

Ershad's trial: PW declared hostile

Four prosecution witnesses (PWs) including two senior government officials yesterday testified before a special judge's court in the city trying deposed president Hussain Muhammad Ershad and two others in the Jatiya Party Office case, reports BSS.

One of the witnesses, a retired superintending engineer of the PWD, was declared hostile at one stage of his deposition. Public prosecutor Abdur Razzak Khan, who was conducting the deposition, later cross-examined the witness.

The number of PWs to have testified so far in the Special Case No 50 of 1993 thus rose to 13. The case involves spending of government money for repair, renovation and refurbishing of an abandoned house (House No-104, Road 3, Dhanmadi Residential Area, Dhaka) which was used as the central office of the Jatiya Party during Ershad's rule.

Ershad, the principal accused, is charged with abusing his official position in getting the work done, thereby causing a loss of Taka 82 lakh to the exchequer. Former minister Mostafa Jamal Haider and former Works Secretary M. A. Rouf are Ershad's co-accused.

Md. Sharifuddin, who was superintending engineer of PWD Circle-2, Dhaka during the repair and renovation work of the house, became the first prosecution witness to be declared hostile. Sharifuddin retired in 1992.

PW-10 Syed Amirul Mulk, additional secretary in-charge of the Ministry of Environment and Forests, during testimony yesterday, identified an exhibit — a note — which dwells on the proposal for the work.

Mulk, who was Joint Secretary, Ministry of Finance from 1983 to 1990, had put his signature to the proposal after reviewing the matter. The PW-10, who identified his signature on the note, admitted during cross-examination by Yusuf Hossain Humayun, defence counsel for Jamal Haider, that there was meeting to prevent him from disagreeing with the contents of the proposal.

PW-11 Shah Alam Zahiruddin, chief architect of the Government of Bangladesh, during his deposition said that some time in mid-January 1990, he received a phone call from chief engineer, Rouf (accused Rouf) asking him to send an architect to the house in question the same day.

The PW-11 said following the phone call, he had instructed his deputy chief architect Anir Hossain to visit the site that very day. Later the

design for renovation work was done, he told the court. During cross-examination by T M Akbar, the defence counsel for Rouf, the chief architect replied that there was no written instruction from the accused (Rouf) and added that whatever he had stated, was from his memory.

Md. Sharifuddin, before being declared hostile, deposed that the estimate of the repair, renovation and refurbishing of the house were done at the direction of Ershad and Rouf. He said chief engineer A. F. Sharifuddin had later directed him over phone to do the valuation of the said house.

PW-12 identified the valuation report and said the value of the house was fixed at Taka 1,34,35,435.

When asked by the PP why the valuation was done, the witness said he was not aware of the reason. At this stage, the PP declared him hostile and began cross-examining him.

During questioning by the PP, the PW said he had not raised any objection because the work was done at the directives of high-ups, meaning Ershad and others.

When cross-examined by Khandakar Mahbub Hossain, the defence counsel for Ershad, Sharifuddin said the estimate was prepared as per rules. He said he never had any meeting with the then president, but had heard of instructions issued by the principal accused from the chief engineer. That fact, too, was mentioned in the estimate, he said. He denied having been threatened with being made an accused unless he cooperated with the prosecution. He further said that the valuation was properly done by the executive engineer and he had counter-signed it.

