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NEWS BRIEFS

JS session resumes today

By Staff Correspondent
After a day's break, Parliament session resumes today at 6:30 pm to begin discussion on the President's speech. President Abdur Rahman Bhasa addressed the first sitting of the 18th session of the Fifth Parliament which went into session Monday. The session will be a brief one and is expected to end before the month of Ramadan.

Train services restored

Rail communications in the Dhaka-Chittagong and Dhaka-Sylhet routes via Ghorashal resumed at 9:30 pm yesterday. Train services in the routes were disrupted as jute-textile workers removed railtracks at Ghorashal on Monday to enforce a 72-hour rail-road barricade. Mostafa-e-Jamil, Director, Public Relations of Bangladesh Railway told UNB that the uprooted railtracks had been repaired speedily to restore the disrupted communications.

Mandela in Delhi

NEW DELHI, Jan 24: President Nelson Mandela of South Africa arrived in New Delhi today on a four-day visit that is expected to enhance business and political ties between India and South Africa. Mandela came to India eight months after his release from prison in 1990, but this is his first visit after he was installed as president when his African National Congress won South Africa's first all-race election in April. Mandela is accompanied by Ela Ramgobin, a granddaughter of India's independence leader Mahatma Gandhi, who began his political career by fighting apartheid in South Africa, reports AP.



Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia delivering her inaugural address at the 'Euro money-BOI Bangladesh Investment Conference: The Emerging Tiger' in the city yesterday. — PID photo

700 delegates join int'l confce in city

Dhaka offers best deal for foreign investors: PM

By Staff Correspondent

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia yesterday asserted that Bangladesh was poised for rapid growth and the liberal policies adopted by the country has made it the best place for investment in the South Asian region.

"We have already adopted liberal policies for making all types of investments attractive and profitable... Bangladesh is now the best place for investment in South Asia," she told a large gathering of local and foreign investors while inaugurating the 2-day 'Bangladesh Investment Conference: The

Emerging Tiger' at the Sonargaon Hotel. Nearly 700 investors, including 210 from abroad, are attending the conference jointly organised by the Board

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of Investment (BOI) and Euro money, a leading London-based international financial journal.

The Prime Minister assured the foreign investors that their investments would be secured. "We assure you that your investments will not only be fully safe but also highly profitable."

Presided over by Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman, the inaugural session was also addressed by M Morshed Khan, special envoy to the Prime Minister, BOI Executive Chairman M Mokammel Haque, FBCCI president Salman F Rahman and Managing Director of Euro money Publications Idelhard Embrey.

The Prime Minister was also upbeat about the growth prospects of the South Asian region and said that Bangladesh, because of its location, is also poised to play a historic

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Hasina may chair closing session

By Staff Correspondent

Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina may chair the closing session of the Bangladesh Investment Conference today. "We will invite Sheikh Hasina, as the leader of the largest opposition party, to chair the concluding session of this conference," said M Morshed Khan, Special Envoy to the Prime Minister, taking cue from a suggestion made by Jatiya Party leader Moudud Ahmed.

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No restrictions on foreign investment, says Saifur

By Staff Correspondent

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday urged the foreign investors to invest in Bangladesh which offers the most attractive incentive pack-



M Saifur Rahman

ages for them. The minister was addressing the inaugural session of the two-day International Investment Conference co-hosted by the Board of Investment (BOI) and Euro money Conferences, a London-based organisation fa-

mous for organising such conferences on emerging markets in the world.

He said the government has removed all the restrictions on foreign investment. Investors from any country can now invest any amount in all sectors barring a few related to defence and can also repatriate the entire profits to their countries, he added.

The country has made its currency convertible in the current account and accepted Article 8 of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Finance Minister said. Bangladesh is the only country in the region which makes no distinction between local and foreign investors, he added.

"We are also the pioneers of reform programmes in the region. We have liberalised our economy and eliminated all restrictions on economic activities," Rahman said and added that one of the objectives of the reforms is elimination of inefficiency.

"All obstructions and dis-

ruptions have to be removed, so that the market forces can operate smoothly," the minister said.

He said the government has



M Morshed Khan

provided tax holidays to and duty free import of capital machinery and also liberalised the import of raw materials, measures which have yielded positive results.

In recent times imports of

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Tofael, Moudud assure all cooperation

By Staff Correspondent

The leaders of two major opposition political parties yesterday reconfirmed their commitment to free market economic policies to attain sustainable growth led by the private sector.

