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VOL. IV NO. 336 REGD. NO. DA 781 POUH 17, 1401 BS, DHAKA SATURDAY DECEMBER 31, 1994 RAJAB 26, 1415 HIJRI 12 PAGES : PRICE TAKA 5.00

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NEWS BRIEFS

PM visits Golam Sarwar's residence

KHULNA, Dec 30 : Prime Minister and BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia today visited the residence of acting president of Khulna District BNP, Golam Sarwar Jamadar here, who died on Wednesday. The Prime Minister spent some time with the members of the bereaved family, reports BSS.

BNP nominates for Sherpur by-polls

The Bangladesh National Party (BNP) last night nominated Mahmudul Huq as its candidate for contesting the by-election to the Sherpur-3 seat of the Jatiya Sangsad, party sources said, reports BSS.

One killed in Sylhet road mishap

From Staff Correspondent
SYLHET, Dec 30 : A businessman of Beanbazar died in a road mishap midnight last night near the thana headquarters. The victim Abdul Hannan, 38, while returning home on a motorbike at 11-30 pm met the accident as he lost control over the vehicle which hit the railing of a culvert at a place near his village home at Khasha. He died on the spot.

Seven killed in Vietnam accident

HANOI, Dec 30 : Seven people were killed and nine injured when a van taking a wedding party home collided with a truck, the official Evening News newspaper reported today. The van's driver was among those killed in the accident in the southern province of Song Be last Tuesday, it said, reports Reuters.

Country to be run as per Constitution: PM

KHULNA, Dec 30 : Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia said here today that the country was being run as per the Constitution and the laws of the land and asserted that it would continue in this manner, reports BSS.

Addressing a massive gathering at the Rupsha ferry-ghat here after laying the foundation stone of the proposed Rupsha Bridge, she refuted the Opposition's contention that Parliament no longer has any legal basis following the submission of their letters of resignation to the Speaker.

The Prime Minister said Parliament is still fully legal with elected representatives there.

Expressing her firm resolve to abide by the Constitution and the laws of the land in running the country, she said there was no scope to run the country by bypassing the Constitution and the laws.

Pledging to respect the people's verdict and the responsibilities entrusted on the BNP government by them, the Prime Minister said measures would be taken against those who would hamper public life, destroy the democratic process and obstruct the welfare-oriented development programmes of the democratic government.

The Prime Minister said that as per the Constitution an elected government is to run the country for a particular period and complete its term as per the people's verdict.

After the completion of its term, she said, the people again evaluate the party's achievements and failures and give fresh verdict in elections on the basis of the party's record.

Describing the Opposition's attempt to remove the elected BNP government before the completion of its term as "not the right thing", the Prime Minister said that a particular party had joined hands with the autocrats and 'razakars' (collaborators) to remove an elected government.

It is contradictory, she said. See Page 12 Col 1



Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia laid the foundation of the Rupsha Bridge at Labanchara in Khulna yesterday. — PID photo

Khaleda lays foundation of Rupsha Bridge

KHULNA, Dec 30 : Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia today laid the foundation stone of the Rupsha Bridge at Labanchara, about four kilometres from the city, reports UNB.

Laying the foundation of the long-cherished bridge, Begum Zia said the BNP government is pledge-bound to transform into reality the people's hopes and aspirations and is devoted to the welfare of the commonman.

She stressed the need for political and social stability in the country and sought cooperation from all for the realisation of the people's dream.

The 1128-metre long and 14.50-metres wide six-span bridge with provision for four lanes will be constructed at an estimated cost of Tk 432 crore.

The government will provide Tk 87 crore and the rest is expected to be provided by donor countries and agencies.

The bridge over the Rupsha was one of the election commitments of BNP chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia to the people of Khulna. The BNP government has constructed 223 bridges of different sizes in the last three and a half years.

The need for a bridge over the river Rupsha has been keenly felt for about three decades due to the ever-increasing number of people crossing the river daily and also due to the urgent need of linking the Mongla port with its hinterland of Khulna, Barisal and Rajshahi divisions and the greater Faridpur district of Dhaka division.

The project also envisages the construction of two approach roads linking the bridge to the Khulna-Jessore road and the Khulna-Mongla road at its two ends. The navigational clearance of the bridge is 18.30 metres.

Rao may reshuffle his cabinet tomorrow

NEW DELHI, Dec 30 : Indian Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao plans to carry out a long-awaited cabinet reshuffle on New Year's Day, The Times of India newspaper reported today, says AFP.

