

US, China sign eight trade agreements

SHANGHAI, Feb 20: US Energy Secretary Hazel O'Leary said here today that her current visit to China has already seen the signing of eight cooperative agreements between the US and China in Shanghai, reports Xinhua.

O'Leary and her trade mission arrived here Sunday.

This morning, she attended a symposium on the functions of local governments in Sino-US energy cooperation, and was present at the signing ceremony of the eight agreements in the afternoon.

The total investment for the eight Sino-US energy cooperation projects will exceed two billion US dollars, sources said.

Xu Kuangdi, deputy mayor of Shanghai, met with O'Leary at noon today. Xu expressed the hope that US investors and manufacturers would increase their cooperation with Shanghai in the field of energy.

Speaking on behalf of US President Clinton, the US secretary said that, apart from developing trade relations with China, the US attaches great

importance to the cooperation between the two countries.

AP adds: Talks on improving China's protection against piracy of US movies, music and other products continued today, a day after both sides reported progress.

Meanwhile, Hazel O'Leary arrived in Beijing late today heading a delegation of more than 50 US energy industry executives hoping to find more business in China.

Today's trade talks covered

Editorial on Page 4

copyright verification, software piracy and customs controls, according to a statement from the US Embassy.

"Although the two sides continued to narrow their differences, several outstanding issues remain to be resolved," it said.

Tomorrow the negotiations will be conducted with higher-ranking officials — US Deputy Trade Representative Charlene Barshefsky and Vice Trade Minister Sun Zhenyu.

20000 may sit for MBBS admission test

By Ripon Baig

At least 20 thousand students will appear in the admission test for the MBBS course which will be held on March 17 at 9 in the morning.

According to a source, the exact number of candidates would be known within the next two weeks.

More than 20,000 students had collected application forms from the 13 government medical colleges upto January 11.

Last year, about 16 thousand students sat for the test.

This year the authorities have changed some of the rules for the test.

According to new rules, the total marks for the test will be 190 instead of 140. Out of this, 150 marks will be for the written test, 20 for the viva voce and one per cent of the total marks secured by the candidate in the SSC and HSC examinations.

In the written test, there will be 45 marks each for physics, chemistry and biology and 15 for English. The students will get one and a half hours completing their answers.

Students who had passed the SSC and the HSC examinations in 1990 and 1992 respectively will also be allowed.

Writs

filed by his client was a positive one since the Speaker willfully and intentionally withheld the resignation letters in violation of the constitutional provision and the Rules of Procedure of Parliament.

Clarifying the point of locus standi of the petitioner, advocate Islam said that as a politically conscious man, his petitioner has the right to contest as a candidate for membership of Parliament in the by-election in the vacant seat.

"His legal right of participation in the by-election against vacant seat has been disturbed because of confusion created by the Speaker and Parliament secretary by not (not) allowing the Election Commission to take necessary steps for holding election in due time," advocate Islam said.

"Disputing the contention of the Speaker's counsel Barrister Asrarul Hossain that the vacancy of the seats of the resigning members will be effective from the date of gazette notification, advocate Islam said as per constitutional provisions and the Rules of Procedure of Parliament, the vacancy of the seats would be effective from the date of occurrence that is from December 28 last year.

The larger bench comprising Justice A M Mahmudur Rahman, Justice Kazi Ebadul Huq and Justice M A Karim will resume on February 22.

Businessman robbed of Tk 50000 in

Pabna. Feb 20: Masked muggers attacked a businessman and snatched Tk 50,000 near station club in the town in the early hours today (Monday), reports UNB.

Police said the miscreants, numbering about eight, attacked Abdul Jalil, owner of Rubel Garments, while he was on his way to the local bus stand after Shehri.

The muggers snatched the money at gun point. They also beat him up indiscriminately.

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Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia with the recipients of the 'Ekushey Padak' for 1994 at the Osmany Memorial Hall in the city yesterday. — Star photo

PM: Padak

From Page One

works," she said.

She hoped that the honour to the celebrities, which is recognition for outstanding contribution, would flourish their horizon of creativity and their contribution enrich the repository of our knowledge, art, literature and culture.

"Let our own art and culture, individuality and respect through your works book permanent berth in the world community," Begum Zia added.

She recalled the works of our poets and litterateurs over the past thousand years which enriched Bengali language as one of the great languages of the world.

Mentioning the survival of the nation in coexistence with all adversities, the Prime Minister hoped that all art and literary works, and activities would reflect the lifestyle of the people of riverine Bangladesh.