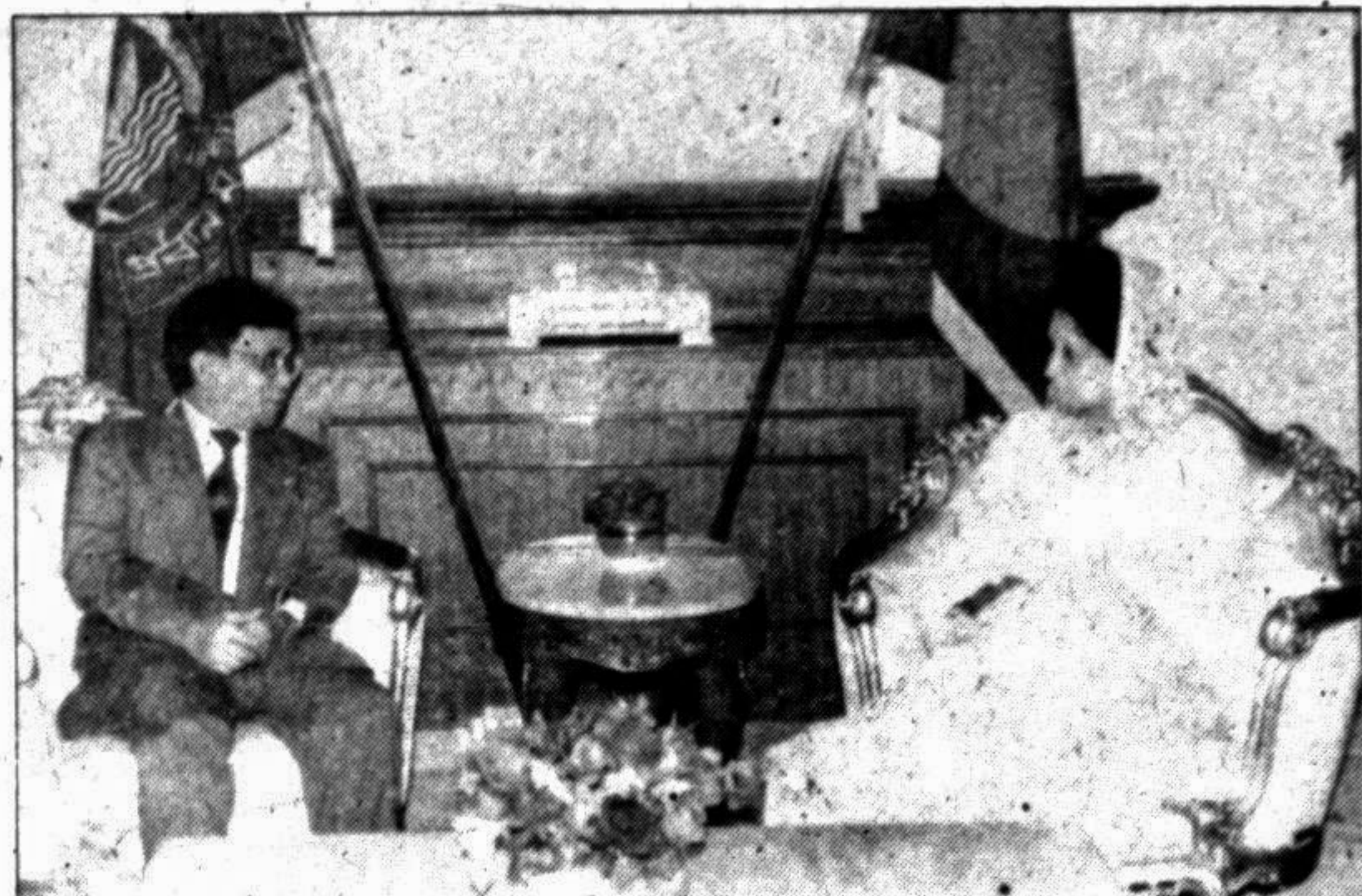
While cross-examined by Yusuf Hossain Humayun, PW-12 said he was satisfied with the work done in the house when he visited it once or twice. He denied keeping any information secret.

The work was done as per estimate, the witness said, in reply to a question from T M Akbar. He said both the estimate and the valuation were done according to rules.

Afzal Hossain, a contractor, was tendered as PW-13. The defence, however, declined to cross-examine him.

Hossain is one of the contractors who carried out the work in the house in question. Three more witnesses are likely to testify today, prosecution sources said.

Zinat Ara, additional District and Sessions Judge (First Court) who chaired the court, adjourned the proceedings till noon today.



The newly-appointed Malaysian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Dato Mahayuddin bin Abdul Rahman called on Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia at her office yesterday. — PID photo

PM: Malaysia

From Page 1 Col 5
cial interest Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad has for Bangladesh and her fruitful visit to Malaysia last October.

She emphasised that the matters, discussed during her visit be followed up in order to consolidate them.

The High Commissioner, referring to the export of manpower, particularly doctors and nurses from Bangladesh, informed the Prime Minister that the recruitment process had already started. He appreciated the standard of Bangladeshi doctors and nurses, saying it matched international standard.

The Prime Minister also mentioned the congenial investment opportunities offered by the liberal policy of the present government and said there was immense scope for joint venture as well as direct foreign investment.

She mentioned the potentials of coastal islands like Sonadia where the government is willing to invite foreign investment for developing the tourism industry.

The High Commissioner informed Begum Zia that Malaysian investors were very keen to invest in different fields and are regularly visiting Bangladesh to explore suitable sectors for investment.

Arafat

From Page 1 Col 8
inian terror organisations ... (including) Islamic Jihad, which have arisen in Syria.

