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NEWS BRIEFS

Khaleda to attend C'wealth summit

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia will attend the forthcoming summit of the Commonwealth scheduled for October 21-25 in Nicosia, Cyprus, a source said yesterday. Begum Zia also attended the last conference of the Commonwealth heads of state and government held in Harare in 1991, reports UNB.

Saifur leaves for Washington

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman left Dhaka for Washington on way to Nassau, capital of Bahamas, to attend a three-day conference of the Commonwealth Finance Ministers commencing on September 21. The Minister is leading a three-member delegation to the Conference. He is also leading a six-member delegation to the Annual Conference of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to be held in Washington from September 28 to 30. Saifur Rahman will also attend the Group-10 and Group-24 Finance Ministers Conference in Washington from September 25-27, reports UNB.

Tk 80 lakh RCC plan for slum areas

RAJSHAHI, Sept 18: The Rajshahi City Corporation has taken up a project at a cost of Tk 80 lakh to improve the condition of 8 slum areas in the city. The UNICEF funded project was designed to construct drains, dustbins, roads and supply of drinking water, reports UNB.



Striking employees of the Sonargaon Hotel chanting slogans in the lobby yesterday.

— Star photo

Sonargaon Hotel staff go on wildcat strike

By Staff Correspondent

Workers and employees of the five-star Sonargaon Hotel in the city staged a wildcat strike and confined the General Manager in his room Saturday demanding target bonus and stoppage of payment of service charge to the staff of the owning company, Hotels International Limited (HIL).

Customer service at the hotel almost came to a halt since 2:30pm Saturday and some fifty odd management executives themselves were attending clients on a limited scale. The abstaining employees of the hotel vowed to continue their programme if their demands were not met by today.

Some 430 members of the Sonargaon Hotel Workers and Employees Union resorted to the programme Saturday following a general meeting of the workers.

The union charged that the executives and employees of the HIL are receiving service charges from the hotel which they are not entitled to. Only the staff of the hotel are entitled to the service charges of 12.5 per cent, union leaders said.

The union demanded an immediate stop to service charge payments to the HIL's employees. It also demanded payment of target bonus which it claimed the management ex-

ecutives of the hotel were awarded unilaterally. But the authorities reportedly rejected this demand.

The long corridors of the Sonargaon Hotel looked deserted where trays with leftover food and drinks were not removed for hours. Except for the security personnel and the skeleton staff, there were no employees working in the room service, food and beverage outlets, housekeeping and in the secretarial service.

The restaurants were almost empty while a few guests were being waited upon by the management executives. The chefs of the hotel were seen asking

the guests about their problems.

The management charged that the union members had taken out food from the kitchens of the hotel and the guests were being kept hungry.

"It's a disaster!" said a Front Office manager serving as a reception clerk.

The Management, however, refused to give any information about whether any guests had checked out because of the work abstention. The 315-room capacity hotel was running at 60 per cent occupancy before the strike.

Meanwhile, instead of the

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Air fare disparity puzzles travellers

By Asiuzzaman

Disparity between the official and 'special' fares puzzles the air travellers and forces them to bargain with the travel agents for cheaper rates, airlines sources said.

None of the airlines strictly follow the official fares approved and published by the International Air Transport Association (IATA), a Biman Bangladesh Airlines executive said, adding that airlines have their own 'confidential' fares.

As many as 30 off-line and on-line airlines have been operating from Bangladesh besides the national carrier Biman.

The official said the airlines are engaged in an unhealthy competition of offering under-cut fares to attract passengers and sometimes they offer 25 per cent to 50 per cent discount, considering the season and traffic pressure.

"You can buy a round-trip Dhaka-Doha ticket at a cost of Tk 14,000 or less but your ticket will show the figure Tk 22,527," the official at Biman's sales promotion department said on condition of anonymity.

More than 80 per cent of air

tickets are handled by some 300 authorised travel agents who have been conveyed the 'confidential' fares of the airlines concerned.

The airlines have good contracts with the travel agencies through which they monitor the fares offered by one's competitors.

