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The Daily Star

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 Standard Chartered
 12 PAGES: PRICE TAKA 5.00

VOL. V NO. 327 REGD. NO. DA 781 PAUSH 7, 1402 BS, DHAKA THURSDAY, DECEMBER 21, 1995 RAJAB 27, 1416 HIJRI

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NEWS BRIEFS

Interview of BNP nomination seekers
 The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has fixed December 23 and 24 for interview of the candidates seeking party nominations for contesting the forthcoming Jatiya Sangsad polls. Interview of the candidates from Faridpur, Gopalganj, Madaripur, Shariatpur, Tangail, Jamalpur, Sherpur, Mymensingh and Netrokona districts will be held on December 23 while Kishoreganj, Manikganj, Munshiganj, Gazipur, Narshingdi, Narayanganj and Dhaka districts including Dhaka metropolitan area on December 24, reports BSS.

UNSC renews Unficyp
 UNITED NATIONS, Dec 20: The Security Council unanimously approved on Tuesday a six-month renewal of the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (Unficyp) until June 30, 1996. There were no speeches and the council meeting lasted only a few minutes. Unficyp, now comprising some 1,150 troops and 34 civilian police, has been stationed on the island since 1964 to help keep peace between the Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, reports Reuters.

Congestion at Aricha eases
 MANIKGANJ, Dec 20: The traffic congestion at Aricha, Nagbari and Daulatdia ghats improved today as the ferry services geared up further. Official sources said 2,600 vehicles were ferried in last 24 hours till 6 pm today while the queue of vehicles was reduced as vehicles from capital Dhaka did not reach the Aricha ghat till 2 pm. But they said 1655 more trucks were still waiting in the queue to cross the river. Meanwhile, one of the four ferries earlier went out of order started to ferry vehicles since this morning, reports UNB.

Deadline expires: Hunt begins today

No report of arms surrender

A nation-wide hunt for illegal arms and armsholders begins today as a December 20 deadline for surrender went unheeded, reports UNB.

Officials said the combined operation of law-enforcing agencies and army troops needed for cleaning the way for smooth holding of the upcoming general elections as the government directives for depositing unauthorised firearms expired yesterday without any reports of surrender from any police stations.

A source at the police headquarters told UNB no arms had been surrendered to any of the country's 489 police stations, including the 15 in capital Dhaka, during the amnesty announced ahead of the vote.

The Home Ministry order for arms surrender came after the Election Commission on December 6 had directed the government to recover illegal arms by January 15 to ensure a free and fair balloting.

The Home Ministry source, however, said some 32 illegal firearms were deposited in the Dhaka Metropolitan area before the 1991 elections following a similar instruction from Acting President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed.

Chief Election Commissioner Justice AKM Sadeque at a meeting on Tuesday with IGP, DGs of BDR, Ansars and VDP and DGI directed them to conduct combing operations across the country to haul up illegal arms.

The law-enforcing agencies will crack down on unauthorised firearms, its manufacturers and distributors at the dictates of the Election Commission in the run-up to the polls rescheduled for February 7.

An Opposition leader had recently quoted the Home Minister to have said that there were more than a lakh illegal arms across the country. The illegal arms trigger widespread violence, particularly in educational institutions.



Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia addressing the foundation laying ceremony of the World Trade Centre at Agrabad in Chittagong yesterday. —PID photo

Foundation of WTC laid

Ctg will be turned into int'l export city: PM

CHITTAGONG, Dec 20: Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia today laid the foundation stone of the World Trade Centre (WTC) here, pledging to turn Chittagong into the country's full-fledged commercial capital raising it to global plane, reports UNB.

"Inshallah, we'll be able to build Chittagong as an international classic export city with the infrastructures so far set up here," she said, seeking cooperation from all in maintaining the trend of production and development.

Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI) is constructing the 20-storied trade centre, first of its kind in the country, at an estimated cost of Tk 40 crore in the port city's commercial hub of Agrabad.

The government has donated 1.9 bighas of land to the CCCI for the construction of the World Trade Centre (WTC) down town Agrabad.

Globally, at present, there are 78 WTCs in different developed as well as developing countries.

The Prime Minister said in all the developed countries of the world, the respective world trade centres work as the driving force behind their economic development and advancement.

"World Trade Centres play the principal role in collecting and disseminating investment and commercial information and data, exchanging views among local and foreign investors and expanding trade and investment," she said.

