

Water Resources Minister Abdur Razzak addressing a seminar at the auditorium of Z H Sikder Women's Medical College & Hospital in the city yesterday. — PID photo

President, PM greet Myanmar leader Than Shwe

President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina have felicitated Myanmar leader Gen Than Shwe on the auspicious occasion of the independence day of that country, report APB.

In separate messages yesterday the President and the Prime Minister conveyed warm greetings to Senior General Than Shwe, Chairman of the State Peace and Development Council of the Union of Myanmar on the eve of its independence day.

They hoped the existing friendly relations between the two neighbouring countries would be further strengthened and consolidated in the years to come.

The President and the Prime Minister also wished good health, happiness and long life of the Myanmar leader and continued peace and progress of the friendly people of that country.

'Followers of Bangabandhu won't deviate from ideals'

CHITTAGONG, Jan 3: Labour and Employment Minister M A Mannan said yesterday that the followers of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman would not deviate from their ideals even when rivals perpetrate killing and terrorism and create frustration through unfair means, reports BSS.

He said, followers of Mujib ideals were struggling to build up a happy and prosperous Bangladesh under the leadership of Bangabandhu's daughter Sheikh Hasina.

Speaking as the chief guest at a memorial meeting held at local Engineers' Institute the minister said, communal forces had always been conspiring against mass movement, democratic movement and independence movement. Communal forces are enemies of humanity, he added.

The memorial meeting held under the auspices of Enam-Mansur Shaheed Memorial Parishad of Chandgaon here was presided over by parishad president M Rezaul Karim Chowdhury. It was also addressed by Chittagong city Awami League joint secretary Enamul Haq Daru, principal Abdul Hai, central leader of BCL Gulam Rabbani Chinnu, city Jubo League leader Sayed Mahmudul Haq and advocate Iftekar Saimum.

Death anniversary

The 26th anniversary of death of valiant freedom fighter Sadat Ali will be observed today, reports BSS.

A milad mahfil will be held this afternoon at his residence at Narayanganj.

Besides discharging his duty as a political advisor in sector 3, Ali took part in the War of Liberation directly.

5 more die of diarrhoea in Sirajganj

SIRAJGANJ, Jan 3: Five more deaths from diarrhoea were reported during the 48 hours ending this evening raising the total to 13 since the disease broke out last week in four thanas of the district, reports UNB.

Civil surgeon's office said the water borne disease was spreading in Belkuchi, Kazipur, Shahjapur and Tarash thanas where about 500 people were attacked on Friday and Saturday.

Health workers and village doctors said the main causes of spreading the disease are unsafe drinking water and unwholesome food taken by the poorer section of the people. Shortage of oral saline was reported from the afflicted areas.

Medical teams including nine in Tarash thana have been working round the clock to combat the disease.

The number of patients reporting to the thana health complexes with dysentery and other cold related diseases has increased.

Obaidul Quader visits youth dev project

About 100 young people of Bhashantek area under Mirpur thana of the city earn Taka 60 lakh annually investing a mere 10 lakh takas, reports BSS.

The youth, both boys and girls, invested Taka 10 lakh in fish cultivation in 20 water bodies of the area after receiving training from the Youth Development Programme, run by the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

Anisur Rahman elected ICAB president

Md Anisur Rahman FCA has been elected president of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Bangladesh (ICAB) for 1999 at its council meeting held on December 31, says a press release.

The council also elected Mohammad Alamgir FCA, Mohammed Abdul Baree FCA and Anwaruddin Chowdhury FCA vice presidents for the same term.

The proprietor of Rahman Anis & Co, Chartered Accountants, Anisur Rahman qualified as a chartered accountant from ICAB in 1979. He has been serving the Council ICAB in various capacities for three consecutive terms now. Prior to that Rahman served as Chairman of Dhaka Regional Committee of ICAB also for three terms. He was president of the Bangladesh Jute Mills Officers Association from 1982-1994.

Attack on N'ganj Sangram Parishad leaders: 1 hurt

From Our Correspondent

NARAYANGANJ, Jan 3: A group of unidentified people attacked the leaders and activists of Narayanganj Shahar Unnayan Sangram Parishad as they came out of the municipality office after submitting a memorandum to the administrator this morning.

One Shaokat, 26, was critically injured in the attack. He was rushed to the Pangu Hospital in Dhaka.

A press release of the Sangram Parishad claimed that some unidentified youths attacked their leaders and activists who went to the municipality office to submit the memorandum containing a charter of 11-point demands.