"In the present day of modern communication technology, national dignity and pride can only be upheld through flourishing and preservation of indigenous culture," she pointed out.

Ekushey returns to inspire

From Page One

state language, but also accelerated the movement for development of our own culture and establishment of people's rights.

Opposition leader Sheikh Hasina, in a message, called upon the people to safeguard democracy by strengthening the movement for elections under a neutral caretaker administration.

She said democracy is now at stake since the ruling party 'ignored' the people's demands. Besides, the government's failure to rule the country properly and its autocratic behaviour have been leading the nation towards uncertainty, she said.

In such a situation, the great Ekushey has come up with a new spirit and the people would have to face the situation with that spirit for making the ongoing movement for democracy a success, she added.

The day is a public holiday. The national flag will fly at half-mast.

As usual, Bangladesh Television and Radio Bangladesh will put up special programmes while the newspapers will bring out special supplements highlighting the significance of the day.

The Central Shaheed Minar in the city and its surrounding areas have been given a facelift on the occasion. Some important road-islands in the city have also been decorated with festoons inscribed with Bangla alphabet.

Various political parties, student bodies and socio-cultural organisations have drawn up befitting programmes to observe the day. These include discussions, seminars, milad mahfil, blood donation campaign and placing of wreaths at the Shaheed Minar.

The government has also asked all the mosques to organise Quran khwan and milad mahfil and offer special prayers for the salvation of the souls of the martyrs.

The day's programmes began with the placing of wreaths at the Central Shaheed Minar at two minutes past midnight last night by Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia to the strains of the famous song, "Amar bhayer roktey rangano Ekushey February, amiki bhulitey par."

A coordination committee titled "Committee for Observance of Amar Ekushey '95" has been formed for maintaining sanctity of the day and enable people from all walks of life to visit the Shaheed Minar in a solemn atmosphere.

The committee headed by Prof A T M Zahurul Haque, President of the Dhaka University Teachers' Association, has urged the people not to hang any portraits, posters or banners at the Shaheed Minar and not to bring out processions or hold rallies in the Doyel

Threat to kill condemned Christians in Pakistan

LAHORE, Feb 20: Judges hearing the appeals of a Christian teenager and another man sentenced to death for blasphemy were themselves threatened with death Monday by Muslim militants rallying near the courthouse, reports AFP.

Several of the 400 rally participants delivered emotional speeches calling for dismissal of the death sentence appeals. "If the death sentences are reversed, we will kill the judges and their families," one of them said.

The crowd, which blocked traffic for more than three hours outside the heavily-guarded Lahore High Court, dispersed peacefully after the court adjourned to take up the case again on Tuesday.

One person described as a "heart patient" died on way to a hospital in an ambulance which was stuck in the melee, officials said.

Salamat Masih, 14, and his uncle Rehmat Masih, 44, were sentenced to death by a lower court here earlier this month on charges of blaspheming

Prophet Mohammad.

They were accused of scrawling blasphemous remarks on papers and throwing them into a Punjab province mosque in 1993, when Salamat Masih was only 12.

A third accused in the case, Manzoor Masih, was slain by unidentified gunmen here last year.

The case, tried under a law instituted by late military dictator Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq, has attracted international attention and led Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto to say it would harm Pakistan's image abroad.

Benazir was accused of contempt of court for saying she was shocked and unhappy over the guilty verdict. The accusation was made in an application to the country's appellate court by Advocate Ismail Qureshi, who contends Benazir was trying to influence the appeals court in the matter.

The appellate court has referred the contempt issue to the Chief Justice of the Lahore High Court, recommending that a larger bench be set up to hear it.

rate programme to observe the day. The programme includes hoisting the national flag and party flags at half-mast besides black flags at party offices including the party central office at Nayapattan in the city. Leaders and workers of the party and its front organisations will assemble near the New Market at 6 am wearing black badges and march towards Azampur graveyard to offer feteah and place wreaths at the mazzars of the Ekushey martyrs.

Awami League's programme on the day includes hoisting of the national flag and black flags at its central office and at the Bangabandhu Bhaban at half-mast. Leaders and activists of the party and its front organisations, wearing black badges, will gather at New Market at 6:30 am and walk bare-footed towards the Central Shaheed Minar for placing wreaths at 7:30 am.

