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Tamils blamed: Wijetunga takes over: Funeral Thursday

Premadasa assassinated

File photo of assassinated Shri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa.

COLOMBO, May 2: Tens of thousands of people, some weeping openly and beating their chests, mourned the assassination Saturday of President Ranasinghe Premadasa by visiting his home and walking past his body as it lay in state today, report AP, AFP.

A suicide bomber assassinated President Premadasa Saturday, plunging the Indian Ocean nation — long hit by insurrections — into a new crisis.

Prime Minister Dingiri Wijetunga was sworn in as Shri Lanka's interim President. The ruling United National Party today nominated him to succeed Premadasa in election later this month.

No one claimed responsibility but Colombo blamed the Tamil Tigers for the attack.

Premadasa's widow, Hema, and his 23-year-old daughter, Dulanjalee, who had just returned from London, broke into tears, threw their arms around each other and buried their faces in a flag on the coffin.

As they were helped away, the 25,000 people waiting in lines outside the building continued to walk past the coffin guarded by four soldiers holding golden swords and bowing their heads.

Some of the mourners in this Buddhist country worshipped the coffin in a traditional way by falling to their knees, folding their hands in prayer and dropping their heads to the floor.

In a nearby government building, Cabinet ministers held their second emergency meeting since the assassination of Premadasa.

At least 16 people besides the president and the assassin were killed and 60 others were injured in the blast that occurred while Premadasa was leading a May Day parade through Colombo.

The assassin who had explosives taped to his body triggered the blast as the president was talking to his governing party activists. The explosion badly disfigured Premadasa's body.

"One of his hands was missing and there were wounds all over his body," said Dudley Wickremasinghe, a local photographer, who saw the body in a hospital morgue. Part of Premadasa's face had badly disfigured.

Premadasa, who rose to his country's highest office from the slums of the nation of 17 million people, had gained popularity with his anti-poverty programmes, including free homes and food stamps to poor people.

Police said initial eyewitness accounts suggested that a man strapped with explosives rammed his cycle into the United National Party (UNP) rally that Premadasa was leading through Colombo's commercial district.

Premadasa, in his usual style, was personally supervising arrangements at the procession, when the blast ripped through the crowd, witnesses said.

The government on Sunday officially blamed a guerilla

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Shock, outrage grip Dhaka: 3-day mouring

The Bangladesh flag at half mast over the Jatiya Sangshad Bhaban yesterday

By Staff Correspondent

The news of the assassination of Shri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa Saturday was received in Bangladesh with a deep sense of shock and outrage.

A three-day national mourning was declared immediately after the news reached here.

The nation recalled late President Premadasa's contribution to regional co-operation and Bangladesh Television

See Page 12 Col 2

PM to attend funeral

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, who is the current SAARC Chairperson, leaves here for Colombo Thursday morning to join the funeral of assassinated Shri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa, the Foreign Office said yesterday, reports BSS.

Foreign Minister A S M Mostafizur Rahman and Energy Minister Khandker Mosharraf Hossain will accompany the Prime Minister.

We Mourn

A most tragic and brutal fate has befallen a friend of Bangladesh, a beloved leader of Shri Lanka and an enthusiastic builder of the SAARC. The assassination of President Ranasinghe Premadasa along with 30 others while leading a May Day parade is a reminder, if it was at all necessary, as to what extent our region has become vulnerable to acts of terrorism and to the machinations of terrorists. We raise our resolute voice of condemnation against such acts.

President Premadasa's brutal killing touches us all in a very personal way. It was just the other day that he was here sharing his joys and dreams with us, and inspiring and charming us all with his words of determination and that ever-present smile.

We condemn his killing with all the force and strength we are able to muster. While sharing the sorrows and pains of the people of Shri Lanka, we call upon all the countries of the region to strengthen their resolve to build the SAARC, which President Premadasa nurtured with such dexterity and farsight during his tenure as its Chairperson. We salute the memory of this extraordinary man, who rose from the very bottom rung of his society, not only to occupy the highest office of his country, but also to capture the hearts of the people of this ancient, highly advanced and extraordinary culture.

Bosnian Serbs sign peace plan conditionally

VOULIAGMENI, Greece, May 2: Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic, threatened with Western military intervention and by his Yugoslav patrons, on Sunday signed a plan to end a year of ethnic warfare, reports AP.

However, the agreement must be ratified by the Bosnian Serbs' self-styled parliament, which rejected the plan last week for the second time. Speaker Momcilo Krajisnik on Sunday said the plan was still unacceptable, and that Karadzic signed only under "tremendous pressure and threats of bombing."

The assembly plans to meet on Wednesday.

