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NEWS BRIEFS

2nd phase of tribal repatriation ends

CHITTAGONG, Aug 5: The second phase repatriation of the tribal refugees from Indian state of Tripura to Bangladesh ended when 314 refugees returned to their homes in Khagrachhari hill district through Ramgar border point today. Official sources told BSS, over telephone here tonight that with this last batch in the second phase, the total number of the repatriated persons to Bangladesh now stood at 3346 of 648 families.

Model polls in Tongi today

Chief Election Commissioner Justice Abdur Rauf will inaugurate the model election programme in Tongi Pourashava today at 11 am, said an official announcement yesterday. On the first day identity cards will be given to the voters, registered under the new system to prevent false voting, reports UNB.

Two killed in boiler blast

JESSORE, Aug 5: Two workers, both of them brothers, were killed and eight others including two children and two women injured when a paddy boiler exploded here yesterday, reports BSS.

Benazir leaves for Saudi Arabia

ISLAMABAD, Aug 5: Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto left for Saudi Arabia today for an Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca, the state television said. She is also likely to meet King Fahd during her two-day visit, the private PPI news agency said, reports Reuters.

NATO jets bomb Serb targets

SARAJEVO, Aug 5: NATO warplanes launched an air strike on Serb targets near Sarajevo at 6.35 pm (1635 GMT) today, a UN military spokesman told Reuters.

French Lieutenant-Colonel Bernard Labrousse said: "A strike was carried out at 1835 (1635 GMT) just outside of the southern edge of the weapons exclusion zone, east of Mount Igman. Targets were hit and destroyed."

He believed two aircraft took part in the attack but he could not say what was hit.

UN troops went on high alert after the attack, and took cover at the main UN head-

quarters in Sarajevo.

Earlier, the United Nations summoned NATO warplanes to enforce the order banning heavy weapons from around Sarajevo after Bosnian Serbs shot at a UN helicopter, a US official said today.

A State Department official in Washington confirmed the attack and said two US A-10 aircraft and two French Mirage jets took part in the raid.

"We understand the strikes did occur," the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman John Shalikashvili confirmed the NATO air strikes

were ordered after the Serbs removed heavy weaponry from storage areas in the region. But he could not immediately confirm the attack.

The United Nations can call in NATO warplanes to enforce a ban on heavy weapons around Sarajevo and protect its peacekeepers, but until now had been reluctant to do so without an immediate threat to Sarajevo.

Bosnian Serb soldiers took a T-55 tank, two armored personnel carriers and a mobile anti-aircraft gun before dawn today from a UN collection point in Serb-held Ildiza, just

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BJP's 'no' to Manmohan Singh's apology

NEW DELHI, Aug 5: India's main opposition party today rejected a government apology over its response to an all-party probe into the country's worst financial scandal and refused to call off its boycott of parliament, reports Reuters, PTI.

In a clear attempt to end the boycott, Finance Minister Manmohan Singh apologised for some words used to describe the parliamentary probe into the affair.

Singh told the Upper House that his ministry used words such as "unwarranted and unfair" inadvertently to describe parliament's criticism of the government over the 1.28 billion dollar scandal.

"I'm really sorry for this lapse, which was entirely unintentional," he said in a long statement that appeared to

contain several government concessions.

"I would like to assure the house that it was never our intention to show any disrespect to the Joint Parliamentary Committee."

"If these words convey such an impression, I have no hesitation in requesting you to treat them as withdrawn."

The government, Dr Singh said, agreed with the view of the JPC that the irregularities in securities trading revealed both failures in various aspects of the financial system including both internal control mechanism of banks as well as the supervisory system, and also a deliberate and criminal misuse of public funds with the aim of illegally siphoning off funds of banks by select brokers for speculative returns.

Singh appealed to the op-

position to return to parliament and debate the government action report.

"The government seeks the views of the honourable members in this regard," Singh said.

Jaswant Singh, a senior leader of the main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party, rejected the apology and the appeal.

"Nothing short of a withdrawal will do," he told Reuters.

The opposition, from right to left in rare union, has insisted that the government withdraw its "action taken report" detailing what it had done about a joint parliamentary committee (JPC) probe into scandal.

It announced a boycott on Tuesday for the rest of a parliamentary session due to end in late August.

Top suspect in Bombay bombings held

NEW DELHI, Aug 5: A top suspect in a one-day wave of terrorist bombings that killed more than 300 people last year in Bombay was arrested Friday, India's interior minister said, reports AP.

The minister, SB Chavan, told Parliament that evidence recovered from Yakub Abdul Razak Memon, 33, proved that Pakistan, India's Islamic neighbour and arch enemy, was involved.

But Chavan declined to disclose that proof, beyond showing a Pakistani passport and driver's license with Memon's picture.

Pakistan denied any involvement. "The arrest of Yakub Memon in the Indian capital suggests that he was all along under the protection of Indian authorities," said the Pakistan embassy.

A court ordered Memon held in custody for investigation for 30 days. At a hearing, Memon told the judge he had come to India from Karachi via Nepal, the Press Trust of India news agency said.

