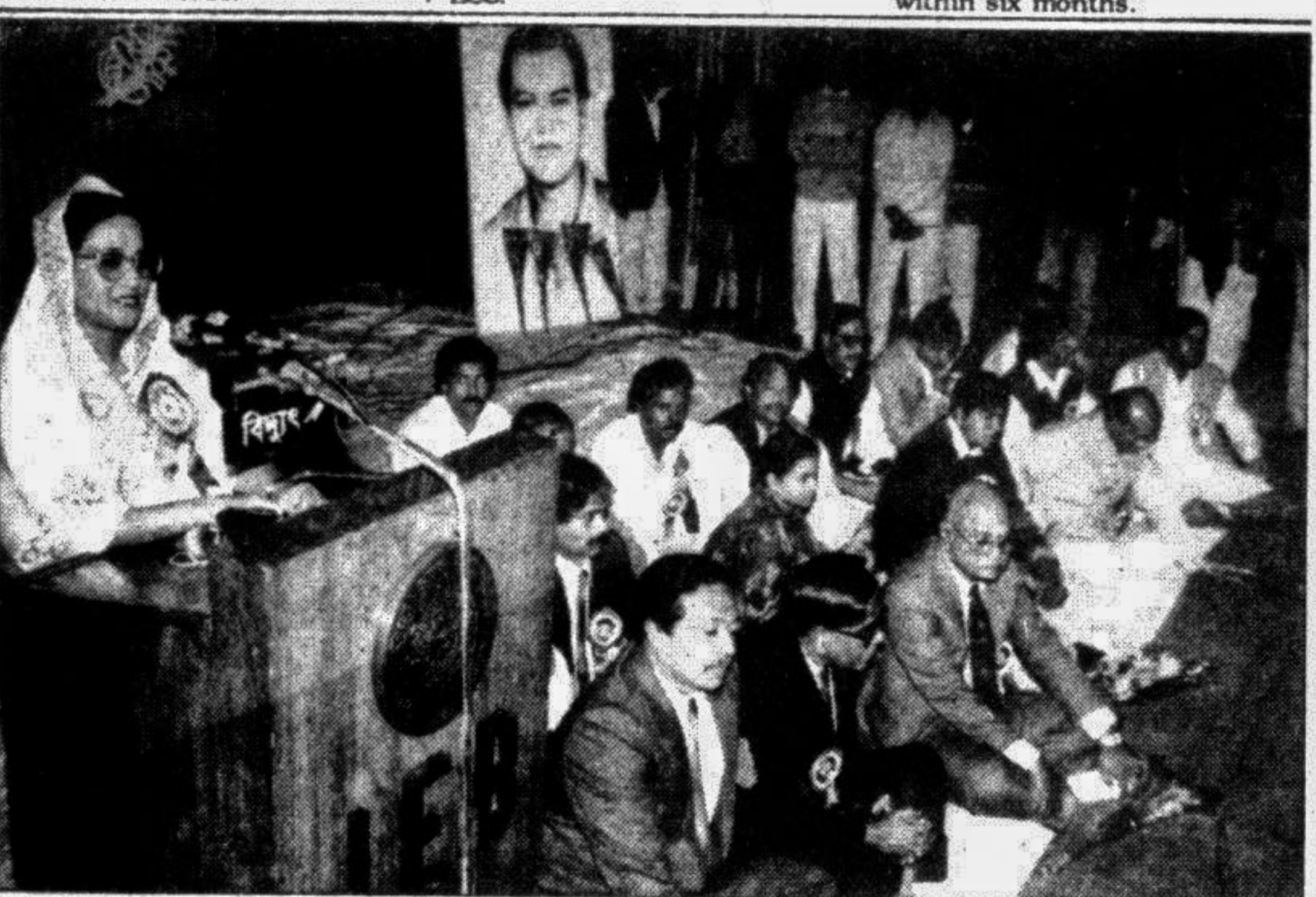
doctors will render round-the-clock medical service there from tomorrow, the Mayor informed. He claimed that the people who fled the Halishahar area fearing further trouble have started returning home from today.

However, about 200 BDR personnel and several hundreds of police still have been guarding the violence-torn area. Officials said the forces would be withdrawn as soon as complete normalcy returned.

BSS adds: Information Minister Barrister Nazmul Huda this evening visited Bandartila and its adjoining areas to see the condition of the affected people there.

While visiting the burnt houses and talking to the affected people, the minister expressed his profound sympathy to them and also expressed his grief for the untoward incident on Saturday last.

Huda assured the people of providing adequate relief materials and compensation to the affected people.



Sheikh Hasina addressing the re-union of Bangladesh Chhatra League (M-I) in observance of the 45th founding anniversary of the organisation at the Institution of Engineers, yesterday. — Star photo

Hasina: govt pushing

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middle-income groups.

Moreover, the Opposition leader said, unemployment, retrenchment of workers and lawlessness further aggravated the misery of the people.

There has been no development in the condition of the common people excepting the ministers, government party MPs and leaders in last two years, Hasina alleged.

She said although the autocratic government of Ershad was ousted by the people, the BNP government is faithfully following the same policies and programmes which had been introduced by Ershad.

On the continued violence on the campuses, Hasina alleged that the government had been instigating terrorism in colleges and universities to establish its control over the students' unions and halls.

She also criticised the BNP government for not implementing the 10-point demand of the student community.

Recalling the glorious history of Chhatra League, she urged the students to face terrorism on the campuses politically. "Root out violence, restore peace and build yourselves as worthy citizens to shoulder the future responsibilities of the nation."

Responding to criticism against Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the Awami League, Hasina said her father faced criticism by certain vested quarters possibly because he had led the country's War of Liberation in 1971.

She was critical of the post-1975 regimes of Zia-Ershad-Begum Zia asking what they had done for the country and the economic well-being of the people. She said Bangladesh had become a nation of beggars because of the misrule in the last 17 years.

The Awami League leader asked the members of the Chhatra League to continue the struggle for completing the unfinished task of slain leader Bangabandhu who dreamt of a self-reliant nation.