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NEWS BRIEFS

Tornado hits Netrokona

NETROKONA, July 5: Seven school children were injured, three of them critically, in a tornado today that hit a village near Netrokona town. The tornado that lasted for about 20 minutes at village Bigjan, two kilometres away from the Netrokona town, damaged a primary school, Land Development Office and 50 houses. Several electric poles and trees were also uprooted, reports BSS.

Speaker visits ailing Whip

Speaker of the Jatiya Sangsad Shaikh Razzak Ali yesterday visited the Suhrawardy Hospital to see Whip Md Ashraf Hossain who was recently admitted to the hospital, reports BSS.

CPB, GP discuss merger

By Staff Correspondent

A joint meeting of the Ganatantri Party and Communist Party of Bangladesh Monday discussed the possibility of forming a unified political organisation. Presided over by Saifuddin Ahmed Manik, the meeting was attended by Ahmedul Kabir, Muhammad Afzal, Azizul Islam Khan and Saiful Islam of Ganatantri Party and Nurul Islam Nahid, Ajay Roy Shamsuddin, Shekar Dutta, Dr Wajedul Islam Khan and Mukul Chowdhury of CPB.

Sharif invites Benazir to discuss polls

ISLAMABAD, July 5: Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said on Monday he was not afraid to hold mid-term elections and urged opposition leader Benazir Bhutto to meet him to discuss her demand for polls.

"We are not running away from elections," Sharif told Reuters a day after Bhutto sent him a letter urging him to put aside their enmity and join forces to end a political crisis and hold off martial law.

"A democratically elected government should not be hesitant about going to the people, but we have a mandate for five years and how will elections solve this crisis?" he said in an interview.

Bhutto demanded that Sharif call elections to resolve a crisis she said had intensified since last Thursday when

powerful Chief of Army Staff General Abdul Waheed spoke out. Waheed advised Sharif that he should end his paralysing six-month-old deadlock with President Ghulam Ishaq Khan or dissolve the National Assembly.

"We are ready to talk," Sharif said, adding that Bhutto appeared to have reservations about meeting him.

"All these issues could be discussed in a one-to-one meeting with Benazir Bhutto," Sharif said.

Bhutto has long been at loggerheads with Sharif, who succeeded her after she was dismissed as Prime Minister in 1990, and several previous attempts at reconciliation — including talks last month — have been fractured by bitter disagreement.

A spokesman for the oppo-

sition leader said today she would not agree to meet Sharif unless he first met her condition of setting a date for elections.

Bhutto presented Sharif with a three-point formula — formation of a national government, constitutional reforms and new election — to solve the political crisis.

She threatened to bring her supporters onto the streets across the country and to throw out Sharif through popular protest if he rejected her solution.

Sharif dismissed her fears that the political confrontation could lead to an army takeover, saying the military had taken a neutral stand and was not involved in politics.

"This is a good thing that is happening for the first time in

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If war breaks out who will control Army?

ISLAMABAD, July 5: Pakistan's government called for the reshaping of the country's political structure today, saying the current crisis was the result of a system that was neither presidential nor parliamentary, reports AFP.

"We should now seriously discuss that the authority should rest in the hands of one executive," said Commerce Minister Malik Naem at a press conference, referring to gaps in the constitution that fail to adequately define the roles of the President and Prime Minister.

"If war breaks out tomorrow, who will control the Armed Forces?" Naem asked.

The Pakistan Constitution has a clause saying the government would have 'control and command' of the Armed Forces. However, a 1985 inscription said 'supreme command

Judgement in heroin case now July 13

By Staff Correspondent

Judgement in the heroin smuggling case involving teenage American girl Eliadah McCord has been deferred until July 13, court sources said.

The judgement was originally reserved for yesterday by the Second Additional District and Sessions Judge Anwaruddin Sikder but was postponed because the judge was reportedly preoccupied with some pressing matters.

Three of the five accused in the case — Eliadah McCord, Robert Blankson and Gudy Okendo, a Nigerian — were produced before the court yesterday.

Two other suspects another Nigerian Oky Goodwin and a Bangladeshi, Abdul Quyum — have been absconding since the trial started.

JS probe committee Terms of reference stumbling block

By Staff Correspondent

Differences of opinion among the ruling party and the opposition on the terms of reference of the proposed parliamentary committee to probe alleged irregularities in the Agriculture, Irrigation, Water Development and the Flood Control Ministry headed by Majid-ul-Huq.

Speaker Shaikh Razzak Ali was expected to announce the committee and its terms of reference yesterday but could not do so because the two sides failed to agree on the nature and scope of the investigations.

The ruling BNP maintained until last night that the committee should investigate only into those allegations brought by Awami League (AL) MP

Tofael Ahmed on the floor of Parliament on June 26 while the opposition now wants the committee to investigate into the entire affairs of the Agriculture, Irrigation, Water Development and the Flood Control Ministry headed by Majid-ul-Huq.

The AL submitted a copy of the terms of reference it would like for the body to Speaker Shaikh Razzak Ali yesterday morning.

