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The Daily Star

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 BANGLADESH AIR EXPRESS INT'L LTD.
 12 PAGES: PRICE TAKA 4.00

VOL. III NO. 36 REGD. NO. DA 781

FALGOON 7, 1399 BS,

DHAKA FRIDAY FEBRUARY 19, 1993

SHABAN 26, 1413 HIJRI

12 PAGES: PRICE TAKA 4.00

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NEWS BRIEFS

PM attends MPs' dinner

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia yesterday gave a clarion call to all to work unitedly to help consolidate democracy and economic uplift forgetting differences of opinions. Speaking at the annual dinner of parliament members club here in the evening Begum Zia said, "We have to work together in the same spirit as we did to switch over to parliamentary democracy to find solutions to the accumulated problems. We cannot waste time blaming each other", reports BSS.

Hartal observed in South Surma area

SYLHET, Feb 18: A dawn-to-dusk hartal was observed in South Surma area of the town today in protest against inclusion of three unions in the pourashava, reports UNB.

30 injured in Habiganj clash

HABIGANJ, Feb 18: At least 30 people were injured, four of them seriously, in a clash between two groups at Fathepur village of Azmirganj thana on Wednesday. The clash ensued over a dispute on the boundary of a paddy field, according to information received today. Both sides used lethal weapons during the clash which lasted for about two hours, witnesses said, reports UNB.

Hundreds drowned as Haitian ferry sinks

PORT-AU-PRINCE (Haiti), Feb 18: Upto 2000 people were feared dead when a Haitian ferry overcrowded with peasants heading for market sank during a rainstorm, radio reports said today, reports Reuter.

About 100 people did survive the sinking of the freighter Neptune, used as a ferry between the southwestern city of Jeremie and the capital of Port-Au-Prince. They swam to shore or were rescued by small boats in the area of the devastating accident.

AP adds: Officials and survivors reported Thursday that hundreds of passengers were feared dead.

The US Coast Guard said 800 tickets were sold but the

skipper said as many as 1,500 people were packed onto the ferry when it sank early Wednesday.

Fewer than 100 survivors had been reported by Thursday morning.

Communications are notoriously bad outside of the capital, and it took more than a day for reports of the sinking to get back.

Relatives of those aboard travelled Thursday to the coastal site of the sinking to wait for news that their loved ones survived.

Destina Momrosier, a seamstress in Port-Au-Prince, said her brother and a cousin were aboard the Neptune when it pulled left late Tuesday on the 180-mile (300

kilometer) voyage.

Momrosier, 42, said she had taken the boat several times, usually with 500 to 600 other passengers, but that as many as 1,500 probably could fit aboard the triple-deck ship.

"It's generally overloaded", she told The Associated Press. "It sways from side to side with people standing, sitting, even up on the roof."

Skipper Benjamin Sinclair said as many as 1,500 people were aboard, and military authorities in Jeremie even estimated that 2,000 were on the ship.

There were heavy rains during the trip, and Sinclair said passengers panicked, causing the ferry to capsize.

Dhaka-Delhi relations returning to normal

By Toufique Imrose Khalidi

Bangladesh and India appear to be heading towards normalisation of relations that nosedived in the wake of re-terminations and counter-re-terminations over the SAARC summit postponements and the Jatiya Sangsad resolution on the Babri Mosque incident.

In the first official meeting since Indian Minister of State for External Affairs R L Bhatia's January 10-11 visit to Dhaka, Foreign Secretary Reaz Rahman and High Commissioner R K Raghunath yesterday discussed what a senior Indian High Commission official said "outstanding bilateral issues".

Last week, Bangladesh High Commissioner in New Delhi, Farooq Sobhan met with

Indian External Affairs Ministry officials to discuss the sore points. Details about the meeting were not made available.

Until these formal diplomatic contacts, all issues in the agenda of bilateral issues were in the freezer.

"They reviewed the bilateral relations," the official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said of yesterday's meeting declining to give details.

