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NEWS BRIEFS

Hasina greets Wijetunga

Awami League President and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina yesterday congratulated Dingiri Banda Wijetunga on his election as the President of Sri Lanka. In a message to President Wijetunga, Hasina hoped that he would make special contribution to combatting terrorism and restoring peace in Sri Lanka as well as in the region. She wished him a success in serving the rest of assassinated President Premadasa's six-year term until December 1994, good health and long life, reports UNB.

BUET convocation today

The fourth convocation of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) will be held today at 9.30 am. Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, who is also the Chancellor of the BUET, will preside over the convocation and distribute certificates and medals among the recipients, reports UNB.

Jatiya Sangsad session from tomorrow Budget may be placed well before June

By Nurul Kabir

The country's fifth Parliament will go into its third budget session tomorrow.

According to sources, the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) wants the session to concentrate mainly on debating the economic issues affecting the nation, specially for the next financial year rather than raising any major new political controversy.

Sources, requesting anonymity, told The Daily Star last night that in a departure from the usual practice, the budget for fiscal 1993-94 may be placed before the house by the third week of this month. Normally, it has been customary to announce the budget in June.

Sources close to the Prime

Minister's office told The Daily Star that directives have already been issued to expedite the work of preparing the budget draft.

Barrister Rafiqul Islam Miah, Works Minister and an influential BNP leader, feels that parliament would be able to offer a 'good budget' provided the session solely concentrates on debating the ways and means of economically advancing the country.

The opposition, on the other hand, plans to raise, along with their positions on the budget, different socio-political issues that marked the country's political scenario for the last few months.

Mohammad Nasim, whip of the opposition in par-

liament, told The Daily Star that they would press the ruling party for discussing law and order in the country, its position on the bills relating to setting up of the parliament secretariat, separation of the judiciary from the administration and repeal of the clause of the constitution that bars trial of the killers of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

"Besides, the ruling party has to come out with a clear position on the four-point accord signed with the opposition last year," Nasim added.

That accord includes trial of Golam Azam as a war criminal under the law of the land and ensuring democratic tolerance to opposition activities.

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Nirmul's May 9 sit-in

DMP bans rallies around JS

By Staff Correspondent

The authorities fear a breakdown of law and order ahead of the Nirmul Samannaya Committee's sit-in before the Jatiya Sangsad tomorrow.

A notification of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner issued Friday asked all vehicle owners and drivers except rickshaws to avoid the PG crossing near Shahbagh, and the Bangla Motor and Katabon crossings between 2 pm and 7 pm on Sunday as "there is a possibility of a breach of the peace around the Jatiya Sangsad areas."

The press release urged commuters to use the Maghbar crossing, Tongi diversion road, the Bata crossing and Sonargaon crossing during the period.

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Ministers to meet SKOP leaders today

Govt might take legal action

By Nazmul Ashraf

The government may opt for legal action against the organisers of the proposed 72-hour nationwide shutdown planned from May 11.

This was hinted by Jute Minister A S M Hannan Shah while talking to The Daily Star last night.

Blasting the strike callers, the Jute Minister termed the programme as illegal, anti-people and detrimental to the national economy and said "the government has the option to take legal action if the callers don't abandon their destructive path."

"It is untenable that the labour leaders would do whatever they wished. There must be a limit," Hannan Shah said, adding "The people are now opposed to such harmful programmes and no one has the right to keep the whole nation

