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### NEWS BRIEFS

**Yadav Kant Gilwal to become SAARC SG**  
Nepalese Foreign Secretary Yadav Kant Gilwal will be the new Secretary General of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Foreign Secretary Reaz Rahman told newsmen here yesterday the term of the present Secretary General Ibrahim Hossain Zaki will expire on December 31, reports UNB.

**City BNP meet held**  
A meeting of the Dhaka city BNP was held today at its Nawab Yusuf Market office here with Mayor of Dhaka and senior vice-president of city BNP Mirza Abbas, MP, in the chair. All the vice-presidents of the city unit of the party, general secretary, presidents of thana and ward committees and their general secretaries attended the meeting. It was conducted by Salahuddin Ahmed, MP, reports BSS.

**UP chairman shot dead in Barisal**  
BARISAL, Dec 1: A UP chairman was shot dead by gunmen while returning from a village arbitration near the town this evening. Syedul Alam, 40, was attacked and gunned down from a rickshaw by a gang of a dozen miscreants near Utkalbari on the Barisal-Jhalakathi road at 7:30 pm, reports UNB.

**604 Rohingyas go home**  
From Our Correspondent  
COX'S BAZAR, Dec 1: Another 604 Rohingya refugees of 136 families have been repatriated to Myanmar today. They left from three transit camps of Teknaf. The refugees were received by the Myanmar officials at the Kaniyongh reception centre. With this, the total number of repatriated refugees stands at 51,120.

## Aman procurement at snail's pace 200 tonnes of paddy bought in 15 days

The aman procurement drive for the current season is yet to gain momentum as only a little over 200 tonnes of paddy were bought by the government in 15 days until Tuesday.  
With a target to procure three lakh tonnes of paddy equivalent to two lakh tonnes of rice, the aman procurement began at about 700 purchase centres of the Food Directorate all over the country on November 15.  
The government has fixed the procurement price of paddy at Taka 200 per maund, which

is Taka ten lower than the price fixed for the previous year.  
The ongoing procurement drive is scheduled to continue until April next year. According to sources 25,000 tonnes of paddy were supposed to be procured in November, while 75,000 tonnes is targeted for procurement this month. Afterwards, at least 50,000 tonnes of aman paddy will have to be procured each month until April to reach the total target.  
This season's procurement drive is also lagging far behind than the achievement of the last year. During the first 15 days of the last procurement season, over 2000 tonnes of aman paddy were bought. The procurement target of the last season was two lakh tonnes of paddy, of which 1.4 lakh tonnes could be procured.  
The authorities concerned attributed the slower pace in procurement this year to the prevailing market price situation which is, according to them, 'better' than the procurement price fixed by the government.  
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## Ord on workers' service conditions JS debates legality of retrospective effect

The Speaker of the Jatiya Sangsad (JS) yesterday deferred until Sunday a discussion on some Opposition motions seeking disapproval of an ordinance relating to the service conditions of the workers following a legal dispute which surfaced in the House between the Treasury and the Opposition benches.  
The President promulgated the ordinance on October 19 last seeking retrospective effect of the proposed law from July 1991.  
The Opposition members, while arguing in favour of the disapproval, said that the giving retrospective effect to an ordinance was violative of the country's Constitution. The relevant Article of the Constitution only permits the President to promulgate an ordinance with the effect from the time of its promulgation, the Opposition law-makers argued.  
On the other hand, the treasury Bench members maintained that there was no such legal bar in giving retrospective effect to an ordinance. In a bid to substantiate their position they told the House that an ordinance was as good as a law

and retrospective effect could be given to an ordinance because there was no legal bar in giving it.  
However, Speaker Shaikh Razzak Ali deferred the discussion till Sunday arguing that the concerned parties including himself needed to be sanguine over the exact legal situation on the issue. 'I shall also give a ruling on the debate on Sunday,' he added.  
The whole debate started in the House when AKM Jahangir of the Awami League (AL) sought a ruling from Deputy Speaker Humayun Khan Panni, who was presiding over the House at that time.  
AL MP Shuhrangshu Shekhar Halder pointed out the issue in the beginning but the chair avoided the debate.  
However, in the face of repeated demands for a ruling on the legal point, Humayun Khan Panni adjourned the House for five minutes apparently to pave the way for Speaker Shaikh Razzak Ali to come at 8:13 pm.  
Asked by the Speaker to clarify the Treasury Bench's position, State Minister for Establishment and Barrister Aminul  
See Page 12 Col 3



Poet Sufia Kamal inaugurating a week-long street drama festival on the Liberation War at the Central Shaheed Minar in the city yesterday — Star photo

## Polls puncture BJP's 'invincible aura'

NEW DELHI, Dec 1: India's main Hindu party was reeling today after a disastrous showing in critical state elections which punctured the aura of invincibility it had acquired in recent years, reports AFP.  
Leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian people's party) were groping for answers after losing control of the Madhya Pradesh, India's largest state to Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao's Congress (I) Party.  
The loss capped an election debacle for the BJP, which also ceded the tiny state of Himachal Pradesh to the Congress and suffered a shock defeat in the Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous and politically-crucial state.  
A narrow win in the desert state of Rajasthan and a sweep of the vote for a local legislature in New Delhi were small consolation for the losses elsewhere.

