

International

115 troops killed in 3 weeks

Major search operation against LTTE launched

COLOMBO, Mar 24: Security forces launched a major search operation in eastern Sri Lanka Sunday after Tamil Tiger guerrillas wiped out an entire army patrol, killing 40 troops and a civilian bus passenger, officials said, reports AFP.

Cordon-and-search operations were underway in the district of Batticaloa where the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) ambushed the army patrol and killed them on Saturday afternoon, officials said.

Officials said that the civilian killed in the fighting was a Muslim who was returning home to the town of Batticaloa after attending a massive rally calling for ethnic peace in Sri Lanka.

"Ground troops estimate a minimum of 50 terrorists were killed and a large number injured," the ministry said in a statement; there was no immediate word from the Tigers about the incident.

Officials said a Muslim civilian was also killed when the bus in which he was travelling drove straight into the fire fight between the Tigers and the army. Nine civilians were also wounded.

Another AFP report says, Tamil Tiger guerrillas have escalated their attacks against security forces, killing 115 troops in three weeks in a bid

to blunt a planned military onslaught against them, officials said today.

The rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) scored their biggest hit this year by wiping out an entire platoon of 40 soldiers Saturday after luring them out of their camp using civilian decoys, officials said.

"The army was taking counter measures to interdict a Tiger build-up brought to their notice by some civilians," a defence official here said. "They just walked into the trap and suffered heavily."

The military claimed that it killed at least 50 guerrillas during a fierce one-hour hand-to-hand battle and in subsequent aerial attacks carried out by Mi-24 helicopter gun ships and artillery units.

The latest attack came as junior Defence Minister Anuruddha Ratwatte vowed to crush the Tamil Tigers and warned that skirmishes will be inevitable until the separatists were wiped out.

The solution to this problem is to hit them (Tigers) hard and to wipe them out. Ratwatte said in an interview with the English language Sunday Island newspaper. "You have to finish them once and for all."

Bosnian govt frees 109 Serb prisoners

SARAJEVO, Mar 24: The Bosnian government freed 109 Prisoners of War from a jail in Tuzla on Saturday in partial fulfillment of its obligations under the Dayton peace agreement, the Red Cross said, reports Reuters.

The ICRC had registered a total of 152 Prisoners of War who were still being held by Bosnia's former warring parties — 129 by the mainly-Muslim government and 23 by the Bosnian Serbs.

The army has poured reinforcements to the area and deployed two Mi-24 helicopter gun ships to attack suspected the Tamil Tiger positions in the region.

The attack marked a further escalation of violence in the embattled eastern region where 13 days ago the LTTE attacked an elite police commando unit and killed 23 troopers.

Meanwhile the death toll in a major Tamil Tiger attack against security forces rose to 91 with the confirmation of 50 rebel fatalities, the Defence Ministry military said Sunday.

5 Nepali ministers withdraw their resignations

KATHMANDU, Mar 24: Five ministers withdrew their resignations from Nepal's beleaguered centre-right coalition government today, state-owned Nepal Radio said, reports Reuters.

The move paved the way for the likely defeat of a parliamentary no-confidence motion which Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba faces later in the day.

"We have reached some understanding to gradually clear the difficulties we faced while running the coalition," Local Development Minister Kamal Thapa told Reuters.

"We will vote against the no-confidence motion," he said. "The five ministers were Agriculture Minister Padma Sundar Alwari, Minister of State for Local Development

Ram Krishna Acharya, Assistant Minister for Land Reforms and Management Prem Bahadur Bhandari and Assistant Minister for Commerce Rajib Parajuli.

The five resigned on Friday after the parliamentary leader of the Rasstriya Prajanta Party (RPP), the junior partner in the ruling coalition with 19 members, was approached to support the no-confidence motion.

Deuba, whose Nepali Congress Party has 86 seats in the 205-member House of Representatives, heads a centre-right coalition with the RPP and the Nepal Sadbhavana Party (NSP).

The motion was introduced by the main opposition Communist United Marxist-Leninist (UML) Party, itself removed from power in September last

year through a parliamentary vote sponsored by Nepali Congress.

RPP parliamentary leader Lokendra Bahadur Chand was promised the prime ministership in a new coalition with the Communists if he supported the motion.

The ministers' decision to withdraw their resignation followed an assurance by Deuba to sort out inter-party differences in the coalition through dialogue.

