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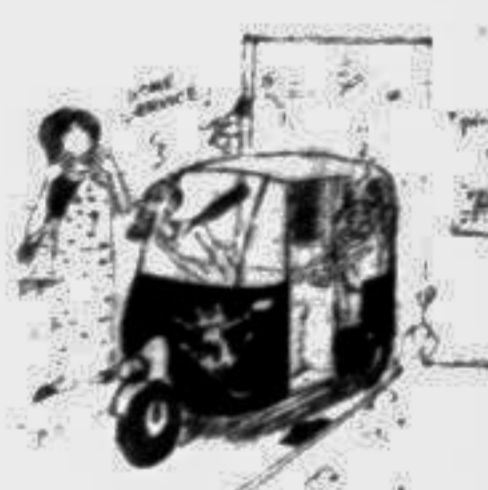
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NEWS BRIEFS

Majid off to Rome

Agriculture and Irrigation, Water Development and Flood Control Minister M Majid-ul-Haq left Dhaka yesterday for Rome, Italy to attend the 27th Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) conference to be held from November 5 to 26. He will also attend the 104th and 105th council conference of FAO. The Agriculture Minister is leading a seven-member delegation of Bangladesh, reports BSS.

BNP emergency meet today

An emergency meeting of the presidents and general secretaries of the BNP Dhaka metropolitan city unit, metropolitan thana units, all BNP front organisations, all Members of Parliament elected from the Dhaka City and BNP central joint secretaries general will be held today at 6 pm at the BNP central office here, reports BSS.

Rafiq leaves for Bangkok

Works Minister Barrister Rafiqul Islam Mia left Dhaka for Bangkok yesterday to attend the ministerial conference on Urbanization in Asia and the Pacific being held there from October 27, reports BSS.

New laws soon to curb 'defaulting culture'

By Inam Ahmed

The government is planning some drastic changes in the country's laws to tackle the problem of defaulting loans.

To strengthen the existing legal framework, the government will soon enact a bankruptcy law, according to the top rankers heading the country's financial sector reforms programme.

Sources said this law will be similar to the Chapter 11 bankruptcy act of the US and also will be enforced accordingly.

Moreover, the jurisdiction of the financial loan courts will also be stretched so that it becomes more effective in collecting the bad debts.

Bangladesh Bank sources said another legal code, called the Mortgage Act, suggested by private bankers as a means for recovering bad debts, is still under consideration.

Under the proposed Bankruptcy Act, anyone with defaulting loans will be declared bankrupt and he will be denied fresh loans and certain privileges and facilities.

Bankers now feel that this new law would discourage the 'defaulting culture' since they feel, most defaulters do not repay bank loans deliberately because the legal procedures to bring them to book are too weak and often full of loopholes.

To back up the bankruptcy act, the financial loan courts will be empowered to enforce its decisions. Presently, in most cases, the defaulters file appeal petitions with the Higher courts against the decisions of the loan court and the litigation drags on for years.

But under the contemplated changes in the legal framework, steps will be taken to avoid lengthy litigation procedures.

The country's banking circle feels that about 35 per cent of the total loans have now become technically defaulting loans. They pointed out that this has been mainly because of 'buying out' of back loans by new loans.

The total amount of advances by the schedule banks, as on October 7 last, was Taka 25582 crore.

Sources said the drafts of the new laws will be completed within the next three months and sent to Parliament for adoption.

The changes are a result of the World Bank's repeated concern over the country's bulging bad debts and as a preliminary step, the Finance Minister had also disclosed names of some selected bad defaulters in Parliament. However, his action evoked severe reactions from the private sector.

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No change in Delhi's attitude, Foreign Secy tells newsmen

By Staff Correspondent

There has been no perceptible change in the attitude of New Delhi since the issue of water-sharing was raised by Dhaka at the UN.

Foreign Secretary Reaz Rahman said this in reply to a question during a press briefing at the Foreign Ministry yesterday afternoon.

The Foreign Secretary said there were a series of contacts with India but did not elaborate. He, however, hoped that good sense would prevail on New Delhi to settle the water and other bilateral issues.

About the planned visit of Indian Premier Narasimha Rao to Dhaka, Reaz said, "There is no confirmed date but a standing invitation has been extended by our Prime Minister to her Indian counterpart during her visit to Delhi in May last year."

Reaz, however, added, "We are hoping the Indian Prime Minister's visit would take place." See Page 12 Col 2

Health ministers' meet in city from today

By Staff Correspondent

Health ministers from 10 South and South-east Asian countries are starting a three-day meeting in Dhaka from today to foster better cooperation to combat common health menaces in the region.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia will inaugurate the 11th meeting of the health ministers of the WHO South-east Asia region, at the International Conference Centre (ICC) at 10 in the morning.

