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Order to produce ULFA leader in court on Feb 3

By Staff Correspondent

The court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate (CMM), on a petition of the Bangladesh Manobadhikar Shamannay Parishad (BMSPP), on Thursday ordered for production of Anup Chetia alias Golap Barua, in the court on February 3. BMSPP lawyers said.

Alina Khan, one of the lawyers of the organisation who moved the petition said that they prayed for open trial of the cases filed against Barua and his production in person before the court.

BMSPP sources said that their lawyers were denied access to Dhaka Central Jail to see Barua, serving a 30-day detention.

Barua said to be the secretary general of United Liberation Front of Assam was arrested from a house in the city's Mohammadpur area and sent to the Dhaka Central Jail on January 1.

Charges brought against Barua include entering the country with false travelling documents, possessing illegal foreign currency, satellite phone and illegal stay in Bangladesh.

Police sources in the Mohammadpur area, when contacted last night said that they were yet to file the chargesheets of the cases filed against Barua.

Sunken launch traced, another body recovered

PIROJPUR, Jan 23: The death toll from Thursday's launch disaster in the river Kocha here rose to three with the recovery of the body of a minor girl today, reports UNB.

Two women were killed and 150 people reported missing after MV Baleshwar, hit by cargo vessel MV Faisal, sank in the river Thursday afternoon, survivors said.

Identity of the minor girl, aged about 10, could not be known immediately.

Divers traced the capsized launch about 200 yards south of the main spot this afternoon. They also continued the search for those missing.

However, rescuers were yet to ascertain if bodies were trapped inside the launch.

Chief Whip Abul Hasanat Abdullah visited the spot and directed the authorities concerned to bring rescue vessels Hamza or Rustam to salvage the ill-fated launch.

The Divisional Commissioner, DIG, Deputy Commissioner and Police Super were present.

Sunni protester gunned down in Pakistan

PESHAWAR, Jan 23: Gunmen opened fire on a demonstration by Sunni militants in a remote corner of northwestern Pakistan today, killing one person and injuring nine others, some of them critically, the authorities said, reports AP.

Barely 100 members of the militant Sunni group, Sipah-e-Sahabah or Guardians of the Friends of the Prophet, had converged on the bazaar in Hangu, about 60 kilometers (36 miles) southwest of Peshawar, when gunmen opened fire.

The gunmen attacked the

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Sehri, Iftar timings				
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24	24	5-20	5-42	
25	25	5-20	5-43	
26	26	5-19	5-44	

Akhtaruzzaman's party activities suspended

By Staff Correspondent

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has suspended 'all organisational activities' of dissident party MP, Major (retd) Akhtaruzzaman, accusing him of breaching party discipline.

A BNP press release last night said, "All organisational activities of Maj (retd) Akhtaruzzaman, as a primary member, BNP National Council member, Kishoreganj district committee convenor and BNP National Executive Committee member have been frozen."

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan told The Daily Star yesterday that the disciplinary action against Akhtaruzzaman would not affect his status as a BNP lawmaker "as long he does not vote against the party."

Replying to another question whether the party lawmaker was consulted before the action, Mannan Bhuiyan said that the decision of suspension was taken after the party's Standing Committee heard him recently.

Meanwhile, in an instant reaction to his suspension, Akhtaruzzaman told The Daily Star last night that he would launch a signature campaign in his constituency and meet the party Chairperson Begum Khaleida Zia soon to demand withdrawal of the suspension order.

Talking over telephone from his constituency in Kottadi, Kishoreganj the "rebel" BNP lawmaker said he along with his supporters will come to

Dhaka to seek an audience with the party chief.

Akhtaruzzaman's suspension came in the wake of his recent campaign for the party's return to the parliament. The BNP has been staying out of parliament since it walked out of the House on August 30 last year.

BNP Standing Committee, the highest policy making body of the party, on January 12 summoned Akhtaruzzaman and had a written apology from him for circulating an open letter among party MPs arguing for the party's return to parliament.

Akhtaruzzaman addressed a party rally yesterday evening at Kottadi to explain his stand before.

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'Large-scale retrenchment unlikely' 1000 Bangladeshis lose jobs in Malaysia

By Reaz Ahmad

About one thousand Bangladeshis workers have lost their jobs in Malaysia in the wake of a recent slump in the fast growing economy of that country.

Official sources in Dhaka confirmed yesterday that about 1,000 Bangladeshis workers have been retrenched, mainly from service sectors, by private companies in Malaysia. They, however, brushed aside a recent report of a Malaysian daily that had estimated retrenchment of forty to sixty thousand Bangladeshis workers in that country.

Talking to The Daily Star, officials of the Labour and Manpower Ministry said that the Bangladeshis workers who lost jobs in Malaysia over the last one week were not expected to return home right now.

Quoting a message received from the Bangladesh mission in Kuala Lumpur, the sources told this correspondent that the Malaysian government was trying its best to absorb the retrenched foreign workers having legal work permits in the export-oriented manufacturing sector and the plantation sector.

The Malaysian government

has decided to absorb the workers with proper immigration papers into sectors where they are immediately needed. Some 60,000 workers are needed in the plantation sector and other 20,000 in the manufacturing sector, they said.