Later, a meeting of the AL parliamentary party, held in the evening, approved the draft in principle.

The formulation of the terms of reference, however, is entirely the Speaker's discretion.

FM to attend special OIC meet

By Staff Correspondent

Foreign Minister M Mostafizur Rahman is expected to lead a high level Bangladesh delegation to a special meeting of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) scheduled in Pakistan on July 12 and 13. Islamabad is expected to be the likely venue of the meet.

Bangladesh is among 14 countries invited to the specially convened OIC meet which will review the latest situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The UN peace-keeping efforts in the war-torn region is also likely to figure in the agenda, according to informed sources.

The High Commissioner of Bangladesh in Islamabad and Momin Chowdhury, Dhaka's Ambassador to Riyadh, who is also Bangladesh's representative to the OIC, are expected to be in the delegation.

Next round of CHT talks on July 14 proposed

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, July 5: The Liaison Committee brokering peace-talks between the government and the tribal rebels has sent a letter today to the leaders of the Parbathya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) with a proposal for holding the fourth round of talks on July 14.

The tribal rebels, known as the "Shantibahini," have been waging an insurrection for about two decades in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

The PCJSS, the parent organisation of the Shantibahini, has been negotiating the peace-talks with the government.

According to sources from

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Prime Minister and BNP chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia presiding over her Parliamentary Party meeting yesterday at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban. Law and Justice Minister Mirza Golam Hafiz and LGRD Minister and party Secretary General Barrister Abdus Salam Talukder are on her right while Deputy Leader of the House AQM Bodrudozza Chowdhury and Chief Whip Khandker Delwar Hossain are seen on her left. — PID photo

BNPPP meet held MPs oppose UP bill's tax provisions

By Staff Correspondent

The parliamentary wing of the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) last night resolved to bring about a few important amendments to the Local Government (Union Parishads) (Amendment) Bill, 1993.

This was decided following criticisms of a few provisions of the bill, now before Parliament for considerations, by several party legislators.

The bill was introduced in the House in February and was taken up for consideration on Sunday.

According to the original bill, the Union Parishads would levy taxes on 40 items, including bicycle, motorbikes, commercial boats, births, marriages, tournaments, theatres and public gatherings, etc.

The bill also proposed that Union Parishads failing to collect 75 per cent of the targeted taxes would stand dissolved and the Thana Nirbahi

Officer (TNO) would run the parishads until the next elections. The Union Parishad or council is the lowest tier of local government in the country.

Most of the MPs who spoke in yesterday's meeting held at the Sangsad Bhaban, strongly opposed imposition of taxes on the rural people and criticised BNP Secretary General Abdus Salam Talukder, who is also the Local Government and Rural Development (LGRD) Minister, for moving the bill without prior discussion in the party's parliamentary committee.

Whip Mahboob Alam Tara, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, Abdus Salam Pintu, and Nurul Islam Moni, opposing the tax proposals, said these would not only hit the poor people living in the rural areas, hard but also tarnish the pro-people image of the BNP government.

They also criticised the Zila

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18th PGR Day PM's call to join 'new march' to development

By Staff Correspondent

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia yesterday urged all to lend more active cooperation from their respective fields to the "new march" towards development and prosperity initiated by the present government, reports UNB.

She made the call while addressing a function of the President Guard Regiment (PGR) organised to mark the 18th Raising Day of the unit at the Dhaka Cantonment.

"You have to remember that welfare of all depends on the overall development of the country," the Prime Minister told the 'darbar' attended by officers, jawans and members of Shaheed families of PGR.

Praising a high sense of discipline, responsibility and professional skill of the regiment, she said "your role in the security system of the 7th SAARC summit will be memorable."

The successful holding of the summit has brightened the national image abroad, she said and hoped that the traditional

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Poetic protest

By Staff Correspondent

Industries Minister Shamsul Islam Khan's speech on sick industries in Parliament has shocked the convenor of the Inter-Association of Sick Industries Rehabilitation Council to write a poem.

Alaudin Ahmed composed a 36-line poem protesting the minister's speech in Parliament on June 23, in which the minister stated that "There is no sick industry in the country."

Ahmed, in his verses, depicted the problem he faced with his own industry since the sanctioning of loans by a bank to the subsequent intricacies involved.

The poem also says that delinquent borrowers live in peace in Gulshan but the genuine industrialists are harassed.

The council convenor clipped some other papers with his poem, including a copy of a gazette notification of the government forming the cell for rehabilitation of the sick industries.

The Industries Minister,

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3 Indian ministers to visit Dhaka soon

By M Anwarul Haq

Three Indian ministers are expected to visit Bangladesh between August and October, according to informed sources.

They are Finance Minister Manmohan Singh, External Affairs Minister Dinesh Singh and Commerce Minister Pranab Mukherjee.

Indian External Affairs Minister Dinesh Singh is likely to come to Dhaka after a firm date is fixed for the Joint Economic Commission (JEC) meeting.