Begum Zia said the CCCI had been trying for years to establish a world trade centre, but no initiative was taken in this respect. The government gave a piece of land valued Tk 4 crore free of cost because "we want improvement of private sector."

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New railway terminal bldg opens

CHITTAGONG, Dec 20: Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia today said the government has taken up a massive development plan for turning the railway into a profitable sector, reports UNB.

"We're convinced that development of railway without increased investment is a formidable task. So efforts have been made to attract investment in this sector," she said while inaugurating the new railway terminal building in the port city.

The Prime Minister unveiled a plaque at the new building constructed with attractive architectural design and gave a green signal to the Dhaka-bound intercity Purabi train at 3:12 pm.

Begum Zia said a token allotment of Tk 713 crore has been earmarked in the annual development programme for linking the Mad-

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Ctg Nagorik Committee starts week-long agitation

CHITTAGONG, Dec 20: Several hundred people, wearing black ribbons on their foreheads, demonstrated in front of the Bipani Bitan here today to start the week-long agitation programme organised by the Chittagong Nagorik Committee demanding proper development of the port city.

The demonstrators at one stage, wanted to march towards the nearby railway terminal-building, where the Prime Minister was present, witnesses and police said.

But their attempt to march towards the railway terminal was foiled by the activists of ruling party, as the police, most of whom were in riot gear, stood to provide tight security in the area.

Then the demonstration turned into a chase and counter-chase amid some blasts of cocktails between the activists of the ruling party and the agitators drawn from the Awami League and Chhatra League, witnesses said.

Police, however, dispersed the agitators by resorting to lathicharge. Some agitators later took shelter in front of City College, located within a shouting distance from the Bipani Bitan and the railway station.

Civic Committee and Awami League sources claimed that during the melee at least five of their activists were injured during the blasts and they were later admitted into private clinics. Three of the injured were identified as Saidur Rahman Sohel, Atik Ullah, and Sawkat Hossain, a party press release said.

Police officials said no one was arrested. But a major clash between the activists of JCD and BCL was averted with their intervention, they claimed.

Earlier, at 2:30 pm the Civic Committee held a rally at Bipani Bitan crossing with AL leader Khorshed Alam Sujjan in the chair, in support of 28-point charter of demands declared by Mayor ABM Mo-hiuddin Chowdhury for the development of Chittagong.

Among others who addressed the rally were Jamsheer Alam Chowdhury, Solaiman Selim, Jalal Uddin Iktal, Giasuddin Heru and Iftakar Iftu.

Speakers at the rally expressed their determination to resist the visit of Begum Zia to Chittagong in future. From the rally some balloons attached with black flags were released in the air to mark the demonstration against Khaleda Zia, the party press release said.

Meanwhile, black flags were hoisted last night atop

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ECNEC approves Ashuganj-Bhairab Bridge Project

The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC) in a meeting on Tuesday night approved the Ashuganj-Bhairab Bridge Project over the Meghna river on the Dhaka-Sylhet highway, reports UNB.

The proposed 837-metre-long bridge with nine spans will be built 120 metres upstream of the Bhairab Railway Bridge at an estimated cost of Tk 267 crore including foreign assistance of Tk 155 crore to be provided by the British Overseas Development Administration (ODA).

The construction of the bridge will begin soon and is expected to be completed by the year 1999-2000. On completion of the bridge, the journey between Dhaka and Sylhet will be easier requiring less time.

It will also smoothen transportation of materials like boulders, stones and cement, imported items like

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British Home Secy due Jan 10

LONDON, Dec 20: British Home Secretary Michael Howard is to visit India, Pakistan and Bangladesh in two-week mission focusing on the problems of illegal immigration, drug trafficking and race relations, reports AFP.

The Home Secretary will fly to Delhi on December 29 and remain in India until January 5, visiting Bombay and the Kashmiri capital Amritsar, he then flies to Pakistan, where he will visit Islamabad, Karachi and Lahore before flying to the Bangladesh capital Dhaka on January 10.

He expected to be updated on Indian government efforts to free four western hostages including two Britons held by Kashmiri militants since July 4. Howard said at a press briefing to announce the visit Tuesday.

But he ruled out discussions with the Indian government over reports that it

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Shibir activists damage vehicles, explode bombs to enforce hartal

The half-day hartal called by the Islami Chhatra Shibir in the capital and 5 other divisional headquarters yesterday evoked partial response.