"As strange as it seems Arafat raised the issue that in fact they are attacking him, that they threaten his life not less than they threaten the lives of Israelis," Rabin said.

"Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for a suicide bomb attack which killed 21 Israelis near Tel Aviv on January 22.

Radical groups in Damascus on Friday condemned the Cairo summit and said bloody attacks against Israel would continue.

Trade bodies assure govt

No further price-hike of essentials in Ramadan

Against continued price-hike of essentials in the city markets, leaders of trade bodies in a meeting yesterday assured that prices would not rise further during the rest of Ramadan, reports UMB.

The merchants said prices of many consumer products have come down and remained stable during the last few days due to measures taken by the government to contain prices of essentials.

Commerce Minister M Shamsul Islam, who chaired the meeting at the ministry's conference room, noted that prices of some commodities have increased. In the wake of Ramadan although the rise is not so high.

Senior officials of different ministries, departments and corporations, and leaders of various trade associations attended the meeting, arranged by the Commerce Ministry to review the supply and price situation of essentials.

The meeting was a follow-up of two fruitful meetings in December where the businessmen also had assured that prices would not climb in Ramadan. But they had also requested the ministry to take measures for solving some of the problems faced by them.

Commerce Secretary A H Mofazzal Karim told the meeting that the government had extended cooperation to the private sector to face the "routine price-hike in the month of Ramadan."

But this time prices of some essentials marked a rise "without any reason" before the Ramadan, he said.

Prices of rice, wheat, atta, sugar, salt, edible oil, pulses, onion, garlic, dates and eggs — all in the hot items' list — were appraised at the meeting where the traders' representatives claimed that their prices have shot up in the world market.

The only good news came from the representative of the Dhaka Metropolitan Meat

Traders' Association Rabiul Haque who said his association has refixed prices of beef at Tk 60, buffalo meat Tk 50 and mutton of Tk 100 per kg.

Haque requested the consumers to contact his association over telephone no. 806040 regarding "higher prices, less weight or misconduct" from any meat trader. "We'll take drastic action," he assured.

Director General of the Food Department Nurul Absar informed the meeting that prices of rice have stabilised following the open market sale (OMS) which began last month. Rice prices in 63 districts are stable while it is showing downward trend in one district, he said.

The official further informed that OMS of atta has also begun at the thana level as well as in the capital. The stock of foodgrain is satisfactory and ships carrying imported rice and wheat reached the country during the last few days.

He also told the meeting that more ships carrying foodgrain imported by the government and the private sector are due in the coming months.

The Commerce Minister, regretting the fact that eggs were now being sold at Tk 15 for four, informed the meeting that egg producers would be invited to a meeting shortly to discuss the situation.

He hinted that import of eggs, restricted earlier upon assurance by the poultry farm owners to make eggs available at a rate of Tk 11 for four, would be considered if the situation does not improve soon.

A Gafur of the Bangladesh Bus-Truck Owners Association requested the minister to step up implementation of some decisions of a Home Ministry meeting held last year.

The meeting, on December 28 last year took a number of decisions relating to providing speedy ferry facilities to vehicles carrying foodgrain.

Humayun Zahir murder Approver cross-examined

By Court Correspondent

Mohammad Alam, approver in Humayun Zahir murder case, was cross-examined for three hours in the Second Additional District and Sessions Judge's Court in the city yesterday.

Answering queries from defence lawyers, Alam admitted he along with two of his accomplices organised the murder of businessman Humayun Zahir in accordance with a plot by Akhteruzzaman Chowdhury Babu, MP.

He received Tk 4,500 to meet the costs of carrying out the plot and was assured that he would be sent to the US, Alam confessed. But, he added, after the murder was committed, he got no opportunity to leave for the US and managed to flee to India, crossing the Brahmanbaria border.

Alam further said, a retired army man named Bhulu, was assigned to shoot Zahir, but he failed to confirm who actually committed the murder.

Senior advocate Sirajul Haq and advocate Khan Saifur Rahman cross-examined the approver as defence lawyers.

Humayun Zahir was murdered on April 8, 1993 at his Dhanmadi residence in the city. Awami League MP Akhteruzzaman Chowdhury Babu has been accused of the murder. Babu has been absconding.

Three witnesses have been examined so far. Alhaj Zahurul Haq, father-in-law of the victim, was examined on October 9 last year and Abul Hossain, a guard at the residence of Zahir, was examined on January 8 this year.

