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Italian PM due Jan 8

Italian Prime Minister Prof Romano Prodi arrives in Dhaka on January 8 on a two-day official visit at the invitation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, reports UNB.

It will be the first-ever official visit by an Italian head of the government to Bangladesh. He will be accompanied by his wife Flavia Prodi.

The two prime ministers are expected to hold formal talks to review the entire gamut of bilateral relations as well as regional and international issues of mutual interests.

The Prime Minister of Italy will pay a courtesy call on President Shahabuddin Ahmed and address a meeting of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI).

His entourage members will include Trade Minister Augusto Fantozzi and Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Umberto Vattani, and a technical economic team and a business delegation.

The visit is considered to be of special significance as it takes place at a time when the two countries completed 25 years of establishment of diplomatic relations.

CHT accord signed unconstitutionally, says Ershad

Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad yesterday accused the Awami League government of reneging its election pledges, reports UNB.

"During its election campaign, the ruling party had committed to scrap the Special Powers Act and give autonomy to the state-run television and radio, but it failed to follow up its words in action," he said.

The former President was addressing a public meeting at the Naz Mohammad High School ground in Brahmanbaria.

Referring to the CHT accord, Ershad said the peace agreement itself has become a threat to peace in the region as it was signed unconstitutionally.

"The accord has curtailed the sovereignty of the country, so we cannot accept it," the deposed president said adding that the AL government "has been isolated from the people and the people are not satisfied with its rule."

Biman

From page 1

from Abu Dhabi via Dubai landed at Chittagong airport yesterday to allow Chittagong-bound passengers to disembark there. It returned to Dhaka with the rest of the passengers, saving the airlines the transit flight to the port city.

Radio-TV

From page 1

of BTV. But BTV's face-lift programme is progressing in such a bullock-cart pace that the authorities concerned could not yet confirm a time for launching private channels in the country. For example, project papers for setting up a 'Reporting Wing' in BTV is still gathering dust in the Planning Commission though the plan was conceived nearly a year ago. To add more, procurement of a hi-tech 'OB-Van' (outdoor Broadcast Van) for BTV has now become an age-old issue.

The minister, however, came up with a logic that in addition to bringing in qualitative changes in BTV, the recently started 'Package Programmes' from private production houses would help team up a good number of media professionals, artists and technicians. "I am sure this will be an added benefit for the would-be owners of private channel operators as they will get a large group of 'readymade' work-force," said Sayeed.

Meanwhile, no substantial progress has been made in allowing private radio channels also. Government's indecision over dedicating FM frequency to private operators has already frustrated at least one internationally reputed broadcasting corporation, said sources on condition of anonymity.

Asian Highway

From page 1

2000.

When completed the road will provide a short-cut link for Bangladesh, as the Myanmar authorities plan to extend it upto Mongdu, opposite Teknaf in Cox's Bazar, ESCAP sources said.

A bilateral negotiation between Myanmar and Bangladesh for having another AH link based on that road is, therefore, very important. Once the countries agree bilaterally, ESCAP can take steps to complete necessary formalities," said an ESCAP high official.

PM sees no tangible reason for BNP's boycott of JS

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday accused the opposition BNP of creating unrest and boycotting the parliament without any tangible reason, reports UNB.

"It is not clear why they're trying to create unrest and not joining the parliament," she said addressing the leaders of Praktan Sainik Sangstha, an association of the retired soldiers, at the PM's office in the afternoon.

Hasina said it is already decided that the present government will quit power on completion of its tenure and take part in the election under a caretaker government. "Why then is the BNP trying to create unrest?"

Referring to the peace agreement on CHT, she said it has cleared the way for restoring peace in the troubled region of the country, but they are opposing the accord just for the sake of opposition.

"We've become successful in signing the accord as we could earn the trust and confidence of the people in the region with our sincere commitment."

The BNP also tried to reach an agreement with the tribal leaders and 'gave many concessions but did not succeed,' Hasina said.

She categorically said, "We've signed the peace agreement without any compromise on the question of Constitution and sovereignty of the country."

The Prime Minister said the government is trying to restore stability and discipline by pursuing appropriate policies in every sector and this has created an investment climate in the country.

