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VOL. VII NO. 44 REGD. NO. DA 781 FALGOON 19 1403 BS. DHAKA MONDAY, MARCH 3, 1997 SHAWAL 23 1417 HIJRI 12 PAGES: PRICE TAKA 6.00

Torch rally to march thru' country Mar 7-26

A ceremonial torch rally will march through the country from March 7 to 26 as part of the silver jubilee celebration of independence, reports UNB.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will inaugurate the rally at Suhrawardy Udyan at 3 pm on March 7, the historic day when independence was declared by father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1971.

The torch rally will touch at Tungipara, the birthplace of Bangabandhu, on March 17.

The torch will first go to Chittagong and then touch at different places in 28 districts.

Two freedom fighters will carry the torch while two others the national flag in the 20-day-long march.

It will be back at Suhrawardy Udyan on March 26, the Independence Day.

The decision was taken in a meeting at PM's office with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair.

BNP agitation begins today

The month-long country-wide agitation programme of main opposition BNP against the eight-month-old Awami League government begins today, reports UNB.

Party Chairperson and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Begum Khaleda Zia announced the programme at Feni on February 26.

As part of today's agitation at district headquarters, Dhaka city BNP will hold a meeting in front of the Jatiya Press Club at 3 pm. It will be followed by a procession.

Meanwhile, Dhaka city BNP, Jatiyatadabi Chhatra Dal and Jubo Dal yesterday held separate meetings to discuss the preparatory measures of agitation programme.

The main opposition announced the agitation programmes to realise its various demands and protest the 'undemocratic and anti-people' activities of the present government.

The demands include release of the prisoners detained in jail and withdrawal of false cases.

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Samad Azad goes to Pakistan today

By Staff Correspondent

Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad leaves Dhaka today on a two-day official visit to Pakistan.

He is expected to carry a letter from Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for the newly elected Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

During his stay in Islamabad, he will hold talks with his counterpart Gauhar Ayub Khan on matters of bilateral interest.

Diplomatic sources said Samad's trip is mainly a good will visit. He will facilitate the new government and brief the Pakistani leaders about Bangladesh's new foreign policy initiatives.

Meanwhile, a special meeting of the OIC will be held in Islamabad on March 23. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is expected to attend the OIC meeting.

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Consensus on all issues: Hasnat

Repatriation of tribal refugees begins soon

AGARTALA, Mar 2: A Chief Whip of the Jatiya Sangsad and Chairman of National Committee on Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs Abul Hasnat Abdullah said the repatriation of the tribal people who had taken shelter in the Indian State of Tripura would begin soon, reports BSS.

Abdullah held a meeting with the leaders of the tribal refugees at the Circuit House here on Saturday.

After the three-hour-long meeting, the Chief Whip observed that both the sides reached consensus on all the matters that came up for discussions. He said he had proposed to the committee to enhance certain facilities in addition to the 20-point package programme of the government in the light of demand, submitted by Chief of the Hill Refugee Welfare Samity Upendra Lal Chakma.

Abdullah said the national committee will consider the proposals subject to discussions with the government.

Official sources said the refugees had responded positively to return to their homeland when they would be given assurance of security. The Indian government had also assured to extend all possible assistance and cooperation for the repatriation of refugees, the sources added.

The Bangladesh delegation at the end of their four-day visit to Tripura today visited Kathachari refugee camp.

The delegation included Mayor of Chittagong ABM Muddud Chowdhury, Kalpa Ranjan Chakma, MP, Dipankar Talukder, MP, Bir Bahadur, MP, Advocate Fazle Rabbi, MP, Awami League leader Ataur Rahman Khan Kaiser and Secretary, Special Affairs Division, Kazi Golam Rahman.

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PCJSS for next round of talks on Mar 12

Parbattya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) has agreed to hold the next round of peace talks with the government in Dhaka on March 12, reports UNB.

The PCJSS sent a letter to the liaison committee on February 26, saying that they had no objection to joining the next meeting with the government in Dhaka. Copies of the letter were circulated to the press yesterday.

The last peace talks between the government and the PCJSS concluded in Dhaka on January 27.

The PCJSS in its letter to the liaison committee asked for necessary steps to take its delegation straight to capital Dhaka by helicopter from Dudukchhari, a frontier village of Khagrachhari district, at 11 am on March 12.

10 killed, 50 hurt as bus skids off road in Manikganj

MANIKGANJ, Mar 2: At least 10 people were killed and 50 injured, 20 critically, when a bus skidded off the Dhaka-Aricha highway at Mulgan near the town today, reports UNB.

