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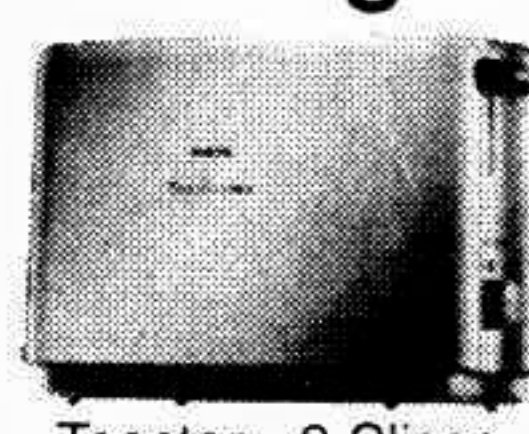
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PHILIPS

BJP worried but rules out mid-term polls

BANGALORE, Jan 2: India's ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) said today it was worried about its poor performance in provincial polls but ruled out early national elections, reports Reuters.

"Our organisation is very worried about our shortcomings," K L Sharma, the party's senior vice-president, told reporters at a two-day meeting of the BJP's national executive in the southern Indian city on Bangalore.

"We will work to overcome these... but our government is stable and we don't foresee any possibility of a mid-term poll."

The normal term of parliament in India is five years and the next national elections are due in 2003.

The right-wing BJP, head of a 13-party federal coalition, started its meeting by examining its losses in the provincial elections, Sharma said.

The BJP suffered defeats in three states in November, failing to retain power in Rajasthan and Delhi and unable

to win control of the central state of Madhya Pradesh from the Opposition Congress Party. Sharma said the party had identified the reasons for its poor performance and reports were being presented at the national executive meeting — the first since the setbacks.

"Passivity of party workers, passivity of pro-BJP voters, poor election management by the party, and issues such as increase in the price rise of basic commodities influenced the voters away from us," Sharma said.

He said the meeting was serious about addressing indiscipline in the party. "The party will take stern measures to tackle situations where members are placing themselves above the party," he said but refused to give any more details.

Congress victories in all three states raised questions about the longevity of the federal government.

In his opening remarks, BJP president Khusabhai Thakre played down the effects of the provincial electoral setbacks and told party members to 'learn lessons' from them.

"Results of one round of elections cannot be a final judgement," he said.

Senior BJP leaders told Reuters the party would have a chance to put the defeats behind it in elections in the southern states of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Goa this year.

"Over the next two days, we will learn from our defeat and move forward, firm in our resolve to win the next round of elections," Thakre said.

Khaleda leaves for KSA Jan 7

BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia will visit Saudi Arabia this month for medical check-up, reports UNB.

She will leave Dhaka for Riyadh on January 7, a party source said. Begum Zia will be a royal guest of the Kingdom.

Meanwhile, a meeting of BNP's National Standing Committee will be held at the official residence of the Leader of the Opposition at 29, Minto Road at 6 pm today.

Party Chief Begum Khaleda Zia will preside over the meeting, said a press release yesterday.

Ershad

From Page 1

Ershad said about the MPs who had met Manju so far. Reports say at least a dozen MPs had already assured the minister of their support. JP has 33 MPs.

Manju will need at least 10 MPs to form a parliamentary group of his own. Sources close to him said that he was expecting at least 18 MPs in his fold.

The sources said Ershad has become jittery at the prospect of such desertion and publicly warned them, something he has done out of frustration, fearing loss of control on them.

But Manju remained quiet yesterday, restraining himself from any headlong attack on Ershad.

There is no scope for any "compromise", he told the BBC last night.

"Our efforts are directed at a democratic, constitutional and stable political system. However small our efforts could be, it would continue against any attempt to create anarchy in the country," he said.

On his support among JP MPs, Manju said that it would be tested in parliament when it goes to session. He wished Ershad well and said he is not seeking any revenge.

"With due respect to him I could say that BNP chairperson would never trust him and take him into confidence," Manju said about his former leader's tilt towards the BNP-led opposition.

Unloading of foodgrains yet to resume at Mongla

From Staff Correspondent

KHULNA, Jan 2: Unloading of imported foodgrains from ships at Mongla port remained suspended since Friday as contractors stopped work demanding higher transportation rates.

