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JS session resumes today

Parliament resumes its winter session today after 16 days of recess for Eid-ul-Fitr. The session will start at 11 am to pick up general debate on the President's new year's address to Parliament and take up other legislative business. Ruling party sources told UNB that the current session which began on January 14 might continue till March with some breaks so that the next Budget session could start in May. Several important bills, including those relating to Upazila and Pourasava, are likely to be introduced in this session. The bills on the Chittagong Hill District Council and Regional Council may come up for consideration in the House if the session continues till March. There is also a possibility of forming the remaining 21 parliamentary standing committees on ministries during this session. Earlier, 14 standing committees were constituted keeping the quota of BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami vacant. BNP and Jamaat's return to the current session remains uncertain as the fresh move for government-opposition dialogue fell flat.

HR situation in Bangladesh better than in US, says Farrakhan

Louis Farrakhan, the American Black Muslim leader, yesterday observed that the human rights situation in Bangladesh was better than in his country where many people are left without the basic needs, reports UNB. "The right to food, clothes and housing to the people must be ensured for ensuring human rights. But America could not ensure these basic needs to all her citizens... USA has to go a long way to ensure the human rights to its people," he said. Farrakhan was addressing a press conference at the Jatiya Press Club in the morning before leaving for the Philippines at the end of his two-day visit to Dhaka.

PM's public meet at Satkhira today

From Staff Correspondent KHULNA, Feb 7: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is expected to address a public meeting at Satkhira Govt High School ground tomorrow afternoon. According to official source, she will also present in a meeting of the district law and order committee to be held soon after her arrival here.

Khaleda leaves for KSA today

BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia leaves Dhaka today for Saudi Arabia to perform Omrah and for her post-operative medical check-up at Riyadh, reports UNB. After performing Omrah and offering *fateha* at the holy Rouja Mubarrak of Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (SM), Begum Zia will go for medical check-up at King Faisal Specialised Hospital at Riyadh. The BNP Chairperson is suffering from arthritis and had an operation at the hospital in November 1996. She requested the countrymen to pray for her.

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No progress in payment of Tk 280cr compensation by Occidental

By Mizan Ali and Iqbal Siddiquee in Sylhet

The US Company, Occidental, has officially abandoned the Magurehara exploration well without paying the compensation of Tk 280 crore claimed by the affected institutions, departments, organisations and local people for losses caused by a massive explosion and flow-up during drilling. The total amount, however, does not include the claim Petrobangla is preparing to file. Meanwhile, one of the directly affected tea estates has served a legal notice on Occidental for realising its compensation claim. Of the total amount over Tk 176 crore has been claimed by the Forest Department, Tk 45.7 crore by the 19 affected tea estates. Tk 30 crore by the Bangladesh Railway (BR) and Tk 26 crore by the Roads and Highways Department (RHD), according to official sources. Forty Khashia homesteads in Lawachhara Pan Punja, evicted following the explosion, claimed about Tk 2 crore for their losses and rehabilitation. Many compensation claimants still remain bewildered as the Occidental is yet to make any effort to settle their demands, they complained. Even after repeated attempts, Occidental officials both in Dhaka and Sylhet could not be contacted. Sealing the burnt out well on January 9 last, the Occidental started transporting its rig and other machinery and equipment from Magurehara to Sylhet during night, creating a sense of confusion among the people. At one stage, when the people of the locality stopped movement of some containers of the company demanding immediate payment of the compensation claims, the government formed a committee under the Deputy Commissioner of Moulvibazar to settle small claims. Magurehara exploration well in Komolganj thana of Moulvibazar district was contracted out to the Occidental in January 1995. An explosion occurred in the site in the early hours of June 15, 1997, the flames of which rose upto 600 to 800 feet. The fire was doused recently. A five-member inquiry committee was formed on June 16, 1997 to investigate the causes of the explosion. Findings of the report, however, are not yet available. See Page 12 Col 6



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina visiting stalls at the Bangla Academy premises after inaugurating the Ekushey book fair yesterday. —PID photo

Book Fair at Bangla Academy Opens Conspiracy still on to destroy spirit of Ekushey: PM