Other political parties, including Left Democratic Front, Workers Party, JSD, BSD, CPB, NAP, Gano Forum, JAGPA and student bodies JCD and BCL will place wreaths at the Shaheed Minar. Nazrul Institute, Islamic Foundation, Sangbadik Oikya Andolan, Bangladesh Udichi Shilpi Goshthi, North South University and many other organisations and institutions will pay tribute to the martyrs of the Language Movement through similar programmes.

Today's programme of the academy include a discussion on "Significance of Ekushey on our lives." Syed Maksud Ali will present the keynote paper.

Vice-Chancellor of Dhaka University Prof Emajuddin Ahmed will be in the chair.

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has chalked out elaborate programme to observe the day.

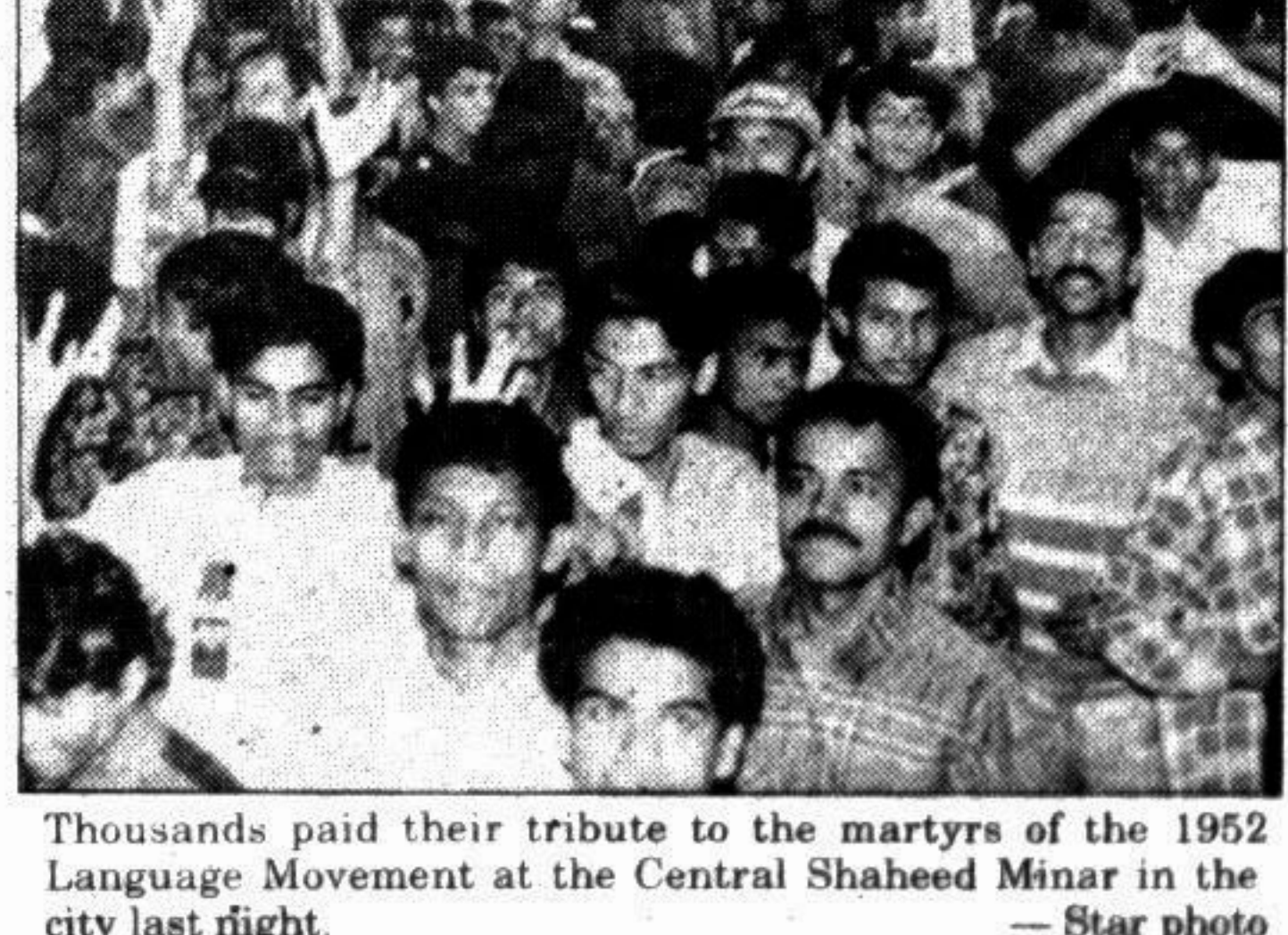
The Shilpakala Academy has taken up an elaborate programme to mark the day. The programme includes laying wreaths at the Shaheed Minar early today and discussion meeting and cultural function at 10 am.

