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CHT talks reach crucial stage

By Special Correspondent

Negotiators were trying to finalise the draft of an agreement to end the decades-old insurgency in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) late last night. The talks between the National Committee on Chittagong Hill Tracts (NCCHT) and the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS) began at 3-30 in the afternoon and were continuing till the writing of this report at 12-15 last night. It was being held at the state guest house Padma after remaining in limbo for the past two days when two sides conducted informal negotiations.

See Page 12 Col 8

Hasina assures non-govt pry teachers of a lasting solution

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said all problems of non-government primary school teachers will be solved gradually, reports UNB. The government is going to introduce a modern and balanced education policy aimed at solving all problems in the education sector, including those of teachers, students and educational institutions, she said. "We are looking for a lasting solution to your problems so that you would not need to agitate time and again," she said while addressing representatives of the non-government primary school teachers at ICC in the city yesterday.

Members of the Non-government Primary School Teachers Association from across the country came to the Prime Minister's office and place their various demands, including nationalisation of the registered non-government primary schools. "I'm very much aware of the problems of the teachers, the architects of the nation," Hasina said adding that successive governments in the previous years assured the teachers several times, but they failed to follow up their commitments in action. "It may take time, but I can assure you of an effective and permanent solution," she assured the teachers.

Lailatul Barat on Dec 15

The Holy Lailatul Barat will be observed on the night of December 15, the National Moon Sighting Committee announced in the city yesterday, reports UNB. The Committee at a meeting said that since the Shaban moon was not sighted yesterday anywhere in the country the month of Shaban will be counted from December 2 and the 14th Shaban (Shab-e-Barat) will fall on the night of December 15.

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on the Internet
<http://www.dailystarnews.com>

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Month-long UP polls begin today

By Nurul Kabir

Election of union parishads in the country begins this morning amidst apprehension of widespread violence. The Election Commission has identified 13,630 polling centres, out of a total of 39,728, as trouble-prone, 1983 as less risky and 24,215 as normal. Rival political parties have been actively backing their respective candidates, although officially the local level polls are to be held on non-party basis. The polls will be held for 4318 UPs, out of the 4468 local bodies. According to the schedule announced by the EC, it will take the whole of December to complete the polls in phases.

The expenses for the polls have been estimated by the EC at about Tk 44 crore. On the first day, election will be held for 380 UPs in six administrative divisions. Polling will begin at 8:00 am and continue till 4:00 in the afternoon without any break. Election of some of the parishads has been suspended due to disputes between contesting candidates. Polls for the rest of the UPs will be held after the expiry of their tenure in May next. According to EC estimates, around 4.79 crore voters are to choose their representatives from a total of 2,04,908 candidates.

Of the candidates, 44,421 women are fighting for 12,954 reserved seats. The voters of each UP constituency will elect a chairman and 12 members. Of the 12, nine seats are open for both male and female candidates and three are reserved seats for women. Some 1,725 candidates including 37 for the posts of UP chairman and 592 women for reserved seats have already been elected unopposed. Thana level officials have been appointed Returning Officers of the polling centres. For smooth holding of elections, See Page 12 Col 4

