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NEWS BRIEFS

Thai flights to India resume

BANGKOK, Oct 8: Thai Airways International has resumed normal flights to New Delhi, after several days of limited service in which passengers were allowed to disembark but not board in the Indian capital, the airline announced. For the New Delhi flight, which resumed Friday, the airline will accept passengers only after they have been examined by Thai and Indian doctors, the airline said Friday, reports AP.

AL, BNP clash in Sirajganj

SIRAJGANJ, Oct 8: At least seven people were injured in a clash between two groups of political activists on Mujib road in the town today. Witnesses said the trouble began when the BNP activist, Saiful Islam was beaten up allegedly by the Awami League supporters at about 1:30 pm. Later, BNP activists made a counterattack on the Awami League supporters and stormed several houses in Dargapatti area, reports UNB.

4 BCL activists hurt in Sylhet

From Our Correspondent SYLHET, Oct 8: Four activists of the Bangladesh Chhatra League (S-P) were injured by the supporters of Islami Chhatra Shibir in Madan Mohan college today. Of them, Sadhan was admitted to the Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital while another victim was given first aid in a private clinic. The clash took place when some students were collecting admission forms.

Schoolboy killed

BARISAL, Oct 8: A minor schoolboy was killed when a speeding bus hit him near Khurair ferry ghat on Amtali-Khepupara road today. Al-Amin alias Salam, 8 died on the spot, at about 11 am, local people said. The driver sped away with the vehicle soon after the accident, reports UNB.

US, British ships move to counter Iraqi buildup

KUWAIT, Oct 8: US and British warships were heading to Kuwait to counter an Iraqi military buildup today and the sheikhdom's leaders said they were confident any attempt at a repeat invasion would fail, reports Reuter.

Witnesses saw about 50 Kuwaiti tanks moving towards the demilitarised zone on the border in a manoeuvre described by military analysts as a normal measure at a time of heightened tension with Iraq. "God is with us, brothers are with us and friends, are with us," Kuwaiti Foreign

Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah said after an emergency cabinet meeting chaired by his brother the Emir. "Everything is taking the necessary precautions," a western official involved in Kuwaiti defence preparations told Reuters.

Two Republican Guard divisions of around 20,000 men and 350 tanks which advanced towards the Kuwait border on Thursday and Friday were still in southern Iraq, but diplomats said they saw no immediate evidence they were planning

hostilities. "As of this moment it doesn't look anything more than a show," one diplomat said. "Certain ingredients that one would look for in such a situation are not there."

The United States which spearheaded the military assault that ousted Iraqi occupation troops in 1991, and Britain were taking no chances. A senior US military official in the region said the US aircraft carrier George Washington, which is accompanied by a battle group of

warships and support vessels, was expected to move to the Red Sea from the Mediterranean on Sunday night — within aircraft striking distance of Iraq.

Diplomats see the movements as Iraqi brinkmanship aimed at pressing the international community to lift UN sanctions and sabotaging confidence in Kuwait's post-Gulf War recovery. There were few signs of panic. Parents took their children to school, civil servants showed up for work, super-