However, international mediators felt obstacles had been overcome. European Community representative Lord Owen, who crafted the plan with UN envoy Cyrus Vance, said Karadzic's 'signature is a commitment.'

"This is a happy day in the Balkans," Owen said after the session in Vouliagmeni, a resort 20 kilometres (12 miles) south of Athens.

But fighting was reported Sunday near the Bosnian town of Serbrenica and another besieged eastern Muslim enclave, Goradze.

More than 134,000 people are reported dead or missing and more than 2 million have been displaced in the Bosnian conflict, which broke out after Muslims and Croats voted to secede from Serb-dominated Yugoslavia.

Pressure has been building for Western military intervention, and President Clinton on Saturday settled on a series of actions including unspecified military steps to end the fighting.

US State Department spokesman Richard Boucher reiterated Sunday that Karadzic's signature was not enough to deter US action.

"It will take deeds and concrete actions," Boucher said.

Reaction on the streets of Sarajevo, the Bosnian capital that has been besieged by Serb forces for more than a year, also was skeptical.

"Stupid !" declared Dzeno Borovina. "I'd prefer them not to sign it. ... I'll bet you they are not going to carry out a third of the plan in a year. You won't be able to walk down the streets of Sarajevo because of snipers for a year."

The peace plan divides Bosnia-Herzegovina into 10 semi-autonomous regions.

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A Shri Lankan soldier watches over bodies shortly after a suicide bomber riding on a bicycle (background) exploded a device strapped to his body, killing President Ranasinghe Premadasa (second left) and his entire staff in Colombo on May 1. — AFP photo

Aga Khan arrives today

By Staff Correspondent

Prince Karim Aga Khan, the Imam of more than 15 million Shia Ismaili Muslims, arrives in Dhaka today (Monday) on a four-day 'goodwill visit' to Bangladesh.

Foreign Minister A S M Mustafizur Rahman will receive him at the Zia International

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5.1 pc growth projected in B Bank report

Star Report

The national economy is projected to grow at a rate of 5.1 per cent in the current fiscal year as against 3.9 per cent during the previous fiscal, according to the annual report (1991-92) of the Bangladesh Bank released Sunday.

The report attributed the expected acceleration in the growth rate to the expansion of the ongoing structural adjustment programme, along with the aggressive reforms initiated in the country's financial sector.

It identified the energy, gas and industrial sectors as having made the largest contributions to the GDP growth rate of 3.9 per cent in the last fiscal as against 3.6 per cent in 1990-91.

During the period, the energy and gas sectors recorded a growth of 8.9 per cent against 4.4 per cent in 1990-91 while industrial growth went up from 5.9 per cent to 7.7 per cent and construction and other sectors recorded a rise by 0.2 per cent and 0.5 per cent.

However, agricultural growth remained stagnant during

See Page 12 Col 7

May Day observed

By Staff Correspondent

As elsewhere in the world, the historic May Day was observed in Bangladesh Saturday with renewed pledges to protect the rights of the working class.

Public rallies, discussions, seminars and symposia were held throughout the country to mark the historic day and pay respect to those who sacrifice their lives in Chicago's Hay Market in 1886 for the cause of the working class.

BSS adds: Various socio-political organisations, trade unions and the Labour Direc-

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World leaders shocked

UNDATED, May 2: World leaders Sunday expressed shock and sent their condolences on the assassination of Shri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa, while Nepal, Bangladesh and the Maldives went into state mourning, reports AFP.

In Washington President Bill Clinton denounced the assassination as a 'brutal act of terrorism' that robbed Shri Lanka of a champion for economic progress.

Chinese President Jiang Zemin messaged acting President D B Wijetunga to express shock and grief, the Xinhua news agency said, while Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating paid tribute to Premadasa's contributions to development.

'I am outraged', Clinton said in a statement issued at the White House. 'I condemn this brutal act of terrorism'.

Jiang called Premadasa an 'outstanding statesman' and 'a friend well known to the Chinese people,' Xinhua said.

Three days of national mourning were declared for Premadasa in the neighbouring Maldives and in Bangladesh, and two days in the Himalayan kingdom of Nepal, a fellow member of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

Immediately after the killing, Indian Minister of State for External Affairs R L Bhatia had described Premadasa's death as 'a great tragedy' while Pakistan President Ghulam Ishaq Khan and caretaker Prime Minister Balkh Sher Mazari expressed their horror in a joint statement.

The statement described Premadasa as 'a great world statesman' and called the bombing a 'dastardly act of terrorism.'

'Shri Lanka has lost a patriot, the South Asian region a statesman and Nepal a friend,' Nepal's King Birendra said in Kathmandu.

