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NEWS BRIEFS

Speaker returns
Speaker Shaikh Razzak Ali returned home last night after attending the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) conference on the North-South dialogue and global prosperity in Ottawa. The Speaker left Dhaka on October 5 to Iran for a goodwill visit leading an eight-member Bangladesh Parliamentary delegation. Later, he went to Ottawa to attend the IPU conference, reports UNB.

GF standing body meets today
A meeting of the Standing Committee of the Gano Forum will be held today at 5 pm at the Forum's 89, Segun Bagicha office. All members of the committee have been requested to attend the meeting, reports UNB.

661 Rohingyas go home
COX'S BAZAR, Oct 25: Another batch of six hundred sixty one Rohingya refugees voluntarily went back to their homes in Myanmar through three transit camps at Teknaf here today. Official sources told BSS tonight that with this 95th batch of repatriation, the total number of repatriated persons now stood at 43,454.

BB Bill auction
Twenty three bids for a total amount of Tk 146 crore were received at the 35th auction of the 91-day Bangladesh Bank Bill held yesterday. Eight bids were accepted. Face value of the bids accepted was Tk 45 crore.

Inspection by SC judges

Gross irregularities in district courts

S Y Bakht

The Supreme Court is expected to take action regarding the gross irregularities detected in a number of district courts during recent inspections by judges of the country's apex court.

According to informed sources, the inspection and inquiry conducted in the civil and criminal courts of six districts revealed serious anomalies including procedural lapses, poor maintenance of judicial records and non-compliance with the civil rules and order (CRO).

The Supreme Court judges, including the Chief Justice, carried out the inspections from September 12 during the ongoing annual vacation of the court.

Chief Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed personally inspected the courts in both Sylhet and Tangail districts while other judges visited the courts in Narail, Moulvibazar and Habiganj. Justice Mahmudul Amin Chowdhury also led an investigation into alleged irregularities at the Satkhira district court.

The Supreme Court judges have inspected the civil and criminal courts of 30 districts since April 1992.

According to the sources, the Supreme Court judges, during the inspections, found that some of the magistrates and judges in the district courts failed to arrive on time to carry out their judicial functions.

In some instances magistrates and judges arrived in the courts at 11 am, 12 pm or even as late as 3 pm instead of the official time of 10:30 am.

Some of the court officials were also found to be delaying the announcement of judgments even more than a year after.

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Two small boys watch as a relative kisses for the last time the body of his dead son, during his funeral yesterday in Sarajevo. The man's son was killed while serving in the Bosnian Army. —AFP photo

Small members ask C'wealth for action plan on their issues

LIMASSOL, Oct 25: Commonwealth leaders have asked the Secretariat to draw up a plan of action to help deal with problems facing small member states. Cyprus Foreign Minister Alocos Michaelides said today, reports Reuter.

An 18-member group of small states met bigger countries, including Britain, on Sunday and a report was presented to the Secretariat today, he said.

The problems listed include economic development, security and the environment.

Small states have the disadvantage of tiny markets in the face of large trade blocks, Michaelides said.

On security, he said the meeting had highlighted the vulnerability of small states to expansionist neighbours, adding that Cyprus had been cited as one example.

Michaelides, said it had been suggested that the UN Security Council should become guarantors of the security of small states.

The Cypriot officials said the meeting had also discussed how small states were used for illegal activities, such as drug trafficking.

They proposed that all states ratify international conventions on the environment and appealed for financial help from larger states to enable them to implement these resolutions.

AP adds: Commonwealth leaders, delving into ethnic disputes that divide Cyprus, on Monday demanded the speedy withdrawal of Turkish troops and mainland settlers from the island.

The demand was issued in a draft communique as leaders met here for a five-day summit.

In the past, the Commonwealth has refrained from becoming so involved in the ethnic and political conflict. Past summit communiqués contained only a brief paragraph on Cyprus.

According to a draft communique obtained by Reuters, 36 heads of government and 11 top ministers, representing a quarter of humanity, called on all parties to play a constructive role in negotiations for a democratic and non-racial South Africa and stick to agreements reached so far. White and black conservative groups have been boycotting the talks.

The Commonwealth said Sunday it will send up to 70 representatives to monitor South Africa's first multiracial elections in April, marking the largest such operation in its history.

They will also help in preparations for the ballot and in 'policing duties' to try to stem political violence, Commonwealth Secretary General Chief Emeke Anyaoku of Nigeria announced.

The Commonwealth leaders decided on what Anyaoku called 'a significant role' in the April 27 elections.

The draft did not elaborate on a statement on Friday calling for an urgent conclusion to world free trade talks.

A five-nation Commonwealth team — Barbados, Canada, Ghana, Malaysia and Mauritius — will visit world capitals late in November to press for a successful end to the Uruguay Round of GATT talks by December 15, the deadline set by the US Congress.

The summit concludes today.

Water tariff up by 10 pc from Nov

The cabinet yesterday approved a proposal enhancing water tariff to 10 per cent from November 'in the interest of overall improvement of water supply system in the capital,' reports UNB.