That meeting long overdue scheduled to take place in October last year, the meet had to be postponed due to "preoccupations" of the Foreign Ministers of the two countries. Although the two sides have not yet found a mutually convenient date, yet 'hectic' consultations are on to fix an early date, preferably in the latter part of August or early September.

Indian Finance Minister Manmohan Singh and Commerce Minister Pranab

Mukherjee are likely to come in September or October after the Indian Parliament is adjourned following its next sitting in the third week of August. The Indian Parliament will sit for what is popularly known as its 'monsoon session' on July 19 and is expected to continue deliberations for a month.

The proposed visits of Manmohan Singh and Pranab Mukherjee are expected to be 'return visits' following the earlier trips to India by Bangladesh Commerce Minister M K Anwar in August and Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman in September last year.

Both ministers had extended invitations to their counterparts and the Indian Ministers expressed their desire to visit Bangladesh to discuss issues of bilateral nature.

Communications Minister Ol Ahmed also visited India in May this year.

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Opposition terms UP (amend) bill as anti-people

The opposition members termed the Union Parishad Amendment Bill as "undemocratic and anti-people" when the Jatiya Sangsad continued the discussion on the bill for the second day yesterday, reports BSS.

Lashing out at the bill, pending since last winter session the opposition described it as a 'sugar coated pill' and said Zeminidat System of the British Raj would be reintroduced in a different guise.

They were critical of the proposed provision to empower the Union Parishads to levy taxes, rates and fees on different 14 items. The poor people would face hardship if they were made to pay taxes as proposed in the bill, the opposition members said while moving their amendments to send the bill either to the select committee or to elicit public opinion.

Eighteen members belonging to different parties and groups took part in the inconclusive discussion on the local government (Union Parishads)

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UN arms experts pull out of Iraq



Nikita Smidovich, the leader of the latest UN inspection leaves Baghdad yesterday with its mission unaccomplished as a defiant Iraq warned their departure was a prelude to new attack. — AFP photo

BAGHDAD, July 5: A team of UN arms experts pulled out of Iraq today after failing to persuade Iraq to let them install monitoring cameras at missile test sites, reports Reuter.

The experts, led by senior inspector Nikita Smidovich of Russia, left Baghdad for Cyprus. The UN Security Council has warned Iraq of unspecified serious consequences if it does not permit the cameras.

"So the camera installation team is departing," said Smidovich, who had been in Iraq since June 4.

"Iraq has to assess the decision of the Security Council which qualifies the position of Iraq as a breach of Security Council Resolution 687, the ceasefire and 707," he added.

The decision to pull the inspectors out has cast a shadow over talks between Iraq and the United Nations in New York this week on the conditions for Iraq resuming oil sales.

US Secretary of State Warren Christopher said Iraq's refusal to let the inspectors install the cameras, as de-

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News Analysis SROs: Saifur's options

By A Special Correspondent

Last week Finance Minister Saifur Rahman announced that Statutory Regulatory Orders (SROs) shall not be issued unless there is an emergency. Nor prices of utilities will be increased.

Pointing out that the Minister has not ruled out tax and utility price increases altogether, analysts project that the Finance Ministry may face an emergency early next year irrespective of whether or not nature is adverse.

In his budget statement, the Finance Minister informed Parliament that administrative measures had led to receipt of an additional Tk 310 crore on VAT (and to a minor extent, Income Tax) account during 1992-93.

Minister Rahman expects that there will be a repeat of this experience in 1993-94 and he will be receiving Taka 388 crore through improvement in VAT administration. At the same time, Saifur Rahman has raised the turnover limit for VAT exemption from Taka 5 lakh to Tk 7.5 lakh.

Analysts point out that the unexpected increase in VAT collections in 1992-93 occurred through a major drive to expand the VAT net by forcing registration of businesses which do not qualify as cottage industry but have turnover in excess of Taka 5 lakh. The increase in turnover limit from Taka 5 lakh to Taka 7.5 lakh has, in one stroke, eroded the VAT tax base significantly. To make up for this a new set of VAT payers will have to be identified. This has very low probability of success.

Consequently, there will be a shortfall in revenue receipt. There is also an apprehension that the shortfall will be amplified by shortfall in receipt of customs duty projected at Tk 3070 crore — Tk 235 crore higher than the 1992-93 receipt.

This revenue crunch will constitute the 'emergency' that will require Saifur Rahman to raise taxes through SROs and, perhaps, to raise utility prices.

Hasina urges West to spend more for poor states

Opposition leader Sheikh Hasina has stressed a defence expenditure cut in developed countries to spend more money for development and welfare of the hapless people in the small and poor countries, reports UNB.

Although the end of cold war had resolved certain issues, some new problems have been created—the demise of Soviet Union has cast a long term impact on international relations, generating tension in mutual relation between different countries, she said.

Speaking at a convention of French International Socialist Party at Lyon on Saturday last, Hasina said emergence of regional economic groups has deeply influenced the world economy. Different economic blocks have been involved in competition to capture markets.

She said many countries of the world are now thinking to formulate new strategies to advance the 'progressive movement to improve the condition of deprived men and women.