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## Biman employees reject pay scale, stage sit-in

By Special Correspondent

Bangladesh Biman employees yesterday staged a sit-in at its headquarters rejecting the new pay scale proposed for them by the Finance Ministry.

They demanded a special pay structure for the airline employees. Their leaders said airlines all over the world have a specialised pay scale.

The employees later met Minister for Civil Aviation Mosharraf Hossain, who was at the Biman head office at the time, and explained various aspects of their grievances.

Biman CBA president Abul Kashem said they have been receiving special pay above that of the government and autonomous organisation employees.

The government employees' minimum pay was fixed at Tk 1500. The Biman employees' minimum pay has been set at Tk 1560, he said adding that there had a number of anomalies in the proposed pay-scale for the Biman employees sent to the airline management recently.

Police kept vigil at the Biman head office.

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## Sunken launch salvaged: Death toll rises to 13, 100 still missing

PIROJPUR, Jan 25: The sunken launch, MV Baleswar, was rescued with 10 more bodies on Saturday night two days after it capsized in the river Kacha of the district, raising the death toll to 13, reports UNB.

The rescue workers apprehended that more bodies might be recovered from the river basin of Baleswar and Kacha as over 100 passengers of the launch were still missing.

Twelve of victims were identified as Rabiul, 6, Majlun Bibi, 55, Jona Begum, 18, Zesmin, 11, Nurunnisa, 22, Nawab Jan Howlader, 45, Peyara Begum, 38, Sakina Begum, 35, Rabeya, 5, Asma Begum, 8, Beby Begum, 20, and Shahera Begum, 30.

Meanwhile, Deputy Commissioner of the district handed over the 12 bodies to their relatives while another unidentified body of a woman has been kept at Pirojpur Ad-hunik Hospital.

## Lailatul Qadr tonight

Holy Lailatul Qadr will be observed by the Muslims all over the country tonight, reports BSS.

The devotees will offer prayer throughout the night, seeking divine blessings for themselves as well as for the country.

Newspapers will publish special articles highlighting its significance in today's issues while the Bangladesh Television and Bangladesh Betar will broadcast special programmes on the occasion.

The Islamic Foundation has drawn up elaborate programmes on the occasion.

## Inside Today

### Article

#### Will East Asia export its Deflation abroad?

Column: Insight by Kabir U Ahmed Page 4

### Focus

#### Whither equal rights?; and An approach for reduction of urban poverty

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### Business

BOI chief targets corruption, red tape  
4-point fall in DSE index  
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### Supplements

Today's 16-page issue of The Daily Star contains a 3-page supplement on 'Real Estate' on Pages 13, 14 & 15 and one page supplement on 'Australia Day' on Page 16

### Sehri, Iftar timings

Ramadan	Jan	Sehri	Iftar
26	26	5-19	5-44
27	27	5-19	5-45
28	28	5-19	5-45

## Industrialists, employers demand Scrap accord with SKOP on wages commission

By Staff Correspondent

Six leading associations of industrialists and employers yesterday demanded immediate scrapping of the agreement signed on Tuesday between the government and the Sramik Kar-machari Oikkyo Parishad (SKOP) on formation of a Wages Commission.

The 12-point agreement, among other things, mentioned that the Wages Commission would be formed within one month and the national minimum wages for industrial workers would be announced within six months which would be effective from July 1, 1997. It also stipulated that all regular workers will get a lump sum amount of Tk 1000 in advance and temporary workers Tk 500.

pending implementation of the Wages Commission Award.

The government would not go for any massive denationalisation programme, the agreement said.

In a joint statement the associations expressed 'deep concern' and said they were 'perturbed' over the agreement.

The statement was signed by Rokia A Rahman, President, Bangladesh Employers Association, Mostafa Golam Qudus, President of Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association, Mohammad Shahjahan, Chairman of Bangladesh Textiles Mills Association, Najmul Haq, Chairman of Bangladesh Jute Spinners Association, Mirza Ali

Behrouze Ispahani, Chairman of Bangladesh Jute Mills Association and Samson H Chowdhury Vice-President of Bangladesh Aushad Shilpa Samity.

"It is most unfortunate that the democratically elected government yielded to the pressure of SKOP, repeating the mistake which was earlier committed by an autocratic government," the statement said.

The agreement will have far reaching legal and adverse financial implications.

It is a well-known fact that the SKOP does not have any legal status. The agreement is a serious blow to rule of law, which has been promised time and again by the government.

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## Clinton may be impeached if charges prove true

WASHINGTON, Jan 25: Charges President Bill Clinton lied about an alleged affair with a former White House intern could, if true, bring down the President, AFP quoting a former top White House official said.

"If these are baseless charges, it'll be OK," former White House chief of staff Leon Panetta told the San Jose Mercury News in an interview published Saturday.

But if there is some truth in the allegations, it would be better for the Democrats if (vice president) Al Gore became president and you had a new message and new individual up there," Panetta told the daily.