Rao, 73, may also simultaneously reorganise his ruling Congress (I) Party, the daily said, in an apparent bid to fend off a challenge from his main rival Arjun Singh who quit the cabinet one week ago.

'The Times quoted "sources close to Rao" as saying the Prime Minister would seek the resignation of all his ministers Saturday and "go ahead with the long-awaited" shakeup of his three-tier cabinet the next day.

The newspaper said President Shankar Dayal Sharma had decided to cancel a visit to the southern state of Tamil Nadu on Sunday so he could be present in New Delhi to preside over the swearing in of the new cabinet.

The Times said Rao may create a new ministry of human rights.

Congress sources declined comment on the Times report, but said a reshuffle had become imperative following the resignations of five ministers this month on top of five other resignations since Rao took office in June 1991.

Rao axed three ministers linked to corruption scandals on December 22, after the highly-respected civil supplies Minister A K Anthony quit the cabinet in a huff after being blamed by a colleague for a sugar scandal.

Arjun Singh, Rao's main rival in the ruling party and the *de facto* number two in the government, shocked the Congress by resigning from the cabinet on December 24 after blaming the premier for the crisis within the party.

Arjun Singh's dramatic resignation was seen as a challenge to the leadership of Rao, who has been under a cloud since leading the Congress to a humiliating election defeat in two key states this month.

On Thursday, Rao finally struck back at Arjun Singh, leaving him out of a 26-member Congress committee formed to oversee its campaign in five states that go to the polls in February.



Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina, a life member of the Bangla Academy, is listening to Director General Harun ur-Rashid at the annual general meeting of the academy in the city yesterday. — Star photo

Chechens offer New Year ceasefire

GROZNY (Russia), Dec 30 : Chechen and Russian troops clashed outside the rebel capital Grozny today and officials in the region said an oil refinery fire in the city threatened an environmental catastrophe throughout the Caucasus, reports Reuters.

Chechen leader Dzhokhar Dudayev offered a new year ceasefire from 2000 (1700 GMT) on Saturday, but made it conditional on Russian troops starting to pull out at the same time. Postfactum news agency said.

There was no immediate Russian response to the offer.

Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev said the crisis in the breakaway region of Chechnya was a tragedy but she insisted that force was the only way to solve the problem.

"Of course it is a tragedy, and I think that faced with a similar tragedy any other democratic state would have behaved in the same way," he told reporters. "We are in a situation where there is no other choice."

Russia's government information centre said two soldiers were killed when Chechen forces tried to break Russia's grip on the rebel capital in fighting during the night.

A Chechen foreign ministry official, quoted by Interfax news agency, said the fire at the refinery could spread to a nearby ammonia storage facility, causing environmental catastrophe.

A Reuters reporter in Sleptovsk, about 60 km (40 miles) from Grozny, said a column of black smoke billowed up from the direction of Grozny on Thursday night. A cloud of smoke was still visible in the early afternoon on Friday.

A Chechen reporter said on Thursday that the refinery was hit during a Russian attack earlier in the day. Russia denies its aircraft hit the refinery.

Russian officials said on Thursday they would pursue their military offensive against Chechnya, threatening for the first time to send troops into Grozny unless the rebels capitulated.

"We will continue our push deep into the city to seize weapons and liquidate armed formations if they do not give up their arms and capitulate,"

Still room for solution: Speaker

KHULNA, Dec 30 : Speaker of the Jatiya Sangsad Shaikh Razzak Ali said here today that the problem created out of the submission of the resignation letters by the Opposition MPs to him could still be resolved through talks, reports BSS.

Addressing a meeting at the Rupsha ferry-ghat, organised on the occasion of the foundation-laying of the proposed Rupsha bridge here, the Speaker said it was right that the Opposition Parliament members had submitted their resignations to him. But those letters, he said, were now under his scrutiny as per the Constitution and the Parliament rules of procedures.

"There is still time," the Speaker said, adding: "If you (Opposition MPs) want to give democracy an institutional shape, I believe it is still possible the problem can be solved through discussions by all."

Sk Razzak Ali hospitalised

By Staff Correspondent
Speaker of the Jatiya Sangsad Shaikh Razzak Ali was admitted to the Suhrawardy cardiovascular disease hospital with a mild chest pain, family members and hospital sources said last night.

"It's nothing serious. He is out of danger," an attending doctor told The Daily Star.

The Speaker was taken straight to the hospital at 7:45 pm on his return from Khulna where he addressed a public rally organised on the occasion of the foundation-laying ceremony of the Rupsha Bridge. Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia was the chief guest at the function.