Addressing a plenary session of the Bangladesh Investment Conference, which opened amid a half-day hartal enforced by the opposition parties in the capital yesterday, Awami League leader Tofael Ahmed and Jatiya Party leader Moudud Ahmed assured all cooperation in promoting foreign investment in the country.

They also asserted that Bangladesh is the right choice for investment with its great untapped potentials.

Describing the two-day conference as a 'significant event', Tofael, however, expressed dismay at the 'failure' of the local organisers to discuss about the conference with the Awami League, the largest opposition party.

He pointed out that after a comprehensive review of the

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Bomb explodes near PM's motorcade 50 hurt during hartal in city

By Staff Correspondent

A crude bomb went off as the Prime Minister's motorcade was passing by Awlad Hossain Market near Farm Gate during a half-day hartal in the capital yesterday at the call of opposition political parties.

None was, however, injured in the blast. When contacted, official sources would neither confirm nor deny if it was an attempt on the PM's life.

Eight persons were arrested from the spot and sent to jail.

Police filed three cases against the arrested on charges of rioting and obstructing the police and also under the Explosives Act and the Special Powers Act.

The arrested are: Bashir, Hakeem, Mira, Ajay Roy, Ralash, Harunur Rashid, Khurshid and Ashrafur Islam — all Opposition activists.

The eight-hour hartal that started from 6 am left at least 50 people injured, including two senior leaders of the opposition Awami League.

Three mainstream opposition parties — the Awami League, the Jatiya Party and the Jamaat-e-Islami — have called for another hartal today, from dawn to dusk, throughout the country.

The parties are pressing their demand for dissolution of Parliament and general elections under a neutral, caretaker administration. Today's hartal call is also in protest against spiralling prices of essentials.

Yesterday, at about 11:15 am, when the PM's motorcade was returning to her Tejgaon office from Sonargaon Hotel, venue of the two-day international conference on invest-

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50 women and children hurt Gangsters torch homes in N'ganj village

From Our Correspondent

NARAYANGANJ, Jan 24: At least 50 women and children were injured. 23 houses and eight shops gutted and another 40 houses and shops badly damaged in two separate incidents of fire and terrorist activities here this morning. In the first incident, an armed gang of youths numbering 70 to 80 created a reign of terror when they attacked Kaitakhali village under Bandar thana at about 9:45 am.

The youths, reportedly belonging to a gang led by one Sabir who was killed in a gunfight yesterday, set 23 houses afire and prevented the Fire Brigade men from entering the village until the houses were burnt to ashes.

They also damaged at least 20 shops and several more

houses in the village, the abode of Mannan, leader of their rival gang.

Sabir was killed and five other youths of his group were injured Monday when members of Mannan's gang allegedly attacked them with arms.

All the injured women and children were released after first aid at local health centres. But they are now shelterless. The male inhabitants fled the village after yesterday's gunfight.

Police reached there two hours after the incident when all the armed youths had already left the scene.

Villagers alleged that Bandar police refuse to take their cases while police said

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Continue agitation till fall of govt: Hasina

By Staff Correspondent

Awami League president Sheikh Hasina yesterday called for intensifying the on-going agitation and continuing it until the fall of 'neo-autocrats'. "This government must go since it now has no right to stay in power," Hasina told a post-hartal rally in front of the party central office at Bangabandhu Avenue in the city.

She accused the present rulers of corruption and repression on opposition leaders and workers. "The government has resorted to repression to foil the agitation," Hasina said, resenting police action on party leaders and workers during the hartal hour yesterday.

The AL chief said the ruling BNP did not know the language of democracy and it was out to foil the 'Opposition's peaceful agitation' by taking the path of torture and repression.

She reiterated her contention that the present government has lost its 'legitimacy' after the mass resignation of Opposition

Parliament members.

The AL chief demanded release of those arrested during yesterday's hartal period and warned that the government alone would be responsible for the consequences of continued atrocities.

Hasina said the Opposition called the hartal to protest price spiral of essentials and asked if the people had the right to go for such protests.

Referring to the international investment conference in the city, she said without political stability, there could not be any investment. "We have suggested at least three elections under neutral caretaker governments to ensure political stability in the country," she said.

She further said investment was not taking place because of the failure of this government, not for hartals. The rulers' incompetence and corruption spoiled the investment climate, she added.

