

Armed forces are our pride: PM

JESSORE, Dec 7: Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia said here today that it had been proved that it was possible for individual talents to flourish to the maximum only in a democratic society and we had established that desired democracy at the cost of supreme sacrifices after a protracted struggle, reports BSS.

She said still we did not have the most modern technology in the world of aerial warfare but we could fill that shortage by personal talent, relentless training and exercise.

The Prime Minister was addressing the passing out parade marking the commissioning of 29 general duties pilot and 33 ground courses of Bangladesh Air Force Academy (BAFA) at the BAFA parade square here this morning.

She said that armed forces were our pride and they had earned laurels from home and abroad for their efficiency, perseverance and skill.

"We have won the victory in the War of Independence on December 16, 1971 at the cost of supreme sacrifices and sufferings. To protect that independence and sovereignty is the solemn responsibility of our armed forces," Begum Zia said.

The Air Force, she said, was raised through our great War of Independence and as the sentinel of national air boundary, Air Force was our pride.

The Prime Minister told the graduating cadets that the teachings of the life of a soldier is to protect the inde-

pendence of the motherland at any cost as safeguarding the independence and sovereignty is the basic duty of a soldier's life.

Begum Zia said it was her belief that the graduating cadets would meet the expectation of the nation by upholding the flag of independence.

She recalled the praiseworthy role of the Air Force at the time of natural disasters and in disaster relief.

The Prime Minister hoped that with the strength, courage and talents of the graduating cadets, Bangladesh Air Force would become a stronger one and would protect the air boundary of Bangladesh free from any aggressive force.

She reviewed the smartly turned out parade commanded by Wing Under Officer M Sajjad Hossain and took salute at the impressive march past. The Prime Minister also presented sword of honour, trophies, flying wings among the graduating cadets, she also presented the academy colour to number one squadron.

Earlier, on her arrival, the Prime Minister was received at the base by Air Chief Air Vice Marshal Altaf Hossain Chowdhury.

Ministers, Chief Election Commissioner, Chief of Army Staff, Chief of Naval Staff, members of Parliament, members of the diplomatic missions, high civil and military officers and guardians of the cadets were present.

The parade was rounded off with a spectacular fly past by the training aircraft of the academy.



A BDR truck patrolling a city street during yesterday's opposition hartal. — Star photo

AL agitation

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Jalal Mohiuddin and Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya, Senior vice-president of the City Awami League Rezauddin Ahmed presided.

Abdur Razzak MP urged the government to accept the demand for a neutral caretaker government to avert any confrontation.

Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina was struggling to establish peace and stability, he said, but alleged that the prime minister was trying to destroy peace and stability in the country.

Razzak said the government was scared of the current struggle as "proved by recent imbalanced speeches of the prime minister."

Amir Hossain Amu said the people would "teach this corrupt and power-hungry government a good lesson" through agitation for realising their demands.

The AL presidium member accused the government of unleashing terrorism across the country, especially against the Awami League workers. He was particularly very critical about the "recent provocative speeches by the Prime Minister."

Awami League leaders thanked the people for making yesterday's hartal a success and called upon them to join a post hartal rally today in front of the National Press Club at 12 noon.

The hartal continues up to 12 noon today.

Curfew to avoid Hindu-Muslim clash in Nepal

KATHMANDU, Dec 7: Authorities have imposed a curfew on Nepalgunj township for the second day today in a bid to avoid serious clashes between Hindus and Muslims, a Home Ministry source said, reports AFP.

A row between Hindus and Muslims at Nepalgunj, southwest of here, flared up Tuesday after both sides started pelting stones at one another.

The clashes began after the Hindus started constructing a temple to Lord Shiva at Fateymushfirkhana, a heavily Muslim populated area, the source said.

400 troops

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between the towns, would remain, sources said.

UN officials reported that the Bihac pocket, a Muslim enclave that includes Velika Kladusa, appeared to be quiet Tuesday. A Serb attack apparently aimed at the water supply for the town of Bihac was unsuccessful, said UN spokesman Lt Col Jan-Dirk von Merveldt in Sarajevo.

On Tuesday, the commander of the Bosnian army 5th Corps said his defence lines were holding solid. But the Bosnian Serb news agency SRNA claimed today that government troops were withdrawing, leaving the town in flames and rubble. There was no confirmation of the Serbian claim.

The UN mission to Bosnia has been nearly paralyzed by Serb restrictions such as the refusal to allow adequate supplies for the Bangladeshis.