One of Razzak Ali's family member said that he may leave hospital today.

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BNP leaders misleading people: Zillur

Awami League General Secretary Zillur Rahman yesterday said the statements of the Prime Minister, the Speaker and the BNP Secretary General after the Opposition MPs' resignation were designed to mislead the people, reports UNB.

In a statement, he described Salam Talukdar's reported statement that the Speaker would take a decision on the acceptance of the resignation letters as unwarranted. Such statement reflects ignorance of the constitutional provision, he said.

He said the ruling party is now engaged in a conspiracy to bluff and confuse the people in the wake of growing agitation. They have resorted to political dishonesty to divert the people's current agitation and Salam Talukdar's statement is a new addition to that, Zillur said.

Quoting Article 67 (2) of the Constitution, the AL leader said parliamentary seats fell vacant as soon as the Opposition MPs submitted their resignation letters to the Speaker. He questioned the knowledge of the Speaker.

See Page 12 Col 1

4 killed in city road mishaps

By DMCH Correspondent
At least four people including a minor girl were killed in road accidents in the city's Demra and Sonargaon Link Road areas yesterday.

Two persons aged between 30 and 40 and a minor girl, about eight years old, died on the spot when an autorickshaw and a truck collided at Sonargaon, Demra, around 10:30 in the morning.

None of the three victims could be identified immediately.

BNP won't accept advisory council

By Asiuzzaman
Ruling party leaders said yesterday that the last portion of their proposal was negotiable, but they would not accept any proposal for forming a 10-member advisory council under the President during the next general elections.

The second part regarding hartals and sieges is negotiable. We can drop it if the opposition parties drop their demand for an interim cabinet," BNP Secretary General Abdul Salam Talukdar told The Daily Star.

He said a mechanism can still be devised if the opposition parties agree and change their mind for the greater interest of the country.

Another ruling party leader said that fresh correspondence has been established among the mid-level leaders of the two sides but such contacts are still in the very early stages.

Salam Talukdar said that he had heard about such a 'move' but he had no details of the latest situation.

He alleged that the Opposition MPs submitted their resignation, even after the BNP fulfilled their basic demand — that a party government would not be in power during the elections.

The ruling party proposal was that the Prime Minister and her cabinet shall not be in power 30 days before the elections at the end of the five-year term, provided the MPs of the opposition political parties

See Page 12 Col 4

Elections only solution to crisis: Opposition

Leaders of the mainstream Opposition which quit Parliament Wednesday said yesterday immediate general elections under a neutral, non-partisan caretaker government is the only way to overcome the present political crisis.

Talking to UNB Mohammad Nasim of the Awami League, Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury of the Jatiya Party and Moulana Matjur Rahman Nizami of the Jamaat-e-Islami demanded resignation of the Prime Minister and election to parliament as per the new framework of the Opposition.

The new framework, announced on December 28, envisages the resignation of the incumbent Prime Minister, dissolution of Parliament and general elections under a caretaker administration.

According to the plan, the President will appoint a Prime Minister either from among the Appellate Division Judges of the Supreme Court, retired Appellate Division Judges or a non-partisan, acceptable personality. The new caretaker Prime Minister, who will not contest the elections, will appoint a non-partisan cabinet.

Mohammad Nasim said all proposals and discussions before the Opposition's resignation are now dead. There is no legal and constitutional scope for reconsidering their resignation, as urged by the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister should immediately step down to pave the way for general elections

See Page 12 Col 7

Further cut in Relief Ministry food budget

Star Report
Due to shortage of wheat, the food budget of the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief for the current fiscal has been slashed further and re-fixed at 810,000 tonnes.

The budget, which was 873,000 tonnes last year (1993-94), was earlier fixed at 840,000 tonnes for the current year. But the authorities revised the budget recently and curtailed the wheat allocation for various relief and rehabilitation programmes, including the food-for-work (FFW).

According to ministry sources, allocation for this year's food budget was reduced due to non-availability of adequate quantity of wheat from the government's own resources as well as a reduction in foreign assistance.

Some 438,550 tonnes of wheat were available last year from overseas donors, which has been reduced to 4,170.38 tonnes this fiscal. The government sanctioned from its own resource 434,550 tonnes of wheat for the last fiscal year but the allocation has come down to 392,962 tonnes this year.

