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NEWS BRIEFS

BNP completes nominations

The BNP yesterday nominated party leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to contest the coming Jatiya Sangsad elections from Bagerhat-1. With the nomination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the BNP completed the nomination of its candidates to all the 300 seats of the Jatiya Sangsad. BNP office secretary Mohammad Nazrul Islam told BSS.

'Human circle' on DU campus tomorrow

The students of Dhaka University will organise a 'human circle' tomorrow on the campus demanding the trial of the killers of university teacher Nuban Ahmed and to protest the deteriorating law and order. A press release said. The circle will be formed around the Arts Faculty at 10 am, reports BSS.

JEB official made OSD

From Our Correspondent
JESSORE, Jan 8: Inspector of Schools, Jessore Education Board (JEB) Fazlur Rahman Talukdar, has been made officer on special duty (OSD) for his alleged involvement in registration scandal in the last year's SSC examination of the board, sources said.

64 arms recovered

Law enforcing agencies yesterday recovered 64 firearms, 384 bullets and 30 explosives on the 19th day of the countrywide illegal arms hunt. According to the Law and Order Coordination Cell of the Election Commission, during the combing operation of police, army, navy and BDR, 305 people were picked up on various charges, including possessing of illegal arms, reports UNB.

Cargo ship untraced for 45 days 24 Bangladeshis still missing

By Rafiq Hasan

A cargo vessel, owned by a Bangladeshi, has been missing with 24 Bangladeshi crew for more than one month in the China Sea, off Taiwan coast, according to family sources of the owner.

The ship, Al-Kashem, had sailed from Singapore for Onahama, Japan on October 27 last year but lost contact since November 21 when its owner and captain Rabiul Islam had made the last radio phone call to his wife in

Khulna. Rabiul had told his wife that they were crossing a rough weather along the Taiwanese coast and expected to reach Onahama on December 30, two days behind schedule. Rabiul's elder brother Nurul Islam told The Daily Star here yesterday.

The ship belonged to the Seatine Shipping Pte Ltd., a Singapore-based company owned by Capt Rabiul and was flying a Belizean flag.

Nurul Islam and some other relatives of the missing crew said they got no information about the ship from officials or local agents of the ship in Bangladesh or any source in Taiwan, Japan, Singapore or China during last one and a half months.

Rabiul used to get in touch with his family twice or thrice a week. But there has been no communication since November 21, Nurul Islam said.

"Since the ship is reportedly missing we can assume that it is either taken over by pirates or it has sunk," said Capt Wahed who had disembarked from the ship due to illness at Hainan port, China, where it had anchored due to a typhoon off the Vietnamese coast. The 6000 DWT ship was carrying 5000 tons of cargo, mainly raw materials for cosmetics. Wahed said he was to join the ship in Japan

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9 killed, 100 hurt in train collision

From Our Correspondent

CHANDPUR, Jan 8: At least nine persons were killed and over 100 injured, 20 of them critically, as two trains collided today at a place between Hajiganj and Meher stations.

The number of casualties may rise as rescue operation continued, witnesses said.

The trains, Chittagong-bound Sagarika Express from Chandpur and a Chandpur-bound 101 local train from Chittagong, collided head-on at around 6 pm, near Kan-gaish village under Hajiganj thana, 15 km from here.

Seven carriages two of the

express train and five of the local, derailed in the collision, killing 8 persons on the spot and injuring more than 100 others witnesses said.

The injured, 20 of them in critical condition, were taken to Hajiganj and Chandpur hospitals. One person died on the way to hospital. Two train guards, Kobbat and Abbas Uddin were among those injured critically.

The dead could not be identified till the writing of this report at 11:30 pm.

Fifty of the less seriously injured people were released

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250 killed as plane ploughs into market in Zaire

KINSHASA, Jan 8: At least 250 were killed today when a Russian-built airliner ploughed into a teeming market in the Zairean capital, medical staff and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said, reports AFP.

ICRC staff reported 230 people killed, including 217 from the crowded Sim-bazikita market where the Antonov AN-32 came down after failing to gain altitude as it was departing Ndolo airport, a small airport near the centre of Kinshasa used for domestic flights.

A further 12 bodies were taken to Kinshasa central hospital, the ICRC said. Medical staff said a further 20 bodies were taken to the Mama Yemo Hospital.

On December 18, a Lockheed Electra turboprop, operated by a Zairean firm, crashed after takeoff in Angola, killing more than 140 people.

