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Launch capsized 2 drown, 150 missing in Pirojpur

PIROJPUR, Jan 22: Two women drowned and 150 people were missing when a launch capsized in river Kocha near Togra ferry ghat in the district today, reports UNB.

The two women could not be identified immediately.

Survivors said the overloaded launch, MV Baleshwar, sank in the midstream of the river when a cargo vessel, MV Faysal, hit it at about 12:45 pm. They alleged that the master of the Pirojpur-bound launch, ignored the signal of the cargo to maintain a safe distance from it. The launch with about 200 people on board started its journey from Barguna.

About 50 passengers, who were on the rooftop of the launch, managed to swim ashore. But the rest, mainly women and children, were feared drowned.

Seven of the survivors were admitted to Pirojpur Sadar Hospital.

Deputy Commissioner A T M Zulfikar Haider Chowdhury and Police Super MIA Abul Hossain visited the spot, about seven-km south from the district headquarters.

Two crew of the cargo vessel — Babul Mollah and Akhtar Hossain — were arrested as they tried to escape after anchoring the vessel at Indurani ghat.

Rescue teams were continuing their search for the missing persons.

MOU with French co to lease F-28 aircraft

By Special Correspondent

Bangladesh Biman has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with TAT, a French aviation company, to dry lease a Fokker-28-4000 aircraft, official sources said.

It would replace the similar aeroplane Biman lost in an accident in Sylhet last month.

Biman negotiated the MOU after shortlisting four companies out of 22 companies which offered quotes for the dry lease. But the sources declined to disclose details of the agreement.

They said after the deal with TAT is finalised, the aircraft would be on a dry lease for a year and the agreement can be terminated by either side on three months notice.

The deal is expected shortly as Biman is facing trouble in continuing its service in the domestic route, which is now in disarray following the crash.

Bangladeshi farmers get back 40-bigha land along border with India

Bangladeshi peasants have regained the possession of 40 bighas of land in the frontier between Meherpur and Nadia in West Bengal, said a BDR press release, reports UNB.

It said the land between border pillars 126 and 127 at Rudranagar has been under the possession of Bangladeshi nationals since independence.

But a recent move by Indian nationals with the help of BSF men to capture the land led to a squabble between nationals of the two countries.

The Bangladeshi farmers got back the right to cultivate the land as per the decision of a BDR-BSF meeting held on January 9, the press release said yesterday.

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Blast in cosmetics factory in city claims 7 lives



Relatives of explosion victims wailing at the DMCH yesterday.

— Star photo

By Staff Correspondent
At least seven young men were killed and three seriously injured in an explosion in a small cosmetics factory at Rahmatganj in the old part of the city yesterday.

Police said the victims were workers of Motilal Chemical Company located on the first floor of a two-storey building on Haji Ballu Road under Lalbagh than.

The dead were identified as Sumon, 20; Ali Hossain 24; Delwar, 30; Zakir, 20; Md Hossain, 22; Md Ali, 20; and Badal, 21. They succumbed to burn injuries at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

The injured — Zahir, 16; Amir, 14, and Javed, 15 — were admitted to the DMCH. Their condition was critical, hospital sources said.

All the victims suffered burns. The explosion was ignited reportedly by a candle in the congested factory full of chemicals at about 1:30 am.

About 10 workers in the factory workshop lit candles to continue working as the locality plunged into darkness.

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Short-term effect of crises in SEA Bangladeshis will lose jobs, exports to suffer

By Toufique Imrose Khalidi and Reaz Ahmad

Bangladesh is counting the costs of the crises plaguing Asia's so-called tiger economies.

An yet-uncalculated short-term cost is loss of jobs by Bangladeshis in these countries, notably in Malaysia. In the longer run, the country's exports are exposed to a stiff competition from the countries whose currencies have lost value drastically.

A top Bangladesh Bank official said loss of employment by Bangladeshis would reduce remittance from Southeast Asia, but would be "covered by increased receipts" from such

countries as the United States because of improved fund transfer facilities.

"There hasn't been any impact so far," said Deputy Governor Khondker Ibrahim Khaled. The central bank officials have also ruled out any direct impact on the Bangladesh currency. "These countries were exposed too much to foreign borrowing," one official said.

But both government and business circle agree that exports will suffer when Bangladeshis products will compete with those from Southeast Asian countries whose currencies have lost more than half their prices in most cases.

Chamber officials here also point out that these countries are also efficient producers.

According to Metropolitan Chamber, Bangladeshis ready-made garments and leather products, among others, will feel the pinch. The chamber however doesn't see any major problem for Bangladesh in terms of loss in export revenue as the volume of exports to these countries is quite insignificant.