The cut in the food budget will mainly affect the FFW, the biggest annual programme of the Relief Ministry. A total of 137,240 tonnes of wheat, available from the government's own resource, have been allocated for this year's FFW while during the last fiscal 197,600 tonnes were spent for the same purpose.

The sanction for the test relief (TR) programme has also been reduced to 54,189 tonnes of wheat from 61,289 tonnes of the last year.

The FFW programme, which begins in January every year in the rural areas, was largely dependent on the food aid provided by the US organisation CARE. But CARE stopped providing the grant for this programme since the last fiscal year which has resulted in the downsizing the volume of FFW.

Young man killed, maid found dead in city

By Staff Correspondent
Dilu Road, was found mysteriously dead in the kitchen around 12:30 pm.

Ramna police said one Mohammad Azad, who identified himself as the landlord, informed them over telephone.

Police said the 22-year-old Sada's body was found lying in the kitchen with bruised marks on the neck, which was fastened with a scarf.

Sadia, a spinster, was the daughter of one Joyanal Sikder of Gopalganj district. She reportedly came to this house as a domestic help four months ago.

Babu was taken to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) where he expired shortly after arrival.

Cantonment police, investigating the crime, believed Babu was the victim of rivalry between two groups of musclemen of the locality.

Local people said, the murder was a sequel to an armed clash in the area two days earlier.

The body was sent to the DMCH morgue for autopsy and no arrest was reported until filing of this report at 10:30 last night.

In another incident, a young maid Sada, employed in the house of one Maqbul Hossain at

Ctg-Dubai Biman flights likely soon

From Nurul Alam
CHITTAGONG, Dec 30 : Biman Bangladesh Airlines is expected to begin direct flights between Chittagong and the Middle-Eastern countries from the first week of February, 1995.

Biman sources said a plan to press DC-10 aircraft into service in this new route was taken up following a study by a Civil Aviation team about two weeks ago.

Initially, twice-a-week flights between Chittagong and Dubai will operate. Later this may be extended to Muscat and some other countries in the region, Biman sources said.

A senior Biman official said, on condition of anonymity: "A tentative date may be announced by the middle of January but the government is serious."

See Page 12 Col 3



Reazuddin, Monirul Alam Press Club president, secy

Reazuddin Ahmed and Khondakar Monirul Alam were yesterday elected president and general secretary respectively of the National Press Club for a two-year term, according to club election commission sources, reports BSS.

Reazuddin Ahmed, Chief Editor of the daily Financial Express, polled 219 votes against his nearest rival A B M Musa who got 142 votes.

See Page 12 Col 3

Opposition urged to exempt export-oriented units from hartals

Redwan Ahmed, MP and president, Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) yesterday called upon the politicians, including the Leader of the Opposition, to keep all export-oriented industries including the garments sector outside the purview of all types of hartals, reports BSS.

Ahmed, in a statement to the press, expressed his grave concern about the future of the garments industry in the changed political situation in the country.

Recalling the recent call on the Leader of the Opposition by the BGMEA under his leadership, Ahmed said that the BGMEA had requested her to keep the export-oriented industries outside the ambit of hartals.

December and January are a hard time for the garments industry because the quota years of the United States and Canada end during this time, he said. If exporters fail in ensuring shipment of their products on schedule those become stocklots or they have to send those by air at their own cost Ahmed explained.

The BGMEA president said that some countries of the region had lost their export markets due to political instability and Bangladesh was now facing a similar fate.

No govt can accept one-sided demand, says Hassan

Maj General (Retd) Mahmud Hassan yesterday said that it was not possible for any government to accept the one-sided demand of the Opposition, reports BSS.

He said the confrontational situation created in the country has put democracy in jeopardy.

In a statement issued yesterday, General Hassan, who resigned from the Jatiya Party and joined the BNP Wednesday, said the concession given by the Prime Minister at the last moment was acceptable to him and also to all conscious citizens of the country.

As for his resignation letter, he said, the unsigned letter was prepared nearly one and a half months ago when the situation of the country was completely different. He said, after the latest concession from the Prime Minister, he did not feel it proper to resign and accordingly requested the Speaker in writing to reject his letter of resignation.

One killed in road mishap

From Our Correspondent
NARAYANGANJ, Dec 30 : One person was killed on the spot and another seriously injured in a collision between an autorickshaw and a jeep on the Dhaka-Munshiganj road near Gogonagar at 3 pm today.

Witnesses said, autorickshaw passenger Iman Ali, 35, was killed on the spot when his Dhaka-bound vehicle collided with the jeep coming from the opposite direction.