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NEWS BRIEFS

Justice Hossain laid to rest

From Our Correspondent SYLHET, Feb 12: Election Commissioner Justice Syed Mesbahuddin Hossain was buried at the graveyard adjacent to the mazar of Hazrat Shahjalal (RA) after Asr prayers today. His Namaz-e-Janaza was held in the Dargah premises. Several thousand people attended the Janaza.

BNP nomination seekers' interview

The Bangladesh National Party (BNP) has requested those who have applied for the party nomination for the Magura-2 by-election to appear before the interview at 3pm tomorrow at the party central office at 28/1 Naya Paltan in the city, reports BSS.

Aminul Hoque returns home

State Minister for Establishment Barrister Aminul Hoque returned Dhaka yesterday from Washington after attending the National Prayer Breakfast programme. The programme was held at the US capital on February 3, reports UNB.

Call money rates

Money rates in the call, money market during the last week ranged from 2.50 per cent to 8.00 per cent. During the same week interest rates offered by the bank on certificate of deposits varied from 5.50 per cent to 8.75 per cent. The bank rate, however, remained unchanged at 6 per cent, reports UNB.

Sehri, Iftar timings

Rmdn	Feb	Sehri	Iftar
01	13	—	5:58 pm
02	14	5:11 am	5:59 pm
03	15	5:10 am	6:00 pm

The Daily Star

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RAMADAN 1, 1414 HIJRI



All is set to receive Chakma refugees

All is set to welcome the Chakma refugees when their homecoming from the Indian camps begins Tuesday morning, reports BSS.

The government has made elaborate arrangements to welcome them back home and also provide necessary help to facilitate their rehabilitation, official sources said.

Minister for Communications Md Ahmed, who mainly conducted the discussions for their return after about seven years, will personally receive the first batch of 403 Chakma families when they arrive at the Khagrachhari border point from the camps in the Tripura province of India.

The Governor of Tripura province Romesh Bhandari is also scheduled to be present at Khagrachhari on the occasion from the Indian side.

After the arrival of the first batch, the refugees would return home in batches three days a week, official sources said.

All preparations have been completed at Ramgarh and Tabalchhari under Khagrachhari Hill District to receive more than four hundred tribal families returning between February 15 and 22.

According to official sources, 100 tribal families will return to Bangladesh on February 15, 105 families on

February 17, 76 families on February 19 and 124 families on February 22.

Over 50,000 tribals left the Chittagong Hill Tracts for the Indian state of Tripura over the past ten years at the instigation of so-called Shanti Bahini. The tribals are returning to their homes in Chittagong Hill Tracts on the basis of an understanding among the representatives of India, Bangladesh and the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity in the recent past.

Reception committees consisting of Union Parishad chairmen and village headmen, See Page 12 Col 1

Security stepped up in Khagrachhari

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Feb 12: The authorities have tightened security in Khagrachhari Hill District in the back-drop of recent violence by the activists of the Pahari Chhatri Parishad.

According to official sources, the security measures have been taken to ensure peaceful repatriation of the Chakma refugees, scheduled to return home from February 15.

The police have arrested ten activists of the Pahari Chhatri Parishad in connection with Thursday's violence. They are Kalamoni Tripura, Pronoy Chakma, Kusum Moni Tripura, Bipul Chakma, Sathy Bikash Tripura, Prongsita Tripura, Pradipita Kisa, Rikton Chakma, Priti Kumar Tripura and Prakash Chakma.

Section 144 has been imposed with effect from February 4 to 24 in a bid to maintain law and order.

Dhaka seeks seat on top UNHCR body

By Farid Hossain, Guest Writer

Bangladesh, which suffered two major refugee crises in the past one decade, seeks to enter the Executive Committee of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

The request was conveyed to the UN Secretary General by Bangladesh's Permanent Representative to the United Nations in June last year. This was circulated as a provisional agenda to the Economic and Social Council last month.

Having played host to tens of thousands of Rohingya refugees twice in a decade Bangladesh strongly believes that it qualifies for the membership on the Executive Committee, a policy-making body that usually advises the High Commissioner for the refugees.

"Bangladesh is thus keenly interested in the UNHCR and is in a position to make a meaningful contribution to the work of the committee," the Permanent representative said in his application.

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Ramadan begins

Holy Ramadan begins today throughout the country, reports BSS.

On the eve of the month of abstinence, President Abdur Rahman Biswas, Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina have, in separate messages, greeted the people of the country.

They called for upholding the spirit and solemnity of the holy month through utmost dedication, sacrifice, tolerance, and fellow feelings.

According to the Islamic Foundation, iftar today in Dhaka and its adjoining areas is at 5:58pm while the last time for sehri tonight ends at 5:11am.

Meanwhile the month of fasting for Muslims began Friday in parts of the Middle East.

Ghali invited to visit Bangladesh

The UN Secretary General Dr Boutros Boutros-Ghali has lauded Bangladesh's success in the field of social welfare and assured all possible help and cooperation for socio-economic uplift programme of the country, reports UNB.

This was stated when State Minister for Social Welfare Md Fazlur Rahman met with the Secretary General at the UN Headquarters in New York Thursday, said an official handout yesterday.

The State Minister invited the UN Secretary General to visit Bangladesh.