Meanwhile, the government

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Major changes in BB

Star Business Report

The Board of the Bangladesh Bank yesterday vowed to enforce laws to ensure an atmosphere of discipline in the central bank offices and its functions, official sources said.

The bank also made a major reshuffle, putting a deputy governor in charge of administration and replacing the executive director and the general manager in the department.

Hanarayan Majumder was made executive director in charge of administration. The present general manager, Shamsuddin Ahmed, was also replaced.

Changes in other senior positions in the department will also follow.

The changes came in the wake of the unruly activities by trade union activists who as-

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Sharif to punish those responsible for '71 'tragedy'

KARACHI, Jan 22: Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif promised today to punish those responsible for the 1971 'tragedy' when East Pakistan broke away to become the independent state of Bangladesh, reports AFP.

"This is unfortunate that nobody was punished for that tragedy," he said in a speech.

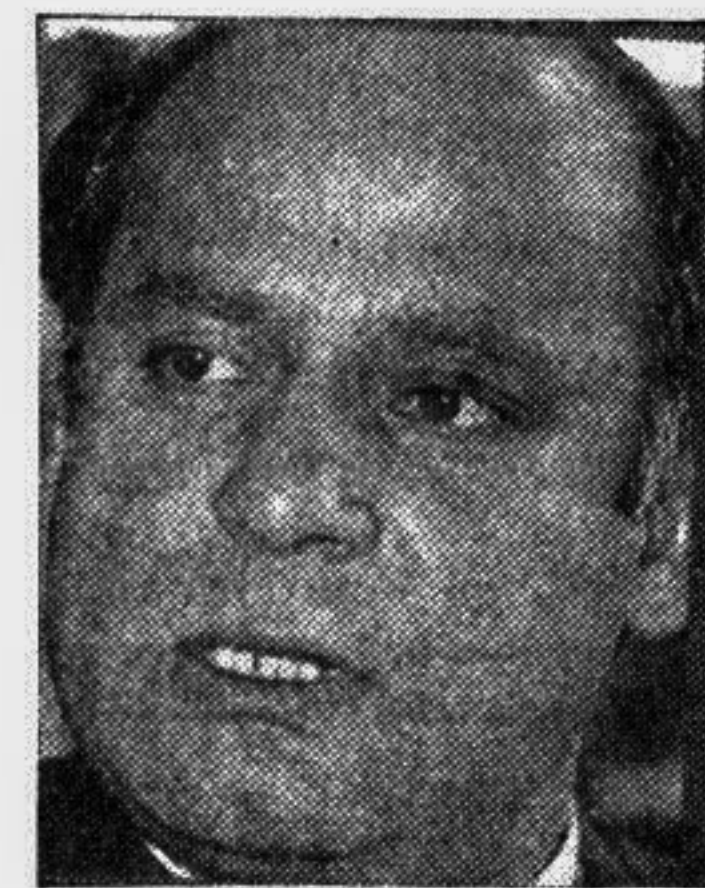
"But we have four years with us and we will definitely do that," Sharif said, addressing a gathering of an allied party, the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM).

Sharif, elected in February for a five-year term, said it was tragic that those who "disembled" Pakistan had become its "respectable citizens."

Sharif did not specify whom he blamed for the dismemberment, which followed a military crackdown against Bengalis under military President Yahya Khan and a war with India which sent its troops into Bangladesh.

A high-level judicial inquiry was held into the 1971 debacle but the report has never been made public.

The MQM, which represents immigrants to Pakistan from India after the subcontinent's partition in 1947, has been demanding the repatriation of more than 200,000 Pakistani nationals who have remained stranded in Bangladesh since 1971.



Nawaz Sharif

The issue of repatriation came up during Sharif's visit to Bangladesh recently. Sharif said repatriation would start when funds were available. A Saudi Arabia-based religious body, Rabita Alam Al-Islami is reportedly trying to raise the money.

A few hundred stranded Pakistanis were repatriated from Bangladesh during Sharif's earlier term as Prime Minister from 1990 to 1993.

At the MQM function today, Sharif distributed cheques to children of MQM activists killed in Karachi during former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's rule.

TU activities banned in Bangladesh Bank

By Staff Correspondent

The government yesterday decided to ban all activities of trade unions or Collective Bargaining Agents (CBA) in the Bangladesh Bank (BB).

The Finance Ministry in a letter to the BB said the government is deeply concerned at the development in the central bank and it is observing these incidents with importance.

It said the government has decided in principle of ban CBA activities in the BB.

