



BNP organised a discussion meeting at the Jatiya Press Club yesterday to mark the 63rd birth anniversary of late President Ziaur Rahman.

Singapore DPM warns against political dissension

SINGAPORE, Jan 24: A Singapore leader has warned against political dissension in the tightly controlled island nation and urged a strong military as regional uncertainties persist, reports AP.

"We must guard against political opportunists who will seek to sow dissension and discord in our society," Deputy Prime Minister Tony Tan was quoted as saying at a Saturday ceremony for the People's Action Party, which has ruled Singapore since independence in 1965.

There have been few challenges to the party's dominance, and only three elected opposition politicians sit in the present 93-member Parliament. In contrast, there are nine government-appointed non-partisan members.

One opposition leader, Democratic Party chief Chee Soon, has waged a campaign recently for greater freedom of expression and the press.

He faces trial next month for flouting a law requiring police permits for any public speech. If convicted, Chee faces a fine and 5-year ban from running for office.

Tan made no direct reference to Chee's actions in his Saturday speech, but emphasised the need for unity and order.

Speaking to a gathering of about 1,000 leaders and party faithful, he said that regional events last year should serve as a reminder of how easily societies could splinter under economic duress.

He said the deep unrest in neighbouring Indonesia would degrade regional stability, unless the economy improves there and political uncertainties are resolved.

"In such uncertain times, Singapore must continue to ensure that we have a defense capability which can ensure our security," added Tan, who is also the defense minister.

7 killed in India road mishap

NEW DELHI, Jan 24: Two passenger buses rammed into each other in a village in southern India Sunday killing seven people and injuring 33 others, domestic news agencies reported, reports AP.

At least 15 of the injured were admitted in serious condition in hospitals close to Karaikal village in the southern Tamil Nadu state, where the accident took place, Press Trust of India reported.

The news agency said 40 people were injured, United News of India put the number of injured at 33.

The drivers of both buses, owned by the state's government-owned transport corporation, were killed in the accident. Few other details were available.

The area is 1,900 kilometers (1,180 miles) south of New Delhi.



Unmindful of the cold temperatures and snow fall, a member of the Indian border security forces continues his duty yesterday on the streets of the commercial hub of Srinagar, capital of Kashmir, ahead of India's Republic Day that falls tomorrow.

Maharashtra rulers a bunch of cowards, says Sonia Gandhi

SHIRAMPUR, Jan 24: Congress president Sonia Gandhi has said those ruling Maharashtra today were a "bunch of cowards" seeking to cow down the common man through violence, reports PTI.

"Those in power in the state are nothing but a bunch of cowards who had gotten together evoking the name of the great Marathi warrior, Chhatrapati Shivaji and are out to terrorise people," Sonia told a massive public rally here yesterday.

The Shiv Sena-BJP government in the state is blatantly insulting the age-old Indian tradition of brotherhood and respect for all religions," she said while addressing the over two lakh participants of the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) rally.

In her severe criticism of the four-year-old Sena-BJP alliance government in the state, Sonia said "What Maharashtra government is doing is not just a political issue but is related to the very soul of the nation every patriotic and peace-loving Indian should fight these forces."

Referring to the "snatching away of the fundamental human rights" by the Sena-BJP government, she cited recent issues like the controversy over the film 'Fird', digging of the Feroze Shah Kotla Pitch and the dumping of the Sri Krishna Commission Report into a corner by the alliance government.

The Congress president also declared that her party would strongly oppose the state government's move to scrap the Bombay Industrial Relations Act (BIRA) they are scrapping this act because they want to infiltrate anti-social elements in the trade union movement, she said.

Iraq ready to talk with Kurdish rebels

BAGHDAD, Jan 24: Iraq is ready to hold talks with Kurdish rebel leaders to discuss their demands for greater autonomy for three provinces in the country's north, Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz said Saturday, reports AP.

Iraq is "ready for a dialogue with the Kurdish leadership to achieve a peaceful and democratic settlement," Aziz told a meeting with 129 Spanish leftist activists who are visiting Iraq to express solidarity with its sanctions-hit people.

Iraq recognises the autonomous rule for the Kurds within the framework of the Republic of Iraq," Aziz said.

The deputy prime minister did not say how the Baghdad government would conduct talks with the Kurds or how it would guarantee their autonomy.

Iraq has made similar offers in the past, but Kurdish leaders have turned them down, wary that President Saddam Hussein's government will not keep its promises.

The latest offer comes in the wake of a stepped-up US campaign to mobilise Iraqi opposition groups against Saddam.