In reply to a question as to why an airline offers such big discounts, the official cited a simple example: "It is like an office bus plying between Motijheel and Uttara. When the bus returns from Uttara after dropping the employees it takes on some passengers almost without any rate of fares."

Airlines usually offer heavy under-cut fares on return trips if there is no rush of passengers, the official said, adding that not only in Bangladesh but all over the world airlines have been facing similar competition.

Executives of the foreign airlines operating from Dhaka, when contacted, declined to comment on the 'fare war' terming it a 'trade secret'.

The IATA determines the

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32000 landless families rehabilitated, PM told

Nearly 32,000 landless families have been rehabilitated in some 800 ideal villages under the 'Adarsha Gram Project' of the Land Ministry, reports UNB.

Briefing Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia at her office yesterday, State Minister for Land Kabir Hossain said Tk 58.96 crore was approved by the National Economic Council in November, 1991 for the project aimed at providing shelter and security to some 40,000 landless families on 'khas' land.

The state minister also informed the Prime Minister that the government has planned to establish another 150 'adarsha gram' (ideal villages) to accommodate some 6,000 homeless families.

Under the project, each family has been provided with a two-roomed house, a kitchen and a latrine on 0.08 acre. Each family has also been given 1.50

acres of cultivable land in the joint name of husband and wife.

More than 50 NGOs are working on community development in some 400 'adarsha gram' helping to form effective village groups and to promote education, health and family planning.

After the briefing by the state minister, the Prime Minister termed the 'Swanirbar Adarsha Gram Project' an effective programme to supplement government efforts in eradicating poverty and to checking migration of rural people to the cities.

The Prime Minister pointed out that the members of Parliament can also make significant contribution for successful implementation of the project.

She referred to the success of similar programmes in Shri

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World Bank's 1993 annual report due today

Developing countries' growth boosts world economy

By Special Correspondent

The World Bank Annual Report for 1993, to be released world-wide today, says that signs of global economic recovery are now visible owing to strong growth in East Asia and the Middle East regions.

Overall growth of the world economy was 1.3 per cent in 1992 compared to the feeble growth of 0.5 per cent in 1991. In East Asia growth was 9 per cent, reflecting mainly China's leap in output of 12 per cent.

In South Asia — comprising Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka — growth was nearly 5 per cent in 1992. Commending Bangladesh and Pakistan's financial policies and ongoing reforms, the Bank report says that these steps have produced higher growth.

During 1992 foreign direct investment became an even more important source of external finance for developing countries reaching a world total of 38.3 billion dollars compared to 34 billion dollars in 1991 and 24 billion dollars in 1990. Generally the middle income developing countries managed

to attract private equity financing.

Low income countries like Bangladesh remained unable to attract international investors. For them the outlook for external financing became gloomier with a decline in the inflation adjusted volume of aid. Aid has also become less concessional with a decline in the amount of grant provided by the rich industrialised countries.

In 1992 the index of non-oil commodity prices was at half of the 1990 level — the lowest point in the post-war period.

In the area of trade China recorded the strongest expansion in both exports and imports followed by Malaysia. France replaced Japan as the third leading importer after USA and Germany.

In 1992-93 the net disbursement of aid by the World Bank and IDA totalled 7.1 billion dollars — up from 6.2 billion dollars in 1991-92. In 1992-93 the World Bank paid about 10 billion dollars to foreign suppliers supplying equipment and services to borrowing countries. The highest

amount paid was to US suppliers — 1.4 billion dollars. Bangladesh suppliers supplied only 4 million dollars worth of goods in this period. The total value of contracts won by Bangladeshi suppliers since 1971 is 46 million dollars compared to 831 million for India.

The World Bank has become more sensitive to environmental issues in the 1990s. Countries borrowing from the World Bank's soft lending window — the International Development Association (IDA) — are required to submit national environmental action plans to be eligible for IDA lending. Projects supported by the World Bank are required to be cleared by the newly set-up Environmentally Sustainable Development vice-presidency in the Bank.