The decision came following Monday's incident in which some employees enjoying the blessing of the ruling party had threatened a senior official of the BB with death. Later, a clash between the activists of the CBA and its rivals left a number of people injured.

Finance Minister S A M S Kibria, talking to The Daily

Star yesterday, said some amendments to the Bangladesh Bank Order would be necessary to ban CBAs.

"We will make the necessary legal amendments after the Eid," he said. The decision was taken because of the recent violent incidents at the Bank. Such activities go against the interest of the country and as such these cannot be allowed to go on. These can have destabilising effect on the economy for which we have taken the decision to ban activities of CBAs in the central bank.

This is the second time that the government has decided to ban CBA activities at the central bank. In the first instance, trade union activities were banned in the BB's Security and Printing Press following turbulence.

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Arms surrender from Feb 10 Prime Minister may be present on first day

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is expected to be present when the Shantibahini insurgents lay down their arms on February 10 at the Khagrachhari Stadium, official sources here said yesterday, reports UNB.

Around 2,000 tribal guerrillas are likely to surrender arms, according to a list the National Committee on CHT received on January 15 from PCJSS, the political umbrella of Shantibahini.

The tribals will lay down their arms as per the peace accord signed between the government and Parbatyia Chhattagram Jana Sanghati Samity

(PCJSS) on December 2.

A NCCHT-PCJSS meeting earlier on January 15 had decided that the Shantibahini men will surrender their arms and ammunition to the government on February 9, 16, 22 and 28.

Meanwhile, the government has constituted a three-member implementation committee headed by NCCHT Convenor Chief Whip Abul Hasnat Abdullah to monitor the implementation of the agreement.

Two other members of the committee are Dipankar Talukder MP and PCJSS Convenor Jyotirindriya Bodipriya

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Writ challenging legality of CHT accord rejected

By SC correspondent

The High Court yesterday summarily rejected a writ petition challenging the legality of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Agreement signed between the government and the Parbatyia Chhattagram Jana Sanghati Samity on December 2.

But soon after the rejection of his petition, the writ petitioner, Advocate Shamsuddin Ahmed, said that he would go to the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court to challenge the HC order of rejection.

The division bench of the HC comprising Justice Kazi Shaifuddin and Justice Syed JR Modassir Hossain after hearing the petition on the question of issuance of rule refused to accept the writ.

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Cloths imported for garments sector flood Ctg markets

From Nurul Alam

CHITTAGONG, Jan 22: Local markets here were flooded with foreign cloths worth crores of taka imported in the name of garments factories.

Some racketeers import the cloths under back-to-back LC but sell those in the market in collusion with a section of officials and employees in the customs and in the port jetty, sources said.

Some C&F agents reportedly clear those consignments of cloths imported by the racketeers under a package deal with the officials and employees. Proper checking is hardly done as large sums of 'speed money' are paid under the package deal

before delivery of the consignments, the sources said.

The "speed money" is realised by the customs officials on the basis of quantity of cloths thus imported. "Each and every yard of cloth is counted for realising the speed money," one source said.

Higher amount of "speed money" is realised if any false declaration of imported cloths, like suiting instead of shirting, is detected by the customs officials.

Some consignments of cloths thus imported are reportedly supplied to Islampur market in Dhaka and wholesale markets in the port city,

sources said.

Chittagong custom authorities earlier used to send letters to Dhaka custom authorities to check on the spot whether the consignments of imported cloths delivered from Chittagong port actually reached the garments factories concerned for utilisation or sold outside.

Those letters issued from the Chittagong Customs House, were mostly suppressed by the racketeers in collusion with some dealing clerks though in the register those were shown to have been despatched, the sources said.

Those racketeers reportedly

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Low turnout JS session adjourned till Feb 8

By Staff Correspondent

The current session of the Jatiya Sangsad was adjourned yesterday till February 8.

Yesterday was the fifth working day of the seventh parliament's eighth session that began on January 14.

The House witnessed a dull business yesterday with a very low turnout of lawmakers from the ruling Awami League and the Jatiya Party. The opposition BNP legislators were continuing their boycott. It was private members' day yesterday.

Lack of quorum in the House yesterday forced the Chair to suspend the business briefly and ring the bell to have the out-of-House lawmakers inside.

After the question-answer session, the House adjourned.

BCL factions clash over tender at DU

By DU Correspondent

Two persons were injured when rival factions of the ruling party-backed Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) clashed on the Dhaka University campus yesterday.

The rival groups clashed with bricksbats and stones near the Commerce Building of the university over submitting tender forms for buying computers worth Tk 25 lakh for the Department of Marketing, campus sources said.

The injured were identified as Swapan and Al Amin. Five rounds of gunshots were heard during the incident from Mohsin Hall area of the university.