The approval was given in the regular weekly cabinet meeting held in Bangabhaban in the morning with Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia in the chair.

The meeting rejected the proposal for increasing the rate of water charge in phases from 1994 to the year 2000 after reviewing elaborately the proposal for reorganising institutional and financial framework of Dhaka WASA.

The cabinet also approved in principle, implementation of reform programmes in the industrial sector. A proposal for excluding services of the employees of the sector corporations from the Services (Re-organisation and Conditions) 1975 was, however, not approved.

AL announces programmes for November

By Staff Correspondent

The Awami League will observe November 3 as a 'protest day' and stage a sit-in in front of the Secretariat on November 10.

This was announced at a rally organised by the city Awami League at the Bangabandhu Avenue yesterday to protest terrorism in different campuses, including the Chittagong and Rajshahi Universities, and the killing of AL activist Anisur Rahman in Lalmonirhat recently.

The AL leaders warned the BNP government of continuous agitation in the coming months. It also announced its support to the half-day country-wide hartal on October 30 called by the Jatiya Samannay Committee of the Nirmla bodies.

The rally, presided over by city AL president Mohammad Hanif, was addressed, among others, by AL general secretary Zillur Rahman, presidium member Amir Hossain Amu, Abdur Razzak MP, Mozaffar Hossain Paltu, city vice president Fazlur Rahman, Mofazzal

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Abiola supporters hijack Nigerian airbus

NIAMEY, Oct 25: Four armed Nigerians demanding the installation of 'elected authorities' hijacked a domestic flight to Niamey today, but freed more than 100 of the 150 people aboard the plane, a Niger aviation official said, reports AFP.

Niger's Transport Minister Souleye Abdouleye earlier said the hijackers had promised to free children, women and non-Nigerians aboard the Nigeria Airways Airbus A130 provided it was refuelled and allowed to fly on to Frankfurt in Germany.

Abdouleye said the Chinese Deputy President was among the passengers, but would not give his name.

There are now fewer than 50 people on the aircraft," he said.

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Superboy indeed!

NEW YORK, Oct 25: A five-year-old boy whose mother said he thought he could fly survived a six-story fall with only bruises, newspapers reported today.

Paul Rosen, whose mother Christine called him 'a strong, brave child who thought he could fly,' fell 70 feet onto concrete but suffered no serious injuries, the New York Post and the Daily News said, quoting doctors, reports Reuter.

His mother did not elaborate. "It was like the angels caught him," the news quoted one paramedic as saying. It said the child "apparently landed on his rear end."

The Post quoted a hospital source as saying the boy was playing at Superman and had jumped.

But the news quoted a policeman as saying the boy had apparently just reached for a dangling toy and fallen from a Manhattan apartment window, which did not have city-mandated guard rails to prevent such accidents.

Diarrhoea claims 300 in one month

By Staff Correspondent

The newly detected cholera-type bacteria which caused an outbreak of severe diarrhoea a couple of months ago, has affected seven more districts, doubling the death toll during the last one month.

According to the Health Directorate, diarrhoea had already claimed 664 lives in 21 districts until yesterday morning since the beginning of the June when they started monitoring the situation. Some 300 people had died of the disease in 17 districts until September 14, the source added.

A Health Directorate source said that the bacteria had been rapidly spreading in the country's northern districts. Pabna, Kurigram as well as Manikganj might be affected during the next two weeks, it added.

Now the most affected districts are: Bogra, Gaibandha, Comilla, Brahmanbaria, Sirajganj, Kishoreganj and Habiganj.

During the last four months, nearly 1.5 lakh people have been affected by this cholera-type bacteria in the reported districts, according to the Health Directorate monitoring report available yesterday. Of the affected, 2263 people were enlisted in the last 24-hour.

The bacteria, identified as Vibrio Cholerae Non-O 139, has been detected in the country early this year.

An earlier report of The Daily Star said it is as deadly as the known cholera germ and totally new in the country. The patients attacked by this bacteria suffer from severe dehydration due to acute watery discharge and vomiting and need immediate treatment.

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ALCWC sits today to decide strategies

By Nurul Kabir

A two-day meeting of the Central Working Committee (CWC) of the Awami League (AL) begins this afternoon to moot strategies for addressing some socio-political issues which the party feels are of national importance.

The issues include the AL's actual position on the demand for banning religion-based politics, ways of compelling the government to repeal the Anti-Terrorism Act, the fate of the parliamentary body investigating into the allegations of the corruption in the Agriculture Ministry, and the party's organisational activities across the country.

A draft outline of the local government set-up, as an alternative to the ones pursued by the ruling BNP and the Jatiya Party, is also scheduled to be submitted before the meeting. The last CWC meeting had as-

signed a group of experts to prepare the draft.

During the general debate on campus terrorism in the last session of Parliament, all the Opposition parties and a few MPs of the ruling BNP accused the Jamaat-e-Islami, Bangladesh for unleashing violence on the campuses and demanded a ban on the party. AL Chief Whip Mohammad Nasim announced in the House that his party would move a bill seeking a ban on religion-based politics in case the BNP failed to move such a legislation.