One killed, 55 injured in pre-polls violence

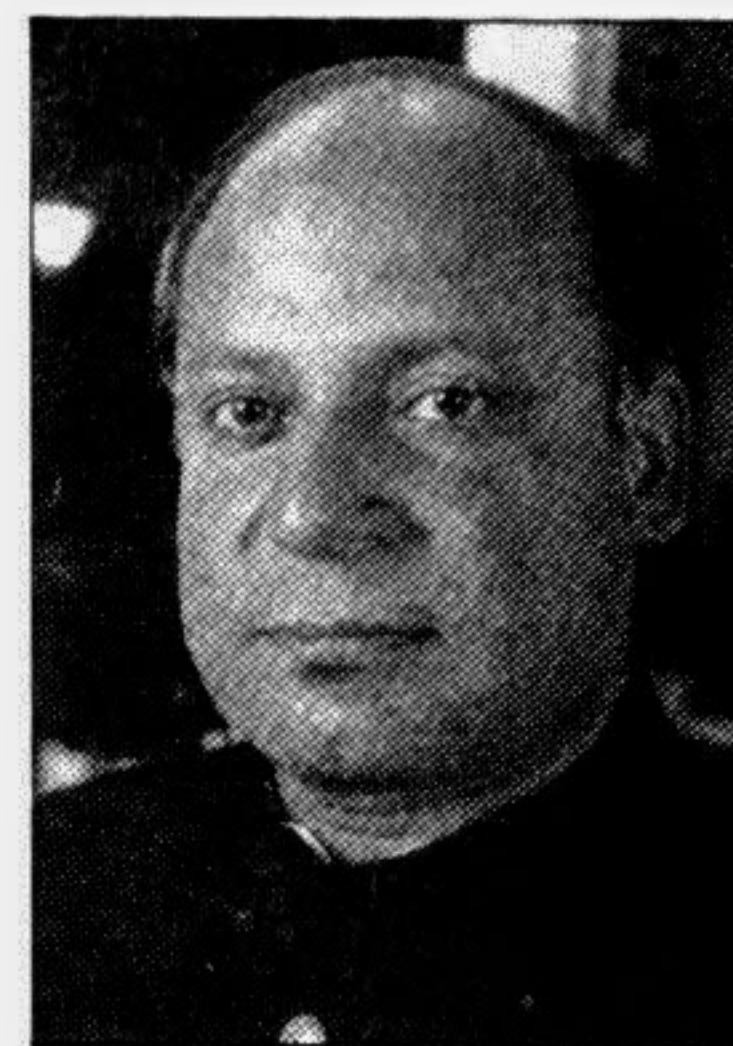
By Staff Correspondent

One person was killed and at least 55 others were injured in separate clashes yesterday, day before the Union Parishad election. Our Correspondent from Narsingdi reports: One person was killed and 10 others injured in pre-polls violence at Chardighadi union of Sadar thana. The clash took place between two member candidates of Ward Number 5 of Duani village concerning shifting of a voting centre. The voting centre was shifted this year from its usual venue at the Junior High School at Duani village to a madrasah in the neighbouring Araiyan village. See Page 12 Col 6

Sharif to fight 'conspiracy' by Leghari, Chief Justice

ISLAMABAD, Nov 30: A defiant Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif today accused both the president and chief justice of staging a conspiracy to undermine his 10-month-old government, reports AP. In a televised address to the nation, Sharif vowed to fight on. "I have uncovered a greater, deeper conspiracy... But I will fight," said Sharif in a 30-minute speech. He accused both President Farooq Ahmed Leghari and Chief Justice Sajjad Ali Shah of obstructing Parliament, tossing out legislation and waging a campaign to unseat him. "They have done a great crime against the people... I will not allow the people to become a victim to this conspiracy," he said.

The political crisis that has pitted the prime minister against both the Chief Justice and President has virtually paralysed the country and has some people fearing it could prompt Pakistan's powerful military to seize power again. In neighbouring Rawalpindi where the army is headquartered, the Chief of Staff Gen Jehangir Karamat was holding an unscheduled meeting of senior generals tonight. For the past two weeks Karamat has been cast in the role of mediator, an unusual one for an army chief in Pakistan where historically the army has thrown out elected governments. Earlier today, the Chief Justice accused Sharif of engineering. See Page 12 Col 3



Nawaz Sharif



Anti-hartal activists chasing pickets on the city's North South Road during hartal hours yesterday.

— Star photo

One killed, 60 hurt during hartal

By Staff Correspondent

At least one person was killed and 60 people including some policemen were injured in sporadic clashes in the capital during a BNP-called half-day hartal in the six divisional head quarters yesterday. The hartal hours, beginning from 6 am, passed off by and large peacefully in the other divisional headquarters of Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna, Barisal and Sylhet, reports reaching here said. The hartal was called to protest an alleged attempt on the life of BNP chief and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Begum Khaleda Zia during her visit to Chittagong Tuesday last. Jamaat-e-Islami, Jatiya Party (Z-M) and three other small parties supported the hartal. In the capital, Hafizuddin, 28, a rickshawpuller, was fatally injured when a bomb exploded near New Market at about 9:30 in the morning. Both his arms were blown away in the explosion. Half, son of one Ismail Hossain of Tejgaon area, died at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital at about 5:30 pm. Eighteen of the injured people were admitted to the DMCH. Most of them were injured in bomb explosions, hospital sources said. Of the injured policemen, Habibur Rahman was admitted to the Rajarbagh Police Hospital with bomb injury, police said. A total of 70 people were arrested from different areas of the city and 11 cases were initiated against 33 of them for "acts of violence," police said. Clashes between supporters and opponents of hartal took place at Naya Bazar, Mahakhali, Jafarabari, Dhaka University, Farmgate and some other areas. At Suritola in Naya Bazar area, the rival activists clashed for about four hours from 9 am, exploding bombs and hurling brickbats at each other, leaving 35 people including 4 policemen injured, witnesses said. Police hurled tear gas shells to disperse the clashing groups. See Page 12 Col 6

