

Forest resources in CHT face depletion

RANGAMATI, Dec 25: Huge forest resources in two hill districts face depletion due to massive extraction of wood and obstruction to afforestation by local people, reports UNB.

The authorities apprehended that the government revenue would all if this illegal activities continued unabated in the forests of Rangamati and Khagrachhari.

The government earned revenue of Tk 11.32 crore from the forest resources in the two hill districts in the last financial (1994-95).

Officials in the Forest Department said forests in 326,352 acres of land of the two districts are classified as protected, reserved and unclassified state.

According to a survey conducted by Canadian experts in the 60s, some 76 per cent of the forest area in the greater Chittagong Hill Tracts is only suitable for afforestation.

Soils of the hill regions can hardly be used for agriculture and other farming

purposes, the experts observed in the survey.

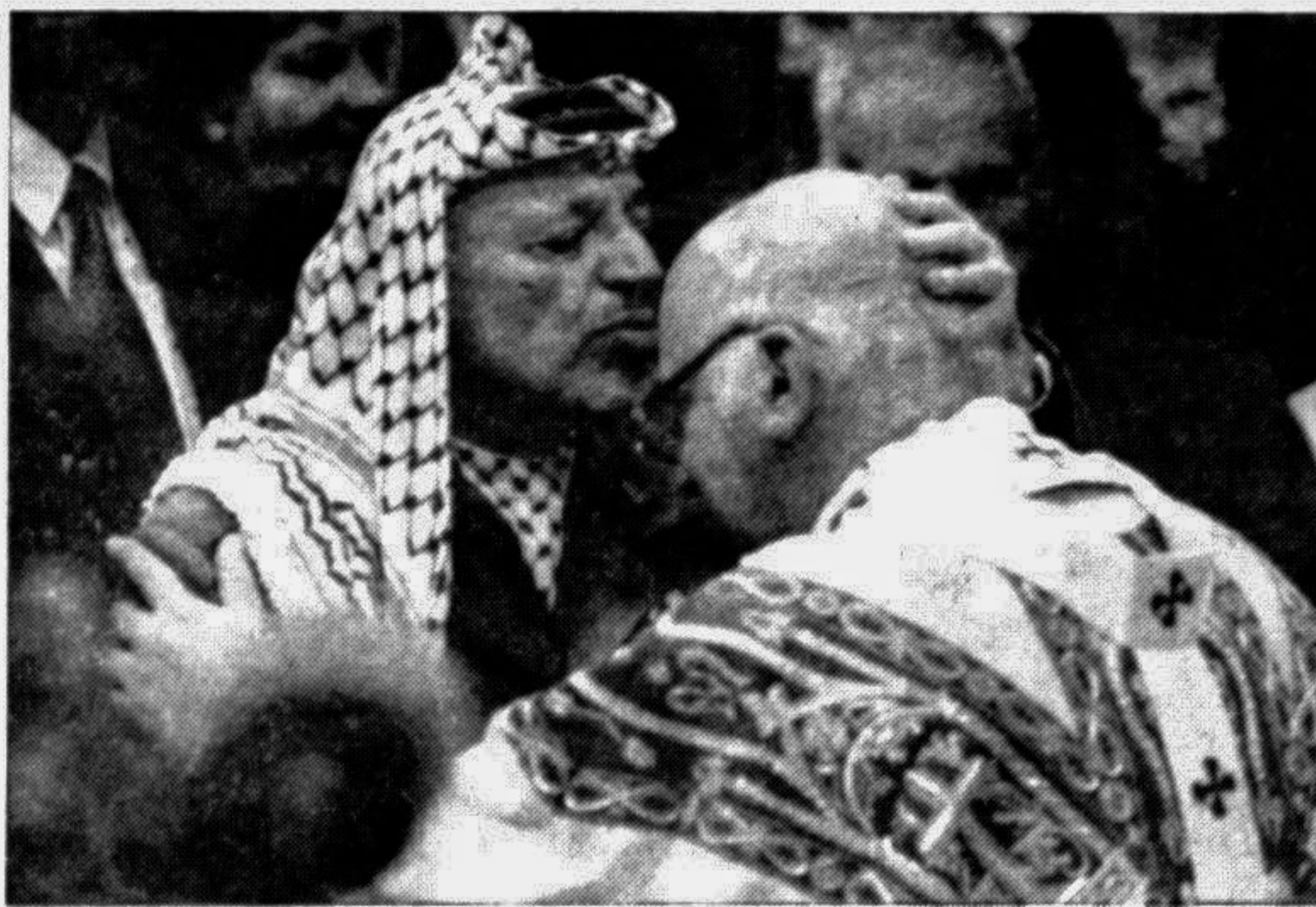
The afforestation in the two hill districts is being predominantly hampered because of two practical conditions prevailing in the trouble-torn hills, according to the authorities concerned.

