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NEWS BRIEFS

Khaleda shocked

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia yesterday expressed her shock and grief at the loss of lives and property of Indonesians in the powerful earthquake that hit Sumatra on Wednesday. In a condolence message, Begum Zia said, "I would like to express our profound shock and heartfelt grief at the loss of valuable lives and property due to the severe earthquake which hit the island of Sumatra on February 16," reports UNB.

City BNP meets today

An emergency meeting of the BNP Dhaka City unit will be held today at 3 pm at party central office. City BNP president Mir Shawqat Ali will preside. City unit vice president and presidents, general secretaries and organising secretaries of all thana units have been requested to attend the meeting, reports UNB.

Fahd greets Biswas

King Fahd bin Abdul Aziz al Saud of Saudi Arabia has greeted President Abdur Rahman Biswas on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan. In a letter to President Biswas, King Fahd said, "I pray to Allah to make this month accompanied with blessings and accept all of our fastings and prayers." He also prayed for continued prosperity and stability of Bangladesh, reports UNB.

Rmdn	Feb	Sehri	Iftar
06	18	—	6:02 pm
07	19	5:09 am	6:02 pm
08	20	5:08 am	6:03 pm

'Policy dialogue' with cabinet colleagues Saifur refuses to take all blame for backlash of reforms

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday denied that his policies were responsible for a political setback for the ruling party and a blow to domestic industry, reports UNB.

"Economic reform is the collective policy of the government involving all the ministries concerned, not an individual one," Saifur was quoted to have told a discussion meeting participated by a number of his cabinet colleagues and senior officials.

Saifur Rahman's economic reforms were blamed for the recent debacle of the ruling party in the city corporation elections as well as for an influx of foreign goods.

The Finance Minister defended himself at a 'policy dialogue' on the on-going eco-

nomic reform policies of the government, held at NEC Bhaban at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar.

The first of its kind, the closed-door meeting was attended by Foreign Minister ASM Mostafizur Rahman, Communications Minister Oli Ahmed, Energy Minister Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, Health Minister Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf, Industries Minister AH Zahiruddin Khan, State Minister for Planning Moyeen Khan and State Minister for Textiles Abdul Mannan.

Presided over by Saifur Rahman, the meeting had detailed and lively discussions lasting for three hours, said an official handout.

The Finance Minister did not, however, deny that his

policies had given the way to foreign goods to flood the domestic market.

"Our country is opening up its market to foreign goods by substantially reducing tariff rates and taking other liberalised measures for justifiable reasons. We also expect a favourable response from other countries," Rahman was quoted to have told the meeting.

He, however, pointed to the protectionist policies pursued by some western countries.

The Finance Minister said though carrying out of economic reform in a democratic society like Bangladesh is difficult, yet it is necessary for the long term benefit. In implementing the reform, the gov-

ernment should be watchful so that the democratic process is not hampered. At the same time it has to ensure adequate compensatory and safety measures for the persons affected.

Defending the reforms, he said it is aimed at broad-based economic growth with equitable distribution of resources. The key to economic growth is appropriate policies, proper technology, good governance, adequate investment and savings. To achieve these objectives, all restrictive policies and regulatory impediments must be removed.

Saifur said the rate of savings in Bangladesh is not encouraging. Though the domestic contribution to the ADP increased substantially over the

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Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia yesterday hosted an iftar at Sugandha in honour of her cabinet colleagues, MPs and leaders of different political parties. From left are: AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury, Speaker Shaikh Razzak Ali, the PM, Gana Forum Convenor Dr. Kamal Hossain, Awami League general secretary Zillur Rahman and LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdus Salam Talukder.

— PID photo

'Chakmas' return marks progress in Indo-Bangla ties'

Bangladesh views the repatriation of "Chakma" refugees from India to their homes in the Chittagong Hill Tracts as a "forward movement" in the bilateral ties between India and Bangladesh, a Foreign Office spokesman said here yesterday.

Terming the development as a resolution of a long-standing problem, the spokesman, Foreign Secretary MR Osmany, said this not only facilitates the return of the refugees, but also reflects the willingness of the two countries to settle seemingly intractable problems.

The governments of the two countries, the refugees themselves and others made this possible," he said of the repatriation that began last Tuesday with the return of the first batch comprising 77 families.

Osmany said the return of the refugees has come about after months of intense negotiations and added that the repatriation of the first batch in the presence of important persons from both the countries augurs well for return of all the refugees.

A total of 1,98,177 refugees await repatriation in 16 evacuation and three transit camps, he added.

Replying to a question, the Foreign Secretary denied that repatriation of the "Rohingya" refugees had slowed down and said the 16th meeting between the senior officials of the two countries could not take place

due to pre-occupation of the Myanmar side.

He said the meeting is expected to be held after Ramadan.

The Foreign Secretary said Bangladesh and Myanmar are in the process of concluding a border trade agreement, the draft of which has already been prepared and the agreement will be signed after examination.

Hearing of writ against DCC repolling adjourned

By Staff Correspondent

Hearing of the writ petition relating to repolling in three centres of the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) was held by a division bench of the High Court yesterday.

The hearing was adjourned until Sunday morning.