The death toll could rise as rescuers looking for victims said three more dead were seen under the damaged bus that plunged into a 30-foot dry ditch at Bhatbaur in the district at about 3 in the afternoon.

Fire Brigade team was trying to recover the bodies and look if there were any more people trapped under the coach, coming from Kurigram-Rangpur area.

Police and witnesses said eight people died on the spot while two on way to hospital. Identity of the victims could be known immediately.

Rescuers said they recovered nine bodies from inside the bus. The wounded persons, 20 of them in critical condition, were taken to the Manikganj General Hospital.

The bus, bound for Dhaka, could not be salvaged till 5 pm. The driver could not be traced.

Injured passengers said the bus was overloaded. It was also carrying passengers on rooftop and 'moving abnormally' after leaving Aricha ghat.

Police Super of Manikganj NK Chanda and other district officials visited the spot.

12 arrested for killing PG hospital doctor

By Staff Correspondent

Twelve people were arrested yesterday in connection with the killing of Dr Hafizur Rahman of PG Hospital in front of his residence at Santanagar in Zigatola area under Dhanmondi thana in the city Saturday night.

Dr Rahman was killed as he tried to get hold of one of the members of a gang of dacoits who entered his house at about 9:30 pm, police said.

Police arrested 12 people aged between 15 and 25 in this connection from different places in Zigatola and some other areas and also recovered two toy pistols from their possession.

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Heavy snowfall in Iran's tremor-hit area 3000 killed, say rescue workers



Women from the northwestern Iranian village of Kalkhouran, 20 kms from the city of Ardabil, comfort each other Saturday on the ruins of their house that was destroyed by an earthquake measuring 5.5 on the Richter Scale.

— AFP/UNB photo

SHIRAN, Iran, Mar 2: Temperatures plunged and a blanket of snow covered northwestern Iran today, hampering rescue teams trying to reach villages devastated by a massive earthquake, reports AP.

The earthquake that struck Friday has claimed at least 3,000 lives, rescue and aid workers say. The official toll released by the government stood at 554, but was expected to rise. The government said at least 2,000 were injured.

The Farsi-language Kayhan daily on Saturday quoted an official in the hard-hit Ardabil province as saying that 110 villages were affected.

The narrow roads leading to the villages were covered with sheets of ice today making access difficult. Most villages had received some help, but survivors said they needed tents and fuel to cope with temperatures that fell Sunday to minus 7 degrees Celsius (19 degrees Fahrenheit).

Some aid workers said a string of villages beyond the Sabalan mountains, made impenetrable by the snow, may have been the hardest hit. But they have been unable to reach the area to make an assessment.

On this side of the mountains, Shiran, a wealthy farm-

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Firing incident in Savar 32 including thirteen Ansars arrested

By Staff Correspondent

CID police arrested 32 people including 13 Ansars in connection with the killing of four persons at Sadhapur village in Savar Friday morning, Savar police said last night.

CID sources, however, could not be contacted for confirmation of this.

A CID team led by an ASP is investigating the cases filed with Savar thana following the killings.

The identities of the 19 other arrested people could not be known immediately. Savar police said that all the arrested were in the custody of the CID in Dhaka.

Ansars had opened fire allegedly during a clash with villagers at Sadhapur killing four persons including a teenage girl and injuring at least 25 people.

The 13 Ansars involved in the incident were posted at the camp set up early last month on a 100 acre plot land reportedly belonging to Partex Real Estate Ltd., a sister organisation of Partex Group.

CID officials visited Sadhapur and were questioning villagers yesterday.

The plateau commander of the Ansar camp at Sadhapur filed a case with Savar thana while the brother of one of the victims filed a case with the same thana following the incident.

Savar police said that the situation in the village became normal yesterday. Police was guarding the trouble spot till last night.

Dy Speaker says Home Minister should make statement on Savar incident

By Staff Correspondent

Deputy Speaker Abdul Hamid said in the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday the Home Minister should make a statement on Friday's firing in Savar that left at least four people dead and many injured.

The Deputy Speaker made the observation after a BNP lawmaker, Abu Yusuf Mohammad Khalilur Rahman, had raised the issue on a point of order.

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Fidel Ramos due Mar 5 Dhaka, Manila to focus on trade at talks

By M Anwarul Haq

Expansion of trade and investment opportunities between Dhaka and Manila will be the main focus during the ensuing three-day official visit of President Fidel Ramos of the Philippines.