State Minister for Cultural Affairs Jahannara Begum will attend the function as chief guest, while Prof Ahmad Rafiq, Khan Ataur Rahman and Prof Jubaida Gulshan Ara will take part in the discussion with Director General of the academy Mobarak Hossain Khan in chair.

Self-composed poems will be recited at the function while artistes of the Shilpakala Academy, Altaf Mahmud Sangeet Bidya Niketan, Bulbul Lollitakala Academy and Abhyudaya Sangskritik Protisthan will render songs.

The Bangla Academy is already holding nearly a month-long Ekushey book fair and has organised staging of drama, painting show, lecture series and musical soiree.

Thousands paid their tribute to the martyrs of the 1952 Language Movement at the Central Shaheed Minar in the city last night.



Thousands paid their tribute to the martyrs of the 1952 Language Movement at the Central Shaheed Minar in the city last night. — Star photo

Digital phones T & T takes steps to improve service

By Staff Correspondent

The Telegraph and Telephone (T&T) Board has taken some steps to improve the service of the digital telephone exchanges and resolve the problems of delayed dial tone and cross connection.

The Board has already contacted the National Electric Company (NEC), supplier of the digital equipment, to ensure fault-free service to the clients, a statement clarifying the position of the Board said yesterday.

The clarification followed a report published in The Daily Star on February 15 which said that digital telephone service in different areas of the capital has become troublesome due to imbalance and overloaded system.

It pointed out that the telephone traffic from Motijheel and Dilkusha Commercial areas has recently increased.

To meet the increased demand, the T&T Board has provided digital lines of these two areas from Nilkhet and Maghbazar digital exchanges which were originally designed to cater mostly to the low-traffic residential areas, the statement said.

Besides, the reduction of digital ISD connection fees by Taka 10,000 and introduction of card phones having ISD facilities have also increased the number of telephone calls, putting pressure on the existing facilities, it said.

Outdated and worn-out cable networks and, sometimes, when digital line is connected with analog number were prone to cross connection, the clarification said.

It further said installation of additional 20,000 digital lines for Motijheel and Dilkusha during the third quarter of this year would eventually ease the situation and also improve the service at the Maghbazar and Nilkhet exchanges.

In addition, installation of one lakh new digital lines, including 20,000 at Ramna exchange next year would also further improve the overall telephone service in the city, it added.

3 more killed in Manipur post-polls clash

NEW DELHI, Feb 20: Indian troops gunned down three tribal separatist guerrillas in the northeastern state of Manipur, taking to nine the number of people killed during local elections, officials said today, reports AFP.

Three militants of the outlawed National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) were slain in a gunbattle in the state's Chandel district on Sunday, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported.

The soldiers also arrested three militants and seized two AK-47 rifles.

The NSCN has been waging an armed campaign for nearly four decades to secede Nagaland, a Christian-majority state adjoining Manipur, from India.

The NSCN is also active in Manipur, where hundreds have been killed in clashes in the past year between the rival Naga and Kuki tribes. Manipur, like Nagaland, borders Myanmar.

Judges' promotion

From Page One

Counsels for the petitioner, argued that Article 116 provided that any posting, promotion or transfer of members of the judicial service could only be done by the government after consultation with the Supreme Court and this was a mandatory requirement and an essential safeguard for the independence of the judiciary.

It was further argued that without any such constitutional safeguard the executive branch of the government could exercise absolute discretion with regard to promotion of judicial service officers to executive posts and thus, the independence of the subordinate judiciary would be undermined.

The High Court also accepted the petitioner's submission that the writ was maintainable in this case.

The counsel for the respondents argued that the promotion of district judge to a non-judicial post such as that of Joint Secretary in the Law Ministry does not require consultation with the Supreme Court and further stated that any grievances in this regard could be redressed by the Administrative Tribunal and hence the writ petition to the High Court Division was not maintainable.

Dr Kamal Hossain and Amirul Islam appeared for the petitioner and were assisted by Abdul Baset Majumder, Subrata Chowdhury and Pramila Biswas.

Senior Advocate T H Khan was specially appointed to represent the government in the case. He was assisted by Deputy Attorney General Kaiser Ahmed and F H Khan.

