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VOL. VII NO. 333 REGD. NO. DA 781 POUH 14 1404 BS. DHAKA SUNDAY, DECEMBER 28, 1997 SHABAN 27, 1418 HIJRI 12 PAGES : PRICE TAKA 6.00

3 rivers rise
Rabi crops on 55000 acres inundated

SIRAJGANJ, Dec 27: The rabi crops on about 55,000 acres of land in char areas of the Ganges basin have been inundated due to sudden rise of the water level in rivers Padma, Jamuna and Mahananda, official sources here said, reports UNB.

According to the Water Development Board, such rise of water level in the rivers had never been observed in last 22 years during the period following the commissioning of the Farakka Barrage on the Ganges by India.

The vast crop fields in the See Page 12 Col 5

Traffic congestion eases at three ferry ghats

By Staff Correspondent

Traffic congestion at three ferry ghats — Aricha, Daulatdia and Natakholia — eased to a large extent yesterday as fewer vehicles arrived at the ghats over the last three days due to holiday.

Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC) officials said favourable weather and slight rise in river water level also helped in operating the ferries smoothly. As a result, a large number of vehicles were ferried across the rivers.

Early morning fog did not affect ferry movement much today. Till 6 pm today, 1344 vehicles arrived at the ghats while 1475 more vehicles, See Page 12 Col 4

Road link with Ctg disrupted for 8 hours

CHITTAGONG, Dec 27: Road communication between Chittagong and Dhaka remained snapped for eight hours today as agitated workers of Chittagong Textile Mills put up barricade on the highway in front of the mills protesting their lay-offs, reports UNB.

The mill authorities announced the lay-off on Friday. Witnesses said the workers put up barricade at 8 am at the Olongkar Cinema crossing, the entry point of the port city. See Page 12 Col 6

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Khaleda declares at Ramna Park rally

BNP won't return to House unless CHT accord scrapped

By Staff Correspondent

BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia has categorically said her party will not return to the Jatiya Sangsad to discuss the CHT issue unless the anti-national accord on it is scrapped.

"A parliamentary discussion after scrapping the accord can help reach a consensus on the CHT issue and we are ready to participate in such a debate.... There will be no use going there (parliament) if the agreement is not annulled," she told a public meeting at Ramna Park in the city yesterday evening.

The Leader of the Opposition in Jatiya Sangsad said the government could make the Sangsad effective by scrapping the CHT accord and implementing BNP's 14-point charter of demand that includes sufficient time for the Opposition lawmakers to speak in the House.

Criticising the government for not entertaining her proposal for a President-mediated round-table conference on the CHT issue, the former prime minister said, "This proved their insincerity in resolving the political stand-off."

"The CHT accord will break the country into pieces," Begum Zia said and called upon the patriotic citizens to "arm themselves with whatever they have to protect the motherland."

She also blamed the government for what she said signing the CHT accord, ignoring the Opposition parties, by-passing parliament and even keeping the ruling party leaders in the darkness.

"We will have to continue agitation even during the month of Ramadan because, to us, existence of the country is above all. People will not be able to practise religion if the country does not exist."

She also warned of tough agitation to topple the government for its 'anti-national activities' but did not announce any fresh programme at yesterday's rally, organised by the city BNP to protest the CHT accord.

Those in power will flee the country after jeopardising the national sovereignty and handing it over to their foreign masters by signing anti-national agreements one after another. See Page 12 Col 7



BNP chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia addressing a rally at Ramna Park in the city yesterday. — Star photo

Roundtable on financial sector reform told

'Wilful loan defaulters must be punished'

By Staff Correspondent

Time has come to differentiate defaulters who had taken money through fraudulence from those who are victims of the consequences and take actions against the defaulters.

This observation by a group of economists, bankers and businessmen yesterday, received full support from Finance Minister SAMS Kibria. He said quick action has to be taken against those who had committed criminal offence in taking loans.

