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NEWS BRIEFS

Indian Commerce

Secy meets Shamsul

Indian Commerce Secretary Tejendra Khanna called on Commerce Minister M Shamsul Islam at his office in Dhaka yesterday. During the meeting, the Commerce Minister hoped that the door of trade expansion among the SAARC countries could be opened through successful implementation of the SAPTA besides their existing trade cooperation, reports UNB.

Laegreid calls on Hasina

Counsellor at the Norwegian Embassy in India Oddvar Laegreid, now on a visit to Dhaka, called on Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina at her Sangsad Bhavan chamber yesterday. They discussed various issues relating to economic, social and political affairs of the two countries. Laegreid is representing the Norwegian Ambassador, who is stationed in New Delhi, and concurrently accredited to Bangladesh, reports UNB.

Probe body on ZIA incident

The government has formed a five-member committee to investigate the untoward incident that occurred at the Zia International Airport on November 16. Joint Secretary (Political) of the Home Ministry has been made Convenor of the probe body, said an official announcement yesterday. The committee will submit its report within seven days of starting its function, reports UNB.

Khaleda tells banquet hosted by Koirala

Proper use of region's water resources will benefit all

KATHMANDU, Nov 22: Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia said here today that proper development of water resources in the region would bring enormous benefits for all, reports BSS.

Begum Zia said the development of water resources could assist people of this region in their search for economic uplift and help them combat floods and droughts and halt the degradation of the environment.

The Prime Minister, who arrived here today on a three-day visit, was addressing the banquet hosted in her honour by Nepalese Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala at the state hall, Singha Durbar.

Begum Zia said the peoples of Bangladesh and Nepal could face their natural crises better

and protect the environment more effectively through mutual cooperation and exchange of information.

The Prime Minister said Bangladesh aimed at developing friendly and meaningful relations with all her neighbours and this must be on the basis of mutual respect for sovereign equality and non-interference in each other's internal affairs. She said "We note with satisfaction that our two countries hold similar views on a number of global issues. As least developed countries seeking a better deal for our economies, we make common cause in international fora," she said.

Begum Zia said Bangladesh and Nepal have steadily built and nurtured their bilateral relations. She said "We are confident that a promising future of

mutually beneficial cooperation lies ahead of us.

"Our commitment to a democratic way of life is the common thread that binds us in friendship," she said.

Begum Zia, who is also the SAARC Chairperson, said the South Asian population comprising one-fifth of humanity, possessed immense potentialities but the burden of poverty and stagnation had pulled them back. This stagnation had to be overcome, the Prime Minister stressed.

Begum Zia said the only way to assure 'Daal Bhaat' to the peoples of the SAARC nations and satisfy their basic needs is through combining the initiatives of all.

"We must stand together within the framework of the SAARC", Begum Zia said.



Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia (L) taking salute during a welcoming ceremony on her arrival in the Nepalese capital Kathmandu yesterday. Nepalese Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala is seen on her left. — AFP photo

Nat'l Energy Policy draft to be ready by next Feb

The committee formed early this year to draw up a National Energy Policy will finish its work in February 1994.

The new energy policy will aim at long-term development of the energy sector by encouraging private investment, sources say.

National gas is the only energy resource that Bangladesh has in a significant quantity. Until the late Eighties investment in the natural gas sector increased rapidly to feed the growing number of power generation and fertilizer plants and other types of industries. As a result growth of the construction and utilities sector, where power and gas have major shares, increased through the Eighties and peaked at around 13 per cent in 1987-88.

At around this time the World Bank (WB) pulled the hard brake on energy sector investment. With lending to power sector under suspension, much of the urgency for gas sector development evaporated. As a result, the planned sequel to the major WB-assisted gas sector investment programme during the mid-Eighties — which was

to be around 200 million dollars, Gas Infrastructure Development Programme (GIDP) — got delayed.

The size of the GIDP has also been reduced to around half according to unconfirmed reports. The truncated GIDP is being designed as an emergency stop gap measure to meet demand from new gas consumers like KAFCO.

Beyond that, development of the energy sector will mostly be left in private hands. The National Petroleum Policy which came into force in July this year has opened the energy sector to private investment. To improve the incentive package already placed on the table a new production sharing contract is being drawn up.