On Tuesday, the Clinton administration chose seven Iraqi opposition groups as eligible for \$97 million in aid, mostly in the form of military material from pentagon surpluses.

Three of the groups are from the Kurdish region — Kurdistan Democratic Party, Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and the Islamic Kurdish Party.

The Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union share control of the Kurdish autonomous zone, a region in northern Iraq that has been under US and British protection since the Baghdad government crushed a rebellion there shortly after the 1991 Gulf War.

On Saturday, the Al-Iraq newspaper published by pro-government Kurdish groups urged Kurdish leaders not to be part of American attempts to topple Saddam.

"Let us adopt a responsible attitude on the threshold of history... It is not in Iraqi interest to follow the United States, which does not care for anything but its own interests," he said.

In his comments to the Spanish activists, Aziz also accused the United States of double standards for criticizing the Iraqi government while ignoring the undemocratic rule in Saudi Arabia.

"We don't say our regime is liberal, but we say there are at least some parties... there is a parliament and there are trade unions" in Iraq, Aziz said.

"What is there in Saudi Arabia? There is a monarch and... there is one union — for the princes," he said.

Aziz denied that Iraq is a threat to its neighbours. The country had not fired a single shot against Saudi Arabia and Kuwait in the last eight years while those two countries had allowed their bases to be used by American fighter jets targeting Iraq.

"So who is threatening whom," Aziz asked.

Lawyers boycott court in Barisal

From Staff Correspondent

BARISAL, Jan 24: Lawyers of the Barisal Bar abstained from attending court today protesting the refusal of the President to assent to the Civil Procedure Code (Amendment) Act adopted unanimously in the last session of the JS.

A resolution was also adopted in a meeting of the lawyers, chaired by Masudul Haq Khan, president of the Barisal Bar Association.

Forty-two candidates collected their forms for nine ward commissioners and fifteen for three reserved women seats.

According to an official source there are 50366 voters in Faridpur Pouroshava. Of them 26079 are male and the rest are female.

The candidates who collected nomination papers have political affiliation with both ruling party and the main oppositions.

According to observers the hartal or boycott call by the opposition will have little impact on Pouroshava polls since this election is not held on party basis.

Junta blames NLD, PDF for inciting riots

YANGON, Jan 24: Myanmar authorities have accused the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) and the People Defence Force (PDF) which the government calls an expatriate insurgent group of inciting riots in the country by spreading anti-government pamphlets in the last two months, reports Xinhua.

The authorities said some of their members dropped and distributed "instigative" pamphlets in the Institute of Medicine No 12 in Yangon on buses and at bus stops and in public parks during November and December, the official New Light of Myanmar reported today.

An organiser of the PDF formed in 1990 in a Thai border area, was charged with distributing the pamphlets and propaganda leaflets in collusion with some NLD members.

Action in being taken against them for the move, the report said.

The NLD, a winning party in the 1990 general election, last June urged the government to call the parliament. After its call met with ignorance, the NLD unilaterally formed a 10 members "committee representing the people's parliament elected in the election" and set up the "people's parliament" on September 16.

On December 8, the representing committee further formed 10 "sub committees" adopting some resolutions including a criminal complaint against the government's National Intelligence Bureau for detaining the party's parliament representatives elect and forcing a number of its party branches and members to dissolve and resign respectively since then.

Poura polls Great enthusiasm prevails among candidates in Faridpur

FARIDPUR, Jan 24: Great enthusiasm is prevailing among the intending candidates as well as voters in the Pouroshava polls, despite the hartal call on Tuesday by the main opposition parties, coinciding with the date for submitting nomination papers for Pouroshava polls, to force the authorities to cancel the scheduled, reports BSS.

According to local election office sources, about sixty-two intending candidates including sixteen females collected their nomination forms for chairman, ward commissioners and reserved women seats till 5 pm today without any hindrances or resistances from any quarter.

According to the sources, five candidates including one female and the sitting chairman collected nomination forms for the coveted post of chairman of Faridpur Pouroshava.

More candidates backed by strong political forces are expected to collect their forms tomorrow, it was reliably learnt.

Police said Sonatan got into a hot argument with Sunita when she was making an earthen stove in the compound of her house at about 8 am to prepare for the Saraswati festival. At one point Sonatan, who had reportedly been nursing a grievance against her for not giving him a loan, lost all control and ran amok. He picked up a dao and hacked her life away.

A case has been filed with the local police and Sonatan has been arrested.

Ex-principal of Gournadi College joins JP

Former principal of Gournadi College in Barisal Prof Gurnadi joined the Jatiya Party, a party press release said, reports UNB.