PM briefed on political developments

Star Report

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia held a meeting with some of her cabinet members yesterday afternoon to discuss the latest political developments. A minister, who participated in the meeting, informed The Daily Star that the PM was apprised of the latest political developments following negotiations with the Opposition over the last few days.

The meeting was attended by BNP secretary general and LGED Minister Abdus Salam Talukdar, Works Minister Rafiqul Islam Miah, Information and Commerce Minister M Shamsul Islam, Education Minister Zamiruddin Sircar and State Minister for Establishment Aminul Huq.

Before attending the meeting, Shamsul Islam told The Daily Star that the 90-day limit of holding elections after the dissolution of the Jatiya Sangsad was absolutely mandatory.

The idea of an advisory council under the President with executive powers vested in his office has already been conveyed to the Opposition quarters, said Islam, adding that the response is yet to be received.

Zamiruddin Sircar, who did not get the party nomination for the forthcoming election, said that he would go back to his law practice at the Supreme Court but would remain in politics and work for the BNP as a member of the party's advisory council.

CPA earns Tk 284 cr revenue in '95

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Jan 8: The Chittagong Port Authority recorded a revenue earnings of Taka 284 crore in 1995, an increase of about Taka 42 crore compared with that of 1994, official sources said.

In 1994, CPA earned Taka 242.94 crore against the handling of cargo, vessels and other sources of rents, port reports said.

Port officials attributed the increase in revenue last year to a remarkable growth of traffic through this major port of the country.

Chittagong port in 1995 handled 110,27,321 metric tons (MT) of cargo as against 90,38,481 MT handled in 1994, according to port reports.

Last year's total cargo include 95,48,348 MT of import goods and 14,78,973 MT export goods while in '94 the import cargo recorded 78,13,229 MT and export cargo 12,25,252 MT.

Similarly, Chittagong port handled a total of 2,45,417 TEUs container, up from 2,04,739 TEUs handled in 1994.

In 1995, the port handled 180 vessels more than that of previous year.

Correction

The Daily Star reported on Monday that a meeting between Awami League leader Amir Hossain Amu and Information and Commerce Minister Shamsul Islam took place at the latter's residence.

Information and Commerce Minister informed yesterday that no such meeting took place on that day. We regret the inadvertent error.

EC defers polls Mitterrand passes away

By Staff Correspondent

The Election Commission (EC) has again revised the schedule for parliamentary elections fixing February 15 as the polls date.

The rescheduling followed verbal and written requests from the major opposition political parties, an EC announcement said yesterday.

The announcement came only an hour before the deadline for submission of nomination papers yesterday as per the earlier revised schedule.

The mainstream opposition had earlier called a 48-hour hartal that started yesterday morning, coinciding with the last dates for filing nomination papers and scrutiny.

The dates for submission of nomination papers and scrutiny are now January 18 and 19 and that for with-

drawal of candidature is January 23, the EC announcement said.

The election schedule was first announced on December 4, fixing January 18 as polls date. The voting was then deferred to February 7. On January 2, the Election Commission made a partial change in the schedule fixing January 8

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and 9 as last dates for filing nomination papers and scrutiny.

But the opposition Awami League, Jatiya Party, Jamaat-e-Islami, Left Democratic Front, Gano Forum and others rejected the election schedule pending a solution to the persisting political crisis over the caretaker issue.

The EC expressed its hope that the political parties will be able to reach an

understanding and participate in the elections within this time.

"Elections have to be held within 90 days, that is February 21, following the dissolution of Parliament, as prescribed in the Constitution," the announcement pointed out.

The EC could not shift the elections beyond February 15 as because of the Shaheed Dabash, Eid-ul-Fitr, Shab-e-Qadr and Jumatul Bida, it explained.

The EC, however, did not mention the names of the parties which requested it verbally or in writing to shift the election date again.

Since the very first announcement of election schedule, the agitating opposition parties called hartals, coinciding with the dates for submission of nomination papers and scrutiny.

PARIS, Jan 8: Former French President Francois Mitterrand, a socialist who guided France through a turbulent 14 years spanning the end of the Cold War, died today, his office said. He was 79, reports Reuters.

"The President died this morning at 8.30 am," his personal secretary said. He died at the Paris office he had occupied since leaving power last May.