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said reactionary group that opposed the historic Language Movement is still active in destroying the spirit of the movement and values of Liberation War, reports UNB. "Still now, we feel the shadow of that force which had struck the national spirit and values time and again," she said, calling upon all to remain alert against any conspiracy against independence and the spirit of Liberation War. Inaugurating the Ekushey Boi Mela (book fair) at the Bangla Academy premises, the Prime Minister said this fair is one of the main features of the Bangalee culture. This book fair has been turned into the pride of the nation, she said, adding that the seed of liberation war has been dormant in the language movement, the most significant, non-communal and spirited movement of the country. Hasina said it is an unprecedented incident in the history of the world that a nation had shed blood for its language. Father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had dream of building a happy and prosperous Sonar Bangla. See Page 12 Col 4

JCD stages demonstration on DU campus

By DU Correspondent Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), the student wing of opposition BNP staged a demonstration on the Dhaka University campus yesterday protesting inauguration of the Amar Ekushey Grantha Mela by the Prime Minister. However, JCD's bid to resist the PM from inaugurating the fair failed as police bid a tight security blanket in and around the campus. Earlier, the JCD had declared that it would resist the PM from opening the fair saying that she had lost the "moral right" to come to the DU campus because of her "autocratic" accession. See Page 12 Col 3

150 more killed as fresh tremors jolt Afghanistan

KABUL, Feb 7: Another series of tremors jolted remote northeastern Afghanistan today, killing another 150 people just days after an earthquake touched off massive landslides that left between 2,000 and 4,000 dead, Afghan officials said, reports AP. The latest series of quakes split apart roads leading into the already devastated region, possibly further hindering efforts by foreign aid agencies to bring emergency supplies, said Sayed Ali Javed, who heads a government team coordinating the relief efforts. "At least 150 people died in the earthquakes today," Javed told The Associated Press today by satellite telephone. "And now we may only be able to reach the survivors by helicopter." The first earthquake Wednesday night hit the remote Rustaq district of Takhar province, nestled between the junction of the Hindu Kush and Pamir mountain ranges. Reports of the 6.1-magnitude quake only reached the Afghan capital Kabul, 240 kilometres (150 miles) to the south, yesterday evening. Details were difficult to confirm today. Officials with the military alliance that controls the poor farming area said as many as 15,000 families were left homeless. Whole hillsides collapsed onto each other, crushing thousands of mud and brick homes perched on the slopes. Aid workers have expressed skepticism about the high figures given by the alliance, noting that the area was sparsely populated and that Afghan officials have exaggerated natural disasters in the past. Opposition sources told a Pakistan-based Afghan news service at least 4,400 bodies had been recovered and rescuers were struggling in bitter cold to find more in the debris of Wednesday's quake in the Rustaq district of Takhar province.

Repatriation of stranded Pakistanis Financial, political problems blocking efforts: Pak FM

COLOMBO, Feb 7: Pakistan Foreign Minister Gohar Ayub Khan has said that political as well as financial problems are coming in the way of repatriating the stranded Pakistanis from Bangladesh. Khan, who was on a three-day visit here to attend the 50th anniversary celebrations of Sri Lanka, said financial constraints were a major problem as far as repatriating the stranded Pakistanis was concerned. "There are political problems too, because they will not settle down in Baluchistan or the (North West) Frontier Province," he told IANS. "They have the tendency to live in a group and the place they will settle down is Sindh and already the Sindh population protests that they are being outnumbered by non-Sindhies. Hence it is very difficult for us to find places for the stranded Pakistanis," he said. Khan charged that the neighbour-friendly Gujral doctrine of Indian Prime Minister I.K. Gujral has no chance of implementation because of "stiff resistance" from the Indian bureaucracy. He said though it was a unique policy concept, the doctrine was not very realistic. Khan alleged that senior officials of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs had circumvented any progressive steps proposed by Gujral at bilateral, tripartite or South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) meetings. He claimed that during the

West Bengal govt to expand 2 roads near Bangladesh

By Staff Correspondent The West Bengal government has decided to expand two highways along the Bangladesh border to facilitate the proposed road communication between Dhaka and Calcutta, says a BBC report monitored yesterday. The Works Department of West Bengal will begin the development work of the two highways called National Highway 35 or Barasat-Banga Road and Banga-Chakdah Road shortly. The Department thinks that the expansion is required for the smooth plying of the buses and for quick communication between Dhaka and Calcutta, the report said. The expansion work of some other roads in the northern region of West Bengal has also been started following a decision by the Bangladesh government to expand some roads in the southern region of Bangladesh. The Minister for Works of West Bengal Kshiti Goswami told BBC that the development work will be completed shortly. The central government of India has, meanwhile, decided to extend financial assistance to the West Bengal government in this regard, the BBC report said.

