

Come to CHITTAGONG Come to

BANGKOK THAI RESTAURANT

The only place for ORIGINAL THAI FOOD SEA FOOD in CHITTAGONG. Please try us and you will love BANGKOK THAI RESTAURANT more than ever before.

10% Discount to PayLess, Privilege Card Members

1443 ASIAN HIGHWAY, OPPOSITE Y. M. C. A. NASIRABAD CHITTAGONG, TEL: 226803, FAX: (880) (31) 225258

VOL. IV NO. 65 REGD. NO. DA 781

The Daily Star

CHAITRA 10, 1400 BS, DHAKA THURSDAY, MARCH 24, 1994 SHAWAL 11, 1414 HIJRI

NIRMAN TILES

Broken Marble Tiles
In More Shades
Than The Rainbow

Tel: 605957, 861985

12 PAGES: PRICE TAKA 4.00

Inside Today

Article

Water is Life—Not Death!
Column: Window on Asia
by Shahed Latif
Page 4

International

Flight delays common feature in India
Rising water threat to existence of Maldives
Page 5

Business

Kuala Lumpur slams opponents of EAEC
Asian markets react positively to US central bank's decision
Pages 6,7

Women on the Move

Women in a men's world; Women protest embankment; and Doctor Cynthia makes a difference
Page 8

Metropolitan

Dhaka Day by Day

"Vote for the Mosquito"
Page 3

Gas cylinder blast kills 9 in city

Nine people, including two women and two children, were killed in a terrible gas-balloon cylinder explosion in the city's Narinda yesterday morning. At least two dozen others were injured, some of them suffering serious burns and lacerations.

The accident, which happened with a loud bang heard half a mile away, claimed the lives of all nine instantaneously. The dead also included the yet unidentified vendor of balloons.

The relative quiet of a vehicle-free hartal morning was shattered by the explosion which many residents of nearby areas in the older part of the city first thought was an earthquake.

The tragedy happened near a public hydrant on the narrow Sarat Gupta Road when the

seller of balloons was preparing a solution of aluminium sulphate and sodium hydroxide (caustic soda) — a crude formula used by local balloon-sellers to make hydrogen gas which fills the balloons and makes them lighter than air.

Talking to The Daily Star late last night Dhaka city Mayor Mohammad Hanif said that he had passed an order prohibiting the use of cylinders for selling gas balloons with immediate effect.

The disaster, reminiscent of a similar tragedy at Joykall Mandir Road some years ago which claimed seven lives, even caused cracks in many of the old, dilapidated buildings in the area.

The severity of the explosion can be gauged from the fact that parts of the bodies of

the dead victims — as well as those of some of the more critically injured — were strewn all over the place. Blood marks were also seen on the walls of some adjacent buildings, at a few places even as high as three storeys.

All the wounded persons were rushed to different city hospitals.

The wailing sirens of the ambulances and fire engines added to the shock and grief of the neighbours and thousands of curious people who turned the narrow alley into a veritable human sea. Many an on-looker was repelled by the grotesque sight of the severed limbs and decapitated bodies.

Many of the dead, including the two women, had come to the hydrant to fill their pitchers. Others had gone there for

See Page 12 Col 4

A very risky innocence!

Star Report

The gas balloon-cylinder tragedy which claimed nine lives in Narinda yesterday morning, was not the first of its kind in the city. A few years ago a similar mishap killed seven people at Joykall Mandir Road, not too far from Narinda.

Mohammad Alauddin, a balloon seller on the footpath near the Sobhanbagh Mosque, oblivious of the accident, was going about his business as usual when suddenly the owner of a nearby shop asked him to pack up and leave.

The shopkeeper shouted: "Get lost fast! You chaps just killed so many people. Your cylinders are so risky."

Poor Alauddin saw no option but to pack up and leave.

But just as he was leaving a Daily Star reporter confronted him. Asked what he used to make the hydrogen gas, Alauddin said "Aluminium, caustic soda and water."

Asked if he was aware of the dangers of an explosion, he innocently replied: "No sir, I've never had an accident."

AL won't renew 25-yr Indo-Bangla treaty

Sheikh Hasina yesterday gave identical reply during question hour in the present Parliament. So, all the governments admitted that it is a friendship treaty.

But she made it clear that there has been a lot of changes in global politics. Moreover, after the establishment of SAARC and the signing of SAPTA (South Asian Preferential Trade Arrangement) accord, Awami League does not feel it necessary to renew the treaty.

"So, if it returns to power, Awami League will not renew this treaty," Hasina told the journalists.

