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VOL. VIII NO. 322 REGD. NO. DA 781

INTERNET: <http://www.dailystarnews.com>

POUSH 2 1405 BS

DHAKA WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 16, 1998

SHABAN 26, 1419 HIJRI

20 PAGES : PRICE TAKA 6.00

Liquor poisoning kills 6 in Feni

FENI, Dec 15: At least six people died and 21 fell sick after drinking toxic liquor last night at Fulgazi in the district, reports UNB.

Police and local sources said the victims had collected the spurious rectified spirit from homeopathic shops at Fulgazi Bazar.

They said Aminul Islam Babul, 26, of South Koraia died at Parshuram Health Complex. Nazrul Islam, 35, of Goshapur and Idris Bachchu, 42, of Jalur village at Feni Sadar Hospital. Meer Hossain, 45, of North Sreepur, and Mohammad Yusuf, 50, of Goshapur and Abul Kashem of Daulatpur died at their homes.

Meer Hossain was identified as Darbar union Awami League president and Abul Kashem as ex-president of Fulgazi thana Juba League.

Eight of the 21 who fell sick were identified as Habibullah Bahar, Abdul Kader, Kabir Ahmed, Jamaluddin Majumder, Alauddin, Daud, Alam and Roop Kumar.

Jamaluddin Majumder, president of Fulgazi thana BNP, was shifted to Dhaka in critical condition.

BIMST-EC meet opens in city tomorrow

A three-day meeting of BIMST-EC the newly launched five-nation economic bloc — will begin in the city tomorrow, reports APB.

The conference will have two sessions — one at senior officials level and the other at ministerial level.

The ministerial meeting, due on Saturday, will be preceded by a two-day session of senior officials of the member countries.

Inside Today

Victory Day Special

The Glory of Being Independent
by Mahfuz Anam

Victory Day 1998
by Shah AMS Kibria

Some Reflections on History
by MM Rezaul Karim

Victory Day: A Subjective Etymology
by Neeman A Sobhan
Pages 4-6

Victory Day returns, reminds pledges

By Staff Correspondent

The nation celebrates Victory Day today amid gaiety and festivity with a fresh pledge to materialise the spirit of the Liberation War to ensure a better future through economic emancipation.

The day marks emergence of Bangladesh as an independent state after a nine-month bloody war with Pakistani occupation forces which had perpetrated the worst genocide in world history with the help of collaborators — Rajakars, Al Badrs and Al Shams.

The nation will remember with gratitude the supreme sacrifices made by the valiant freedom fighters who laid down their lives for the motherland and renew its pledge to protect the country's independence and sovereignty, earned at the cost of three millions lives.

The government as well as different political parties, socio-cultural organisations, professional groups and student bodies have already announced elaborate programmes to celebrate the Victory Day with due

respect and solemnity. The programmes include placing of wreaths, discussion meetings, cultural functions, Guran Khuan, Milad Mahfil, rally, procession, street corner drama, art competition and film show.

The day is a public holiday. A 31-gun salute will herald the day. The National Flag will be hoisted atop of all public and private buildings. Newspapers will publish special supplements while the Radio and BTV See Page 12 Col 6



"Freedom you are the juvenile poems of Tagore ..."

— Star photo

EC-bound processions banned

By Staff Correspondent

Dhaka Metropolitan Police has banned hosting of rallies and processions, carrying of firearms, explosives and all sorts of harmful materials in some specific areas heading towards the Election Commission Secretariat in the city from 6 am to 6 pm Thursday.

The ban has been imposed following agitation programmes, announced by the 7-party alliance, towards the EC Secretariat on Thursday, said a press release yesterday.

The restricted areas are from Bangla Motor crossing-Mohakhali Rail crossing, from western part of Bangla Motor See Page 12 Col 4

Amartya Sen arrives today

CALCUTTA, Dec 15: Amartya Sen is the second Indian after Mother Teresa to arrive in Calcutta with the Nobel Prize, reports PTI.

Sen who received the Nobel Prize on December 10 at Stockholm arrived here today prior to leaving for Dhaka tomorrow.

Mother Teresa who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1979, though born in Albania was an Indian citizen. She returned straight to Calcutta after receiving the prize.

The country's first Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore could not receive the prize as the prize giving ceremony was cancelled because of the First World War. The Prize was sent to Tagore through a British diplomat. Lord Carmichael gave the prize to Tagore at a special function later in Calcutta.

Obaid, Moazzem Manjur admitted to BSMMU

By Staff Correspondent

Three leaders of BNP and Jatiya Party, arrested in connection with the Jail Killing Case, were admitted to the prison wing of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) Hospital at around 11 a.m. yesterday.

BNP leaders KM Obaidur Rahman and Nurul Islam Monjur and Jatiya Party leader Shah Moazzem Hossain were sent to the hospital following a High Court order on December 8 that the accused be shifted to a hospital for medical grounds.