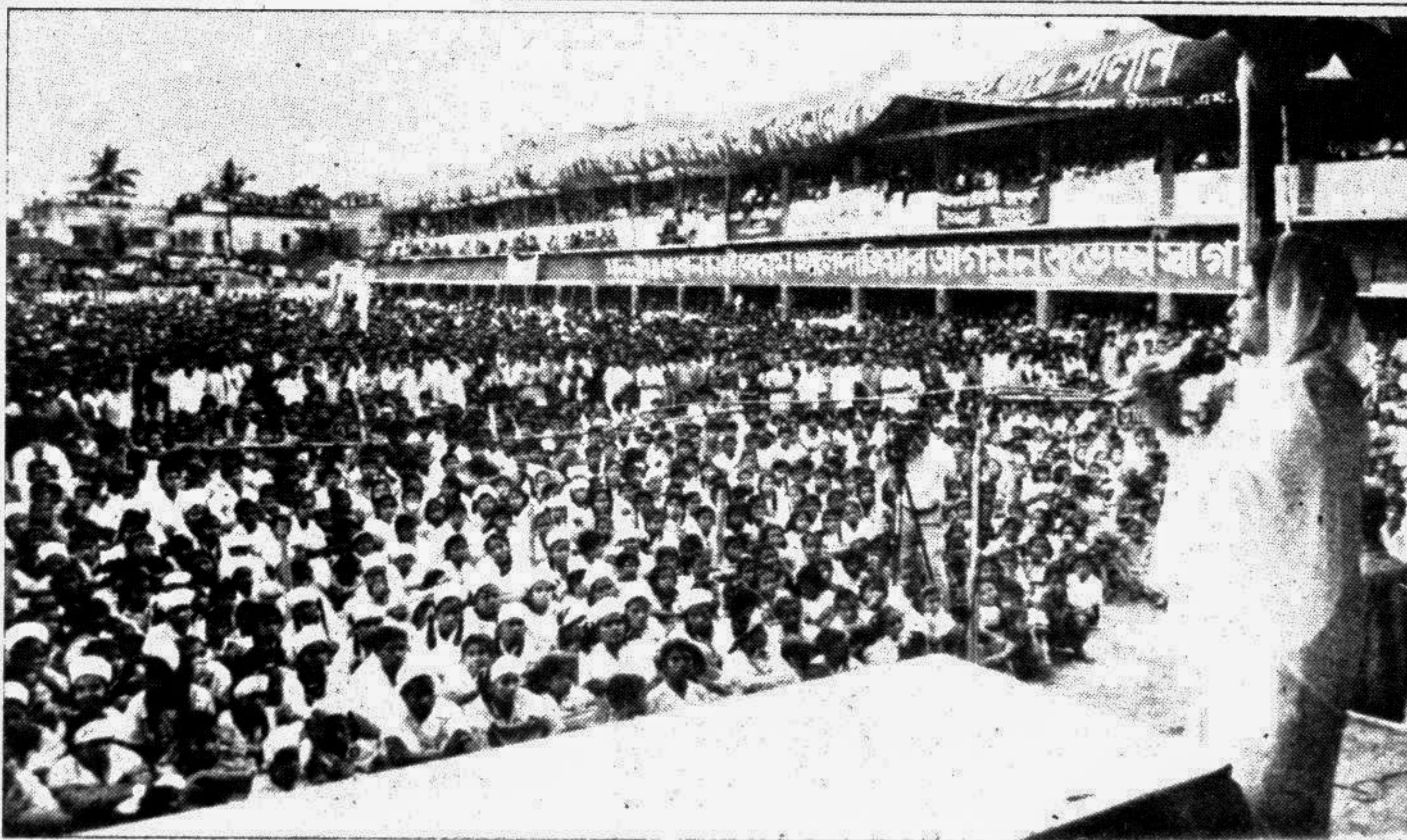
India responds to Mostafiz's speech

India has said it was committed to devising an equitable long-term and comprehensive arrangement of water-sharing with Bangladesh through bilateral discussions, reports UNB. "When Bangladesh is ready for a meaningful dialogue with India and shows genuine willingness to play a constructive role in seeking a mutually acceptable solution, it should be possible to reach agreement on the sharing of river waters," an official spokesman for the Indian government said. The statement, made available to the press in the city yesterday, said: "India stands

ready as hitherto for a purposeful dialogue with Bangladesh on the subject." The spokesman came up with statement responding to Bangladesh Foreign Minister ASM Mostafizur Rahman's address to the UN General Assembly on Thursday when he said the critical issue of sharing the Ganges water with India remained unresolved for long and sought world support for an early and equitable solution of the issue. The spokesman claimed that India continued to supply water from the Ganges to Bangladesh to enable her to