However, the Awami League central body is yet to take an official decision on how to proceed with the issue.

Replying to a question, an influential leader of the party told this correspondent yesterday that there were a lot of 'technical' problems in pursuing

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PM to open conversion plant at ERL tomorrow

From Nurul Alam

CHITTAGONG, Oct 25: The Secondary Conversion Plant set up at the country's lone crude petroleum refinery here, at a cost of Tk 410 crore, is ready for commissioning on October 27, official source said.

The plant, installed at the Eastern Refinery Ltd with a foreign exchange component of over Tk 150 crore under an IDA credit, is aimed at converting furnace oil produced by the refinery into diesel.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia is expected to inaugurate the plant Wednesday.

The plant has an annual capacity to turn 5 lakh tons of furnace oil into 1,40,000 tons of diesel, 12,000 tons of naphtha and 4,000 tons of LPG.

The country's annual diesel requirement stands at nine and a half lakh tons, of which about 3 lakh tons are met by the Eastern Refinery while the rest is imported, according to official source.

With the commissioning of this newly-built conversion plant the country could save around Taka 72 crore annually against diesel import, officials

Israel begins freeing prisoners

JERUSALEM, Oct 25: Israel today began freeing almost 700 prisoners under an agreement with the PLO, but halted the release of Muslim fundamentalists after the killing of two soldiers, reports AFP.

The first 70 of the 600 to be freed were released from Megiddo Prison in central Israel, an army spokesman said.

Military radio said the others would be freed later in the day, but the release of 23 Hamas and Islamic Jihad members had been cancelled after the killing of the soldiers on Sunday.

Those allowed out were women, the sick, and those under 18 or older than 50, in accordance with an agreement reached between Israel and the PLO in the Egyptian Red Sea resort of Taba on Thursday.

The International Committee of the Red Cross estimates 12,000 Palestinians are in Israeli jails, but Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin says only 9,500 are held.



Sher-e-Bangla's 120th birthday today

The 120th anniversary of birth of Sher-e-Bangla A K Fazlul Huq will be observed across the country today in a befitting manner, reports UNB.

To observe the day, various

socio-cultural organisations have organised elaborate programmes, including Quran Khwani, milad mahfil, discussion and placing of wreaths at the mazar of the late leader.

The Sher-e-Bangla Jatiya

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Two-hour strike by doctors tomorrow

By Staff Correspondent

The Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA) yesterday announced a fresh three-day agitation programme, including a two-hour strike by the doctors across the country from 11 am to 1 pm tomorrow.

The programme which begin today with wearing of black-badges by the doctors, were announced at a news conference as part of the BMA's protest against the killing of Dr Mizan in Chittagong on Oct 18 and other terrorist activities in different parts of the country.

The BMA also observed a day-long strike on October 20 to protest Dr Mizan's murder.

The new programmes of the BMA, the apex body of the country's physicians, also include a dawn-to-dusk hunger-strike by the doctors under the banyan tree at the PG Hospital premises tomorrow, and submitting a memorandum to the Prime Minister demanding removal of the Home Minister on charges of

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Kashmir insurgency

BJP blames US, Muslim states

NEW DELHI, Oct 25: India's rightwing Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) accused the United States and a group of Muslim nations today of encouraging a raging separatist insurgency in the northern Jammu and Kashmir state, reports Reuter.

The BJP, which advocates a military crackdown on Muslim militants fighting Indian rule in

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'Diversion of Ganges water calls for global attention'

By Staff Correspondent

Community Development" in the capital. The minister attended the function as chief guest.

Organised by the UBINIG, a policy research NGO for development alternatives, the opening function was also addressed by Managing Director of the UBINIG Farhad Mazhar, president of the Jatiya Krishak Samity Abdul Matin, UBINIG Executive Director Farida Akher, Helmut Hess of the Bread for the World, Germany and Camfort N Mensah, a participant from Ghana.

The Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh (ADAB) chairperson Khushi Kabir presided.

Thirty-five participants from India, Pakistan, Nepal, Thailand, Ghana, Tanzania, Germany and hosts Bangladesh are taking part in the workshop to share experiences for evolving a formula for sustainable agriculture.

Minister for Environment and Forests Akbar Hussain Bir Pratik yesterday said unilateral withdrawal of Ganges waters at Farakka has caused immense environmental and ecological damage to Bangladesh.

Without naming India, the minister said forestry, fisheries, the surface water level and quality of soil have been badly damaged and life of the people have been adversely affected because of diversion of waters by "the upper riparian for agricultural development of that country."

India has been diverting the Ganges waters through the Farakka Barrage on the Ganges in the State of West Bengal.

"An example like this (the damage wrought by the diversion of Ganges waters) calls for regional and global attention," Akbar Hussain told the inaugural ceremony of a 12-day international workshop on "Sustainable Agriculture and

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