Hasina, who went to India early this month to visit Ajmeer Sharif and offered feteiha at the mazar of Khwaja Mainuddin Chisty, also met with the Indian Vice-President, the Prime Minister, the Speaker, the Finance Minister and the Commerce Minister.

To a question about her meeting with the Indian leaders, Hasina said that during the meetings, she had de-

See page 12 Col 2

75 killed in Russian air crash

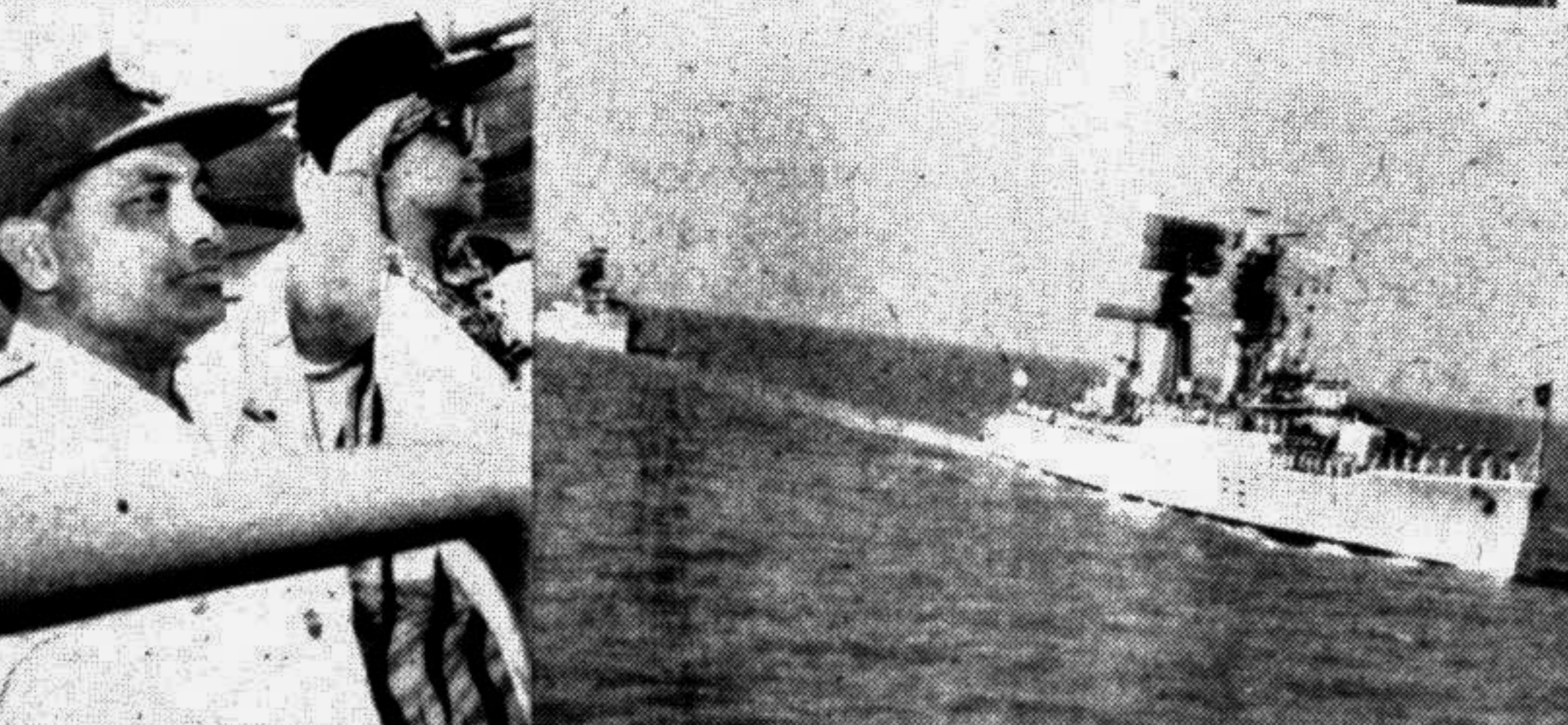
MOSCOW, Mar 23: A Russian jetliner plunged into a remote forest in Siberia on Wednesday and exploded in flames, killing all 75 people aboard, officials said, reports AP.

The State Emergency Committee said the Airbus A-310 exploded and burned after crashing in the Altai Mountains near Mezhdurechensk, some 3,200 kilometers (2,000 miles) east of Moscow near the Mongolian border. Rescue workers found no survivors, the committee said.

The 63 passengers on the plane, en route to Hong Kong, included 23 foreigners, mainly from Hong Kong and Taiwan, committee officials said. Airline officials also said there were passengers from Britain, India, Canada and the United States.

