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Foreign expert to oversee work of foreign oil, gas cos

By Sharier Khan

The government is going to appoint a foreign consultant in the Petroleum, Concessions Division (PCD) of Petrobangla's Operations Directorate, which monitors activities of foreign oil and gas companies working in Bangladesh, according to official sources.

PCD lacks adequate number of manpower for nearly a year now. A number of vital posts are vacant for months and the authorities have not taken any move to fill up those.

The foreign consultant is being hired under a 10 million US dollar World Bank scheme. Once hired, the highly paid consultant will oversee the work of the PCD.

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Pre-polls violence in Gopalganj: 70 injured

From Our Correspondent

GOPALGANJ, Nov 21: At least 70 persons were injured in a clash between the supporters of two rival UP chairman candidates at village Gopinathpur under Majeedat Union of Gopalganj Sadar thana last night.

According to eyewitnesses, the supporters of Hafizur Rahman Mukul and Moksud Ali — two chairman candidates in Majeedat Union Parishad elections — brought out two separate processions at 10 pm.

When the processions came face to face, both the groups chanted slogans against each other and locked in clash that continued for about five hours leaving 70 persons injured, 13 of them seriously.

The feuding groups exploded bombs and used lethal weapons during the clash.

The seriously injured persons were admitted to Gopalganj Sadar Hospital.

They are: Mohar Ali, 30, Nasir Fakir, 32, Omar Ali Khan, 30, Jhuma Khan, 25, Baharuddin Khan, 10, Mamun Mollah, 18, Aroz Ali Sikder, 35, Sharun Kazi, 17, Nazrul Khan, 28, Eklash Khan, 28, Kashem Kazi, 17, Islam Kazi, 28, and Sirajul Haque Khan, 50.

Police arrested eight persons in this connection.

Pre-polls clash AL leader stabbed in Shailakupa, dies

From Our Correspondent

JHENIDAH, Nov 21: A local Awami League leader, stabbed during Union Parishad election campaign in Shailakupa thana on Wednesday, died at Jhenidah hospital last night.

Harun-ur-Rashid, 45, was stabbed and his companion, Babar Ali, 47, a candidate for the post of UP chairman, was seriously beaten up allegedly by some BNP activists when they were returning home in Bagutia village at about 9:30 pm, police said. Babar Ali is under treatment at Kushtia General Hospital.

Harun was buried at his village home after Namaz-e-Janaza this afternoon.

Shailakupa police arrested 13 people in connection with the killing.

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Tremor jolts country: 3 killed in Chittagong bldg collapse

Star Report

At least three persons were killed and ten injured in a building collapse in Chittagong city as an earthquake rocked different parts of the country yesterday evening.

The three died when a newly constructed five storied building went under soil up to the first floor at Nanjarbagh in the port city. Rescue worker said the casualty may be higher.

The quake was felt for 26 seconds in Chittagong. It also shook Dhaka, Munshiganj, Tangail, Jessore, Chandpur, Rangpur, Bhola, Sandwip, Sitakunda, Rangamati, Cox's Bazar, Barisal, Sylhet and Jhenidah, the duration being

three to six seconds, the Meteorological office said. In some areas, it was followed by after shocks.

Originating from an unidentified place, 247 km north-east of the port city, the quake was felt in different areas of the country from 5:20 pm to 5:40 pm. But the poorly equipped Met office, whose lone seismic observatory with vintage equipment at Chittagong remained inoperative for a long time, failed to locate the epicentre.

BSS news agency quoted Chittagong Medical College sources as saying that they gave first aid to over 100 people,

most of whom were female government workers who were injured while trying to get out of their work places in panic during the tremor.

Many buildings in the port city developed cracks or got tilted. BSS said quoting fire brigade sources.

Panic stricken people scurried down their flats and high rise buildings in Dhaka and elsewhere in the country as the buildings were shaken, catching some people in their naps on the weekend or enjoying time with their families in the late afternoon.