RPP members have complained that they have been marginalised in the administration, with Nepali Congress workers treating them as rivals rather than as coalition partners.

"I shall continue effort to resolve our differences and misunderstandings," Deuba, 49, said in a statement.

China rebuffs US on N-tech sales to Pakistan

WASHINGTON, Mar 24: China has rejected a US demand that it rule out future shipments of sensitive nuclear-related materials or technologies to Pakistan, making it more likely the Clinton administration will impose economic penalties for past shipments, The Washington Post reported, says AP.

The paper said in Sunday editions that the rejection came during talks in Beijing last week and leaves US officials disappointed because it undercuts an administration plan to avoid punishing China for past involvement in the Pakistani nuclear bomb programme by extracting a promise to stop nuclear sales.

Voting begins in Iraq

BAGHDAD, March 24: Iraqis began voting today for their first new parliament in seven years but initial turnout was much lower than during last October's referendum for President Saddam Hussein, reports AFP.

Voters marked the candidates they wanted for the 220-member parliament and put the ballots in boxes in public view. Polls opened at 8 am (0500 GMT) and will close at 8 pm (1700 GMT).

Eight million of Iraq's 18 million people are registered to vote and are asked to choose from 689 candidates, including 160 who are running in the name of the Baath Party.

Voters trickled into polling stations and there was no sign of the long lines of people who arrived for the opening of the polls during the October presidential referendum to elect Saddam Hussein to another seven-year term.

16 killed as shell crashes into central Kabul

KABUL, Mar 24: About 16 people were killed and a similar number wounded when an artillery shell crashed into central Kabul today, witnesses said, reports Reuters.

The attack came two days after Afghan government jets bombed rebel positions and the two sides fought artillery duels south of the capital, according to state Kabul radio.

Witnesses said the shell landed in a central area in the middle of the day. No other details were immediately available.

It was not clear who had fired the shell, but opposition Taliban militiamen frequently shell and rocket the city

Off the Record

Did Marco Polo ever been to China?

LONDON: If Marco Polo spent years exploring China for the Mongol ruler Kublai Khan, as he claims, why do his reports contain no reference to the Great Wall, to Chinese tea-drinking ceremonies or to the practice of 'binding girls' feet to keep them small? reports AP.

In a new book, "Did Marco Polo Go to China?", British librarian Frances Wood highlights the holes in Polo's account of his years in Asia and suggests he never made it to China. "It is a terrific story; the only trouble is that there is no evidence to support it," argues Wood, head of the Chinese section of the British Library.

"Like so many other great historical legends, the story is a myth."

Since 1295, when the adventurous Venetian merchant returned, ragged and exhausted, to his home city of Venice after 24 years on the road, he has been accepted as the first European to travel right across Asia.

He told his story to a writer with whom he shared a Genoese jail cell in 1299 after being taken prisoner in a sea battle. It became the travel epic, "Divisament dou Monde," (Description of the World), which had a deep impact on other early voyages of discovery.

Columbus is known to have owned a copy and studied it closely before sailing off in 1492, thinking he was headed for Asia.

Polo says he set off for China in 1271 with his father and uncle, bearing a letter from the papal legate in Acre and a bottle of oil from the lamp that burns in Jerusalem's Holy Sepulchre.

In 1275 they arrived in Kublai Khan's summer palace in Shangdu. The Mongol leader's huge empire then spread from China to the Mediterranean.

Polo says Kublai Khan took a liking to him because of his lively conversation and sent him on fact-finding tours across his newly conquered territory of China.

In her book, published in October, Wood says although Chinese sources of the period are littered with references to foreigners at the court of Kublai Khan, there is no mention of Marco Polo — or any Italians, for that matter.

And, although his report includes long descriptions of Chinese cities and aspects of life there, he fails to remark upon the cultivation of the Yangtze delta area and ignores the Great Wall and the practice of foot-binding.

PM for peace accord with Beijing Lee urged to seek good Sino-Taiwan ties

TAIPEI, Taiwan, Mar 24: President Lee Teng-hui, returned to office by a landslide, was urged by newspapers Sunday to make good on campaign promises to seek improved relations with China, reports AP.

While attention during the campaign focused on Lee's defiant responses to China's war games and missile tests, he and his senior lieutenants also reassured voters that once the election was over they would move to defuse the crisis.

