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Ctg port workers stop handling containers

From Staff Correspondent
CHITTAGONG, Feb 9: Handling of containers at the ships anchored at Chittagong Port remained suspended from last night following a dispute over sharing of work between the labourers engaged by the master stevedores and a group of dock workers.

A senior port official said some dock workers aided by a labour leader of the port last night attempted to take control of "lashing and unlashings" of containers in ships, forcing out the workers engaged by the

See Page 12 Col 8

Municipality Ordinance Cabinet okays draft bill for amendment

The cabinet has approved the draft bill for amendment to the Municipality Ordinance, 1977, reports UNB.

The approval was given at the weekly meeting of the cabinet with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair at her office yesterday.

According to the amendment, one commissioner in each ward and one woman commissioner in each three wards will be elected by direct votes in each panchayata.

The cabinet also approved the bilateral agreement on civil aviation between Bangladesh and Uzbekistan.

Writ challenging detention of ULFA leader

By SC Correspondent
 A writ petition challenging the detention of Anup Chetia, an ULFA leader, has been filed in the High Court.

Saiful Islam, Secretary General of Bangladesh Human Rights Commission filed the petition yesterday.

The office of the Attorney General was actively observing the situation as to when and in which bench the writ petition would be moved. However, the petition was not moved yesterday.

Unloading of 'unclaimed' rice continues

From Staff Correspondent
CHITTAGONG, Feb 9: Chittagong customs house authorities today submitted an affidavit to the court with a report on the 12,000 tons of rice brought by a ship without having any importer in Bangladesh, an official concerned said.

The ship in owned by a Bangladeshi and registered in Cyprus.

The Customs house authority

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Yasmin murder Govt appeals against acquittal of 8

By SC Correspondent
 The government filed an appeal before the High Court against the order of acquittal of eight accused in the case of disappearing or concealment of the material evidence of the Yasmin murder case.

In the sensational Yasmin murder case, the District and Sessions Judge, Rangpur vide the first part of the judgement and order sentenced three former police-men to death and by the second part of the judgement on the allegation of lapse in duty, damaging 'alamat', concealing facts and diverting the case, acquitted the accused from the charges.

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 Slight fall in DSE index
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Aman harvest 11pc lower than last year's: USAID report

By Inam Ahmed and Reaz Ahmad

This year's Aman production, estimated to be around 8.5 million metric tons (MT), is about 11 per cent less than that of last year and 3.73 per cent less than the average production in the last ten years, a USAID report said.

Bangladesh was blessed with a bumper Aman harvest of 9.55 million MT in fiscal 1996-97. The last ten years' average is 8.81 million MT.

The report on "Outlook for 1997-98 Aman and Early Impression on 1997-98 Wheat and Boro", is based on a rapid ap-

praisal conducted during November through December 30, 1997 by the USAID Food Security Team headed by John Swanson. A copy of the report was available to The Daily Star yesterday.

"Paddy price normally drops as the crop is harvested in November and December. An unseasonal increase in paddy price during December supports the estimate of a modest shortfall in production," observed the report. "The shortfall is being compensated for by increased rice trade coming from

India, resulting in a somewhat dampening effect on rice prices at present," it said.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday John Swanson said despite a drop in Aman production due to a number of reasons, prospect of coming wheat and Boro harvest looks bright.

The reasons behind fall in Aman production include erratic rainfall, insufficient moisture in the soil at flowering stage, lesser application of fertilizer and other inputs, attacks by brown plant hopper (BPH), and sterile grain

('cheetaa') caused by late drought, Novartis Ltd, a multinational company engaged in agro-business said.

The USAID has estimated that the total use of fertilizer during 1997 Aman season was lower by 95,000 MT compared to the same period of 1996.

Sarwar Ahmed, executive director of Novartis, said government now needs to shift its food stock to areas that suffered harvest problem as "the next two months seem to be crucial till the harvest of Boro".

Ruhul Quddus, Marketing

Manager of Novartis, gave a radical view that the current high price of rice should not be depressed for the sake of encouragement to farmers.

"Unlike Aman season, farmers have now more control over inputs, and fertilizer is available. Farmers are quite responsive to the current trend of rice price," said Swanson. He, however, hastily added that sometimes loadshedding caused hurdles to irrigation.

