

172 bodies recovered

Nigerian boat with 260 aboard sinks

LAGOS, Nigeria, Jan 27: More than 220 people most of them Nigerian traders, were feared dead after their boat capsized in stormy seas, a newspaper reported today, says AP.

The accident occurred Wednesday morning off Nigeria's southeast coast as the boat headed for Gabon, said Saturday Punch Newspaper. It said bodies continued to wash up on shore.

The accident was not formally announced by the military government, but the state-run news agency carried excerpts of the Punch report. It is not unusual for Nigeria's military junta to keep quiet about incidents that might add to the country's image as a centre of decay and corruption.

Punch, which has been forced to close in the past for angering the government, quoted witnesses as saying the boat was carrying about 260 people but did not have enough life rafts or other safety equipment.

Foundation stone of Khan Jahan Ali Airport laid

BAGERHAT, Jan 27: Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia laid the foundation stone of an airport here today, hoping that it will boost economic activities and tourism in the maritime region, reports UNB.

The Khan Jahan Ali Airport project on 95 acres of land, being financed from the national exchequer, is expected to be completed in two years. An amount of Tk 15 crore has been earmarked in the current annual development programme (ADP) for its implementation.

The new airport will open a direct air link between capital Dhaka and the country's southwestern region, including the second sea port of Mongla, the Sundarbans and other tourist spots in the Bay belt.

10 hurt as rivals clash over appointment of principal

KISHOREGANJ, Jan 27: At least 10 people were injured, one of them seriously, in a clash between rival groups over appointment of the principal of a madrassah at a village in Hossainpur thana of the district today, reports UNB.

Police seized one revolver, some lethal weapons and hand-made bombs, and arrested seven people, including a principal candidate, Moniruddin, from the scene.

According to witnesses, the clash erupted at Madhakhola village when Moniruddin's men attacked the supporters of acting principal Anwar Hossain Bhuiyan during a managing committee meeting of the madrassah at about 2 pm.

One killed in Khulna

From Page 1 Awami League workers showed black flags as the Prime Minister drove into the city through Ralli Gate near Daulatpur from Jessore at about 1.15 pm.

At Kashiipur near Khalispur, Juba Sanghatti and Awami League offices were ransacked by the ruling party supporters.

Earlier, the BNP supporters armed with bombs and sticks allegedly ransacked Awami League office at Shankha Market and Jamaat office near Dakbunglow at about 1 am. They also burnt the motor cycle of Chhatra League leader Sudul.

A procession of Jamaat were also attacked at Ferihat at about 10:30 am where several processionists were beaten up.

Police lobbed tear-gas shells on pro-hartal activists in New Market area at about 12:15 pm where several bombs were exploded.

The Prime Minister, who flew into Jessore from Dhaka this morning, reached Khulna at about 1.30 pm and crossed the Rupsha river through the ferry ghat here at about 1.35 pm for Bagerhat.

No sooner had the Prime Minister's motorcade left for Bagerhat than the opposition militants with black flags paraded the city streets shouting anti-government and anti-polis slogans.

Lawyers of Khulna bar boycotted court and brought out a procession at about 12 noon, demanding that the February 15 election schedule be rescinded.

They also held a rally at the court premises. Mohammad Ali and Rajab Ali of Awami League, Abdul Halim of Jamaat and Israil Hossain of JP addressed the rally.

Opposition workers assembled at about 15 points including Dakbunglow, Shibbari, Joragata, Natun Rasta crossing to protest Begum Zia's visit.

The hartal, called by the opposition, forced shops, banks and private offices closed. All vehicles went off the roads during the shutdown. The metropolitan city wore a deserted look.

A tense situation was prevailing in the city. A huge contingent of police, BDR and armed battalion forces was deployed in the city. Additional police forces from Rajshahi and Khulna divisions were called in for beefing up security for the PM's electioneering tour.

Editor: Mahfuz Anam



Awami League President Sheikh Hasina addressing the extended meeting of her party at the Engineers Institution in the city yesterday. - Star photo

Hasina Launch campaign: AL

From Page 1 The AL has clear-cut policies on economy, agriculture, industries, commerce, education, health and foreign affairs to ensure overall development of the country, she said.

