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3 CHT bodies reunite, float party

Three organisations in the CHT have floated a new party to realise their demand for full autonomy, reports UNB.

Leaders of Pahari Gano Parishad, Pahari Chhatra Parishad and Hill Women Federation formed the United People's Democratic Front (UPDF) at a 2-day joint conference that ended on December 26. The conference was held at the TSC of Dhaka University.

Some 125 councilors of the three organisations and representatives of 'Jhum refugees' took part in the conference.

Gano Parishad general secretary Prosit Bikash Khisa was elected convenor of the five-member central committee of the UPDF.

Other members are Rabi Shankar Chakma, Sanchoy Chakma, Dhrubo Jyoti Chakma and Dipi Shankar Chakma, said a press release yesterday.

From now on, it said, Gano Parishad, Chhatra Parishad and Hill Women Federation will act as front organisations of the new party.

The three organisations were split after Jyotindra Bodhipriyo Lama alias Shantu Lama of PCJS signed the historic peace accord on December 2, 1997.

Barricade on Dhaka-Aricha Highway

MANIKGANJ, Dec 27: Transport workers and the activists of transport owners association put up barricade on the busy Dhaka-Aricha highway and adjacent roads since 6 pm today protesting extortion of tolls in and around Aricha Ghat, reports UNB.

The action of the transport workers caused immense suffering to the passengers, said the workers of Inter-district truck drivers union and transport owners association put up barricade on Dhaka-Nabinagar, Tangail-Bhuapur and Dhaka-Aricha highways for an indefinite period demanding immediate action against the extortionists.

President of the Inter-district Truck Drivers Union Kafil Uddin told the news agency at 10:15 pm that they would continue the blockade until the demand was met.

The strikers rejected a meeting proposed by the Deputy Commissioner and the Police Super.

HC asks police Refrain from harassing Bunty

The High Court yesterday directed the police to refrain from harassing Bunty Islam, an accused in the film actor Sohel Chowdhury murder case, till December 31 in connection with a criminal case against him under the Narcotics Control Act, reports UNB.

The court, however, refused to pass any order in respect of bail petition in the case of murder of Sohel, and directed Bunty Islam to surrender before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate.

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Prayer Timings

December-28			
Fajr	Azhan	Jamaat	
5:15	5:20		
Zohr	12:45	1:15	
Asr	4:00	4:15	
Maghrib	5:23	5:27	
Esha	7:00	7:15	

Source: Islamic Foundation

Sehri, Ifar timings

Ramadan	Dec	Sehri	Ifar
8	28	5:24	5:24
9	29	5:15	5:24
10	30	5:15	5:25

Arab MPs call for lifting sanctions

Iraq to fire on warplanes in no-fly zones

BAGHDAD, Dec 27: In its latest challenge to the United States and Britain, Iraq declared that it will fire on warplanes patrolling the no-fly zones that Washington and its allies imposed after the Gulf War, reports AP.

The United States and Britain said their aircraft would continue to enforce the no-fly zones and pilots would respond to any threats.

"Iraq knows that it should

not interfere with those flights, and our pilots can act in self-defence if they feel threatened at any time," National Security Council spokesman P. J. Crowley said in Washington.

A Ministry of Defence spokesman in London said all British and American aircraft "operate to a very strict set of rules of engagement. If aircraft are threatened those rules of engagement do allow the return of fire."

The United States, Britain and France set up the no-fly zones in 1991-92 to halt air attacks against Kurdish rebels in the north and Shi'ite Muslim rebels in the south. French aircraft no longer patrol the northern zones, but still help to maintain the southern zone.

A week after a US-British bombing campaign against Iraq ended, Iraqi Vice President Taha Yassin Ramadan said his government would not allow flights over northern and southern Iraq.

We say frankly now that any violation of Iraqi airspace will be met by Iraqi fire," Ramadan told Qatar's Al-Jazeera television Saturday.

Iraq has never recognised the zones and has occasionally confronted aircraft flying in the area.

Asked why Iraq had not fired previously on planes enforcing the no-fly zones, Ramadan said, "When you want to restore your rights, you choose the suitable time and circumstances."