An internal scrutiny of the Bank's performance was conducted in 1992-93. The scrutiny revealed that the quality of Bank projects had declined over the last decade. The task force set up to make this scrutiny concluded that the World Bank should give greater attention to implementation.

WB assures help in oil, gas exploration

The World Bank has assured its continued help and cooperation in oil and gas exploration in Bangladesh which recently opened up the sector for private investment, reports UNB.

The assurance came at a meeting between Energy and Mineral Resources Minister Dr Khondaker Mosharraf Hossain and World Bank Vice-President Joseph Wood at the Bank's headquarters in Washington on Friday, according to a message received in Dhaka yesterday.

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Arab League expected to back accord

CAIRO, Sept 18: Arab League Foreign Ministers meet here on Sunday to give their expected backing to the PLO-Israel autonomy pact, despite opposition or reservations from some members, reports AFP.

Three countries have openly condemned the accord on Palestinian self-rule signed in Washington on Monday. Libya, calling it a "face," Iraq, describing it as a "sellout" and

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Ceasefire extended till Nov 30

Talks with Shantibahini end inconclusively

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Sept 18: The Shantibahini leaders expressed unhappiness over the government's reply to their five-point demands, placed in the form of a framework for solution to the CHT issue in today's inconclusive peace talks held at the Khagrachhari Circuit House.

But they agreed to continue further dialogue with the government for a peaceful solution to the CHT problem and extend the current 13-month old ceasefire, due to expire Oct 31, until November 30.

The leader of the five-member Shantibahini team which attended today's talks, J B Larma alias Shanto Larma also expressed such reaction to the pressmen at the end of the talks, saying: "We are not satisfied with the government's response to our demands, yet we would like to continue further talks for finding out a peaceful solution."

However, the fifth round of peace talks today between the nine-member parliamentary committee headed by Communication Minister Col (Retd) Oli Ahmed and the leaders of tribal rebels' umbrella organisation —

the Parbatyia Chattagram Janasanghati Samity (PCJSS) — witnessed a detailed discussion on the government's reply to the five-point demands of the Shantibahini, officials added. The talks continued from 10:25 am to 4:35 pm with a lunch break for an hour and a half.

Both parties agreed to hold the next round of negotiations in the first week of November, officials informed newsmen.

The talks over, the Shantibahini team was flown back by helicopter to Dudukchhari, a frontier village under Panchhari thana of Khagrachhari.

The other members of the Shantibahini team were Sudhasindhu Kisa, Raktautpal Tripura, Rupayan Dewan and Gautam Chakma while the nine-member parliamentary committee included Syed Wahidul Alam, Barkat Ullah Bhulu, Rashed Khan Menon, Md Shahjahan, Mostaque Ahmed, Kalpanjan Chakma and Shahjahan Chowdhury.

Meanwhile, a 22-member team of Indian officials and leaders of Chakma refugees living in camps in the Indian state

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Over 100 bighas of prize land in city illegally occupied

Star Report

Over 100 bighas (33 acres) of prize government land at the Tejgaon industrial area earmarked as industrial plots are under illegal occupation.

According to an authoritative source in the Ministry of Works, the plots, occupied illegally for long, have already been identified following a recent survey of the land.

"We will soon go for action to recover those land by evicting the unauthorised occupants," said the source, mentioning that grabbing of those industrial plots in Tejgaon began in the Sixties and continued until even a few years ago.

The grabbers used fabricated maps and forged documents to occupy the plots in connivance with a section of corrupt government employees, said the source, adding that buildings and even some industrial plants were constructed on those land.

The process of identification and survey of those plots was initiated about a year ago and the authorities now have a clear picture about the situation.

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AL observes Demonstration Day

By Staff Correspondent

The Awami League observed 'Demonstration Day' yesterday throughout the country to press home its four-point demands, including repeal of the Indemnity Ordinance and the Anti-Terrorism Act.

The party's Dhaka city unit organised a rally at the Bangabandhu Avenue yesterday afternoon in observance of the day.