Clinton faces allegations he had an affair with 24-year-old Monica Lewinsky, lied under oath about the relationship and urged the young woman to lie about it in a sworn statement.

If proven true, the charges would likely lead the House of Representatives to initiate impeachment proceedings.

Meanwhile, nearly half of Americans say they would favour Clinton's impeachment and ouster if the allegations are true.

A new Newsweek survey of 751 adults conducted January 22-23 says Americans would support the wrenching political step by a 49 to 43 percent margin.

The poll says that 57 percent of Americans believe that telling someone to lie about a sexual relationship is on the same scale as the 'high crimes and misdemeanors' that led Richard Nixon to resign the presidency in disgrace in 1974.

An NBC poll showed that Clinton's popularity was plummeting, down 15 percentage points since the scandal broke last week. In addition, 70 per cent of those surveyed did not believe the President had been candid or open.

Another report says, Monica Lewinsky's attorney pledged today that his client would 'absolutely, unequivocally' tell the full story about her relationship with Clinton if she's granted immunity.

"Yet lawyer William Gins-



Monica Lewinsky and President Bill Clinton are shown in an image taken on November 6, 1996, at a White House lawn party. The pair will be the cover of TIME's February 2, 1998, issue.

— AP/UNB photo

burg declined again to say whether Lewinsky had a sexual affair with the president. "I cannot broach the attorney-client privilege," he told NBC's 'Meet the Press'.

Reuter adds: Clinton's advisers are prepared to attack the character of Lewinsky if she makes a deal to testify that the president had a sexual relationship with her and wanted her to lie about it, the Washington Post reported today.

Clinton advisers are bracing for a possible deal between Ginsburg, and independent counsel Kenneth Starr, the Post said, such a deal would grant

immunity from prosecution for Lewinsky in turn for her testimony about her relations with the President.

Those advisers are plotting legal strategy for how they might attack Lewinsky's credibility if she turns on the president, the newspaper reported.

"Until now, they have been careful not to demean Lewinsky's character, lest they offend her and send her into Starr's arms. But sources say they are prepared to call her integrity into doubt if she contradicts Clinton's denials," according to the Post.

## Jewellers sell gold at much higher price

By Govinda Shil

Beware of unscrupulous jewellers if you are going to purchase any gold ornaments!

Dishonest jewellers are pocketing huge amount of money through their greedy sleight of hands by charging much more than the actual price of the bullion in the international market.

The unscrupulous ornament

sellers have fixed gold price at Tk 9,500 per tola (bhar) or 11,664 gm against its current international price of Tk 4,814 only (one ounce or 31 gm for 280 US dollars).

Ornaments sellers cannot give any satisfactory answer why the big difference still exists between the local price of gold and its international price.

If anyone gives Tk 420 as duty on each tola of pure gold, the price should remain at Tk 5,234. But local jewellers are charging Tk 6,200 to Tk 6,500 for each bhori of the ornament, depending on its craftsmanship.

Moreover, most gold ornaments sold in the local market hardly contain 21 karat as

guaranteed by these traders. Here also the customers are being cheated. Every jeweller in the city hangs a notice in his shop saying all gold items contain 21 karat.

"In most cases, buyers are cheated," said Aftab Ahmed of the Guinea Exchange Jewellers. He said many jewellers do not maintain 21 karat standard at all. The helpless buyer has to simply believe in what the seller claims as regards his merchandise. There is no other way to ascertain the purity unless the gold is melted and separated from the mix.

"This is another way of pocketing and appropriating money from the innocent people," Ahmed said claiming that he sells 22-karat guaranteed gold ornaments in the city. "They claim 21 karat and the customer sometime gets less than 18 karat," he alleged.

Any incoming Bangladeshi can bring in three kg of pure gold or equivalent gold ornaments with him under the present 'baggage rule', paying Tk 420 duty on each 11,664 gm.

"You can bring baggageful of gold from abroad but you cannot sell or even display it under the existing law," said M A Wadud, President of Bangladesh Jewellers Association. "This law must be changed for the sake of easy procurement of gold for the jewellers."

Wadud, however, could not explain how pure gold was being procured for the ornaments industry. One source said gold bar is purchased from some illegal

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Police on duty on the Bangladesh Bank premises following a clash between rival trade union activists recently. — Star photo

## Ekushey Book Fair

### No stall to be allowed outside Bangla Academy

No stall will be allowed to set up outside the Bangla Academy to ensure a congenial atmosphere in the Ekushey Book Fair-98 which is scheduled to begin on February 7, reports UNB.

The decision was taken at the Inter-Ministerial meeting recently.

In line with the government's previous decision of not allowing any gathering on the city street, the authorities took the decision to ensure free movement of vehicles in the city and uphold the significance of the great Ekushey February with due solemnity.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will inaugurate the month-long Book Fair on the day at 10.30 am at the Academy premises.

In previous years, stalls on other items and using of mike spoiled the atmosphere of the Ekushey Book Fair.

## CHT agreement anti-constitutional, says Biswas

Former President Abdur Rahman Biswas yesterday called the CHT accord 'anti-constitutional' and said that people's rights were violated by this agreement, reports UNB.