There are 11 countries in the South Asia region of the World Health Organisation including Bhutan, North Korea, India, Indonesia, the Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand and host Bangladesh.

Meanwhile the Health and Deputy Health Ministers of several countries arrived in the city yesterday.

They include Indian Health Minister B Shankarananda, Indonesia's Prof Dr Sujudi, Sri Lanka's Mrs Renuka Herath

Ranaweera and Mongolia's Dr P Nymananda and the Deputy Minister of Health of Nepal Dr Ram Baran Yadav, Dr Udomail Srisnam of Thailand, Dr Kim Yong K of DPR Korea, Dr Abdus Sattar Yousuf of the Maldives and Col Thau Zin on Myanmar.

Bhutan will be represented by a delegate since the country does not have a health minister at the moment.

Director General of the WHO, Dr Hiroshi Nakajima also arrived in the city yesterday.

The leaders of the delegations and the WHO chief were received at the airport by Health and Family Welfare Minister Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yousuf.

Bangladesh hosted the second meeting in 1982 while the first ministerial meeting was held in Indonesia in 1981.

The ministers will submit separate reports on the progress of implementation of the 10th meeting, held last year in Bhutan.



Mahfuz Anam takes over as Editor of Star

By Staff Correspondent

Mahfuz Anam has assumed office of Editor of The Daily Star beginning today. Anam succeeds S M Ali who died in Bangkok on October 17.

The appointment of Mahfuz Anam, 43, as the Editor of The Daily Star was made on behalf of the Board of Directors of Mediaworld Ltd, owners of The Daily Star in a signed statement by A S Mahmud, the Managing Director, yesterday afternoon.

The Mediaworld, while making the announcement, noted that: "Mahfuz Anam worked closely with founder-editor S M Ali in conceiving, planning and finally launching the paper."

"The Board also recognises with appreciation the contribution made by Anam as Executive Editor in working." See Page 12 Col 1

11 JN College students get 26yrs' RI each

A special tribunal yesterday convicted 11 students of the Jagannath University College and sentenced each to 26 years' rigorous imprisonment for possessing illegal arms, reports UNB.

The convicts are Sukumer, Seikh Mohammad Nasiruzzaman, Asim Bhattacharjee, Md Shahidul Islam, Lakkhan Chandra Nath, M A Samad alias Helal, Billop Das, Harun-or-Rashid, Mahbubur Rahman, Tapan Pal and Motilal.

According to the prosecution, the accused on August 1, 1991 attacked activists of a rival student organisation of the same college with bombs and explosives when they were observing chelium at the gate of the college. After a hot chase police took them to custody from the Mahajan Club at 39, Patuati Lane. Some arms including 12 pipe guns, 10 bullets, 12 cocktails, 10 randoos and daggers were recovered from their possession.

During the trial the court examined 4 witnesses and

Post '75 regimes distorted '71 war spirit: Hasina

Awami League president Sheikh Hasina yesterday appealed to the intelligentsia to contribute their endeavours and talent in writing the country's history of liberation struggle and its great heroes with objectivity, reports UNB.

Speaking at a meeting of noted intellectuals and elite at the Bangabandhu Bhaban, Hasina deplored that the history and the spirit and values of the 1971 War of Liberation were "distorted in a planned way by the post-'75 regimes."