Ctg rally demands arrest of killers of 3 AL workers

CHITTAGONG, Nov 30: Speakers at a protest rally today demanded immediate arrest of and punishment to the killers of three activists of Awami League and its front organisations, reports BSS. Jointly organised by Chittagong city, district north and south chapters of Awami League, the rally was held here at the Shaheed Minar premises. The rally was addressed by Chittagong City Corporation Mayor ABM Mahiuddin Chowdhury, Awami League Commerce and Industry Secretary Akhteruzzaman Chowdhury Babu, Abul Kashem Master MP, MA Salam, Muslemuddin Ahmed, and Dr Sayedur Rahman. AL leader Ishaque Mia presided. The speakers said people of this country will resist the politics of killing, coup and conspiracy. Criticising the destructive and negative politics of BNP, they said its ulterior motive is now to create chaos and mislead the people. CCC Mayor said whenever Khaleda Zia comes to the port city, it results in loss of lives and destruction of property. The Mayor demanded that See Page 12 Col 2

Two oil cos place revised budget Cairn's up by one-third, Occidental's four times

Star Report

Unnecessary expenditure made by foreign oil and gas companies working for exploring and developing gas fields will increase the cost of gas produced by them, according to official sources. Both Cairn of UK and Occidental of USA, which signed production sharing contracts (PSCs) with the government nearly three years ago to explore oil and gas in Bangladesh, have already spent more than their originally approved budgets and have submitted revised budgets to the government for approval. Cairn, which succeeded in striking gas in Sangu in January last, has placed a revised budget which is nearly 100 million US dollars more than the original budget of 188 million dollars. Similarly, Occidental placed a revised budget which includes an additional budget for Moulvibazar 1 (Magurchhara) alone. The original budget for Moulvibazar 1 was 8 million US dollars. The revised budget proposes an additional expenditure of nearly 35 million dollars. A high official of the government however said that these "escalated budgets" were being "dealt with" and the government would "not approve those unless and until it is convinced about the rationale behind the revised budget."

Sources said that the government has already sought explanation from Cairn for the enhanced expenditure and "it is likely that a big chunk of the added costs would be slashed."

