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NEWS BRIEFS

Two-taka currency notes from today

Two-taka currency notes, signed by Finance Secretary Nasim Uddin Ahmed, will be issued from Bangladesh Bank, Motijheel C/A, Dhaka office, today. The notes will be later issued from other branches of the bank. Excepting signature by the Finance Secretary, colour, water mark, security strip, design etc will all resemble the existing two-taka notes. The existing two-taka notes including the newly issued ones will remain in vogue simultaneously, reports UNB.

President assents to insurance bill

President Abdur Rahman Biswas yesterday gave his assent to Insurance (Amendment) Bill, 1993. The bill was passed in the Jatiya Sangsad, says a Parliament Secretariat press release, reports BSS.

Hasina elected Vision forum VP

Leader of the Opposition in Parliament and Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina has been elected Vice-President of Eastern Vision Forum, at the London School of Economics. The Eastern Vision Forum is a body comprising distinguished and eminent personalities from the academic and political world, reports BSS.

BCS exam viva voce dates shifted

Viva voce of the 14th BCS Examination, scheduled for today and tomorrow, have been postponed due to some unavoidable circumstances. The oral test will now be held at 9 am on April 6 and 7 respectively, report UNB.

Sheri, Iftar Timings

Ram	Mar	Sheri	Iftar
20	15	—	6.14 pm
21	16	4.47 am	6.14 pm

Govt-labour talks fail 48-hour shutdown begins today

By Staff Correspondent

Trade union leaders decided to go ahead with the nationwide 48-hour strike beginning at 6 am today after last-minute negotiations with the government last night failed to avert it.

The strike, called by the Sramik Karmachari Oikya Parishad (SKOP) and four jute textile-cotton-sugar workers federations, threatens to stall production in factories, and halt road and rail communications throughout the country.

The three and half-an-hour

talks between the ministers for labour, jute and textiles and the labour leaders at the Manpower Employment and Training Bureau office ended at 11-05 last night when the labour leaders boycotted the meeting rejecting government offers of partial implementation of the workers' demands.

After the meeting, Labour Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan told waiting Reporters that they (the minister) had accepted two of the workers' demands fully and one par-

tially. Explaining, he said, we agreed to fix Taka 950 as minimum wage for the public sector employees but the leaders demanded that it be fixed at Taka 1000.

This amount is the maximum, he said adding that, further increase would cause the industries to collapse.

Mannan Bhuiyan further said they had agreed to release all workers, arrested under the Anti-Terrorism Act if the strike was called off. We also

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Sramik Karmachari Oikya Parishad (SKOP) brought out a torch procession in city yesterday in support of its 48-hour shutdown beginning today. — Star photo

Use of child labour US companies start taking actions against Bangladeshi contractors

By Staff Correspondent

Large US companies, sensitive to the negative media publicity surrounding the use of child labour, are taking unilateral action, in the absence of national legislation, against their contractors in developing countries including Bangladesh.

The clothing manufacturer Levi Strauss & Co. has recently issued guidelines for its Bangladeshi contractors, prohibiting the use of child labour while the huge retailing giant Wal-Mart is also considering similar options, including making financial contributions to primary schools in Bangladesh.

According to USIS on Sunday, president of the Global sourcing of Levi Strauss, writing in the January issue of the Harvard Business Review, reported that the company found an "innovative solution" to charges that its contractors in Bangladesh were employing children under the age of 14.

"Rather than simply discharging the youths, which could have brought severe hardship to the children and their families, we worked with the contractors to pay the

youths their salaries and benefits while they attend school—with the understanding that they will be offered jobs upon turning 14," he wrote.

In addition to prohibiting the use of child labour, the company's guidelines also stipulates payment of the prevailing wages and benefits and setting a maximum 60-hour week.

Western labour and human rights activists believe that the number of Third World children who work for a living—under harsh conditions and for paltry wages—is increasing.

"It is difficult to know the full extent of the problem," says Pharis Harey, executive director of the International Labour Rights Education and Research Fund (ILREF).

Based largely on government data, the Geneva-based International Labour Organisation (ILO) concluded in 1986 that over 200 million children under the age of 15 worked for a living, many in dangerous industries.