We have to do a lot of hard work for the future said a dejected party spokesman M Venkiah Naidu, who had predicted a BJP sweep in the staggered elections held last month in the four states and the capital.  
Rao, 72, had sacked BJP governments in the four states in December after Hindu Extremists allied to the BJP destroyed the Babri Mosque in the Uttar Pradesh town of Ayodhya and built a temple to Hindu god Rama on its ruins.  
The sacrilege, condemned by secular Indians and the Islamic nations, polarised the country.  
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Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Reaz Rahman presiding over the 18th meeting of the SAARC Foreign Secretaries Standing Committee at a local hotel in Dhaka yesterday. Seen on his right: SAARC Secretary General Ibrahim H Zaki and SAARC Director Prabal S Rana, and on the left DG (SAARC), Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Chief Coordinator of the 13th SAARC Council of Foreign Ministers, Ashfaqur Rahman. — PID photo

## SAARC standing body discusses major issues

The SAARC Standing Committee comprising the Foreign Secretaries of the seven-nation regional body began its three-day deliberations in the city yesterday. All the Foreign Secretaries except Indian Foreign Secretary J N Dixit were present. Dixit is expected to arrive today.  
Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Reaz Rahman, who is the current chairman of the SAARC Standing Committee, told newsmen that on the first day's four-hour long meeting, all major issues, including trade liberalisation, economic cooperation and poverty alleviation, came up for discussion.  
Reaz said the standing committee particularly deliberated on 22 items which also include the agenda for the SAARC Council of Ministers meeting.  
The two-day SAARC Foreign Ministers' meet begins on Saturday, December 4. The meeting will be inaugurated at 10:00 am by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, who is also the current Chairperson of the SAARC.  
The detailed report presented by SAARC Secretary General Ibrahim Hossain Zaki was also discussed yesterday. The Foreign Secretary informed.  
Reaz said a budget of seven  
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## Exports under SAPTA Dhaka must produce new, cheaper items

Bangladesh will have to produce new items in more competitive price for export if the country really wants to get benefits out of the South Asian Preferential Trade Agreement (SAPTA).  
According to concerned officials, India, the 11th largest exporting country in the world, produces almost all the items which Bangladesh and the other least developed nations of the region can offer for tariff and other concessions under the agreement.  
The Indian commodities are also cheaper than those of the other SAARC members because of a large market inside and outside the country, it would be difficult for the least developed nations like Bangladesh to compete with those products even after withdrawal of tariffs and removal of non-tariff barriers, the officials observed.  
Moreover, there will remain a very few items which would not coincide with the offers being made by the other member countries; the officials said, adding that in that case, Bangladesh would have a fewer items to be considered as eligible for getting tariff and other concessions. The cost of production of Bangladeshi products (both industrial and agricultural) is higher than that of the other SAARC countries because of various reasons including low productivity, low technology and anomalies in the policies and the tariff structure.  
If these factors cannot be removed, Bangladesh would be in a disadvantaged position to avail of a large market of the densely populated SAARC region even after offering the concessions, the officials pointed out.  
According to sources, the list of Bangladeshi commodities offered to India for concessions includes 20 items, 20 items while the list for the Maldives includes 55 items. The number of items offered by Bangladesh to the other member countries for concessions ranged in between the two numbers.  
An official of the Ministry of Commerce, while talking to The Daily Star said, 'We may not be benefited by the agreement at this stage. But we don't have anything to lose for SAPTA.'  
The SAPTA has opened up a new avenue for extending the  
See page 12 Col 1

## Credit schemes for small investors, voluntarily rtd employees

The Government has initiated, with immediate effect, a Tk 50 crore credit guarantee scheme for small investors and a Tk 62.5 crore credit support scheme for public sector employees opting for voluntary retirement to start small scale self-help projects.  
This was disclosed by Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday at a press briefing held at the conference room of the Ministry.  
Both the schemes, the Minister noted, are designed to encourage commercial banks to offer loans to small investors and to create opportunities for public sector employees opting for voluntary retirement to undertake productive investments of their compensation funds in efficient, labour intensive cottage and small scale enterprises.  
Rahman also talked about the overall investment situation prevailing in the country and about the constraints to investment.  
The Tk 50 crore credit guarantee scheme for small investors would be administered by Bangladesh Bank and all scheduled banks would participate in the scheme.  
The scheme is designed to remove the handicaps faced by small investors as banks are reluctant to provide credit to them because of the lack of collateral security, the Finance Minister said.  
'Under the scheme, small investors will be able to get access to the bank loan if their projects are found viable in all respects but they are unable to provide necessary collateral as security against the bank loan.'