Birds and crows returning to their nests on tree tops left their

Snap polls seem inevitable UF rejects demand for ousting DMK

NEW DELHI, Nov 21: India's ruling United Front coalition today closed ranks against a threat from its key supporter, the Congress Party, and refused to expel one of its partners even at the cost of new national elections, report agencies.

"Elections will follow," former Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda said after a 90-minute meeting of the United Front coalition.

Congress had threatened to withdraw support if the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) was not thrown out of the coalition.

The DMK has been accused of supporting rebels linked to the 1991 assassination of Congress



Sonia agrees to lead Congress?

NEW DELHI, Nov 21: Sonia Gandhi, the enigmatic widow of former premier Rajiv Gandhi, has agreed to try to lead India's Congress(I) Party back to power if the country's minority coalition government collapses, The Times of India newspaper reported today, says AFP.

Sources in the Congress said

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'I hope to live in peace in my homeland'

578 refugees back from Tripura

From Nurul Alam and Shuvo Chakma in Tabalchhari

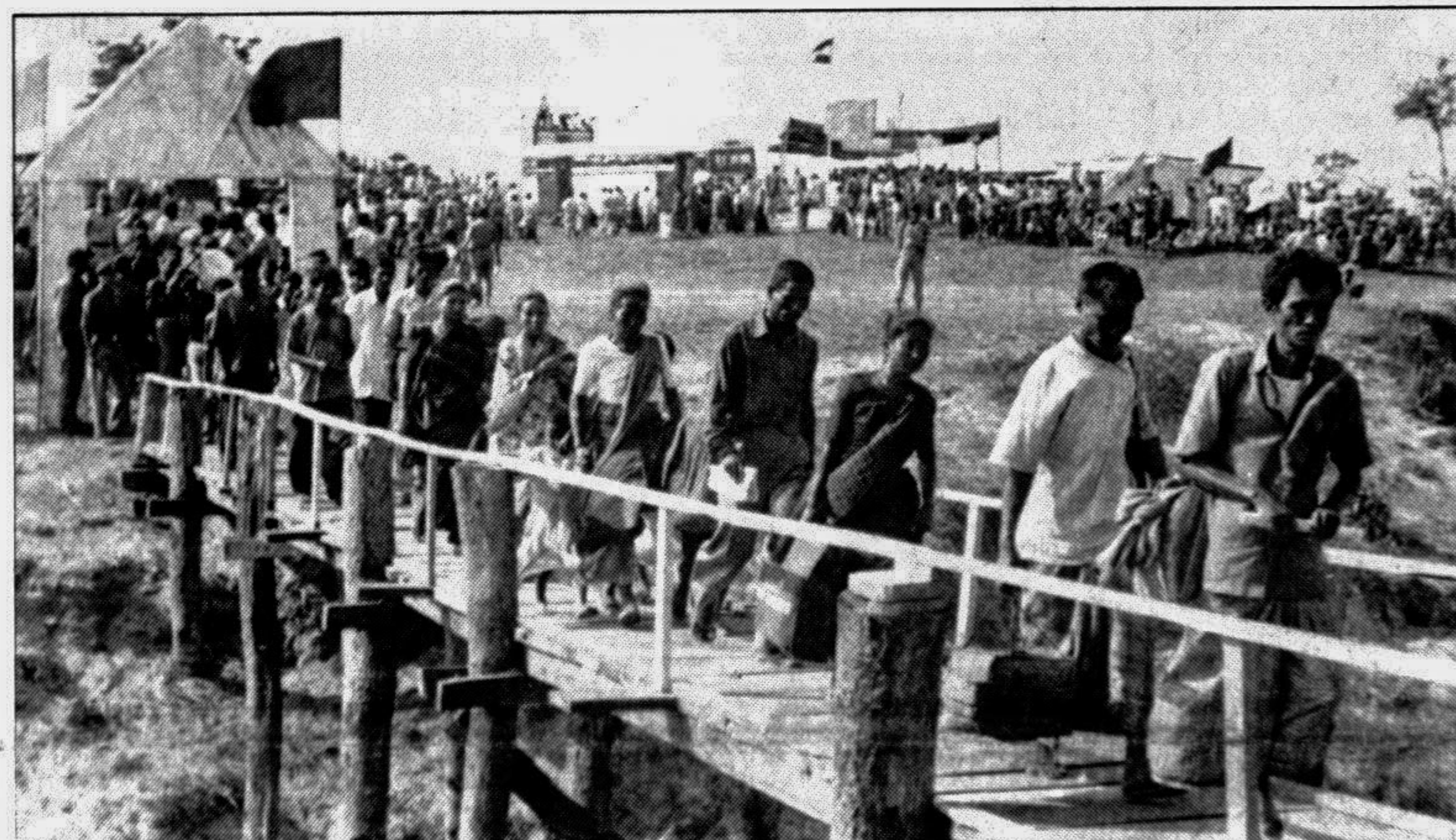
When Sukomol Chakma, 42, a school teacher, stepped on Bangladesh soil leading his five-member family, walking down a makeshift wooden bridge on the Feni river separating his homeland with Tripura state of India, his feeling was pure joy.