The rally, presided over by the unit president Mohammad Hanif, was addressed, among others, by party general secretary Zillur Rahman, President members Tofael Ahmed, Abdur Razzak and Matia Chowdhury. Chief Whip of the Opposition in Parliament Mohammad Nasim, Amir Hossain Amu, Mozaffar Hossain Chowdhury Maya and Akhtiarul Alam.

Zillur Rahman threatened to

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Contempt of court notices against Sharif, Benazir

ISLAMABAD, Sept 18: A judge filed contempt of court notices against former Pakistani prime ministers Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif today and urged their disqualification from next month's general elections, reports Reuters.

Lahore High Court judge Abdul Majeed Tawana ordered lawyers for Bhutto, head of the Pakistan People's Party, and Sharif, leader of the Muslim League, to appear in court on

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RMC closed sine die

RAJSHAHI, Sept 18:

Rajshahi Medical College was closed today sine die, and all ongoing MBBS examinations have been postponed following a series of clashes between rival student groups on the campus on Friday, reports BSS.

The decision to close the college was taken at an emergency academic council meeting of the college held on Friday night with Principal Prof Mizanur Rahman in the chair. Students of four hostels of the college have already vacated

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Professionals observe token strike

Engineers, agriculturists, physicians and BCS Coordination Committee yesterday observed a two-hour strike throughout the country demanding implementation of their 17-point demand, including an accountable administration, reports UNB.

All emergency and security activities were, however, exempted from the strike which began at 11 am.

During the strike, Prokrikti-BCS central coordination committee organised a series of rallies in the city.

India wants PLO-Israel type talks to end Kashmir crisis

NEW DELHI, Sept 18: India is willing to hold talks with arch foe Pakistan, like those between the PLO and Israel, to resolve a dispute over Kashmir, Indian External Affairs Minister Dinesh Singh was quoted as saying today, reports Reuters.

An Indian official quoted Singh as saying that a meeting with Pakistan similar to secret talks in Norway that produced a ground-breaking Middle East deal was a good idea.

"But it takes two hands to clap," the official, who was recounting an interview that Singh had with an Asian news

agency, quoted the minister as saying.

Some 13,000 people have been killed in India's northern Jammu and Kashmir state since discontent against Indian rule burst into open rebellion three years ago.

India and Pakistan have fought two of their three wars against each other over Kashmir, the only Muslim majority region in mainly Hindu India, since independence from Britain in 1947.

It remains a bitter bone of contention, with Islamabad denying Indian charges that it

arms and trains separatists.

Singh was earlier quoted by the Dubai-based Khaleej Times as saying a proposal to hold quiet talks with Islamabad may not go down well with Indian opposition parties.

"Will our system permit them? Will the opposition permit it?" Singh asked.

India's main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) said such talks could confuse Indian troops in Kashmir.

"I am left dismayed by the suggestion that there should be secret parleys... this is not the government's position," BJP

member of parliament Jaswant Singh told Reuters.

Pakistani diplomats declined to comment on the Foreign Minister's remarks but said there would be a chance for him to meet Pakistani Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar in New York next week, when the two men attend the UN General Assembly.

"We are not aware of any steps for them to meet. But these things are arranged at the spur of the moment," a senior Pakistani diplomat said.

Indian diplomats are worried about a Pakistani move to press a resolution at the United

Nations on alleged human rights abuses by Indian security forces in Kashmir. India dismisses the charge as propaganda and says proven abuses are punished.

Indian diplomats said Indian Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao, starting a three-day visit to Iran on Monday, might seek Tehran's support to play down the Kashmiri ceasefire move.

"Iran has been critical of India on Kashmir but it also understands our difficulties," a former ambassador to Pakistan said.

Indian diplomats say Rao, who visited China last week, ex-

tracted assurances from Beijing that it would oppose the proposed censure on the grounds that the conflict should be resolved between India and Pakistan.

India is also worried over a recent shift in Washington's position on Kashmir, after US officials for the first time described the region as disputed territory.

India has welcomed the accord between Israel and the PLO as courageous. Pakistan, which does not have diplomatic ties with Israel, has endorsed the move with more caution.