The diplomat, however, hinted that they discussed the suggested new dates for the twice-postponed SAARC summit. Diplomatic sources here say that the seven nations are now engaged in consultations about holding the summit in

AL MP demands Tk 1 cr for each MP to develop their areas

By Staff Correspondent

An opposition member Thursday proposed in the parliament to enact a law for allocating Taka one crore development fund annually for each of the members of the parliament.

Abdul Awal Mian of Awami League alleged that the ministers and treasury bench members are taking money for their respective constituencies.

Placing a private member resolution, he said, that the people of the respective constituencies sent their representatives to the Parliament to bargain for development of the areas.

The ministers and treasury



Painters giving a finishing touch to the wall facing the Central Shaheed Minar by inscribing names of martyrs of the Language Movement and quotes from patriotic poems in preparation of the Amar Ekushey. — Star photo

Mosquitoes invade House

By Staff Correspondent

"The mosquito menace has lately entered into the centrally airconditioned parliament building and a number of members raised the issue seeking ministers explanation regarding the measures the authorities have taken to check the menace.

Speaking on a call attention notice Rahmat Ali of Awami League described mosquitoes as omnipresent and spared none from its stings.

A number of other MPs raised hands to add something to it.

A menacing situation is prevailing over the country because of mosquitoes, it is everywhere and also in the parliament, Rahmat Ali asked.

See Page 12 Col 3

No scope of confusion about Mirpur polls: PM

By Staff Correspondent

PABNA, Feb 18: Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia today said, there was no scope of any confusion about the results of by-election in Mirpur constituency which was held in a free and fair atmosphere, reports UNB.

The Prime Minister was addressing a mammoth public meeting here where some 20,000 Awami League leaders and workers joined the ruling party.

Begum Zia, without naming Awami League, said a party was resorting to acts of violence, anarchy and destruction with a motive to hamper the developmental activities initiated by her government.

She bitterly criticised frequent hartals which "never" do good to the people."

See Page 12 Col 3

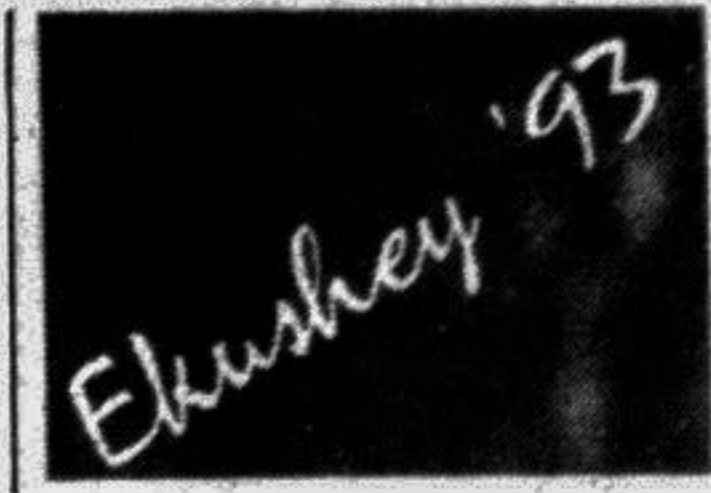
BNP Secretary General Salam Talukder in the meeting alleged that Awami League activists went on rampage at Dohar in Dhaka following election to the student union of a local college.

He alleged the Awami Leaguers there not only damaged mosques and public buildings but also burnt the national flag—symbol of the hard-earned independence.

Begum Zia said people in their thousands were rallying round BNP across the country to lend support to its politics of production.

"People love BNP," like its politics of people's welfare and want to carry forward its constructive programmes," she told the meeting.

See Page 12 Col 3



Biographies of nation's heroes very few

By Staff Correspondent

Sptakers at a discussion meeting at the Bangla Academy yesterday stressed the need for writing and publishing more books on the lives and works of the nation's heroes.

The Academy organised the meeting as part of its month-long programme in observance of Amar Ekushey.

Chaired by Dr Anisuzzaman, the meeting was presented an article titled "Bangladesh's Literacy: Biography and Autobiography", by Prof Zulfikar Matin. Bashir Al-Helal, Prof Muntazir Mamun, Dr Golam Murshid and M Moniruzzaman discussed the article.

