

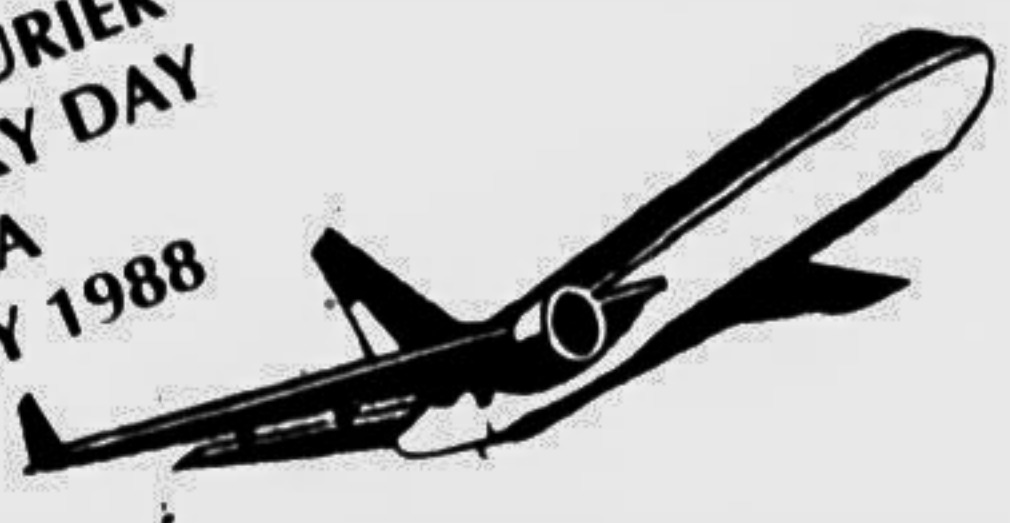
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## Tough response to report

From page 1  
diplomatic niceties by holding a press conference without prior permission of the host government, or at least informing them about it as a matter of courtesy. Many of them interpreted the US mission's gesture of ignoring its diplomatic obligation as the United States' "usual arrogance in a unipolar world," while others observed that it was the lack of integrity of the country's major political parties that had time and again created scopes for the foreign missions, especially that of the US to interfere with our various internal affairs — political and economic.

All of them found Holzman's argument that he could not seek the permission due to Eid holidays to be a lame excuse as the government offices were open on the day the report was released.

However, the nationalist ego of many was satisfied as the Foreign Ministry showed the guts to summon the US Ambassador, John C. Holzman, just the day after, to communicate its dissatisfaction over the incident.

But what surprised many was that the government rejected outright the contents of the human rights report by saying that the "US report contains inaccuracies, half-truths and unsubstantiated allegations. Termining the report a mere 'compilation of heresays and misinformation that badly lacked objectivity,' the Foreign Secretary complained that the report was 'gathered from local press as if the press reports were gospel truths.'

What was the content of the US report on Bangladesh? It talked about the country's poverty level, various impediments in economic, including corruption, restrictions on or denial of many fundamental rights of the citizens, violence against women, discrimination against the disabled and religious minorities, extra-judicial killings committed by police, deaths in police custody under suspicious circumstances, impunity enjoyed by police who routinely use torture and other forms of abuse in interrogating suspects, indiscriminate use of so-called national security laws including the notorious Special Powers Act against political opponents and so on.

Now, can an any sensible person deny the fact that the people of Bangladesh have been exposed to the said human rights violations since long and the phenomena would continue even years after a political party, ideally committed to the people, takes over?

But our Foreign Secretary can. He has even gone to the extent of politically defending the government of Sheikh Hasina by claiming that she had never made any commitment to abolish the SPA. Had he scanned the local newspapers which he visibly loves to undermine, the Foreign Secretary could see that Sheikh Hasina had several times criticised the government of Khaleda Zia for its failure to repeal of the SPA. Scanning of the local newspapers would have also helped the Foreign Secretary to know that a top-ranking Awami League leader had moved a resolution in the Fifth Parliament seeking repeal of the SPA and the party legislators headed by Sheikh Hasina voted for the resolution. The resolution was not passed as the then ruling BNP voted against it. It is a common knowledge that the front ranking AL

leaders had in the past repeatedly demanded, in and outside the parliament, abolition of the Act.