The activist of the rival BCL factions damaged chairs and window panes of the first floor of the building where the office of the Marketing Department is located.

The tender box was closed following the clash.

Police conducted a raid in the area.

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Attack on Ctg BNP office

CHITTAGONG, Jan 22: Unidentified gunmen attacked the BNP office at Nur Ahmed Sarak in the port city early today, leaving two people injured, reports UNB.

Police said the miscreants fired shots at the office at about 5:30 am, injuring Jasim, 20, son of the security guard of the BNP office at Nasim Bhaban, and Mohammad Jasimuddin, 22.

The victims, who were sleeping during the attack, were rushed to Chittagong Medical College Hospital with bullet wounds.

Meanwhile, city BNP at a rally today blamed Awami League and its student wing Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) for the attack, and demanded punishment to the persons responsible.

Severe traffic jam at 3 ferry ghats again

MANIKGANJ, Jan 22: A severe traffic congestion was created at Aricha, Nagbari and Daulatdia ghats following disruption in ferry services due to thick fog today, reports UNB.

BIWTC sources said about 8,000 vehicles were stranded at the three ghats as the ferry services were suspended for 11 hours since early Wednesday.

They said a seven-km-long queue of vehicles was formed on Dhaka-Aricha highway while a three-km line at Natakola and a two-km queue at Daulatdia ghat due to the congestion.

The problem worsened further when three ferries went out of order, disrupting road communication between Dhaka and north and southern regions of the country.

Today, a total of 454 vehicles were ferried while 1750 were waiting in queues to cross Padma and Jamuna.

The sources apprehended that the traffic jam at the ghats may take a serious turn as the Eid festival is drawing near.