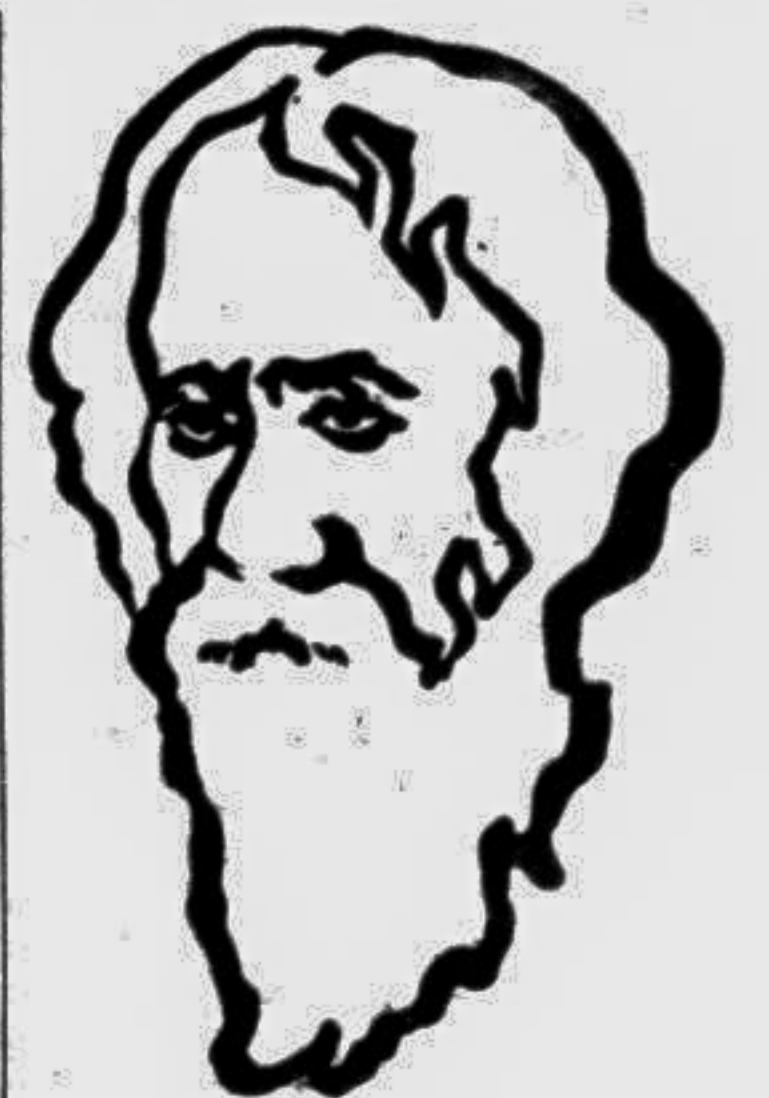
hostage in the name of agitation."

Replying to a question, the Jute Minister informed this correspondent that he had been continuing informal dialogue with the labour leaders of different sectors separately but such talks were purely confined to fixation of minimum wages for the industrial workers and ways to relate those with productivity.

"I held such talks over the past few days and will do so at the Adamjee Court building this morning," he said, ruling out any negotiation with the strike callers on their proposed shutdown.

Responding to a query about the strike itself, an angry Hannan Shah said, "It's up to them to decide how far they would go."

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Anniversary of Tagore's birth today

By Staff Correspondent

Today is the 132nd birth anniversary of poet Rabindranath Tagore.

Tagore, who enriched Bangla literature and culture so immensely with his versatile genius, was born on this day in 1861.

The government has organised a four-day programme in observance of the great poet's birthday.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia will inaugurate the programme, which includes seminars, discussions, Rabin-dra-fair and exhibitions, at the Shilpakala Academy this evening.

Radio Bangladesh will broadcast the programme.

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Sharif accused of reducing duties to help his business

ISLAMABAD, May 7: The caretaker government of Prime Minister Balikh Sher Mazar today accused deposed Premier Nawaz Sharif of reducing duties on scrap metal imports to aid his family business, reports AFP.

Labour Minister Zahid Sarfraz, who was named earlier this week as Chairman of three-member ministerial commission to investigate alleged misdeeds of the previous government, said Sharif obtained a two-thirds reduction in duty on import of scrap metal.

The move caused a revenue loss of 1,024 million rupees (about 40 million dollars) to the national exchequer, Sarfraz told a news conference here.

He claimed that the biggest user of shredded and banded scrap was Ittefaq Foundries run by the family of Sharif, who had devised fiscal and taxation

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Wijetunga elected, vows to stamp out violence



Wijetunga removes a flower garland after he was unanimously elected President yesterday. — AFP photo

COLOMBO, May 7: Sri Lanka's new President Dingiri Banda Wijetunga was sworn in Friday and vowed to unify this strife-torn island republic, respect human rights, and stamp out violence and intolerance, reports AFP.

Parliament elected Wijetunga, 71, as the unopposed successor to assassinated President Ranasinghe Premadasa who was blown up by a suicide bomber and suspected Tamil Tiger guerrilla here Saturday.

"My first priority will be to unify the nation. We will explore the possibilities and the impossibilities. Unifying a nation in pieces is a lengthy process," Wijetunga told reporters as he came out of parliament.

Shortly after his swearing in before Chief Justice G P S De Silva, Wijetunga reappointed

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PM returns

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia returned home in the early hours of Friday after attending the state funeral of slain President Ranasinghe Premadasa of Sri Lanka at Colombo Thursday.

The Prime Minister was received at the Zia International Airport by ministers, secretaries, chiefs of the three Services and high civil and military officials.

Mostafiz goes to Jakarta today

Foreign Minister A S M Mostafizur Rahman leaves for Jakarta this morning to attend a ministerial conference of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), reports UNB.