In the city, at least 20 people were injured as Shibir pickets damaged vehicles and exploded scores of bombs to enforce the hartal and in chase and counter-chase between them and activists of other student and youth organisations who opposed it.

Police lobbed at least 23 tear gas shells to disperse the rival activists and picked up 35 people for picketing, 15 each from Purana Paltan and Farmgate areas, two each from Dhanmondi and Mohammadpur areas and one from Lalbagh in the city.

Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS), the student front of Jamaat-e-Islami called the hartal in the divisional head-

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Section 144 in Habiganj

HABIGANJ, Dec 20: Section 144 was clamped on the town today as suburban residents planned to gherao the district headquarters in support of transport workers, reports UNB.

The local transport workers locked in a feud with some youngsters of the town who damaged a passenger coach on Saturday.

Coach service between the capital and Habiganj remained snapped following the incident.

Meanwhile, the feuding groups clashed on Hospital Road while the transport workers in a protest procession after the violence were marching towards the Deputy Commissioner's office to submit a memorandum demanding arrest and punishment of the attackers.

At least 15 people were injured in the clash, witnesses said.

The district administration imposed the Section 144 at 11 am today to avert possible flareup in the town.

Bangladesh-Maldives soccer tie this afternoon

Battle for 'fastest man' crown at SAF Games today

MADRAS, Dec 20: Bangladesh will vie for golds in three events of the 7th SAF Games here tomorrow, reports UNB.

The country's celebrated athlete and the fastest man of South Asia Bimal Chandra Tarafdar along with his promising mate Mahboob Alam will battle for the 100 metres sprint crown with US-based India sprinter Rajib Balakrishnan at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium.

Karar Mizanur Rahman, the SAARC and SAF gold medalist swimmer of Bangladesh, will compete in his favourite 100 metres breaststroke at the Velacherry Aquatic Complex.

Ace shooter Atiqur Rahman, the gold medalist of SAF and Commonwealth Games, will take part in men's free pistol 60 shot event along with two other Bangladeshi shooters — Nazrul Islam and Tawfique Rahman — at the Veerapuram Shooting Range.

Bangladesh today won a

Medals table

MADRAS, Dec 20: Following in the Final medals tally at end of second day's competitions at the seventh SAF Games here today reports PTI.

Country	G	S	B	Total
India	15	8	0	23
Nepal	3	1	1	5
Pakistan	0	5	4	9
Bangladesh	0	3	5	8
Sri Lanka	0	1	9	10
Total	18	18	19	55

(Pakistan awarded two bronze medals in men's doubles event of table tennis).

In the 86 kg class Bangladesh's Munzur Rahman got the silver losing to India's Sarabjit Singh who grabbed the gold in the event. Nepal's Kancharan Tamang bagged the bronze.

In the 78 kg category Nepal's B Chaudhari Jit won the gold and Sri Lanka's DM, Son Piyal Rochita clinched the silver. Bangladesh's Mohonto Susil got the bronze.

In the 65 kg class Najib Agha of India got the gold while Nepal's Hor Bahadur Thapa took the silver and Bangladesh's Abdul Motalib bagged the bronze.

In the team events, Bangladesh Football team will play their inaugural match

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No more shifting of polls date: CEC

By Staff Correspondent

Chief Election Commissioner Justice AKM Sadeque is optimistic that all political parties will take part in the forthcoming general elections, resolving the present crisis through understanding.

"By virtue of the powers vested in the Election Commission (EC), it is trying its best to take all measures to ensure free and fair elections in the country, demonstrating through actions," Justice Sadeque said yesterday.

The CEC was briefing newsmen at the conference room of the EC to explain the measures taken so far to ensure transparency in the election process.

Replying to questions, Justice Sadeque ruled out any possibility of further shifting of the election date, saying that the Constitution does not permit holding of elections after the 90-day deadline that ends on February 22.

The elections are due on February 7.

The EC was already enjoying enough power, he said, hastily adding that there still remained room for further empowerment.

According to him, separation of the judiciary from the administration and a particular cadre service for EC officials are two vital factors to strengthen the EC, which at the same time will help build its public image.

Turning to the illegal arms recovery issue, Justice Sadeque said with the expiry of the deadline for the surrender of illegal arms yesterday, police along with Army and

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BNP unlikely to give 'further concession'

By Nazmul Ashraf

The ruling BNP is unlikely to give 'any more concession' to the agitating Opposition as regards the modality of an interim government since the party policy planners are apprehensive of the Opposition's sincerity about resolving the lingering political crisis within the ambit of the Constitution, competent sources indicated.

