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NEWS BRIEFS

BNP confce body meets today

An emergency meeting of the conference preparatory committee of the BNP will be held today at 7 pm at the central office. Convenor of the committee Chowdhury Tanvir Ahmed Siddiqi has requested all members of the committee and sub-committees to attend the meeting, reports BSS.

Dhaka-Yangon talks Aug 29

COX'S BAZAR, Aug 20: The 15th round of official level talks between Bangladesh and Myanmar will begin in Dhaka from August 29. Official sources said Chittagong Divisional Commissioner Omar Faruque and Director General of the Myanmar Immigration Department Aung Maung will lead their respective teams, reports UNB.

Patsatsia new Georgian PM

TBILISI, Aug 20: Georgia's parliament named Otar Patsatsia today as Prime Minister, replacing Tengiz Sigua who resigned August 6. Moving on a proposal by parliamentary speaker, 124 deputies voted for Patsatsia, 16 against and seven abstained, reports AFP.

Storm hits Moheshkhali

COX'S BAZAR, Aug 20: A cyclonic storm hit three unions of Moheshkhali thana of the district today, leaving about 20 people injured, witnesses said. The storm that lasted for about two hours from 3 pm, damaged some 400 houses in the villages of Hoanok, Kalamarchara and Dhalghata unions, reports UNB.

Countrywide hartal on Oct 10

AL announces package of demands

By Staff Correspondent

Sheikh Hasina yesterday announced a series of agitation programmes, including a countrywide hartal on October 10, to press home a package of political and economic demands.

Hasina, chief of the Awami League (AL), demanded that the killers of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman be tried and the Anti-Terrorism Act be repealed.

The AL chief's demands also included dismissal of 'corrupt ministers', trial of Goliam Azam as a 'war criminal' in a special tribunal, a halt to the large-scale retrenchment of public sector workers and increased subsidy for agriculture.

Sheikh Hasina was addressing a huge public rally yesterday afternoon at the Manik Miah Avenue in the city.

Hasina, who is also the Leader of the Opposition in Parliament, called upon the people to observe a 'peasants' day' throughout the country on September 8 as part of her party's recently announced 'Save the peasants, Save the nation' movement.

She also called upon the people to observe a 'demonstration day' on September 18 to intensify the countrywide agitation against the government.

The AL chief asked her party activists to prepare for demonstrations against the government at the thana and district

headquarters on both the 8th and 18th of next month.

During her 48-minute speech, Sheikh Hasina accused the government of breaking several promises in the past and betraying the interests of the people.

She was also very critical about some AL leaders who she said, had betrayed the party whenever it decided to achieve a 'major break-through' in the country's politics. In this connection, the AL chief mentioned the name of Khandaker Mush-taque Ahmed and also clearly hinted at Dr Kamal Hossain, who is planning to float a new party.

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Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina addressing a public meeting at the Manik Miah Avenue in the city yesterday. — Star photo

Import of toxic fertiliser by BADC

PM's Office approves probe body findings

By S Y Bakht

The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) has recently approved recommendations, including legal and punitive action, against the supplier and the officials involved in the import and distribution of toxic fertiliser last year.

According to an authoritative government source, the recommendations of an enquiry committee have now been sent to the Ministry of Agriculture for implementation.

The findings of the probe, headed by Dr Shamsher Ali, Vice Chancellor of the Open University, were included in a report submitted to the Ministry of Environment earlier this year.

In January last year, the Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation (BADC) imported 3150 tonnes of zinc oxy-sulphate fertiliser from the United States. Chemical tests on the consignment later revealed that it was contaminated with industrial toxic wastes.

However, even before the

tests were fully completed the BADC went on to distribute 1113 tonnes of the hazardous material.

The 3-member enquiry committee recommended sending back the remaining portion of the toxic fertiliser to its country of origin and initiating a long-term study to look into the environmental and health effects in the areas where it was used.

In addition to taking legal action against the Washington-based supplier and punitive action against the officials involved in the import and distribution of the consignment, the committee also recommended putting in place legal and administrative safeguards to check against dumping of industrial wastes in the country.

Meanwhile, it is learnt that the US government is contemplating prosecuting the supplier and asking him to take back the contaminated stock from Bangladesh.