The second meeting of the Standing Ministerial Committee on Economy of the NAM will begin on Sunday on the picturesque island of Bali in Indonesia.

President Soeharto will inaugurate the four-day conference, to be attended by 37 NAM countries.

RU reopens today

RAJSHAHI, May 7: The Rajshahi University will reopen tomorrow amid tight security measures after an unscheduled closure of 90 days, reports UNB.

The university was closed on February 6 following a bloody clash between activists of the Islami Chhatra Shibir and All-Party Students' Unity that left five students killed.

Authorities have prohibited all sorts of political processions and rallies on the campus up to May 25 to avoid any untoward incident.

All the 12 residential halls of the university reopened for the students today but very few returned to their dormitories.

The halls have been rid of outsiders and students have been advised to carry their identity cards on the campus.

Existing labour laws stifling investment

Star Report

Labour unrest and non-enforcement of existing labour laws are a major deterrent to both domestic and foreign private investment in Bangladesh, observes a recent report by a World Bank affiliate.

"A generally contented and productive labour force is seen as a *sine qua non* for ensuring a favourable climate for investment and sustained production," says the report, based on a study conducted last year by the Washington-based Foreign Investment Advisory Service (FIAS).

The report goes on to note the various "contradictions and inconsistencies" of the numerous pieces of legislation enacted over the years on an ad hoc basis to deal with labour relations in Bangladesh.

Presently, the labour and industrial law of Bangladesh is contained in some 47 acts, ordinances, rules and regulations. The important ones are the Workmen's Compensation Act of 1923, the payment of Wages Act of 1936, the Employers' Liability Act of 1938, the Maternity Benefit Act of 1939, the Minimum Wages Ordinance of 1961, the Employment of Labour (Standing Orders) Act of 1965 and the Industrial Relations Ordinance of 1969.

Over the years, the report points out, "these enactments were made in response to

pressures of the moment" resulting in a number of inconsistencies between them.

As an example, the FIAS report notes that the definitions of a 'workman' differ in the Standing Orders Act and the Industrial Relations Ordinance (IRO).

Moreover, it says, certain categories of workers — watchmen, security guards, confidential assistants and cipher assistants — are excluded from the definition of a 'workman.' Hence they cannot claim the statutory right of applying under Section 34 of the IRO for enforcement of any of the rights granted under the IRO.

In regard to industrial disputes, the IRO confers the jurisdiction on the labour courts to "adjudicate and determine and industrial dispute" which has been referred to it under Section 35(5) of the ordinance.

The IRO also empowers the labour court and the labour appellate tribunal to prohibit strikes or lock-outs when an industrial dispute is pending before them for adjudication or appeal respectively.

Noting that a strike or lock-out during the pendency of such proceedings is illegal under existing laws, the report says "In practice, however, the powers of the labour courts are

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Indian army Gen, 8 others killed in chopper crash

NEW DELHI, May 7: Top Indian Army General Jameel Mahmood, his wife and seven other military personnel were killed when their helicopter crashed in the highlands of Western Bhutan, about six hours drive by road from the Kingdom's capital Thimphu, a ministry spokesman said.

The Soviet-built Mi-8 helicopter of the Indian Air Force crashed shortly after takeoff from Ha in the highlands of Western Bhutan, about six hours drive by road from the Kingdom's capital Thimphu, a ministry spokesman said.

"There were no survivors", the spokesman told AFP. Only a detailed inquiry, which is already underway, will reveal what caused the crash. All I can tell you is that the helicopter had [caught] fire.

Earlier reports had said eight people, including Lieutenant General Mahmood, whose age was put at about 57, and his wife Dilras, died when the helicopter crashed into

the mountainside but the death count was amended to nine.

The spokesman said the bodies of three of four crew members had been identified, and that a relief and rescue team had flown to the crash site from an Indian military base.

Efforts were underway to fly the bodies to India. General Mahmood will be buried with full military honours.

The Press Trust of India (PTI) said King Jigme Singye Wangchuk had visited the site and sent a message to Indian Army Chief Sunith Rodrigues expressing shock and deep sorrow at the deaths.

General Mahmood, who was chief of the Eastern Army Command, was on an official visit to Bhutan. The Defence Ministry spokesman said the visit was part of routine military interaction between the two close neighbours.

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Four of a family electrocuted in Munshiganj

From Our Correspondent

NARAYANGANJ, May 7: Four members of a family were electrocuted in Munshiganj district early yesterday.

Trinath Chandra Das, 42, his sister Sandha Rani Das, 50, Trinath's son Madhab Chandra Das, 28, and daughter Anju Rani Das, 16, of Purabazar area of Tangibari thana under Munshiganj were electrocuted Thursday.