Opposition padajatra today

By Staff Correspondent The major opposition parties — the Awami League, Jatiya Party and Jamaat-e-Islami — will organise padajatra (long march) towards the capital from three places around the city today. The padajatra is part of the three parties' 40-day agitation programmes launched October 1 to realise their demand for a caretaker government for holding national elections. Sheikh Hasina will lead the march of the AL from Tongi stadium at 3 in the afternoon. The marchers will hold a rally at Mahakkhal bus terminal. Hasina and other leaders of the party are likely to address the



Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia addressing a public meeting at the Beraid Muslim High School ground in city suburb yesterday. — PID photo

Join hands to achieve self-reliance: PM

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia yesterday made a fervent call for all to join her government efforts to turn the country self-reliant through boosting production, employment generation and poverty alleviation, reports UNB. She said her party programmes and policies aimed at the people's welfare, increasing production and providing service to the nation to brighten its image abroad ending the past stigma. "Bangladesh is no more a 'basket case'. Now it is a country full of prospects and possibilities. Bangladesh has developed and the honour of this country increased abroad due to development measures undertaken by the BNP government," she told a huge gathering at the Beraid Muslim High School ground on the outskirts of the city. On her trip to the meeting venue in a fleet of mechanised boats from the Demra ghat, the Prime Minister was greeted by hundreds of people standing in

queues on both banks of the river Balu. She waved back to the cheering suburban people during her more than an hour-long boat journey to the area where small hamlets looked like tiny isles surrounded by flood waters. On her arrival at Beraid under Gulshan thana in the capital, Begum Zia was given a warm reception by the local people chanting pro-BNP slogans. Begum Zia told the gathering that the economy of the country had now picked up and per capita income and purchasing capacity of common man increased. The country is now witnessing a development spree as a result of the BNP's politics of production. Referring to manpower export, the Prime Minister said this government had provided about 7:50 lakh Bangladeshis with jobs in abroad. "We do not believe in lip-service and politics of talk

Prokrichi postpones strike

By Staff Correspondent The Prokrichi BCS Central Action Committee yesterday announced the postponement of their proposed strike scheduled to begin tomorrow. At a news conference at the Engineers' Institution, Prokrichi leaders said, the strike had been deferred till November 7 because of what they said, legal complications. According to observers, the decision follows last week's injunction upon the Bangladesh Medical Association against the country-wide doctors' strike. The government doctors are also part of the Prokrichi. Secretary general of the 70,000-strong body of government officials belonging to the 26 BCS cadres, Abu Hena, however, said, they would go for a two-day mass leave programme on October 26 and 27 to protest the non-implementation of their 17-point charter of demands. A convention will also be held on October 26 to chart the next course of action. Abu Hena told newsmen that they had a meeting with Labour and Manpower Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and State Minister for Establishment Aminul Haq earlier at their Secretariat offices but there had not been any fruitful discussion on their demands.

2 die during exercise PM visits injured soldiers at CMH

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia visited five injured army personnel at the Combined Military Hospital (CMH) yesterday evening, reports UNB. Official sources said two soldiers were killed and five others injured following a grenade blast yesterday while participating in regular exercise at the Rajendrapur Cantonment. Begum Zia enquired about the condition of the injured.

Dhaka plans emergency meet with Yangon

COX'S BAZAR, Oct 8: Bangladesh is planning an emergency meeting with Myanmar to resume the repatriation of Rohingya refugees stalled after a restriction was imposed on it following the outbreak of plague in India. The Refugee, Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) at Cox's Bazar has sent a letter to Myanmar authorities to this end and they are likely to receive it by tomorrow, Additional RRRC Raquibuddin Ahmed told UNB. The Myanmar authorities turned down entry of 930 Rohingya refugees who were to be repatriated in the normal course under an earlier agreement because of "plague fear". Authorities also have re-