An expert mission of the Asian Development Bank (ADB),

which financed the purchases, visited Dhaka last month. The ADB team, which also included an expert from the World Health Organisation, made preliminary inquiries on the use of the toxic fertiliser and its possible impact on the environment and human health.

The Manila-based bank is likely to offer technical assistance to determine the impact and to set up a long-term mechanism to study the effects in the areas — primarily in north Bengal — where the toxic substance was used.

Chemical tests on the consignment, both locally and in the US, revealed that it was contaminated with toxic industrial wastes and contained excessively high levels of lead and cadmium.

The BADC went ahead with the distribution of the toxic fertiliser after just a preliminary test at the Bangladesh Agriculture Research Institute (BARI), which was done without proper standards.

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Several hurt in attacks on AL processionists

By Staff Correspondent

Several persons were injured when processionists, in large groups, were proceeding towards the venue of the Awami League public meeting at Manik Miah Avenue yesterday.

At Siddiq Bazar, some bombs were hurled at a truck procession at about 3.30 pm. One Abul Hashem, General Secretary of the AL's Ward 36 unit, along with some of his colleagues were injured in the attack.

AL sources said, some 50 crackers were hurled at the trucks as they were passing through the North-South Road in the older part of the city.

A similar attack was reported on a truck procession at Roy Saheb Bazar, under Sutrapur thana. The explosion left one Abul Hossain seriously injured.

Party sources said processionists were passing through the North-South Road in the older part of the city.

Biggest rally in city since '91 elections

Star Report

The city yesterday witnessed the biggest public gathering since the 1991 general elections.

The Awami League organised the mammoth public gathering at the Manik Miah Avenue, the widest road in the capital in front of the Jatiya Sangsad building.

The entire area of the meeting venue was packed with an estimated audience of about three lakh people. The attendees constituted party activists, supporters and sympathisers who converged on the venue from all directions of the city, its suburbs and from far-flung areas of the country.

Buses and trucks carried the

See Page 12 Col 2

EC food aid scheme begins this year

By Inam Ahmed

A new food aid programme of the European Community (EC) starts from this year.

Under an agreement, signed last month between the government and the EC the Community will channelise its food aid to Bangladesh under the Integrated Food Assisted Development Programme (IFADEP), a six-year-long scheme.

The IFADEP programme, with four sub-projects whose ultimate goal is a higher and less risk-prone quality of life for the rural poor, was originally supposed to start from 1992.

However, signing of the pact was delayed since the government had a full stock of food-grain in its godowns and no place to store new food supplies, concerned sources said.

Under the IFADEP, the European food aid to Bangladesh will trickle down from its present 1.4 lakh metric tons to only 21,000 tonnes by the end of the programme.

This scaling down was planned in view of the country's near self-sufficiency in food.

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Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia addressing the newly elected office-bearers of the Nabinagar College Students' Union and Nabinagar thana BNP leaders and members at Sugandha in the city yesterday. LGRD Minister and BNP Secretary-General Barrister Abdus Salam Talukder is seen on her right. — PID photo

PM tells students from Nabinagar

Muscle-power cannot sustain politics

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia said in Dhaka yesterday that the present development trend created by her government should be carried forward with tolerance and patience ignoring all instigations from vested quarters that may try to jeopardise national progress, reports BSS.

"No politics can be sustained through threat and muscle power. We believe that politics becomes strong only with the love and support of the people of the country," Begum Zia said while addressing the newly elected Nabinagar Government College Students Sangsad which met her at her Sugandha office.

Begum Zia said the nationalist force was in favour of independence, multi-party democracy and progress. "We are determined to uphold democracy and make independence meaningful by attaining progress in a peaceful atmosphere," she said.

Refuting an opposition political party's allegation of politicalisation practised by her government, the Prime Minister said, "We carry out our politics for betterment of the people and if this politics of progress is termed as politicalisation, we are ready to accept this allegation."

Begum Zia said her government and party were happy to see that the support of the people.

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Commentary

Move to convertibility may not be disruptive

By Special Correspondent

In the backdrop of reports that preparations for making the Taka convertible is proceeding in full swing, business circles are trying to get a bearing on the possible direction of the exchange rate in a deregulated market.