The Komsomolskaya Pravda newspaper reported Wednesday a fire broke out Tuesday on a Russian TU-154 airliner while on a flight to China. The plane managed to land at

See Page 12 Col 7



Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia taking salute at a steam past of the BN ships after witnessing the annual sea exercise of the Bangladesh Navy in the Bay of Bengal yesterday. — Photo ISPR

Navy to be turned into a modern force: PM

CHITTAGONG, Mar 23: Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia today reiterated her government's willingness to equip the country's Navy with modern equipment saying Bangladesh Navy would soon be turned into a modern, strong and disciplined force, reports BSS.

The government has a plan to commission some more ships including the latest research and survey ships to the existing fleet of the Navy, she said while addressing the officers, sailors and the civilian employees of Bangladesh Navy at local naval jetty after witnessing an amazing sea exercise in the Bay of Bengal.

On board BNS Osman, a frigate of the Bangladesh Navy, the Prime Minister witnessed the missile firing, anti-aircraft and anti-submarine firing, fleet review and various tactical manoeuvres carried out by the naval ships.

The missiles fired from a

Hasina's comments baseless, say 16 BNP MPs

Sixteen BNP MPs yesterday protested Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina's statement at Tuesday's press conference and described it as 'fabricated, motivated and libellous,' and demanded immediate withdrawal of her baseless allegations against the MPs, reports BSS.

In a statement they said that much of what the Leader of the Opposition said reflected 'bad taste.'

They demanded withdrawal of the baseless allegations the Leader of the Opposition made about MPs in her statement and said they were surprised at the falsehood.

The sixteen MPs said that much of what the Leader of the Opposition said following her party's electoral defeat in the Magura by-election was devoid of the truth.

They said that a reply to the charges would be given by the party functionaries of the BNP; they were protesting the por-

See Page 12 Col 6

Hartal passes peacefully

By Staff Correspondent

A half-day hartal called by two opposition parties was observed peacefully in the capital as elsewhere in the country yesterday.

No untoward incidents were reported during the hartal, called separately by the Awami League and the Jatiya Party, to protest alleged rigging in last Sunday's Magura-2 by-election.

In Dhaka, vehicles were off the streets except a few rickshaws which charged exorbitant rates. Shops and other business centres were shut and banks and commercial centres did not function during the hartal hours. The inter-city buses did not ply.

The train service, however, was normal. According to sources, as all the trains ran on schedule.

The domestic and international flights were also not affected by the hartal.

The two parties held several rallies in the city demanding re-election in the Magura-2 constituency.

In the port city, cargo delivery was disrupted by the hartal, our correspondent reports.

The hartal also went off peacefully at Chittagong, Rajshahi, Sherpur, Barisal, Natore, Gopalganj and other districts, according to reports received in Dhaka last night.

Two school-goers, however, were attacked at Gazipur, reportedly for defying the strike. The injured — Masum and Munir — were admitted to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

In a handout, the government said the hartal did not hamper the industrial sector as all the state-owned mills functioned normally. Mills, factories and units under the

See Page 12 Col 8



NO TRAFFIC, NO POLICE: A man apparently having a sound sleep on a city traffic island during yesterday's hartal hours. — Star photo