The leaders were earlier refused bail but later won a court order that they be transferred either to Suhrawardy Hospital or Dhaka Medical College Hospital or the BSMMU. Since Suhrawardy Hospital and DMCH have no prison cell, they were sent to the BSMMU, jail sources said.

Family sources of the lead- See Page 12 Col 5

Poor handling of block bidding Foreign cos losing interest

By Sharier Khan

Foreign oil companies which were very enthusiastic to explore oil and gas in Bangladesh two years ago have now lost their interest to a great extent due to the government's poor handling of the Second Round Block Bidding, sources said.

There are, however, many other reasons for their declining interest. Of these, the most important is the global economic recession specially the drastic fall in oil price. Giant companies like Shell, Mobil and Exxon are cutting cost, retrenching workers and reducing activities, the sources pointed out.

The government has already delayed by a year finalisation

of negotiations under the Second Round Block Bidding in which some 20 foreign companies participated.

The bid was highly contested and the participation showed clear enthusiasm of the oil companies. But many companies have now stopped knocking the doors for negotiation or persuasion.

"They are disappointed not because of the delay but because of the reasons for the delay and the way the government is handling 'private' exploration deals," said one source. Instead of an oil company's experience and financial and technical strength, the government was prioritising those companies having local agents with high

political connection.

"Unocal is getting more attention than any other oil company not because of its track record but because it has FBCCI chief Abdul Awal Minto as its local partner," said the source.

Similarly, Enron is being supported by former FBCCI chief Yusuf Abdullah Harun and Pangsang by Quayum Reza Chowdhury. All of them are known to have high political connection.

Shell-Cairn do not have any local agent. But it is said that Shell got the highest score in the original bidding evaluation in four blocks. It was, however, offered two blocks. Later, the government gave it only one See Page 12 Col 4

BNP delves into Pabna debacle as discontent brews

By Nazmul Ashraf

Amid mounting discontent in the party rank and file, BNP has started digging out reasons for its debacle in the Pabna-2 by-election.

In another move, the main opposition party has also decided to ask the Election Commission to withhold gazetting the by-polls results and announce re-polling in all the 81

centres of the constituency. The party had earlier lodged complaints with the EC regarding results in 15 centres only.

The request for suspending the official result will be made in a day or two, said Haris Chowdhury, a joint secretary general of BNP.

The gazette notification was not made until yesterday and the EC is supposed to look into the BNP complaints before the result is gazetted, EC sources said.

At the heart of the debate are the 'conflicting reports' to the party high command from those assigned to monitor the crucial vote, according to party sources.

BNP chief Khaleda Zia is learnt to have been 'highly disappointed' with her party colleagues who sent 'misleading' reports from Pabna until the end of voting, saying their candidate Selim Reza Habib was going to win.

The optimism was expressed by the candidate himself and BNP's chief election co-ordinator Fazlur Rahman Patal. But another group of party leaders including Dr. Khondakar Mosharraf Hossain and Abdul Matin Chowdhury who were See Page 11

Sexual assault DU students lay siege to VC's office

By DU Correspondent

A section of general students of Dhaka University and activists of some student organisations yesterday laid siege to the Vice Chancellor's office demanding exemplary punishment to a teacher for "sexually assaulting" a female student.

The students demanded that the teacher be expelled from the university.

An MA (final) year female student of Public Administration Department in a written complaint to the VC said that she was sexually harassed by Prof. Shahiduzzaman of International Relations.

The students, united under the banner of a committee titled Students - Protesting Sexual Repression held a rally at the Aparajeya Bangla on the campus at noon.

Addressing the rally, some students demanded that the report of the fact-finding committee be released immediately. The DU authorities formed the committee on December 7 to inquire See Page 12 Col 5

Holiday

The Offices of The Daily Star will remain closed today on the occasion of the Victory Day.

Therefore, there will be no issue of the newspaper tomorrow.

Clinton fails to persuade Israel

EREZ CROSSING (Gaza Strip), Dec 15: US President Bill Clinton failed today to persuade Israel to resume the West Bank troop withdrawals called for under the Wye River peace accord, but he declared the Mideast peace process 'back on track', reports AP.

Clinton held out hope the pullback would take place soon. "We will have fits and starts but we will get through this just fine," he said after a 90-minute meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

Clinton called his three-day Mideast trip a success.

"I think we are back on track again and we're going to see this thing through," he told reporters at this border checkpoint. "I have achieved what I came here to achieve."

In remarks to reporters later, Sandy Berger, the president's national security adviser, qualified Clinton's remark about the peace process being on track. "It's a bumpy track," he said with a smile.

Clinton said Secretary of State Madeleine Albright would return to the region soon for further talks.

In their three-way meeting, the leaders discussed the work of committees set up under the October accords negotiated at Wye River, Maryland, to work out sticky issues such as weapons confiscation and the size of police forces, Clinton said.

"We now have to decide practical means to go forward," he said.

Arafat left without speaking to reporters, but an adviser, See Page 12 Col 3

Ershad's U-turn: JP now to back BNP

In a policy shift former President H M Ershad yesterday declared his party's solidarity with the mainstream opposition's current movement against the government, reports UNB.