The State Minister for Foreign Affairs came up with the most disappointing statement on the much talked about issue of deaths in police custody. In an interview with the BBC on February 5 last, the state minister not only refused to accept that the government has to take, 'at least partially,' the responsibility of deaths in police custody, but also argued that the police should not be blamed for such deaths. In this regard, the western educated state minister told the BBC: "Lives and deaths of the people depend on the wish of God. The statement has just taken many back to the recent past when the same man had rightly criticised both the government of Khaleda Zia and the police for the death of Yasmin in police custody."

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has defended the US report by arguing that it reflected only part of the human rights abuses. While defending the US report, party Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan in a statement said that the report only reflected a portion of human rights abuses in the country. He also termed, perhaps rightly, the Foreign Secretary's bid to compare OJ Sympson's case with that of Seema Chowdhury to be funny.

But the 'nationalist' party failed to appreciate the government's bid to assert the country's authority against the US mission's failure to seek permission ahead of holding the press conference. Many people considered this act, rather the inaction, to be a typical limitation of the political parties of the country to appreciate political opponents even for a good job.

They had tried to destroy the spirit of the language movement, but could not succeed for the resistance from the conscious section of the society, litterateurs, intellectuals and cultural activists, the Prime Minister added.

Conscious people were always active in all the progressive movement of the country, she said, calling upon them to remain alert and build up strong resistance against the reactionary groups.

The Prime Minister, who also laid the foundation of the multi-storied Ekushey Bhaban on the Bangla Academy premises, hoped that this building will be nerve centre for the activities of Bangladeshi culture.

This building will be used as a research centre of Bangladeshi culture for its proper grooming and flourishing, she said.

Stressing the need for using Bangla language in every sphere of life, the Prime Minister suggested publishing of the academic books in Bangla.

Presided over by Chairman of Bangla Academy poet Shamshur Rahman, the function was also addressed by educationist Dr Nileema Ibrahim, State Minister for Cultural Affairs Obaidul Quader, Bangla Academy Director General Prof Syed Anwar Hossain, Book Publisher and Sellers' Association president Syed Fazlul Huq and Mela committee member secretary Habibul Alam.

Later, the Prime Minister formally opened the three-week-long book fair. She also visited different stalls of the book fair.

Some 185 book stalls have been set up this year.

tripartite meeting held recently in Dhaka between the leaders of Pakistan, India and Bangladesh. Indian officials were reluctant even to amend the original draft declaration although the three leaders had agreed on certain changes.

"An officer refused even to add the words 'peace and security' into the draft which was agreed upon by the three prime ministers," he claimed.

"Leaders of Pakistan and Bangladesh had to intervene and urge Gujral to personally give instructions to the official to incorporate the agreed words," he added. Admitting that the Gujral doctrine is a unique policy concept which could ensure good neighbourly relations, Khan said, "Gujral is like the person who promised a son to everybody. It is not realistic."

Although Khan made the maximum use of his Colombo visit to woo colleagues from 15 countries, including SAARC foreign ministers, he did not get much support for his scathing attacks on India, mainly on his country's long-standing dispute with India over Kashmir.

From page 1

kept inflation at a lofty level. Since food accounts for over 50 per cent of the newly introduced inflation basket, the experts said that unless the government could effectively control the spiralling trend of rice prices, the inflation trend is unlikely to come down.

The inflation rate in the urban areas was higher than in the rural areas in the first six months of the current fiscal from July to December. For urban areas it was 8.13 per cent in July, 8.49 per cent in August, 8.66 per cent in September, 7.38 per cent in October, 5.54 per cent in November and 5.9 per cent in December.

For rural areas, it was 5.26 per cent in July, 6.07 per cent in August, 6.47 per cent in September, 7.83 per cent in October, 5.63 per cent in November and 5.98 per cent in December.

From page 1

yet to be published. Petrobranga, which signed the Production Sharing Contract with the Occidental, however, is now planning to claim compensation from the US company for destroying the gas reservoir located in those two blocks. Petrobranga chairman told The Daily Star yesterday.

Affected persons and organisations have been asked to contact the Occidental and settle their compensation claims with the company, the chairman added.

Petrobranga will place its demand for compensation from the Occidental shortly, the chairman said adding, it was yet to calculate the losses suffered due to the blow-out.

The organisation is likely to demand a compensation for at least 200 billion cubic feet of gas worth 500 million US dollars, sources said adding that the figure may further increase.

The Petrobranga chairman, however, said that as per the seismic data collected by the organisation, "the figure is too small."

If the compensation for the burnt out gas of the reservoir is settled in terms of local gas price rather than the international price by the Petrobranga, then the country will incur huge losses, experts observed.

Following the blow-out, production in 19 gas gardens in the surrounding area suffered as the gas supply was disrupted for quite some time.