Turning to the latest political situation, Hasina urged those involved in the electoral process not to cooperate in holding the February 15 polls.

The AL President alleged that the government in the name of the on-going drive to recover illegal weapons was using the armed forces and other security agencies to serve its political interests.

"We don't want that the army help the government steal votes," she said. "We don't want that they stand on the way of the people and want them to get back to the barracks."

She explained the "Opposition's efforts to end the longstanding political crisis" and said that the ruling party had not responded despite many concessions offered by the Opposition in its dialogue with the BNP.

She accused Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia of violating the Constitution on many counts and said the BNP was out to rig the polls only to cling to power.

There were six review petitions from the five constituencies. The review continues today.

Nazmul Huda arrived at the CEC's office with his lone rival Mohiuddin Ahmed — an elderly man in kurta — and said "he wants to withdraw his nomination paper in view of a mistake made."

Mohiuddin had earlier appealed against the rejection of his nomination and got it confirmed by the EC. The man who had seconded his candidature was not a voter in Dhaka-1 Constituency.

"During the appeal the Commission erroneously accepted a document produced by Mohiuddin and reinstated his candidacy," the CEC admitted. "On this ground his (Mohiuddin's) nomination is cancelled and his election symbol is scratched from the ballot paper," the CEC said.

During the process, Mohiuddin remained silent.

In the case of Ziaur Rahman Khan, the petition for review was rejected as the petitioner did not dispute the evidence produced by the defendant proving that he was not a bank loan defaulter.

The petition against Shahnewaz Chowdhury Mantu was 'not pressed' by the petitioners. Therefore, the decision of the returning officer in his case remained valid. He was elected unopposed.

NEW DELHI, Jan 27: India today conducted flight trial of a longer range version of the indigenously developed surface-to-surface guided missile 'Prithvi' at Chandipur, Orissa, according to agency reports here, says BSS.

The launching of the 250-km range missile developed by the country's Defence Research Development Organisation (DRDO) came following the induction of main battle tank, 'Arjun'.

The 'Prithvi' is launched in the face of veiled disapproval of the United States of America and hue and cry raised by Pakistan.

The today's test launch of the most sophisticated short range missile, which was the 15th in the series, was carried out after a gap of about 19 months.

The launching of the missile, which was billed for January 16, was postponed for undisclosed reasons.

Asked what punitive action would be taken if he was found guilty, Justice Sadeque said first the EC would have to determine the nature of the violation.

The CEC again said that if all the parties participated in the forthcoming election then it would have been much easier to penalise for the anomalies.

On trade matters, also covered in the talks, Lohani said he had asked that India provide a trade corridor through its territory to Bangladesh for Nepalese goods.

"India has agreed in principle to provide the overland transit facility to Nepalese exports," he said, adding the agreement was subject to ratification by a joint commerce secretary-level meeting in the coming weeks.

Nepal also sought India's cooperation on reducing customs duties on its products to Indian markets to help close its massive trade gap.

Nepal's total exports to India in the 1994-95 fiscal year, ending July 16, stood at \$6 million US dollars while imports were \$60 million dollars.

The Indian side agreed to waive customs duties completely on Nepalese products

Avoid interference in voting process, US urges parties

WASHINGTON, Jan 27: The United States voiced regret Friday at the ongoing political crisis in Bangladesh and called for fair and peaceful elections in the South Asian country, reports AFP.

"The United States regrets that the major political parties in Bangladesh apparently have not been able to arrive at a mutually agreed-upon formula under which fully participatory elections can be held," State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns said.

"And the United States hopes that both sides in this dispute will continue to work for a long term solution on the issues that clearly divide them," he told reporters here.

The US Ambassador in Dhaka is working very hard on this with all concerned, he said, urging all parties to avoid violence, coercion, and interference in the voting process.

"We believe that there should be the fullest possible observation and transparency of the election process," Burns said.

The Bangladeshi opposition has sought for nearly two years to force Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia to step down to allow for elections under a neutral caretaker government.

So far, however, Khaleda has refused, on grounds that handing over power to a caretaker administration would be unconstitutional.

A leader from Habiganj district pointed out to the party president that she should be extra-cautious in letting people use the "oars of the boat," the party's symbol.

Earlier, AL General Secretary Zillur Rahman placed the party's activity report at the meeting.