Prof Zulfikar Matin in his essay noted that biographies and autobiographies were usually written when the nation was driven by its social needs.

Prof Matin regretted that the number of such books were very few related to the demand.

See Page 12 Col 1

No plan to raise allowance for Shaheed families

The government yesterday said that it had no plan to increase financial assistance to the families of the seven "Bir Shresthas" or the regular monthly allowances given to the Shaheed families of the country's War of Liberation, reports BSS.

Replying to questions put forward by several Treasury and Opposition bench members during the question hour, Labour and Manpower Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, who spoke on behalf of the Ministry of Defence, said that although the government had no such plan to raise the assistance, it might consider any further rise if required.

Major (Retd) Hafizuddin (BNP) thanked the government for giving financial assistance to the family members of the "Bir Shrestha" and other holders of gallantry awards, but proposed that the amount should be raised. Citing an example of financial insolvency of Bir Shrestha Hamidur Rahman, Major Hafiz, who was also a freedom fighter, said that he personally knew that the condition of family members of Shaheed Hamidur Rahman were now in bad shape.

BNP member Nurul Islam Moni, narrating pitiable condition of a Shaheed family in his area, urged the government to find out the Shaheed families who were yet to get government benefit even after 21 years of the War of Liberation. Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan said that the government would take immediate action as and when such Shaheed families were found.



Fish rot for want of ice. — Star photo.

Fish prices soar as ice factories remain shut

By Staff Correspondent

Prices of fishes in the city have gone up by Taka 30 to Taka 40 per Kg yesterday due to the indefinite strike by the ice factory owners demanding withdrawal of VAT charges from their production.

Scarcity and price hike of fish have also pushed up chicken price by Taka 20 to 30 a piece.

Meanwhile, the export of chilled fishes—Chanda, Lakkua and Hilsa has stopped for the last few days as exporters could not avail of any supply, according to the President of Bangladesh Fruits, Vegetables

and Allied Products Exporters Association.

Over 300 ice factories went on an indefinite strike since February 5. The owners association sources said, the authority had not taken any move to resolve the crisis.

The sources said that hundreds of trawlers and boats were moored in the coastal regions and also in Dhaka for want of ice causing acute shortage of fish in the markets.

At the city markets the supply of fishes dropped by

'Law for curbing smuggling insufficient'

By Staff Correspondent

The National Anti-Smuggling Committee yesterday stressed the need for national consensus in curbing smuggling across the border, reports BSS.

The committee called for united efforts irrespective of political ideology to stop smuggling for greater national interest.

The call was given at a meeting of the committee held at Jatiya Sangsad Bhavan with Home Minister Abdul Matin Chowdhury in the chair.

The meeting was informed that prevailing law for curbing smuggling was insufficient. It emphasized to amend the existing laws to ensure exemplary punishment for the smugglers.

Law Minister Mirza Golam Hafiz, State Minister for Law Md Aminul Haque and Whip Prof. Md Shahjahan Mia and 16 other parliament members of bordering areas of Rajshahi and Khulna divisions attended the meeting.

It stressed the need for strengthening anti-smuggling drive in shops and marketing centres during Ramadan and before Eid festival.

The meeting advised the MPs and concerned officials to list the names and activities of smugglers and send it to the committee.

Home Secretary in-charge M Shafiqur Rahman, I G of Police, D G of BDR, Convenor of Anti-Smuggling Central Task Force, divisional commissioners, sector commanders of BDR, collectors of Customs, D I G's of police and other high officials were also present in the meeting.

Azam changed complexion after '71 crackdown: AG

By Staff Correspondent

Golam Azam "completely changed his appearance and complexion" immediately after the military crackdown on March 25, 1971.

This was stated by Attorney General Aminul Haque Thursday the second day in the hearing of the Writ petition challenging the cancellation of the citizenship of Golam Azam at the Single Bench of the High Court Division comprising Justice Anwarul Huq Chowdhury.

Quoting newspaper reports which had appeared in the Daily Sangram during the period, the Attorney General noted that Azam, at the time,

was "very much in favour of transfer of power and the withdrawal of martial law".