Children under age 15, the ILO reported, constituted about 11 per cent of the workforce in some Asian countries, 17 per cent in parts of

Asia and between 12 to 26 per cent in many Latin American countries.

"No one is disputing any longer that child labour is an important part of these economies," says Terry Collingsworth, general counsel for ILREF, who visited Bangladesh in December 1992, and has recently traveled to Thailand, Cambodia and Nepal.

"In Bangladesh, everybody apologises (for widespread child labour) rather than denies" its existence, he reports. The growth of child labour, experts believe, is tied to the extreme poverty in parts of the developing world, and to the fact that multi-national firms can shop from country to country looking for the cheapest labour.

Major Western importers, they add, are similarly free to purchase goods from far corners of the globe, giving contracts to the lowest bidder.

The use of child labour in so-called "modern-sector" industries such as garment production is "one of the most worrisome" aspects of the problem, says Bob Sencer of

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US, French, Interpol help in probe sought Bombay blasts : Police seize huge cache of explosives

BOMBAY, Mar 14: Police today claimed a breakthrough in investigations here into Friday's serial bombings that left almost 300 people dead and 1,240 people injured in India's deadliest terrorist strike, reports AFP, Reuter, AP and PTI.

Detectives seized a huge cache of high explosives from a scooter's luggage compartment in central Dadar district saying the material was wired to the two-wheeler and would have exploded if someone had switched on its ignition.

The seizure of eight kilograms (17.6 pounds) of

'Semtex' plastique and highly-reactive RDX explosives took bomb experts closer towards the bombs that were used Friday, but police are yet to unravel the plot behind the strikes.

"It will help us to find out where the explosives originated. This is a major breakthrough (in our investigations). It is a very good lead," said Bombay police chief Amarjit Singh Samra.

Samra on Saturday said the explosives used in the bombs had never been used in India and added that his suspicions on Sri Lanka's Tamil guerrillas

were natural because of their familiarity with Semtex and RDX.

But, Tamil separatist guerrillas today denied any involvement in the bomb attacks in Bombay.

"We are not responsible for the blasts. We are not involved," said a spokesman for the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in a telephone interview from the groups office in Paris.

Police evacuated a large number of homes and shops from Dadar as army bomb experts in armoured suits dis-

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UAE orders return home of all child camel jockeys

ABU DHABI, Mar 14: United Arab Emirates (UAE) President Zayed Ibn Sultan Al-Nahayan has ordered the return home of all child camel jockeys, mostly Asians, after banning them from races, officials said Saturday, reports AFP.

Sheikh Zayed, 76, will pay for the repatriation of the jockeys, mainly from Bangladesh and Pakistan, he said.

"The President has ordered the return of those jockeys to their homes or families, if they reside here, at his own expense," an official said.

Sheikh Zayed, who owns thousands of camels and horses, issued a law early this year banning child jockeys from participating in camel races after an increase in accidents.

The ban also followed public furor triggered last year by the killing of a six-year-old

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French aide meets PM, assures all help

Ann Lauergeon, the visiting special assistant of French President Francois Mitterand, yesterday lauded the economic progress achieved by Bangladesh in last two years and assured all assistance and cooperation in the country's quest for self-reliance, reports UNB.

The assurance came when Lauergeon called on Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia at her office in the afternoon.

The top aide of the French President who arrived here on a two-day visit spoke of the importance given by her country to the present democratic system of Bangladesh, which she cited as a bright example for other developing nations.

Lauergeon appreciated the leadership of Begum Zia in restoring democracy in Bangladesh.

Reviewing the French assisted projects, particularly

the flood action plans in Bangladesh, Lauergeon expressed her satisfaction over the work of the first phase of work and hoped the 2nd phase would progress rapidly.

She also assured that French assistance would be forthcoming for the water treatment plant to be set here.

Expressing satisfaction over the existing bilateral relations, the envoy invited Begum Zia to visit France soon.

The Prime Minister said she would visit France at mutually convenient date.

Begum Zia thanked the French government for its assistance to Bangladesh during the 1988 catastrophic floods and at times of other crises. She conveyed her greetings to President Mitterand through the envoy.