Serbs made a slight concession Tuesday, allowing one UN aid convoy carrying 96 tons of food, fuel and winter supplies into Srebrenica. The fuel was the first to arrive in six months.

Meanwhile, a convoy for another eastern enclave, Gorazde, reached its destination today after being held up Tuesday. The office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in Zagreb said that it had received permission to send a convoy to Bihac with 100 metric tons of food.

Serbs have warned that desperately needed shipments of food and fuel will continue to be blocked unless the threat of NATO airstrikes is lifted.

In all, the Serbs are detaining 356 peacekeepers as insurance against NATO airstrikes.

Hartal observed

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Press Club. Presided over by city AL General Secretary Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya, the rally was addressed by central leaders of the party Mofazzal Hossain Poltu and Amir Hossain Amu.

The Jatiya Party and the AL-backed Chhatra League also held two small rallies in the area.

Our Narayanjan Correspondent reports: At least 15 persons were injured in clashes between supporters of the AL and the JP and the ruling BNP in the morning in different parts of the port town.

Six of them were admitted to hospitals in serious condition. They are Badal (30), Abul Hossain (23), Selim (23), Iftu (21), Habib (22) and Biddut (20). Some of them received bomb injuries.

The clash first broke out in front of the district AL office in the town around 11 am when a group of youths, identified as BNP activists, hurled some cocktails and the AL activists began chasing them.

The clash soon spread to other areas including Ukilpara, BB Road, Golachipa and Chashara. Police and witnesses said, the rival groups used guns and sharp weapons. The clashes ended at the intervention of police.

Our Sirajganj Correspondent adds: Over 25 persons were injured when pro-hartal and anti-hartal groups clashed in the town. Chhatra League leader Belal and JCD leader Selim were among the injured.

The clashes broke out when two processions of the Awami League and the BNP came face to face near the Victoria Quarters in the morning. The clash later spread to Suhrawardy Road and Bazar station areas.

Several rounds were fired

and crackers were exploded during the clash.

Our Natore, Gaibandha and Comilla correspondents report that hartal was observed peacefully at these towns, barring at stray clashes between supporters of BNP and the AL.

Our Staff Correspondent reports from Chittagong: The Opposition-called hartal paralysed life in the port city yesterday.

All commercial centres, shops and markets, industrial units, offices and banks remained closed on the day.

However, a few offices functioned with thin attendance.

The hartal affected activities at Chittagong Port.

Port officials said delivery of goods to and from the port was totally suspended as vehicles could not ply. Only very limited Cargo handling was possible inside the port jetties.

The roads and highways here more a deserted look as all kinds of vehicles including rickshaws stayed off.

Railway sources said train service to and from Chittagong was normal, though with less passengers.

Picket were active in most of the city areas and barricades were put up them, witnesses said.

Truck-loads of police were seen patrolling some city roads to prevent possible violence.

Our Staff Correspondent in Khulna reports: Hartal was observed here peacefully, processions were brought out by opposition parties. Life came to a standstill as all modes of transports remained off the roads. Shops, private offices and banks were found closed.

But after dusk, at least 13 handbombs were exploded in different areas.

Police yet to unearth mystery over BUET teacher's death

By Staff Correspondent

Police are yet to unearth the mystery regarding the death of a BUET professor Ajmal Nayat Ahmad.

Prof Ajmal, 54, of the Urban and Regional Planning Department of the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), was found dead inside a locked room of a rest house at Rajendrapur on Tuesday.

The police superintendent of Gazipur district and Gazipur thana police when contacted last night said that they could not make any progress in their investigation and no suspects had been arrested so far.

Relatives are still confused as to how and why the professor went to the rest house at Rajendrapur on Monday.

Businessman Mamul Huq, a brother-in-law of the late professor, told this correspondent, "As I knew him (Ajmal), it was impossible for him to be at Rajendrapur without letting my sister (Ajmal's wife) know."

Huq suspected Ajmal was abducted and taken to the rest house while he was going to an underconstruction site at Motihel Monday afternoon.

"He had nothing to make enemies except his property, but at this moment I cannot guess anything," Huq added.

Meanwhile, police are yet to receive the autopsy report from the Gazipur Sadar Hospital. The doctors there were awaiting the pathological test report, according to a source.

Yangon-Dhaka flights from Dec 21

YANGON, Dec 7: Myanmar's international airline, Myanmar Airways International, announced plans Wednesday to expand its fleet and services, reports AP.