India has long blamed Pakistan for financing and training the terrorists who plan-

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Biman's DC-10 averts mishap

By Staff Correspondent

A Biman aircraft carrying 260 passengers from Muscat, Oman, narrowly escaped a mishap Thursday after it was caught in a whirlwind. Biman sources said last night.

"It was a miracle that we survived," Captain Akhteruzzaman, commanding pilot of the DC10-30 aircraft, told The Daily Star. "We had to use full power of the engine and it took a minute and 30 seconds to come out of the windshear."

The aircraft safely landed at the Zia International Airport early Thursday after four hours of flying. A Biman source said that the engine of the aircraft might have to be overhauled because it suffered heavy strain.

The pilot of the aircraft said

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Muslim divorce law Indian SC orders lower court to review decision

NEW DELHI, Aug 5: The Supreme Court has ordered a review of a lower court decision that struck down the age-old Muslim divorce custom as unconstitutional, reports AP.

The ruling by a two-judge bench, Thursday means that, for the time being, a Muslim can divorce his wife by saying "talaq" three times in succession. "Talaq" means divorce in the Arabic language.

The divorce 25 years ago of Khatoon Nisa has become a test case for the priority of the nation's secular constitution over the authority of religious law in personal affairs like marriage and divorce.

India is the home of more than 100 million Muslims, who follow the Muslim Personal Law. Hindus are 82 per cent of India's population of 900 million.

In its ruling, the Supreme Court said that in view of the

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DUTA token strike from tomorrow

By DU Correspondent

The Dhaka University Teachers Association (DUTA) will observe token strike tomorrow and Monday to protest the attack on teachers Thursday.

DUTA at an emergency meeting yesterday, demanded withdrawal of Dr M Ershadul Bari, Dean of the Faculty of Law, from the DU Senate, Syndicate, hall administration and various committees within seven days. Otherwise, the association would take fresh programmes, according to a DUTA press release.

The meeting resented the statement of the Prime Minister regarding Thursday's violence on the DU campus.

DUTA alleged that the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) led the terrorist activities on the DU campus Thursday.

The DUTA also demanded of the government to withdraw Prof Azhar Uddin, Pro Vice Chancellor of Rajshahi University, from the Dhaka University Senate as he reportedly spoke against the playing of National Anthem in the first session of the Senate meeting of the National University.

DUTA demanded of the authorities assistance for the treatment of Dr Ratan Lal Chakrabarty, who received bullet injury in his leg Thursday.

Accord on WB credit for gas project soon

By S Y Bakht & Inam Ahmed

The government has completed negotiations with the World Bank for securing a 141-million US dollar credit to finance the gas-sector infrastructure development project (GIDP), both Bank and Energy Ministry sources have confirmed.

The two-year project is being seen as "extremely critical" in improving the overall gas transmission system in the country to meet the projected growth in demand in the coming years.

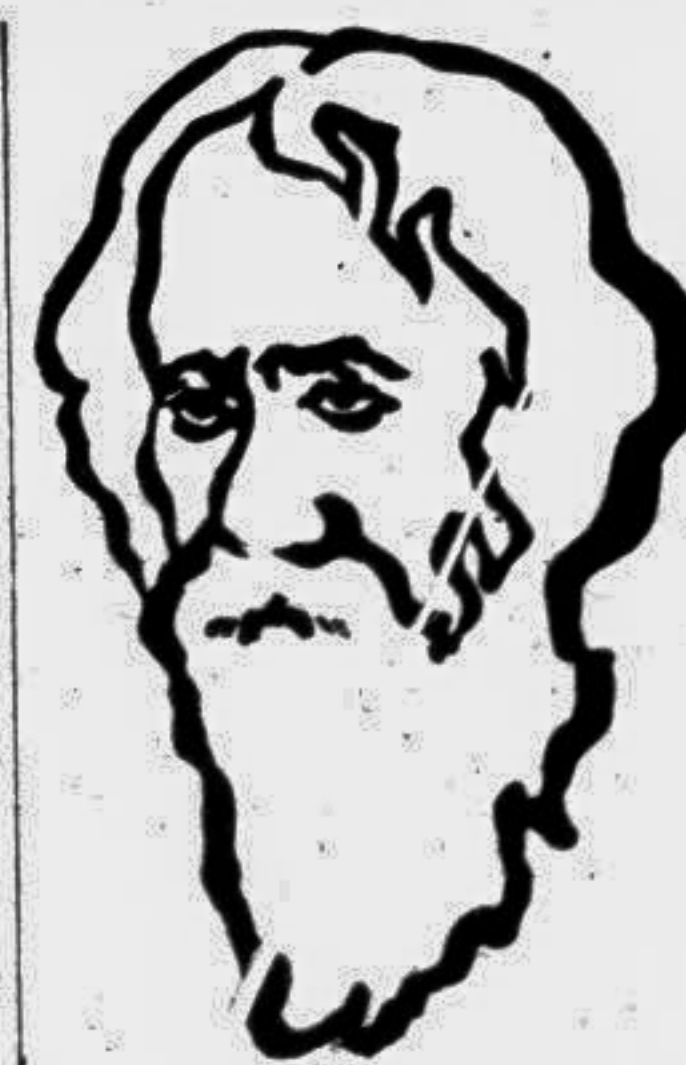
Petrobangla conducted the negotiations with the World Bank (WB) and the agreement is now expected to be finalised in Washington later this month. The loan accord would then be placed before the bank's board in September.