One is that the activists of the outlawed Shantibahini are cutting trees illegally on the one hand and obstructing process of afforestation on the other.

The forest department has almost lost their control in the forests, as officials and staff, responsible for afforestation and other duties, now live only close to the police stations and army camps for fear of the Shantibahini.

Taking the advantage, some unscrupulous quarters have joined hands with Shantibahini in their illegal activities of extraction of wood.

Tribals who enjoy privileges of cutting wood only for their own consumption, under the 1901 Hill Tracts Manual, are now allegedly defying the rules.



PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat kisses the head of the Latin Patriarch of the Holy Land Michel Sabbah as Arafat leaves the Christmas mass early yesterday in the Church of the Nativity. — AFP/UNB photo

Pope sick, cuts short Christmas mass

VATICAN CITY, Dec 25: Influenza stopped Pope John Paul from celebrating Christmas Day mass today and forced him to cut short his traditional message and greetings, reports Reuters.

It was the first time that the Polish-born Pope, who is 75, had been unable to go ahead with Christmas Day mass in St Peter's Basilica since his election in 1978.

Despite running a temperature, the Pope appeared at noon at the window of his private apartments to deliver his "Urbi et orbi" message to the city of Rome and the world but had to halt his Christmas greetings in 54 languages after feeling sick.

He had spoken in Italian and French but then paused, cleared his throat and stepped away from the balcony.

"Excuse me, I must interrupt this," the Pope, his voice hoarse, told a crowd of more than 30,000 pilgrims who had braved rain to gather in St Peter's square.

The Pope returned to the window about 20 minutes later to reassure the waiting crowd that he was not seriously ill.

"You see that even the Pope has his weaknesses but he is trying to resist. Thank you with all my heart for your patience and I wish you a heartfelt merry Christmas," he said to cheers.

Christmas celebrated

Holy Christmas, the greatest festival of the Christian community, marking the birth of Jesus Christ, was celebrated yesterday in the country as elsewhere in the world, reports BSS.

The festival began midnight Sunday night with the ringing of bells 12 times in the churches.

The Christian community in the capital has arranged elaborate programmes. The singing of Christmas carol and distribution gifts and cakes were part of the festivity.

Special candles were lit at homes and churches.

Meanwhile, a delegation of Christian leaders yesterday called on President Abdur Rahman Biswas at Bangabhaban and exchanged greetings.

The Pope's Christmas greetings, usually pronounced by the pontiff from the central balcony of St Peter's Basilica, are one of the high points of the Roman Catholic calendar and are broadcast live to hundreds of millions of people worldwide.

The Pope's place at Christmas Day mass was taken by cardinal Virgilio Noe, the high priest of St Peter's Basilica.

Chief Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls said the Pope had caught cold after celebrating midnight mass in the Basilica, the largest Church in Christendom.

Qatar Airways starts operation

Qatar Airways, the official airline of Qatar, starts its operation to and from Dhaka today. The operation will be marked by receiving the airlines' inaugural flight from Doha at the Zia International Airport. On the occasion, Qatar Airways will arrange a reception at the ZIA at 9 am, reports UNB.

Arafat joins Bethlehem prayers

BETHLEHEM (West Bank), Dec 25: PLO leader Yasser Arafat and Palestinian Christians prayed for a future of peace and freedom on the first Christmas Day since 1966 free of Israeli rule in the town where Jesus was born, reports Reuters.

Thousands of people, rejoicing in the end of occupation and hoping for a new dawn of prosperity, thronged to Manager Square in Bethlehem where Arafat joined Christian prayers for reconciliation with Israel today.

"The beginning of the Palestinian freedom is also a beginning of reconciliation between the two peoples, Palestinian and Israeli," said the Latin Patriarch of the Holy Land, Michel Sabbah, in his midnight mass sermon.

The Midnight File

Inkatha warriors kill 8 in South Africa

DURBAN, South Africa, Dec 25: At least eight people were killed in South Africa's Kwazulu-Natal province today in a mass raid by Inkatha Freedom Party warriors on supporters of the rival African National Congress (ANC), police said, reports Reuters.