A number of agreements and protocols on business links and cultural cooperation signed between the two countries previously, but now dormant, are likely to be reactivated during the visit.

The Philippines President arrives in Dhaka on March 5 at 9 am at the head of a 120-member delegation. His entourage includes Foreign Minister Domingo L Siazon, the Minister for Trade and Industry, two other ministers, leaders of business and industry and media representatives.

A 35-member trade delegation would be accompanying the President Ramos.

President Shahabuddin Ahmed will receive Fidel Ramos at the Zia International Airport. A 19-gun salute will herald his arrival. From the airport, the two presidents will ride in a ceremonial motorcade to state guest house Jamuna where the distinguished visitor would be residing.

This would be the first top level visit by a Filipino leader after the independence of Bangladesh. Earlier, President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, President H M Ershad and Prime Minister Ataur Rahman Khan had visited the Philippines.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina would be paying a courtesy call on President Ramos at the Jamuna immediately after the latter's arrival.

Official talks will take place between the Bangladesh side led by Sheikh Hasina and the Filipino side led by Fidel Ramos at the Prime Minister's office on March 5.

Increase of commercial interaction between the two countries by identifying new areas and commodities for export and import would be the main thrust of the official talks.

Foreign Ministry officials said the volume of trade between the two countries has increased in a dramatic fashion since the end of the 1980s.

The actual situation in the detention camps is yet to be known" but according to information received from secondary sources it was improving, Rasiah said.

Rasiah came to Dhaka recently to see the family members of some of the Bangladeshi who died in the detention camps in Malaysia. He also met family members of some of those who are learnt to have been detained there.

Indonesia, Bangladesh, the Philippines, India and Sri Lanka provide the bulk of the foreign labour force required by Malaysia.

The Malaysian government recently took stern action against illegal workers coming from other countries.

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Steps taken to check pollution in 4 cities, minister tells JS

By Staff Correspondent

Forest and Environment Minister Sayeda Sajeda Chowdhury told the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday various steps have been taken to check the air and sound pollution in the four metropolitan cities, including Dhaka.

The minister was replying to a call attention notice on the air pollution in the city moved by Tasmima Hussain of the Jatiya Party. Sajeda Chowdhury also replied to a number of questions relating to environment.

She said, letters have been sent to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrates of Dhaka, Khulna, Chittagong and Rajshahi asking them to set up mobile courts with the aim of checking vehicles emitting black smoke. A letter was also sent to the DC (Traffic) of DMP asking him to gear up their drive against faulty vehicles.

The minister however admitted that due to insufficient number of police and magistrates, it was not possible to operate mobile courts as frequently as possible. But steps

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President urged to be neutral Govt protecting bank defaulters: BNP

Opposition lawmakers charged the government with protecting bank defaulters as the House resumed debate on the President's address to Parliament, reports UNB.

Ruling party members, however, praised Sheikh Hasina's eight-month administration for initiatives to revamp the economy and attract foreign investment and for signing the historic water treaty with India.

Jahanara Khan, Meher Afroz, AK Fazlul Huq, Dr Mokhesur Rahman, Mohammad Abdus Sattar, Tabibur Rahman Sardar and Panchanan Biswas of the Awami League, Shah Mohammad Abul Hossain, Abdul Khaleque, Alamgir Kabir, Prof Rezaul Karim and GM Fazlul Huq of the BNP, Golam Hossain and Joyal Abedin of Jatiya Party took part in the general discussion.

Meher Afroz, (AL) lauded the government for neutral application of law ensuring justice and consolidating democracy.

Afroz, daughter of slain Awami League leader Moyezuddin, questioned how the notorious killers could get release on mercy from all.

She urged the government to take steps to commemorate the martyrs of democracy. She also demanded public trial and capital punishment of women and child traffickers.

Shah Mohammad Abul Hossain decried that President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed who earned fame for his strict neutrality in 1991 as caretaker president lost that repute in 1996 after becoming President on Awami League ticket.

"Justice Ahmed is the President of this country, not of a political party," he said and requested the President to play his neutral role in the future.

Alamgir Kabir alleged that some pro-government businessmen and so-called foreign investors looted and siphoned off thousands of crores of taka from the country's stockmarket. "But the President failed to mention it in his speech."

Kabir was bitter about black money-holders and said: "Bit loan defaulters are travelling with the Prime Minister as

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Illegal immigrants in Malaysia 90 died in detention camps in 3 years

By Mizan Ali

At least 90 people died in the Malaysian detention camps for illegal immigrants during the last three years, said Sivrasa Rasiah, a lawyer and human rights activist of that country, quoting official figures released there.