The Food Department earlier refused to meet their demands to increase transportation rates by 20 per cent.

Eight ships carrying 57,000 metric tons of wheat and rice are now anchored at the port.

Sources in the Food Department said today that demand for enhancement of the existing rates by 20 per cent is not at all reasonable.

The ocean-going vessels awaiting unloading of foodgrains are: MV Naz Lizi, MV Banglar Maya, MV Shujung, MV Sea Bird, MV Globaljig, MV Debelon, MV Aqua and MV Sulasa. Of these eight ships, only MV Aqua is containing wheat imported at the private level.

2 killed in Pabna incidents

From Our Correspondent

PABNA, Jan 2: Two persons were killed in two violent incidents in the district yesterday.

Police said, Saidur Rahman, 10, of Ramchandrapur was stabbed to death near the town's Ananta Cinema Hall at around 11 pm. The incident followed a brawl over purchasing night show tickets. Two others were injured during the incident.

Police arrested one Sohul, 18, in connection with the murder.

Meanwhile, in an armed clash at a remote village, one person was killed and 18 others injured.

The incident occurred over a land dispute. Police said, one Swapan and his associates were attacked by Rashid and his men, on the land at village Sreerampur. During the clash Swapan was seriously injured. He later died at Natore General Hospital. Eighteen others of both the sides were injured.

Jhalakati AL chief resigns

JHALAKATI, Jan 2: District unit president of ruling Awami League advocate Shahjahan Ashraf resigned today from his post, reports UNB.

He sent the resignation letter to party chief Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina saying he was unable to perform his duties due to illness.

AL for new allies

From Page 1

In a major shift in his political stance, Ershad no longer wants to remain a 'dead horse' and intends to play opposition. Before sacking Manju he had also charged him with making the JP a virtual 'B-team' of Awami League.

Manju is now learnt to be trying to gain support from JP lawmakers, specially those who did not like Ershad's decision of sacking him days after merger of the Zafar - Moazzem faction with the mainstream JP.

It is learnt that besides meeting Sheikh Hasina over the last few days, Manju had also talks with some senior leaders of AL and JSD. JSD (another Samantanjik Dal) is another partner in Hasina's 'consensus government'. JSD leader ASM Rob is a minister in Hasina's Cabinet.

A minister and senior AL leader foresees a split in the JP Parliamentary Party provided

Editor: Mahfuz Anam

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Another world

For the less fortunate, the purpose is well served by these clothes, old but good enough to fight the winter chill. Near the Buckand Bundh in Old City, this wholesale market for old warm clothes is having brisk business for obvious reasons.

—Star photo by A K M Mohsin

Sohel murder: Liton placed on remand

The Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's (CMM) Court yesterday granted a five-day police remand for interrogating Mohammod Haroon-or-Rashid alias Liton, one of the accused in film actor Sohul Chowdhury murder case, reports BSS.

The group led by Saidur Rahman at a press conference at the Jatiya Press Club yesterday announced a 25-member central committee with Anwarul Kabir Milu and Hedayet Hossain as president and general secretary.

The new committee was rejected by the other group calling it "unconstitutional and illegal".

Saidur Rahman claimed at the press conference that formation of a new committee became urgent as some office-bearers of the former committee, including general secretary Tawhid Reza Nur had made the organisation inactive by not doing any organisational activities. Saidur also alleged that leaders of the other group had met the Prime Minister without taking any opinion from the then president and majority of the office-bearers of the organisation.

Nur, leader of the other group in a statement yesterday alleged that the new committee was formed secretly, ignoring the opinion of the majority and violating the constitution of the organisation. The statement was signed by six office-bearers of the former committee.

Nur alleged that leaders of the other group remained inactive due to differences on principles and had been using the

Deadly virus from China finds way into Calcutta

NEW DELHI, Jan 2: A deadly virus, which killed more than 12,000 people in China in 1982, has been traced in some patients in the eastern Indian city of Calcutta, AFP quoting a newspaper reported today.

Scientists at the National Institute of Cholera and Enteric Diseases said they 'stumbled upon' the B Roto Virus, during a routine examination of patients in a city hospital, the Asian Age daily said.