However, the reason behind the attack could not be known immediately.

Meanwhile, administrator of the municipality in another press release alleged that some people from the gathering near the municipality office hurled bombs at the building when the parishad leaders went out of the building.

The demands of the parishad include repairing of damaged roads and drains and holding municipal elections.

Police have been deployed in the area as a tense situation was prevailing.

Chief Minister says reports 'exaggerated' Violence against Christians flare in Gujarat

AHMEDABAD, India, Jan 3: A mob set a Pentecostal prayer hall on fire in a tribal area of India's western state of Gujarat in the latest in a wave of anti-Christian attacks, police said today.

"We have received complaints of a prayer hall being set on fire by nearly 60 to 70 youths around midnight (on Friday)," the state's additional Director General of Police, Satyabrata Banerjee, told Reuters.

The mob first broke furniture and the roof of the prayer hall at Hampat village and then set it on fire, he said, adding that no one was injured.

Hampat is in the predominantly tribal district of Dang, where mobs have attacked priests and nuns and burnt churches and missionary schools in at least 11 incidents since Christmas Day.

Gujarat Chief Minister

Keshubhai Patel said the attacks had been exaggerated and were triggered by "Christian miscreants" in the first place.

"I fail to understand why these minor incidents have been blown out of proportion all over the place," Patel told news agency Asian News International in an interview late on Saturday.

"The buildings that were set on fire were not even churches but small constructions used by tribal Christians to pray. And not even a single person has been killed in the violence," Patel said on the sidelines of a meeting of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party in the southern city of Bangalore.

"The incidents are unfortunate but were triggered in the first place after some Christian miscreants pelted stones at a procession of tribal Hindus," Patel said.

Blast kills 6 Ukrainian miners

KIEV, Jan 3: Six Ukrainian miners died and another was badly injured by an explosion that ripped through a coal mine in the eastern Ukrainian region of Luhansk, a local emergency ministry official said today, reports Reuters.

Viktor Sapon said the blast occurred late on Saturday at a mine in the town of Kirovsk as workers were preparing explosives underground.

"Rescue workers recovered six miners' bodies and evacuated one injured miner," Sapon said by telephone from Luhansk, 750 kilometres southeast of the Ukrainian capital Kiev.

Last April a gas blast at Skochinsky mine in the Donetsk region killed 63 miners.

22 massacred in Algeria

ALGIERS, Jan 3: Twenty-two people were massacred overnight in Algeria's said a region by armed Islamic extremists, security services said Saturday, reports AFP.

The massacre, the second since the start of the month of Ramadan, occurred in Oued El Atchane some 450 kilometres southwest of the capital Algiers.

Sixteen people were killed over the last weekend in the Ain Delfa area, 120 kilometres west of Algiers.

Vietnam to boost cooperation with China in 1999

HANOI, Jan 3: Vietnam's Prime Minister Phan Van Khai said Saturday that Vietnam will boost cooperation with China in 1999, considering Sino-Vietnamese relations an important factor for his country's development, reports Xinhua.

Answering a question by Xinhua on the Vietnam-China relations at a new year press conference here, the prime minister spoke of the similarities between the two countries and their joint desire to promote investment and trade relations toward the goal of 2 billion US dollars in two-way trade by the year 2000.

He also recalled the favourable developments in solving the issues in land border and delineation of the Tonkin Gulf.

Khai also reaffirmed Vietnam's policy to attach importance to its friendly and cooperative relations with Laos and Cambodia and its hope to have a peaceful and friendly border line with neighbouring countries.

Answering question on situation in Cambodia, the Vietnamese prime minister said his country will not interfere in internal affairs of Cambodia.

Vietnam hoped Cambodia will restore earlier its peace and stability.

Iraq to resist 'western-imposed' no-fly zones

BAGHDAD, Jan 3: President Saddam Hussein said Iraq will resist western-imposed no-fly zones in the north and south of his country, the Iraqi news agency reported today, says Reuters.

It said Saddam told a cabinet meeting that the no-fly zones were "an aggressive operation which violates the will of the Arab people and the Iraqi people."

The news agency did not say when the cabinet meeting took place.

It said Saddam described the no-fly zones, set up by western powers to limit Iraq's military strength in its northern Kurdish and southern Shi'ite regions, as "flagrant and clear-cut violations of international laws, accords and norms particularly the charter of the United Nations."

