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NEWS BRIEFS

President assents to six bills

President Abdur Rahman Biswas has assented to six bills passed by Parliament. The bills are: 1) The Electricity (Amendment) Bill, 1993; (2) The Land Development Tax (Amendment) Bill, 1993; (3) The Narcotics Control (Amendment) Bill, 1993; (4) The Rangamati Hill District Local Government Parishad (Second Amendment) Bill, 1993; (5) Khagrachhari Hill District Local Government Parishad (Second Amendment) Bill, 1993; and (6) and Bandarban Hill District Local Government Parishad (Second Amendment) Bill, 1993, reports UNB.

BCS preliminary test results

A total of 18,595 candidates came out successful in the 15th BCS (1993-94) preliminary test. An official handout said the candidates who were selected temporarily have been asked to appear for the written test. The written test is expected to be held in March, 1994. Details time-table of the written test will be announced through newspaper advertisement in due time, the handout said, reports UNB.

Prokrichi-BCS mass holiday

By Staff Correspondent
The Prokrichi-BCS Central Action Committee at a meeting yesterday asked all members to observe a three-day 'mass holiday' from December 11 to 13.
It also asked the members of the Prokrichi-BCS to observe the programmes taken up by the Association earmarked for December 15 to December 30 including mass resignation.
The Action Committee will hold a press conference on December 9 to announce the details of their future programmes.

15-member JS body proposed Joint move to decide local govt system

By Staff Correspondent

The Jatiya Sangsad (JS) yesterday witnessed an unprecedented Treasury Bench move for accommodating the opposition views on the concept of local governments and formation of a special parliamentary committee to decide on the composition as well as function of the district level local government.

The proposed committee — a fifteen-member one, headed by the Local Government and

Rural Development (LGRD) Minister, will also decide on the system of election of the district council chief. The committee will have seven members each from the Treasury and the Opposition Benches.

The House was scheduled to consider a Treasury Bench bill relating to the district council body.

Introduced during the last budget session, the bill came

for consideration in an amended form following a thorough discussion on the issue in the parliamentary wing of the BNP.

However, the proposal for formation of the special committee, following an hour of negotiation between the leading members of the Treasury and Opposition benches, came from Barrister Abdus Salam Tahukder.

See page 12 Col 3

Advani, Joshi and six others arrested

NEW DELHI, Dec 7: Police on Tuesday arrested eight top leaders of a Hindu nationalist party in connection with the demolition of a disputed mosque a year ago, reports AP.

The arrests spawned fears of violence in India, where Hindus make up 82 per cent of 880 million people.

In New Delhi, the city's 42,000 police force was put on high alert, a police source said. There was no immediate report of violence.

Lal Krishna Advani, president of the Bharatiya Janata Party, known by its acronym BJP, his deputy Murlidhar Joshi and former chief minister of Uttar Pradesh state, Kalyan Singh, were among the eight who were arrested in Lucknow, capital of Uttar Pradesh state.

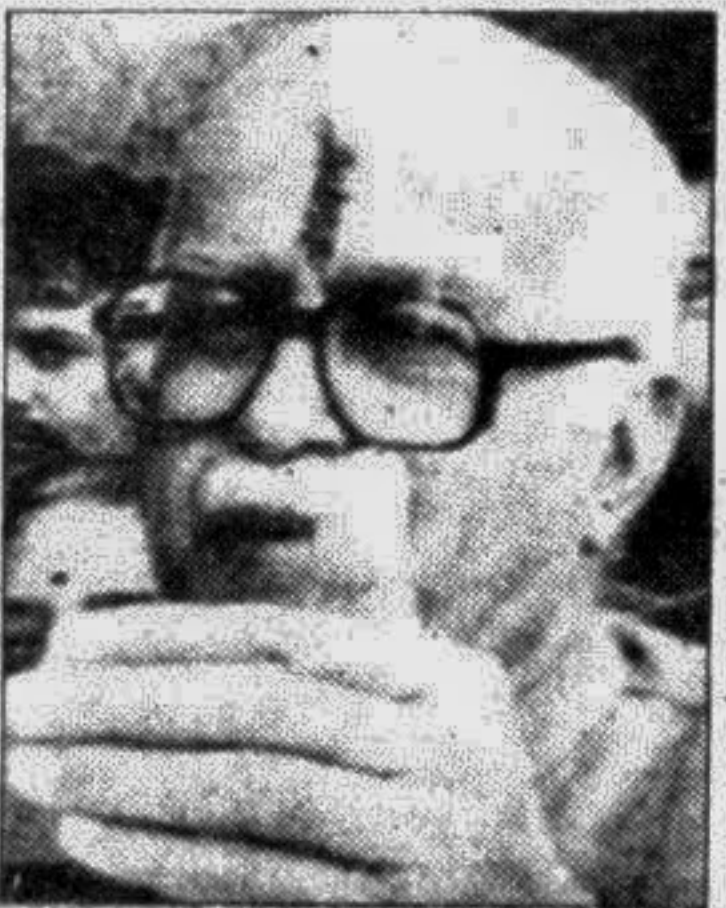
"This is outrageous and we have every reason to protest," said BJP spokesman Dev Das Apt, speaking on the report of the arrests.