AL sources said that a formal resolution of the meeting was expected in couple of days.

The expelled persons are: Abdul Hal, vice president, Habiganj District BNP and member, Nabinaagar thana committee, Advocate Zakir Hossain, vice president, Noakhali district committee, Major (Retd) Asgar Ali, member, Gaibandha district convening committee and Mohammad Ekhlash Uddin Mollah, member, Pallabi thana convening committee.

Special DU Senate meet tomorrow

By DU Correspondent The Vice Chancellor of the Dhaka University has convened a special meeting of the Senate on January 29.

The irregularities in different sectors of the university will be discussed in the meeting, sources said.

Seven teachers and 25 registered graduates in a letter requested the VC to call a special meeting of the Senate, by January 29, sources added.

The two agenda mentioned in the letter were — irregularities in appointing teachers and officers in the university and delay in the implementation of the decisions taken by the Senate.

This is the seventh special meet of the DU Senate since Independence. The earlier meetings were held on June 28, 1975, January 29, 1976, January 20, 1980, June 24, 1986, May 3, 1990 and March 17, 1993.

Dais of minister's meet set on fire in B'baria

BRAHMANBARIA, Jan 27: The opposition activists foiled the first election meeting of the ruling party candidate, State Minister for Disaster Management and Relief Harun Al Rashid, in the town today, reports UNB.

The state minister, the BNP nominee for contesting the February 15 parliamentary election from Brahmanbaria-3 seat, could not hold the meeting as the dais at the Deaf and Dumb School premises was set afire at about 5 pm.

Witnesses said the opposition activists had attacked the meeting venue, set fire to the dais and damaged the microphones.

However, an election meeting was later held inside the school building, which was addressed by the minister who held the Awami League and Jatiba Party responsible for the attack.

The Midnight File

Pakistan to take counter-measures against Prithvi launching

ISLAMABAD, Jan 27: Pakistan today called India's test of a longer-range version of its medium-range Prithvi missile very dangerous and said Islamabad would have to take counter-measures, reports Reuter.

Another shutdown of US govt averted

WASHINGTON, Jan 27: Just three hours before a midnight deadline, President Clinton and a conflict-weary Congress averted a third shutdown of the US government since November by financing dozens of agencies for seven more weeks, reports AP.

"There's no question now of the government shutting down," Clinton said Friday night before signing legislation warding off another round of furloughed workers and padlocked offices that both sides saw as a public relations nightmare.

The Senate passed the bill 82-8 earlier Friday, capping a week in which Republicans relinquished their effort to pressure Clinton into a pact to balance the federal budget by 2005. The House of Representatives passed the measure on Thursday.

Republicans were especially eager to avoid another closure, since most Americans blamed Republican intransigence in the budget fight for the first two.

"All of us want to avoid another shutdown of the federal government," said Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Mark Hatfield.

In a sign of the Republican's determination to do so, Hatfield called the threat of another closure "a gun to our head" that prevented senators from changing the measure — which would have delayed its completion until a new shutdown began Saturday morning.

On another budget front where Republicans have suddenly become less combative, Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole sought to assure financial markets that Republicans would reach agreement with Clinton over extending the government's debt limit and avoiding a historic federal default.

"We believe we can get this done, get it done in a timely fashion," Dole said.

Polis observers

From Page 1 from South East Asian countries, China, Brazil and from the Middle Eastern countries were present.

Foreign Secretary Farooq Sobhan who conducted the briefings reportedly told the diplomats that he had been instructed by the Chief Election Commissioner to convey the latter's request that participation of foreign observers was being "sincerely desired" by the CEC.

Besides welcoming observers from their respective countries, the foreign missions have also been permitted to monitor the polls using their resident staff, according to meeting sources.

The diplomats were told that there was no deadline for providing the list of poll monitors and observers but an early list, at least seven days ahead of the polls, would help the EC and the Foreign Ministry to provide police escort and protocol services if required.

When the diplomats pointed out that movement for poll monitoring might be hampered and could be a matter of security concern because of a possible Opposition-called hartal on the polling day, they were informed that the monitors would be taken to the spots on the previous night. The EC was also considering providing helicopter facilities for the monitors wherever possible.