On the day after the election, as Taiwanese began their first day ever under a fully elected president, several newspapers called on Lee to set about mending fences with China.

"The island cannot prosper continuously without seeking improved relations with the mainland, which is separated from us only by a thin strip of water," said the English-language China Post.

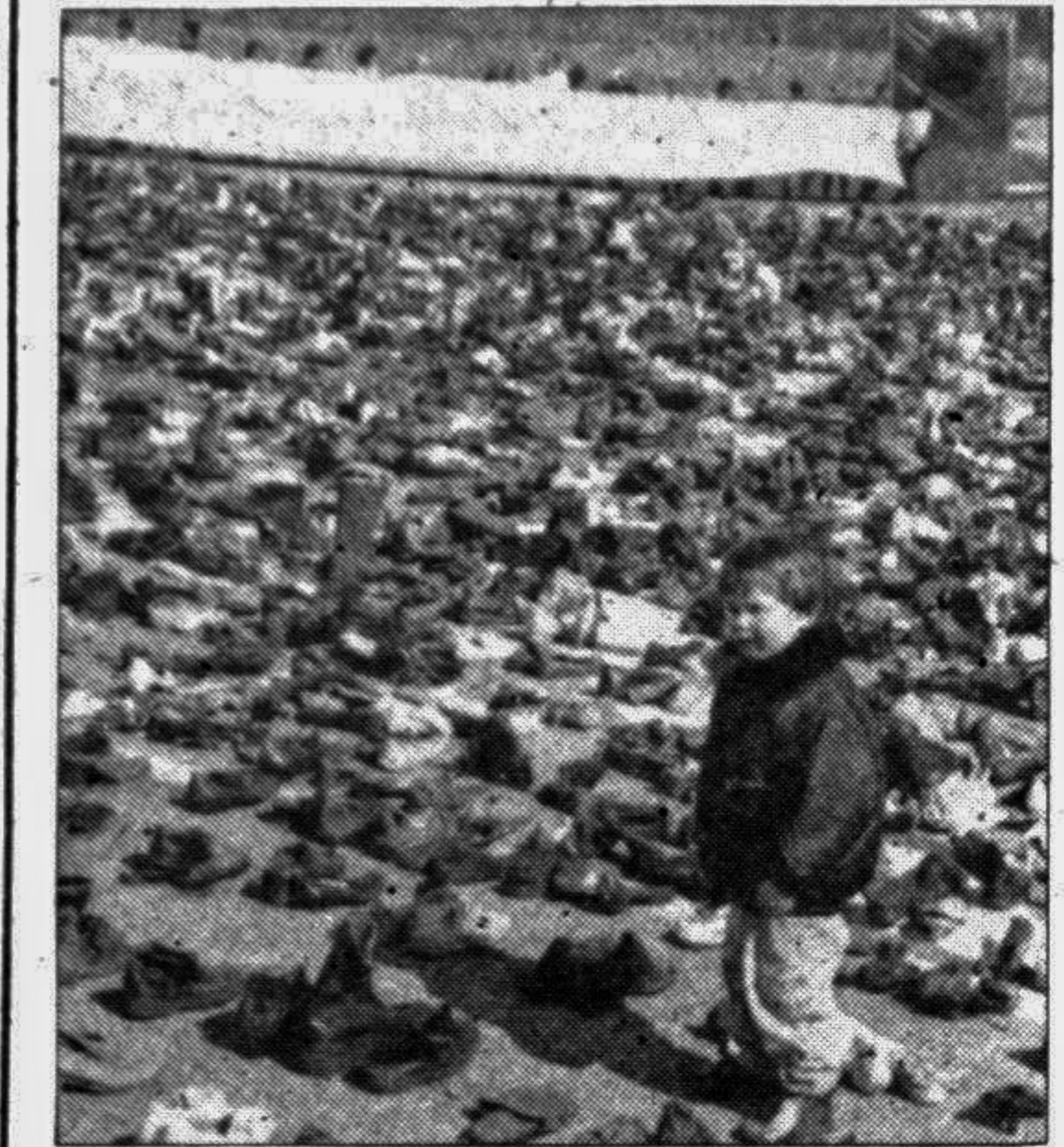
The China Times, a leading Chinese-language daily, suggested Lee should seek top-level talks with China, not just the low level dialogue that has gone on since 1993.