19 Georgians may face death sentence

TBLISI, Georgia, Feb 4: Nineteen men accused of murder and terrorism by the Georgian government might be sentenced to death next week, an official said Saturday, reports AP.

They are charged with trying to assassinate a powerful Georgian warlord, Jaba Ioseliani. The June 1992 bomb attack killed five passers-by and provoked general outrage in the former Soviet republic.

The 16-month trial, which resumes Monday, has been heavily criticized by the Human Rights Watch-Helsinki.

10 killed in Karachi

KARACHI, Pakistan, Feb 4: Ten men were fatally shot Saturday night in a series of attacks apparently linked to a bitter feud between Sunni and Shi'ite Muslim militants, police said, reports AP.

In the worst attack, four people were gunned down outside a club where many Shi'ite men gather to play board games in central Karachi.

At least six of the 10 men killed were Shi'ites.

'4 poura polls were more or less free, fair'

By Staff Correspondent

An election monitoring report on the four Pourasabha polls held recently said that the elections were more or less free and fair, except some minor irregularities in Sylhet.

The Study and Research Group (SRG), a local non-government organisation, monitored the elections in the municipalities of Barisal, Sylhet, Chandpur and Shibganj on January 22.

The SRG in its preliminary report released to the press yesterday, said election campaign in Barisal, Chandpur and Shibganj towns was widespread and effective, but the candidates had no restriction on expenses.

Polling agents were present at most of the polling centres, dotted with election camps, the report said adding the voters' list was found faulty to some extent.

The elections in Sylhet were also free, but some electoral irregularities were found such as 'under-age voting and impersonation,' the report said.

Voting could not take place at seven centres in Sylhet pourasabha because a section of people of the areas enforced a general strike in protest against inclusion of their areas in the municipality.

A ballot box was snatched by some miscreants from booth number 13 under Ward-3, causing suspension of voting for sometime, the report pointed out.

The sealed ballot box was, however, recovered within 15 minutes with the help of the law enforcing agencies and voting resumed.

The Midnight File

Myanmar frees 23 detenus

YANGOON, Myanmar, Feb 4: The government Saturday said it had released 23 political prisoners, including a member of the central committee of the opposition party led by Nobel Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi. Suu Kyi has been under house arrest since 1989 as part of the ruling junta's wider attempt to crush the prodemocracy movement. She has been refused all but a handful of visitors, reports AP.

Chechens plan Afghan-style war

MANAMA, Bahrain, Feb 4: Chechya's military chief was quoted Saturday threatening to spread an Afghan-style guerilla war into the Russian hinterland. "It will be very painful for Russia," Defence Minister Aslan Maskhadov told a reporter for the Arabic daily Al-Hayat at his headquarters near Grozny, reports AP.

3 killed, 12 injured in road mishaps

By Staff Correspondent

Three people including a minor girl were killed and twelve others injured in road accidents in Noakhali and Jhalakathi yesterday.

UNB from Noakhali reports: Two people were killed and seven others injured when an autotempo skidded off the road and fell into a ditch near Bhejhal Bari in Begumganj thana yesterday.

Police and witnesses said the Majdee Court-bound autotempo carrying passengers from Chowmuhani met with the accident at about 3:30 pm when one of its wheels flattened.

Autotempo driver Sharfulah Mintu, 25, and passenger Beal Hossain, 35, a peon of Agrani Bank Chowmuhani branch, died on the spot.

All the injured were admitted to Majdee Court Sadar Hospital.

US sanctions

From Page 1 Col 7

was drawn from an initial list of 2.8 billion dollars in Chinese goods that was published a month ago. Among the hardest hit products are plastics, including picture frames, cellular phones, answering machines, sporting goods and some bicycles.

The plastics category accounts for 465 million dollars, answering machines and cellular phones 108 million dollars, sporting goods 78 million dollars and bicycles, 65 million dollars.

Kantor said the items were selected because they are the fastest-growing Chinese exports to the United States, are mostly made in state-owned factories, and are not comparable to American products.

Human organs

From Page 1 Col 5

and takes force with immediate effect to curb rampant trafficking in human parts, health ministry officials added. It bans donors from gifting organs to anyone but close relatives and orders medical facilities to obtain official clearance before extracting body parts from dead or living humans.

"The law will go a long way in preventing a racket in human organs in India," a ministry official said of a recent scandal involving several government doctors who had allegedly removed kidneys from unsuspecting victims admitted to hospitals for treatment of minor ailments.

Some 21 women from the southern state of Tamil Nadu testified to the police that they had lost a kidney each during treatment at a state-run hospital last month in the adjoining state of Karnataka.