The minister was speaking at a round-table discussion on financial sector reform, organised by a vernacular daily, Bhorer Kagoj. It was coordinated by Editor of the daily Motiur Rahman.

"I assure you that nobody will be obstructed from doing lawful business. But the government will not waver in taking legal actions against anyone who has broken the law," Kibria said.

"We will not let the practice of wilful defaulting continue. There were defaulters in the society and everyone including the Bangladesh Bank knew about them. But nothing had been done against them. We deserve some credit that we are going to do something against them now," the finance minister said.

The roundtable witnessed lively discussions when a leading entrepreneur, Abdul Awal Minto, remarked whatever is being said about loan defaulters is in fact a 'diversionary tactics' and has been politically inflated out of proportion.

Kibria contradicted him by saying that loan defaulting is a real economic problem.

"I do not agree that it is a diversionary tactics," he said. "It could be said so if defaulting loans had no effect on the economy. It creates wide difference between lending rate and deposit rate."

He said there are three types of defaulters. The first is those who fraudulently take money and do not repay.

"It is beyond my understanding why the Bangladesh Bank do not take action against them," Kibria said. "Here, I really feel helpless. The defaulters are interrupting the law because they are powerful entities."

In the second category fall those defaulters who had taken loans legitimately, he said. They are not repaying the money because no one is asking them to. The normal loan recovery drive will be against them.

"In the third category fall those who had failed in their businesses due to various reasons," he said. "The banks should solve their problems through bank client relationship."

President of FBCCI Yusuf Abdullah Haroon said time has come to stop discussion and take action against defaulters. See Page 12 Col 4

Autonomous bodies do not maintain audited accounts

By Inam Ahmed

All the autonomous public sector corporations have defaulted in preparing audited account statements in defiance of government regulation making it difficult to monitor their financial health and accountability.

There are 165 autonomous bodies and corporations in the country, of which 63 are bound by law to prepare their yearly audited account statements and submit reports to the Executive Committee of National Economic Council (ECNEC). But 47 of those never submitted their reports to ECNEC in the last 26 years since the birth of Bangladesh.

This was revealed in an investigation by the finance ministry recently.

The 47 organisations include Bangladesh Bank, all the nationalised commercial banks, city development authorities, DESA and Civil Aviation Authority.

"This happened mainly because of callousness of the ministries concerned and non-adherence to rules by the corporations," said an official source.

Only four corporations prepared their reports for ECNEC till 1994-95, three prepared till 1993-94, two till 1991-92 and seven till 1990-91.

On the other hand, 27 of the 63 organisations had prepared their audited account statements till 1995-96, eighteen prepared till 1994-95, seven till 1993-94, two till 1992-93, two till 1990-91 and one till 1989-90. Four organisations did not mention any date of their audited accounts.

ECNEC at a meeting in April this year had asked the finance ministry to monitor the submission of reports on accounts.

It was decided that all the autonomous bodies should complete their audited accounts by year end and prepare report for the ECNEC.

Following this, the finance ministry had collected information from the corporations which showed the defaulting nature of their audited accounts.

"The ministries concerned are supposed to ensure that the corporations submit their reports properly audited by chartered accountant firms," said an official concerned. "If they don't, one is really in the dark about the spending of an organisation, its losses and profits. These information are vital for smooth implementation of the budget."

One arrested, case against 6

Killers of BCL activists belong to Shibir: DB

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Dec 27: Police today arrested one Ali Akbar in connection with the killing of three BCL activists by unidentified gunmen in Chandgao residential area here yesterday.

A friend of the victims, Saiful Azam, filed a case with Chandgao thana, accusing six persons of killing the three young men. The six are Mohibullah, Humayun, Yakub, Babar, Jasim, and Ayub Ali, police said.

Detective police officials here said the accused belonged to Islami Chhatra Shibir. Raids were made last night to arrest the accused but they could not be traced.