A BNPK-backed commissioner candidate Abul Ahsan Talukder Noni of Ward 57 filed the writ challenging the cancellation of the results of three polling centres on the Dhaka University campus. The division bench comprising Justice Abdul Jalil and Justice Ruhul Amin, after a preliminary hearing earlier, issued a stay order on repolling in the centres for two weeks from February 8 and also issued a *rule nisi* on the Election Commission and the Government.

"We are, indeed, happy and we encourage both parties for talks that are aimed at improving the climate in the region," he said. Bangladesh has always welcomed such positive developments.

Asked about Bangladesh's response to the proposed talks between India and Pakistan in China next week, the Foreign Secretary said Dhaka welcomes such move, aimed at reducing tensions between the two neighbours.

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tion of the draft.

Referring to the recent meeting of the heads of the five United Nations agencies here — for the first time outside the United Nations headquarters in New York or at Rome — Osmany said the choice of Bangladesh as the venue of such a meeting reflected a strong commitment of these five agencies towards working in close cooperation with this country.

The Foreign Secretary said the UN agencies have committed to redouble support to Bangladesh and also assured to give special priority to this country in recognition to its commendable achievements in various sectors of the economy.

Osmany mentioned the visit of the special envoy of Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and said his talks with Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia and Foreign Minister Mostafizur Rahman covered issues including the human rights issue in Kashmir.

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PM takes iftar with politicians

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia hosted an iftar party in honour of cabinet ministers, members of Parliament and leaders of different political parties at her Sugandha office here yesterday, reports BSS.

Begum Zia, who is also chairperson of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), exchanged greetings with them.

Speaker Shaikh Razzak Ali, Deputy Leader of the House

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BSS regrets report on Sheikh Hasina

The Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS) regretted an "inadvertent mistake" while reporting certain parts of the proceedings of the Jatiya Sangsads on February 14 that the Leader of the Opposition, Sheikh Hasina had written letters to the foreign aid missions.

The fact, as discussed in the Sangsads, was that the Leader of the Opposition had written letters to various educational institutions which received assistance from the government out of funds given by donor agencies. The issue was raised by a treasury bench member during the question hour on February 14, the agency said.

The mistake was not at all deliberate but it occurred because the reporter of the agency concerned could not

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11 killed in road mishaps

By Staff Correspondent

At least 11 persons were killed and several others injured in separate road accidents in Dhaka, Narayanganj and Tangail yesterday.

Seven died in the capital and two each in Narayanganj and Tangail.

According to police, four persons were killed when a minibus rammed into an autorickshaw at Kutubkhali on the Biswa Road early yesterday morning.

The collision left the drivers of both the ill-fated vehicles killed on the spot. Two passengers of the auto-rickshaw succumbed to their injuries at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital. The identity

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Passers-by mill around the mangled auto-rickshaw after it was crushed by a minibus near Jatrabari in the city yesterday. The accident left four people dead.

— Star photo

Stormy debate in JS

BNP Chief Whip accused of misusing power

By Staff Correspondent

Parliament yesterday witnessed an unscheduled stormy debate over the alleged abuse of official powers by the acting chief whip of the treasury bench.

Tofael Ahmed of the Awami League, showing a letter from the Superintending Engineer, PWD of Feni dated February 12, said that ruling party whip Mahbubul Alam Tara "had ordered the engineer to collect money from contractors to patronise the Feni district football team."

"The treasury bench whip influenced the office of the Superintending Engineer to collect money from the contractors," Tofael alleged. It could not have happened if the Parliamentary Probe Committee on the Irrigation Ministry had investigated the alleged irregularities and submitted a

report to the House, Tofael added.

Mahbubul Alam Tara, denying the allegation, said the decision to raise funds for the national champions Feni football team was taken at a meeting which was also attended by AL MP Joynal Hazar.

"I have no ulterior motive but to help the Feni District Sports Association and the football team which has qualified to play in the final round of the national championship," Tara pointed out.

Hazari, however, denied having attended any such meeting and said he had submitted three notices to raise the issue in the House.

Taking the floor, Moudud Ahmed of the Jatiya Party said a "Pandora's Box" had been opened in the House. Government

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Khaleda goes to Japan March 28

Prime Minister Begum Zia will pay an official visit to Japan from March 28 to April 1 at the invitation of her Japanese counterpart Morihiro Hosokawa, reports UNB.

The government is attaching much importance to this visit. It is expected to help further strengthen the close bilateral relations between Bangladesh and Japan, especially in the fields of trade, investment and economic cooperation.

A government announcement yesterday said the tour would also provide an opportunity for exchange of views between the two prime ministers on international and regional issues of mutual concern.

During the visit, the Bangladeshi Prime Minister would have an audience with his Majesty the Emperor of Japan, Akihito.

Begum Zia would be meeting groups of Japanese business

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533 Chakmas return in second batch

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Feb 17: The second batch of Chakma refugees returned home today through Tabalchhari border of the Khagrachari hill district from the Indian State of Tripura.

According to an official source, 533 tribal refugees of 101 families returned to Bangladesh in this second batch today.

Bangladesh officials welcomed the returnees at the Tabalchhari reception camp. Officials said the repatriation today beginning from 3 pm continued until 9 pm.

Anwarul Islam's body arrives today

The body