India not free from plague: WHO

NEW DELHI, Oct 8: The World Health Organisation on Saturday said although India is still not free of the plague, a ban on flights to and from the country is unnecessary since health authorities have acted swiftly to contain the deadly disease, reports AP. The WHO said people can visit India, but should avoid plague-hit cities such as Beed and Surat and take antibiotics if they come down with symptoms of the disease. "The ban on flights is beyond international regulations. It is an overreaction," WHO Director-General Dr. Hiroshi Nakajima told a news conference in New Delhi. Instead he hoped all foreign countries will adopt internationally accepted arrangements to quarantine only air and sea travellers who visited plague-hit areas, rather than examine all people coming from India. Fifteen countries banned flights to and from India after two types of plague broke out in India last month and killed at least 61 people. Since then, some countries have lifted the ban. Thousands of people were hospitalised across India with symptoms of the plague — high fever, sore throats and runny noses — but only 242 confirmed cases of pneumonic plague were reported, making WHO reluctant to call it an epidemic, he said.

ported about 100 cases of bubonic plague nationwide, almost all of them from Beed in Maharashtra state that was hit by an earthquake last year. The WHO can declare India free of the plague only 12 days after the last reported case of the disease. On Friday, authorities reported six new cases of pneumonic plague, he said. Dr. Nakajima said he flew to India at the request of many Gulf nations that were worried that the plague could spread to their region. In India, Dr. Nakajima said he met with health officials and patients in the western city of Surat, where pneumonic plague has killed at least 57 people. An international team of experts from the United States, Russia, Switzerland and India will begin an investigation next week into how pneumonic plague showed up in India, he said. The WHO chief said he asked Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao to improve the working conditions of laboratories that test blood and sputum of patients. Meanwhile, Thai Airways International has resumed normal flights to New Delhi after several days of limited service in which passengers were allowed to disembark, but not board, in the Indian capital, the airline announced in Bangkok on Friday night. Six countries in the Persian Gulf on Friday lifted an earlier ban on the import of food from India, said Tejinder Khanna, a top official in the Commerce Ministry in New Delhi.

Baby boom at Rohingya camps

From Our Correspondent COX'S BAZAR, Oct 8: Every day some 25 to 30 new born babies are adding to the total number of Rohingya refugees at 18 camps in Cox's Bazar and Bandarban districts, according to officials. The non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working here, however, claimed that the birth rate is over 30 babies a day. At this rate as many as 18,602 babies were born at the camps during the last 32 months, officials said. An unofficial count put the figure at 24,000, which is almost one third of the total number of 81,292 Rohingya refugees repatriated so far. The officials said during the 32-month period, 6232 babies died at the refugee camps. Besides about 3000 mothers are now reportedly expecting. NGO sources said polygamy and apathy towards contraceptive use among the generally conservative-Rohingya refugees is one of the main reasons behind the baby boom. Some 2.65 lakh Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh in 1991 to escape repression by the Myanmar military authorities.

ALCWC gives Hasina a free hand

By Staff Correspondent The Awami League Central Working Committee (ALCWC) has authorised party chief Sheikh Hasina to take any decision on the issue of the proposed Commonwealth-brokered dialogue with the government, committee sources said. The ALCWC, which met yesterday at the party central office, resolved that Hasina will have the authority to select party representative for the dialogue and give any decisions on issues coming up during the talks with government side. The meeting also empowered her to decide, if necessary, to abandon the proposed negotiations at any phase of the talks, the sources said. Party General Secretary Zillur Rahman, however, told The Daily Star that the leaders attending yesterday's meeting hoped that the proposed dialogue would resolve the present political impasse. The meeting, however, made it clear that there was no scope for compromise on the issue of a caretaker administration for holding general elections, he added. Some of the AL central leaders are also learnt to have complained at the meeting that the Jatiya Party (JP) and the Jamaat-e-Islami was out to

'exploit the present common struggle' for a caretaker administration by making their own demands like release of Ershad or passage of a blasphemy law. These leaders told the meeting that the AL could not support such demands in the name of united agitations for a caretaker government. Meanwhile, an AL press release, quoting the resolutions adopted at the meeting, said although the Prime Minister had agreed to the Commonwealth Secretary General's proposal for the dialogue, she was now "vitiating the pre-dialogue atmosphere by making frequent statements against the concept of a caretaker government." "Such a negative attitude towards the main issue on the agenda of the proposed talks would affect the prospect of resolving the crisis through dialogue," the press release added. UNB adds: In a separate resolution, the meeting criticised the government's inaction in facing the drought and famine-like situation in the country's northern districts where people were either starving or suffering from diarrhoeal diseases. It called for declaring the northern districts as a disaster area.