However, they could not say readily how many more Bangladeshis workers would face joblessness till absorption in the two sectors begins.

An international news agency quoted Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim as saying recently that despite a slowdown in the economy, the country was focusing on moving foreign workers to more vibrant sectors.

Earlier this month, another Malaysian minister had said that one million out of a total 2.2 million foreign workers in that country would be sent back home due to the slow economic growth.

Mentionably, there are some three lakh Bangladeshis working in Malaysia whose jobs feared to be vulnerable in the wake of the current spell of depression that swept the so-

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EU body meets soon to discuss ban on shrimp

By Special Correspondent

The veterinary standing committee of the European Commission (EC) would take up the issue of whether to continue the ban on entry of Bangladeshi shrimps to the European Union (EU) market, in the first week of next month.

The EU slapped a ban on Bangladeshi fish products following a report by its inspectors that the EU health guidelines were not being followed in the fish processing plants it visited last year.

Bangladesh embassy officials in Brussels told Frozen Foods Association president Mohammad Golam Mostafa Thursday that the veterinary standing committee may take up the case of Bangladesh either on February 4 or February 10.

They said that they have been lobbying hard with the EC to lift the ban that has almost halved the annual Bangladesh frozen fish exports of 350 million US dollars, as the EU ban was followed by similar moves by Kuwait and Canada.

The embassy officials told Mostafa they are hopeful that the ban is likely to be withdrawn by EU following measures taken by fish processors to improve hygiene conditions in their factories.

BJP's new ploy to win hearts of Muslim voters

KANPUR, India, Jan 23: The leader of India's Hindu nationalists today made a direct appeal to Muslims to abandon their traditional suspicions and vote his party to power in upcoming elections, reports AFP.

Atal Behari Vajpayee told a rally of 100,000 people here in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh that Hindus and Muslims should "march hand in hand...shoulder to shoulder."

He made the conciliatory speech in the city of Kanpur, where around a third of the four million population are Muslims.

He added: Muslims are changing their attitude towards us, they realise the reality.

"They were looking at us over the past 50 years through the glasses of our adversaries, now they are seeing our programme."

Earlier this week he had to disown making comments

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Jumatul Wida observed

The holy Jumatul Wida, the last Friday of the holy month of Ramadan, was observed throughout the country yesterday with due respect and solemnity, reports UNB.

Thousands of devoted Muslims thronged different mosques to offer Jumma prayers.

At the Baitul Mukarram Mosque over one lakh devotees offered prayers.

President Shahabuddin Ahmed offered his prayer at Bangabhaban mosque.

State Minister for Religious Affairs Maulana Nurul Islam, Director General of Islamic Foundation Mohammad Morshed Hossain, Religious leader of Iran Hazrat Ayatullah Shahrampi and Iranian Ambassador to Bangladesh Saadeq Faiaz were, among others, present during the Jumatul Wida Khutba at Baitul Mukarram National mosque.

Special prayers were offered

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The Jumatul Wida congregation at the Baitul Mukarram Mosque yesterday was also participated by a large number of women. — Star photo

6 merchant banks, 4 issue managers likely to get licences tomorrow

By M Shamsur Rahman

Six merchant banks and four issue managers are expected to receive licences tomorrow and will begin business soon, SEC officials said.

The SEC Board gave the necessary stamp of approval Wednesday after clearance from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), raising prospects for a revival of the bearish stock market.

The Board also framed new rules for issuance of rights shares in the wake of complaints against companies. The Rights Share Issue Rules 1998 will replace the existing guideline.

Details of the rules could not be known. SEC officials said the new laws, to be gazetted soon, aimed at tougher regulation of rights shares management.

While there are high hopes about the role and impact of the merchant banks, some analysts say the companies could run short of trained manpower.

Issue management, under-

writing and portfolio management are three key functions of a merchant bank.

There are several issue managers already in the market, but some bigger ones have remained out of business since being implicated in the share market manipulation early last year.

The government-controlled Investment Corporation of Bangladesh and members of Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) acted as underwriters, the second job of a merchant bank. Insurance companies and banks also started underwriting business later.

Issue management and underwriting are directly related with public issue. Issue manager manages the issue on behalf of the issuer while underwriter bears the risk.

"Portfolio management is the only merchant banking activity which may contribute effectively to the country's capital market at this moment," said Moin Al Kashem, a capital market analyst.

"Portfolio managers act on behalf of individuals as well as institutions in designing and managing their portfolios. Thus they have access to different sources of untapped funds, which may strengthen capital market's demand side," Kashem said, explaining the possible role and impact of the new institutions.

"Moreover, their professionalism in risk-return analysis will build investors' confidence, lack of which makes the capital market unstable."

He, however, cautioned that acute shortage of human resources with expertise and experience in this field could pose a problem for these companies.

The six merchant banks getting the go-ahead are: Vanik Bangladesh, Sabineco, Banko Transworld Bangladesh, Millennium Investment Management Company — at Rahmatganj in Lalbagh area. With this, the death toll from the explosion rose to eight.