State-controlled Iraqi media have issued almost daily reports of violations of the country's airspace since the United States and Britain ended four days of airstrikes on Dec 19.

Meanwhile, participants in an extraordinary meeting in Amman of members of parliament from 16 Arab countries called today for a lifting of sanctions against Iraq, the speaker of the Jordanian parliament said.

"All the delegates called in

See Page 12 Col 7

It still happens!

By Staff Correspondent

Manzoor Ahmed never expected to get back his valuable travel bags lost at the Zia International Airport by mistake.

But in a rare feat of honesty of some policemen and a microbus driver, Manzoor got back his bags.

And to his surprise, his valuable documents and passports were in place and nobody even touched the dollars he had kept in one of his bags.

"I returned at around 1 pm from a tour in Bangkok," Manzoor, Director of Unicef's Japan office told The Daily Star yesterday. "I was received at the ZIA by my brother. I lost my luggage by mistake."

Before getting into his brother's car, Manzoor mistakenly placed his hand bag and a suit-carrier bag in the open boot of a microbus thinking it to be his brother's. Few minutes

later, he realised his mistake. By that time, the microbus, which belongs to a rent-a-car service provider, left for Gazipur with passengers.

Manzoor immediately reported the incident to Airport Police. He also put classified advertisements in two dailies in the evening and went to his Mirpur house.

His bags contained valuable documents, his diplomatic passport and an ordinary passport, his wife's US passport, personal valuables, 50 dollars and two suits. "I did not expect anyone to return these to me. I gave advertisements in papers so that I could apply for passports. And, may be, someone would at least return my official papers," Manzoor said.

At around 8 pm, a policeman from Mirpur thana came to his

See Page 12 Col 7

Ship breaking industry at Sitakundu dying

From Nurul Alam

CHITTAGONG, Dec 27: A persistent slump in the ship breaking industry due to decreasing demand for scraps is threatening more units with closure and workers with unemployment.

The industries which developed along the Sitakundu coast in over two decades and was a source of huge revenue for the government is now facing a setback, ship breakers said.

Without use of any modern technology, it meets 90 per cent of the demand for raw materials of re-rolling mills which produce rods and other construction materials, they said. The industry is capable of supplying around one million tons of scrap to re-rolling mills every year.

"We are now dying as demand for scraps dropped, pushing down the prices due to slow development work in recent months," Mizanur Rahman,

President of Bangladesh Ship Breakers Association (BSBA) told The Daily Star yesterday. "Scrap billets are now sold at Tk 10,000 per ton, down from Tk 13,500 earlier. This is forcing us to suffer huge loss in every ship scrapped at our yards," Rahman said.

"Some ship breaking units have been closed, throwing a large number of labourers out of employment. Survival of others is also threatened," he added.

It is a labour intensive industry employing around three lakhs people directly and ten lakh more indirectly. Besides, it reduces dependence of re-rolling mills on imported billets, he said.

"There are too many vessels at the ship breaking yards now but not enough buyers," said Anam Chowdhury, a beaching captain engaged by ship breakers.

"The ship which earlier re-

quired three to six months' time for scrapping, now needs more time as demand of scrap is very dull," Anam said.

Mizanur Rahman also said that ship breakers have to pay excess duties on the basis of higher tariff value though international price of such ships slid down to around 100 dollars per ton from 175 to 190 dollars earlier as a fallout of economic recession in South East Asian countries and economic sanctions against India and Pakistan.

Another businessman, Kamal Uddin, who bought six ships at his yard at Sitakundu with Tk 200 crore, said, "We are to pay more interest on bank loan now because ship-breaking takes more time due to the dull market. If the trend continues, most of us will be bound to pack up."

Everything of a scrapped See Page 12 Col 8

Traders call 48-hr hartal at Feni from today

FENI, Dec 27: As normal life and businesses in the town remained crippled amid political violence, traders called for a 48-hour hartal here from tomorrow, reports UNB.

The businessmen opted for the shutdown in protest as they could not open shops today (Sunday) due to threats and counter-threats by rival political activists in a wave of unrest since the killing of a ruling party leader on December 20.

