

The Midnight File

Chechens free 3000 hostages

KIZLYAR, Russia, Jan 10: Chechen rebels freed up to 3,000 hostages they seized in a southern Russian city and left early today in buses for their breakaway republic still holding more than 100 hostages, officials said, reports AP.

Israel frees hundreds of Palestinians

SALEM, West Bank, Jan 10: Israel freed hundreds of Palestinian prisoners today under a self-rule deal with the PLO just days before the first Palestinian national elections, witnesses said, reports Reuters. The first batch of 35 inmates kissed the ground and hugged anxious relatives after being bussed to an Israeli military checkpoint on the northern West Bank border with Israel. They were among some 800 prisoners, including members of Islamic and leftist groups opposed to Israeli-PLO peace moves, due to be freed by the end of the day in various parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Under an accord signed with the PLO last September, Israel agreed to free 1,200 prisoners ahead of Palestinian elections on January 20. Most were jailed for resisting Israeli occupation. "I feel more sad than happy," said 22-year-old Mustafa Abu Arra, a member of the Islamic militant Hamas group who spent four months in jail without trial. "My colleagues are still in jail being treated as a bargaining chip in the hands of the Israelis," he said. Prisoners said a total of 220 prisoners were freed from Israel's Megiddo prison — including the 35 who arrived at Salem on their way to Jenin — for other West Bank cities.

Bangabandhu's Homecoming Day observed

The Homecoming Day of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was observed in capital Dhaka and elsewhere in the country yesterday, reports UNB. On this day, in 1972, Bangabandhu returned home after nine months of captivity in Pakistan during country's Liberation War. To celebrate the day, Awami League and its front organisations, different socio-cultural and political organisations arranged various programmes. In the capital, the day's programmes began with hoisting the national and party flags at the Awami League central office at Bangabandhu Avenue. Awami League president Sheikh Hasina accompanied by the party leaders garlanded the portrait of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at Bangabandhu Bhaban, Dhanmondi, at 8 am. Later, different political and socio-cultural organisations and people from all walks of life thronged at the Bangabandhu Bhaban and placed wreaths at the portrait of Bangabandhu. The organisations include Dhaka city Awami League, Jatiya Samik League, Juba League, Chharta League, Mohila Awami League, Krishak League and Bangabandhu Parishad.

Old man murdered in Faridpur

FARIDPUR, Jan 10: A slaughtered body of an old man was recovered from a rice godown at Chawkbazar in the town this morning, reports UNB. Police said, they found the body of Sudhir Kumar Ghose, 60, of Nagarkanda thana with several cut marks at his throat and abdomen from the godown owned by one Joy Gobinda Saha. Sudhir Kumar, a dealer of hessian bags, had been staying in the godown at night for several years. Police suspected that Sudhir Kumar might have been killed by miscreants who ransacked the godown and tried to break its iron safe vault early today, police said. Police, however, recovered the iron safe from near a pond of the godown intact. A case was registered with the Kotwali police. District Police Superintendent visited the spot and further investigation is on.

Bid to kidnap schoolgirl: 3 nabbed

SIRAJGANJ, Jan 10: Local people failed an attempt to kidnap a schoolgirl and nabbed three of the kidnapers at Shimultala in the town today, reports UNB. Witnesses said a gang of about seven youngsters in a microbus waylaid the rickshaw of Gulnazar Mithil, 16, a student of class X of Kalia-akanda High School, at Shimultala as she was returning home from the school at about 10:30 am. On hearing hue and cry of Mithil, daughter of one Abdul Maiek of Kaliahorpur village, local people rushed to the spot and nabbed three of the youngsters along with the microbus. Later, they handed over the three young men — Anisur Rahman of Shantibag, Dhaka, microbus driver Nurul Islam and Shakil Parvej of Gosal road in Sadar thana — to police.

JP rejects jailed husband and JP Chairman

She rejected rumours about a JP deal with the government to participate in the elections. No solution to the present political impasse is possible without having Ershad at the negotiating table, Raushan said. Moudud Ahmed said executive powers shall have to be vested in the office of a non-partisan person and not in the President's office.

