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NEWS BRIEFS

Special on S M Ali, Shamsur Rahman planned

By Staff Correspondent The English Department Alumni Society of the Dhaka University plans to bring out a special supplement named 'Hridaye Ali, Hridaye Rahman' (All in our hearts, Rahman in our hearts) containing write-ups on the late founder-editor of The Daily Star S M Ali and poet Shamsur Rahman, said a press release.

Transport strike observed in Ctg

From Staff Correspondent CHITTAGONG, Oct 28: A dawn to dusk transport strike was observed here today in support of 16-point demand of the Transport Workers' Federation. All kinds of motor vehicles today were off the roads and highways here causing a dislocation in transportation of goods and commuters.

City Zia Manch reconstituted

The Dhaka metropolitan committee of the Zia Jubo Manch has been reconstituted at a meeting held here Wednesday with Rafiqul Islam Rafiq, convener of the central committee, in the chair, reports BSS.

World Bank mission says Growth slow despite notable economic stabilisation

By a Special Correspondent

A recent mission from the World Bank (WB) has said that Bangladesh has achieved noteworthy progress in stabilizing the economy over the last three years. As a result the annual rate of inflation is now only 1.3 per cent. The current inflation rate is the lowest recorded rate in the country's history. This sharp decline has occurred as a result of decline in rice prices. The decline in rice prices can be a boon for farm households. Seventy per cent of the farm households are net purchasers of food, according to the mission. Success in stabilisation has also led to a strong balance of payments and a manageable fiscal deficit. The most recent estimate is that exports have increased by 20 per cent over the last fiscal year along with a

rebound in imports. Exports are now equal to 60 per cent of imports in value terms—compared to only 40 per cent five years ago. Bangladesh's foreign exchange reserve exceeded 2.2 billion dollars at the start of the current fiscal year. The deficit in the fiscal account, that is, excess of expenditure over receipt, stood at 5.3 per cent of the economy's gross output compared to 7.7 per cent recorded in 1989-90. "However, the success in stabilisation is not matched by a success in generating higher economic growths. The World Bank mission has determined that even if the agriculture sector grows at the rate of 3 per cent per annum, Bangladesh will need a growth rate of 10 per cent per annum for overall GDP growth to be at the acceptable 6-7 per cent range.

In the last two years the GDP growth has averaged only around 4 per cent — largely because the manufacturing sector growth has been small. The WB mission has also flagged attention to low level of investment in Bangladesh. Between 1990-91 and 1992-93 investment as a ratio of the GDP has increased from 11.5 per cent to 12.7 per cent. In the last year, two thirds of the increase in investment came from the private sector. This recent increase notwithstanding, the level of investment in Bangladesh is still very inadequate. The WB mission has identified lack of success of the government in implementing its Annual Development Programme as a major cause of depressed investment and growth. In 1992-93 46 per cent of total investment was

from the public sector. During 1990-91 and 1992-93 the government's investment performance was short of target by an average of around 20 per cent. The WB mission has faulted the weaknesses of the concerned ministries for the failure to achieve investment targets. The mission has commended the performance in mobilisation of domestic resources. This has helped to make up for a fall in aid flow in proportion to the GDP. The mission has suggested that part of the growing government savings could be used to assist selected industries in structural transformation. The mission has also suggested that in future, substantive focus should be on stimulating investment in private manufacturing.

BNP rejects demand for polls under care-taker government

By Staff Correspondent

The ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has rejected the opposition demand for the next general elections under a care-taker government, party sources said. The party policy-makers, during an emergency meeting of the standing committee yesterday, termed the opposition's demand as 'unreasonable and implausible.' The meeting of the powerful 15-member body at Sugandha last night was presided over by party chairperson Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia. It continued for more than three hours beginning at 8pm. A two-day meeting of the central working committee of the major opposition Awami League which concluded Wednesday decided that the party would demand the next general elections, due in 1996, be held under a care-taker government. The Jatiya Party and the Jamaat-e-Islami, Bangladesh, over the past few months, have

already voiced a similar demand at different public meetings and also in Parliament. The BNP leaders opined that none of the by-elections under the present government was disputed by any independent body. BNP Secretary General Abdus Salam Talukdar, Law Minister Mirza Golam Hafiz, Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman, Irrigation Minister M Majid-ul-Huq, Deputy Leader in Parliament Prof Badruddoza Chowdhury, ruling party Chief Whip Khandaker Delwar Hossain and Foreign Minister A S M Mostafizur Rahman were present at the meeting. Three of the 15 posts in the standing committee have remained vacant for a long time. The BNP high command also decided to send an official order to the district-level leaders asking them to resolve their factional disputes and announce fresh committees. In nearly half-a-dozen districts, the party has already held meetings. See Page 12 Col 3