Witnesses said the Awami League supporters and businessmen were threatened allegedly by BNP activists and the BNP-backed traders by ruling party supporters, deteriorating the whole situation in the district headquarters.

Local BNP extended support to 48-hour hartal called by Feni See Page 12 Col 8

Ershad wishes Khaleda 'good health, long life'

By Nazmul Ashraf and Rezaul Karim Lotus

Long-time political foes Khaleda Zia and H. M. Ershad have had some formal contact at long last. Yesterday, the former general sent a letter to the Opposition leader regretting his absence from an iftar party she had invited him to.

The contact between the two top opposition leaders in this manner is considered very significant ahead of the plan for a grand opposition unity to dislodge the Awami League government of Sheikh Hasina after the month of Ramadan.

Analysts say the Khaleda-Ershad contact is a big step towards bridging their gap and may contribute a lot to the ongoing efforts for waging a simultaneous street agitation by the major opposition parties.

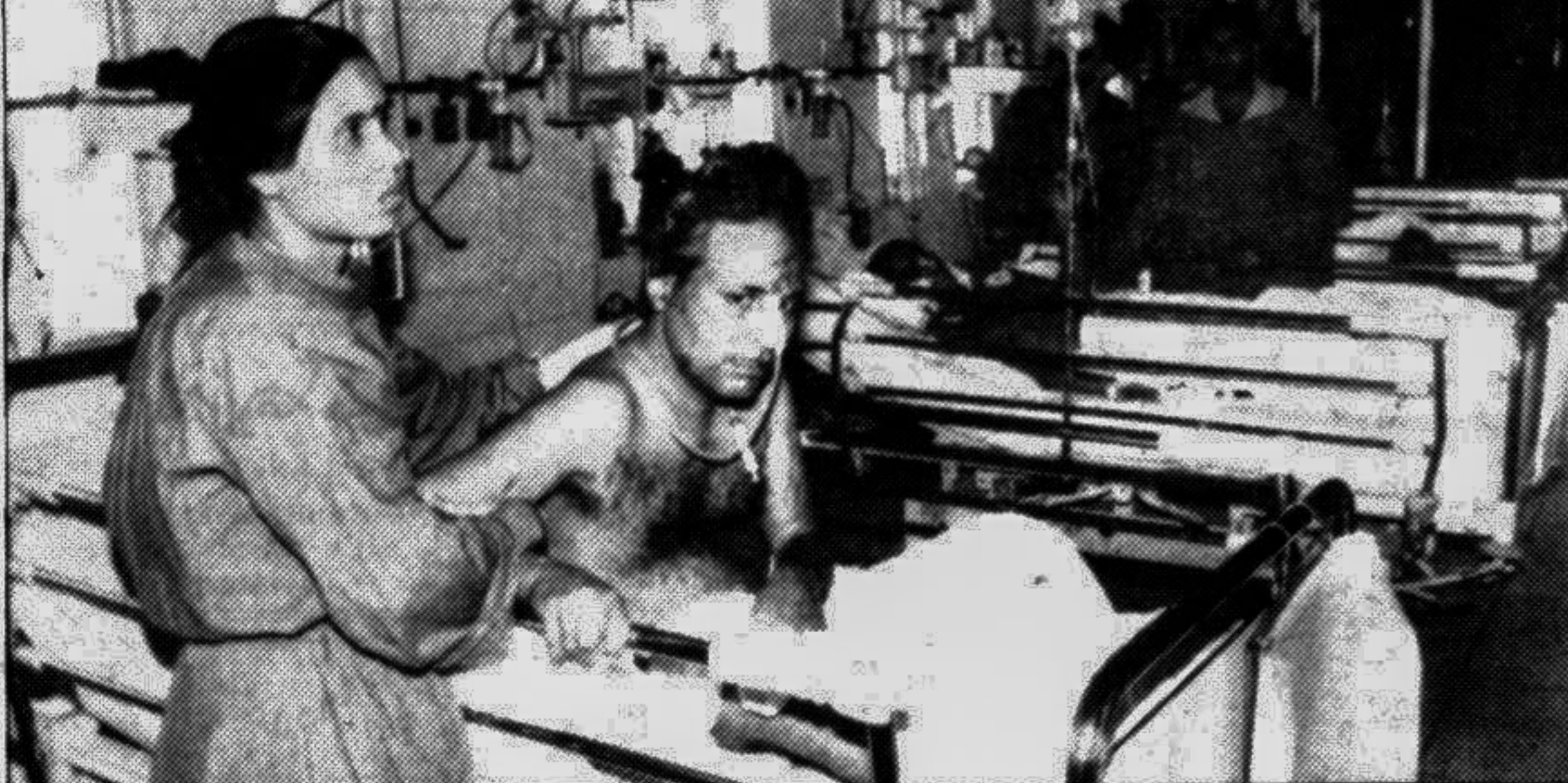
They also find it significant for at least another reason -- reunification of two Jatiya Party factions, scheduled for today. One of the major objectives of the two factions' merger is to bring the BNP, JP, Jamaat-e-Islami and some other smaller parties together to press for their common demands including a mid-term election.