Centre for Bengal Art opens

By Staff Correspondent

Dhaka University Vice-Chancellor Prof Enamuddin Ahmed Sunday inaugurated an International Centre for Study of Bengal Art (ICSBA) in the city which aims at promoting the study and development of Bengal Art.

The Centre at House 32-E, Road 17-A, Banani, would help researchers gather information and coordinate research on Bengal Art now being conducted in the universities museums and other places in a scattered way, said speakers at the inaugural programme held at Shishu Academy.

The inaugural function, held at the Shishu Academy, was chaired by a trustee of the ICSBA prof Salahuddin Ahmed while Prof A B M Hossain of the Rajshahi University, Prof A Momin Chowdhury of Dhaka University, A K M Zakaria of Asiatic Society and Founder President of ICSBA Dr Enamul Haque also spoke.

Dr Enamul Haque, former founder Director General of the National Museum and Prof Zulekha Haque, former Chairperson of the Department of History, Eden University Girls College, Dhaka donated rare collection of nearly 20,000 books, journals, photographs, negatives, slides etc to the centre. Some of these articles are believed to be the only copies in Bangladesh.

The inaugural session was followed by a round table discussion on the Recent Trend of Research on Bengal Art in which some 50 scholars took part.

A Board of Trustees now operates the ICSBA, a non-profit, non-government and non-political organisation. An international advisory committee consisting of scholars from Bangladesh, France, Germany, India, Pakistan, UK and USA guides the academic activities of the centre.

Pak opposition for talks with govt on Sindh

ISLAMABAD, Dec 25: Pakistan's opposition today said it was willing to talk to the government if Karachi replaced the chief minister in troubled Sindh province, in an attempt to stop the unrest rocking the country, reports AFP.

The opposition made the offer at a conference in Islamabad, and suggested the new chief minister of Sindh province, whose capital is Karachi, be chosen jointly by the federal government, the main opposition Pakistan Muslim League (PML) party and ethnic Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM).

The conference in Karachi was attended by politicians, intellectuals and former high judicial and military officials who spoke about the economic and political danger of the unrest in Karachi that has claimed some 1,800 lives this year.

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Cold claims 250 in Moscow

MOSCOW, Dec 25: Nearly 250 people have frozen to death in Moscow over the past two months, including seven over the weekend, health officials reported today, says AP.

All the victims registered since the first death on November 1 were drunk, a spokesman for the city's Health Department told the Interfax news agency.

Temperatures in the Russian capital this month have dropped well below freezing, and went as low as -19 degrees Celsius (-2 degrees Fahrenheit) in mid-December.

The Russian cold claims numerous victims every year, of them dozens in Moscow. In December 1994, however, only about 24 people had died of exposure by mid-month, despite record cold. In December 1993, there were 136 cold-related deaths, compared to about 90 so far this month.

Russian election results

MOSCOW, Dec 25: The Communist Party came top in Russia's parliamentary elections last week with 22.31 per cent of the vote, final results from the Electoral Commission showed today, reports AFP.

The communists were followed by the ultranationalist Liberal Democratic Party with 11.06 per cent, the government party Our Home is Russia with 9.89 and the Liberal Yabloko with 6.93 per cent, the commission said. The results were final, but not yet official, the commission said.

Marksman

From Page 1
In the day's event (men's free rifles three position), Bangladesh shooters took the top three positions. Golam Mahiuddin Haider clinched the gold scoring 1222.4 points, Mohammad Nasiruddin Jony (1210.4 pts) got the silver and Saiful Alam Rinki, who won the .177 air rifle gold, finished third to win the bronze scoring 1209.5 points.

All the three shooters together scored 3364 points to win the team gold of the event.

The event's silver medalist, Nasiruddin Jony, earlier won the men's free rifles prone shooting.

In the men's rapid fire pistol, Daka Banwanlal of India lifted the gold scoring 651.4 points. Another Indian, Telgote Ajab Rao, took the silver making 643.7 point while GM Chandana of Sri Lanka bagged the bronze scoring 639 points.

India also bagged the event's team gold scoring 1648 points. Sri Lanka took the silver with 1632 points and the Bangladesh team of Nazrul Islam, Asif Hossain and Abdur Rahman got the bronze finishing a distant third scoring total 1578 points.

Quake

From Page 1
The earthquake registered seven on the open-ended Richter scale, he said, and was detected as far away as Antarctica.