Since the United States and Britain ended their punishing four-day campaign of air strikes against Iraq two weeks ago, Baghdad has repeatedly challenged the legitimacy of the no-fly zones, firing on western planes overflying its territory and twice claiming to have shot down aircraft.

Both sides have accused each other of opening fire first. Saddam said the United States was trying to placate Arab anger over its "colonialist aggression" by claiming to have acted in self-defence.

Annan expresses outrage 2nd UN plane shot down in Angola in two weeks

WASHINGTON, Jan 3: UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan expressed outrage at news that a plane carrying seven passengers, including UN personnel, was shot down Saturday over Angola, reports AFP.

"The Secretary-General is outraged by reports of a second United Nations aircraft apparently shot down in Angola within the past week," Annan said in a statement.

The C-130 cargo plane was shot down by rebels near the central Angolan town of Huambo, the local state-run radio reported Saturday.

AP adds from Luanda: UN officials Sunday pleaded for information and access to a UN-chartered cargo plane shot down.

The C-130 aircraft, with eight people aboard, was hit by anti-aircraft fire 20 minutes after it took off from the city of Huambo Saturday, about 480 kilometres southeast of the capital, Luanda, UN spokesman Hamadoun Touré said.

The plane was carrying four Angolans, two Filipinos, an American and a Namibian, Touré said. Four of those aboard were crew members, three were from the United Nations and another was working for the World Food Programme. Touré refused to give their names or further information about them, and said it wasn't known if there were any survivors.

The plane, chartered from the TransAfrica company, was headed to Luanda. After it was hit, the aircraft tried to return to Huambo airport, but crashed about 80 kilometres outside the city in an area held by the rebel group UNITA, Touré said.

UNITA rebel officials were

not available for comment.

Another UN-chartered C-130 with 14 people aboard — including eight UN peacekeepers — crashed in the same area Dec. 26 while flying over an area of fighting between the government army and rebels.

The plane that crashed Saturday was carrying UN equipment out of Huambo. Last week, the United Nations evacuated dozens of staff members from the city after it was briefly shelled by the advancing rebels. Still more than 100 UN staff remain in Huambo.

Touré said the United Nations has suspended all flights in the country through Monday and was waiting for more information from UNITA before sending a rescue team to the area.

The UN mission in Angola already wants to ask UNITA rebel leaders about government claims that the movement is holding survivors from the earlier crash. A rebel leader told The Associated Press earlier Saturday that government claims of survivors were a ploy. "It went down in flames. I can't believe there are any survivors," UNITA Secretary-General Paulo Lukamba Gato said by telephone. "They know (the passengers) died, but they want to get some political advantage out of making UNITA look bad."

On Friday, army spokesman Brig. Manuel Jota said captured rebels had told the government they shot down the plane in the first crash, and that an unknown number of survivors were being held at rebel bases near Huambo.

Jota did not say how many of those aboard had survived, and the report could not be independently confirmed.

Lockerbie trial

UK to ask for Mandela's help

LONDON, Jan 3: British Prime Minister Tony Blair is to launch a fresh appeal to South African President Nelson Mandela to broker a deal with the Libyan government over the Lockerbie trial, he said today, reports AFP.

Blair who embarks on a four-day visit to South Africa on Wednesday, told the British weekly Sunday Business that Mandela has played a "unique and important role" in trying to resolve the controversy.

And he said he will be asking the south African leader to intervene again to get the two suspects released from Libya for trial.

He said: "I will explain that we have now done all we reasonably can to resolve the impasse over the trial."

The UK-US initiative for a trial in the Netherlands has been on the table for four months, I will appeal to President Mandela to convince the Libyan government that a third-country trial should now proceed."

Britain and the United States agreed in August that the two Libyans Abdel Basset Ali

El-Megrahi and Al-Amin Khalifa Fhimah, could judges, dropping demands that be tried by a US or British court.

Libyan Leader Moammer Gaddafi agreed to the arrangement in principle, promoting the UN Security Council to vote unanimously for lifting the sanctions once the two were extradited for trial.

But he has since demanded a number of guarantees about the fate of the two men, particularly that they be imprisoned in the Netherlands, and not shipped to Britain or the United States, if found guilty.

Mobs burn police station in Indonesia: 75 held

JAKARTA, Jan 3: Mobs hurled rocks and burned a police post and half a dozen cars and motorcycles in Indonesia's second-largest city. At least 75 people were arrested, police said Sunday, reports AP.

The riot Saturday in Surabaya, a major industrial center on the main island of Java, was the latest unrest to hit Indonesia, which is enduring political uncertainty and the worst economic crisis in three decades.