The incentives that will be offered under the new production-sharing contract include tying of gas price to international high sulphur fuel price, waiver of import duties on equipment imported for exploration, development and production, and waiver of signature bonus. Investors may also be offered exemption from all corporate taxes.

Bangladesh has recently concluded negotiation of two production-sharing contracts. Following the Petroleum Investment Round Table in Houston last September four oil companies signed memoranda of understanding with the Petro-bangla.

If the expected interest from private investors in putting their money in the gas sector materialise, the troubled power sector will be next in line for complete privatisation.

With the upstream gas industry in private hands the managers of publicly owned power sector will feel a hard budget constraint for the first time. And, the private sector will find that they can, if allowed by the government, through management and efficiency improvements turn around the power sector quite easily.

These pair of scissors can cut the power sector free from the current stagnation and inefficiency. Whether this will happen will depend on the National Energy Policy, due next year.

Bangladeshi troops to police Kuwait-Iraq border

KUWAIT, Nov 22: One hundred Bangladeshi troops will police the Kuwait-Iraq border, under orders to open fire if necessary, to stop Iraqi incursions, the UN said today, reports Reuters.

The troops will arrive in the next few days to reinforce UN-armed UN observers who have had to deal with three Iraqi border incursions in the last month — the latest involving up to 600 people on Saturday.

The Bangladeshis will be armed and under certain circumstances they will be able to open fire, Abdelatif Kabbaj, spokesman of the UN Iraq-Kuwait Observer Mission (UNIKOM), said.

He didn't spell out the circumstances under which the Bangladeshis, to be followed by

the remainder of a 775-strong Bangladeshi infantry unit by December 20, would be allowed to 'open fire'.

The reinforcement was mandated by the United Nations in February following a previous round of Iraqi incursions, UN military observers said.

The 250 unarmed observers currently stationed along the 207 km border have no mandate to open fire, Kabbaj said.

On Saturday the Iraqis, mainly women and children, marched across the border to protest against the UN's demarcation of the frontier and chased away Kuwaiti workers digging a security trench. A UN-observer and a Kuwaiti policeman were wounded by stones thrown by Iraqis, Iraq, which occupied Kuwait

for seven months in 1990-91, does not recognise the border demarcated and guaranteed earlier this year by the United Nations.

The Bangladeshis' arrival has long been scheduled and is not a response to Iraq's latest incursion.

The United States said, Saturday's incident showed Iraq was trying to repudiate its post-war obligations and question the legitimacy of the UN-guaranteed boundary.

Al-Watan newspaper reported Minister of Information Sheikh Saïd Nasser Al-Sabah as saying the incident was aimed at pulling Kuwait into a military confrontation.

The Kuwaiti government was well aware of the dimensions of

We share common problems & our steps are similar, says Koirala

KATHMANDU, Nov 22: Prime Minister of Nepal Girija Prasad Koirala termed the Bangladesh Prime Minister's visit here significant saying this would help promote the ever growing friendship, cooperation and understanding between the two countries, reports BSS.

He was speaking at the official banquet given by him in honour of Bangladesh Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia at the state hall, Singha Durbar.

Koirala said both Nepal and Bangladesh continue to enjoy warm and close relationship. "There are similarities in the culture, tradition and the way of life of our peoples. We share many things in common and have devised similar approaches to the problems confronting our countries," he said.

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Regional experts for dams, reservoirs on major rivers

By Staff Correspondent

Water experts from India, Nepal and Bangladesh yesterday proposed building dams and reservoirs on the major rivers of the region for the common good.

Addressing the opening session of a two-day international conference on the Eastern Himalayan waters, which began in the city yesterday, experts agreed a common approach was needed to optimise the uses of the regional water resources.

The conference, jointly organised by the Global Infrastructure Fund (GIF) Research Foundation of Japan and the Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad (BUP), is being attended by 10 experts from Bangladesh, five from India, five from Nepal and 13 from the GIF.

Sources said the closed-door conference discussed separate proposals put forward by the

delegates from different countries.

The Bangladesh delegates proposed building a dam on the Ganges and taking up measures to stop erosion in the Brahmaputra basin.