"Now it will be possible to accelerate the economic activities using the resources of the country properly," she said calling upon all to cooperate with the government in its mission for moving ahead.

"Now you will have to think how much you can give to the nation, instead of counting what you are getting," she told the former soldiers, saying that it is necessary to sacrifice the present for building a bright and prosperous future.

Narrating the plight of the former soldiers, their leaders said they become jobless after their retirement in early age of about 40 to 45, when they have the most to give to the nation.

The Prime Minister suggested them to involve themselves in different self-employment projects like agriculture, dairy and poultry farming, small business and small industries. She also suggested them to go for bigger projects through cooperatives.

"The government will extend all-out support for your income generation," she said, asking them to take micro-credit for their various projects.

Chief adviser of the Praktan Sainik Sangstha Humayun Kabir, its chairman Zahid Sarwar and vice chairman Mollah Moniruzzaman also spoke on the occasion.

Another adviser of the Sangstha Adjutant General Maj Gen Matur Rahman was also present at the meeting, attended by former soldiers' leaders from different parts of the country.



A delegation of Jahangirnagar University Teachers' Association called on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her office yesterday. — PID photo

FFs peace rally at Rangamati Vow to resist conspiracy against CHT accord

RANGAMATI, Dec 30: Freedom fighters at a peace rally here today expressed their determination to resist the conspirators who are planning evil design against the CHT peace accord, reports BSS.

They also expressed their commitment to uproot these evil elements who have been jeopardising the life of the peace-loving people of Chittagong Hill Tracts in the name of opposing the peace accord.

The peace deal would open up an avenue of peace and prosperity in the region as well as the country, they said.

The peace rally participated by thousands of freedom fighters was held on the municipality office premises this afternoon.

Iqbal Hussain, vice-chairman of Muktioddha Sangsad Central Command Council, presided over the rally while its chairman Abdul Ahad Chowdhury was the chief guest.

Abdul Ahad Chowdhury said these elements who had spread

propaganda against the Bangladesh during the Liberation War have become active again in hatching a conspiracy against humanity, amity, harmony and peace.

Once we have fought for the liberation and now we are prepared to fight for legality and peace, Ahad said, adding that those who cannot advocate peace for the people, they are the enemies of the community.

The chairman urged the opposition to join parliament for discussion on peace accord either for ratification or any modification they desire.

He also urged the freedom fighters to identify those who have been playing with the bloods of the innocent people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts region.

Dipankar Talukder MP urged the freedom fighters to work for the implementation of the peace accord, upholding the spirit of the Liberation War for the betterment of the 12 crore people.

Sonia: Strategies

From page 1

who overtook it in parliament after the last year's elections.

Though Congress today pinned its hopes on Sonia, its opponents said her arrival on the political stage would make little difference.

"Sonia has always been a member of the Congress party, formally or informally. Why will it affect us," said Jaipal Reddy, spokesman for the ousted United Front coalition.

Sonia's move might help galvanise the ailing Congress but could also demystify the myth surrounding her, The India here said today.

The Indian Express said, "the elections will put to a severe test Sonia Gandhi's ability to garner votes, and also her willingness to give up the comforts and safety of the fortified bungalow to mix with the people," it said.

The Pioneer newspaper warned that Gandhi's entry into mainstream politics would make her more accountable to both Congress and her critics.

"The discarding of the Purdah by Sonia Gandhi is welcome news not only for the Congress but for all who have chafed at the unaccountable power that she has wielded so far," it said.

The Express said although her decision would 'stem the exodus' of party members, it would also give rival parties more ammunition against the Congress.

It said the Opposition would rake up a 1986 bribery scandal which led to the fall of her husband's government and the alleged bribe of an Italian businessman who was a close friend of the couple.

The Express said India's Hindu nationalists would also question Sonia's commitment to India and highlight her catholic faith, with a campaign slogan pitting the Hindu God Ram against 'Rome'.

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Assault on JU students: PM assures action

A delegation of the Jahangirnagar University Teachers' Association (JUTA) called on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her office yesterday, reports BSS.

The delegation was led by its president Dr Sharif Enamul Kabir and General Secretary Dr M A Matin.