The authorised negotiators of the ruling party were now taking least interest in continuing back-stage parleys with their counterparts in the Opposition and they are unlikely to make further contacts unless the Opposition leaders come up with any new proposals, the sources said quoting BNP stalwarts.

Meanwhile, US Ambassador David N Merrill met separately BNP leader and Information and Commerce Minister Shamsul Islam and Awami League leader Amir Hossain Amu on Monday.

This has created considerable interest in the political circles.

The central leaders were now busy finalising the list of party nominees for the elections. The list would be announced shortly after interviews of the rest of applicants are held on December 23-24, said a member of the BNP nomination body.

Sources close to the BNP negotiators said, the policy-makers of the party believed that the Opposition did not want elections within the February 22 constitutional deadline, and wanted to push the polls beyond the deadline. Once the Opposition succeeded, they would put pressure on the BNP to go for constitutional amendments regarding the election deadline and holding of polls under a non-party caretaker government, which the ruling party was determined not to accept.

Tea prices, export go up but production falls

CHITTAGONG, Dec 20: Both export and prices of Bangladesh tea went up during the first five months of the current financial year but production decreased.

According to official reports here, exports of tea during July-October of 95-96 fiscal were recorded at 8.41 million kgs, up from 7.47 million kgs of the corresponding period of the previous fiscal (94-95).

The average export price of tea jumped to Taka 54.09 per kg during this period from Taka 46.83 in the same period last fiscal, showing an increase of Taka 8/- per kg, officials and exporters said.

They attributed the increase in price and exports to better demand for Bangladesh tea in the global markets. Poland, Russia, Sudan and Pakistan were among the prominent buyers of Bangladesh tea this season, they added. High prices this year will enable the growers to recover the losses sustained last year due to fall in export and price. Poland bought 8 million kgs during the 5 months against 1.1 million kgs during the same period last fiscal. Russia, Sudan and Pakistan also raised their purchase.

The country earned Tk 455.27 million from export of tea during the five months against Tk 350.05 million during the corresponding period of last fiscal year. In fiscal 94-95, Bangladesh earned Taka 1241.4 million by exporting 26.71 million kgs of tea.

However, tea output in the 9 months till September this year dropped to 31.60 million kgs during the same period in 1994. Officials and growers said prolonged drought this year hampered production in 150 tea gardens.

Air dropping of arms Calcutta press reports false: Foreign Office

Bangladesh government yesterday termed as baseless and mischievous the news items of parachute air dropping of arms in Purulliya of West Bengal, published in some newspapers of Calcutta on Tuesday, reports BSS.

A Foreign Office press release issued here said, "attention of the Government has been drawn to news items published Tuesday in a section of the press in Calcutta, India, about the parachute air dropping of boxes containing arms, ammunition and rocket launchers etc. in Purulliya, West Bengal. According to the said reports, the boxes carry labels bearing the imprint 'Cad', Rajendrapur, Bangladesh."

The government feels that such concocted reports making unfounded insinuations against Bangladesh have been published with a malicious intent and ulterior motive to baselessly malign Bangladesh and to harm Bangladesh-India relations.

Meanwhile, while contacted a Foreign Office spokesman said such mischievous reports, are nothing but a load of rubbish and do not even deserve any comment.

'BTV report on Taramon Bibi distorted'

By Staff Correspondent

Different organisations condemned a report of Bangladesh Television on Tuesday on Prime Minister's decoration of Taramon Bibi, Bir Pratik, saying the report was distorted.

Sammilita Nari Samaj leaders Farida Akhter and Khushi Kabir who were present at the award giving ceremony said that Taramon, while taking the award from Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia held the premier's hand and had told her that there were other freedom fighters who were struggling with their lives now and requested her to look after them.

The BTV news also said that Taramon had praised the Prime Minister for her role in upholding the freedom fighters and that the name of the Prime Minister would be written in golden letters.

Taramon had actually told, "we had brought the freedom"

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One killed in Jamuna boat collision

SIRAJGANJ, Dec 20: A head-on collision between two engine boats near Ghat-achar in the river Jamuna today left one person dead and three other injured, reports UNB.

Survivors said Abdur Rahim 46, a businessman of Bhuapur in Tangail district, died as he fell from one of the boats into the river after receiving head injury.

They said the boat — one sailed from Bhuapur and another from Sirajganj — collided in the morning as the boatmen lost their visibility due to dense fog