



Vendors are busy selling *tupi* (caps) to *musullis* (devotees) in front of the Baitul Mukarram National Mosque yesterday during the holy month of Ramadan. — Star photo

PM's remarks irk Ershad

By Staff Correspondent

Jatiya Party Chairman H M Ershad in a statement on Thursday expressed resentment at what he said, Prime Minister's remarks about him while meeting OACB members day before.

Prime Minister on Wednesday said it would be rather interesting to see alliance of Begum Zia and Ershad, as once Begum Zia had identified Ershad as the killer of her husband Ziaur Rahman and staged movement against his autocracy.

In his statement, Ershad requested the Prime Minister to withdraw such remarks as, according to him, the remarks were not only indecent but also out of decorum.

Referring to his status as a member of the parliament, Ershad said "such irresponsible remarks about me is not only defamatory but also against the existing law of the country".

UNB adds: Jatiya Party chairman H M Ershad yesterday blasted the government for the signing of the Ganges Water Sharing Treaty, CHT Peace Accord as well as for its failure to arrest price hike of essentials.

Addressing a group of newcomers to his party from different political parties of Ullapara thana at the party's Bardhara office, he said the government has virtually divided territorial integrity of the country by signing the CHT Peace Accord.

Ershad also criticised the government for what he said, its failure to keep the prices of essentials in the holy month of Ramadan within the capacity of the common people despite repeated assurances in this regard.

JP Vice Chairman and Information Adviser to the party chief Fakir Ashraf, party leaders Barrister Raoshan Ali, Dr Rezaul Karim Reza, Abdus Sattar and Abdus Hakim were also present.

Sher-e-Bangla's birth anniversary observed in Calcutta

The 125th birth anniversary of Sher-e-Bangla Abul Quasem Fazlul Huq was observed in Calcutta with due honour, reports BSS.

A discussion meeting was organised at the West Bengal Bidhan Sabha Bhaban premises to mark the day. Bangladesh State Minister for Jute A K Fayezul Huq who is also the son of the late leader attended the discussion as the chief guest.

The speakers said Sher-e-Bangla was the glittering instance for communal harmony of the Sub-continent. They said as a mark of political wisdom and bold leadership Sher-e-Bangla was simultaneously a perfect Bengalee and a man of amiable disposition. The speakers said Sher-e-Bangla, the first chief minister of the undivided Bengal, was also very close to the distressed and oppressed including the peasants, workers and the general people.

Elaborating the long political history of his father Fayezul Huq said "my father attained the rare opportunities to become secretary general of All India Muslim League and the president of All India Congress for his 'non-communal spirit' and 'sharp political wisdom'. He said Sher-e-Bangla was a perfect Bengalee and a Muslim as well.

In his speech Jyoti Basu said there would be hardly found a politician and humanitarian like Sher-e-Bangla in present time. He said Huq was respectable to all because of his contributions to the oppressed and the peasants.

Reflecting on different aspects of the improvement of the bilateral relations between Bangladesh and India, the West Bengal Chief Minister laid emphasis on mutual cooperation and communication. He also pointed out that the young generation of Bangladesh have proceeded a lot and a dynamism emerged in exercising the Bengalee culture and language.

Abdul Halim said Sher-e-Bangla would be ever remembered with gratitude for his leading role in spreading the education and enacting a number of laws for the economic emancipation of the general people.

Palestinian Muslim leader calls for 'liberation'

JERUSALEM, Dec 25: Palestinian Muslim leader Sheikh Akramah Sabri called for "the liberation" of the holy city and the "Entire holy land of Palestine" in his weekly prayer sermon at Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque today, reports AFP.

"Let us pray for the day when Jerusalem and the entire holy land of Palestine are liberated from Israeli occupation," the Palestinian Mufti told the crowd of about 200,000 worshippers.

In his sermon, Sheikh Akramah attacked what he called Israel's "Judaisation" of Jerusalem, and also decried proposals backed by the Vatican for the internationalisation of the holy places.

"This huge crowd, in this holy Mosque and in this holy month, bears witness to the fact that Muslims will defend Jerusalem and its mosques against all attempts to interna-

tionalise or to Judaize them," he said.

The Mufti also attacked US President Bill Clinton, who 11 days ago made the first ever visit by a US President to the Palestinian territories.

The aggression against Iraq was designed to divert attention from the shameful things happening in the United States, where the President has been involved in nauseating activities," he said.