Inflation rate in Dhaka over 8.3 pc during first 6 months of '97-98

Star Report For Dhaka city dwellers, the first six months of the fiscal 1997-98 have proved to be the costliest time in the last four years. According to official figures, on an average, the inflation rate in Dhaka was above 8.3 per cent during the period. In December, the rate of inflation in Dhaka was 7.82 per cent, showing an increase over November's 7.04 per cent. In the last four years beginning from 1993-94, Dhaka SMA (selected metropolitan area), inflation rate never crossed 6.67 per cent recorded in 1994-95 with the lowest of 2.6 per cent in 1996-97. According to the Dhaka SMA calculation with the base year as 1985-86, the rate of inflation was the highest in September 1997 at 10.35 per cent. In July it was 7.6 per cent, in August 9.39 per cent, in October 7.81 per cent, in November 7.04 per cent, and in December it was 7.82 per cent. The inflation rate for Dhaka city was 4.38 per cent in 1993-94, 6.67 per cent in 1994-95, 5.38 per cent in 1995-96 and 2.64 per cent in 1996-97. The national inflation rate with 1985-86 as the year, also showed an increasing trend in the first six months. It was 5.95 per cent in December 1997 rising from 5.6 per cent of November. However, August, September and October were the months when the national inflation was at its peak. It was 6.6 per cent in August, 7.01 per cent in September and 7.69 per cent in October. Experts noted that the rise in fuel price had a direct impact on the inflation rate this year. The announcement of the national pay scale for government employees also had an immediate impact on prices, specially for the Dhaka city dwellers. These, along with the current increase in the rice price, See Page 12 Col 4

Indonesia keen to buy new items to reduce trade gap, says Alatas

Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas arrived in city yesterday on a four-day visit with a mission to strengthen the bilateral relations and explore new areas of economic cooperation between Dhaka and Jakarta, reports UNB. "We want to widen and deepen the friendly relations between the two countries... we need to see how to expand our cooperation in trade and economic," See Page 12 Col 3

Student leader killed in Comilla bomb blast

COMILLA, Feb 7: A student leader was killed and another injured in a bomb blast at Hassanpur Government Degree College in Daudkandi thana today, reports UNB. Witnesses said Babul Mian, 22, a third year student of the college was found lying in a pool of blood on the college ground following a bomb blast at about noon. However, none could say who carried the bomb or how it exploded. Babul succumbed to his injuries on way to Gouripur Health Complex. He was the Assistant General Secretary of the College Students' union and a leader of ruling party student wing, BCL. Injured Sharif was sent to Pangu Hospital in Dhaka. The authorities closed the college for next three days. Ordinance disposal battalion to be sent to Kuwait Bangladesh is sending a 600-member Emergency Ordinance Disposal Battalion at the request of the Kuwait government. The first batch of the Battalion comprising an officer and 99 army personnel left Dhaka for Kuwait recently. The remaining 500 members of the battalion will reach Kuwait within a month, says a press release. See Page 12 Col 1

News Analysis

Tough response to a hard-hitting report

By Nurul Kabir The recent US State Department report on human rights situation in Bangladesh has visibly provoked many, possibly for the first time, to take up the human rights situation as a subject for discussion among themselves. The issue has at least four dimensions: The content of the report, the way the report was released by the US mission, the government's reaction to those and the opposition reaction to the entire affair. The US mission released its report through a press conference in the city on February 4, which accused the government of Sheikh Hasina of human rights abuses in many areas. The day after, the government reacted to the incident on the ground that the US mission failed to meet the diplomatic obligation to seek prior permission from the foreign ministry. While registering the protest against the US mission's failure to seek prior permission, the government also rejected the content of the report. On the other hand, the main opposition party, Bangladesh Nationalist Party, defended the content of the report, but kept mum on the US embassy's failure to show respect for the diplomatic norms. However, the people aware of universal diplomatic norms are found to be convinced that the US embassy went beyond the See page 12 col 1

BCP activist slaughtered in Jhenidah

From Our Correspondent JHENIDAH, Feb 7: An activist of outlawed Biplabi Communist Party (BCP) was slaughtered allegedly by the activist of Purba Bangla Communist Party at village Gopalnagar under Harinakundu thana of the district last night. Police said, a group of armed activists of Purba Bangla Communist Party picked up BCP activist Aftab Uddin, 35, from his house at about 7:30 pm. They took him to a nearby paddy field and severed his head from the body. Police recovered the body this morning and sent it to hospital for autopsy. A case was filed with Harinakundu thana in this connection.

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