Violence in Surabaya, which has 3 million residents, broke out after rumours spread that police had murdered two robbery suspects who had been detained for questioning.

Speaking by telephone, police Col. Alian Anwar denied the rumours and said that one alleged thief who died in custody had been badly beaten by a crowd that later turned him over to police.

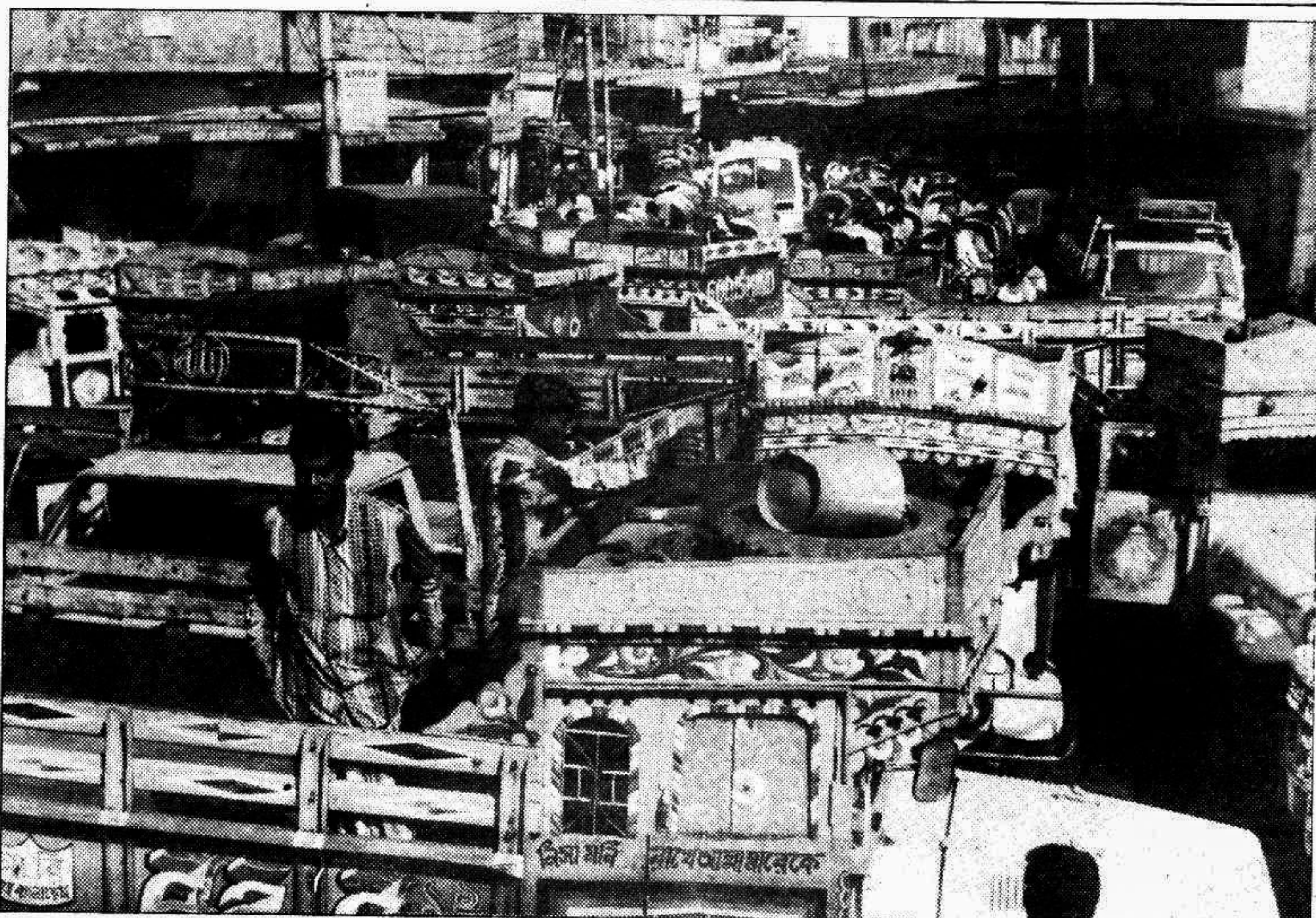
Many Indonesians are suspicious of the military, which includes the police force, because of its former role as guardian of the authoritarian rule of ex-President Suharto.

The police are widely viewed as corrupt, although the government of President B J Habibie has pledged to curb official graft.