However, the deaths did not affect normal work in a number of other such factories in Rahmatganj area yesterday. This correspondent found workers working in the congested single-room cosmetics factories in the area.

Local people alleged that some people buy or hire old buildings in the area and set up factories dealing with inflammable chemicals. These small factories, mostly producing cosmetics, plastic goods and polythene bags do not have any emergency exit or arrangement

Blast in cosmetics factory Another dies, owners go into hiding

By Staff Correspondent

Another young man who was fatally injured in an explosion at a cosmetics factory in the city's Lalbagh area on Thursday died at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital early yesterday morning.

The dead was identified as Amir Hossain 24, a worker of the factory — Motilal Chemical Company — at Rahmatganj in Lalbagh area. With this, the death toll from the explosion rose to eight.

However, the deaths did not affect normal work in a number of other such factories in Rahmatganj area yesterday. This correspondent found workers working in the congested single-room cosmetics factories in the area.

Local people alleged that some people buy or hire old buildings in the area and set up factories dealing with inflammable chemicals. These small factories, mostly producing cosmetics, plastic goods and polythene bags do not have any emergency exit or arrangement

for extinguishing fire.

Motilal Chemical Company was housed in a makeshift room on the roof of a very old building at Haji Ballu Road.

Khokon, a part-time worker of the factory, who was present during Thursday's explosion managed to escape as one of his colleague broke open the only exit which was locked from inside. Khokon, a resident of the locality, suffered burns in his arms.

The explosion in Motilal Company occurred when a candle somehow fell into a bowl containing highly inflammable substance like spirit.

"We have to continue work with candle light when there is no power supply. Otherwise owners cut our two days' salary. This led us to take the risk," replied Khokon when asked why they used candle in the factory dealing with inflammable chemicals.

Meanwhile, the three owners of the affected factory have re-

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'Devalue Taka to make exports competitive'

By Special Correspondent

Different bodies of exporters including Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers Association (BGMEA) have demanded immediate devaluation of Taka further to make exports competitive.

The demand was made at a meeting of the exporters on Thursday with BGMEA president Mostafa Golam Kuddus in the chair.

After reviewing the currency adjustment by competitor countries like Indonesia, Thailand, South Korea, Philippines, India, Thailand, Pakistan and Sri Lanka the meeting urged the government to adjust the exchange rate at Tk 50 for one US dollar.

They also urged the main opposition party in parliament BNP to return to House, putting economic agenda above 'political goals'.

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Mass Upsurge Day today

The Mass Upsurge Day will be observed today to commemorate the popular uprising against the Pakistani military dictatorship in 1969, reports UNB.

On this day in 1969, school student Motiur Rahman Malik and a teenager Rustam were killed in police firing at the final stage of the mass movement that ousted General Ayub Khan from power and paved the way for the country's independence.

Motiur was a student of class ten of Nabakumar Institute. Many others were also injured in the indiscriminate police firing during a general strike in the city on that day.

In a message on the eve of the day, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has paid tributes to the memory of Shaheed Motiur and other martyrs of the historic Mass Upsurge of 1969.

Different political and socio-cultural organisations and student bodies have drawn up elaborate programmes to mark the day.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will attend a discussion meeting at Nabakumar Institute this afternoon.

Dacoit dies as he jumps from rooftop to flee

An alleged dacoit arrested by police died as he tried to escape by jumping from the roof of a five-storeyed building at Lal Mohan Saha Street in the city yesterday, reports UNB.

The alleged dacoit, Arun Chakrabarty, was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital and then shifted to Pangu Hospital where he succumbed to his injuries at about 4.30 am, said a DMP press release.

Earlier, Detective Branch police arrested Arun along with two accomplices, Helal and Ayub — on charge of committing dacoity at a house at Padmaidhi Lane on January 18.

During interrogation, Arun admitted that he kept some of the looted goods and fire arms in his house at Lal Mohan Saha Street.

According to his confessional statement, police took Arun to the house to recover the goods on Thursday night. At one stage of searching, Arun jumped from the roof of the building.

An unnatural death case was filed with Tejgaon police.

Israel rejects US proposal

JERUSALEM, Jan 23: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has rejected US proposals for an Israeli troop pullback from at least 10 per cent of the West Bank, a senior Palestinian negotiator told Reuters from Washington today.

"The Americans told us that Netanyahu has rejected two digits for the redeployment and he insists on cancelling the third phase of further redeployment," the negotiator, Saeb Erekat, said by telephone.

The gaps between us and Netanyahu are very big because what Netanyahu is offering is totally alien to the Oslo accord," he added.

Alleged trader of illegal firearms arrested

By Staff Correspondent

Detective police arrested an alleged illegal firearms trader along with two revolvers and a gun from Bonogram area in the city Thursday evening.

The arrested person was identified as Mojibar Rahman alias Tota, 28, an accused in several cases filed with different thanas in the city.

In a six-hour operation, police arrested Mojibar from a house at Bonogram Road in Sutrapur thana.

Mojibar was involved in selling firearms to criminals in the city for long, police said.

A case was lodged with Sutrapur thana in this connection.