To increase flights from Yangon to Bangkok and Singapore, and start a new service to Dhaka in Bangladesh, the airline will lease two Boeing 737-400 jetliners from Malaysian Air Services, an official of the Myanmar airline told reporters.

The new once-weekly service to Dhaka will begin December 21.

The airline already leases two airplanes from Malaysia. They are flown and maintained by staff from the Malaysian company.

The number of flights to Bangkok is to increase from seven to 10 a week effective December 11, and the number of flights to Singapore from three to four per week starting December 9.

Injured Khulna JCD leader dies

From Our Correspondent

KHULNA, Dec 7: A degree examinee, Mizanur Rahman Tutul, 22, who received grievous head injuries in an assassination attempt here on November 28 died at the PG Hospital in Dhaka on Tuesday.

Tutul, a former cultural secretary of Azam Khan Commerce College students' union and a JCD leader was fatally injured in an attack by a group of youngmen in front of his residence here.

Pakistan to submit resolution on HR in Kashmir at OIC confce

ISLAMABAD, Dec 7: Pakistan will submit a resolution on human rights violations in occupied Kashmir at the upcoming Morocco summit of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), officials said here today, reports AFP.

The resolution will also seek Islamic support for the Kashmiri people's right to self-determination. Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto is to lead Pakistan's delegation to the summit, which is due to be held in Casablanca on December 13 and 14.

Pakistan has expressed its concern over the continuing violations of the line of control by the Indian occupational forces, the spokesman said. Pakistan has already lodged a strong protest with the United Nations observers group between India and Pakistan.

A special envoy of King Hasan II of Morocco Abdel Kabir Alaqui M'daghr today called on Prime Minister Bhutto and delivered an invitation letter to her on behalf of the king for participation in the summit.

The summit will be preceded by a senior officials' and the OIC foreign ministers' meeting on December 10 to 12 to sort out the resolutions to be considered by the summit.

Besides Kashmir, the summit would discuss various political, economic, cultural and social problems facing the ummah.

The Midnight File

7 killed in Karachi violence

KARACHI, Dec 7: At least seven people, including a religious leader, are believed to have been killed in an attack on mosque here late today, eyewitnesses said. Hospital authorities said four bodies had come in and more were expected later. Four others were admitted to city hospitals with gunshot injuries. Qari Saeedur Rehman, the president of the Karachi branch of the Sunni Muslim Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), was the target of the attack, said an SSP spokesman. Rehman and six others died in the attack inside the masjid Akbar Mosque, he added, reports AFP.

Christopher ends ME tour

JERUSALEM, Dec 7: US Secretary of State Warren Christopher declared today after wrapping up his seventh Middle East shuttle this year that the peace process was progressing. "I am convinced that the peace process is moving forward," he said after talks with Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, reports AFP.

Lanka ready for truce

COLOMBO, Dec 7: The Sri Lankan government has told Tamil rebels fighting for independence in the island's north and east it is ready for a formal ceasefire, government and military officials said today, reports Reuters.

"We're ready for a ceasefire," a senior military official said. "We're waiting for a response from them (rebels)."

The government was prepared to declare a ceasefire in response to an unofficial, week-long unilateral ceasefire observed by the rebels last month, officials said.

The government's readiness for a ceasefire was conveyed to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) rebels in a letter sent on Tuesday through the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) operating in rebel areas, they said.

An initial cessation of hostilities in which both sides have a tacit understanding not to attack each other could go into effect before a planned second round of peace talks, as a confidence-building measure, officials said. If this was successful a formal ceasefire would be called, they added.

Information Minister Dharmasiri Senanayake said last week the government will resume peace talks with the rebels before Christmas. A government negotiating team held talks with rebel leaders in their northern Jaffna stronghold in mid-October but a second round scheduled for October 24 was postponed after the assassination of opposition leader Gamini Disanayake. The rebels have denied any involvement in the attack.

Meanwhile: AFP from Delhi says, India today voiced support for the Sri Lanka government's efforts to end the raging ethnic conflict in the island. The Press Trust of India (PTI) reported.

Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao told visiting Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar that he hoped peace would return to Sri Lanka following Colombo's plans to resume peace talks with Tamil guerrillas, the news agency said. Sri Lanka has suffered from "violence for so long," Rao was quoted as saying, referring to the bloody separatist drive being waged by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Kadirgamar, who arrived here today from Dhaka, informed Rao that Colombo hoped to resume the LTTE negotiations that were suspended following the assassination of a Sri Lankan opposition leader in October.