Pandemonium at Ctg JCD confce: 10 injured

From Staff Correspondent CHITTAGONG, Oct 8: At least 10 persons were injured when two rival groups clashed at a convention of the JCD, Chittagong south unit, held at the Muslim Hall in the city today. Of them the seriously injured were identified as Abu Bakur Siddiqui, joint convener of the Jubadul, Chittagong south unit, Badul Alam, general secretary of JCD, Anwara thana unit and Saleh Ahmed an activist of the JCD. The injured were rushed to local clinics. Police and witnesses said, some cocktails were exploded when the two groups suddenly started throwing chairs at each other amid shouting of provocative slogans. Despite the pandemonium, the JCD convention was held there as the trouble ended with the intervention of some party leaders, sources said.

Tala BNP secy killed in blast

From Our Correspondent KHULNA, Oct 8: Acting General Secretary of Tala unit of the BNP Mohammad Saiful Islam, 22, was killed in a bomb blast in front of the Tala Government College today. Two others belonging to the same party were injured. According to an FIR lodged with Tala thana of Satkhira district, one of the bombs hurled at a JCD procession hit the abdomen of Saiful Islam who succumbed to his injuries at Tala hospital. He was leading the JCD procession which came under attack by the Chhatra League activists on the college campus, said the FIR. Several shops of Tala bazar were damaged when the supporters of the JCD brought out a procession in protest against the killing. The JP and the Jamaat offices were also ransacked. Police later brought the situation under control. The body of the deceased, who appeared at the HSC examination from Keshabpur College this year, has been sent to Satkhira hospital for autopsy.

BB seeks to strengthen its capital base

By Sohel Manzur The Bangladesh Bank seeks to 'strengthen its capital base' to cover any loss due to major fluctuation in the foreign exchange rate, according to official sources. The central bank at present has a capital of Tk 3 crore and a proposal for increasing it to Tk 10 crore was made to the Ministry of Finance recently, the sources said. Bank sources told The Daily Star yesterday the capital of the bank would be increased further in phases to make its 'capital base compatible with increased banking activities.' The bank now has a huge reserve of foreign exchange and the loss to be incurred by the bank will also be huge if the rates of the foreign currencies face major fluctuations. The bank should, therefore, be

prepared to cover the loss by strengthening its capital base, the sources noted. A top official of the bank said such loss was incurred by the Malaysian central bank a few years ago which prompted it to increase its capital. The central banks of India and Pakistan have also strengthened their capital base by increasing their capital and reserve funds, he added. According to sources, the proposal made by the Bangladesh Bank is now being reviewed by the Finance Ministry. If approved by it, the proposal will be sent to the Law Ministry for examining the legal aspects of the matter. Implementation of the proposal will require amendments to the Bangladesh Bank order



The Central Liaison Committee of the Secretariat Employees Coordination Council organised a meeting and a 4-hr work stoppage yesterday. — Star photo

Govt employees observe 4-hour strike

By Staff Correspondent Work in government offices throughout the country including the Secretariat came to a virtual standstill as class III and class IV employees observed a four-hour strike yesterday. The employees, as per their declared programme will also observe similar strike today and tomorrow. The programme was declared by the liaison committee of the Government Employees Coordination Council to press home their 14-point demand. These include 30 per cent dearness allowance, selection grade and transfer of the employees in the development sector to the revenue sector. According to the committee sources, the government employees abstained from duties