Advani, Joshi and Singh went to Lucknow to appear before a court Tuesday to reply to charges that they were behind the Dec 6, 1992, demolition.

A year ago, members of Hindu groups backed by the BJP demolished the 16th century Babri Mosque in Ayodhya,

claiming it was built by Muslim invaders who had demolished a Hindu temple. Many Hindus believe the site is the birth place of the warrior god Ram.

Destruction of the mosque set off two months of communal riots across India that killed at least 2,000 people.



L. K. Advani

On Monday, the anniversary of the Ayodhya demolition, bombs exploded in five trains and a bus, killing at least three people and injuring 27 others.

Reuter adds: The leaders refused to seek bail after they were formally charged in an Indian court today.

See Page 12 Col 7

Fair polls not possible under BNP govt: Hasina

GOPALGANJ, Dec 7: Awami League president and leader of the opposition in parliament today (Tuesday) reiterated her demand for holding the national elections under a caretaker government, reports UNB.

The last 30 months have proved that fair polls are not possible under the BNP government which has politicised everything, including the administration," she said while addressing a reception in front of the party office here this afternoon.

District Awami League, Chhatra League (M-I) and Juba League jointly organised the reception.

Presided over by Mohammad Ali Khan Abu Mia, the function was addressed, among others, by party's education and cultural secretary Obaidul Kader, district general secretary Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah and Kazi Abdur Rashid MF.

Sheikh Hasina said if voted to power, Awami League would undertake programmes to ensure education, health, housing and employment for the poor people.

She was accompanied, among others, by journalist Rahat Khan, film producer Abbas Ullah, artiste Tarana Halim and Sharmila Radha Eva.



Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia addressing a public meeting in observance of the Democracy Day at the Democracy Square in the city yesterday. — Star photo

No Constitutional provision for polls under care-taker govt: PM

By Staff Correspondent

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia Tuesday dismissed the Opposition's demand for holding elections under a caretaker government saying it had no constitutional sanction.

"How can they even demand elections under a caretaker government? The Constitution does not provide for holding elections under a caretaker administration. They are unwilling to accept the sanctity of the Constitution. They are demanding the election only to frustrate the large-scale development programmes of the BNP government", Begum Zia told a public meeting at Fulbaria in the city yesterday.

The meeting was held to mark the Democracy Day observed Monday.

The Prime Minister, in an oblique reference to the Awami League chief, pointed out that the AL leader had complained of 'subtle rigging' in the last parliamentary polls which was held under a neutral caretaker government.

"How can they demand an election under a caretaker government when they themselves expressed no faith in it," she asked.

Begum Zia, chairperson of

the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), also accused some Opposition political organisations of conspiring against the development process initiated by her party.

"To them, nothing is greater—the country, the democracy and development—than their own interest."

The Prime Minister paid tributes to those who laid down their lives for the restoration of democracy and congratulated the people on the occasion of the Democracy Day Monday and said her party was in the process of fulfilling all its pre-election pledges.

Criticising the Opposition for demanding elections under a caretaker government, she said the fairness of the February, 1991 parliamentary polls was internationally-acclaimed.

The Election Commission had maintained its neutrality and ensured fairness in all subsequent by-elections, she pointed out.

"As the party in power, we never even attempted to rig any elections. In many polls we won, while in several we lost. This only speaks of our faith in the Election Commission."

Begum Zia criticised the Awami League Chief's statement on giving a 'jolt' to the government to teach democracy and said "We are not afraid because the people are with us."