The law provides for preservation of human organs and bans removal of body parts from unclaimed bodies in prisons or hospitals, only with official clearance, the officials said.

Expert committees have been set up by the government to monitor extraction of human organs.

Most private blood banks here rely on paid professional donors to stock up on plasma while a massive racket exists in the sale of organs, many of them bought from the poor for a few hundred dollars.

Small credit

From Page 1 Col 4

The Finance Minister urged the bankers to encourage fresh breed of young entrepreneurs to come for investment in the country.

The meeting was informed that during the current financial year credit flow to both industrial and agricultural sectors had increased substantially.

During the first six months of the fiscal, different banks have sanctioned Tk 1481 crore as industrial credit, which is nearly 50 per cent of the target of Tk 3110 crore fixed for the year.

The agriculture sector also registered a 30 per cent increase in credit flow during the first half of the current fiscal in comparison to the corresponding period of last year. The recovery of current dues has also increased substantially during the period.

Task Force on drought submits report

The task force formed to identify ways and means to face the drought situation in 36 districts of the country presented its report before an inter-ministerial meeting held in Dhaka yesterday with Agriculture and Water Resources Minister M Majid-Ul-Haq in the chair, an official handout said, reports BSS.

Food Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and high officials concerned were present.

The committee was formed last December in the wake of a democratic fall in the ground water level in the northern region due to a drought.

In its report the task force has made 26 recommendations to overcome the situation.

Benazir

From Page 1 Col 7
only the 1949 United Nations resolutions, which called for a referendum in Kashmir, could form the basis for a settlement.

"India should shun the policy of oppression and aggression and give serious thought to coming to the negotiating table to decide on the modalities of plebiscite," she said.

"India talks of negotiations, but when we invite them for talks on finding ways and means of implementing the UN resolutions it says Kashmir is our integral part," Bhutto said.

She added, "if Kashmir were part of India; there would not have been any dispute and the dispute would not have been acknowledged at the UN."

Bhutto accused India of "interfering" in Pakistan's internal affairs in retaliation to Islamabad's support for Kashmiris.

She said the India Consulate was closed in Karachi in December because it "supported terrorism" there — a charge denied by India.

Indonesia

From Page 1 Col 8
officials this month to ask for a higher quota." Religious Affairs Minister Tarmidzi Thaber told reporters after meeting with President Suharto.

He said the current Indonesian quota was 192,000 people.

"About 200,000 people have registered and paid for the pilgrimage. The last registration for payment is February 15 but I think there may be around 240,000 Indonesian Muslims who want to go this year," he said.

Indonesia has been undergoing an Islamic revival in recent years.

Govt-Opposition chasm

From Page 1 Col 7
complete its tenure but the ruling party's intransigence forced them to resign.

"It is unfortunate that we had to resign even after the Prime Minister decided to resign before the elections," he said adding, "we had requested the announcement be made before submission of our resignation letters. We could have postponed our resignation to hold further talks if such announcement was made earlier."

The three major opposition parties have already called a country-wide hartal on March 12-13.

Another opposition leader said the opposition parties need not launch any street agitation. The parties should just maintain their unity and should not take part in any election, he said adding, this would bring maximum political gains for them.

"It is now clear to us that the ruling party plans to keep the Opposition inactive till the next elections by resorting to various tactics," an AL leader said adding, "The policy of



A Thai soldier loads his rifle in a bunker on the Thai-Myanmar border near Kawmoora, 15 km south of Manerplaw Thursday. Security on the border has been intensified since Myanmar soldiers captured the Karen stronghold of Manerplaw January 27 to prevent a spillover of the fighting. — AFP photo

Govt-Opposition chasm

an all-out agitation after the Ramadan and the Eid-ul-Fitr.

"The ruling party is now feeling comfortable as they are not facing street agitations from the Opposition but the situation would be quite different after this month," one Opposition leader said.

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procrastination will bring no good to the ruling party, rather, it may create a constitutional crisis."

Ruling party sources said that they would take a decision after the court verdict.

"We are preparing ourselves to face any consequences," a top leader of the BNP said. "Everything would go according to the Constitution and laws of the land."

The BNP leader, who is a member of the party's standing committee, said the opposition parties had thought they would be able to topple the BNP government by resigning en masse from Parliament.

"I think their calculation was wrong. The BNP still enjoys popular support which would be reflected in the next election," he said.

He declined to comment on whether the party is preparing for early general elections.

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