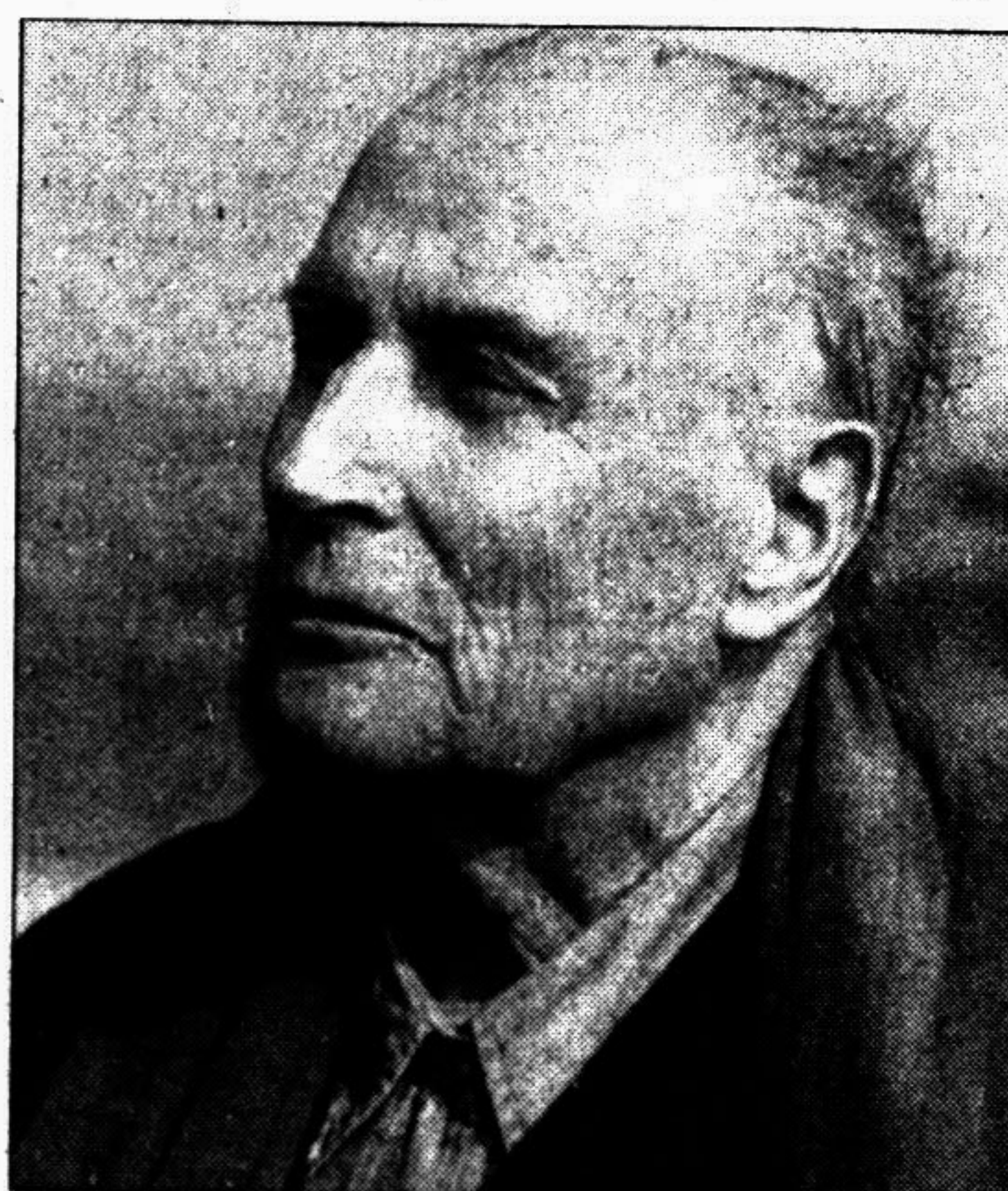
Mitterrand, a devoted builder of the European Union who had been suffering from prostate cancer, stood down as a president in May. He had twice beaten his successor, President Jacques Chirac, to the job.

Mitterrand turned the Socialist Party into an enduring government force, becoming France's longest-serving President, and reconciled the French left with the market economy.

Chirac told reporters he had gone this morning to pay tribute before Mitterrand's body.

He said Mitterrand had tried to reinforce 'solidarity' and had 'made the construction of Europe move forward with determination. He had

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Francois Mitterrand

Clashes, blasts mark hartal's first day

By Staff Correspondent

Clashes between activists of rival political parties and sporadic bomb explosions marked the first 18 hours of the Opposition-called 48-hour hartal that began yesterday, paralysing normal life in the capital as elsewhere in the country.

At least 10 people were injured, four of them stabbed in clashes between pro- and anti-hartal activists and explosion of crackers in the city.

The major opposition par-

Hartal relaxed

The countrywide hartal, which was scheduled to continue till 6 am Wednesday, will now end at 5:30 this evening. The three major opposition parties in separate statements yesterday also relaxed the hartal hours for rickshaws allowing them to ply from 2 pm today.