Talking to the members of the delegation, the Prime Minister said the government has taken steps to bring back discipline in every sphere of life and to create congenial academic atmosphere on the campuses.

Referring to the recent untoward incident between the students of Jahangirnagar University and transport workers on Dhaka-Aricha highway, she said a committee has been formed to probe into it.

The Prime Minister said that action would be taken against those responsible for the incident.

Responding to various demands of the teachers, the Prime Minister assured that steps would be taken to increase the number of departments in the university. She said the medical centre would be improved and a BRTC bus terminal, will be opened at the university gate.

She said the government would also look into the problems of the central library and the shortages of accommodation of the teachers.

Other members of the delegation were Nazma Siddiqi, Khaled Hossain, Prof UHM Shamsunnahar, Dr Mohammad Farhad and Dr Subhas Chandra Das.

JMB to open for traffic June 23

SIRAJGANJ, Dec 30: The Jamuna Multi-purpose Bridge will open for traffic on June 23 next, reports UNB.

This was disclosed by Post and Telecommunications Minister Mohammad Nasim while inaugurating the Inter-city Sundarban Express train at Sirajganj Bazar station today.

Train service resumed on the Sirajganj-Khulna route at 3:36 pm today after 15 years of suspension since 1982.

Addressing the function, the minister said the government has a plan to link the intercity train with Dhaka from Khulna via Sirajganj after the completion of the Jamuna bridge.

He said the government is pledge-bound to develop the country's communication system as "it is the pivotal force for all development."

Nasim called upon all to cooperate with the government in fulfilling its objective by rejecting terrorism.

Sirajganj will be upgraded as a port city of the northern region, he said.

Titas Gas office in Demra ransacked

By Staff Correspondent

A section of local people ransacked a Titas Gas office yesterday morning, demanding proper supply of gas in Golapbagh area under Demra thana in the city.

Police said violence erupted following an altercation between some Titas Gas staff and a group of about 100 people led by the local ward commissioner of DCC. They went to the Titas Gas office to submit a memorandum as shortage of gas supply in the locality persisted.

The agitated people damaged some furniture and a few motor vehicles on the office premises.

Demra police rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control. None was, however, arrested in this connection till the filing of this report last night.

Police said the Titas Gas authorities filed a case with Demra thana.

4 held for attack on garments workers

By Staff Correspondent

Police arrested four local garments owners in connection with the attack on the garments workers at Kaliganj in Keraniganj on Monday.

The arrested were identified as Fazlur Rahman, Nazrul Islam, Mohammad Shahid Mia and Abdur Rauf Khan, police said.

Keraniganj police arrested them on Monday night and produced them before the court yesterday.

Most of the injured people admitted to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital following the incident were released yesterday.

Meanwhile, one person was killed and at least 30 people were injured when a gang of armedmen attacked a rally of ready-made garments workers at Kaliganj Bazar on Monday.

A case was lodged with Keraniganj thana in connection with the incident.

PCJSS planning to send list of armed cadres to govt

KHAGRACHHARI, Dec 30: The Parbatyia Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) is planning to send the government a list of the armed Shantibahini members who will surrender their arms, reports UNB.

Sources in the Liaison Committee, which acts as the go-between for the government and the PCJSS, said the Shantibahini guerrillas want to see the legal coverage to the peace agreement before surrendering their arms.

Under a provision of the peace agreement, the list of the Shantibahini members and surrendering of their arms will have to be made within 45 days from December 2, the date of signing the accord.

The sources said that before the January 14 parliament session, the government and the PCJSS leaders might have some important meetings on the question of preparing the list of Shantibahini cadres and fixation of date for surrendering arms.

When contacted, Liaison Committee convenor Hangsha Dhaja Chakma said the PCJSS has requested the government to declare general amnesty to allow the Shantibahini members to return to normal life.

Sergeant Farhad murder: Main accused held

DB police arrested a wanted criminal, the main accused in sergeant Farhad murder case, from Sadarghat area in the city on Monday night, reports UNB.

Police said GM Sazzad Haider, the alleged killer of Sergeant Farhad, was arrested in several criminal and murder cases.