Speaking in seminar last week Bangladesh Bank Governor Khorshed Alam expressed the optimism that the deregulated foreign exchange market will eventually lead to emergence of competitive rates which will help both importers and exporters.

The Governor, however, added that the movement of the exchange rate toward a competitive level may be interrupted by swings in the dealers' mood between high optimism and extra caution.

Some observers, however, believe that the transitional difficulties implied in the Bangladesh Bank Governor's statement will be minimal because the Taka will continue to remain pegged to a basket of currencies. At present the Taka-

US dollar exchange rate is adjusted in response to changes in exchange rate between the dollar and the basket currencies.

Convertibility will mean that this adjustment in daily rates will be made by the banks dealing in foreign exchange commented an observer, adding that the recent withdrawal of the Bangladesh Bank's forward cover for foreign exchange dealers will minimise the possibility of sharp changes in the exchange rate.

The observer also pointed out that the current exchange rate may not be too far off the competitive market rate.

This has occurred through the gradual fall in the inflation rate in Bangladesh, increasing the real value of the Taka.

The convertibility of the Taka, when introduced as announced by the Finance Minister, will move Bangladesh one step further towards full convertibility on the current account and granting of Article VIII status by the IMF to

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Patients leaving hospitals as nurses continue strike

By Staff Correspondent

More patients continued to leave the government hospitals to avoid miseries caused by the continuing strike of the nurses across the country.

The Bangladesh Diploma Nurses' Association (BDNA), which is leading the indefinite strike, rejected the government Press Note issued Thursday night regarding the strike, terming it 'misleading' and instead urged intensification of the agitation.

The nurses began the strike from Wednesday protesting a government order to transfer the Directorate of Nursing Services to the Health Directorate.

"Although we have been under the authority of the Directorate of Nursing for the last 16 years," general secretary of the BDNA Mofizullah told The

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Duty on capital machinery for units with 100pc exports to go

Star Report

Import duty on capital machinery for export-oriented industries will be exempted if 90 per cent export of the products is guaranteed.

This provision will be incorporated in the Export Policy for 1993-95, to be announced soon.

The Cabinet Committee on Finance recommended that the export-oriented industries located outside the Export Processing Zone (EPZ) should also enjoy the facilities of import duty exemption for capital machinery. Industrial units in the EPZs already enjoy such duty exemption.

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Dhaka reaffirms support to Palestinians

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia yesterday reaffirmed Bangladesh's unwavering support and total commitment to the Palestinians in their just cause and the realisation of their inalienable rights, reports BSS.

In a message on the occasion of the observance of the Day of Islamic Solidarity with the Palestinian People, Begum Zia said this occasion commemorates the criminal attempt at burning down of the Holy Al-Aqsa Mosque which is one of the most sacred places for the Islamic Ummah.

The Prime Minister expressed her deep concern at the escalation of acts of aggression on the holy places in the occupied Palestine as well as deteriorating situation of the city of Al-Quds Al-Sharif.

Over the years, the Prime Minister said an international consensus has emerged based on cardinal precepts of the UN; that the acquisition of territory by force is not permissible under international law, that no country should enjoy the fruits of aggression and that no people can be denied of their inalienable rights.

Babangida asked to hand over power to Speaker

ABUJA, Aug 20: The Nigerian senate passed a resolution overnight demanding that President Ibrahim Babangida hand over power to senate speaker Iyorchia Ayu on August 27, a senator said today, reports AFP.

The vote came only hours after Nigeria's trade unions said Thursday they would launch a national civil disobedience campaign if the country's military leadership did not step down by August 27, the official Nan news agency reported.

Babangida has repeatedly pledged to hand over power on August 27 an offer before the 'national assembly on Tuesday to resign as president and commander in chief of the military, saying an interim government of national unity would be set up shortly.

But the senator told AFP in the federal capital of Abuja that if Babangida really wanted a constitutional government to be set up then he had to hand over his powers to Ayu on August 27.

We are the mainstream, says Dr Kamal

JINJIRA (Keranganj), Aug 20: Democratic Forum leader Dr Kamal Hossain today termed his initiative as the mainstream of politics and called on the people to be united in a single platform to get their hopes and aspiration materialised, reports UNB.