Meanwhile, the foreign companies have succeeded in

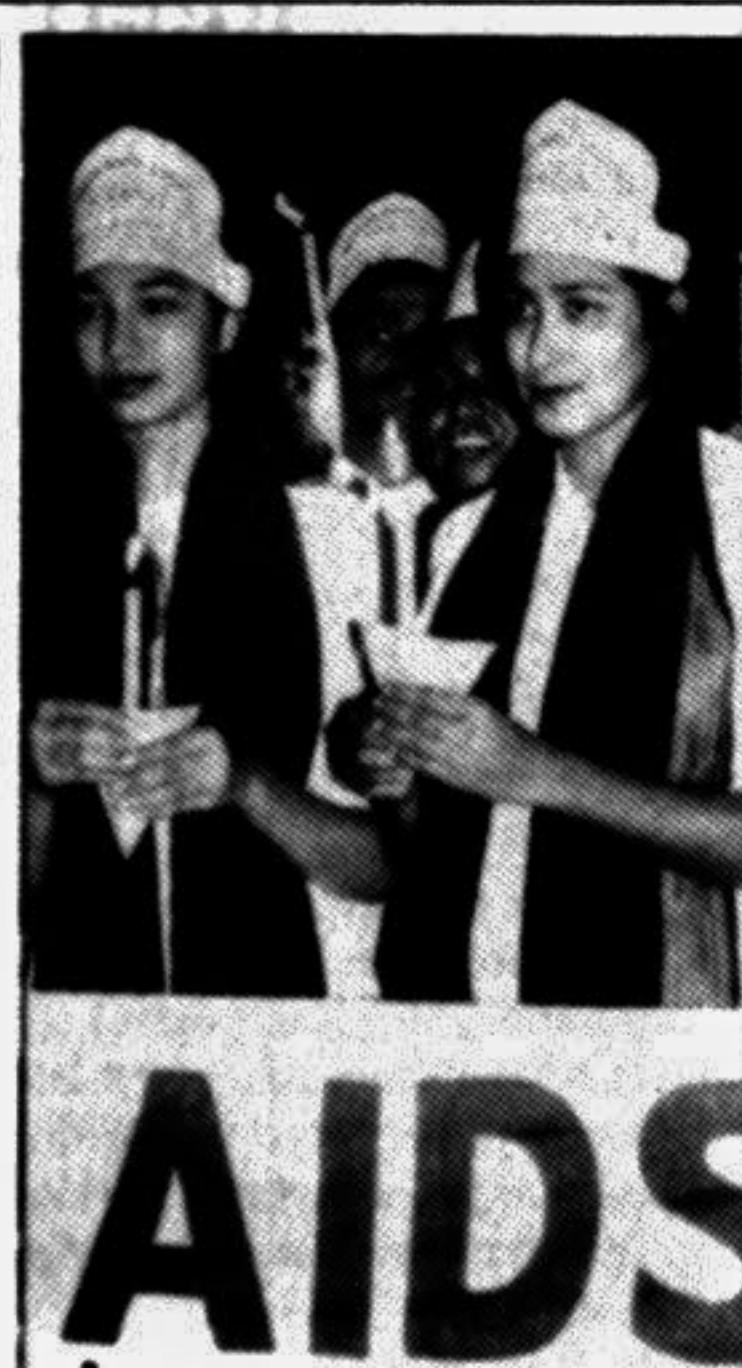
Japan to provide Tk 103cr for reconstruction of 5 bridges

Bangladesh will receive a grant of Taka 102.98 crore from Japan for the project of reconstruction of five small and medium bridges on Dhaka-Chittagong highway, reports BSS. An agreement in this regard was signed in the city yesterday between the two governments. The total cost of the project has been estimated at Taka 123.46 crore. The project work which will begin soon is scheduled to be completed by March 2000. With this grant, the total commitment of Japanese grant assistance to Bangladesh will stand at about Tk 9544 crore.

getting four tax free passbooks per block from the government. Previously, the government allowed three such passbooks for one company or group of companies for each PSC. Now, the number of passbooks of Occidental has increased to 12 and Cairn's to 8.

These passbooks allow Cairn, Occidental, UMIC and Rexwood Okland — which have signed PSCs with the government — to import consumer goods and other items without tax. Sources said that these passbooks were "misused in the past and now the risk of misuse has increased further."

Besides, sources pointed out that these companies were not maintaining safety rules properly. Consumption of liquor or wine, which is strictly prohibited in exploration spot, is rampant, witnesses said. The government has also taken note of such "violations" and is taking measures, official sources said. "It has become absolutely essential for the government to increase manpower in monitoring the financial and technical activities of the foreign companies. Otherwise, Bangladesh will lose a lot no matter how competent or committed these companies are," observed an official.



A candle light procession in the city yesterday to mark the World AIDS Day

— Star photo

World AIDS Day today

World AIDS Day will be observed in the country as elsewhere in the world today to create awareness among the people about the impact of the fatal disease, reports UNB. On the eve of the day, President Shahabuddin Ahmed and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina gave separate messages, laying emphasis on making the nation aware about the prevention of AIDS. This year the AIDS Day focuses on plight of children. Every day one million children under the age of 15 are apprehended to be living with HIV and of them more than 95 per cent are living in developing countries. Some 30 million people around the world are now infected with HIV — the human immunodeficiency virus that causes AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome).

