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Hajj flight from March 16

The Biman flight for the pilgrims who will perform Hajj under the government management will begin on March 16 and continue till April 2, reports UNB.

This was disclosed yesterday at a high-level interministerial meeting held at the conference room of Religious Minister with Religious Secretary Abdus Shakur in the chair.

More than 9,000 pilgrims under the government management will perform Hajj this year, said an official handout.

It said the return flight would begin from April 20 and continue till May 6.

The meeting discussed different activities done following the decision to send the year's Hajj pilgrims from the under-

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Body to review garments exporters' demands

Star Report

The Commerce Ministry has formed a nine-member committee to review the garments exporters' demand for lowering insurance charges, on export of apparels.

A circular of the ministry issued yesterday said the committee headed by a joint secretary of the ministry will review the premium rates of fire, flood, marine and general insurances.

It will submit its recommendations within two months.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters' Association (BGMEA) will meet the chairman of the National Board of Revenue (NBR) today to press for quick customs clearance of raw materials for the sector.

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Khaleda goes to Bogra today

BNP chairperson and Leader of the Opposition Begum Khaleda Zia goes to Bogra today to visit the fire-ravaged New Market of the industrial town, reports UNB.

A number of senior leaders of the party will accompany the party chairperson during the visit, says a press release.

Goods worth about Tk two crore were burnt at the devastating fire at Bogra New Market on Friday night.

30 tin-shed houses gutted in city

By Staff Correspondent

A fire destroyed about 30 tin-shed houses at Maddhya Badda under Gulshan thana in the city yesterday afternoon.

The cause of the fire could not be known immediately. Fire Service sources said.

Fire fighters from Tejgaon station took around half an hour to extinguish the blaze.

No casualty was reported till last night.

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Business

EC praises quality of Bangladesh cotton

Strong positive sentiment prevailing on DSE floor

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A dance sequence at an Ekushey function at the Central Shaheed Minar in the city yesterday.

PM proposes parliamentary probe body

Pandemonium in JS over Shima's death in custody

A Pandemonium reigned in the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday as BNP lawmakers demanded a discussion on the killing of Shima despite the Prime Minister's assurance of a parliamentary probe into the death, reports UNB.

After about one and a half hours of wild noise after Magreb break, Deputy Speaker Abdul Hamid, who was in the chair, adjourned the session as he failed to come to grips with the situation.

The stormy debate erupted when young BNP member

Mashirul Rahman of Jhenidah raised the issue and demanded full-dress discussion on it.

Taking the floor, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina informed the House of the steps already taken by the government to probe the death of the garments worker in Chittagong.

Hasina asked the law minister to frame a tough law, providing capital punishment for abusing and repressing women, and sought Opposition support to pass the planned act.

The Leader of the House asked the opposition BNP to give two names to form the parliamentary committee. The

will in no way allow the culprits to go unpunished," she said amidst desk-thumping cheers by deputies of the ruling Awami League.

Hasina said a judicial enquiry commission had already been formed on the death of Shima in Chittagong last week and if the opposition members wanted, a parliamentary committee would as well be formed for further investigation.

Besides, she said, the home minister held meetings with senior officials and steps are being taken against those who are responsible for the incident.

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High-powered medical team to probe Shima's death

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Feb 16: A high-powered medical team has been formed to investigate the death of Shima Chowdhury, sources in the district administration said.

Shima, 17, a garments factory worker was allegedly raped in October last year by police personnel and was later kept in 'safe custody' at Chittagong Jail. She was declared dead when brought to Chittagong Medical College Hospital from the jail at 6:45 pm on February 7.

Meanwhile, the Superintendent of Chittagong Jail, Aminul Islam, has been made an OSD and the jail doctor Salahuddin Ahmed, suspended for their negligence in providing timely treatment to Shima.

A one-member enquiry commission has already been set up. The commission comprising a retired judge of the High Court Division, Daili Uddin Ahmed will submit its re-

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Ups & downs in share market natural, says Kibria

By Staff Correspondent

Finance Minister Shah AMS Kibria yesterday said that rise and fall is part of the natural course of any bourse.

Responding to a query from a journalist on the recent fall in share market, the finance minister said, "it's very natural.

Stock exchanges in Hong Kong, Thailand, New York and London also experienced such ups and downs.

After a plunge in the Bombay share market, India had set up a national stock exchange.

Kibria was speaking during a press conference of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at Zia International Airport when the latter referred the finance minister to answer questions relating to the share market.

Giving a picture of latest economic situation of the

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Nawaz Sharif takes office today

ISLAMABAD, Feb 16: Pakistan's new Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif takes office tomorrow, armed with a massive popular mandate but facing an equally challenging agenda with the nation looking up to him with high hopes, reports AFP.

The tasks ahead include improving an economy plagued by budget deficits, high inflation and 30 billion dollar external debts, and satisfying people's aspirations for relief and a clean administration.

On the external affairs front loom the unrelenting tensions with neighbouring India, and the festering factional conflict in Afghanistan that has marred Pakistan's hopes of increased trade through reaching out to Central Asia by land.