The virus had affected about a million Chinese during the 1982 Helonjiong epidemic and this was the first time that it was found outside China.

No deaths have been reported due to the virus in Calcutta so far.

Ctg: Arms

From Page 1

AK-47, two AK-22, nine sawed rifle, one SMG, one SLR and 18 revolvers and explosive materials. Some LMGs were recovered in Raazvan earlier.

In mid-April last year, police launched a crackdown in the port city to nab the 'identified terrorists' whose names were on the lists of the Home Ministry and police authorities here.

Over 300 terrorists and illegal toll collectors were arrested during the crackdown. The arrested included some ring leaders identified as Nasir of Shibir-backed Nasir Bahini, BCL-backed Mamunur Rashid Mamun, Sunil, Dulu, Babar, Kader of Agrabad Kader Bahini and JCD-backed Don. Samrat. But many of them were freed on bail.

Though the terrorists and their ring leaders were arrested, the illegal arms possessed by them could hardly be recovered as police dared little to take them on remand for interrogation.

A senior police official seeking anonymity said, "Police are now suffering from a sort of 'phobia' after the Rubel incident in Dhaka. Besides, political pressure is causing difficulties in taking the criminals on remand for interrogation about possession of illegal arms. Consequently, the illegal arms are yet to be recovered."

On the other hand, no crackdown was launched so far by police outside the city areas, particularly in Raazvan and Fatikchhari, known as the strongholds of the terrorists where they keep illegal arms in their hideouts.

Projonmo '71 to split

From Page 1

tee of the organisation was formed when it was floated on October 29, 1991. The tenure of the committee expired after two years but no new committee was formed.

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Nur alleged that leaders of the other group remained inactive due to differences on principles and had been using the

organisation for petty personal interest.

Nur claimed that they organised Muktijuddha Mela and Bijoy Mela, observed the death anniversary of Jahanara Imam, donated money to the Prime Minister's Relief Fund and met the Prime Minister after taking opinion from majority of the office-bearers.

Under these circumstances, the committee declared yesterday is "illegal" and majority members of the Projonmo '71 can not accept it, he said in the statement.

The statement was also signed by former vice-president Rabiul Aftab, joint secretaries Ashif Munir and Salma Nargis, publication secretary Farzana Chowdhury Nipa and publicity secretary Babul Chowdhury Day.

At the press conference Saidur also put forward some demands including formation of a Shaheed Family Welfare Trust, housing facility for the families of martyrs, for welfare of the children of the martyrs. The demands include housing facilities for, setting up of separate liberation war based museum both centrally and locally, preparation of a definite list of the martyrs of 1971 and invitation of martyrs families in all state functions, formation of a Shaheed Family Welfare Trust and observance of national mourning day in honour of the 3 millions martyrs of the war of independence.

He reiterated the organisation's demand immediate trial of all war criminals in a special tribunal

Truckers in Dhaka dist go on strike from today

By Staff Correspondent

Bangladesh Truck Drivers and Workers Federation (BTDFW) has called an indefinite truck strike in greater Dhaka district from today demanding effective measures to stop toll extortion at Aricha ghat and arrest of miscreants disturbing smooth functioning of Utholi Truck Stand.

All types of trucks and tank lorries will come under the purview of the strike.

"We were compelled to call the strike during the month of holy Ramadan, as there was no response from the authorities concerned. Earlier, we put forward our demands to the authorities including the district administration of Manikganj, BTDFW leaders said in a statement yesterday.

BNP will extend all out cooperation in establishing such election monitoring process in the country and their cooperation would also go to FEMA.

Replying to a query, Huda said that contents of the FEMA report on Pabna-2 by-election about terrorism and mismanagement during polls were authentic. But the conclusion of the report was confusing as it said the by-election was as a whole impartial.

Barrister Huda said Begum Zia suggested FEMA representatives that the organisation should gain strength and courage so that it can faithfully raise its voice against any mismanagement and partisan role of the Election Commission.

Referring to a remark of the Chief Election Commissioner, the BNP leader said the CEC has created division within EC by issuing a controversial statement. FEMA should oppose such attempts of EC.

Asked about electoral alliance among BNP, Jamaat and JP, Huda said it is possible for the up coming mayoral elections.