In other violence this weekend, rioters threw stones at two garment factories in the western Java town of Purwakarta that they said were polluting the area.

A daily newspaper, the Suara Pembauran, said the attack Saturday left one factory workers seriously injured.

In the Indonesian capital of Jakarta on Sunday, hundreds of people, some using carts and trucks, looted old supplies of bricks, iron and aluminum from abandoned warehouses. Two police trucks were parked nearby but there were no reports of violence.



Haphazard parking of trucks at Dholakhal hampers the movement of vehicles in the area. As a result, traffic remains standstill in Tipu Sultan Road area for long. — Star photo.

201 years after his birth, Mirza Ghalib continues to reign in the hearts of Indians

NEW DELHI, Jan 3: He's an unlikely national hero — a poet known for the difficulty of both his verse and his personality, ambivalent in his politics and unobservant in his religion, reports AP.

Yet Mirza Mohammad Asadullah Khan is being celebrated in his bicentennial year in India with an enthusiasm befitting the one-word pen name with which he crowned himself: Ghalib, or 'the lustre'.

At a celebrity-studded commemoration in the weeks leading up to the 201st anniversary of his birth December 27, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee said Ghalib, who wrote in both courtly Persian and the Urdu of the markets and brothels of 19th century Delhi, spoke to the common man. The nation issued a new postage stamp honouring the poet, and a December international conference in New Delhi drew scholars who have translated him into French, German and Czech.

Indian cultural historian Pavan Varma said he grew up hearing Ghalib quoted at the dinner table.

"There was a Ghalib couplet to reinforce every argument or illustrate a point or counter an argument, because his canvass was so broad," Varma said in an interview. "He wrote poetry that penetrated the human condition."

Ghalib excelled at the exacting ghazal, a form composed of

a series of short couplets that can be independent of each other in subject and spirit, but are linked by rhythm and rhyme. He infused his ghazals with sophisticated puns and allusions, discoursing on philosophy, literature or history in a gesture.

Indians revel in the wit, economy and musicality of Ghalib's ghazals, and despair at ever being able to fully explain them to those who speak neither Urdu nor the classical Persian to which it is related. Translators like the American poet Adrienne Rich working with Urdu scholar Aijaz Ahmad have created compelling verse based on Ghalib's work.

The most quotable Ghalib, Varma said, has been passed down by word of mouth. That process was accelerated a decade ago by a popular film and then a television series on his life in which his verses were set to music and sung by some of the country's most beloved musicians.

Popular drama also popularised the image of Ghalib as bearded and soulful-eyed under the tower of a brimless hat still seen on older men shuffling through the narrow alleys of Delhi's Muslim neighbourhoods.

For a new documentary on New Delhi's past completed this year, filmmaker Sanjay Roy chose Ghalib's familiar figure to guide viewers through the

transition from the order of the Mughals who once ruled from the red sandstone fort at the heart of Delhi's old quarter, to the ascension of British colonists.

Ghalib lived through those troubled, often violent, decadent times. He found rich material to lampoon, but also sighed to see a world fading.

"Inside the fort a few princes get together and recite their verses. Once in a while I attend these gatherings. Contemporary society is about to vanish. Who knows when the poets will meet next or meet again at all?" the poet once wrote a friend.

"He was a romantic figure — tall, handsome. And he wore his attitude," filmmaker Roy said, recounting the story of the perennially cash-strapped poet refusing a college teaching appointment because the British director did not pay him the respect of meeting his carriage when Ghalib arrived for the job interview.

If he looked on the British with disdain, he sometime chafed at the Persian Muslim mores that were the heritage he shared with the Mughals. He adored wine and women, and rarely prayed.

Quatrain Hyderabad, one of India's best-known contemporary Urdu writers, said Ghalib would not have been surprised at the attention surrounding his bicentennial.

"He was very much sure of his own genius," she said.