BNP won't bow to 'unjust' opposition demands

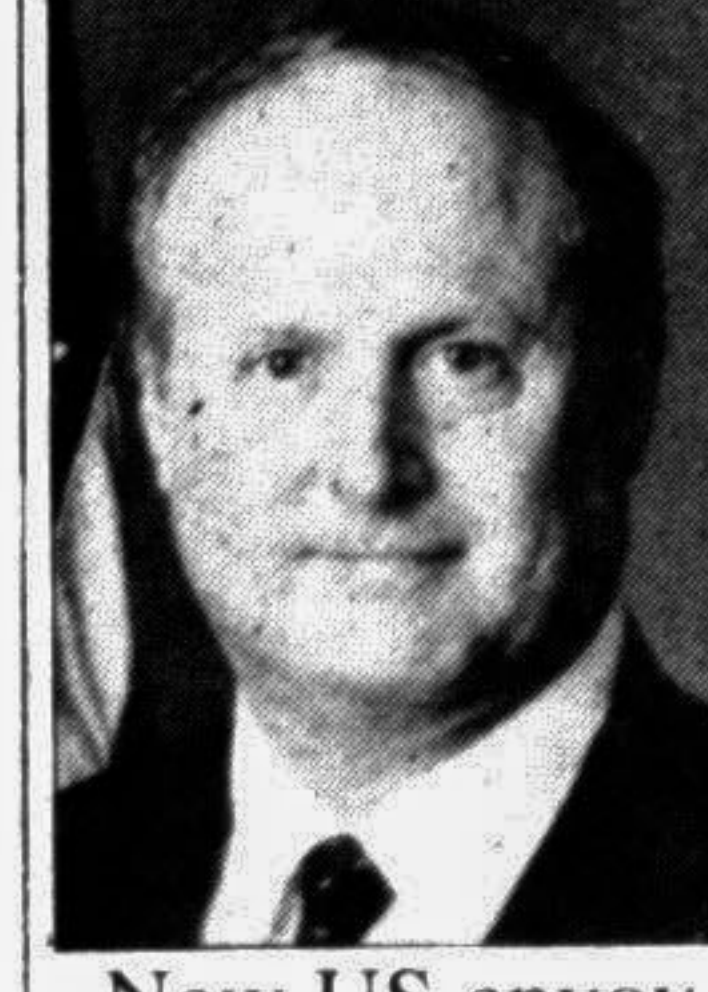
By Asiuzzaman

The ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) will not make any concessions to the Opposition to bring them back to Parliament, BNP policy-makers said yesterday.

"Democracy does not mean that unjust demands of the opposition parties will have to be accepted," one senior leader said. "We have the people's mandate and cannot compromise with our victory" after the Magura-2 by-election the Awami League (AL) and other opposition parties had threatened to continue boycotting Parliament which they started from the last session following some comments by the Information Minister Nazmul Huda. The minister, however, later regretted having made those comments.

"It will be unwise for the Opposition to link all the issues with the sessions of Parliament, whose main objective is to discuss and solve national problems," the BNP leader requesting anonymity, said.

"In the last city polls, the voters of Dhaka and Chittagong gave their verdict in favour of the AL which the BNP accepted but the people of Magura gave their verdict to



New US envoy arrives

Ambassador David N Merrill, the United States Ambassador-designate to Bangladesh, arrived here yesterday and said he foresees a closer Dhaka-Washington relationship in the days ahead, reports BSS.

"The friendship between our two countries is deep — the United States considers this friendship valuable — we want this relationship to be strengthened in the days to come," he said in a brief airport statement on arrival to take up the new assignment.

Ambassador Merrill was Acting Administrator and Deputy Assistant Administrator of USAID Bureau for Europe till his new assignment.

See Page 12 Col 7

JP will not go to election under BNP

The Jatiya Party will not participate in any election under the BNP government, party leaders announced at a rally in Dhaka yesterday, reports UNB.

Addressing the rally in front of the Jatiya Press Club during the half-day hartal, the JP leaders demanded immediate resignation of the government and a fresh national election under a caretaker administration.

They said, people have no faith and support for the BNP government after the 'massive rigging' in Magura-2 by-election.

The JP leaders called upon the party activists to prepare for a greater agitation against the government to force it to resign.

"Democracy is not safe under the BNP government. It has killed the democratic process through killing, rigging and corruption," alleged Mahubul Haq Dolan, a presidential member of JP.

"So, the BNP has no moral right to stay in power," he said.

The rally was also addressed by Col (Rtd) M A Malek and Khaledur Rahman Tito, Saifur Rahman, S Alam and Taibur Rahman.

Join agitation to oust BNP govt: Hasina

By Staff Correspondent

Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina yesterday called on the people to continue the anti-government agitation until their rights to vote, food and work were ensured.

Addressing a post-hartal rally at Bangabandhu Avenue in the capital, the Awami League chief also urged the people to join the April 7 siege of the Secretariat in order to force the BNP government to resign.

"People's fundamental rights to vote and food are not safe in the hands of the BNP after it snatched the people's victory in the Magura by-election through widespread rigging and terrorism," she said reiterating her party's demand for scrapping the by-polls results.

"If the results of the Magura by-election are accepted," the Opposition leader said, "people will lose their right to franchise once again."

Speaking further on the Magura polls, Hasina said the 'autocratic' and 'undemocratic' character of the BNP government had been exposed once again by its widespread rigging.

The AL leader also accused the BNP of failing to promote the growth of democracy.

"This government has no right to stay in power," Hasina claimed and said her party believed in political stability and healthy democratic practices in the country. "But the AL would have to think whether to sit with the vote dacoits in Parliament."

Chaired by Hasina, the rally was also addressed by AL leaders Abdul Mannan, Tofael Ahmed MP, Amir Hossain Amu, Mohammad Nasim MP, Zillur Rahman, Abdul Jalil, Kader Siddiqi and city mayor Hanif.