During the meeting, the State Minister gave a brief resume of the government measures in the field of education, particularly female education, health, human resource development, employment generation and credit to the poor.

He said, the government was striving hard to improve socio-economic situation of the country through poverty alleviation programmes.

Also present at the meeting were Under Secretary General for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development Nitin Desai and special adviser to Secretary General Ismat Kittan.

The UN chief recalled the meetings with Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia.

Tk 50,000 reward for arrest of main Lalbagh accused

By Staff Correspondent

Cold Storage Association, the General Secretary of the BICIC Shilpa Malik Samity Anwar Hossain, A Rashid Lebu of the Cargo Vessel Owners' Association, M A Malek Chowdhury of the Plastic Drabba Prastutkarak Association and Saifuddin Alim of the Re-rolling Mills Association were present at the press conference.

"Our exportable items are threatened by foreign goods but our market is open to foreigners," Alaudin Ahmed said. "This proved that the open market policy implemented by the Finance Minister was against the interests of the nation but was favourable to the foreigners. Actually, the open market economy is a blueprint designed to destroy the local industry."

The committee demanded punitive actions against those

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US, Japan appear to be on collision course on trade policy

WASHINGTON, Feb 12: The United States and Japan appeared to be on a collision course on trade policy today despite a friendly parting by President Clinton and Japanese Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa, reports Reuter.

After the two leaders had breakfast in the family quarters of the White House, Hosokawa said at a news conference that Tokyo would not drop its resistance to "numerical targets" to pacify the Americans on trade.

"We will not modify our position in that regard," the Japanese leader said.

Clinton suggested US retaliatory action could come quickly.

"We'll just have to examine what our next steps will be, and we'll be turning to that next week," he told reporters

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Withdrawal of VAT from local products demanded

By Staff Correspondent

The Inter-Association Industries Development and Rehabilitation Committee yesterday demanded withdrawal of the VAT from local products and implementation of the recommendations of the Sick Industries and Revitalisation Cell immediately.

At a press conference in the city, the leaders of the committee said the country's economy, "sometimes called a command economy, sometimes a mixed economy and now a free market economy, was actually a free-style economy in which the whole population was being used as guinea pigs."

Besides the convenor of the committee, Alaudin Ahmed, the president of the Bangladesh Specialised Textile Mills and Power Loom Industries Association Col (retd) Selimuddin, the vice president of the Bangladesh

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Unscheduled debates dislocate JS order of proceedings

By Nurul Kabir

the presidential speech was scheduled to begin Wednesday.

The legislators spent the whole of February 8 debating the then crisis arising out of the appointments of nine Additional High Court judges by the government. The following day passed debating whether a discussion in the House was called for in the changed circumstances vis-à-vis, the judges' appointments.

The proceedings of the House were adjourned for another day on February 10 to mourn the death of Abdul Quddus Makhani.

The other three bills were to be tabled respectively by Minister for Religious Affairs Mohammad Keramat Ali, State Minister for Cultural Affairs Jahanara Begum and Rafiqul Islam of the Awami League.

However, the JS session, resuming this morning after a two-day recess, is scheduled to discuss the issue of the post-polls violence at Lalbagh in the session.

According to the JS order of the day, printed and circulated by the Parliament Secretariat, two treasury bench-sponsored bills were to have been tabled in the House on February 8 and 9.

Two other private member bills, sponsored by the Opposition, were scheduled to be tabled Thursday, the private members' day. Discussion on

The NDP member's bill has sought job conditionalities of the officials and employees of private companies with limited liability.

The bill, if adopted by the House, would stop arbitrary hiring and firing of employees by the directors of the companies and put both the employers and the employees under some legal obligations to discharge their respective responsibilities.

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Bosnian talks end without progress

GENEVA, Feb 12: Bosnian peace talks broke up Saturday

despite increased pressure on the warring sides to reach a settlement before a NATO deadline against Bosnian Serbs, reports AP.

Despite the pressure from the United States and Russia, United Nations mediator Thorvald Stoltenberg said during the three days of negotiations among Bosnian Muslim, Serb and Croat leaders.

"We failed to solve the issue of disputed territories," Stoltenberg said, adding that a new meeting will be held at the end of February or beginning of March.

The United States has put new pressure on Bosnia's Serbs to make major concessions for a settlement of the war in the former Yugoslav republic, now in its 22nd month. Russia also pledged more active role in trying to persuade

the Serbs to be more flexible.

"There is no doubt that Russia and the Americans are working together... for the common good and in the interest of the political settlement," said Vitaly Churkin, Russia's deputy foreign minister and a special envoy at the talks.

But he added: "A solution will be extremely difficult to find despite the joint effort."

Churkin and US envoy Charles Redman, both of whom were stepping up their pressure on the Bosnian leaders, had apparently hoped the Serbs — faced with the NATO deadline — would be willing to make major concessions.

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international mediators have been trying to partition Bosnia among its warring Serbs, Muslims and Croats in what would remain a loose union. But the new US diplomatic approach apparently seeks a stronger constitutional

union of the three major ethnic groups.

Any such strong union

has been vehemently rejected by the Bosnian Serbs, who hold about 70 per cent of the Bosnian territory captured during the war. They want to divide the state and eventually succeed to form a union with neighbouring Serbia.

The NATO ultimatum

and the diplomatic support from Washington

have apparently