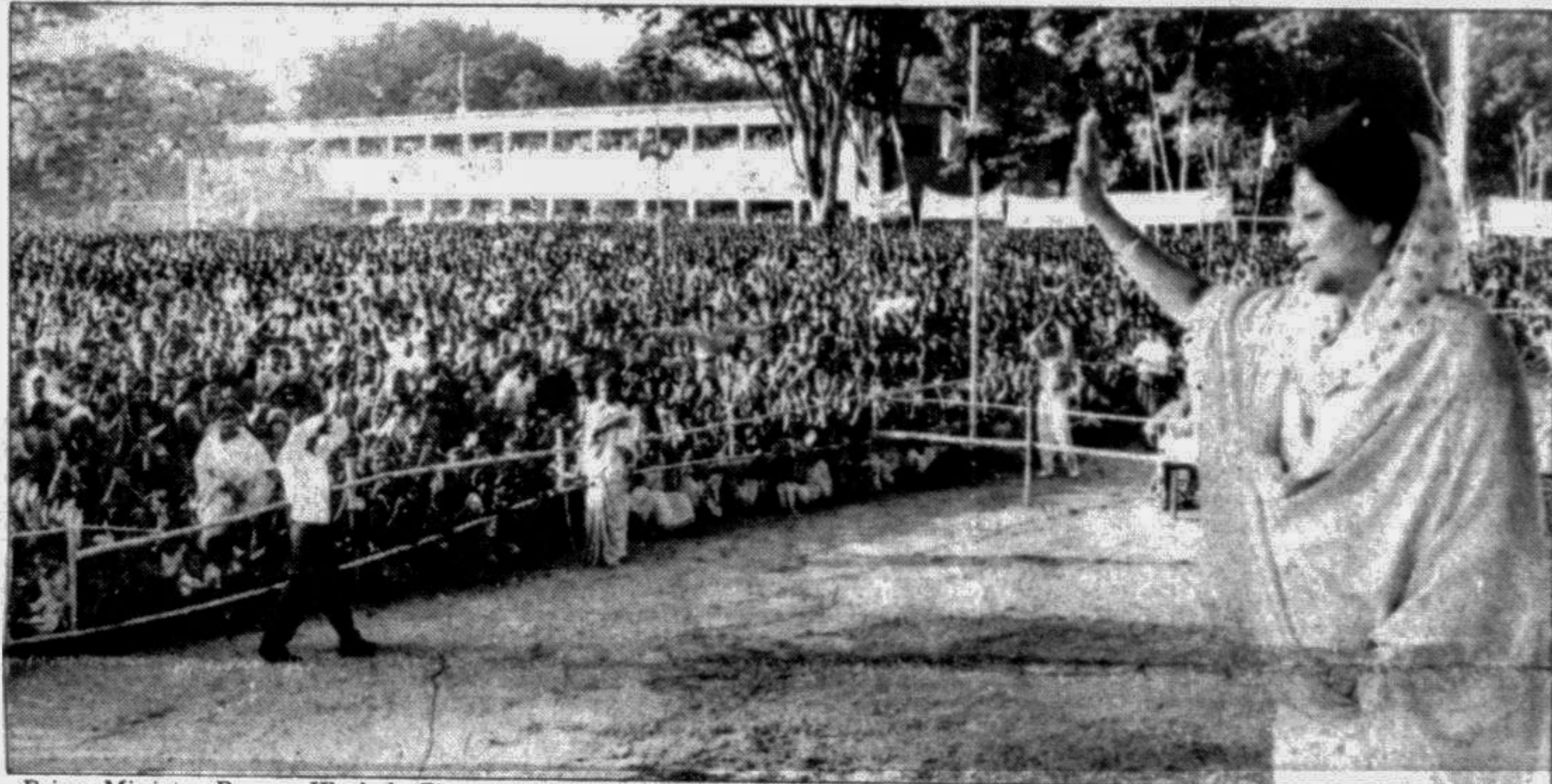
"The mentality of undermining the contribution of the architects of the Liberation War and of independent Bangladesh only reflects the narrowness of the interested quarters," she said.

Nat'l Youth Day today

The National Youth Day-93 will be celebrated today throughout the country as elsewhere in the world with the theme, "Youths are the Life Force of a Nation," reports BSS.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia will inaugurate the five-day programme by hoisting the national flag at the Institution of Engineers' premises here in the afternoon today.

The Prime Minister will also attend a national youth fair at the auditorium of the Institution of Engineers' and pre-



Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia waving to the audience during a public meeting at the Bhuapur Ibrahim Khan College ground in Tangail yesterday. —PID photo

PPP, PML seek to find compromise candidate Wasim Sajjad, Ishaq Khan among 27 to run for Pak presidency

ISLAMABAD, Oct 31: The race for the Pakistan presidency opened today with a record 27 candidates, including incumbent Wasim Sajjad and controversial former head of state Ghulam Ishaq Khan, entering the November 13 presidential election, reports AFP.

The next President will be elected by an electoral college made up of members of the two houses of parliament — the Senate and the National Assembly — and four provincial assemblies.

Election Commission officials said the number was likely to come down after official scrutiny on Tuesday because of visible procedural flaws in several nomination papers.

The large list, tentative until a final lineup emerges after the last date for withdrawals on Thursday, signified a fight for the top slot between the main parties led by Premier Benazir Bhutto and former Premier Nawaz Sharif.

Neither Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP) nor Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League (PML) would say for the time being

who would be their ultimate candidate from among several in the two parties on the provisional list.

Papers for 12 candidates were filed at the Election Commission headquarters in Islamabad, while the rest were presented to provincial chief justices at Lahore, Karachi and Quetta.

The PML has fielded five and the PPP three candidates, besides one, from the splinter PML-Junejo group, a coalition partner with Bhutto.

Analysts expected renewed behind-the-scenes efforts in the coming days for a consensus candidate by the two main forces, which is what the army reportedly desires for the sake of political stability.

Bhutto's previous government was dismissed in 1990 after just 20 months by a hostile president Ghulam Ishaq Khan.