But immediately after the military crackdown, he added, Azam "became more aggressive, more menacing and more atrocious against Bangladesh and went all out to crush the movement for independence".

During the nearly five-hour hearing in two sessions on the day, Barrister AR Yusuf, on behalf of the petitioner, completed placing of the petition, the affidavit in opposition filed by the government and began placing the affidavit of reply of the petitioner.

The Counsel for the peti-

tioner submitted that Golam Azam's stay in Pakistan was "involuntary as he was detained and that he has never acquired the citizenship of any other state."

He argued that under Article 2 of the Bangladesh Citizenship Temporary Order of 1972 (PO-149 of 1972), the petitioner fulfilled all three conditions required to be deemed a citizen. Azam, he said, was born here, continued to be a permanent resident on March 25, 1971 and continued to remain so.

"But it (the relevant Article) does not say how long you have

FBCCI proposes export body headed by PM

By Staff Correspondent

The Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry has proposed that "National Export Council" headed by the Prime Minister should be formed for giving a fillip to exports, reports UNB.

The proposed NEC should comprise representatives from the cabinet, secretaries and representatives from other public and private sector institutions.

It will formulate, evaluate and monitor export strategy and its implementation and performance as well as identify policy package for removing

'Exempt export-oriented units from hartals'

By Inam Ahmed

In view of the downward trend in export and frequent hartals the business circle in the country feels that export-oriented industries should be exempted from the purview of hartals.

According to sources, different business chambers have decided to approach both the Opposition and the government to consider their proposal.

The chambers now feel that if the global strategy was "export or perish", then there was a need to attract investment in the export sector. For

this, the chambers viewed, the country's investment atmosphere must be improved.

Like utility services export-oriented industries are now essential for the country and thus like utility services, such industries should also be exempted from hartals, the chambers viewed.

Meanwhile, a large number of entrepreneurs have requested the chambers to approach the political parties with this agenda.

It has also been estimated that a day's countrywide shut-

Peace mission earns Thai premier a victory over the army brass

From S. M. Ali in Thailand

BANGKOK, Feb 18: The Thai civilian Prime Minister, Chuan Leekpai has won a significant political victory against the country's military top brass by allowing eight Nobel Peace laureates to stage a mission here in support of the Myanmar leader, Aung San Suu Kyi.

The mission was bitterly—and publicly—opposed by the Army Commander-in-Chief, Wimal Wongvanich and his closest associates.

Prime Minister Chuan's refusal to bow to the pressure of

the Army Chief has earned for the Thai leader praise from the cross section of people in the country, foreign observers and a number of Nobel Peace prize winners who were unable

cratically elected Thai Government has never been higher, at home and abroad, than it is today.

In opposing the arrival of the peace mission, General Wimal had taken particular exception to the inclusion in it of the Dalai Lama, a Nobel Prize laureate, on the ground that it would cause offence to China.

The General had also criticised the plan to accommodate the Tibetan leader at Wat Phnom, the home of the country's Supreme Patriarch.

The standing of the demo-

cratically elected Thai Government has never been higher, at home and abroad, than it is today.

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The standing of the demo-



The Thai military opposes the visit of the Dalai Lama to Thailand as a member of the Peace Mission. Courtesy — The Bangkok Post

Injured AJM worker dies in hospital

NARAYANGANJ, Feb 18: Hazrat Ali, 35, a worker of Adamjee Jute Mills Ltd (AJM) who had been injured in a firing incident near Siddhirganj Power House at Katchpur on Dhaka-Chittagong Road on the first day of 48-hour road blockade programmes of jute and textile mill workers on February 15, succumbed to his injuries at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital today, reports BSS.

According to Siddhirganj police sources, the body was handed over to the relatives of the deceased and was sent to Imam Kandi under Sonarganj police station for burial.

A condolence meeting was held at Adamjee Nagar High School today under the auspices of Adamjee Jute Mills, Sangram Parishad to mourn the death of Hazrat Ali with Mr Rehan Uddin Rehan CBA president in the chair.

The meeting expressed sympathy with members of the bereaved families and urged, the government to award exemplary punishment to those responsible for the incident.