US Assistant Secy of State due Nov 2

Robin Lynn Raphael, US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs, will arrive in Dhaka on November 2 for a five-day visit to Bangladesh, reports UNB. During her stay, she is expected to meet with Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia and other high government officials to discuss matters of mutual interest. USIS press release yesterday said. Raphael, a career foreign service officer of the US Department of State, had earlier met with Begum Zia during her visit to New York to address the UN General Assembly. President Clinton nominated Raphael last May to head the newly-created Bureau for South Asian Affairs at the State Department. She was confirmed to the post by the US Senate on July 30 and sworn in August 10. Raphael had testified during her confirmation hearing that US policy goals for the South Asian region include nuclear non-proliferation, continued economic liberalisation and See Page 12 Col 6

PM urges South Asian experts Take regional initiative in medical science

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia yesterday underlined the importance of strengthening regional cooperation in the framework of SAARC to accelerate the pace of progress and prosperity in the region, reports UNB. "Our prime responsibility is to make SAARC a more effective and active forum for the welfare of the people of the region... we can hasten our progress by strengthening the regional cooperation," she told a conference here. Inaugurating the first congress of South Asian Confederation of Anaesthesiologists (SACA) at Hotel Sonar-

gaon in the morning, the Prime Minister called upon the physicians and surgeons to undertake regional initiatives in various branches of medical science. "Our health scenario is different compared to other regions. We believe that regional cooperation in medicine will be very fruitful," she said assuring all cooperation of her government in this regard. About 400 anaesthesiologists including about 100 experts from 18 countries are participating in the conference. The countries represented at the conference are: Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, Nepal, Bhutan, and Timor-Leste. See Page 12 Col 8



Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia addressing the inaugural session of the first congress of the South Asian Confederation of Anaesthesiologists at a local hotel yesterday. Health and Family Welfare Minister Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yousuf is seen on extreme right. —PID photo

Kashmir tense: Another mass march on Hazratbal today

SRINAGAR, Oct 28: Muslim leaders called Thursday for another mass march after Friday prayers to a shrine occupied by rebels, as the standoff between the guerrillas and the army ends its second week, report AP, AFP. Last Friday, paramilitary police fired on demonstrators and killed about 50 people who defied curfew orders to show support for the rebels in the Hazratbal Mosque. The siege of the shrine, said to house a hair from the beard of the prophet Mohammed, is one of the worst confrontations between troops and guerrillas who want Jammu-Kashmir to either join Pakistan or become independent. Army and paramilitary reinforcements fanned out in Srinagar and other parts of the Kashmir valley following a call by the militant All-Party Freedom Conference, a coalition of 32 pro-separatist groups. Some 20 companies, nearly 2,000 men, of the central reserve police force took up positions after being airlifted to Srinagar, police sources said. Official sources said "hectic" talks were underway with members of the clergy to persuade them to cancel the march. Security was also tightened

in areas surrounding the lakeside mosque. "We are ready to meet any eventuality," Kashmir police chief Manohar Nath Sabharwal said, as an uneasy calm prevailed in the valley on the eve of the Juma prayers with no end in sight to the mosque impasse. "The law and order machinery has been put in top gear and all steps taken to prevent any outbreak of trouble tomorrow," said Sabharwal, who took over as police chief on the day the siege began. He said security forces had been instructed to "restrain themselves and use minimum force to avoid a recurrence of last Friday's bloodshed." The Freedom Conference, an umbrella group of political parties and militant groups, set a 3:00 pm (0930 GMT) Friday deadline for the army to lift the siege. Moulvi Abbas Ansari, a leader of the organisation, appealed to Muslims to head for Hazratbal if the government fails to heed the ultimatum. He also urged Kashmiris to prepare for a 'jihad' (holy war) to end Indian rule. Kashmir's chief Imam Mirwaid Omar Farooq said Muslims would "lock their houses and march on the shrine." On Thursday, the govern-