He rejected Clinton's greetings on the occasion of Ramadan, saying Muslims did not want them.

He said the United States and Britain had shown hatred "worthy of the crusaders" in carrying out their bombing raids on Iraq, which continued even after the beginning of the month of Ramadan.

He warned Arab leaders to heed the Iraqi people's appeals for help.

Christmas Day celebrated in Gazipur

GAZIPUR, Dec 25: The Christian community in Gazipur today celebrated the holy Christmas amid huge festivities, enthusiasm and religious fervour, reports BSS.

Hundreds of devotees gathered in different churches of the district early today for special prayers seeking peace, prosperity and development of the country.

All Christian houses and churches were decorated with colourful stars and beautiful X-mass trees last evening. The X-mass functions started after midnight last night with ringing of 12 church bells and sweet Christmas carols.

The celebrations include visit to the friends and relatives houses, distribution of gifts and Christmas cakes to the children by Santa Claus.



Bangladesh Islami Chhatra Majlish Dhaka City unit brought out a procession in the city yesterday with a call to maintain sanctity of the month of holy Ramadan. — Star photo

Yeltsin may visit France in Jan

MOSCOW, Dec 25: President Boris Yeltsin may travel to France in January, his spokesman said Friday. This would be the first foreign trip after months of canceled travel plans due to Yeltsin's ailments, reports AP.

Russian media and politicians — including Yeltsin's own aides — have speculated that Yeltsin's health problems would rule out any foreign travel during the rest of his term, which runs out in mid-2000.

Angered by such suggestions, Yeltsin fired his staff wholesale earlier this month and appointed a new team, which soon announced that doctors had judged Yeltsin fit to travel and that several trips abroad are planned for 1999.

No definite schedule has been announced. Yeltsin doesn't plan to leave Moscow before the end of the year, presidential spokesman Dmitry Yakushkin said Friday.

But "the works schedule for January is being worked out now, and a trip to France is being considered," Yakushkin told reporters.

In another move to assert his authority, Yeltsin scolded his potential successors Thursday for actively mounting presidential campaigns 18 months before the election — or even acting as if they were already president.

Yeltsin didn't name names. Yakushkin said he had asked Yeltsin to elaborate on Friday, but the president had refused.

"He smiled and said: 'Let them think. Let them guess,'" Yakushkin said.

Yeltsin appeared to be referring to Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov, who recently launched his own political movement and has been speaking out on national issues such as economic policy and Russia's foreign relations.

Israel blasts Russian leader

JERUSALEM, Dec 25: Israel denounced Russian Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov Thursday for making "anti-Semitic declarations" and expressed hope that Russian authorities would find appropriate ways to deal with his slurs, reports AP.

Zyuganov, who finished second in the 1996 presidential election blamed Jews in the Russian government for helping to cause "the current catastrophic condition of the country, the mass impoverishment and the process of extinction of its people."

Israel's Foreign Ministry said Zyuganov's statement was not consistent with his claims that the Communist Party "aims to build a democratic society in Russia."



Children of Christian community held a rally in protest against fundamentalism and attacks on the minority in Lahore. They demanded protection from the government to save their lives and churches. Last week a bomb exploded inside a church in Karachi. — AP/UNB photo

Mysterious disease kills 3 children

BARISAL, Dec 25: An unknown disease claimed the lives of three children at Patharghata Thana Health Complex in Barguna district in 24 hours till 6 pm today, reports UNB.

The victims were identified as Ferdousi, 6, of village Chaltatala, and Ismail, 9, and his sister Rashida, 6, of village Hogalpasha.

Family sources said the children fell unconscious within 15 to 20 minutes after they complained of headache with vomiting tendency. They died 4 to 5 hours after respiratory problem and convulsions developed in their unconscious state.

Resident Medical Officer of Patharghata Thana Health Complex told UNB that they could not identify the disease.

Traditional treatment and medicine proved ineffective, he said, adding that none of the victims could be treated for more than two and a half hour.

Two newsmen robbed

By Staff Correspondent

Two staff reporters of the Daily Janakantha were robbed and one of them was stabbed by muggers in separate incidents in the city yesterday and the day before.

Reporter Shanker Kumar Dey who sustained stab injuries came under attack near Bijoy-nagar Water Tank at about 6:30 pm yesterday when he was going to his office by a rickshaw. The other victim Sunil Banerjee was robbed of Tk 8000 at Panthapath near Shamaria Hospital at about 11 am on Thursday.