Zafar, Pradhan granted bail

By SC Correspondent

Kazi Zafar Ahmed and Shafiq Alam Pradhan have been granted anticipatory bail by the High Court in a criminal case filed in allegation of provoking the unruly people gathered at the grand rally of the Sammilito Birodhi Dal which led to five murders in Chittagong on November 11. The division bench of the HC comprising Justice MM Haque and Justice Md Awlad Ali yesterday after hearing both the prosecution and the defence granted them bail.

BCL-JCD five-hour gunfight in N'ganj

From Our Correspondent

NARAYANGANJ, Nov 30: Panic gripped the port town today as activists of Bangladesh Chhatra League and Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal were locked in nearly a five-hour gunfight that left an unspecified number of people injured. The clash started at around 10:30 am when a group of activists of the Awami League-backed BCL attacked some workers of the pro-BNP JCD who had come to the judge's court in connection with a case. Later, a number of JCD activists came to BB Road, wielding firearms. They damaged a

number of shops. BCL workers confronted the JCD activists and the two sides were locked in a gunfight for about three hours. At one stage, JCD activists moved to the Daobhog area. Police fired rubber bullets and tear gas shells to disperse the clashing groups. But the fight continued till about 3 pm. A number of people were injured hit with bullets, witnesses said. BSS adds: Narayanganj police today arrested Zakir Khan, 25, a local Chhatra Dal leader from the district judge's court premises. He was wanted in two cases. According to police sources, the accused was arrested when he came to appear before the judge court for hearing in a case under the Anti-terrorism Act.

Business leaders concerned at frequent hartals

Six chambers and business organisations have expressed concern over the frequent call of hartal and urged the political parties to work out alternative means to express their political differences, reports UNB. In a joint statement yesterday, they said hartal may be a fundamental right to express one's grievances, but it's the fact that hartal seriously affects the economy, particularly the smaller section of the business community. Signatories to the statement See Page 12 Col 3

The agitated supporters of Zakir Khan brought out processions demanding his release. They set ablaze a police outpost at level crossing number two and damaged two vehicles. Police opened two rounds of blank shots to disperse the crowd and picked up 18 people from the spot. Another report adds: Narayanganj police arrested Mamun, 28, a BNP activist and recovered a pistol from his possession from Narayanganj Club area this afternoon. According to police sources, Mamun was a 'bodyguard' of Zakir Khan.

BJP seeks time to prove its majority

NEW DELHI, Nov 30: India's Hindu nationalist leader Atal Behari Vajpayee today met President K R Narayanan to stake his claim to form a government to fill the power vacuum left by the collapse of the United Front coalition, reports AFP. Vajpayee, who headed a 13-day government last year before being ousted, and other leaders from his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) held talks with the head of state at the presidential palace. After the meeting he told reporters: "When we stress the fact that we have the maximum capacity, in a way it amounts to staking claim to form a government." BJP president Lal Krishna Advani said the BJP, the largest opposition party in parliament, has asked the President to give it more time to prove its parliamentary majority. Parliament is scheduled to resume on Tuesday. Advani said the President told them that he would dissolve Parliament and order fresh national elections "as a last resort". He argued the BJP and its allies were jointly stronger than the Congress (I) party or the multi-party United Front coalition which resigned Friday. A Presidential Palace spokesman said Narayanan has also invited leaders from prime minister under Kumar Gujral's United Front and the Congress(I) party, which collapsed the alliance Friday, for talks tomorrow. Since Friday, Narayanan has been exploring whether a new alliance could be created to avoid fresh elections.

South Asian music festival begins today

The first-ever South Asian music festival begins in the city today, reports BSS. Besides artistes from host Bangladesh, some 50 performers including dancers from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, the Maldives and Bhutan are expected to take part in the four-day programme.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is scheduled to inaugurate the function at the indoor stadium at Mirpur in the morning. The festival will start at 6 pm everyday simultaneously in the National Museum Auditorium, Osmany Memorial Hall, Shishu Academy Auditorium, and Gana Granthagar Auditorium.

Varsity officers' 3-day strike begins tomorrow

Dhaka University Officers' Association will go on a three-day work stoppage from tomorrow, responding to the call of Bangladesh Inter-University Officers' Federation, reports UNB. The strike will be enforced to realise their 4-point demand, including revision of pay scale and provision ensuring their representation to university senates and syndicates. Officers of other universities will also observe the programme, said a DU press release yesterday.