Hasina condemned police action on the jute and textile mills workers and alleged that

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Khaleda goes to Lanka today

From Waruna Karunatilake, COLOMBO, Jan 24: Bangladesh Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia will arrive here tomorrow on a two-day visit to discuss bilateral relations and issues connected with the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

The Bangladesh Prime Minister, who is the current Chairperson of SAARC, is paying the traditional farewell visit before handing over the chairmanship to India in April.

Begum Zia will "discuss direct air-links between Colombo and Dhaka, Sri Lanka importing pite and turning the Colombo harbour into a trans-shipment hub for South Asia," Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar told newsmen today.

She will also review SAARC-related issues with Sri Lankan President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga during their 75-minute official talks tomorrow at the Presidential Secretariat.

Begum Zia is the second head of government to visit the

Arjun Singh suspended from party

NEW DELHI, Jan 24: Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao on Tuesday suspended his chief critic from the governing Congress Party after a month-long public feud, reports AP.

The suspension of Arjun Singh's membership in the party and its governing bodies deepened a rift and increased the risk of a split just before elections for six state legislatures in the next two months.

Singh's membership was being lifted for his "anti-party activities resulting in damage to the party's image," party spokesman Janardan Poojary was quoted by United News of India as saying.

Singh, considered the party's No 2 leader, resigned from the cabinet on December 24, accusing the prime minister of inefficiency, indecisiveness and mishandling corruption cases that had plagued the

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72-hr. barricade by industrial workers ends

By Staff Correspondent

The last day of the three-day strike and road-rail barricade by the jute-cotton-textile mills workers across the country passed off peacefully yesterday.

During the 72-hour agitation, at least two workers — one in Chittagong and the other in Narayanganj — were killed and over 350 others injured in clashes with police. The trade union leaders, however, claimed three deaths.

Four trade union bodies and federations jointly called the three-day programme, that seriously disrupted road and rail communications throughout the country, to press for their demands including new pay scale.

On the concluding day of the 72-hour blockade, the striking industrial workers put up road and rail barricades in Chittagong, Narayanganj and other parts of the country. However, there was no report of violence.

The situation at Adamjeeagar industrial belt of Narayanganj where one worker was killed Monday remained

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Three bodies recovered in city

By Staff Correspondent

Police recovered bodies of three young men, two of whom allegedly murdered, in the city yesterday.

Motijheel police recovered the body of Shahjahan — an employee of a video shop at Kabi Jastimuddin Road — from an empty water tank on roof of the four-storey residence of one Dr Mezbahuddin in the same locality yesterday afternoon.

Shahjahan who had been working in the James Video was missing since Friday.

The owner of the video shop informed police who later arrested a young man Utan yesterday morning.

Police said that they recovered the body following the statement of Utan. The young man has been detained in the

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A look into Bangladesh Railway: Part-V Political blows to infrastructure

By Morshed Ali Khan

Bangladesh Railway's infrastructure has all along suffered blows from the political quarters. Overriding political considerations were either imposed on or dictated to the institution. There are routes where BR suffers heavy losses. "But any move to close these routes is prevented by the government itself since it fears losing public support in the areas concerned," one source said.

The recently installed multi-million Taka Computerised Booking and Ticketing system cannot be wholly operated as skilled attendants are not available.

On its Dhaka-Tongi route, a modern electronic interlocking signal system breaks down repeatedly because the work-

force lack training to operate the device.

There are eight government registered labour unions in BR. One of them, the Running Staff and Labour Union, has recently come up with a 16-point demand which includes leasing out BR's derelict property only to its staff, inclusion of rail track in the Jamuna Bridge project and abolishing 'discriminatory' pay scale, etc.

A ban on new recruitment of non-graded staff has been in force since 1989. To curtail its crowded corridors of 55,413 workforce, BR launched a Voluntary Separation Scheme during 1992-1993, popularly known as the 'Golden Handshake'. Under the scheme, 13,413 BR workers have so far retired, bringing the total

number to 42,000, the target being 40,000.

Till 1982, the responsibility of the railway lay with the Railway Board. In a bid to gain wider control, the government brought BR under the Railway Division of the Ministry of Communications. In other words, bureaucrats took over with little or no experience of the railway sector. In the course of this investigation, it was found out that many of these officials were directly or indirectly involved in the country's promising road transport business.

Speculations are rife that BR will soon undergo major changes. Foreign firms and financiers like the ADB and the WB have shown interest. An

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The roof of a stationary train at Tongi station makes a good place to rest for destitute of the area. — Star photo