France, as a member of Group-7, attaches top priority

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Court bars Mizan Tito from working as JP chairman, secy

A court yesterday ordered temporary injunction restraining Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury from functioning as Acting Chairman and Khaledur Rahman Tito as Secretary General of Jatiya Party, reports UNB.

The injunction also barred Hasanuddin Sarkar from working as Acting Secretary General and Tajul Islam Chowdhury and Col (Retd) Zafar Imam as members of the presidium of JP.

Kutubuddin Ahmed Shikder, Assistant Judge, 2nd

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Hajj pilgrims asked to submit copy of house rent accord

All Bangladeshi Hajj pilgrims are to submit their copy of advance house rent agreement for staying in Saudi Arabia to the Saudi Embassy in Dhaka while applying for visa, reports UNB.

This is obligatory under the Hajj agreement of 1993 which the Bangladesh government signed with the Saudi authorities, according to an official handout Sunday.

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Emergency in dozen US states Blizzard claims 42 in North America

WASHINGTON, Mar 14: The mammoth blizzard ravaging eastern North America left at least 42 dead and five missing by early Sunday and plunged three million homes into darkness, officials said, reports AFP.

Some 18 of the victims died in Florida, where 50 tornadoes have been recorded since Friday. Some victims of last summer's Hurricane Andrew were hit again, fleeing unpaired homes or tent cities built after the hurricane.

In Cuba, three people were killed and at least 28 injured by raging rainstorms, according to first estimates by Civil Defence authorities. Much of the Cuban capital Havana was flooded and without electricity late Saturday.

Dubbed the "storm of the century," it has given rise to states of emergency in a dozen American states including Connecticut, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Georgia, Virginia, Florida and Massachusetts.

This is like a hurricane with snow," said Devin Dean of the Atmospheric Science Research Centre in New York. Winds of 160 kilometres

per hour (100 miles an hour) were recorded Sunday at key west on the extreme southern tip of Florida and in North Carolina, while New York state was swept by 90 KPH (60 MPH) winds.

At 0600 GMT Sunday the storm's centre was north of New Jersey and was moving towards Vermont and New Hampshire.

Many of the victims died in traffic accidents or home collapses, drowned or struck by falling trees.

More than three million homes were without electricity as the storms brought down power cables across large swathes of the country. Power outages were reported for two million homes in Florida, 450,000 in Georgia and 400,000 in Alabama.

Most highways along the eastern coast were shut due to heavy snowfalls, with snowdrifts of up to two metres (seven feet). Airports at New York, Washington, Boston, Atlanta, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh have been closed since Saturday.

At Chicago's international airport, 250 flights were cancelled.

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South Asia losing importance in global politics, experts say

Two Japanese scholars of international relations yesterday said that possibly a lack of proper knowledge of each other between South Asia and the other Asian regions made them more remote than they actually are geographically, reports BSS.

Asian cooperation does not include South Asia, said Takako Hirose, professor of International Relations, Daito Bunko University, Tokyo.

"South Asia is too distant", she said.

"South Asia is losing importance in global politics" Prof Takako said in a paper entitled "Japan-South Asia relations after the Cold War" she presented at a seminar at the auditorium of Bangladesh Institute of International and

Strategic Studies (BISS) in Dhaka.

"The United States is losing interest in South Asia" she said, and added Japan does not give much importance to South Asia.

Japan's world-wide influence has increased tremendously, said Susumu Yamakage, professor of International Politics, Tokyo University.

"It has nothing to do with the Japanese government. It is because of Japan's trade and investment which are obvious everywhere," said Prof Susumu in a paper entitled "Japan's foreign policy initiative and democratization in South Asia."

The two Japanese scholars presented their papers at the seminar jointly organised by the BISS and the Embassy of

Japan.

Prof Takako said, "In Japan we don't even get a travel guide of Bangladesh."

If we include Australia, South Asia does not even occur," she said trying to explain the reality of the prevailing psychological distance between South Asia and Japan, which are otherwise, geographically speaking so close neighbours.

Known to espouse the cause of South Asia, in the academic circles of Japan, Prof Takako said personally she felt quite concerned the way the world was getting polarised and in that framework leaving South Asia completely out.