HSC candidates boycott test exams in Rajshahi

RAJSHAH, Jan 10: HSC examinees of the Rajshahi Government College and Barendra College today boycotted their test examinations demanding separate question papers for each Education Board of the country, reports UNB. College sources said the All College Council, an organisation of the HSC examinees, led the boycott programme. Later, they brought out a procession and held a rally at Anatala on the Rajshahi College campus.

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Maid shot dead

From Page 1 let struck Fatema. The cause of the attack could not be known immediately. However, sources said that a local mastaan along with some of his accomplices went to the building to pick up one person from the place. They started firing and hurled crackers when local people resisted them. At the time, a stray bullet hit the maid. The gang attacked the office of a rice agency there. Police from Kotwali thana recovered the body of Fatema, who hailed from Barisal. No one was arrested in this connection till last night.

Amu, Tofael

From Page 1 Meanwhile, Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia yesterday held a meeting with four of her cabinet colleagues at her Tejgaon office to take their views on the current political impasse.

Ansar, VDP

From Page 1 VDP Development Bank to create employment for the members of the auxiliary law-enforcing force as they are not able to create jobs owing to want of capital as well as financial difficulties. "My dear brothers and sisters (Ansar-VDP) are the owners of this bank. You will buy share and take credit from it. And you will increase your income and create jobs with the help of this bank for yourselves and your families," Begum Zia said.

Principal

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Printed & Published by A. S. Mahmud, Managing Director, on behalf of MediaWorld Ltd, 52, Motijheel C/A, Dhaka-1000, from City Publishing House Ltd, 90 Kakrail, Dhaka-1000. Editorial, News & Commercial Offices: House No: 11, Road No: 3, Dhanmandi B/A, Dhaka-1205. PABX: 500092-4, Commercial: 500091 (Direct), Fax No: 88-02-863035. GPO Box No: 3287, Cable: DAILYSTAR, DHAKA.



Danielle Mitterrand, the wife of late former French President, leaves his Paris home where she lay in state late Tuesday. Outside the building dozens of Parisians have gathered, leaving red roses, the symbol of Francois Mitterrand's socialist party.

Mitterrand's funeral World leaders pay last respect today

PARIS, Jan 10: A host of world leaders will gather in Paris tomorrow to pay their last respects to former President Francois Mitterrand, France's longest serving head of state and a key figure in post-war world politics, reports AFP. Some 20 heads of state or government will gather for a memorial mass at the Notre Dame cathedral to pay tribute to Mitterrand, who died from prostate cancer on Monday aged 79, eight months after leaving office. At exactly the same time the Socialist leader will be buried in an intimate family ceremony in accordance with his wishes in the family vault in his home town of Jarnac, southwest France. The simple ceremony will be in line with previous French presidents including General Charles de Gaulle and Georges Pompidou who also declined the pomp and circumstance of a state funeral.

Participants at the Notre Dame mass to be at 11 am (1000 GMT) at exactly the same time as the Jarnac ceremony will include key political leaders whose countries were marked by Mitterrand over his 14 years in office. Those already confirmed include German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and Israeli President Ezer Weizman. Former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev may also attend. For Britain the Prince of Wales has been confirmed, while Prime Minister John Major's presence has been muted. Although US President Bill Clinton will not attend personally, a high level official is to be designated. A national day of mourning has been declared to mark the funeral. Flags will fly at half mast on all public buildings while public offices and schools will respect a minute's silence at 11:00 am. France has been grieving since Monday morning when Mitterrand died at his official residence near the Eiffel Tower after a long battle against prostate cancer. Mitterrand's body will remain there until Thursday morning when it will be flown by military aircraft to Jarnac.

Gold seized at ZIA

By Staff Correspondent Customs officials at the Zia International Airport (ZIA) seized 160 tolas of gold from a Bangladeshi passenger yesterday. The officials recovered 16 gold bars from Md Sayeed, 38, who arrived from Dubai by an Emirates flight at around 10 am. Customs sources said, A departmental case has been filed in this connection. Meanwhile, the detective branch police in a raid at a store in Kawran Bazar in the city recovered banned cigarettes worth about Tk 1.45 lakh, police said.