Despite reports of some damages caused to Boro seedlings due to the recent spell

of cold wave, Swanson foresees substantial increase in cultivation area of both Boro and wheat.

"The farmers reported that wheat area was increased this year to compensate for some loss of Aman rice. Also, favourable cool weather, combined with a favourable price for wheat encourages farmers to cultivate more wheat than in previous years," said the USAID report. It estimated a 10 per cent increase in wheat yield. Total production of wheat is estimated to be 1.1 million MT.

See Page 12 Col 8



Australian FM arrives today

By Staff Correspondent
 Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer arrives today at 11 am in the capital on a two-day official visit to Bangladesh.

This is the first visit of an Australian foreign minister in eight years. Garret Evans came to Dhaka as foreign minister in August, 1990. Downer's visit follows that of Australian Deputy Prime Minister Tim Fischer who led a trade delegation to Bangladesh in April 1997. Earlier in 1975, then Australian Prime Minister Gough Whitlam paid an official visit to Dhaka.

The visit will build on the See Page 12 Col 4

BNP-led parties call day-long hartal in Ctg Division

Shantibahini to lay down arms today after long bush war

From Shehab Ahmed

Pankajini Chakma, Priti Kumar may not return home
From Nurul Alam

CHITTAGONG, Feb 9: Pankajini Chakma, widow of Manobendra Larma, the founder president of PCJSS, and Priti Kumar Chakma, leader of a splinter faction of Shantibahini, are unlikely to return to their homeland in the Chittagong Hill Tracts along with the group or rebels led by Shantu Larma, the incumbent president of the party, sources said.

Shantu Larma and his group will formally lay down arms from tomorrow availing general amnesty following signing of a peace accord with the government.

But his elder brother's wife Pankajini reportedly not in good terms with him, may stay back at Agartala, the capital of Tripura state of India, without returning to CHT, the sources

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Authorities have thrown a security net in Chittagong Hill Tracts ahead of tomorrow's arms surrender ceremony, in which tribal insurgents will lay down their arms, ending more than two decades of bush war in the hills.

The ceremony is taking place amidst a general strike on the day in 11 districts of Chittagong division including the CHT, called by the BNP-led Seven-Party Alliance, protesting the agreement under which the Shantibahini insurgents are laying their arms.

Activists of the Alliance staged a torch procession on Monday evening, in the port city of Chittagong with riot police maintaining a close watch on the demonstrators, marching to drum up support for the general strike. But they dispersed without trouble.

Demonstrations were also reported from Bandarban and remote areas of Khagrachhari and Ranggar districts in sup-

port of the strike.

The authorities have scanned the region for any trouble, placing troops on alert and securing all roads, bridges, culverts and strategic locations in the 14,200 sqkm forest clad CHT for smooth holding of the ceremony at the Khagrachhari stadium, security sources said.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, releasing white pigeons in a gesture of peace, will formally accept the surrender of arms by the first batch of 743 Shantibahini guerrillas, led by their chief Jyotindriyo Bodhipriyo Larma at a colourful ceremony at the Stadium.

Officials said the guerrillas have already gathered at different transit camps and handed over their guns and ammunition to the security forces on Monday.

They will be permitted to carry their empty guns which they will surrender formally at the ceremony.

A total of 1933 guerrillas are to lay down their guns in four

phases beginning tomorrow. The next dates for surrendering arms by the remaining guerrillas will take place on February 16, 22 and 28.

The surrender is taking place under a peace accord signed between the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) and a government appointed National Committee on CHT on December 2 last year.

It provides for resettlement of the guerrillas to civilian life with a cash grant of Tk 50,000 (1100 dollars) for each.

They will also be provided with security, if asked for, official said.

There had been clashes between rival supporters of the PCJSS after signing of the accord in which at least one pro-Larma activist was killed last month.

A small but hard core group of the PCJSS, which includes its militant student wing, is opposing the accord.

See Page 12 Col 2

BNP MP takes oath as Deputy Minister

Hasibur Rahman Swapan, MP, was appointed Deputy Minister for Industries yesterday, reports UNB.

Swapan was elected on BNP ticket from Sirajganj-7 constituency in the last general election.

President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed administered the oath to Swapan at Bangabhaban at a simple ceremony at 7-15 pm.

