

Strike paralyses Assam: Over 1000 arrested

GUWAHATI, India, Dec 19: More than 1,000 demonstrators were arrested as a general strike called by a tribal group crippled northern districts of the far eastern Indian state of Assam today, officials said, reports AFP.

Shops, businesses, schools and government offices were closed in response to the shutdown called by the All Bodo Students Union (ASSU), which is demanding greater autonomy for members of Assam's Bodo Tribe, they said.

Train service to the rest of the country from the Assam

capital Guwahati was cut off by the strike, railway officials said.

Police said some more than 1,000 demonstrators were arrested in different parts of northern Assam including two deputies in the state assembly.

Police used batons to break up demonstrations in several towns, slightly injuring at least a dozen people, witnesses said.

The strike was called by the ASSU to force the government to include more than 500 villages along India's frontier with Bhutan in a Bodoland autonomous council set up as part of an agreement between Bodo groups and the authorities two years ago.

Body recovered

By DMCH Correspondent

Body of an unidentified man was recovered from near Sahara residential area near airport last night by the Cantonment Police.

The body was recovered with marks of stab injury in almost every part of his body. However, the right side of the lower part bore severe injuries.

Police said an unnatural death case has been registered in this regard. No one has been arrested so far, they added.

ICS calls half-day hartal today

By Staff Correspondent

Islamic Chhatra Shibir (ICS), the student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami, called a half-day hartal in six divisional headquarters and in Mymensingh town today to protest the recent killings on the Bangladesh Agriculture University (BAU) campus.

The hartal call was given as part of a series of programmes announced by ICS through a press conference in the city on Monday. Its programmes also include a siege on the Prime Minister's Secretariat on Saturday.

Three students were killed and at least 50 others injured in a series of clashes between the activists of ICS and the All-Party Students Unity (APSU) of the BAU campus on December 16.

Illegal arms

From Page 1

gal firearms to maintain a peaceful atmosphere during the coming national election.

He asked the officials and employees of the law enforcing agencies to be impartial in taking action against the criminals. He also directed them to take drastic action against those who would give shelter to the miscreants.

Among others, Election Commission Secretary Md Irshadul Haq, Home Secretary Syed Rezaul Haq, Inspector General of Police ASM Shahjahan, Director General of BDR Maj Gen Ejaj Ahmed Chowdhury, DG of Ansar and VDP Maj Gen MA Kabir Talukder attended the meeting.

Taramon

From Page 1

der Sector 11.

Taramon, now in her 40, took part in several armed encounters with the Pakistani occupation forces. She was also actively involved in intelligence service for the FFs.

Begum Zia was moved to have learnt that Taramon had been suffering from Tuberculosis, and instructed authorities concerned instantly for proper treatment of the veteran freedom fighter.

She will now undergo treatment at the Combined Military Hospital in Dhaka and the government will bear the entire expenses of her medicare.

Begum Zia also announced a grant of Tk 25,000 for Taramon from the Prime Minister's Welfare Fund. She further committed that she would provide schooling expenditure of Taramon's two children—a son and a daughter—from her monthly salary.

Earlier, Taramon Bibi, BP, called on Begum Zia at the Prime Minister's office. She narrated to the Prime Minister the episode of her direct participation in the liberation war.

During the 25-minute meet, the Prime Minister wanted to know how Taramon took part in the war, how she fought in the warfield and other battle experiences.

"You are our pride. As a woman you had played a valiant role for the independence of our motherland. The nation will remember you forever and your name will be written in our liberation war history with due honour," the Prime Minister told Taramon.

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\$18.5m ADB fund for cement plant

MANILA, Dec 19: The Asian Development Bank said today it would lend 18.5 million dollars to Islam Cement Ltd and invest a further four million dollars in equity in the firm, which is to build the country's largest cement plant, reports AFP.

The funds would be used to set up a new, 600,000-tonne capacity cement plant worth 90 million dollars in Sylhet district, the Philippines-based bank said.

It said the project would reduce Bangladesh's dependence on imported cement, now running at about 80 per cent. The country's cement industry is currently dominated by the public sector, the bank said.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia said yesterday that the government had decided to involve the private sector in telecommunication for its expansion and making it competitive, reports UNB.

Inaugurating a 20,000-line Motijheel Digital Telephone Exchange at Ramna Telephone Bhaban in the city she said two private companies have been given licence to install and operate digital exchanges in thanas.

Two other companies have received licence to provide cellular mobile telephones and paging services. Private entrepreneurs have already installed cellular telephones and paging services in Dhaka and are going to start similar services in Chittagong, she said.