Cartridge collected from the spot indicated that AK-47 rifle was used to kill the three BCL activists.

But Shibir city unit president Golam Faruk in a statement denied involvement of Shibir activists in the killings. The attack was made as sequel to intraparty rivalry of BCL.

The victims were buried after Janaza at the central Shahid Minar in the city.

Earlier in the morning, BCL supporters staged demonstrations in front of MES College and GEC crossing, demanding arrest of the killers.

Some passing vehicles were damaged and traffic movement came to a halt at GEC crossing during the demonstration.

Mayor of Chittagong Mohiuddin Chowdhury, who is also General Secretary of city Awami League, and BCL leaders blamed the Shibir-backed Nasir Bahini for the killing.

Llyods surveyor due today to assess F-28 damages

Star Report

A surveyor from the Llyods, undertaker of the Fokker-28 aircraft that crash-landed in Sylhet on Monday will visit the damaged plane today.

The assessor arrived in the city on Friday to survey the damages to the aircraft which is said to be beyond salvage.

Biman sources said more surveyors will visit Bangladesh to make the final claims for insurance. The aircraft was purchased for about 12 million dollars in 1981.

The six-member committee investigating the crash-landing of the F-28 with 88 people on board Monday last is meeting today. It will decide where to send the black box and the cockpit voice recorder of the aircraft in a day or two. The decoding will help investigators determine the cause of the accident.

The black box and the voice recorder are likely to be sent either to UK or France for decoding, civil aviation sources said. It will take nearly two weeks to get results of the decoding.

Besides, the investigators will again interview the Captain, co-pilot and two cabin crew of the plane when their condition improves. They survived the crash landing with injuries along with 84 passengers.

The four are recovering at Holy Family Hospital where they were admitted on Thursday.

Meanwhile, Biman operated four domestic flights yesterday using its lone ATP. Two flights were made to and from Sylhet, one to Chittagong one and one to Rajshahi.

Five flights are expected in the domestic sector today, including the one going to Syedpur, Biman sources said.

Ershad not allowed to enter cantt

Jatiya Party yesterday protested the incident of "obstructing" party chairman HM Ershad from entering the Dhaka Cantonment to attend the namaz-e-janaza of Major General (ret'd) Abdul Mannaf, reports UNB.

In a statement, party office See Page 12 Col 5

Production at KNM suspended

From Staff Correspondent

KHULNA, Dec 27: Production at the Khulna Newsprint Mills has been suspended today for an indefinite period due to acute crisis of furnace oil.

The KNM requires 40 tonnes of furnace oil daily for running one of the three units. The authorities had earlier closed two either units for non-availability of furnace oil.

Three oil companies are reported to have returned to supply furnace oil unless the outstanding bills amounting to Tk 7 crore are paid by the mill authorities.

3 drown as boat capsizes in Chapainawabganj

From Our Correspondent

RAJSHAHI, Dec 27: Three persons drowned when a boat capsized in the Mahananda river near Ramjibanpur village under Chapainawabganj district yesterday afternoon.

The victims were identified as Sheuly, 18, of Murshidpur village in Natchol thana, Happy, 11, and Rabeya, 9, both from Chandlai Mahalla of Chapainawabganj thana.

Witnesses said, the boat was overloaded with passengers. BDR personnel rushed to the spot and recovered the bodies. The other passengers swam ashore.

PM attends picnic

GAZIPUR, Dec 27: The Prime Minister today spent nearly two hours with a picnic party at the Bhawal National Park here, reports UNB.

Rehman Sobhan honoured

By Staff Correspondent

Prof Rehman Sobhan was accorded a civic reception yesterday by the Biswa Shahitya Kendra, a literacy and cultural organization, for his outstanding contribution in the field of economics and creating social awareness.

Speakers at the reception, held at an auditorium in the city paid rich tributes to him for his patriotism, firm character, motivating spirit, and lifelong struggle for establishing See Page 12 Col 6