ment briefly lifted curfew in Srinagar after 13 days and people thronged shops to buy food, and cars and buses appeared once again on the streets. The curfew was clamped on about half of Srinagar's 900,000 people hours after the siege began on Oct 15. Meanwhile, negotiations between guerrilla leaders inside the shrine and officials remained deadlocked. The militants have demanded mediation by the International Committee of the Red Cross or by Amnesty International. But the army has refused to allow independent observers inside. On Wednesday, a team of Red Cross officials went to the shrine, but it was not known if they went inside. A group of doctors was led to the steps of the mosque on Thursday, but reporters were kept away. Kasturi Saathe, who walked out of the mosque Wednesday, was quoted by army officers as saying that about 60 militants were inside. Saathe told the police that militants carrying rifles were guarding the mosque around the clock. He said some of the militants were either from Pakistan or Afghanistan, according to Kanwar.

Moves on for govt-Prokrichi dialogue, says minister

By Nurul Kabir The government has already taken some unofficial steps to start formal negotiations with the non-administrative civil servants and the professionals including engineers, agriculturists and doctors (Prokrichi) who have been agitating for administrative reforms since April last. Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia Tuesday assigned Local Government and Rural Development (LGRD) Minister Barrister Abdus Salam Talukdar and State Minister for Establishment Barrister Aminul Haque to open the negotiations, if possible the very next day. One of the two ministers told The Daily Star late last night: "We have already established contacts with the coordination council and have expressed our willingness to talk to them." However, the specific schedule on agenda for the discussions were yet to be chalked out, the minister added, preferring anonymity. Meanwhile, leaders of the coordination council, while talking to this correspondent last night said they had so far no inkling of any government moves for an official dialogue. A meeting of the coordination council was held in Dhaka on Wednesday. See Page 12 Col 2

10 ministers to attend Monday's WHO confce

By Staff Correspondent Ten health ministers of the South-east Asian region will start a three-day deliberation in Dhaka from Monday to forge better cooperation to combat common fatal diseases in the region, local WHO officials said yesterday. Health ministers from North Korea, India, Indonesia, the Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Bangladesh will attend the conference. Dr A N A Abyeundersere told a press conference at his office in the afternoon. Bhutan, which is also in the WHO South-east Asia region, will be represented by a senior official as the country currently has no health minister, he said. Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia will inaugurate the three-day conference at the International Conference Centre at 10 am Monday. Who Director General Dr Hiroshi Nakajima, South-east Asia Regional Director Dr U Ko Ko and Regional Director nominated Dr. Utom Muehtar Rafel will also attend the meeting, the WHO official said. This is the 11th such meeting of the health ministers. The first was held in Indonesia in

1981 while Bangladesh hosted the second in 1982. The local WHO representative said that the 11 countries of the region had been facing similar types of menacing diseases. The minister would discuss strategies and the means to co-ordinate efforts to check these diseases. "Concerted programmes are already going on in these countries on the basis of the decisions of 10 similar meetings held earlier," Abyeundersere, a Sri Lankan said. Citing an example, he said that a new cholera germ (vibrio cholerae Non-O 139) was recently detected in Bangladesh which was borne from the Indian State of Madras. "To eradicate this germ steps should be taken in both India and Bangladesh," he added. He said that HIV-infection is now a threat in India which may also threaten different Bangladesh regions. The ministers will finalise the future actions on AIDS, malaria, TB, leprosy and other common diseases of the region. They will also discuss the progress of the implementation of the recommendations of the 10th meeting held in Bhutan last year.

Nirmul calls 8-hr hartal tomorrow

By Staff Correspondent The Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Samannaya Committee has called an eight-hour hartal from 6 am to 2 pm across the country tomorrow demanding, among other things, the trial of Golam Azam as a 'war criminal' and a ban on communal politics of the Jamaat-e-Islami and other parties. "The Awami League, the alliance of 10 Left parties, and some other smaller political organisations have lent their support to the half-day hartal. In a bid to drum up public support for the hartal, the Samannaya Committee of the Nirmul bodies organised street-corner rallies in different parts of the capital yesterday and brought out a procession which paraded the main thoroughfares of the city. The committee will also hold a public gathering near the Nour Hossain Square (Zero Point near the GPO) and a torch procession this evening. Central leaders of the organisation are scheduled to meet at the Taher auditorium at the JSD (Inu) office tonight to discuss the final preparations for the hartal. UNB adds: The Nirmul Committee, student organisations and professional bodies held rallies and brought out processions in Chittagong yesterday in support of tomorrow's hartal.