This would create an environment in which the full potential and dynamics of the small investors can be exploited, the Minister said adding that this would allow them to play their due role in the growth of the economy.  
The total amount of guarantee would be limited to double the amount of equity investment by the entrepreneurs subject to a maximum of Tk 25 lakh and for a maximum period of seven years. The banks would also provide non-guaranteed loans for the project under the scheme, which would be at least equal to the amount invested by the sponsor.  
See page 12 Col 3

## 27 hurt as police attack cultural procession at RU

From Our Correspondent  
RAJSHAHI, Dec 1: At least 27 persons, including two teachers, of Rajshahi University were, seriously injured this afternoon when police resorted to lathi charge on a procession led by the University Sangskritik Jote, a cultural organisation.  
The violent incident occurred when police resorted to lathi charge on the procession of the Sangskritik Jote at 5:15 pm without any provocation from any quarter, sources said.  
The injured teachers are Moly Bhowmik, Assistant Professor of the Department of Management and Abu Baker, Assistant Professor of the Department of Philosophy. They are now under treatment in a local clinic.  
Two riot police battalions have been deployed on the campus following the untoward incident.

## Australians want better climate for investment

By Staff Correspondent  
The visiting Deputy Speaker of the Australian Parliament, Alfred Jenkins, Wednesday said the entrepreneurs of his country will invest in Bangladesh if a sustainable climate for investment was restored.  
Jenkins, who is leading a nine-member parliamentary delegation, was exchanging views with the leaders of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) in Dhaka.  
'Australia is interested to invest in Bangladesh, but we would like to be satisfied with the overall political and economic situation of the country,' he said.  
Describing the existing relationship between the two countries as excellent, Jenkins said it can be strengthened further through increased economic cooperation.  
Briefing the delegation on the country's economic situa-

## People's welfare PM's top priority

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia yesterday attached top-most priority to the welfare of the people to uphold the democracy attained through a long and arduous struggle against autocracy, reports BSS.  
'The present BNP government laid stress on balanced development of the country and never encourages party interest while taking any development programme, the Prime Minister said while addressing the leaders of different political parties who joined BNP yesterday and the members of the Nawabganj Dohar College Students Union.  
The function was also addressed by LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdus Salam Talukdar, Information Minister Nazmul Huda, State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Abdul Mannan, State Minister  
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## BNP banishing spirit of democracy, says Hasina

Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina yesterday blamed the BNP for banishing the spirit of democracy evolved through anti-autocracy struggle and called upon the people to rise against 'neo-autocracy' as they did in the past, reports UNB.  
Talking to a delegation of the Nurul Huda Smriti Parishad at 29 Minato Road, she said people are disillusioned because of 'corruption, misuse, politicisation, nepotism and terrorism' sponsored by the government.  
Hasina, also president of the Awami League, criticised the ruling BNP for 'betraying with the sacrifices of martyrs of the anti-autocracy movement.  
Even the government set the worst precedence by letting loose police on her party's peaceful sit-in strike at Secretariat on the Noor Hossain Day on November 10, she alleged.  
Hasina said although the government was giving lip service to democracy, the country had been pushed to a horrible situation.  
'A civilised country and nation cannot run this way,' the AL chief said.  
The Nurul Huda Smriti Parishad was formed in memory of Kazi Nurul Huda Ashek, Abul Hossain, Abdul Khaleque and Baby Imon who were killed at Mirpur during the anti-autocracy movement.

## BNP politicising admn: Dr Kamal

NATORE, Dec 1: Gano Forum leader Dr Kamal Hossain today charged the BNP government with politicising the administration to realise its narrow party interests, reports UNB.  
'Politicisation of administration by the government had become a disease. It is hampering the smooth functioning of the administration,' he told a party conference here.  
The GF president also accused the ruling party of creating a 'reign of terror' in the country ignoring the laws of the land.  
Criticising the enactment of the Anti-Terrorism Act, he said opposition workers are being harassed unnecessarily by abusing this law and demanded that it be repealed for healthy growth of democracy in the country.  
Presided over by district Gano Forum president Advocate Kamrul Islam at the local Muslim Institute auditorium, the conference was addressed, among others, by central leaders Zahurul Islam and Abu Zahid Mollah Junar.

## 2 Shantibahinimen surrender

From Staff Correspondent  
CHITTAGONG, Dec 1: Two Shantibahinimen this morning surrendered to the security forces with their arms at Barkal under Rangamat hill district.  
They were identified as Avjitt Marma 20 and Ice Bum 20. They deposited two rifles, an official source said.  
The two tribal rebels laid down their weapon responding to the general amnesty announced by the government after the fourth round of peace talks held with the leaders of the Shantibahini on July 14. The amnesty expires on December 31.  
Today's surrender of the Shantibahinimen along with arms is the first of its kind since the announcement of the amnesty. Earlier, about 20 others surrendered to the authorities without arms, according to official sources.