"There is no third force, — we are the mainstream. We want to solve the people's problems upholding the spirit of democracy," he told a big public meeting at the local Eidgah Maidan this afternoon.

Saifuddin Ahmed Manik of the CPB, Pankaj Bhattacharya of the WAP, Sahjahan Straj MP of the JSD, forum leaders Barrister Amirul Islam, Advocate Zahurul Islam and Mostafa Mohsin Montu also addressed the meeting presided over by Jamaluddin Ahmed.

Kamal blasted the political parties for violating commitments they made to the people during the elections and for their indifferent attitude toward the socio-economic problems

of the country. "Those who don't keep their commitment, have no right to appear before the people," he said.

The Democratic Forum leader observed that the country's problems remained unresolved as the existing political parties viewed those from their narrow partisan point of view. "They are suffering of diseased politics,"

Referring to the violence on the campuses, he said Parliament made a committee to find out ways and means to free the educational institutions from terrorism, but the committee failed to hold any meeting after November, 1991.

"You say that we have an accountable government, we have an accountable parliament, but what's the reason for not holding any meeting of the committee for last one and eight months," he questioned.

Listing the problems of the farmers Kamal said the past government had destroyed the

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Warring leaders given 10 days to respond

Compromise package to carve up Bosnia

GENEVA, Aug 20: International mediators proposed a compromise peace settlement for Bosnia on Friday and gave leaders of the warring factions 10 days to respond, reports AP.

No details were immediately available of the package proposed by mediators Lord Owen and Thorvald Stoltenberg, but spokesman John Mills said, "If they don't sign, the war will continue."

Mills said the package was based on a constitutional outline the leaders already approved as well as a proposed map for dividing Bosnia into three ethnic states under a weak central government.

"They will return home to explain the map and will come back to Geneva for a final meeting the 30th of August," Mills said.

Both Croats and Serbs indicated they would accept the map. The stand of the Muslim delegation was uncertain.

"We are not happy with the map, but we are aware that

compromises have to be made," Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic told reporters.

Croatian President Franjo Tudjman also said he would sign the package.

Lord Owen said Friday major concessions were needed for a final agreement to end Bosnia's civil war despite claims by Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic that everything was in place for a final accord.

"I doubt there'll be signatures here. The crucial thing is whether they go away wanting to settle and sign or whether they go away saying they would continue the war. It's very gloomy prospect," Owen said before entering the talks.

Milosevic, after talks Thursday said "I believe we have now all conditions which are needed for a final settlement."

Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic on Thursday spelled out a series of conditions for ending the war, including an immediate end to the Serb siege

of Sarajevo.

His demands appeared to be an attempt by the Muslims to salvage whatever they could before a peace settlement that was certain to be at their expense.

The Muslims control 10 per cent of Bosnia, while the Serbs have 70 per cent. Croats control the rest.

Serb sources close to the talks said Serbs offered Muslims 32 per cent of Bosnia's land Thursday, including a vital corridor in eastern Bosnia, sweetening an earlier offer of 30 per cent.

Muslims still want at least 40 per cent, said the sources speaking on condition of anonymity.

Owen said that the main stumbling block was still the maps of Bosnia's future three ethnic mini-states.

"Each of them wants to keep more territory than is compatible with the others' demands. It's the old, old story, Owen said, adding, however, that "substantial movements on the

maps had been made during the negotiations."

Izetbegovic wants Serbs to return land they seized around Muslim-held eastern enclaves and have them linked by corridors to the rest of the Muslim republic. He also wants Croats to give up parts of central Bosnia.

The maps carving Bosnia are the last major element needed to end the 17-month conflict that broke out after Muslims and Croats voted to secede from Serb-dominated Yugoslavia. The war has left up to 200,000 people dead or missing.

Reuters adds: Bosnian Croat forces barred a UN aid convoy from reaching the Muslim side of ethnically-mixed Mostar today, UN sources said.

Some 35,000 people in the east side of Mostar controlled by the Muslim-led Bosnian government army have been trapped under heavy Croat bombardment without humanitarian aid since June 2.