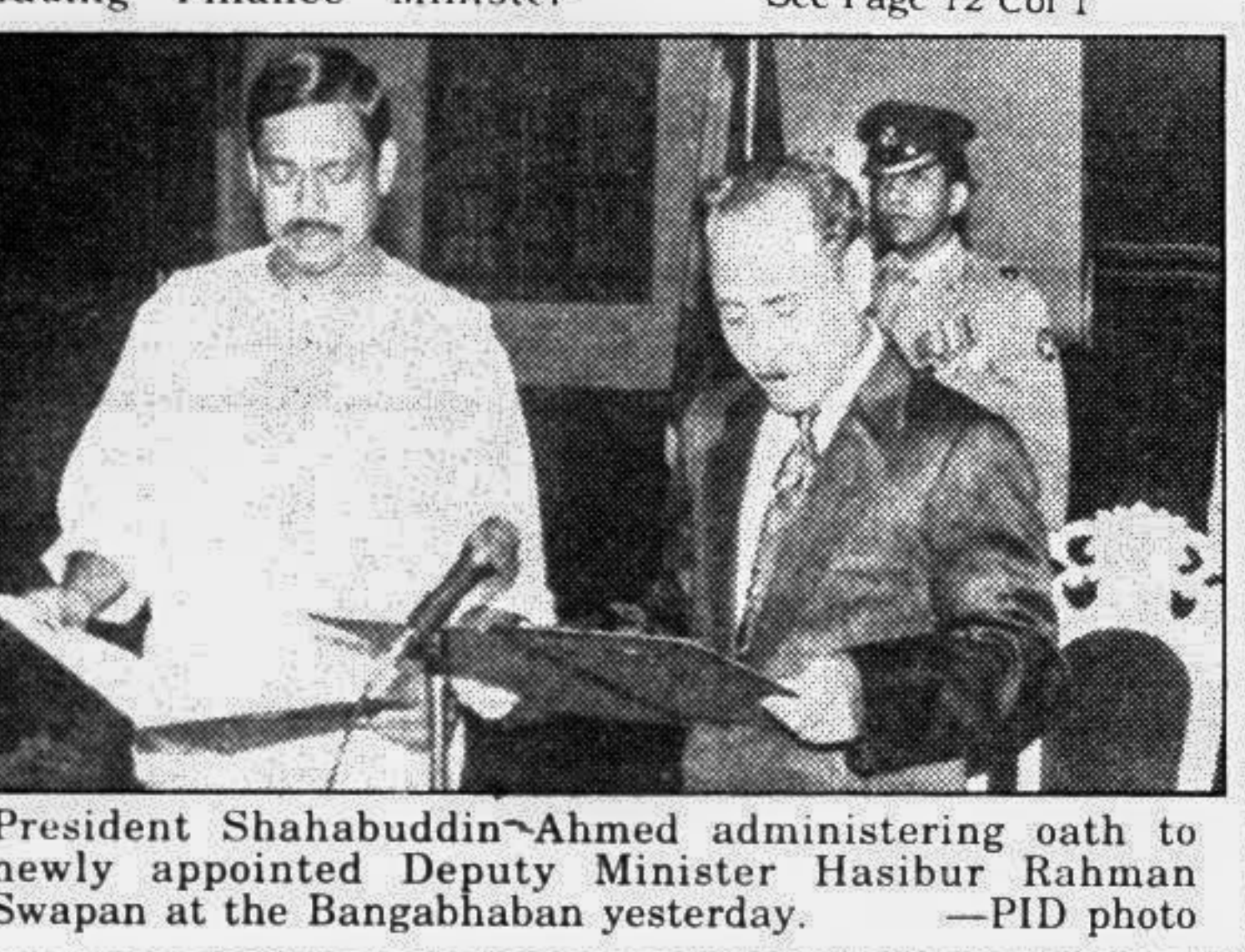
Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, cabinet ministers including Finance Minister

SAMS Kibria, Commerce and Industries Minister Tofael Ahmed, Telecommunications Minister, Mohammad Nasim and Law Minister Abdul Matin Khair were present.

Hasibur yesterday said he will join the parliament session tomorrow.

"There is an opportunity in Parliament to speak for the people... So, I have decided to join the parliament session on February 11 to speak for the people and fulfill their aspira-

See Page 12 Col 1



President Shahabuddin-Ahmed administering oath to newly appointed Deputy Minister Hasibur Rahman Swapan at the Bangabhaban yesterday.