The Indian delegates proposed construction of a dam-cum-reservoir near Tipaimukh on the river Borak. The Borak river is known in Bangladesh variously as the Surma, the Kushiara and the Meghna.

The Indians also proposed a common energy grid for the three countries.

The Nepalese team proposed constructing water reservoirs in the areas of Pancheswar, Shaptakasi and Karnali, which would be able to supply water to the downstream regions during the lean season, sources attending the conference, said.

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Probe body's terms of reference Speaker blames all for deadlock

By Staff Correspondent

The Speaker of the Jatiya Sangsad (JS) yesterday held all the members of the 15-man parliamentary probe body equally responsible for its failure so far to agree on a terms of reference.

Speaker Shaikh Razzak Ali made this observation in the House yesterday following a 140-minute unscheduled discussion on the fate of the probe body formed to investigate opposition allegations of corruption in the irrigation ministry, as well as by the minister concerned himself yesterday.

The discussion on the issue began when Awami League (AL) MP Tofael Ahmed, who bro-

ught the charges, enquired about the committee's fate and accused the treasury bench members in the committee for the failure to agree on the scope of investigations even four months after the formation of the body.

Tofael said that according to rules, the committee was supposed to submit its findings to the House a month after its formation. It was unfortunate the committee was neither submitting the report nor seeking any fresh deadline for its tenure, Tofael added.

The Speaker, however, informed the House that the committee had decided

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One shot dead at BUET

By Staff Correspondent

A youngman was shot dead in a residential hostel compound of the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) in the city last night.

The victim, aged about 25, could not be immediately identified. He was rushed to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) where the attending doctors pronounced him dead at around 10:30 pm.

The youngman received a bullet in his chest from a close range near the gate of the Shaheed Titumir Hall. Two of his companions who were along with him fled the scene just after the firing, witnesses said.

A student of the hostel said that the victim was a stranger. One of his companions with whom he was leaving the hall shot him and escaped, he added.

Lalbagh police said they could not yet find the motive behind the murder. No arrest was made until midnight according to police.

Nayan Murder

Tania sent to jail

By Staff Correspondent

A film actress, Tania Rahman, arrested in connection with a murder in the city, was sent to the Dhaka Central Jail yesterday.

Tania was produced before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Dhaka, yesterday on expiry of a three-day police remand before being taken to the Central Jail.

In the Dhaka Magistracy, Tania made a confessional statement under Section 164 of the Criminal Procedure Code (Cr PC) where she said that her second husband Russel Rahman was responsible for the murder of her male servant, Nayan.

Police are yet to arrest Russel Rahman who has been in hiding since the murder on Tuesday last.

Twenty-two-year-old Alamgir Hossain Nayan was found dead in the bedroom of Tania at her Tallabagh residence.

Suspecting a homicide, Mohammadpur Police arrested Tania on the same day when she went to the police station to report the unnatural death of Nayan.

Hasina calls to build educated manpower

Awami League (AL) president Sheikh Hasina yesterday termed education an essential precondition for economic emancipation of the people and called for building a skilled, educated and laborious manpower for economic progress and overall development of the country, reports UNB.

Inaugurating a two-day seminar on 'Education for All' organised by the Education and Cultural Affairs Department of the Awami League at the Engineers' Institute, Hasina expressed her dismay over the situation in the education sector and the rate of literacy in the country compared to other Asian countries. "A nation cannot achieve much progress with uneducated and illiterate people," she said.

Hasina, also the Leader of the Opposition in Parliament, cited Sri Lanka, Thailand, Malaysia and India where the literacy rates are much higher than Bangladesh's which is recorded at only 35.3 per cent.

"Bangladesh exists like a dark island without education alongside the fast-developing nations enlightened with education," she regretted.

The AL leader said an illiter-

ate population and low standard of education is the main obstacle to industrialisation, modernisation of agriculture, acquiring of scientific and technical know-how, increasing export, employment generation and economic progress of the country.

Hasina said failure in the implementation of the primary education programme was the fundamental and burning problem in the country's education sector. Despite the tall talks of the ruling quarters in the past four decades, about 2.20 crore school-going children remain outside the reach of primary and secondary education, she told the function. Quoting a UN statistics, she said 4.20 crore adult men and women are illiterate in the country.