A six-member committee of the Bangladesh Tea Board estimated the losses of the tea estates at Tk 45 crore 74 lakh in terms of loss of production and other damages. Of all, the tea estates, Fulbari Tea Estate alone suffered a loss of Tk 31 crore 8 lakh, the estimate revealed. Fulbari, where the original exploration well and the relief well is located, suffered severe damages as 80 acres of its land were lost due to the explosion.

Fulbari prepared the claims for the damaged 80 acres as per the formula applied for settling the compensation for the original drilling site and subsequently for the relief well, sources said.

"Now, they are trying to dictate their own terms, paying no heed to the two agreements signed and acted upon earlier," said a source. Fulbari now has

## Observe hartal in Ctg Div Feb 10: BNP

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan yesterday called upon the people to observe dawn-to-dusk hartal in Chittagong division and stage demonstration in the rest of the country on February 10 for cancellation of the CHT accord, reports UNB.

In a statement, Bhuiyan warned that the government's attempt to implement the accord disregarding public opinion would lead to dangerous consequences. The people have rejected this 'black agreement,' he added.

He said BNP is always sincere to establish peace in the CHT within the framework of the Constitution and safeguarding equal rights of both tribals and non-tribals living in that region.

Bhuiyan alleged that the government had blocked the establishment of peace in the hill tracts by signing the agreement.

Book Fair opens

From page 1  
Bangla' imbued with the spirit of the Ekushey, she added.

But a vested quarter always had tried to destroy the spirit and values of the language movement. The most heinous strike was made by them on August 15, 1975, when Bangabandhu was assassinated, she said.

They had tried to destroy the spirit of the language movement, but could not succeed for the resistance from the conscious section of the society, litterateurs, intellectuals and cultural activists, the Prime Minister added.

Conscious people were always active in all the progressive movement of the country, she said, calling upon them to remain alert and build up strong resistance against the reactionary groups.

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## Int'l confce on arsenic begins today

Over 200 scientists, physicians and social workers are meeting in an international conference in the city today to evolve a simple process so that the people themselves could make drinking water arsenic-free, reports BSS.

The five-day conference on "Arsenic pollution of ground water in Bangladesh: Causes, effects and remedies" begins with field trip of the participants to the arsenic-affected Chandipur village under Luxmipur district.

Organised jointly by Dhaka Community Hospital Trust (DCHT) and School of Environmental Studies, Jadavpur University of Calcutta, the conference will be formally inaugurated on February 9 at the LGED auditorium at Agargaon.

Former chief advisor of the caretaker government Justice Mohammad Habibur Rahman will open the conference.

Addressing a press conference at the Jatiya Press Club yesterday, DCHT Chairman Prof Kazi Quamruzzaman said 127 participants from Bangladesh and 108 from abroad will take part in the conference.

The participating countries include Australia, Canada, China, Chile, France, India, Japan, Sweden, Taiwan, Thailand, United Kingdom, Denmark, France and the United States.

Theft of \$790  
from Farrakhan's  
companion: 1 held

By Staff Correspondent

Police yesterday arrested one person in connection with the theft of 790 US dollars from a companion of Louis Farrakhan after Jumma prayer at the Baitul Mukarram national mosque in the city Friday afternoon.

However, Motijheel police declined to identify the arrested man who was held as a suspect. Police produced the person before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court yesterday seeking a 5-day remand.

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## No progress in payment

From page 1

served a legal notice on Occidental for realising its compensation claim.

Initially, the Occidental offered to pay Tk 1.97 crore which the tea garden owners refused. The claim settlement issue, however, remained pending as the Occidental assured of taking proper measures later.

Plants, trees and soil of the forest adjacent to the area were also severely damaged and the environment was also affected due to emission of various gases and smoke.

The Department of Forest has claimed a compensation Tk 176 crore 17 lakh 48 thousand and 400, for the huge damaged

Afghanistan  
seeks aid from  
Bangladesh

Afghanistan has appealed to Bangladesh to extend humanitarian assistance in the aftermath of the devastating earthquake which rocked the landlocked country Wednesday claiming over 4000 lives, reports BSS.

President of the Islamic state of Afghanistan Prof Burhanuddin Rabbani made the appeal to President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed, Afghan Charge d'Affaires Ghulam Mohammad Sukhanyar said yesterday.

In his message, Prof Rabbani requested President Ahmed to give instruction to send humanitarian assistance to earth quake victims in the Takhar province at the earliest possible time.

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