Remove PM, help end crisis, Jamaat urges President

The Jamaat-e-Islami yesterday urged the President to play a 'historic role' by removing the obstacles in taking measures for overcoming the present political crisis, reports UNB. The president will have to play a historic role in opinion before the political crisis turns into a constitutional crisis," said Matiur Rahman Nizami, the Secretary General of the Party, at a rally in the afternoon. Jamaat city unit organised the rally at the north gate of Baitul Mukarram national mosque following the two-day hartal that concluded Tuesday evening. The Jamaat leader identified the prime minister's 'obstinacy and just for power as the main obstacle' on the way in taking efforts by the president for resolving the staggering political crisis.

Gulshan incident

From Page 1 the nine arrested persons, was released on bail on Tuesday. The killing of Shamsul Islam and release of one of the accused persons later sparked violent protest at Gulshan during which angry people gheraoed the thana, clashed with police and held a rally.

Businessmen on hunger strike

KHAGRACHHARI, Jan 10: Some 70 businessmen of Dighinala thana, affected by fire at a bazar, went on fast-unto-death in front of Press Club here today for a plot to establish a market, reports UNB.

Another PPP activist gunned down

KARACHI, Jan 10: Four gunmen ambushed and killed a member of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's party on Wednesday, police said, reports AP. Abdul Qayyum, 45, is the third member of Ms Bhutto's party to be gunned down in this ethnically troubled port city since Tuesday. Police said Qayyum, a councillor on the Karachi Municipal Council, was walking to his office in Laqatabad, one of the most violent neighbourhoods in Karachi, when at least four gunmen opened fire with automatic rifles. On Tuesday police recovered the bullet-riddled bodies of two other Bhutto supporters, including another municipal councillor, Abdur Barri, 55, who had been kidnapped from his home, tortured and shot. While no one is claiming responsibility for the recent killings, the police is blaming members of the militant wing of the Mohajir Qumi Movement, representing Indian Muslims who settled here after 1947. Mohajirs, who represent about 70 per cent of Karachi's 12 million people, say they are treated like second class citizens. They are demanding recognition as a fifth ethnic group in Pakistan, believing that will give them equality. Successive governments have refused their demands, but in the past year their struggle has turned increasingly violent. Militants regularly target members of the Karachi security force. Last year 122 policemen and paramilitary Rangers were killed. Ms Bhutto's government has held several rounds of peace talks with the MQM's largest faction, led by Atif Hussein. However, both sides accuse the other of negotiating in bad faith.

SAARC to gear up drive for free trade zone

NEW DELHI, Jan 10: The seven-nation South Asian bloc yesterday agreed to accelerate its drive to create a regional free trade zone, by cutting tariffs across the board, trade ministers of the countries said, reports Reuters.

At the end of a two-day meeting in the Indian capital, Pakistan said it would resolve the issue of granting India most favoured nation (MFN) status shortly. Indian Commerce Minister P Chidambaram told journalists.

This was the first time that the trade ministers of the seven nations met since the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was set up more than a decade ago. SAARC comprises India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives. In a joint statement after the meeting the commerce ministers said they had entrusted a special team, comprising representatives of the seven nations to work on relevant mutual tariff concessions and removal of the select trade barriers.

The panel, the inter-governmental group (IGG) on trade liberalisation, will meet next March in Colombo. The panel may consider adopting sectoral and across-the-board approaches in addition to the product-by-product approach to accelerate the process," the joint statement said. Sidestepping decades of political friction between its two largest members, India and Pakistan, the group launched a preferential trading accord last month with a Barapukuria From Page 1 ted for a road from Moheshpur of Madhyapara to Barapukuria. "The authorities should immediately develop a set of Mine Codes which involves only Tk 30 to 35 lakhs. But they are looking for foreign assistance for this small amount," claimed the official.