"The president should respond directly to the aspirations of Taiwanese opinion toward normalisation," of China-Taiwan ties, it said.

Reuter adds, Taiwan Premier Lien Chan said he wants serious consideration of a peace agreement with China.

"On the question of a peace agreement with China we are interested in seriously thinking about it and a lot of preparations need to be done for that," he told reporters.

BRIEFLY



A child walks among some 10,000 shoes on Saturday in Creys-Malville, southern France, during a protest called by the "Europeans Against Superphoenix" coalition. Some 100 French and Swiss anti-nuclear activists laid 10,000 old shoes around the Superphoenix fast-breeder reactor in a novel attempt to get the trouble-plague power plant shut down. — AFP/UNB photo

3 Greenpeace ships in Papeete:

Three of the five Greenpeace vessels seized by the French military during a recently-concluded series of nuclear tests have arrived in Papeete, AFP reports from Papeete.

The Manutea, followed by the Vega and La Ribaudie, arrived at the weekend, anchoring in the harbour of the French Polynesian port, after an untroubled journey of 1,200 kilometres from Mururoa Atoll. They were greeted by a handful of ecologists and other sympathisers on arrival.

Gaddafi calls for Arab summit:

Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi has called for an Arab summit to counter what he called Israeli terrorism and the effects of the recent "summit of peacemakers" held after bombings by Islamic militants in Israel, Reuters reports from Dubai.

"The Sharm el-Sheikh summit was like an earthquake in the Arab world," Gaddafi said in an interview on Dubai television published by official United Arab Emirates press on Saturday.

33 Muslim rebels face trial in Cairo:

Some 33 Muslim militants went on trial at a state security court in Cairo on Saturday charged with killing 26 policemen and civilians in troubled southern Egypt, legal officials said, AFP reports from Cairo.

They are also charged with wounding 35 other people, in the case with the highest number of victims since the start of the militants violent anti-government campaign in March 1992.

Clash leaves 4 dead in S Lebanon:

At least four guerrillas were killed by Israeli troops who detected them as they prepared to launch attacks in a south Lebanon border enclave, AP reports from Marjayoun.

'Benazir has failed to attack roots of violence in Karachi'

KARACHI, Mar 24: Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto may be winning her battle for law and order in Karachi but she has failed to attack the roots of political violence in Pakistan's commercial hub, diplomatic sources here said, reports AFP.

Change has swept over the city that was gripped with fear just six months ago as militant factions turned its streets into a battleground.

Big hotels, which were nearly deserted last fall now are fully booked, and people have resumed going out to dine at luxurious restaurants and shop at once empty supermarkets.

In the streets, gun-toting

paramilitary rangers are still seen stationed behind their sandbag observation posts as passers-by pay them little attention.

"Nothing vanishes as quickly as fear," a local businessman remarked.

Casualty figures in the first quarter of this year dropped to 179 deaths — less than half the toll recorded in the first three months of 1995 — and strike calls which frequently paralysed Karachi last year have been less effective this year.

"The law-and-order situation has definitely improved and people are moving about freely, but economic activity has not picked up to the extent desired," Siraj Kassim,

businessman and former president of the Karachi Stock Exchange, told AFP.

"You have to realise that positive effects do not come immediately while the result of violence is always quick," he said.

During the past six months, the government under Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto has launched several major operations to curb violence between political factions in the city.

Police and paramilitary forces have been frequently deployed in the city's troubled districts in operations to flush out militants.

Increased security however has also resulted in claims of "extra-judicial killings" being

carried out by police, according to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP).

"It is fairly safe to say that in 1996 there has been one extra judicial killing every day," HRCP secretary general Zohra Yusuf said, explaining that suspected militants were often detained and then executed by police who later claim they were killed in an "armed encounter."

Much of the political violence, which has seen an alarming increase since Benazir was voted to power in October 1993, is due to an ethnic rivalry between migrant Mohajirs and native Sindhis.

One diplomat attributed the

lessened tension in the city to government efforts to fight ethnic-based terrorism by the Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM), which represents Muslims who migrated here after the division of the Indian sub-continent in 1947.

The MQM is clearly weakened," the diplomat said.

The MQM, whose members claim they have been discriminated against by majority Sindhis, is a powerful political force in the city of 12 million people and has been blamed by the government for fomenting much of the violence.