The former President urged the Leader of the Opposition Begum Khaleda Zia not to take part in any elections, including local government polls, under the Hasina government.

"From today, my party will act as a real opposition," he said amidst slogans and clapping from his party workers who gathered at the Diploma Engineers' Institution premises to observe the Victory Day.

The Jatiya Party chairman also asked Communications Minister Anwar Hossain Manju to quit the Awami League cabinet and return to JP fold.

Manju, the former JP secretary general, joined the cabinet

of Sheikh Hasina when the party supported Awami League in forming the 'consensus' government.

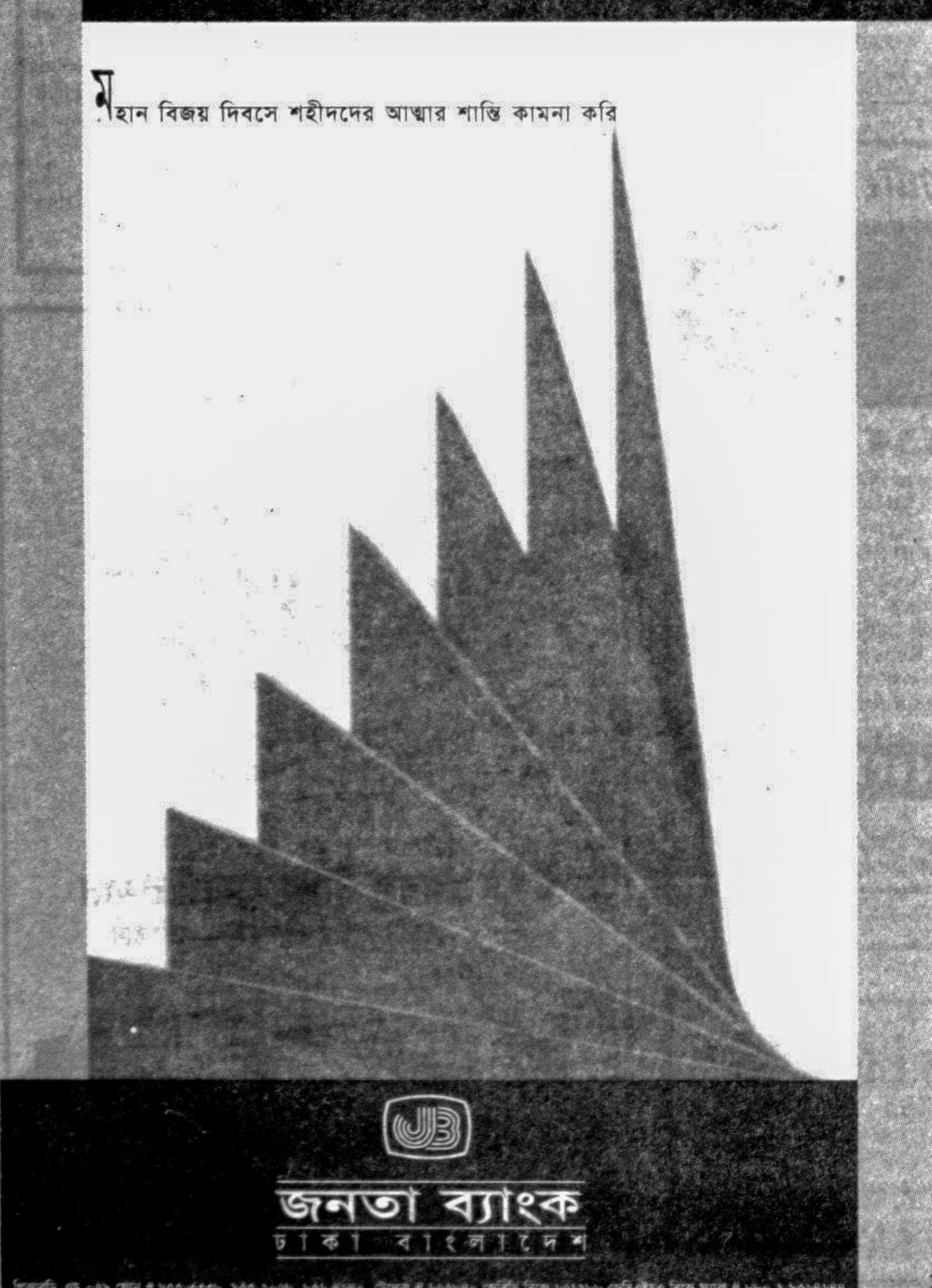
"Those who have deserted me, for whatever reasons, should come back to Jatiya Party family and stand united at this crucial juncture of the nation," the JP chief appealed to the party dissidents.

"From the experience in Pabna it is now clear that no free and fair election is possible under the present government," he said.

Regarding general strike, Ershad told his partymen: "I always had requested all to find an alternative to hartal. But against the backdrop of present situation, we shall call hartal for the greater interest of the country and nation."

The discussion was also addressed by Begum Rawshan Er- See Page 12 Col 5


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