A shelterless family sitting on the rubble of their fire-ravaged house at North Muggdapara in the city yesterday. About 100 shanties were gutted in a fire there on Sunday night. —Star photo

BNP won't allow govt to implement accord on CHT: Mannan Bhuiyan

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan has warned that his party will not allow the government to implement the CHT agreement as the people rejected the accord, reports UNB.

"The unconstitutional black accord will never bring peace... it will rather create unrest in the country," he said addressing a central committee meeting of Jaitvabadi Krishak Dal in the city yesterday.

The BNP leader said people across the country have been demonstrating for cancellation of the agreement and the movement will take a serious turn if the government tries to implement it rebuffing public opinion.

He accused the government of trying to implement the accord forcibly disregarding the people's opinion by resorting to repressive acts. "The government will not be able to stop the movement by harassing its political opponents."

See Page 12 Col 4

Fall in industrial output denied Seasonal fluctuations, not a fact: Kibria

Star Business Report

The government yesterday disputed press reports that the industrial output was on a downward trend saying they amounted to 'misinterpretation and misrepresentation of facts.'

Two senior ministers told a group of newsmen that the media's portrayal of the plight of the industrial sector failed to take into account the "seasonal fluctuations," inherent in the system.

The general manufacturing index was up by 12.2 per cent in July-November 1997 in comparison with the same period of the previous year, Finance Minister S A M S Kibria said, citing Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) data.

Commerce and Industries Minister Tofael Ahmed came up with the explanation. "Exporters do not get similar orders throughout the year. Or markets do not consume at a similar rate all the time," the commerce minister said. "In October and November, the output is always low," he said, pointing to similar situations in the previous year.

"What is important is to compare it with the corresponding period in the previous year,"

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'Sufficient forex reserves to import food'

Star Business Report
 Finance Minister SAMS Kibria said yesterday that the foreign exchange reserves were comfortable enough to pay for food imports this year.

The foreign exchange reserves, he said, rose to 1731

See Page 12 Col 5

Investment protection accord with Jakarta.

An agreement between Bangladesh and Indonesia concerning the Promotion and Protection of Investment was signed at the State Guest House Padma yesterday, reports UNB.

Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad and his Indonesian counterpart Ali Alatas initialed the agreement on behalf of their respective governments.

The agreement intends to create favourable condition for investment by investors of the contracting states in the territory of the other on the basis of sovereign equality and mutual benefit.

Both the ministers expressed their deep satisfaction at the signing of this vital protocol and hoped that this would further strengthen the cooperative relations existing between the two countries and their peoples.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh and

Contempt petition filed against foreign secy

A defence lawyer yesterday filed a petition before the District and Sessions Judge's Court accusing Foreign Secretary Mostafizur Rahman of contempt of court for his comment on an under-trial prisoner in the Bangabandhu Murder Case, reports UNB.

In the petition, Advocate Khan Saifur Rahman, the defence counsel for accused Lt Col (ret'd) Syed Farooqur Rahman, told the court that the Foreign Secretary in protesting the US State Department Report on Bangladesh Human Rights has termed his client as a self-confessed killer of Bangabandhu.

Advocate Khan said his client, Syed Farooqur Rahman, is an accused in the Bangabandhu Murder Case, the trial of which is going on in this court.

He further said it is the legal jurisdiction of the court to de-

See Page 12 Col 5

Bangabandhu Murder Case I read the oath of allegiance under compulsion: M H Khan

After the killing of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on August 15, 1975 discipline in the army was destroyed totally and nobody was in command, reports UNB.

This was stated by the then Navy Chief Rear Admiral M H Khan while deposing as the prosecution witness No 49 in the Bangabandhu Murder Case in the District and Sessions Judge's Court yesterday.

Recalling the events on that day Admiral Khan told the court that he along with two other chiefs of the armed forces were under control of the "armed gang" from August 15 to August 17 at Bangabhaban.

Admiral Khan said under compulsion he was at Bangab-

haban and read the oath of allegiance which was broadcast over radio on August 15 morning to save a situation and to avoid further chaos and killing.

He said he heard the radio announcement of Major Dalim when he was strolling at verandah of his official residence after the Fazr prayers on that day.

Immediately, he said, tried to contact the Army Chief KM Shafiqullah over phone but failed. He then rushed to Air Chief AK Khandaker's residence.