'Holy' jumps

From page 1

did not decline although harvesting started about a month back. Onion was sold yesterday at Tk 16-18 per kg and garlic at Tk 52-62.

The CAB urged the government to take steps to arrest the price hike of essentials.

Meanwhile, the Commerce Ministry at a meeting yesterday reviewed supply and price situation of the essential commodities in the wake of holy month of Ramadan.

The meeting, chaired by Commerce and Industries Minister Tofael Ahmed, made a clarification call to the business community and other concerned to maintain the price at the normal level.

The leaders of the merchant association informed that the overall price situation of essential commodities particularly rice and pulses have been improving and it would come down to the normal within a week.

If tribals get royalty for natural resources, why not others: Khaleda

By Staff Correspondent

BNP chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia has alleged that the government has destroyed the national economy, peoples' livelihood and Jatiya Sangsad and has now fixed its eye on the country's sovereignty, integrity and its national resources.

"Under such a circumstances, the lawyers representing the conscious section of the society must carry out their duty to the country," the leader of the Opposition in Parliament told a group of lawyers who called on her at her Minar Road official residence yesterday.

Claiming that nothing was safe in the hands of this government, the Opposition leader said, "The government has unveiled its real character through signing two accords, one on the Ganges water-sharing and the other on the CHT. Now the people have understood the reasons for Awami League's coming to power and who helped it."

Criticising the authority of the proposed Regional Council in the CHT, she alleged that the government was conspiring to cripple the country through curtailing powers of the civil servants in the region.

"If the tribals are given royalty for extracting natural resources from CHT, why the people of Sylhet and Brahmanbaria would not be paid royalty for exploration of gas, those in Dinajpur for extraction of coal and of Chittagong for using the port there?" asked the former prime minister.

She also blamed the government for 'attempting to surrender' the mineral and natural resources in the hill tracts through signing the "so-called peace agreement."

"We're going to loose our resources due to the government's fraudulent accord. They are trying to smuggle out our resources through pipelines."

About functioning of the parliament, she alleged that the government did not honour its four-point agreement with the biggest opposition party although it enthusiastically signed an accord with an "illegal" organisation of Shantu Larma.

"The government wants to use the parliament as rubber stamp for approving all its misdeeds."

The lawyers from Netrokona, belonging to the Jatiyatabadi Ainjibi Forum, was led by Nurul Islam Bhuiyan.

Pak presidential polls today

LAHORE, Dec 30: Pakistan's lawmakers prepared to elect a new president, despite a Lahore High Court decision today to adjourn a critical hearing into whether the leading candidate is eligible to hold the office, reports AP.

The Lahore High Court will resume hearings on January 12 into whether Rafiq Tarar, the prime minister's candidate for president, publicly criticised the judiciary, a crime that would disqualify him from holding the office.

But elections will go ahead as scheduled tomorrow and Tarar has been allowed to run. But whether he will be able to continue as president, should he be elected, will depend on the final court decision next month.

If he is disqualified a second presidential election will be held, government officials explained.

The president's job became available on December 2 after Farooq Leghari resigned following a bitter power struggle that pitted Leghari and Supreme Court Chief Justice Sajjad Ali Shah against Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his two-thirds majority in Parliament.

At the end of the day, Sharif emerged a winner. Leghari resigned and Shah was removed as chief justice.

Prokrichi: Memo

From page 1

close to him said.

Sources in the Prokrichi said a disparity has been created between the BCS (Administration) cadres and rest of the 28 cadres of BCS following the unilateral upgradation of 329 posts of the Admin cadre last week.

Earlier in the day, they had separate rallies at the Institution of Engineers, Hospital and the Krishibid Institution.

The BCS (Economic) Officers Association held a rally at the Planning Commission yesterday expressing strong resentment and demanding immediate restoration of parity.

Speakers at the rally said that those officials, who had been instrumental in upgrading their 'upgraded scales' by misinterpreting Dr Matin Committee's report as well as covering up Mannan Bhuiya Committee's benefits, did the 'mischievous' to embarrass the democratically elected government.