The two main parties will try to arrange alliances with smaller parties, or they may seek to find a compromise candidate.

PML officials said efforts

would continue for an agreement with PPP to put up a joint candidate.

The PPP's prospective candidates are Foreign Minister Farooq Ahmed Leghari, Defence Minister Aftab Shaban Mirani and former North West Frontier Province Chief Minister Aftab Ahmed Sherpao.

Bhutto favours a constitutional amendment that would limit president's powers. She is looking for a candidate who will not try to block programme she wants to launch.

However, there is no guarantee such a candidate will be chosen, and an antagonistic president will make it virtually impossible for Bhutto to govern effectively.

From the PML side the list includes former National Assembly Speaker Gohar Ayub Khan, ex-Finance Minister Sartaj Aziz, former Agriculture Minister retired Lt. General Abdul Majid Malik, and former Bhutto ally Syed Iftikhar Gilani.

The name of acting President Sajjad was also proposed and seconded by members from the

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MF Hussain due tomorrow

By Staff Correspondent

Internationally renowned Indian painter Maqbool Fida Hussain will arrive in the capital tomorrow to attend the Sixth Asian Art Biennale '93.

Although Hussain was due yesterday, official sources said, the painter, in a message, informed the authorities that he had to reschedule his visit to Bangladesh because he had lost his passport.

Hussain, better known as MF Hussain, is the Energy Minister

Oil and gas exploration Private sector's active cooperation sought

By Staff Correspondent

The government would be unable to meet the future projected demand for commercial energy in the country without the active participation of the private sector in both oil and gas exploration and in power generation.

This was stated by Energy and Mineral Resources Minister Dr Khandker Mosharruf Hossain at the monthly meeting of the American Bangladesh Economic Forum held in a local hotel yesterday.

Referring to the fast depleting known gas reserves of the country the minister underlined the urgent need to expedite exploration for new sources.

"The ability of the public sector is not sufficient for drilling even one exploratory well annually," he said. "The private sector should participate side by side with the public sector, and it is urgent that we enter into the international market to develop the energy sector of the country."

Speaking on 'Bangladesh's Energy: Prospects for the Future,' the Energy Minister

presented a grim scenario in which there is a projected shortfall in meeting the gas and electricity requirement right up to the next century and beyond. In addition, he said, the present gas reserves would be depleted by the year 2010.

However, he added that there are good prospects for discovering more gas reserves, along with oil, and the government is thus encouraging private sector participation to boost exploration activities in the country. The newly-announced petroleum policy provides for a uniform field of operation for both the public and private sectors.

Presided over by the president of the ABEF Forrest E Cookson, the meeting was also attended by the charge d'affaires of the United States embassy James Nach, Energy Secretary Faizur Razzak and members of the Forum. Executive Director of the Forum Aftabul Islam introduced the Minister at the meeting.

The Energy Minister said

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Efforts for accord with militants fail Kashmiris inside Hazratbal say troops must leave

SRINAGAR, Oct 31: A group of 25 men today came out of Kashmir's holiest Islamic shrine that is surrounded by troops, saying none of the people inside would leave until the army moved out, report AP AFP.

The men, most of them in their early 20s, emerged from the white marble shrine in the afternoon and shouted anti-Indian slogans as hundreds of Indian troops watched.

Soldiers with guns trained on the mosque did not fire or make any attempt to grab the men, who stood about 100 feet away in the mosque's courtyard.

"No India, no Pakistan, we want independence," shouted the men dressed in loose cotton

shirts and shawls draped across their shoulders.

On seeing a group of reporters and press photographers outside the mosque, one of them said they were not being held hostage inside the shrine by Muslim militants. Authorities say about 100 people are inside, many of them civilians being held by armed separatist guerrillas.

"We are not militants, you can take our photographs," some of the men shouted.

Earlier today, a 40-year-old woman came out of the shrine and was taken by the police for interrogation.

But a deadlock caused by the refusal of Muslim leaders to mediate between the govern-

ment and Muslim militants continued, and a top Kashmiri official said he could only hope for the best.

Kashmir police chief Manohar Nath Sabharwal said a woman came out of the lakeside mosque, but it was not clear if she had escaped or been allowed to go by the about 50 armed Muslim militants in control of the shrine.

She was the seventh woman and the 12th civilian to emerge from the Hazratbal Mosque since thousands of Indian troops laid siege to it on the night of October 15.

Efforts for an agreement with the Muslim militants were bogged down today after Kash-

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Civilians held up inside the Hazratbal Mosque along with some 50 armed Muslim militants shout responses to reporters during an unusual press conference outside the shrine in Srinagar yesterday. —AFP photo