"I am happy to be home," Sukomol told newsmen amidst cheers from hundreds of people who gathered to welcome them at Tabalchhari, a frontier hamlet in Khagrachhari yesterday.

"I hope to live in peace in CHT in my homeland under a democratic government."

He fled to Tripura leaving his job as a teacher at Taindang Junior High School in Matiranga amidst renewed violence when peace negotiations between the government and Shantibahini collapsed in April 1996. Since then, he had been living in Shilachhari camp along with other tribesmen, estimated to be around 43,000, spread in squalid shanties of six camps in southern Tripura.

An accord between the government and the Refugee Welfare Committee led by Upendra Lal Chakma during his unpub-



Tribal refugees returning home, walking down a 90-foot wooden bridge on the Feni river at Tabalchhari yesterday. — Star photo

'Temporary truce' in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, Nov 21: Pakistan's constitutional crisis appeared to be easing today after last-minute mediation by the army averted a move by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to impeach President Farooq Ahmed Leghari, reports AFP.

Following the army's intervention the Supreme Court also adjourned a contempt case against Sharif and several of his colleagues for a week.

But commentators expressed fears the crisis was not yet over.

"It looks a very temporary truce," said Rehana Hakim, editor of a prominent monthly English-language magazine, Newline, published in Karachi.

Political analyst Ghazi Salahuddin said it was a lull after the storm.

The government has kept both houses of parliament in a "pending session mode," which implies it "may be temporarily lying low, but has not abandoned the option of going on the offensive if required." The Nation daily said.

Political sources said the mediation had helped to calm tempers on all sides.

Officials said a cabinet meeting

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Clash at Gulistan hawkers' market: 12 hurt, 3 held

About a dozen people were injured in a clash yesterday between two rival groups at a market in city's Gulistan area over establishing supremacy, reports UNB.

Police fired teargas shells and resorted to baton charge to disperse the feuding rivals. They also picked up three people from the spot.

The clash began when supporters of former managing committee of Gulistan Hawkers' Market entered the market blasting crackers at about 8:30 in the morning.

Police said supporters of the present committee tried to resist them. Both sides fired more than a dozen gunshots and exploded a series of bombs.

Of the injured, two were admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital. They were identified as Monir and Ripon, hospital sources said.

Commentary

Endless rhetoric but no real debate

By Mahfuz Anam

In a statement in Munshiganj last Tuesday BNP chief Khaleda Zia shifted from her previous position of calling for a hartal on the very day that an accord is signed with the PCJSS to 'going for a tough movement after examining the accord'.

Her new position differs from the old one to the extent she now acknowledges the 'need' to at least look at the Accord before condemning it as a 'sell out'.

The shift is a flicker of logic in her statements compared to what has otherwise been one of irrational, unthinking and mindless opposition to each and everything that the present government has done, or assumed to have done over the last 16 months.

Khaleda Zia claims that the government of Sheikh Hasina is giving away our sovereignty in the guise of negotiating with the PCJSS. She further claims that the AL government is actually conspiring to hand over parts of Bangladesh, such as the Hill Tracts and the Chittagong and its port, to India through the so called peace treaty with the Shanti Bahini.