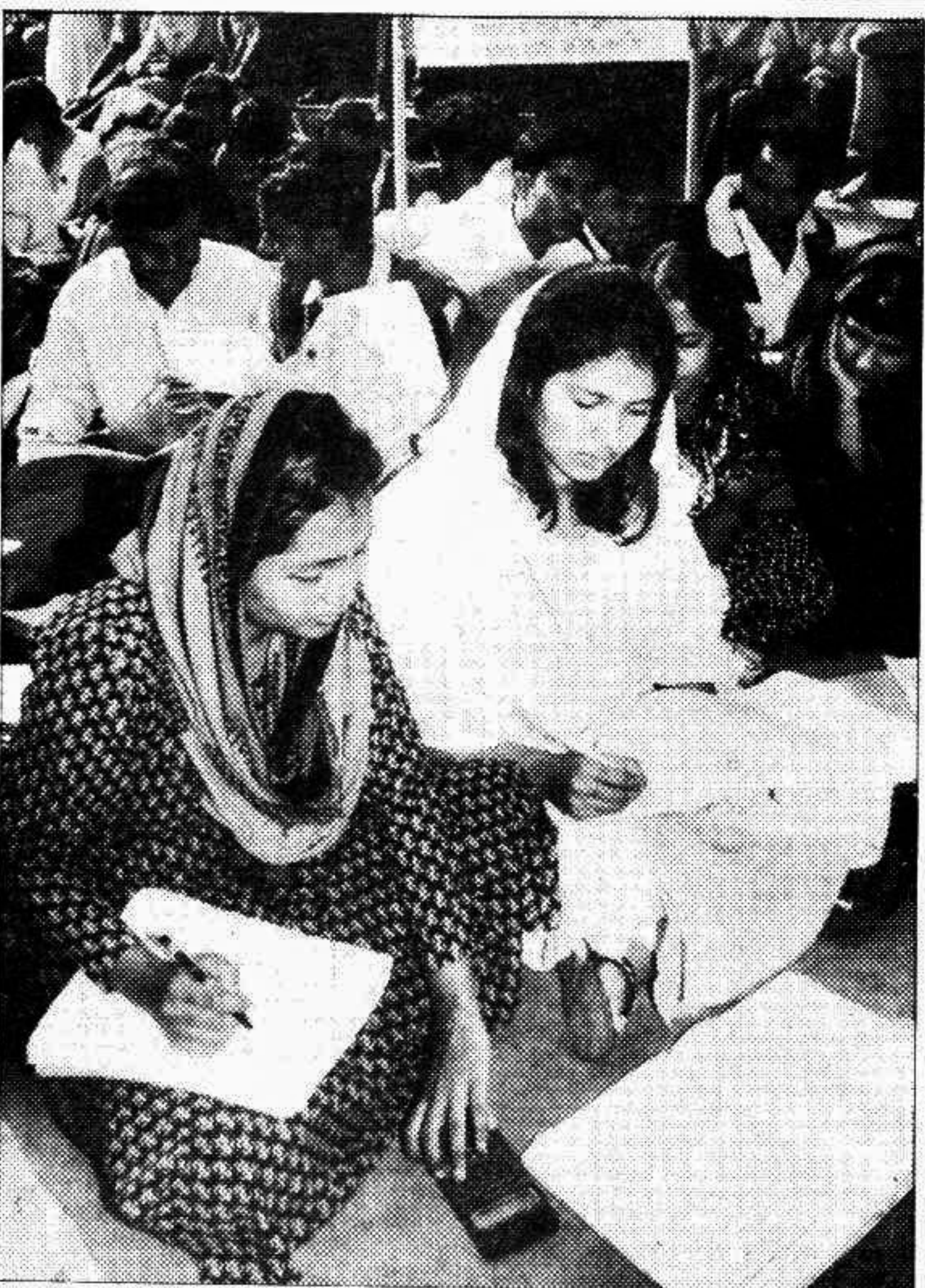
Born in the northern city of Agra, he moved to Delhi while still a teen prodigy. His steady rise in what was then a competitive, lively literary world was capped in 1854 when he was named poetry master to Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar, himself an accomplished poet.

The grave of Ghalib, who died February 15, 1869, still receives scores of visitors every day. Staff at the Ghalib Academy next door are accustomed to, if not overwhelmingly enthusiastic about, unlocking the gate of the iron fence surrounding his tomb.

"So many people come," said R K Ahmed, receptionist at the academy devoted to the study of Ghalib. Four hawkers sitting next to baskets heaped with blood-red roses for pilgrims to place on the shrine were proof the site attracts enough visitors to be a good place to do business.

The tomb is simple, a white marble block in a small pavilion of the same marble, and a Persian inscription declaring "the treasure of knowledge lies buried in the dust."

The wide, scrupulously swept courtyard around it paved in red sandstone is luxurious in a neighbourhood of cramped alleys where everyone seems to know the way to Ghalib's tomb, not least the burly owner of the nearby Ghalib Kebab Stand.



ICMAB students staged a sit-in demonstration in front of the institute in the city yesterday protesting the indefinite closure of the institute. — Star photo