"Such a situation is not only a matter of shame but also a cause of concern for us," Hasina said and asked whether the past governments had at all taken any sincere initiatives for removing illiteracy. "We must try to understand why Bangladesh failed to achieve the desired literacy rate in comparison with other Asian countries,"

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Tk 56 crore MCHTI project uncertain

By Staff Correspondent

Setting up of the proposed Maternity and Child Health Training Institute (MCHTI) in the capital has become uncertain as negotiations with the donors have reached an impasse, according to official sources.

Began in January this year, the negotiations with the co-financiers — Japan and the International Development Agency (IDA), the soft loan wing of the World Bank — have now slowed down because neither side has softened its stance over the conditionalities, sources in the Economic Relations Division (ERD) added.

Meantime, the donors have set a December 30, 1993, deadline for the government to agree

to their conditions falling which, they warned, the commitment of the estimated grants of Tk 56 crore for the project would be withdrawn.

Understanding that the prospect of the project is bleak, the Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman, during a recent meeting of the ECNEC, proposed that the grants be transferred to other projects like construction of bridges and culverts. However, the donors have declined to comply with the request.

According to ERD sources, the crisis originated from the fixation of the project cost, which the Bangladesh authorities consider five times higher than the one they estimated.

Explaining the reason for the

Privilege motions

JS to discuss PM's reported Nov 7 comments Sunday

By Staff Correspondent

Parliament will discuss Sunday the reported comments of the Prime Minister at a city rally Nov 7 regarding the Jatiya Sangsad, against which a group of Opposition members have brought privilege motions.

Speaker Shaikh Razzak Ali, in a ruling yesterday, accepted the notices and fixed November 28 for a two-hour discussion on the issue. Twenty-six Opposition members had submitted notice on breach of privilege.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia reportedly told a BNP public meeting that "some members make untrue statements in the House."

"According to rules such discussion should be held in the presence of the person against whom the charges are brought," Speaker Shaikh Razzak Ali said.

"Since the Prime Minister is now on a visit to Nepal and will be back on November 24 and since the following day is a pri-

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Uproar in JS during question hour

The question hour in Parliament generated heat yesterday as several Opposition and Treasury Bench members demanded disclosure of the political identities of the killers of Chhatra Dal leader Jinnatul Islam Jinnah and businessman Humayun Zahir, reports UNB.

Jinnah, the drama secretary of the Zia Hall of the Dhaka University and a prominent leader of the JCD, was killed on November 1, reportedly because of intra-party conflict in the students' wing of the ruling BNP.

Businessman Humayun Zahir was killed in April this year and a prominent Awami League leader, accused of involvement in the murder, remains absconding.

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Bill seeking legal basis to rename upazilas placed

Minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Mirza Golam Hafiz introduced "Existing Law and Legal Documents (Amendment) Bill-1993", seeking legal basis for replacing the word 'Upazila' with 'Thana' in the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday, reports BSS.

The Law Minister in his statement said the government has decided to name the former Upazila as 'Thana' as the Upazila system was abolished on November 23, 1991.

Mirza Golam Hafiz said there was no scope of discussion on the bill before its introduction. Once the bill is introduced in the House, discussion can be made on the subject, he added.

Raising objection on the bill, Suranjit Sen Gupta said the introduction of the bill after two years of the annulment of the Upazila System was the manifestation of the inefficiency of the government.

Sen Gupta wondered why the House would pass a bill giving two years' retrospective effect to the law. He referred to the Supreme Court order regarding local government elections.

Sudhangshu Sekhar Halder said since the Constitution was involved with regard to the Upazila System, it cannot be amended through simple legislation.

Petitions against Nikunja Project discharged

The High Court Division of the Supreme Court yesterday discharged petitions against the Nikunja Project, reports BSS.

Three writ petitions filed against Rajdhani Unnayan Kartipakkha (RAJUK) challenging the notification of allotment of its Nikunja Project were discharged by two-member bench of the High Court as they were 'not maintainable in law'.

The bench constituted by Justice Habibur Rahman Khan and Justice Fazlul Karim gave the judgement after a long hearing, which began early this month.

The writs were filed last month.

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