Awami League, Jatiya Party and Jamaat-e-Islami called the hartal to press home their identical demand for immediate resignation of the Prime Minister and holding of general elections under a neutral caretaker government.

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (Rab) also gave a call for the 48-hour hartal while the Left Democratic Front (LDF) called a dawn to dusk hartal on the same issue.

The hartal programme

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Awami League leader Motia Chowdhury arguing with security personnel for returning a camera of a photo journalist snatched at Farmgate in the city yesterday. — Star photo

4 SAARC states want removal of high & non-tariff barriers

NEW DELHI, Jan 8: Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bhutan today expressed identical views regarding elimination of tariff, para-tariff and non-tariff barriers to make South Asian Preferential Trade Arrangement (SAPTA) as an effective vehicle for regional economic and trade cooperation, reports BSS.

Delegation leaders representing the four out of seven member countries of the regional body were addressing the two-day meeting of the SAARC commerce ministers which began today at Vigyan Bhawan here.

They said SAPTA should be made the launching pad for eventual progression to a SAARC Free Trade Area (SAPTA).

Indian Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao inaugurated the meeting. He stressed the need for making the next round of SAPTA negotiations

far broader, deeper and meaningful. "In terms of preferential tariff cuts as well as dismantling para-tariff and non-tariff barriers."

Addressing the meeting, leader of Bangladesh delegation Abdul Hamid Chowdhury, Chairman of Bangladesh Tariff Commission, strongly pleaded for removal of high tariff and non-tariff barriers to pave the way for Bangladesh goods to find markets in other SAARC countries.

The advanced economies in the region should unilaterally "eliminate all tariff and non-tariff barriers on all imports from least developed countries in terms of Article 10 of the SAPTA agreement," he asserted. This process, he said must begin immediately and be completed within two years.

Sri Lankan Minister of Trade, Commerce and Food Kingsley T Wickramaratne

emphasised the need for eliminating all tariff, para-tariff and non-tariff barriers to ensure free movement of goods and services within the region.

He favoured adoption of across the board tariff reduction approach instead of the prevailing product by product approach. He identified some of the structural impediments hindering the "expansion of trade among SAARC member countries."

The obstacles he identified include high freight charges, lack of marketing skills, high insurance cost and financial obstacles including inadequate transportation network.

Nepalese Minister for Commerce Fatch Singh Tharu pleading the cases of four least developed countries of the region said the provisions for additional concessions in the articles of the

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Hotel owner murdered: 9 arrested

By Staff Correspondent

Nine persons including a film producer, Faruque Thakur, were arrested yesterday in connection with the killing of a hotel owner, Shamsul Alam at Gulshan in the city Sunday night.

Faruque Thakur, along with eight other accused persons — Syed Din Mohammad, Ziaul Huq, Rustam Sardar, Mizanur Rahman, Arifur Rahman, Mujibur Rahman, Nazmul Hossain and Mithu — were produced before a city court and sent to jail yesterday, police said.

Shamsul Islam, owner of Hotel Plaza in Baridhara, was shot dead during a shootout between two groups of people over possession of the ground floor of a house on Road No 72 there.

Nurul Islam younger brother of Shamsul Islam filed a case with Gulshan thana accusing 20 persons in the incident, police said.

Hashimoto set to become new PM

TOKYO, Jan 8: Japan's ruling coalition announced today it had chosen trade minister Ryutaro Hashimoto as its candidate for Prime Minister, a move that virtually ensures he will be elected to the job by parliament later this week, reports Reuters.

Asked if the coalition party leaders had agreed to back Hashimoto as their candidate for premier, finance minister Masayoshi Takemura told reporters: "Yes, we have decided on that."

Takemura is leader of the Sakigake Party, the smallest partner in Japan's three-way coalition. He was peaking after the coalition party leaders met to decide on their chosen candidate to succeed outgoing premier Tomichi Murayama.

Murayama, who heads

the Socialists, unexpectedly announced his resignation as premier last Friday, saying it was time to hand over power to a new government to be headed by the largest party in the coalition, Hashimoto's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). Parliament votes on Thursday to choose a new prime minister and the coalition holds a solid majority in both houses.

The conservative LDP lost a four-decade hold on power in July 1993 and Hashimoto, 58, would become the first LDP Prime Minister since that time.

Hashimoto, in stark contrast to the low-key Murayama, is known abroad as a tough trade negotiator who won praise at home for his handling of bitter car trade talks with the United States last year.