The Midnight File

ME peace process at impasse: Arafat

PARIS, Feb 20: Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat said Monday that the Middle East peace process was at an impasse because of Israel's delay in respecting the peace accords. He appealed to President Francois Mitterrand of France to help move the process forward in a 30-minute meeting that concluded his three-day visit to Paris, reports AP.

French judicial police chief quits

PARIS, Feb 20: A police chief at the centre of a French political scandal over phone-tapping offered to resign today, the interior ministry said. Jacques Franquet, head of the judicial police, had written to Interior Minister Charles Pasqua to offer his resignation, the ministry said in a statement, reports Reuter.

Six arrested on charge of fraud in city

Six people, including a former UP chairman, were detained in Dhaka yesterday on charge of fraud, reports UNB.

Acting on a tip off, police held Abdul Mannan Sikder, 50, ex-chairman of Kalkini union parishad in Madaripur district, when he was trying to draw Tk 3.5 lakh against a fake cheque at the Fakirpool branch of the Janata Bank at 12:30 pm.

Five of his accomplices — Syed Manjurul Huq Manju, 37, Rahat Hossain, 35, Momin Ali, 32, Faruq Ahmed, 38 and Alamgir Khah, 35 — were later arrested from Chankharpool.

Police said the members of the gang, involved for long in forging cheques, first search for account numbers having big amounts of money in different banks and then draw cheque books by forging the signatures of the account holders before drawing the money.

The gang drew Tk 87 lakh in a similar manner two years ago.

Mannan, the gang leader, attempted to draw the money yesterday from a current account of one Haider Hossain, a businessman.

Besides forging cheques, the gang swindled business-

Hasina

From Page One

Hasina said the objective of the current movement was to protect the interest of the people, their rights to vote and food and overall welfare.

She said Parliament had lost its legitimacy after en masse resignation of opposition MPs. It has been turned into a one-party Parliament, she said, adding that the government has also lost its right to remain in power.

The government is pushing the country towards confrontation to realise its evil political design," Hasina said.

She said common people are suffering due to price-hike of essentials during the holy month of Ramadan. They were in a fix for the price rise of rice, pulses, edible oil and salt, she said.

Awami League leaders Abdul Mannan, Zillur Rahman, Tofael Ahmed, Matiya Chowdhury, Mohammad Hanif and Abul Hasan Chowdhury and a large number of party workers were present at the airport to receive the party chief.

At Zero Hours

From Page One

She stood in solemn silence for one minute at the pedestal to show respect to the brave sons of the soil who laid down their lives for the cause of their mother tongue.

Vice Chancellor of the Dhaka University Prof Emajuddin Ahmed and other members of the Committee for Observance of Amar Ekushey '95 received the PM at the Shaheed Minar premises.

Meanwhile, hundreds of people crammed the area hours before the clock struck twelve to place wreaths, bouquet and garlands at the monument.

A heavy contingent of police, plain-clothes security-men, BNCC and volunteers struggled hard to maintain the discipline.

Organisers urged the people by loudspeakers to maintain the sanctity of the Minar while trains of processions began to arrive at the Central Shaheed Minar from all directions.

A section of people were seen climbing up the Shaheed Minar, defying repeated appeals by the organisers.

As the people placed wreaths, loudspeakers blared, "Amar Bhaier Raktey Rangano Ekushey February, Ami Kee Bhulitey Pari."

The organisations which placed wreaths during the first few minutes after the midnight were: Dhaka University Teachers Association, Dhaka University Central Students Union, Bangladesh Chhatra League, Bangladesh Garo Chhatra Sangsad, Notre Dame College, Bangladesh Coaching Association, Shahidullah Hall of the Dhaka University Padma Bridge Implementation Action Council, Bangladesh Chhatra Front, Jatiya Kabita Parishad and Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal, BUET Unit.

Taliban

From Page One

Afghanistan's many Islamic factions. They also want a neutral security force set up to control the capital.

"We told Mestiri that if he meets our conditions this process will succeed," said Mullah Bor Jan, the front-line commander of the Taliban in Charasyab, 25 kilometers south of Kabul.

President Rabbani's troops control virtually all of Kabul and would be reluctant to cede that control to a neutral security force, according to many observers.

The proposed commission would have about 25 members. It would include one representative from each of the warring Islamic factions as well as prominent Afghans not linked to any of the militias.

Ten separate Islamic factions have fought amongst themselves since they ousted a communist government in 1992.