Banking system

From Page 1 memoire to the banking secretary. "We share your enthusiasm on the reform agenda and appreciate the project concept note prepared by your team," said Fredrick Kilby of the WB headquarters, adding, "While it is ambitious, it is essential for the future growth of both financial and real sector." As a first step to help monitor the preparation effort, the Bank in agreement with the government has already prepared a work programme for December and January.

According to FSDP's project preparation plan, the first year's programme will be accomplished before the start of the project through formal agreements with two major donors. Major tasks in the first year programme include: enactment of new central bank and bankruptcy law, amendments to financial courts act, Rupali Bank privatisation, preparatory work on capital adequacy, asset valuation, etc. The success of the wide range of reform measures taken under the FSDP now at work in the real sector depend to a considerable degree on the efficient performance of the banking sector," said a well-placed source in the Finance Ministry. "The on-going reform will be further intensified under the project for the financial sector to play its important role in the development of the nation."

"Our aim is to restore the capital adequacy of banks based on risk weighted assets, fundamentally improve the income position of banks to ensure that after restructuring they will be able to sustain operations and grow profitably and privatise Rupali Bank immediately," said a central bank official.

The King, a pilot, flew a Jordanian army helicopter to Israel's Sde Dov Airy Base on the edge of Tel Aviv. He got out of the cockpit and warmly embraced Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres. An Israeli military band played the national anthems of both countries which signed a peace treaty in October 1994.

King Hussein in Israel

TEL AVIV, Jan 10: Jordan's King Hussein arrived in Israel's biggest metropolis, reports Reuters. The arrival of his helicopter was broadcast live on Israel television. Police closed off main streets and deployed 6,000 policemen to secure the visit, which includes a stop at a hospital where Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin died.

JU celebrates silver jubilee tomorrow

By JU Correspondent Jahangirnagar University (JU) will observe its silver jubilee tomorrow amid festivities. A day-long programme including a colourful rally and theatrical performances and recollection of members has been organised on the campus to celebrate the 25th anniversary of founding of the university. A number of former teachers and students who are now well-placed in different fields are expected to join the festivities.

Nuban Ahmed

From Page 1 blood". "Let us abhor terrorism" and "We deny co-existence with terrorism." Different organisations also took part in the human chain expressing solidarity with the general students. These organisations included Dhaka University Teachers' Association (DUTA), Dhaka University Alumni Association, Anti-terrorist Student Panel, Dhaka University Journalists' Association (DUJA), Dhaka University Debating Society (DUDBS), Group Theatre Federation, Nagorikbrinda, Sammlita Sanskritik Jote, Kabita Parasad, Abruti Samanyo Parasad, Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA) and some students' organisations. Ataus Samad, Prof Mozaffar Ahmed, Ahmed Fasa, Hosain Zillur Rahman and Farah Mahzar were among some prominent persons who attended the programme.

Hasina vows

From Page 1 like Liton Chowdhury were being harassed, but no search is conducted in the residential halls of education institutions, she alleged claiming that ruling party terrorists were sheltered in many of those halls. The AL chief accused the Home Minister of sheltering terrorists and said, "The Home Minister had said there were over one lakh illegal arms in the country. But how many of those have been recovered so far?" The week-long AL programme includes a 'padajatra' from Gulshan on January 12, mass-contact tour from January 13 to 15 and torch procession on January 16. Recalling the homecoming of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman from jail in Pakistan on January 10, 1972, Hasina said that the Awami League had a record of carrying out pro-democracy and pro-people politics and that the current movement was also aimed at ensuring peoples' right to vote but "not to go to power."

The rally was addressed by AL central leaders including Abdus Samad Azad, Zillur Rahman, Begum Sajeda Chowdhury, Abdur Razzak, Tofael Ahmed, Amir Hossain, Amu and others.

"This election cannot be held. The voters' list is faulty. It should be corrected first," Hasina demanded. "I had called the Prime Minister over phone and proposed a live Radio-TV talk on the non-partisan, neutral caretaker government issue. She turned down the offer and said that she did not understand what a neutral and non-partisan caretaker government meant. During Ershad regime, she used to understand that," Hasina said. Hasina also alleged that many innocent people were being harassed in the name of arms recovery. AL leaders