Another diplomat said: "The MQM would have realised that urban guerrilla activity cannot work... there may well be a

fundamental re-thinking in the MQM strategy."

He added that lessened violence since January could also have been affected by the country's pre-occupation with the cricket World Cup which was played in Pakistan, India and Sri Lanka.

Others have not been as ready to accept success in the government's war against urban terrorism.

"The number of deaths is only a symptom. The causes of violence are still there," a diplomat observed.

"The guns are still there," he said, adding that "the people who may use them are still there."

Bosnia govt fails to protect Serbs: Ghali

UNITED NATIONS, Mar 24: The UN chief accused the Muslim-led Bosnian government Saturday of contributing to the exodus of Serb civilians from the capital by failing to assure their safety and protect them from Muslim gangs, reports AP.

In a report to the Security Council, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said Bosnian Serb leaders also share the blame because they mounted an "overt and insidious campaign" of intimidation against Serbs who wanted to remain in areas recently transferred to Muslim-Croat Federation control under the peace plan signed late last year.

Last Tuesday, the Muslim-Croat Federation took control of the last of five Serb areas of the capital, Sarajevo, after days of looting, arson and reported rape by angry Serbs.

Carl Bildt, who is in charge of implementing the civilian portion of the Bosnian peace plan, warned that the "forces of ethnic separation are still far stronger" than those still working for the goal of a multi-ethnic state.

Up to August, 1995 11,896 rent, loan cases pending in Pabna dist

PABNA, Nov 24: A total amount of Tk 89,45,298 were lying due for realisation and for this purposes 7,199 Rent Certificate cases were pending in Pabna district upto August 1995.

According to an official source, 785 Rent Certificate cases were pending against the total demand of Tk 13,98,026 in Pabna sadar thana; 422 cases against the total demand of Tk 7,62,765 in Atgharia thana; 1,126 cases against the total demand of Tk 18,40,804 in Ishurdi thana; 980 cases against the total demand of Tk 18,02,689 in Chatmohar thana; 317 cases in Bhangoorah thana, against the total demand of Tk 4,81,435; 361 cases against the total demand of Tk 3,78,070 in Faridpur thana; 511 cases in Bera thana against the total demand of Tk 8,51,827; 2176 cases in Santhia thana against the total demand of Tk 9,19,323 and 531 cases in Sujanager thana for realising the total among (demand) of Tk 5,10,324.

All the figures above show the picture upto August, 1995.

According to the same source, it is learnt that a total amount of Tk 5,85,79,220 have been fixed as demand

IU hall students demand free dining

KHUSHTIA, Mar 24: About 400 students residing in different halls of the Islamic University submitted a memorandum to the authority on Friday demanding free dining as they were facing shortage of money due to the ongoing non-cooperation programme, reports UNB.

They also demanded special transport arrangements so that they can return home.

