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NEWS BRIEFS

Biswas attends lawyers' luncheon

President Abdur Rahman Biswas attended the annual luncheon party of the Supreme Court Bar Association at the Supreme Court premises yesterday. Chief Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed, President of the Bar Association Kazi Golam Mahbub, Information Minister Barrister Nazmul Huda, Education Minister Barrister Zamiruddin Sircar, State Minister for Establishment Barrister Aminul Haq, Judges of the Appellate Division and High Court Division, Attorney General Aminul Haq and a large number of advocates were present, reports UNB.

India Today hits city stands

India's leading news magazine, the India Today, made its formal access to Bangladesh market yesterday. A local firm, International Book Agencies, will be importing the highest-circulated newsmagazine for Dhaka market, reports UNB.

Cold wave claims 9 more in Pabna

PABNA, Jan 20: Cold wave claimed nine more people including three babies in five thanas in the last 48 hours. According to local people, the victims are Meherunnesa, 60, Zabed Pramanik, 70, and Mokarram Hossain, 62 of Sadar thana, Zulfiqar, 1, Amu, 2, Sobeda Bibi, 52 of Ishurdi thana, Bimal, 2, of Agharia, and Samad Bepari, 62 of Chatmohar thana and Totamia, 52 of Bhangura thana. UNB

Govt bows to major demands

Doctors call off strike

By Staff Correspondent

The Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA) has called off the indefinite strike at the country's hospitals yesterday — the tenth day of the strike — following specific documented decisions by the government.

At a press conference in the city last night, the BMA leaders announced their decision withdrawing all strikes for the next three months.

The leaders said, the government had already issued two official orders and agreed to issue seven more within January 29 towards implementation of some of the major

demands of the doctors.

The press conference, addressed by its Secretary General Gazl Abdul Haq, was also attended by BMA central leaders including Dr Moshtaq Hossain, Dr Moinul Hasan, Dr Fakhrul Islam Chowdhury, Dr MA Selim, Dr Rafi Ahmed and others.

The BMA decision ending the strike came after a final round of negotiation between the Health Minister and the BMA liaison committee headed by Dr AB Bhuiyan yesterday afternoon.

Dr MA Majed, President of



Posters of all parties and candidates for the Jan 30 DCC polls hang over the narrow B Das Road in Sutrapur in the older part of the city, blocking the sunlight, even at midday yesterday.

— Star photo

Euro-Parliament asks Owen to quit as mediator

PARIS, Jan 20: Frustrated by unsuccessful efforts to halt the war in Bosnia, the European Parliament on Thursday called for the dismissal of Lord David Owen, the European Union's mediator to the Yugoslav peace process, reports AP.

In a 160 to 90 vote with 13 abstentions, the European Union's 518-member assembly said Owen has not fulfilled his task to bring peace to the war-torn region.

The European Parliament has little power regarding foreign affairs and can only urge European governments to take action. But its political statements are seen as a general reflection of European thought.

Deputies criticised "the mandate and the strategy of EU and UN mediators, who have arrived at no result and who persist in wanting to cut

\$ 3.6m Japanese grant for Rohingya refugees

By Staff Correspondent

Japan yesterday announced a decision to contribute 3.6 million US dollars to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) repatriation programme for the Rohingya refugees.

According to a Japanese embassy statement, the government of Japan decided on January 14 to contribute the amount to the UNHCR's repatriation programme for the refugees from Myanmar.

The Japanese response comes following a UNHCR international appeal for a donation of 34 million dollars for the ongoing repatriation programme. The appeal was made after the UN agency

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Inter-regional confce suggests 29-pt plan for accountability

A five-day ASEAN-SAARC conference on administrative and financial accountability ended here yesterday with the adoption of a 29-point set of recommendations for making the administration accountable to the people, reports UNB.

The conference defined accountability as 'answerability to the people through the politico-legal systems introduced by their representatives' and pointed out the lack of focus in the interface between the political and bureaucratic administration.

It suggested that the ambiguous role of the politicians be minimised by providing a predictable interface with the administration, and effective conduct rules be observed by both politicians and bureaucrats.

The conference suggested the Rules of Business be strictly observed by the bureaucrats. The bureaucratic administration should agitate wherever there is any deviation from these rules, it said.

There has been a proliferation of agencies, laws and rules regarding indiscipline, corruption, malpractices and accountability, and it is strongly felt that this trend should be halted. The conference suggested these agencies and laws be consolidated to minimise

their exploitative role.

It called for making the procedures simple and understandable and accessible for the common consumers of information to promote objectivity and transparency.

Participants at the conference pointed out the absence of 'political will' to fight corruption. The answer is to be found out at the appropriate levels.

Calling for administrative credibility of the bureaucracy, the conference said the reputation of the bureaucrats is the only insurance they can rely upon in trying circumstances.

The participants stressed the need for encouraging modern management practices, with particular reference to personal relationship with the staff, to create an atmosphere of commitment to the leadership.

They also laid emphasis on 'sunshine laws', honest dissent within the organisation, minimising exploitative tendencies of the media, establishment of formal representative local government system and providing moral education to stop the erosion of moral values.

The conference pointed out that efficiency, which is not linked with effectiveness.