The earthquake struck at 0443 GMT was centred in the Banda Sea, 169 kilometers under the sea bed and some 230 kilometres west of the town of Saumlaki on, Tanimbar island, said Dadi Kuntadi of the office.

The centre was some 40 kilometres southeast of the small island of Damar but there was no report from the island as it has no direct telephone or radio links.

The walls of the house of the police chief in Saumlaki and a shopping centre in the same town were reported to have cracked but there was no reports of casualties, Kuntadi said.

Dacoit killed in fight with police

COX'S BAZAR, Dec 25: A suspected dacoit was killed as police fought an armed gang to foil a highway robbery near Fashiakhali in Chokoria thana on Sunday night, reports UNB.

A truck helper was also injured critically during half an hour of encounter on the Cox's Bazar-Chittagong highway, police said.

A police contingent led by OC of Chokoria thana, while going to a village to recover arms as part of the current drive, challenged the miscreants attempting to loot two trucks near a bridge on the highway.

The gang of about 10 attacked the trucks, one loaded with urea fertiliser and another carrying betel-leaf, at Jhonjhonia bridge on the highway at about 11:30 pm.

The gang fled leaving behind one companion with serious bullet injuries. The youngman, aged about 26, succumbed to his injuries at a local clinic. Police said they recovered a sawed-off rifle and three bullets from his possession.

The injured helper, Abdul Motaleb, 26, was admitted to Dolahazara Hospital. A case was registered with Chokoria police station.

Comilla clash

From Page 1
who were returning from a party rally at the local High School ground.

As the news spread in the town, angry mob locked into a clash with the Jamaat activists that lasted for about two hours.

Of the injured, one Harun, 20, was rushed to Comilla General Hospital in critical condition while Mofiz, 40, Khalil, 30, Abdul Haq, 50, and Jasim, 30, were admitted to the local thana health complex.

Obituary

Senior advocate of the Supreme Court Abdul Jalil died of a heart attack at his Dhanmandi residence this afternoon. He was 65, reports BSS.

The Namaz-e-Janaza will be held today at Moti Sardar Jame Mosque at Siddiqbazar at 11 am. Another Namaz-e-Janaza will be held after Zohr prayers at Baitul Aman Mosque at Dhanmandi.

The body will be buried at his village home at Chiora Khandirpur under Chouddagram thana of Comilla in the evening.



Dozens of funeral pyres burn in the northern Indian town of Dabwali Sunday where a devastating fire at a school party left more than 400 people dead. — AFP/UNB photo

Nepal crushed

From Page 1
each while Mohammad Musa Miah scored one for Bangladesh.

Jitendra Shreshtha netted the consolation goal for Nepal in the dying moment.

Musa Miah opened the floodgate for Bangladesh in the 10th minute from a penalty stroke (1-0) while skipper Mamunur Rashid doubled the margin five minutes later utilising a penalty corner (2-0).

Sadek scored a nice field goal in the 17th minute by an angular shot (3-0).

Hattrick maker Kamal scored his first goal in the 29th minute by a power-packed shot off a Sadek pass (4-0), followed by Sadek's second goal in the 8th minute of the second half from a goalmouth melee (5-0) and Manun's second goal from a penalty corner in the 14th minute of the last half (6-0).

For his hattrick, Kamal scored three consecutive goals in the 20th, 23rd and 28th minute of the second half of whom two were field goals and one from penalty corner (9-0).

Sadek scored his third goal in his second attempt in the 31st minute of the later half (10-0).

Skipper Mamun completed the winners tally (11-0) two minutes before the final whistle utilizing a lapse of the Nepalese custodian.

Jitendra Shreshtha netted the face saving goal for Nepal

few seconds before the long whistle (11-1).

Bangladesh got 13 penalty corners and one penalty stroke while Nepal got two penalty corners only.

Bangladesh will battle for the bronze with Sri Lanka at 2 pm while the world champions Pakistan will meet the Asian Games runners-up and host India in a gold-deciding match tomorrow (Tuesday) at the Mayor Radhakrishnan Stadium.

'Make Dec 27 strike in newspapers a success'

The central coordination committee of journalists and the press workers and employees yesterday reiterated the demand for immediate formation of the full-fledged Fifth Wage Board, reports BSS.

In a statement, the leaders of the committee said, "If the demand is not met immediately, the information minister and his ministry will have to bear the responsibilities for the situation arises out of it."