Malaysia had set up nine detention camps, Rasiah said, adding that the death toll of Bangladeshi immigrants was almost half of the total number, officially confirmed so far.

The actual situation in the detention camps is yet to be known" but according to information received from secondary sources it was improving, Rasiah said.

Rasiah came to Dhaka recently to see the family members of some of the Bangladeshi who died in the detention camps in Malaysia. He also met family members of some of those who are learnt to have been detained there.

Indonesia, Bangladesh, the Philippines, India and Sri Lanka provide the bulk of the foreign labour force required by Malaysia.

The Malaysian government recently took stern action against illegal workers coming from other countries.

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JUTA polls tomorrow

By JU Correspondent

Elections to the executive committee of the Jahangirnagar University Teachers' Association (JUTA), for the year 1997 will be held tomorrow.

Voting will take place at the JU Teachers' Club from 9 am to 1 pm. The elections will be conducted by Prof Kazi Ali Azam as the election commissioner. At least 265 teachers of the university will cast their votes in the polls.

A total of 22 candidates from two panels of teachers are contesting for the 11 posts in the JUTA executive committee. The teachers' group opposing the panel backed by the VC has nominated Dr Sharif Enamul Kabir (president), Dr Zaheduddin Mahmud Khan (vice president), Dr Amir Hossain (secretary), Khaled Hossain (joint secretary) and Sazed Ashraf Karim (Treasurer). Nominees for executive committee members are Prof Enamul Haq Khan, Dr Nasir Uddin, Abdullah Al Mamun, Anrud-dha Kahali, Minhaz Uddin

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Crippled beggars holding a rally in front of the Jatiya Press Club yesterday demanding government steps for their rehabilitation.

— Star photo

Shima's death: JS body begins probe in Ctg

By Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Mar 2: The parliamentary committee formed to probe the death of government worker Shima Chowdhury in safe custody in Chittagong jail, arrived in the port city today and started its work, official sources said.

The committee headed by Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad today visited Chittagong jail and talked to officials there about the death of Shima.

Earlier, in the morning, the committee members went to Raozan thana where Shima was raped allegedly by four policemen.

The committee members talked to police personnel at the thana and some local people, the sources said.

Meanwhile, the one-member enquiry commission comprising retired High Court judge Dall Uddin Ahmed also came here recently and carried out investigation into the death of Shima Chowdhury, 17.

Letter to Speaker Prof Shahjahan protests remarks by minister in JS

By Staff Correspondent

Former Vice Chancellor of the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) Prof Mohammad Shahjahan has sent a letter to the Speaker of the Jatiya Sangsad protesting the derogatory remarks against him made by a minister in the House, the former VC told The Daily Star last night.

In his letter sent on February 24, Mohammad Shahjahan said there had been no charge of corruption against him in any court. He also requested the Speaker to read out the letter in the House.

Commerce and Industries Minister Tofael Ahmed had told the House on February 22 that the name of Prof Shahjahan had been dropped from the list of the Ekushe Padak recipients because of specific charges of corruption against him.

Meanwhile, M K Anwar of the BNP yesterday demanded in the Jatiya Sangsad that the clarification sent by Prof Shahjahan be read out in the House. In this regard, he said Speaker Humayun Rashid Chowdhury had read out in the House a letter of the Prime Minister's

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Mizan Chy hospitalised

Elderly political leader and former prime minister Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury has been admitted to the BIRDEM Hospital in serious condition, family sources told BSS last night.

Chowdhury, senior vice-chairman of the Jatiya Party who has been ailing since February 25, was admitted to BIRDEM Hospital on February 28 with pneumonia and high fever.

The septuagenarian JP leader is under the treatment of Dr A R Khan while Prof Jaifar Latif, Prof Abcur Rashid and Prof Quasem are attending him, the sources said.

Vietnamese PM arrives Mar 9

By Staff Correspondent

Prime Minister of Vietnam Vo Van Kiet arrives in the capital on March 9 on a two-day official visit to Bangladesh at the invitation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

The Prime Minister will receive her Vietnamese counterpart at the Zia International Airport.

The Vietnamese Prime Minister will hold official talks with his Bangladesh counterpart on March 10.

Vo Van Kiet will address the business community at a reception organised by the FBCCI on March 9. He will leave Dhaka on the same afternoon.