The BNP government wants to further the development process in the country against all threats, she reiterated.

"Keep vigil against those who want to destroy the democratic process. Try to understand why they are doing it and to serve whom," the PM stated and advised. "The cannot be your friends."

Without naming the Awami League, Begum Zia criticised the party for joining hands with the autocratic forces and indulging in the politics of hartal and strikes.

Referring to the Democracy Day, Begum Khaleda Zia said, "This was a day that belonged to the democracy loving people of the country. This day belongs to the people of Dhaka and to all those who made sacrifices at the altar of Democracy. That is why, this place where the meeting is being held has been named Democracy Square."

The Prime Minister regretted

See page 12 Col 1

Elections to 3 city corpns Jan 30

Elections to the Rajshahi, Khulna and Chittagong City Corporations will be held on January 30, 1994, the Election Commission announced last night, reports UNB.

The announcement said elections to the Dhaka City Corporation will be held on completion of delimitation of Wards, which is expected soon.

As per schedule, nomination papers for election of the Mayor and the Ward Commissioners are to be submitted on December 21 (Tuesday) to the Returning officer. Scrutiny of nomination papers will be held on December 22 while the date for withdrawal of candidature has been fixed December 30. Polling will be held on January 30, 1994.

The EC has appointed Deputy Election Commissioners as Returning Officers and District Election Commissioners as Assistant Returning Officers.

Tariff anomalies will go, says NBR chief

By Staff Correspondent

The Chairman of the National Board of Revenue (NBR), Dr Akbar Ali Khan at a meeting Tuesday gave the assurance of removing all the tariff anomalies through constant dialogue with the Tariff Commission and the business community.

"I am in constant touch with the Chairman of the Tariff Commission and I hope the situation would improve soon," Dr Khan said, while addressing a meeting organised by the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) at its conference hall yesterday afternoon.

Refuting the allegation that the recommendations of the Tariff Commission, have been rejected, he said, its recommendations have actually been accepted in a number of cases. In case of non-acceptance of any recommendation, the NBR notifies the rejection and yet there remains the scope for re-considering the cases, if the Ministry of Commerce recommends, he said.

He also said the NBR is not

See Page 12 Col 6

News Analysis

Opening up the fringes of the telecommunication sector

By A Special Correspondent

The Telecommunications Minister's revelations to The Daily Star that private sector will be allowed to operate thana level telephone systems and cellular phones indicate that, at present, only the fringes of the telecom market will be privatised.

The Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTB) is Bangladesh's telecom monopoly as well as regulatory body. Under the 1979 BTB Ordinance all telecommunications products and services must be supplied by BTB or be authorised by it.

In the last ten years BTB has managed to increase the number of telephone lines by only 120,000 to around 230,000. Each BTB employee has only 12 lines to manage according to a recent study by World Bank recruited consultants. Yet quality of service is

poor and BTB itself estimated that customers' call completion rate was only 30 per cent.

Yet BTB is a profit making organisation! BTB's published accounts show around a doubling of operating profits since 1988. And this will increase sharply next year if the telecom minister's expectation is realised.

The prospect of privatisation of BTB was examined in great depth by World Bank appointed consultants. The consultants examined various other policy options as well — including a joint venture between BTB and a private investor, permitting a second telecommunication company, making the telecommunication sector open to as many companies as are willing to enter it and reform of BTB itself.

During the course of recent deliberations on the future of

the telecommunications sector the government expressed a preference for an arrangement under which BTB will remain the major operator. But, there will be greater autonomy for BTB and there will be other provider of telephone services to provide a competitive spur to BTB. The recent amendment of the 1979 BTB Ordinance was made to facilitate this.

It has been recognised that BTB will have greatest autonomy if it is converted into a public limited company. This step, however, is not being considered for the immediate present for fear of opposition from BTB workers and from political platforms. Also, BTB's accounting information is not adequate for an immediate conversion into public limited company.

Private telecommunication See Page 12 Col 8

Int'l parliamentarians' confce

Population will fall, ultimately

By Staff Correspondent

The number of population will stand at around 6 billion in the next 10 years and by the end of the next century, the number would reach 19 billion.

The president of the Population Council, New York, Margaret Catly-Carlson presented a paper on the concluding day of the International Parliamentarians Conference on "Population, Poverty and Life-Style" which said, ultimately the population growth rates would fall and become stable.