Three muggers stopped the rickshaw in which Shanker was travelling and snatched Tk 1500 from him. One of the muggers stabbed in his thigh when the reporter tried to give his identity. With serious stab injuries, Shanker was rushed to the Shamaria Hospital.

In another incident, Sunil Banerjee came under attack of four muggers when he was going to a bank to pay his mobile phone bill.

The gang intercepted the rickshaw in which he was travelling and snatched Tk 8000 at gun point.

But three of them were arrested from the scene as patrol police immediately reached there.

The arrested were identified as Khokon, 20, Abdul Latif, 25, and Abdus Salam.

One killed in road accident

BARGUNA, Dec 25: One man was killed and 35 others were injured in a road accident at Amragachia bus stand on Amtali-Barisal road this afternoon, reports UNB.

The victim was identified as Monirul Islam (25) of Kukua village in Amtali thana.

The injured were rushed to various hospitals of Barguna, Patuakhali and Amtali in critical conditions.

Sultana

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But the forest department officials found it difficult to take care of her because baby elephants normally live 15 to 18 months with their mothers, sucking milk.

Some efforts to force-feed her created problems. She became sick with diarrhoea and the forest authorities decided to send her to the Dhaka Zoo.

Nurjahan said, when brought to the zoo, Sultana looked for its mother at the zoo hospital, sleeping at a corner where a trap door provides a dark shadow, thinking it her mother's shadow.

But Sultana behaves like a naughty child, scampering around when she feeds her with a rubber hose from a plastic pot. Nurjahan said. A baby nipple is sewn with the hope so that she can not swallow while taking milk.

From three litres a day she is consuming 12 litres now, the vet said. She weighed 105 kg on December 3. Her weight increased as vets added vitamins and rice powder with the milk. She has become healthy ever since. The next weighing will be done on January 3.

The growth is satisfactory. Zoo curator Dr Mahbubur Rahman said adding that Sultana would be provided with a touch of nature on the lawn of the hospital so that she can live in a better condition.

"When we release her on the lawn she becomes too naughty jumping around in joy", Nurjahan said.

Anisuzzaman Khan, an elephant expert of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), said she should be released among the two herds said to be surviving in the Cox's Bazar forest.

There were 450 elephants in Bangladesh, according to estimates by IUCN and World Wide Fund for Nature in 1982.

Poachers have taken a heavy toll and mines laid by Myanmar border guards also killed at least 15 elephants out of 22 killed in the area since 1992, Khan said.

Khan said it is a rare event that Sultana has not only survived but gained weight and is growing up at above-normal rate in captivity. The Dhaka Zoo has done a commendable job, he added.

Dr Ainun Nishat, Country Representative of IUCN in Bangladesh earlier sent a message to different zoos and institutions, seeking expert help for Sultana. He received good response including advice by Bangladesh's prominent wild life expert, Dr Ali Reza Khan, who is the curator of Dubai Zoo. He faxed a prescriptions for Sultana.

Collaboration with Russians alleged

Chechen court suspends parliament, fires several high officials

MOSCOW, Dec 25: In a blow to Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov, the top Islamic court in the breakaway republic suspended the parliament and fired several senior officials for "collaboration" with Russians, news reports said on Friday, reports AP.

The Supreme Shariah Court also found Maskhadov guilty of appointing the officials, whom it said assisted Russia's "occupation regime" during the 1994-96 independence war, and warned him against such actions in the future.

In a ruling announced late Thursday, the court also dismissed Maskhadov's wife Kusama as head of a charity, citing "inadmissibility" of women holding top posts in an Islamic state, the Interfax and ITAR-Tass news agencies reported.

The court ruled to suspend the pro-president Chechen par-

liament, saying its activities contradicted Islamic norms, and ordered it be replaced with a council of top military commanders. It was not clear what the court meant by suspending parliament.

Turalp Atgeriyev, Chechnya's deputy prime minister, said on Friday that the court's decision didn't mean the dissolution of the parliament. Members of parliament will join the new council along with military chiefs and religious leaders, he said.

The court also dismissed Chechen Prosecutor General Mansur Tagirov along with the local airline chief, tax boss and Chechnya's envoy to Russia.

The court's verdict came after an appeal from a group of prominent Chechen warlords, who accused Maskhadov of breaking Chechen law by maintaining close relations with Russia and had demanded his

oust.