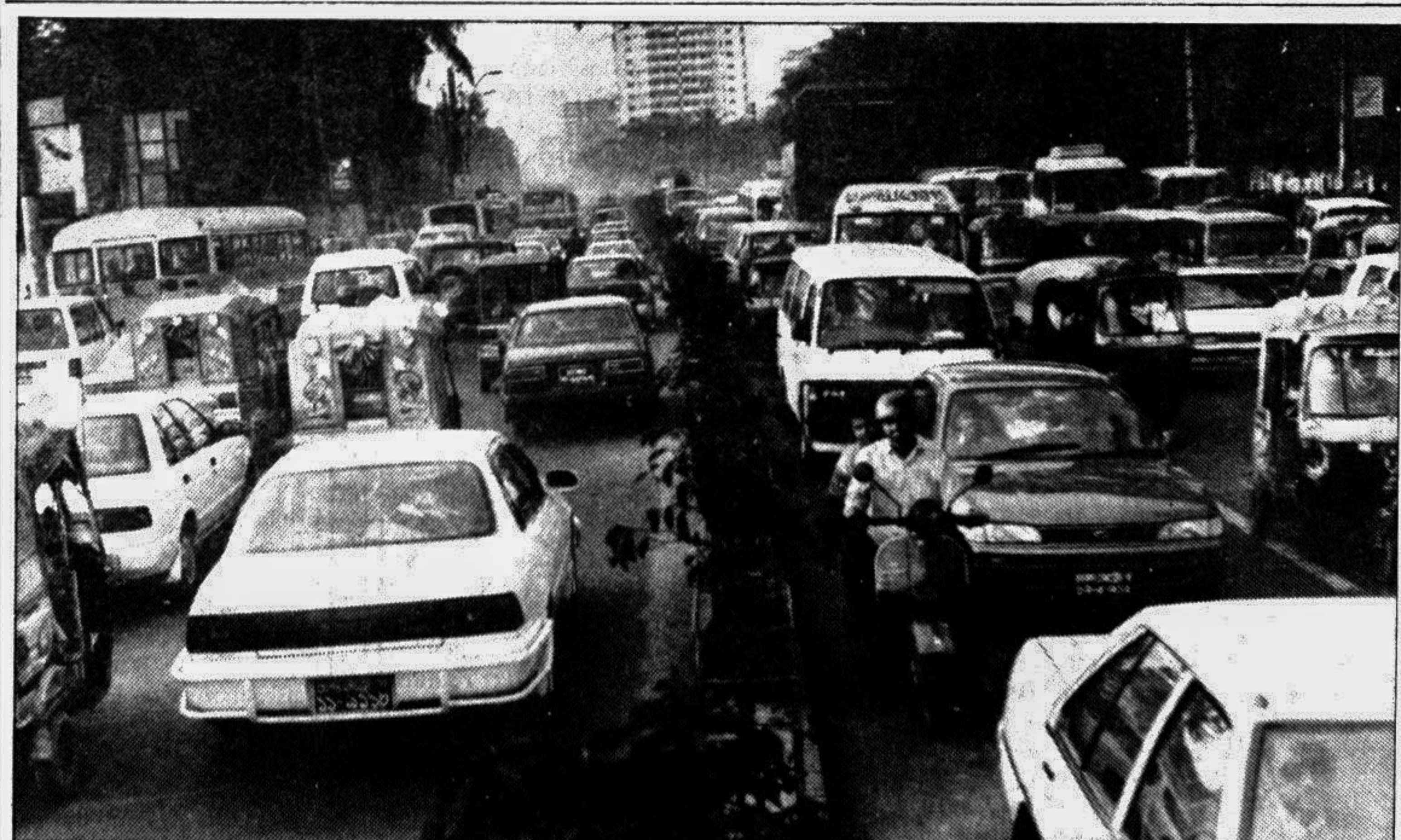
Kidnapped jeweller released

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Jan 22: The owner of a renowned jewellery shop in the city who was abducted by an unidentified armed gang four days ago, returned home last night after he was released by the kidnappers, police said.

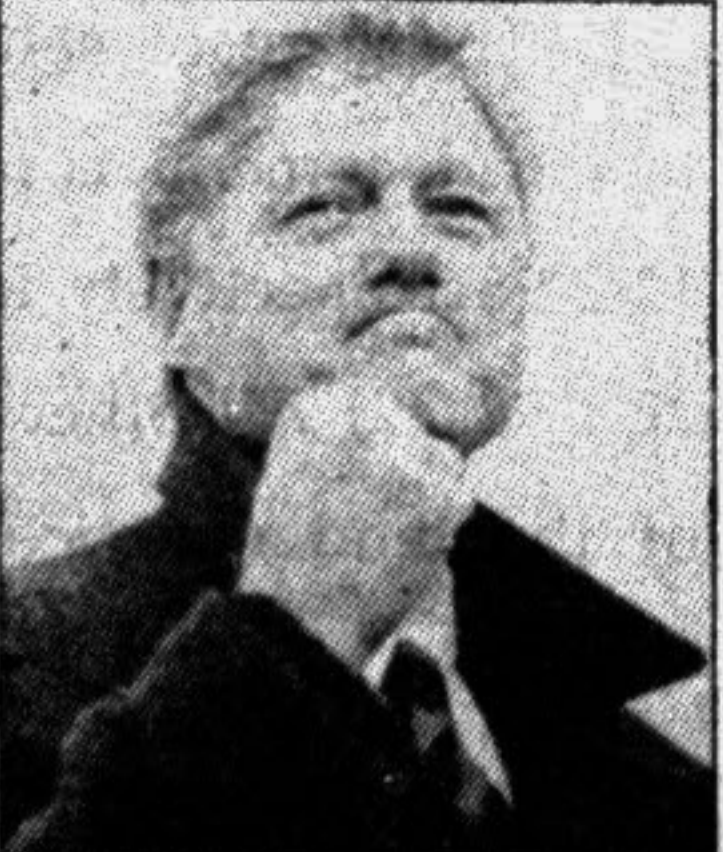
The abductors released Chapal Banik, 51, at Chowkbazar at around 12:30 hours last night after bringing him blind-folded by a microbus from the hideout of the armed gang, police said.

But it was unclear whether his release came after payment of ransom, sources said.



Heavy traffic jam in the city yesterday. The picture was taken from Bangla Motor area.

— Star photo



Bill Clinton

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Clinton admits he had affair with Flowers

WASHINGTON, Jan 22: President Bill Clinton has acknowledged for the first time last Saturday that he had an affair with Gennifer Flowers during the 1970s, AP said quoting a published report.

The Washington Post says in today's editions that the statement came during the president's six-hour deposition in the Paula Jones sexual harassment lawsuit. The Post quoted

unidentified sources familiar with his testimony.

During the 1992 presidential campaign, Clinton denied Flowers' statements that he was romantically involved with her but admitted having caused pain in his marriage.

Ms Flowers, who lives in Dallas, called The Associated Press early today after hearing the report from a friend.

Asked for comment, she said, "I have none at this time," but then added, "It's hard to believe after all this time..." she said. She said she planned to make a fuller statement later today.

The Post said White House special counsel Lanny Davis declined to comment about the testimony on Flowers, citing the gag order imposed by the judge in the Jones case.

Reuter adds: British newspapers today raised the spectre of the Watergate scandal that toppled Richard Nixon in reporting new accusations of sexual impropriety against President Clinton.

The tabloid Daily Star pro-