He said Khandaker told him to go to Shafiqullah's house saying he would be joining him soon there. On way to the Army Chief's residence he found every thing very quiet, except movement of some army transports.

At Shafiqullah's residence, Khan said, he found General Zia in the garden in full battle dress.

After some time, he said, Shafiqullah came to the drawing room wearing casual dress.

"When I inquired about the situation, Shafiqullah was found nervous and could not reply," said the witness.

After some time Chief of General Staff (CGS) Brig Khaled Mosharraf came there and Shafiqullah asked him to wait at Hajj Mohsin, a naval unit, till his telephone call.

About a couple of hours

See Page 12 Col 6

'Identify tubewells, alert people against arsenic poisoning'

By Staff Correspondent

Over one hundred participants from at least 13 countries and some hundred local participants converged at the LGED auditorium in the city yesterday on the second day of a five-day conference on "Arsenic Pollution of Groundwater in Bangladesh: Causes, Effects and Remedies".

The conference organised jointly by the Dhaka Commu-

nity Hospital and School of Environmental Studies, Jadavpur University, Calcutta was sponsored by 13 top commercial houses and NGOs.

The participants — scientists, physicians, geologists, engineers, biochemists, hydrologists and so on — will discuss and try to find ways how best the massive arsenic menace in the country can be han-

dled. The participants had spent the first day visiting an arsenic infected village in Noakhali.

In his welcome address Prof Mahmudur Rahman, Member and Coordinator of Dhaka Community Hospital Trust explained how serious the problem was and said, "Till date, we have analysed 8,065 tube-well water samples from 60 districts

and found arsenic in 52 districts above the WHO recommended level (0.01 mg/l) and in 41 districts above 0.05 mg/l."

"The population of this area is 76.9 million. This does not mean that the total population in these 41 districts are drinking contaminated water. But no doubt, they are at risk," warned Rahman.

In his speech as the chief

guest, former Chief Justice and Chief Advisor of the Caretaker Government Justice Mohammad Habibur Rahman thanked the participants and said, "your presence has encouraged us," he said.

He asked everyone not to create panic over the problem and appealed for chalking out a suitable method to tackle arsenic problem in the country.

"We are a land-hungry people and we are less thirsty. We are filling up ponds, lakes and all low lying areas," he said.

"The arsenic problem is probably a blessing because now we would learn how best we could use surface water," Justice Habibur Rahman said.

World Bank Country Director Pierre M Landell Mills,

See Page 12 Col 8

Regional water confce opens in Kathmandu

From Naimul Haq
KATMANDU, Feb 9: A three-national conference on international river issues began in the Nepali capital this afternoon.

The three-day sub-regional conference on Eastern Himalayan Water Resources 'Development: Perspective for the 21st Century' was sponsored by the Japanese NGO — Global Infrastructure Fund Research Foundation.

Delegates from Nepal, India and Bangladesh participated in the conference to find means of how to utilise the water resources of the Ganges, Meghna and Brahmaputra (GMB) basin.

The Nepal Water Resources Minister Pashu Pati SJB Rana inaugurated the conference as the chief guest while Water Resources Minister of Bangladesh Abdur Razzak was present as the special guest. Also present in the conference was Dr

See Page 12 Col 5

HC transfers murder case against Hazari

By SC Correspondent
 As the Feni Sessions Court felt embarrassed to hear a murder case in which Zainul Abedin Hazari, an influential ruling party MP, is the main accused, the High Court yesterday by an order transferred the case to Comilla Sessions Court for trial.

The division bench of the HC comprising Justice Md Mozammel Haque and Justice Md Awlad Ali upon a reference sent by the Session Court, Feni transferred the case to the Comilla Sessions Court.

Akhtaruzzaman MP freed on bail

By Staff Correspondent
 BNP lawmaker Maj (rtd) Akhtaruzzaman was released on bail from the Kishoreganj district jail yesterday afternoon.

Akhtaruzzaman was sent to the jail after a magistrate's court in the district awarded him three months' simple imprisonment for inciting violence during an attack on Katiadi thana in his home district Kishoreganj in May 1996.

Meanwhile, BNP workers in Katiadi yesterday observed a hartal protesting Akhtaruzzaman's sending to jail.

Reached by telephone in his constituency last night, Akhtaruzzaman said he will hold a press conference on Wednesday at 6 pm at the Jatiya Press Club in Dhaka.