Maskhadov accepted the court's ruling, saying through Atgeriyev that he would accept any verdict "as the Quran requires from a faithful Muslim."

Chechnya has run its own affairs since defeated Russian troops withdrew in 1996, but no country has recognized its independence bid and Moscow continues to consider the southern republic a part of Russia.

Maskhadov won presidential elections almost two years ago by an overwhelming margin, and retains widespread support despite his failure to restore stability and combat kidnapping and other crime.

Hundreds of people have been abducted for ransom in Chechnya in recent years. In an unusually gruesome display of lawlessness, four Western captives were beheaded earlier this month.



Britain's Queen Elizabeth II, leaves the Sandringham Church with her grandson Prince William, right, after they attended the Christmas service with the rest of the British Royal Family yesterday. The Royal usually gather at their estate near the Church, 200 kms north-east of London for Christmas. — AP/UNB photo

Most isolated X-mas on Earth

WELLINGTON, New Zealand, Dec 25: Three adventurers on an ice trek across Antarctica to the South Pole and back could claim the most isolated Christmas on Earth Friday — in a blizzard-blasted tent pitched where no man has gone before, reports AP.

Their only contact with the outside world from their icy campsite 490 km from the South Pole will be by Iridium satellite phone, so long as the Antarctic blizzard allows the connection.

New Zealander Peter Hillary and his team of Australians Jon Muir and Eric Phillips are trying to recreate English explorer Robert Falcon Scott's ill-fated 1911 expedition and ski nearly 3,000 km from New Zealand's Antarctic Scott Base to the South Pole and back with no outside assistance.

If successful, the trip will be the longest unsupported ice trek this century.

Since departing New Zealand's Scott base on Nov 4, the trio have covered 889 km, but failed to reach their hoped-for Christmas destination of the South Pole because bad weather this week once again slowed their progress pulling sleds across the ice.

In a Christmas message on Dec 23, Hillary said the team was excited about crossing the previously untraversed Shackleton Glacier.

"I guess we just about had our Christmas today, we got to the

top of the Shackleton Glacier, and it's certainly the best present any of us could get," Hillary said.

"But we've got the Titan Dome and the polar plateau still ahead, so we'll be out there over Christmas."

"While we're out there, may all of you have a wonderful Christmas day with your families and we'll be thinking of you."

A blizzard began to blow soon after the message was sent. The trio's families were hopeful of receiving a further trans-

Israel to issue 500 shekel note beating picture of Yitzhak Rabin

JERUSALEM, Dec 25: Israel is to issue a 500 shekel note beating the picture of slain Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, the Central Bank said today, reports AP.

The 500 shekel bill will join the 20, 50, 100 and 200 shekel notes already in circulation, the bank said in a statement.

There are currently around 4.2 shekels to the US dollar.

Rabin, of the left-wing Labour Party, was assassinated on November 4, 1995 in Tel Aviv by a right-wing extremist who wanted to prevent him from handing over more territory to the Palestinians.

mission on Friday.

Before the blizzard, the trio were making a steady but slow progress of 20 to 25 km a day, hauling sleds laden with supplies across the frozen landscape.

With no room for luxury supplies, the three will have a strictly nontraditional Christmas dinner, sticking to their usual 6,000-plus calories a day diet of high-energy muesli floating in a mixture of cooking oil and butter.

Their only yuletide surprise — a handful of lollipops stashed in one of their three sleds by Hillary's wife Yvonne.

A small Camembert cheese and miniature bottle of Scotch whisky will be shared on Dec 26 to celebrate Hillary's birthday. Yvonne and Hillary's son Alexander will share Christmas dinner with his father, Mount Everest conqueror and Antarctic explorer Sir Edmund Hillary.

Having completed the ascent of Shackleton Glacier, the team will now trek across the colder polar plateau where temperatures can drop as low as minus 50 Celsius.

The team aims to complete Scott's failed mission to march to the South Pole and back.

Scott and his team of four men, who set out with ponies and sled-dogs, died of starvation and weakness only a few miles from a supply dump, and just days from journey's end.



Nuns cross Manger Square after praying in the Church of The Nativity yesterday in the West Bank town of Bethlehem. Tourists wearing the traditional Arab headdress, the *kafiyeh*, follow behind them. As Christians celebrated Christmas, Muslims were marking their first Jummaprayers of the holy month of Ramadan, and Jews were preparing to usher in the Sabbath at Sundown. — AP/UNB photo