Maldivian President Ma-

See Page 12 Col 8

NEWS BRIEFS

Chinese Minister due today

The Chinese Vice-Minister of Justice, Jin Jian, arrives here today on a four-day goodwill visit to Bangladesh. Jin Jian, who will lead a six-member delegation, will call on President Abdur Rahman Biswas, Chief Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed and Speaker Shaikh Razzaque Ali and Minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Mirza Golam Hafiz, reports BSS.

Lunthin abducts 9 local fishermen

COX'S BAZAR, May 2: Myanmar boarder Security Forces, 'Lunthin', abducted nine Bangladeshi fishermen and their three boats from the river Naaf on Friday evening. Police said a group of Lunthin entered into Bangladesh waters with an engine boat and forcibly took away the nine fishermen who were fishing near a BDR outpost. The Lunthin men also fired 12 rounds when the fishermen tried to resist them, witnesses said, reports UNB.

Imams' confce May 5, 6

A national conference of about 1000 Imams of as many mosques from all parts of the country will be held in the capital on May 5 and 6. The theme of the conference is "Role of Imams in Social Mobilisation for Education, Health and Sanitation," reports BSS.

Body to probe irregularities during Sharif's rule

ISLAMABAD, May 2: Pakistan's caretaker government today set up a three-member ministerial committee to probe alleged irregularities during the 29-month rule of deposed Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, an official statement said, reports AFP.

Headed by Labour Minister Zahid Sarfraz, the panel includes Commerce Minister Ihsan Ul Haq Piracha and advisor Roedad Khan.

The committee, formed at the first full-fledged meeting of the caretaker cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Balkh Sher Mazari, is to complete its inquiry within one month, the statement said.

Information and Broadcasting Minister Kausar Niazi told reporters cases would be sent to the courts after the inquiry.

Niazi said no one would be barred from contesting the upcoming elections nor victimized in any way as a result of the probe.

President Ghulam Ishaq Khan, who sacked Sharif on April 18 for alleged corruption and mismanagement and also dissolved the National Assembly, has set new elections for July 14.

The President's drastic action followed a power tussle over Sharif's plan to slash the President's constitutional powers, which include the authority to dissolve the national assembly.

Mazari stressed during the meeting that the 'main objective' of his government was to hold fair and free elections within the stipulated time, the minister said.

The Prime Minister directed his cabinet members to declare their assets within 15 days so that they could also face accountability when they leave the government, Niazi said.

Sharif has said his government's record is clean and has challenged his successors to prove otherwise.

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Heavy rainfall submerges city areas

By Staff Correspondent

The 150-crore taka storm sewerage project has apparently failed as major city roads went under water after a heavy shower on Sunday.

The Japan-financed project aimed at ameliorating the capital's water- logging, was completed at least three months ago, according to earlier reports, but on Sunday roads in Shantinagar, Motijheel, Green Road, Shajahanpur, Rayer Bazar and some other parts went under knee-deep water.

Under the project, three and half kilometers of canals were re-excavated and an 800 -metre long concrete drain and a pump house constructed

See Page 12 Col 1

Govt proposes date for talks with Shantibahini

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, May 2: The government today proposed to hold the third round of peace talks with the Shantibahini leaders on May 22 at the Khagrachhari Circuit House in an effort to find a political solution to the staggering Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) issue.

According to highly placed sources, a letter issued by the government proposing the date for the third round of dialogue, has been despatched today through a courier to the leaders of the Parbattya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS), the parent organisation of the tribal rebels stationed across the border. The letter was routed through Hangshadoz Chakma, leader of the liaison committee which is brokering the peace negotiation, sources said.

The date for the third round of talks will be finalised if the leaders of PCJSS agree to the proposal, sources added.

Meanwhile, Communications Minister Col Oli Ahmed, who is heading the nine-member Parliamentary Committee for holding the talks with the Shantibahini, left for India today at 12-30 pm. The minister is also scheduled to visit the camps housing the tribal refugees in Tripura state of India along with other members of the Parliamentary Committee ac-

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Paracetamol syrup

HC issues show cause on govt

By Staff Correspondent

The High Court Sunday issued a rule directing the government to show cause as to why paracetamol syrup, which has been found to be unsafe and has caused deaths of children, should not be seized and removed from the market and their sale and manufacture should not be banned until they are ensured to be safe.

The rule was issued by a Division Bench comprising Justice Anwarul Haque Chou-

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$17m UNHCR aid for Rohingya refugees likely

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (HNHCR) is likely to provide Bangladesh with fresh assistance to the tune of about 17 million US dollars for this year to help tackle the Rohingya refugee problems, reports UNB.

The UNHCR's local office sources yesterday said that out of the total amount, 3.3 million US dollars would be exclusively spent for the welfare of the local people in the region who have been affected by influx of

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