She said that Pakistan seems to be more isolated with

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'Reality calls for closer ties between Japan, S Asia'

The Foreign Minister, ASM Mostafizur Rahman, yesterday said that the reality of natural requirements calls for closer cooperation between South Asia and Japan in a newly emerging world order, reports BSS.

Inaugurating a seminar entitled "Japan and South Asia in the Post-Cold War Era" the Foreign Minister said that there was an increasing realisation in the region for closer cooperation with Japan and added that in a highly interdependent world, Japan also needs cooperation with its less prosperous and economically backward Asian neighbours, including South Asia.

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BADC farm workers strike on Seeds worth Tk 10 crore on verge of ruination

Wheat, potato, sugarcane, jute and cotton seeds worth Taka 10 crore are on the verge of ruination with a strike by workers of 72 state-owned agricultural farms entering its 21st day today (Monday).

Leaders of the striking Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC) farm workers said that no headway had been made except a meeting between the leaders and the Chairman of the Corporation Friday which ended unsuccessfully.

An estimated 30,000 workers have launched the strike since February 23 protesting a government order to retrench 932 workers in 72 BADC farms

across the country.

The workers demand that the government pay necessary benefits as is done with the other BADC employees before saying goodbye to the regular but additional workers.

The leaders pointed out that the retrenched agriculture workers should receive one month's gratuity for each year of service, 15 days leave or pay, and one month's salary as festival allowance in the event of voluntary retirement.

BADC in its retrenchment move has already relieved 233 out of a listed 251 old and physically disabled farm workers.

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NICAR okays renaming of UZ as thana

A meeting of the National Implementation Committee for Administrative Reforms (NICAR) was held at the International Conference Centre (ICC) here yesterday with Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia in the chair, reports BSS.

The meeting approved the remaining of upazila as thana. The relevant authority will complete procedural formalities soon, it was decided.

The establishment of 32 police outposts in different parts of the country was approved to ensure security of people and increase the efficiency of the police administration. The establishment of new thanas could not be con-

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Hasina urges govt not to appoint Mujib's killers as ambassadors

Awami League President and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina Sunday urged the government not to appoint three self-confessed killers of August 15 as the country's ambassadors abroad, reports UNB.

In a statement, the Awami League President said government was going to send Major Ahmad Sharful Hossain, Major Nur Chowdhury and AKM Mahiuddin as ambassadors to Oman, Vietnam and Uzbekistan respectively.

"It would be unwise to send such highly controversial persons as the envoys of Bangladesh" to these friendly countries where the governments perhaps do not know their background," she said.

"We are of course aware that certain quarters are trying to

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AL distorted history: Huda

Information Minister Barrister Nazmul Huda yesterday underlined the need for projecting the real history of independence of Bangladesh in its correct perspective to the new generation for the greater national interest, reports BSS.

Barrister Huda was addressing as the chief guest a seminar on "22 Years of Independence: Expectations and Achievements" organised by "Open Forum" here yesterday afternoon at the Jatiya Press Club VIP conference room.

The Information Minister sharply criticised the Awami League for distorting the history of the independence during its one-party rule claiming that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had declared the independence at the Race Course Maidan on March 7, 1971.

He said that independence of the Awami League had tried to distort the history of independence saying that Ziaur Rahman had declared it on March 27, 1971 and not on March 26.

Barrister Huda asserted that Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman had declared the independence on March 26 and the Awami League during its rule had destroyed the relevant historical records.

The Information Minister said it is fact that Sheikh Mujib's March 7 Race Course speech had inspired us at that

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Auranga granted ad-interim bail

The vacation bench of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court yesterday granted ad-interim bail to KM Hemayetullah Auranga, MP, reports UNB.

The bench, comprising Justice Latifur Rahman, granted the bail by staying the operation of the judgement and order of the High Court Division passed on March 13 that cancelled his bail given by a lower court.

Auranga, facing a double murder case, was granted bail on February 22 by the Additional Sessions Judge of the 8th court, Dhaka. It was cancelled by the High Court Division bench comprising Justice Faez Hossain, Justice Habibur Rahman and Justice Abu Saeed Ahmed.