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DCC polls diary

By Staff Correspondent

Door-to-door campaigning has picked up, but the city-dwellers have also devised a new way to evade the persistent candidates.

Apparently to get rid of unwanted campaigners, some voters in the Motijheel area of the city have pasted messages on their doors like "No voters live here" or "we plan to go for an outing on the poll day."

"How long can you entertain an unending stream of campaigners with broad smiles, particularly when they turn up at unlikely hours," commented one anguished voter.

The wastepaper or rag pickers and decorators are doing brisk business.

The DCC polls have opened up a great opportunity for them with mounds of waste posters and leaflets to collect from the streets and from the houses.

Folding chairs, loudspeakers and materials for shamans have become scarce with candidates already booking those weeks in advance.

A ward commissioner candidate said he wanted to pay double the rent for some fold-

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CEC asks officials to ensure fair voting

Chief Election Commissioner Justice Abdur Rouf yesterday asked the election officials to do their duties with honesty and neutrality in the coming city corporation elections to ensure fair voting, reports UNB.

"You will have to prove to the people as well as local and foreign observers that elections were held free and fair," he told a meeting at the Rajshahi Zila Parishad auditorium.

Justice Rouf also asked the officials to abide by the election rules and provisions. "Stringent measures will be taken against violators of election rules and terrorists," he said.

Administering a note of warning against any unfair means by any quarters, the CEC said the commission would not hesitate to take stern action against those people or quarters.

Justice Rouf explained duties and responsibilities of the officials and said any lapses or negligence would not be tolerated.

The CEC also appealed to Rajshahi city dwellers to cooperate with the commission in staging free and fair polls scheduled for January 30.

Private jute mills worried over CBA demands

By Staff Correspondent

Agitation by labour unions in some private sector jute mills demanding implementation of the new Wages Commission — meant only for the public sector workers — may lead to the closure of those units, cautioned the Bangladesh Jute Mills Association (BJMA) yesterday.

In a statement the association noted with concern that workers, led by their respective collective bargaining agents (CBAs), of four private jute mills — Ajax, Mohsen, Sonali and Nowapara Jute Mills in the Khulna and Jessor areas — gheraoed the management earlier this month demanding implementation of the Wages Commission of 1993.

"Under the circumstances the local managements were compelled to sign some agreements under duress and unlawful confinement."

It pointed out that the new Wages Commission is only applicable for the public sector enterprises as per the government announcement.

It also added that a jute advisory committee meeting held in November last and chaired by the Jute Minister decided that the new Wages Commission award is applicable for the public sector jute mills only and "under no circumstances shall it be applicable for the private

sector jute mills and no precedence be created in this regard".

The BJMA statement then goes on to state: "Since the above-mentioned agreements were obtained under duress and wrongful confinement, the concerned mills had no alternative but to repudiate the so-called agreements and take other legal measures."

Moreover the private mills cannot even contemplate increasing their operating costs through wage enhancements at this point, it said, if they are to be made viable under the planned World Bank-funded Jute Sector Restructuring Project, by containing their huge losses currently being incurred and reducing their costs significantly.

"The activities of the workers' unions may, in fact, lead to the closure of the jute mills, which will not be in the best interest of the country nor of the workers themselves," the BJMA cautioned.

Such activities, it added, would put the government's privatisation policy and the restructuring project at serious risk, not to mention its effect in discouraging new industrial investments, both local and foreign, in Bangladesh.

Russia to supply 7 rocket engines to India

MOSCOW, Jan 20: Russia is ready to supply India with a total of seven cryogenic rocket engines, not just two as provided for in a 1991 Russian-Indian contract, the Russian space agency announced as quoted by Interfax news agency on Wednesday, reports UNB.

It said the seven engines, representing a value of 220 million dollars, were aimed at offsetting the consequences of the Russian refusal to supply India with the technology and assistance provided for in that initial contract following US pressure on Moscow.

The United States opposed the agreement, which the Americans said violated the international agreement on non-proliferation of rocket technology — which Russia signed.

Russian Space Agency Director Yuri Koptev had said last month that four engines would be sold to India to offset the cancellation of the technological assistance.

The militants, fighting for an independent Kashmir, fired on a group of 25 security men Wednesday evening on a mountain highway in the Doda district.

Kashmiris kill 6 Indian troops

JAMMU, Jan 20: In one of the most serious incidents this year, Muslim guerrillas ambushed a patrol of border police, killing six and wounding six others, reports AP.

The militants, fighting for an independent Kashmir, fired on a group of 25 security men Wednesday evening on a mountain highway in the Doda district.

Mysterious leaflet incites opinion against Quadianis

By Staff Correspondent

A leaflet recently circulated in Dhaka on behalf of the so-called "amra dhakabasi" (We the Dhaka-dwellers) by one Abdullah of Nayapaltan has invited people to join a procession which is scheduled to start from the Chawkbazar Jame Masjid after Jumma prayers today.

The leaflet charged the government with conspiring against the anti-quadiani campaign and harbouring the sect, commonly known as the Ahmadiyya.

Leaders of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat, Bangladesh have expressed grave concern over the deteriorating situation and called upon the government to ensure the safety and security of the community.

A December 24 congregation

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