Autopsy reports often inordinately delayed

Over seventy reports of post-mortem examinations held this year remain pending with the Forensic Department of the Dhaka Medical College (DMC). Many of these reports have not been completed even a month or more after actual autopsy although the forensic doctors are expected, under law, to send their reports to the concerned police stations within 24 hours, according to a source. The DMC Forensic Department had carried out 1487 post-mortem examinations this year until yesterday. The total figure last year was 1700. Section 306(A) of the Police Regulations of Bengal (PRB), 1943, only said autopsy reports should be sent to the respective investigating officers through the police constable who accompanied the corpse to the morgue. However, sometime after the partition of India the then government, through an executive order, stipulated that autopsy reports should be submitted within 24 hours, said a senior police officer. Meanwhile, relations between the forensic doctors and the police often soured when autopsy reports have been inordinately delayed. Police said, quite often the merit of the cases involving deaths and the police investigations are hampered because of the delay. The doctors explain that an acute shortage of manpower and facilities prevent prompt submission of autopsy reports. Deputy Commissioner of the

Detective Branch (DB) Mohammad Abdul Quayyum said: "It is necessary to get a primary report from the doctors to know the nature of death for the sake of proper investigation." "Sometimes apparent cases of suicides actually turn out to be homicides after the post-mortem examinations. In such cases, if the autopsy reports are delayed, the culprits may escape," the Deputy Commissioner added. He referred to two recent cases where autopsy reports have been delayed. "A woman Magistrate Shahida Chowdhury died on October 15 last and a businessman Quayyum Sardar was murdered on October 2. Post-mortem examinations of the bodies to ascertain the cause of death were done on the

very next day following their deaths, but we are yet to receive the reports although we have issued several reminders," he added. An Assistant Commissioner of the DB said he had sent back the autopsy report of one Shefali, a 15-year-old maid, who was reportedly murdered by her mistress Salma Islam, an air hostess, on March 9, for some clarification three weeks ago, but he was yet to receive the reply from the doctors concerned. A senior teacher of the Forensic Department of the DMC, who preferred anonymity, however, said: "Our first task is to teach the students. Besides, on an average, we examine five bodies everyday and it is not

See Page 12 Col 1

California firestorm destroys 500 homes

LOS ANGELES, Oct 28: A massive firestorm raged across southern California for the second day today, widening a swath of destruction that incinerated at least 500 homes and forced more than 30,000 people to flee, reports Reuter. Fifteen major wildfires continued burning out of control across 88,000 acres (35,600 hectares) stretching from the Mexican border to Los Angeles northern suburbs, giving rise to unofficial damage estimates running into the hundreds of millions of dollars. But with the hot, dry Santa Ana winds that fuelled the runaway fires dying down today, firefighters said they were finally making progress in their

battle against the conflagration, the worst to hit the region in decades. Twenty-four firefighters were hurt, three critically, and at least a dozen civilians were injured. But almost miraculously, no deaths were reported. Daybreak revealed scenes of danger and devastation. Huge plumes of smoke wafted over southern California. Flames flickered in the ruins of multi-million-dollar mansions, and walls of flame continue their advance across parched brushland. Entire neighbourhoods lay in ruins, looking more like bomb-scarred war zones than See Page 12 Col 7

Rumour sparks off demonstrations at Khagrachhari

From Staff Correspondent CHITTAGONG, Oct 28: Hundreds of supporters of the Pahari Chhatra Parishad this afternoon staged demonstrations at the Khagrachhari district headquarters and in front of the Dighinala thana office following a rumour that one of its leaders, had been arrested, sources said. The rumour had it that Prashid Bikash Khisa was arrested from a rally at Naniachar Bazar under Rangamati district. The demonstrators allegedly attacked the Dighinala thana office following an altercation with the police. At one stage police resorted to lathicharge to disperse the demonstrators and See Page 12 Col 2