A western diplomat observed that movement of monitors might be hampered by giving a prior schedule. The diplomat reportedly said that the observers would like to be flexible in their movement to monitor the polls.

The British envoy was learnt to have said that a team of observers would be coming from his country to monitor the elections.

Other envoys appreciated the plan for polls monitoring and said that they would convey it to their respective governments but did not make any commitment.

It was learnt that no briefing was given about the political situation in the country.

PM in Bagerhat

From Page 1 which they passed in parliament.

The PM said despite her government's repeated calls for dialogue to resolve the political problems the Opposition declined to sit for the discussion as they had no commitment to democracy and the people.

She said her government was ready to give all possible concessions within the framework of the Constitution, but the Opposition wanted to create a constitutional crisis through violating the Constitution.

Referring to the boycott of parties, Begum Zia said these parties had participated in elections under an illegal and autocratic government and given it legitimacy in Parliament.

"They sat in the Sangsad with autocrat Ershad. We are a democratically elected government, but they do not want to participate in the polls under the democratic government because they do not want peace, stability and welfare of the people."

Mentioning BNP's victory in the past elections, the Prime Minister said those elections proved that people identified the BNP as their party.

"You must go to the polling centres and exercise your voting right. Don't be misguided by the conspirators," she said and listed her government's development programmes during the last five years.

The BNP Chairperson said the three parties are opposing the coming polls despite their claim of struggling for establishing the people's voting right. She asked the Opposition as to how they would establish the voting right without participating in the elections.

Bagerhat district unit Juba Sanghatti President and Chairman of Ranobjoy union parshad Fakir Tarique Islam formally joined the BNP at a meeting.

Whom do we fight now... they are not on the field and, obviously, not near us," commented a leader from the Patuakhali district.

ABM Mohiuddin, Mayor of Chittagong City, told the meeting that the Awami League workers were not afraid of the consequences.

He recalled how the party workers bravely fought the country's glorious war of independence.

A leader from Habiganj district pointed out to the party president that she should be extra-cautious in letting people use the "oars of the boat," the party's symbol.

Earlier, AL General Secretary Zillur Rahman placed the party's activity report at the meeting.

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'Cosmetic surgery contrary to Islam'

CAIRO, Jan 27: The mufti of Egypt, responsible for giving religious rulings, declared today that cosmetic surgery was contrary to Islam, reports AFP.

"Cosmetic surgery is illegal if it is to accentuate the charms (of a woman) because it is aimed at changing a being created by God," Sheikh Mohammad Sayed Tantawi said, quoted by Al-Wafd newspaper.

Plastic surgery centres have mushroomed in Egypt over the past decade.

Russian President Boris Yeltsin (R) inviting German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel to start their talks in Moscow yesterday. During their talks, Yeltsin stressed again Russia's opposition to expansion of the Western military alliance NATO.



India asks Nepal to help control passage of Pak-trained terrorists

KATHMANDU, Jan 27: Visiting Indian External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee asked Nepal today to help control the alleged passage of Pakistan-trained terrorists through Nepal into India, an official said, reports AFP.

The request came during more than two hours of talks between Mukherjee and his Nepalese counterpart, Prakash Chandra Lohani, the foreign ministry said.

After emerging from the talks Mukherjee told newsmen: "I had cordial talks with Dr. Lohani on subjects of mutual interest including trade, joint cooperation for development of water resources for mutual benefits and several other issues."

But he did not specify the issues.

A highly placed official of the foreign ministry told AFP that during the talks, Mukherjee sought Nepal's cooperation to control the passage of terrorists which New Delhi alleges are trained by Pakistan.

Pakistan has repeatedly denied the charge.

But replying to a question Lohani said Kathmandu had

no "confirmed information about the use of Nepalese soil by anti-Indian terrorists."

"But I would like to fully assure that we would not allow anybody to use Nepalese soil against India," Lohani added.

On trade matters, also covered in the talks, Lohani said he had asked that India provide a trade corridor through its territory to Bangladesh for Nepalese goods.

"India has agreed in principle to provide the overland transit facility to Nepalese exports," he said, adding the agreement was subject to ratification by a joint commerce secretary-level meeting in the coming weeks.

Nepal also sought India's cooperation on reducing customs duties on its products to Indian markets to help close its massive trade gap.