"The GIDP is designed to alleviate gas supply shortages and also to improve the management of the gas sector, including allowing greater decentralisation of the state-owned gas companies," noted a source at the WB Resident Mission.

The government has also agreed to increase the gas tariff by another 10 per cent and to allow the gas companies to retain a larger percentage of gas revenue, enabling them to generate internal resources for development work.

The project is expected to ensure supply to the gas-based Karnaphuli Fertiliser Company (Kafco). The nearly 450 million dollar joint venture company would require about 62 million

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Tagore's death anniversary today

By Staff Correspondent

Today is the 53rd anniversary of the death of poet Rabindranath Tagore.

To mark the day, different socio-cultural organisations across the country have planned elaborate programmes including discussion meetings, recitations and musical soirees.

Bangladesh Television and the Radio Bangladesh will put on special programmes while the national dailies will publish special articles and features on the only Nobel laureate

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Medicine worth Tk 28 lakh seized at ZIA

By Staff Correspondent

Customs surveillance men seized contraband medicine valued at Tk 28 lakh at the Zia International Airport (ZIA) yesterday.

The medicine were found hidden in two unaccompanied TV cartoons in the customs check-in area around 9.30 in the morning.

The TV cartoons containing medicine were brought to Dhaka from Dubai by an Emirates flight (EK-612) in the morning.

None of the passengers claimed the luggage after they had been scanned, a customs official said.

A departmental case was lodged with the Customs authority.

Heroin haul at ZIA

Pak national on NCD remand for questioning

By Staff Correspondent

Pakistani national Wahid Ahmad, who was held at the Zia Airport Thursday while allegedly trying to smuggle in 1.9 kgs of heroin, was taken in remand by the Narcotics Control Department (NCD) yesterday for two days of interrogation.

Wahid, who arrived from Karachi by a PIA flight, was caught by Customs men at ZIA with nearly Taka two crore worth of the deadly drug.

He was handed over to Cantonment police who registered a case under the Narcotics Control Act '90. Later the case was transferred to the NCD for investigation.

The accused was produced before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate yesterday who granted the remand.

BNP-AL clash leaves 30 hurt in Dhamrai

From Our Correspondent

DHAMRAI, Aug 5: At least 30 people were injured in a clash between armed activists of the BNP and the Awami League at Islampur here this morning.

Of the injured, four were admitted to the Dhamrai Hospital and 16 others were sent to different hospitals and clinics in the capital.

Babul Hossain, 20, of the AL sustained bullet wounds while Abdur Razak, 30, of the same party and Ansar Ali, 30, of the BNP were critically injured. Among the other injured persons, 10 were identified as AL activists.

According to police and witnesses, the beating up of one Tota Mia, an AL worker, by a group of BNP activists triggered the three-hour long clash that began at nine in the morning.

During the fighting that spread from Islampur to the Bara Bazar, Jatrabari and Lakuria areas of the Dhamrai Sadar, both sides traded at least 30 rounds of gunfire.

Slum holds up DMC classes

By Asiuzzaman and Ripon Beg

Classes of the Dhaka Medical College have remained suspended for nearly one and a half month despite strenuous efforts by the authorities to resolve the crisis over the eviction of occupants of an unauthorised slum within the college area.

Some 1,000 students have been boycotting their classes and have kept the departments under lock and key since June 26 demanding removal of the slum which they claim is a sanctuary for miscreants.

The students' agitation gained momentum following clashes with a group of truck drivers and workers of the area. The truckers were allegedly backed by some residents of the slums, students claimed.

The clash was sparked by the death of a DMC student under the wheels of a truck in

Sylhet.

"(The slum) is a crime zone in the police books. The miscreants living in the slum engage in anti-social activities," a student leader alleged.

"We will not attend classes unless the slum is removed."

Some 200 teachers of the college also supported the students' demand for bringing back a congenial atmosphere in the area.

The hospital authorities have also been trying to clear the land to start a Tk 40-crore expansion project. A 400-bed hospital with 12 modern operation theatres would be constructed under the project financed by the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

After a series of deliberations between the Health Minister, the local MP, the college authorities, students and employees last month, the Class Four employees decided

to leave the areas if they were rehabilitated elsewhere.

The hospital authorities had constructed only 50 units to house its employees which over the years turned into a 7,000-people slum on nearly eight acres of land.

Principal of the College, Prof Zahurul Mawla Chowdhury, told The Daily Star that they are close to a solution to the impasse.

"We already signed an agreement under which the employees will evict the outsiders by August 30," he said adding "If the government allot a piece of land, the crisis will immediately be resolved."

He declined to elaborate what sort of problems the slum was creating but said that it was a trouble spot.

"Leaving other matters aside I will say that the authorities failed to start the expansion project," he said.

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A partial view of the unauthorised slum near the Dhaka Medical College which has been vitiating the atmosphere of both the college as well as the country's biggest hospital.—Star photo