Supposing, for argument's sake, she is right on both counts. In that case we are forced to say that she has contributed to this 'treachery' by reducing the whole discussion on this vital issue into a battle of rhetoric rather than a debate on substance.

From the very beginning Khaleda Zia went to the rhetorical extreme of claiming that Sheikh Hasina was out to turn Bangladesh into a 'vassal state of India'. According to her, Hill Tracts, Chittagong and its port, the districts of Feni and even Sylhet would be handed over to India as a 'payment' for helping to 'win' the elections and bringing the AL to power. She has repeatedly claimed that June '96

'Hartal if CHT accord beyond constitutional provisions'

From Staff Correspondent

BNP and six other political parties at a joint meeting yesterday resolved that they would go for tough movement programmes including hartal if any accord on Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) signed beyond constitutional provisions and compromising national sovereignty.

The meeting, held at the Minto Road official residence of Leader of the Opposition in Jatiya Sangsad and BNP chief, was chaired by BNP standing committee member Abdus Salam Talukdar, says a press release.

Leaders of BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami, Jatiya Party (Z-M), Democratic League, JAGPA, PNP, and NDA were present.

The meeting discussed in

See Page 12 Col 3

PM tells Armed Forces CHT issue must be solved politically

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said a political solution to the longstanding Chittagong Hill Tracts problem is just around the corner, reports UNB.

"We have reached the doorstep of a solution of the CHT problem through discussion with Santibahini realising the fact that political solution is the real solution," she said at a reception at Senakunja in the evening on the occasion of Armed Forces Day.

The CHT problem will be resolved under constitutional framework maintaining the integrity of the country, Hasina said. "Our government has taken sincere and effective steps to resolve the long running problem."

The Prime Minister said for last two decades a war-like situation is prevailing in the Hill Tracts region, where hundreds of people, including members of the armed forces, have lost their lives.

The problem has become a barrier to the country's stability and economic progress, she said and sought cooperation from all, including political parties and other organisations, for an early solution to the problem.

The initiative of the government for resolving the problem has been widely acclaimed at home and abroad,

See Page 12 Col 6

Fire-related stampede kills 2 garments workers in city

By Staff Correspondent



An injured worker of a garments factory being carried by her colleague. — Star photo

Two female workers were killed and at least 13 injured in a fire-related stampede in a garments factory at Gulshan in the city yesterday.

Police said the dead were identified as Majeda, 18, and Laili, 40, of Dorin Garments Ltd in Gulshan Section - 2.

Most of the injured workers are women. Four of them were admitted to a clinic at Mohakhali.

The stampede in the garments factory followed a fire on the rooftop of an adjacent building at about 8:30 am, fire brigade personnel said.

The fire originated from a stove when some workers were cooking in a makeshift shed on the roof-top of the six-storey building which also housed a garments factory. The fire was extinguished quickly.

Hearing the news of fire, workers of Dorin Garments Ltd started running out of the factory building through the narrow staircase, leaving about 15 injured.

Nine of the injured were taken to the clinic at Mohakhali where Laili succumbed to her injuries shortly after.

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Loadshedding: No early way out in sight

Star Report

The level of loadshedding in the country will remain around 500 MW till March-April next, according to energy experts.

This level of loadshedding had severely affected the economy and disrupted normal life during March-April this year.

The government had repeatedly assured the people earlier that the power supply situation would improve by July-August last.

But in the last one month, the disruption became as severe as that in March-April last as three large power generating units remained inoperative due to technical problems, sources said.

Now the level of loadshedding is no less than 500 MW per day, the sources said. The current demand for power is 2100 MW.

"It is rather unusual to have such power disruption in winter season," observed an energy expert.

While almost all areas of the city are experiencing loadshedding everyday, the power supply situation in the rural areas is even worse.

This loadshedding will continue up to the first week of December and the situation would

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9:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (24th & 25th)

French Fashion Shows & Dinners
Nov. 24th & Nov. 25th
6:30 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.
(for ticket holders only)

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