The Motijheel exchange is part of a 150,000-line digital telephone project which was entirely financed with internal resources.

The Prime Minister said it will be possible to commission more than one lakh telephones by February next by the T & T Board alone leaving aside the private sector.

Motijheel digital exchange opens

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Opposition

From Page 1

In a related development, informal contact between the Opposition and the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) has already been reported in the press.

Leaders of Awami League, Jatiya Party and Jamaat-e-Islami confirmed it to this correspondent that lists of probable nominees of their respective parties have almost been completed. "We are preparing in case there is an understanding," said one source.

Sources in Awami League confided on condition of anonymity that the party got three names of probable candidates from each constituency.

Sources in the Jatiya Party said that over 200 nominations were in the process of being finalised and that the party would field candidate in all the constituencies if it participates in the polls.

Jamaat sources said that they were "more or less ready in finalising the list of candidates." "We will be able to announce the list in a days' notice."

Asked if there was a possibility of an electoral alliance among the parties in agitation now, they said the chance was bleak.

The major opposition parties -- Awami League, Jatiya Party and Jamaat-e-Islami -- have been agitating for the last 20-months for holding elections under a non-party caretaker administration.

Foreign Ministry

From Page 1

ence room of the Foreign Ministry usually every Sunday since early this year.

The briefings were given by senior officials, normally director general of a desk concerned or the DG of External Publicity. The foreign secretary almost as a matter of convention met the press at least twice a month. The foreign minister also was present at one of the weekly briefings.

Normally, the name of the person replying to questions at the briefing was not to be mentioned and the information was attributed to a spokesman of the Foreign Ministry.

Foreign Ministry officials could not give any reason for the abrupt discontinuation of the briefings.

Some sources, on condition of anonymity, said it was done at the instruction of the Prime Minister's office after reports appeared in the press, based on a regular briefing, that thousands of illegal Bangladeshis were waiting in the jungles of Thailand to enter Malaysia for jobs. No briefing was held since then.

A spokesman of the Prime Minister's office, when asked if the briefings were stopped at the instruction of the PM's office, said he had no knowledge about the matter.

Previously, a Foreign Ministry official of the level of DG used to work at the Prime Minister's office to liaise with the Foreign Ministry. Presently the post is lying vacant.

COMDECA

From Page 1

ceremony of the 5-day long second Asia-Pacific Community Development Camp (COMDECA) at Taltali-Mallipara-Tulatali (Ta-Ma-Tu) villages in Amtali thana of Baraguna district.

The women were identified as Taznehar Begum, 25, but the child could not be identified.

Meanwhile, at least 20 persons were injured when the tin-roof of the Taltali College collapsed during the inaugural ceremony.

Local sources said prices of the essentials such as fish, meat, edible oil, salt, and milk have gone up three to five-fold.

More than one lakh Participants are taking part in the special Jamboree.

New pressure group

From Page 1

leadership in finding a way out of the on-going political crisis has led us to form this front, which would play the role of a watchdog and create a platform for the silent people who want to protest the failures of the politicians." Convener of the Andolan, Salman Rahman, said at a press conference in the city.

The Andolan initially involves some 1000 businessmen and professionals of all political affiliations. Rahman said adding, "It has no relationship with the FBCCI."

A number of businessmen including Harun-ur-Rashid, Shahjahan Md A Rahman, MA Chowdhury, Nazibur Rahman, Md Yunus, J Hasan and a BNP leader Khurshid Ali Mollah.

"Our initial task will be make people register protests against the political leadership and demanding an immediate solution by sending letters to newspapers," Rahman said referring to a leaflet having a formatted printed letter which would be circulated across the country to create awareness.

"The country belongs to all

Coast Guard goes into operation

The operational activities of Bangladesh Coast Guard (BCG) began here yesterday with the aim of ensuring safety of the country's vast maritime boundary and protecting the national interests, reports BSS.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia formally inaugurated the operational activities of the newly formed Bangladesh Coast Guard by handing over two patrol ships of Bangladesh Navy to BCG here at Paglaghat.

Speaking at the inaugural function on the bank of the river Buriganga at Pagla, the Prime Minister hoped the members of the Bangladesh Coast Guard would play a significant role in protecting the huge resources spread over the vast maritime area. Proper equipment, she said,

would be provided to enable the coast guard to perform its duties.

Begum Zia said the coast guard would be strengthened through the proper utilisation of the country's limited resources.

She thanked the members of the navy for playing a pioneering role in starting the operational activities of the coast guard with two ships, CGS Touhid and CGS Pabna.