Sharif, 48, whose earlier 1990-93 tenure as prime minister was cut short midway by a power struggle with then President Ghulam Ishaq Khan, is to be sworn in for a new five-year term by President Farooq Ahmed Leghari.

He starts it amid extensive goodwill, even from deposed premier Benazir Bhutto, who has wished him "good luck" despite her bitterness over what she called "engineered" results in the February 3 general election.

Sharif, whose Pakistan Muslim League (PML) together with allies commands a two-thirds majority in the 217-member National Assembly, pledged "full respect" for the opposition.

Political analyst Aali Rizvi said: "The first three to six months will mark a crucial test of Sharif's leadership in political, economic and financial

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Army ordered to shoot at sight in Tripura

22 more Bengali-speaking settlers gunned down

NEW DELHI, Feb 16: Tribal separatist guerrillas gunned down 22 sleeping villagers in the far-eastern Indian state of Tripura, in the second such massacre in four days, officials said today, reports AFP.

An unspecified number of militants armed with "sharp weapons and sophisticated arms" stormed two adjoining villages and opened indiscriminate fire, domestic news agencies said.

The United News of India (UNI) said the dead included women and children. Several others were injured.

The victims were poor non-Bengali-speaking people, the Press Trust of India (PTI)

said the attackers torched several houses in the villages before escaping.

In a separate attack the militants gunned down seven others in the village of Gauranga in western Tripura, UNI added.

One of the villages, Ramchandraghat, is part of Tripura Chief Minister Dasarath Deb's constituency, PTI said. Both villages were under curfew after earlier sectarian violence in the region.

Further details were not immediately available. There was no immediate reaction from Tripura's communist government or Deb, who himself is a tribal but is critical of tribal-sponsored violence.

Tribal guerillas are leading a violent campaign in a bid to seize Tripura which has claimed more than 1,000 lives, mostly non-tribals.

It was the second scene of carnage this month in Tripura, a small state of three million people, after 15 tribal gunmen stormed an isolated hamlet on February 11 and gunned down 18 non-tribal villagers.

That attack took place barely 25 kilometers (15 miles) from the state capital Agartala while Indian Home Minister Indrajeet Gupta, a communist, was visiting to review the deteriorating law and order situation. See Page 12 col 7

Armyman killed in Shantibahini firing

BANDARBAN, Feb 16: An armyman was killed and another injured in rebel attack when troops launched a combing operation to track down the tribal insurgents who gunned down three policemen in an ambush Saturday, reports UNB.

Official sources said septuagenarian Mohammad Mahbub and Abdul Baten of Ruma Garrison sustained bullet wounds when the gunmen opened fire on them from a hideout at village Chandaipara of Paingdu union in Ruma thana at about 10 pm.

The attackers fled with an SMG and ammunition from the spot after an encounter at the village, 10 kilometre northwest of Ruma thana headquarters, official sources said.

The injured were rushed to Ruma Garrison Hospital where Mahbub succumbed to his injuries this morning.

His body and injured Baten were flown to Combined Military Hospital in Chittagong by

helicopter.

Meanwhile, dawn-to-dusk hartal called by local unit of Bangladesh Nationalist Party was observed in the district today in protest against Saturday's killings.

Offices, educational institutions and business establishments were closed during the hartal.

Movement of vehicles in long route was suspended during the shutdown.

Meanwhile Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina announced a grant of Tk 100,000 each for the families of the three policemen and an army sepoys killed by insurgents in Bandarban hill district, official sources said.

The three police constables — Mannan, Sahor Ali and Wahidul Islam — were gunned down while on patrol in the morning on Saturday.

The President and general secretary of Parbatya Gan Parishad, Jalal Uddin Ahmed

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By Staff Correspondent

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said yesterday an accord will be reached soon to restore peace in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT).

"It's my firm belief that we will be able to restore peace in the troubled hill region soon," Hasina said.

The Prime Minister was addressing a press conference at the Zia International Airport yesterday morning on her return from Delhi after attending the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) conference on "Towards Partnership Between Men and Women in Politics".

The Prime Minister also spoke on a wide range of topics including empowerment of women, repression of women, her talks with Indian leaders, repatriation of Chakma refugees, Indo-Pak relations and

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Agreement soon, hopes PM Vested quarters don't want CHT peace'

By Staff Correspondent

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Govt planning to provide low-cost irrigation facilities

By Staff Correspondent

Government is actively considering to provide low-cost irrigation facilities to farmers for augmenting the foodgrain production in the country.

Food and Agriculture Minister Begum Motia Chowdhury stated this while replying to questions at the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday.

Responding to a question by Treasury Bench lawmaker Nurul Islam Nahid, the minister said the government was considering to bring back the irrigation sector under Agriculture Ministry again, which was sep-

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RUTA to go for token hunger strike today

From RU Correspondent

RAJSHAHI, Feb 16: Rajshahi University Teachers' Association (RUTA) will stage a token hunger strike tomorrow (Monday) demanding immediate removal of Vice Chancellor Prof M Yusuf Ali.

The teachers will observe the strike in front of the Senate House on the campus from 8 am to 5 pm.

The RUTA, at a meeting on Friday 6 with its president Prof Shahidul Islam in the

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BCL enforces 8-hour hartal in Gopalpur

From