Indian Minister of State for External Affairs Raghunandan Lal Bhaatia told Kadirgamar that New Delhi "had always supported a peaceful, negotiated settlement of Sri Lanka's ethnic problem."

Sri Lanka is separated from India by a narrow strip of sea.

One killed, 25 injured in Manikganj fire

MANIKGANJ, Dec 7: A woman was killed and 25 people were injured in a devastating fire that burnt several houses at Polsura village in Saturia thana on Tuesday night, reports UNB.

Villagers said eight dwelling houses and valuables worth about Tk 5 lakh were gutted in the fire that originated from a 'Kupi Bati' a local-made lamp, about 10 pm.

They said Shamiran Bewa, 50, was roasted live and 25 others, including her two sons, suffered burns. Critically injured Hanif 40, and Jinal, 5 the sons of the dead, were admitted to Saturia Health Complex.

Rest of the injured were released after first aid. Villagers rushed to the scene and extinguished the blaze.

Mostafiz

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the 25th founding anniversary of the organisation.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia would lead a 32-member Bangladesh team at the two-day summit. She would leave Dhaka on way to Casablanca on December 11 and return home on December 15.

Abu Baker

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the bereaved family and prayed for salvation of the departed soul.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia also expressed her shock and sorrow at the death of Abu Baker.

In a condolence message, the Prime Minister paid tributes to the memory of late Abu Baker.

Speaker Shaikh Razzak Ali expressed his shock and sorrow at the death of Abu Baker. In a similar message Deputy Speaker Humayun Khan Panni also condoled the death of Abu Baker MP and expressed his deep sympathy to the members of the bereaved family.

Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Golam Azam and Secretary General Maulana Matur Rahman Nizami expressed deep shock at the death of Abu Baker.

Meanwhile, a Jamaat delegation led by Maulana Matur Rahman Nizami left Dhaka for Sherkul Agpara village in Natore to attend the funeral of late Abu Baker.

Van Gogh

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in France after World War II but did not recognize the artist's famous signature 'Vincent' in red in the lower right corner, according to Norbart.

She declined to put a value on the Van Gogh, whose flowers sit in a blue vase against a red-brown background. But the painting would likely bring millions of dollars on the international art market, which saw Van Gogh's 'Portrait of Dr. Gachet' bring \$82.5 million at a Christie's New York auction in May 1990.

PM: caretaker govt

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Post and Telecommunications Minister Tariqul Islam, State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Abdul Mannan, State Minister for Forest and Environment Goyeswar Roy, Farida Rahman MP and a number of local leaders.

Defeat raises new doubt about Major's survival

LONDON, Dec 7: Defeated by a parliamentary rebellion in his Conservative Party over a budget measure, Prime Minister John Major has suffered a huge blow to his already shaky authority, raising new doubts about his survival, reports AP.

The government, hoping to avert panic in financial markets after the 319-311 defeat for the proposed measure Tuesday night, abandoned a tax increase on domestic fuels. It said it would announce new measures to plug the 1.5 billion pound (\$1.8 billion) gap in revenue.

The defeat, Major's second parliamentary crisis within eight days, opened divisions in his 22-member Cabinet and left him presiding over what is effectively a minority government.

Fifteen rank-and-file Conservative legislators voted with opposition parties or abstained to defeat and increase in the fuel tax from 8 per cent to 'China won't seek hegemony abroad'

BEIJING, Dec 7: A top Chinese military official has dismissed as "totally groundless" the idea that a more powerful China in the future will pose a military threat to other Asian nations, reports AFP.

"We have no intention of seeking hegemony abroad now, nor in the future when we become stronger and more prosperous," the Vice Chairman of the influential Central Military Commission, Zhang Zhen, was quoted as saying by the Xinhua news agency late on Tuesday.

The so-called "China threat" is totally groundless," Zhang added.

China's announcement in March that it would raise national defence spending.

Two Indian ministers

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action taken report, which the government promised three and a half months ago, is presented first."

Communist Deputy Inderjit Gupta said before Patil stopped the proceedings.

Lawmakers said the main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was also considering a no-confidence vote against Rao if his Congress Party loses power in four state assemblies where elections were held in November and this month. The first results are due to be announced on Friday.

Rao who took power in June, 1991, at the head of a minority government, has survived several close no-confidence votes, mainly over the April, 1992, stocks scandal.

But thanks to defections from the centrist Janata Dal and some regional parties, Rao now has a wafer-thin majority.

Rao's rivals say he could be vulnerable to a possible revolt by dissidents if the Congress