According to a press release issued by Dr M A Mabud and Mohammad Rafiqul Islam, President and General Secretary of the association, the meeting decided to submit a memorandum to the Prime Minister, Finance Minister, Political Adviser to the PM and the State Minister for Planning on January 4 and 5, demanding

Train service to & from Sylhet suspended for 11 hrs

From Staff Correspondent

SYLHET, Dec 30: Train service to and from Sylhet was suspended for about 11 hours after derailment of two bogies of a goods train in between Maignan and Bhatera stations at 2:30 am today.

The Dhaka-bound Jayantika Express was cancelled while the Sylhet-bound Upaban Express was detained at Kulaura station for about ten hours.

The Chittagong-bound Paharika Express left Sylhet, but it was six and half hours behind schedule, said the railway officials.

The train service resumed at 1:30 pm today after the rail track was repaired.

'Peace accord has restored rights of tribals'

Water Resources Minister Abdur Razzak yesterday said the government put an end to the long-standing crisis in Chittagong Hill Tracts politically by signing the peace agreement with the tribal leaders, reports BSS.

The agreement has been signed constitutionally, upholding the independence, sovereignty and integrity of the country, the minister said.

Razzak was addressing a discussion on 'agreement on Chittagong Hill Tracts: A bold step towards peace and development' as the chief guest at the Planning and Development Academy. The discussion was organised by Bangladesh Shanti Parishad.

The agreement has ensured peaceful co-existence of the tribal and non-tribal people in the CHT, Razzak said.

Tripartite meet to solve labour disputes held

A tripartite meeting of labour leaders, owners' representatives of Jute and Textile sector and government officials was held at the auditorium of Manpower, Employment and Training Bureau at Kakrail in the city yesterday, reports UNB.

State Minister for Labour and Manpower MA Mannan presided over the meeting.

Addressing the meeting he called upon all concerned, including workers and owners to come forward to solve all kind of labour disputes through mutual understanding and negotiation.

Labour and Manpower Secretary Mohammad Ahsan Ali Sarkar, Secretary of Jute Ministry Mahfuzul Islam, Labour Director, Chairman and Secretary of Bangladesh Jute Spinning Association, General Secretary of Bangladesh Textile Mills Association and labour leaders Ahsan Ullah Master MP, Abdus Salam Khan, Abul Bashir, Lutfur Rahman, Shah Alam, among others, attended the meeting, says a press release.

B'baria firing

From page 1

Polling was postponed in those centres earlier either due to clashes between supporters of rival candidates or snatching of ballot boxes/papers by them. However, the districts where repolling was held are Tangail, Jamalpur, Sherpur, Noakhali and Lakshmipur.

Hartals

From page 1

to-dusk hartal protesting harassment of their party leaders and workers as well as various activities of the government.

July 3: A half-day hartal was called by the BNP to protest the national budget.

July 15: Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ) and Jammat-e-Islami called the hartal to protest the act of disgracing Prophet Hazrat Mohammad (SM) and the holy Quran by the JSM.

August 24: BNP called the hartal to protest the price-hike of fuels.

September 25: A dawn-to-dusk hartal was called by BNP to protest the "undemocratic" activities of the government, ban on street meetings and demonstrations, repression of political opponents and removal of the Bailey bridge from Crescent Lake.

December 7: BNP and six of its allies called the dawn-to-dusk hartal demanding repeal of the "black peace deal" on the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Savings bonds

From page 1

1254 crore during the corresponding period last year. Of this, 55 per cent was foreign financing and 45 per cent domestic financing, compared to 56 per cent and 44 per cent respectively during the corresponding period last year.

But analysts say despite being a non-inflationary way of deficit financing, the increased level of sale in savings instruments will pose some problems later when the time for maturity of the certificates will come. Since the certificates are sold at higher interest rates than bank rate, the government will have to count make in terms of interest.

Repayment on savings certificates is sharply increasing since 1993-94 from when the government had been sponging money from the public to finance a bigger part of the annual development programme.

In 1992-93, the sale of savings certificates totalled Tk 2692 crore which resulted in a repayment increase in 1993-94. In that year, repayment was Tk 1243 crore, up from Tk 642 crore in the previous year. Repayment increased to Tk 1335 crore in 1994-95 and to Tk 2553 crore in 1995-96. It slightly came down in 1996-97 to Tk 2159 crore, but still remaining high.