The body was sent to Sunamganj General Hospital for autopsy today.

Allegation Miscreants swoop on BCI secretary, force him to resign

By Staff Correspondent

Secretary of Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce (BCI) AK Refaul Huq has complained that he was manhandled by miscreants set on him by two of the directors of the trade body and was forced to resign.

According to an FIR lodged with Motijheel police on Friday, the miscreants resorted to terrorist activities in the presence of BCI President Sharif M Afzal Hossain and compelled Huq to hand over charge to joint secretary Nurul Islam on Thursday.

On December 24, Islam had however been sent on a month's leave on charge of 'insulting and manhandling' the BCI secretary, the FIR said.

Huq also alleged that the miscreants in league with Islam created panic in the BCI office on the BCI Bhaban for two hours before the scheduled AGM on Thursday and beat up Huq indiscriminately when he refused to hand over a file to director AK Azad.

Another director Liaquat Ali Bhuiyan also led the other group of miscreants and gave threats to Huq in the office room of the BCI president. Former BCI director and some other people present there had finally saved the BCI secretary. Huq said in his complaint to police.

The miscreants, however, asked Huq not to come to the office again and threatened on his life if he failed to do so, the FIR added.

The BCI president could not be reached last night for comment.

Report on arsenic in Dhaka WASA water refuted

Dhaka Community Hospital (DCH) yesterday reacted sharply to a report claiming presence of high level of arsenic in the WASA water in the capital, reports UNB.

An English daily Friday carried a news item that intolerable level of arsenic was found in WASA water at city's Uttara, Gulshan, Banani, Dhanmondi and Mohammadpur.

Questioning the authenticity of the test, the DCH, pioneer in the country in arsenic research, said the water samples were tested following the electrochemical method.

But the internationally recognized system is the atomic absorption spectro-photo-metre method.

Earlier, the DCH conducted a survey with Jadavpur University, Calcutta. They tested water of 16 deep tubewell of WASA, but didn't found the presence of intolerable level of arsenic. The test was conducted at Jadavpur University.

The DCH also refuted the report that the Community Hospital, quoting Dr Dipankar Chakravarty, had informed the WASA that arsenic was found in its four deep tubewells.

Meanwhile, Dhaka WASA in a press release yesterday also refuted the newspaper report saying Dhaka WASA has been regularly testing deep tubewell water quality since 1996 but none of the tests showed excessive level of arsenic.

It said the most recent test was conducted by NIPSON. Water samples from 12 deep tubewells of different areas of Dhaka city were taken for laboratory tests. None of the tests showed presence of arsenic.

Dhaka WASA, however, has undertaken a special programme to test water samples from the deep tubewells mentioned in the newspaper. The tests would involve experts from various organisations.

Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Haris Chowdhury, Sadek Hossain Khoka of BNP, JAGPA president Shafiqul Alam Prodhan and Monira Khan and Firoz Hassan of FEMA were also present during the meeting.

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Clinton to seek big military spending

WASHINGTON, Jan 2: President Bill Clinton, back from a 48-hour New Year's respite, said today that he would seek a 12 billion dollar increase for the Pentagon's readiness and modernization efforts when he submits his new budget request next month, reports AP.

The proposal for an overall six-year increase of 100 billion, dollar, if approved by congressional appropriators, would be the first increase in Pentagon spending above inflation since 1991, the year of the Gulf War, and the largest since the Cold War buildup of the mid-1980s.

"We must undertake this effort today so that our nation will remain strong and secure tomorrow," the president said in his weekly radio address. He was responding to complaints by military leaders and Republicans critical of Clinton for the armed forces' declining readiness in the face of increased commitments abroad and aging weaponry and equipment.

The budget proposal, which will also include a 4.4 per cent military pay raise, the largest since 1982, "will help us to do right by our troops by upgrading and replacing aging equipment, barracks and family housing," Clinton said.

The 12 billion dollar would also pay for joint exercises, flight training, badly needed spare parts, recruiting, and "the

next generation" of ships, planes and weapons systems, Clinton said.

A strategy of immersing the president in issues is intended to show him doing his job and standing above congressional squabbling over whether he should remain in office.

As senators float trial balloons on whether to take his impeachment by the House to a full trial, Clinton is putting a