Addressing an exchange of views meeting on the Chittagong Hill Tracts accord at Jatiya Press Club, he said any decision regarding interest of the country should be taken with consensus of people.

"Opinion can't be sought from people individually. But there are their representatives — the MPs. The government should take decision considering the opinion of the MPs and experts," he said.

Biswas, who was the President from 1991 to '96, said that "the government alone can't do everything, it shouldn't."

The former President said people's rights were violated by the CHT accord, but said that

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## BB authorities put TU offices under lock and key

By Staff Correspondent

The Bangladesh Bank (BB) authorities yesterday put all the offices of trade unions (TUs) and the CBA in the Bank under lock and key in a bid to clamp down on trade union activities.

The BB went into action in the afternoon after reviewing the investigation report on last Monday's incident of violence in the Bank.

In the central banks head office, five offices of TUs and the CBA were closed down. The BB authorities also faxed messages to all its branches throughout the country to take similar actions.

This is the second time that the BB closed TU offices. The first time it took similar measures was in 1981 under an instruction from the then president Justice Abulhas Sattar.

These TUs and the CBA are now illegally occupying 6217 square feet of office space which could bring Tk 1.5 lakh monthly as rent.

According to law, the lone recognised CBA of the Bank is entitled to one office in the headquarters.

"We will later decide which room to be given to the CBA," said a BB source. "But until then all offices would be kept under lock and key."

Meanwhile the investigation report identified 19 employees responsible for Monday's incident in which a General Manager of the Bank was manhandled and ten persons were injured in a clash between two factions of trade union activists.

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## Plan for separating under-trial and convicted prisoners

By Mizan Ali

The Home Ministry has taken up a project for separating the under-trial and convicted prisoners in the eight central jails and two of the district jails, according to official sources.

Separate 'factory units' have also been planned for all those jails.

The eight central jails are Dhaka, Rajshahi, Comilla, Jessore, Barisal, Mymensingh, Sylhet and Rangpur jails and the two district jails which are expected to come under the project are Chittagong District Jail and Bogra District Jail.

The jail administration has been asked to estimate the financial involvement of the

government for implementing the project. "It is expected that the project will be included in the Annual Development Plan for the next fiscal," said a ministry source.

The Home ministry has taken up the project as part of its initiative for jail reforms on the basis of the 13 decisions agreed upon during a meeting of the ministry officials with the Prime Minister last year.

The other decisions taken at the meeting including creating more accommodation facilities for prisoners and increasing the number of kitchens and interview rooms in various jails as well as prison staff.

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## BNP hands over list of 'victimised partymen' to US envoy

By Nazmul Ashraf

The main opposition party BNP has handed over to US Ambassador in Dhaka John C Holzman a list of its lawmakers and other leaders allegedly victimised with political cases and other 'acts of government repression'.

The list was given to Holzman during his one-hour meeting with BNP chief and Leader of the Opposition in Jatiya Sangsad Begum Khaleda Zia and three other party leaders at her Minto Road official residence in the city last night, meeting sources said, adding the list was also backed by relevant documents.

At the meeting that began at 7 pm the BNP leaders also cited incidents of "human rights violations" during the Awami League rule and explained their party's grievances blocking its return to parliament.

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## Mirza Hafiz, Rafiq dropped from BNP NSC

By Staff Correspondent

BNP Chief Begum Khaleda Zia has revived the process of recasting the National Standing Committee (NSC), the highest decision-making body of her party.

In the process, she dropped Mirza Golam Hafiz and Rafiqul Islam Mza from the powerful NSC on Thursday. Golam Hafiz was dropped due to his old age complications and Rafiq for his long absence from party activities, party sources said.

Begum Zia is planning to induct some new faces into the NSC, sources close to her said.

The BNP leaders likely to get places in the standing body include former Speaker Shaikh Razzak Ali, Jamiruddin Sircar, Col. (Retd) Akbar Hossain, Nazmul Huda and Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury — all MPs — Tarikul Islam and Mir Shaukat Ali.

Earlier, Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan MP, KM Obaidur Rahman MP, Moudud Ahmed and Khondakar Mahbubuddin Ahmed were taken in the NSC. Two positions were then lying vacant following the death of Col. (Retd) Mostafizur Rahman and resignation of Majid-ul-Haq.

Induction of the four leaders raised the number of NSC members to 16 while the number is 15 under the party constitution. With the dropping of Golam Hafiz and Rafiq, the number now stood at 14.

## 7-party alliance 'demonstration day' Feb 10

The seven-party alliance yesterday announced the countrywide 'demonstration day' on February 10 to press for cancellation of what it called black agreement on the CHT, reports UNB.

The alliance also asked for holding special prayers at mosques tomorrow and at temples and churches on February 1 seeking divine blessings for safeguarding the integrity of the country.

It will conduct mass contact

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Buyers at a jewellery shop in the city yesterday as Eid-ul-Fitr is nearing. — Star photo