The conference organised by the New York based Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA) and the Khan Foundation, Dhaka in cooperation with the Rockefeller Foundation, the World Bank, and the Cowell Foundation was attended by parliamentarians from 16 countries including those from Bangladesh.

The conference yesterday discussed on "Women: Poorest of the poor", "Policies to narrow the economic gap between the North and the South", and de-

graded on "Global environmental degradation: A North-South shared responsibility?"

The conference was addressed by Margaret Carlson, executive director of the Concerned Women for Family Planning, Bangladesh Mufaw-eza Khan, member of Bangladesh Gano Forum AMA Mubith, while Dr Irma Alam-syah Putra, MP of Indonesia chaired a session and secretary general of PGA Dr Kennedy Graham presided the concluding session to draft a recommended change to selected chapters of the annotated outline of the final document of an upcoming conference in Cairo.

The president of the Population Council observed that the developing countries were passing through a time when death rates against the birth rates had significantly decreased due to better medical science for which the number of population had been increasing sharply.

But ultimately, due to population control measures and other socio-economic factors the number of births would exceed the number of deaths which would stabilize the growth of population.

Margaret observed, the South had made a remarkable progress in controlling the size of a family. Where as, it took 58 years for the USA to reduce its average family size to 3.5 from 6.5, Indonesia achieved it within 28 years, Colombia in 15 years and China within a mere 7 years.

In another paper by the country representative of the Pathfinder International Dr M Alauddin, it was revealed that the women literacy rate in Bangladesh had increased to 25.4 per cent in 1991 from 9.6 in 1961.

However, the literacy rate of males is still much higher than the women. The overall literacy rate was 38.9 per cent in 1991. Alauddin observed that women

See Page 12 Col 8

Troops block march toward Hazratbal

SRINAGAR, Dec 7: About 1,200 people marched toward Kashmir's holiest shrine Tuesday until Indian forces stopped them by firing tear gas and hitting them with batons, reports AP.

The paramilitary soldiers also arrested two leaders of the march, Professor Abdul Gani and Mulvi Abas Hussain Ansari. At least six marchers were beaten by Indian soldiers and taken away in armoured vehicles, but the government refused to say how many people had been injured or arrested.

The protesters wanted to clean Hazratbal shrine and examine the relic stored there that many Muslims describe as a hair from the beard of Prophet Mohammad (SM), the founder of Islam.

No one has been allowed in See page 12 Col 1

Benazir defends position as PPP chief

ISLAMABAD, Dec 7: Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto defended today her position as chairwoman of the ruling Pakistan People's Party (PPP), which has been bitterly disputed by her mother, reports AFP.

The PPP central executive committee made Benazir Bhutto the sole leader of the party on Sunday, removing Nusrat Bhutto from the office she held for 16 years under a system of co-chairmanship with her daughter.

The election was a formalization of a de facto position. Benazir Bhutto told reporters in her first comments after a strong protest by Nusrat Bhutto against the PPP central committee decision, seen as intensifying a rift in the family. Benazir Bhutto said her

mother had been invited to become chief patron of PPP and she hoped that Nusrat Bhutto would accept it.

"I have great respect for my mother, but politics is a different matter and my mother's status is above politics, the 40-year old PPP leader said."

Editorial on Page 4

Benazir Bhutto said her accession to the top party office had been decided in fully democratic manner.

She vowed to undertake a vigorous campaign to strengthen the organization of the party, founded by her father, former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto 26 years ago.

Bhutto was overthrown by military ruler General Mohammad Zia ul-Haq in 1977 and hanged two years later on a murder conspiracy charge.

SA multi-racial council takes office

CAPE TOWN, Dec 7: A multi-racial Transitional Executive Council (TEC) took office on Tuesday to oversee preparations for South Africa's first all-race elections, effectively ending 341 years of exclusive White rule, reports Reuter.

The 19-party council, comprising White and Black groups including Nelson Mandela's African National Congress (ANC) and other anti-apartheid liberation movements, held its historic first meeting in Cape Town at 10 am (0800 GMT).

Although President FW de Klerk's White minority government will continue in office until the elections on April 27.

Blacks for the first time will have their hands on the reins of power hitherto enjoyed exclusively by Whites.

Detailed Story on Page 5



Members of the Bangladesh Secretariat Employees' Union held their elections blocking the Abdul Gani Road for the day yesterday. — Star photo