The leaders of the committee, which comprises the representatives of three federations of journalists, press workers and the press employees, urged all concerned to make the 24-hour strike on December 27 a success.

They also urged the journalists, the press employees and workers to join the joint meeting at the Jatiya Press Club at 11am on that day.

Pirates attack 7 fishing boats: 20 injured

COX'S BAZAR, Dec 25: At least 20 fishermen were injured, three seriously, when pirates attacked seven fishing boats in the Bay near the St Martins Island on Sunday, reports UNB.

Chairman of Sabrang Union Parishad Shafiq Miah quoting some fishermen said about 16 miscreants allegedly from Myanmar intruded Bangladesh waters in a powerful mechanised boat and swooped on the boats.

The pirates beat up the fishermen and looted fishes, nets and three engines of the boats worth about several lakh of taka and decamped with the booties.

Another plane

From Page 1
lice custody for seven days by the sub-divisional judicial magistrate of Purulia.

Earlier, the court rejected their bail petition, B K Singh said.

Meanwhile, a city court has remanded Rup Dipak Mullick, arrested late Saturday night from Jodhpur Park in South Calcutta for his suspected link with the arms dumping, in police custody till January 4.

The foreigners arrested from Anandanagar were identified as David Otte, D Charles, William Enckhausen (from the US), Zoymas Evangelous (Greece) and John Sinni (Ireland).

Auto-rickshaw drivers

From Page 1

They also held rallies at different points in the city protesting the seizure of vehicles that began on December 21.

At the rallies they also demanded immediate release of their arrested colleagues and the seized auto-rickshaws. They claimed that police arrested many auto-rickshaw drivers and seized their vehicles in last few days for their "failure to produce original driving licence."

They claimed that drivers carry duplicate licences as the authorities did not give them the original licence.

The strike will continue today, Azizul Haq, a leader of the autorickshaw workers union announced at a rally at Purana Palton and appealed to other transport workers to join the strike. The next course of action will be announced at a rally at Purana Palton today, he said.

Buses, trucks and other transports were stranded for hours at Sayedabad-Jatrabari intersection and other point blocking traffic, said witnesses.

In some parts of the city activists of the autorickshaw workers union were seen forcing autorickshaws off the roads.

Some 108 autorickshaws

Soccer

From Page 1

groomed under the able guidance of famed German coach Otto Pfister, will meet in the final on Wednesday either Nepal or India.

Holders Nepal, who lost 1-2 to Bangladesh in the group match, were playing India in the second semi-final today.

Bangladesh, who have a cent per cent winning record against the Lankans on earlier five occasions, had an impressive run in the day's match, but it rolled to tie-breaker for the failure of their forwards.

Bangladesh last managed a final berth in the 4th SAF Games soccer held in Islamabad in 1989. They also reached the final in the 1984 SAF Games in Nepal and in 1985 in Dhaka.

were seized by the city traffic police in its drive against plying of autorickshaws with fake documents. According to DC traffic, Noor Mohammad, 90 per cent of the drivers of the seized vehicles do not have valid driving licence and in some cases documents of their vehicles were also fake.

Another reason for the drive, according to another highly placed police official, was to identify some autorickshaws which were used in some incidents of mugging and other incidents of crime in the city. A good number of mugging incidents took place in the city in which autorickshaws were used by the criminals, he pointed out.

Meanwhile, some of the vehicles seized during the last four days have already been released after their owners showed valid documents.

Expatriate Bangladeshis urged to help increase export

Expatriate Bangladeshis have been urged to put in their best efforts to increase exports from Bangladesh to boost the national economy at a seminar held in Riyadh last week, reports BSS.

The theme of the seminar was "Role of expatriate Bangladeshis in socio-economic development of the country." It was jointly organised by Bangladesh embassy and Bangladesh business community in Riyadh, according to a message received here yesterday.

A large number of Bangladeshi businessmen and Saudi nationals attended the day-long seminar, the first of its kind in Saudi Arabia, the message said. Bangladeshi exportables were also displayed.

The speakers dwelt at length on the process and scope of exports from Bangladesh and were of the view that keen efforts be taken to boost and thereby strengthen the economy.

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APPOINTMENT OF CONSULTANT

The Board of Investment (BoI) invites sealed proposals from the reputed Bangladeshi consultants/Legal experts/firms for drafting the proposed Investment Promotion Act of Bangladesh which will provide legal support to the private sector investors to set up and operate their industrial activities unhindered.

For details please contact the undersigned by 31 December, 1995.

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