But the ruling Awami League says "it is not worried" about the fresh development in the opposition camp.

Leader of the Opposition and former prime minister Khaleda Zia invited Ershad to the iftar party at her Minto Road official residence. Khaleda's invitation reached Ershad Saturday See Page 12 Col 4

No care for intensive care unit

By Naimul Haq



No nurses around, so a relative comes to the aid of a patient at Intensive Care Unit of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Hospital yesterday. — Star photo

The Intensive Care Unit at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Hospital is unable to provide "minimum care" to patients, some of them alleged.

Some relatives of patients also alleged that they have to remain present almost round-the-clock to look after their patients due to shortage of nurses and absence of doctors after office hours and on holidays.

There are only three nurses for 10 beds whereas the standard ratio of nurses to patients at an ICU is 1:1, sources at the ICU said.

There are also allegations that some of the doctors are not well trained to use some of the equipment, which greatly hampers treatment. Dr. Nizamuddin Ahmed Consultant - in-charge of the ICU, when contacted, admitted this.

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'Equip Asian rice farmers with new, cheaper technologies'

By Reaz Ahmad, back from Bangkok

Science of tomorrow has to begin today. Asia, a continent with the largest population, simply cannot afford to remain complacent about what the Green Revolution has gratuitously endowed it so far.

Some 65 experts, agronomists and journalists from across Asia, who gathered at a Bangkok conference early this month, drew this conclu-

sion in a bid to sensitise Asian governments about the challenge of striking a balance between demand and supply of rice in the years to come.

The International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) and Asia Rice Foundation (ARF) jointly organised the conference styled 'Asian Media and Rice' in the first week of this month.

Dr Mahbub Hossain of IRRI

summed up the gravity of the situation when he said, "Growth in supply of rice will decline at a faster rate than that of demand."

Hossain, who heads Social Science Division at the Institute, explained, "Rate of population growth will decline to one per cent by 2020-25 from 1.8 per cent now. But, because of

See Page 12 Col 1

Child patient hit by doctor?

A child patient fell unconscious after he was allegedly pushed onto the wall by a young doctor in the children's ward of Dhaka Medical College Hospital yesterday morning, reports UNB.

Family sources alleged that Dr Mahbubur Rahman, an assistant CA, had pushed Ruhul Amin, 11, son of Hru Howlader of Mohakhali Sattala slum, onto the wall as the boy uttered obscenities at the doctor.

They said Ruhul was admitted to the DMCH on Saturday night in a critical condition with fever.

The boy did not regain consciousness when this report was filed in the evening.

RMC closed sine die

From Our Correspondent
RANGPUR, Dec 27: Rangpur Medical College (RMC) was declared closed sine die after students, who failed to pass MBBS final examinations this year, went on a rampage on the college campus damaging the principal's office today.

Academic Council of the college made the decision at around 5 pm asking the students to vacate dormitories within 24 hours.

A three-member probe body was formed to investigate the incident.

The outraged students launched the attack at around 2 pm following publication of MBBS final year examinations results which showed only 58 students coming out successful out of 125 appeared.

Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA) condemned the incident and demanded punishment to the persons involved.

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