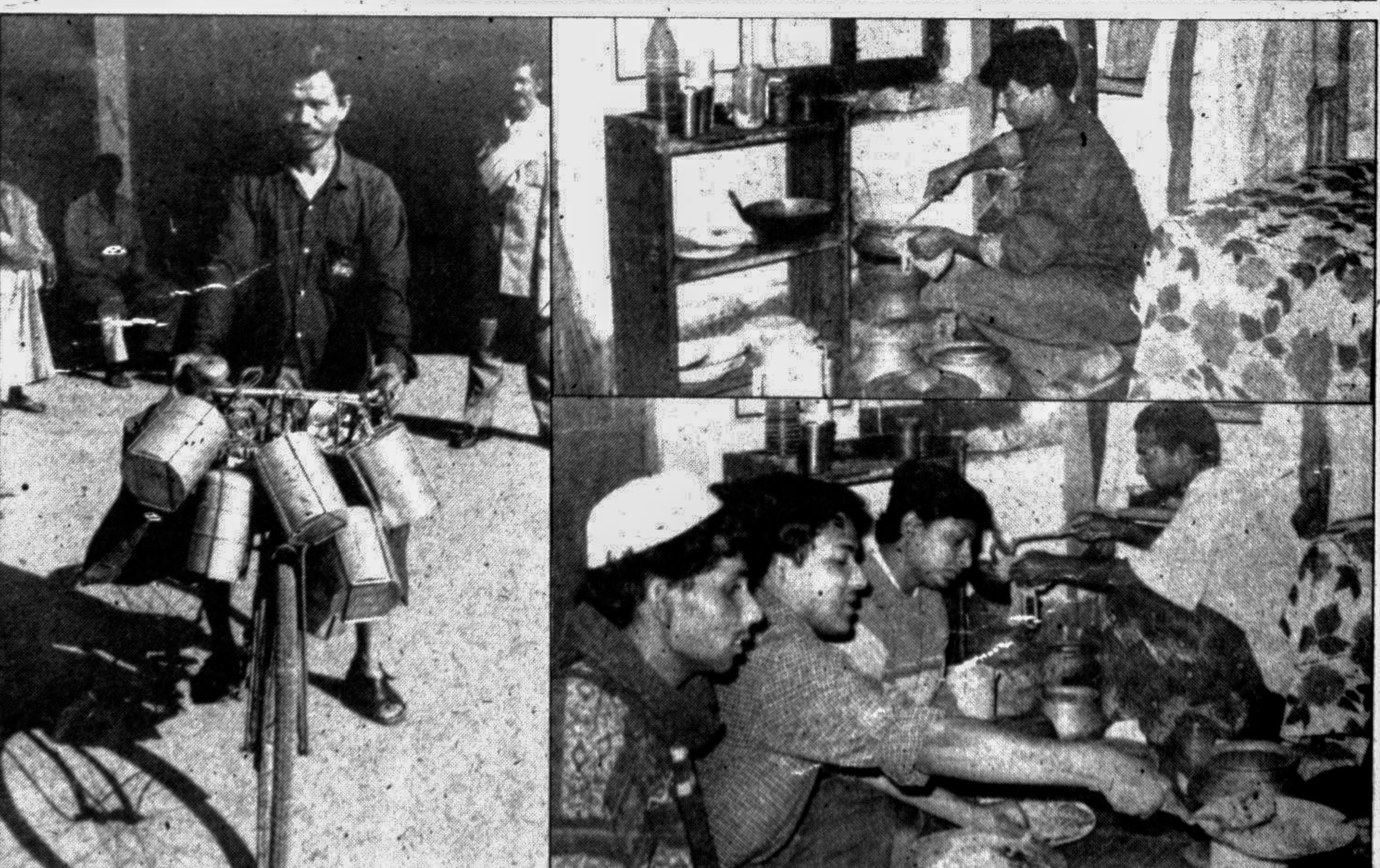
Most of the resident students are now spending their days penniless as their guardians could not send money for them since last couple of weeks due to the deadlock in communication created following the non-cooperation programme.

Registrar of the university, M Jahurul Islam received the memorandum in absence of the Vice-Chancellor. He assured the students of taking all possible measures in this regard.

In this connection, 546 General Certificate cases were pending in Pabna sadar thana against the total demand of Tk 41,63,341; in Atgharia thana, 1316 cases were pending against the total demand of Tk 1,01,90,492; in Ishurdi thana, 411 cases against the total demand of Tk 34,66,362; in Chatmohar thana, 414 cases against the total demand of Tk 46,36,360; in Faridpur thana, 442 cases against the total demand of Tk 39,26,750; in Bhangoorah thana, 337 cases were pending against the total demand of Tk 34,10,979; in Bera thana, 475 cases were pending against a total demand of Tk 69,00,872; in Sujanager thana, 241 cases were pending against a total demand of Tk 29,84,343 and lastly, 466 General Certificate cases were pending in Santhia thana for realising a total demand to the tune of Tk 73,82,098.

These figures also reveal the position upto the month of August, 1995.

Besides, a total number of 4697 Loan Certificate cases were pending throughout Pabna district upto the month of August 1995 for realising a total amount of Tk 10,69,406.



Clockwise from left: Food cooked at home are reached to the Rajshahi University students staying in hostel this way. Carriers like Chand Mia seen in the photo prepares breakfast, lunch and dinner charging Tk 5, 10 and 10 respectively and reaches at the doors of the hall students every day. There are about 10 other Chand Mias who serve food for the inmates. This system developed due to allegedly poor quality of food served in the dining halls of the university. * A student cooking food using electric heater in his hall room. * Students enjoying dinner in a room of Sayed Amir Ali Hall of the university. — Star photos by Tareq Chowdhury