Criticising the Chief Election Commissioner, the Opposition leader said, "He (the CEC) cannot avoid the responsibility of what happened in Magura. He could have postponed the polls after reviewing the situation there." She asked how could the CEC accept the results of the election despite allegations of massive rigging and irregularities. "We are sick and tired of hearing from the CEC that the elections would be fair and impartial. Now we expect justice from him," said Hasina.

The AL leader thanked her countrymen for observing yesterday's hartal.

She said fresh action programmes would be announced on April 7.

Reshuffle before PM's visit to Japan unlikely

Star Report

The much speculated cabinet reshuffle is very unlikely before the Prime Minister's visit to Japan, the PM's office sources hinted yesterday.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia convened a special cabinet meeting on Sunday to finalise the papers to be presented at the Investors' Forum in Japan.

The Prime Minister begins a four-day state visit to Japan on Monday.

Meanwhile, party sources say that after the by-election in Magura which sparked opposition agitation, the Prime Minister may bide time for the situation to calm down.

A change either in the cabinet or in the central body may bring acrimony among the aspirants and the drop-outs, one source said.

"She will possibly take the decisions on return from Japan," he said.

One killed, 8 hurt as train rams tempo in Jamalpur

JAMALPUR, Mar 23: A middle-aged man was killed and eight others were injured, four seriously, when an inter-city train ramed a tempo at a level-crossing near Kendua-Kalibari rail station today, reports UNB.

Rail police said the Kendua-Kalibari-bound tempo, halted on Kachashara level-crossing due to mechanical problem, was smashed by Jaganna-thganj-bound Padma from Dhaka at about 1:30 pm.

The dead was identified as Jalal, 45, a bidi worker of Charharipur village in Melandah thana of the district. The driver of the tempo, Chan Mia, was shifted to the PG Hospital in the capital in critical condition.

Four other seriously wounded people were admitted to the Jamalpur Sadar Hospital. Former general secretary of Sharihabari thana Awami League, Moniruddin, is among the injured.

Housewife, school girl kidnapped

SAVAR, Mar 23: A school girl and a teenage housewife were allegedly kidnapped by miscreants in Savar and Dhamrai thanas today, reports UNB.

Police and family sources said Rita Parveen, 14, a pretty teenager of class nine, was going to the Mohammad Ali High School with her friends at 11 in the morning when a band of miscreants came in a jeep and picked her up at gunpoint.

Whereabouts of Rita, hailing from Rajfulbaria village in Savar thana, could not yet be known.

In Dhamrai, a housewife was kidnapped from the Dhaka-Aricha highway this evening while returning home after watching a movie.

Rokeya Parveen, 18, daughter of Advocate Rashid of village Dhamrai in Dhamrai thana, was abducted near the Gulbahar Cinema hall on way to her home.

She was also picked up at gunpoint by a gang at about 6 pm. Motive behind the kidnapping could not be known.

Two cases have been filed.

NEWS BRIEFS

Minutes with JICA signed

Bangladesh and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) yesterday signed a minutes on a technical assistance project. The Study on Industrial Development of Chittagong Region." ERD Deputy Secretary Dewan Zakir Hussain and Hiroyo Sasaki, leader of the Preparatory Study Team of JICA, an aid agency of Japan, signed the minutes on behalf of their respective authorities, reports UNB.

AL programme on Independence Day

The Awami League has drawn up elaborate programmes to observe the Independence Day in a befitting manner. The programmes include hoisting of national and party flags, placing wreath at National Mausoleum at Savar and discussion meeting at the party's central office. Sheikh Hasina will address the meeting, reports UNB.

106 more Rohingas go home

COX'S BAZAR, Mar 23: Another batch of 106 Rohingya refugees voluntarily returned to their homes in Myanmar today raising the total number of repatriated persons to 53,295. Official sources told BSS here tonight that this 138th batch was seen off by local UNHCR representatives and Bangladesh officials while they were crossing the border through Noyapara transit camp at Teknaf here today.

Bangabandhu research body

A 25-member central executive committee of Bangabandhu Gabeshona Sangstha (Bangabandhu research institution) was elected at its general meeting in Dhaka, a press release of the sangstha said yesterday. Renowned freedom fighter Syed Shamsul Alam Hashu is the chairman and freedom fighter Abir Ahad is the secretary general of the committee, reports BSS.

Sonadia forest set ablaze

COX'S BAZAR, Mar 23: Precious trees in the mangrove forest of Sonadia island were set afire late Tuesday night causing damages worth about Taka one crore. Forest officials say, reports UNB.