The Bangladesh Coast Guard was formed as a paramilitary force under the Ministry of Home Affairs with the assent of the President on December 12 last year.

The headquarters of the BCG has been established at Dhaka with zonal offices at Chittagong and Khulna and 21 check points in different parts of the country.

Ministry for privatisation

From Page 1

stated that it intends to progressively privatise the SOEs (State-owned enterprises) and NCBS (Nationalised Commercial Banks), but over the past five years only 12 enterprises have actually been transferred to private hands representing 5 per cent of SOEs and only 0.01 per cent of their total turnover," he said.

The WB mission chief observed that the politicians should make the people more aware of the "unbearable" cost of the SOEs and the inefficiencies that adversely affect the taxpayers and the electorate.

He said the interests of the taxpayers and the country were sacrificed to maintain a relatively small number of jobs in the SOEs, each job costing 57 thousand taka, representing a substantial diversion of public revenue without any addition to the exchequer.

He dispelled the contention that through privatisation, state assets would be sold at give-away prices to few rich individuals saying, "this eventually can be avoided by widening share ownership through workers buy-outs, more share floatations and general strengthening of regulation of the stock exchange."

On the critics' argument that the private sector is un-

Hartal observed in Khulna

KHULNA, Dec 19: A half-day hartal called by Jubo League and Chhatra League was observed in the metropolitan city today protesting the killing of Jubo League leader Amirul Islam Bablu, reports UNB.

Bablu was kidnapped and shot dead by his political rival last Saturday.

Several bombs were exploded at different areas of the town during the hartal hours. No major incident was reported.

All modes of vehicles were off the road. Business houses, banks and private office remained closed. Mills in Khalishpur industrial area, however, operated normally.

WTC in Ctg

From Page 1

Sarwar Jamal Nizam said "we are planning to build this World Trade Centre under a joint venture move in a bid to ensure smooth completion of work."

We have already received offers of joint venture from some foreign companies to build the trade centre here," Nizam said.

After the completion of the trade centre, the office of the CCCI will be shifted there.

The plan for setting up such a centre was taken up by the CCCI about four years ago in view of the commercial importance of the city.

CCCI has already got an allotment of two bighas of land for the centre aimed at promoting trade and investments.

Meanwhile, a South Korean company provided consultancy service free of cost to build the trade centre, chamber sources said.

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I'm not a bank loan defaulter, says Salman

By Staff Correspondent

President of the Federation of Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) Salman F Rahman yesterday said he is not facing any embargo from the Election Commission in participating in the forthcoming election, but he will not contest in it unless all parties join it.

"I am not a bank loan defaulter. I made it clear to the EC and the Bangladesh Bank." He pointed out at the press conference in the city where he launched the Samridha Bangladesh Andolan.

He, however, said Bangladesh is among the countries having lower level of bad loans. "When the government is so serious about defaulters, why is it sparing the public sector defaulters?"

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Delhi's 'no'

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The expert group consisting of officials and representatives from research bodies and industry should make concrete and detailed recommendations.

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The Midnight File

131 killed in Zairean plane crash

KINSHASA, Dec 19: A Zairean passenger aircraft with 136 people on board crashed in northern Angola today, officials said. There were 136 people on board, and as far as we know there were only five survivors," said an official at the transport ministry who would not be named, reports Reuter.

Russian elections

From Page 1

The Communists looked unlikely to have a majority in the chamber but one-third of the places appeared within their grasp.

"Let us wait and see," a Communist party spokesman said, declining to make any predictions.

Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin's centre-right Our Home is Russia bloc had won only nine seats in the single-mandate race so far, with just 46 of the 225 constituencies left to be counted. It had just 9.6 per cent of votes on the party list.

Yeltsin and Chernomyrdin were expected to discuss the election outcome and its implications at a meeting which they began at the Barvikha Sanatorium outside Moscow where the President is recovering from a mild heart attack.

The communists' strong showing raised the prospect of personnel changes being forced in the government, although Yeltsin has said he does not want to sack Chernomyrdin.

The party list and the single-seat constituencies each fill 225 of the places in the Duma.

Ultra-nationalists Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Demo-

4 more ferries run aground

MANIKGANJ, Dec 19: The persisting traffic jam at the Aricha-Daulatdia and Nagarbari ghats deteriorated further during the last 24 hours till 6 pm today as four ferries ran aground in the mid stream of the river Jamuna, reports UNB.

BIWTC sources said about 2,486 goods-trucks, 500 coaches with a huge amount of perishable items and about 25,000 passengers remained stranded.

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