The accident occurred when a live wire snapped during a storm the day before fell on the kutchha toilet of Trinath's home. Trinath was electrocuted as soon as he went to the toilet early morning, according to police. His daughter Anju, hearing her father's cry for help, rushed to his rescue only to be electrocuted herself.

Sandha Rani and Madhab met their tragic deaths in similar manner.



City roads wore an empty look yesterday because of the heavy downpour throughout the day. — Star photo

Serbs close in on Zepa as UN declares 6 towns 'safe havens'

SARAJEVO, May 7: Bosnian Serb forces, ignoring threats of military intervention, were reported Friday to be closing in on the Muslim-held town of Zepa, reports AP.

The UN Security Council on Thursday evening declared "safe havens" in Zepa and five other mainly Muslim towns besieged by Serbs, but did not back the resolution with force.

In Sarajevo, UN officials said they hoped the resolution would pressure Bosnian Serbs to allow observers into Zepa, UN spokesman Barry Frewer said.

The observers have been denied access to the enclave by Serb forces for the last two days.

Fadil Helić, a spokesman for Zepa civil authorities, said by ham radio Friday that Serb forces were one kilometer (a half mile) away from the enclave and there were no signs the fighting would abate.

Serb sources indirectly confirmed reports of fighting around Zepa, claiming Bosnian troops from the Srebrenica enclave had attacked Serb units besieging nearby Zepa, according to the Yugoslav news

agency Tanjug. The Bosnian Serb army holds a thin strip of land between the two pockets.

Sarajevo radio reported Friday that more than 200 civilians had been killed and about 320 injured in the Zepa fighting.

"For two days, our fighters have not had ammunition or any other material — technical means to put up resistance to the Chetnik hordes (Bosnian Serb forces) armed to their teeth," the radio quoted local Muslim authorities as saying.

Ham radio reports on fighting around Zepa could not be independently confirmed even though Zepa is only 50 kilometers (30 miles) east of the Bosnian capital.

Helić claimed that many of Zepa's 40,000 residents and refugees had escaped from what he described as a burning town. He said they were looking for shelter in the forest and caves of nearby hills.

Meanwhile, Frewer said fighting between Croat troops and the mostly Muslim Bosnian forces flared again Thursday and continued Friday in the central Jablanica and Konjic

arcas, scenes of pitched battles for weeks.

Serb forces were reportedly attacking in other parts of Bosnia, Sarajevo radio said. As many as three mosques were blown up overnight in a series of explosions in Banja Luka, said Peter Kessler, a UN relief spokesman in Zagreb, Croatia.

The Yugoslav government, the main backer of Bosnian Serb fighters, on Thursday responded to their rejection of an international peace plan by saying it would cut off aid except food and medicine.

If implemented, such an

embargo could deprive the rebels of their main source of fuel, weapons and ammunition, leaving them virtually isolated in their yearlong fight against Bosnia's Muslims and Croats.

Belgrade's move on Thursday — the strongest action yet in its recent turn away from the Bosnian Serbs — came hours after the self-styled Bosnian Serb assembly defied pleas by Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic and other Yugoslav leaders to accept the plan to end the war. Instead, it opted to put the peace plan to Serbs voters in a referendum.

12 drowned as boat capsizes in Meghna

BRAHMANBARIA, May 7: Twelve passengers drowned and 13 others were reported missing as an engine-boat capsized in strong winds in the river Meghna near the Ashuganj Power Station here this afternoon, reports UNB.

Police said the Bhatrabazar-bound boat with about 50 passengers had started from Zafarnagar at about 12 noon and off-loaded a few passengers at Ashuganj Ghat before the accident occurred near the water drainage channel of the power station.

Police confirmed the deaths of 12 people tonight and said two thirds of the passengers still remained missing. Five persons, including a woman, swam ashore, they said.

Eleven of the dead were identified as Hazrat Ali, 40, Shahid Mia, 22, Mursheed Mia, 10, Masud Mia 18, Lehas Uddin, 22, Nazir Hossain, 40.

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16 arrested after gunfight in Kushiya

KUSHIYA, May 7: Police arrested 16 miscreants, including two women, following a gunfight in Sadar thana of the district today, reports UNB.

Acting on a tip, police early in the morning gheraoed the house of Harjan Begum of village Luxmipur where the miscreants had taken shelter. Sensing the arrival of the police the armed miscreants opened fire at the police.

Harjan Begum, 40, who received bullet injuries, was admitted to Kushiya General Hospital.