JP chairman HM Ershad welcomed the newcomer at his Baridhara office. Party leaders Dr TIM Fazel Rabb Chowdhury MP and Sunil Gupta were present.

Exam postponed

The final examination of HSS 101 of the University of Asia Pacific scheduled to be held on January 26 has been postponed due to unavoidable circumstances, says a press release.

Fresh date of the examination will be announced later.

Rajshahi Board

High fees demanded from SSC candidates

PANCHAGARH, Jan 24: About 30 per cent of students may not be able to sit for SSC examinations under the Rajshahi Board this year because of very high rate of examination fees demanded by the school authorities, reports APB.

The Rajshahi Board has fixed examination fees at Tk 500 and Tk 615 for Arts and Science groups respectively. But most of the schools are demanding Tk 2,000 to Tk 4,000, it is alleged.

Many parents and guardians said they are unable to meet the demands of the schools. Unless the authorities take immediate action to stop "profligating" by the schools, many students will not be able to sit for the SSC examinations, they said.

One rescued from kidnappers

FENI, Jan 24: Police here on Saturday rescued a man who was kidnapped six days ago, reports UNB.

Abdul Mannan was kidnapped from Chaudhagram of Comilla district on January 17. He was rescued from Saidkandi village in Sonagazi thana on Saturday night following confidential statement of local BCL organising secretary Nurul Amin Tipu.

Police had arrested Tipu for his alleged involvement in kidnapping Mannan. The victim was rescued from the house of local Jubo League leader.

They also arrested Jubo League leader Shukkur Miah and JCD leader Shahabuddin from the house.

Malaysian lawyers propose law on contempt of court

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 24: The Malaysian Bar Council has proposed that a clear-cut law be drafted on contempt of court following a spate of such cases recently aimed at lawyers, news reports said Sunday, reports APB.

Bar Council President Cyrus Das said that the lack of a specific law has given judges the power to arbitrarily hold lawyers in contempt and selected the punishment.

"A liberal and frequent use of the contempt power against lawyers or as a means of disciplining lawyers for some infraction is not acceptable to the Bar," Das was quoted as saying in the New Straits Times newspaper.

The Bar Council has formed a committee to draft a proposal for the legislation. The report would be submitted for approval at the Bar Council's annual meeting in March before being presented to the government, Das said.

He said the proposed law should clearly state what constitutes contempt and how to punish the offense as the current parameters were too broad.

Das said similar laws in Britain, India, Australia, New Zealand and other Commonwealth countries would be studied as models.

On Dec 1 last year, Zainur Zakaria, one of the lawyers for jailed former deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, was sentenced to three months in jail after maligning prosecutors. His appeal is pending.

Anwar's sensational trial on charges of corruption and sodomy — charges he denies — resumes Tuesday.

On Dec 5, lawyer Tommy Thomas was sentenced to six months' jail after the High Court rejected his apology for issuing a press statement in breach of a court order.

Widow murdered in Sylhet

SYLHET, Jan 24: A widow was murdered by her brother-in-law at a village in Goainghat thana here on Friday. He hacked her to death with a dao, a heavy-bladed implement used to cut firewood and vegetation, reports APB.

The victim was identified as Sunita Kanti, 45, a widowed sister-in-law of Sonatan Kanti, 30, of Khasmouja village in the thana. She was the mother of four children studying at high school level.

Police said Sonatan got into a hot argument with Sunita when she was making an earthen stove in the compound of her house at about 8 am to prepare for the Saraswati festival. At one point Sonatan, who had reportedly been nursing a grievance against her for not giving him a loan, lost all control and ran amok. He picked up a dao and hacked her life away.

A case has been filed with the local police and Sonatan has been arrested.

Obituary

Shanti Bhusan Roy, one of the long-serving employees of Adcom Ltd, died of cerebral hemorrhage at the Holy Family Hospital on January 15. He was 50, says a press release.

He left behind his wife, two sons and a daughter and a host of relatives and admirers to mourn his death.

He was cremated at Chashara, Narayananganj.

Pope calls on Christians to help build a better America

MEXICAN CITY, Jan 24: Speaking in one of the most important shrines of Roman Catholicism, Pope John Paul II on Saturday urged his American flock to make the region a "Continent of life" a place without racism, abortion or drug-trafficking, reports AP.

He also announced a new regional strategy for the church Catholics must struggle against the excesses of capitalism and the church must try harder to reach the rich and powerful, not just the poor.

"We must stir up a new springtime of holiness on the continent," he said in his homily.

Millions of Mexicans, with flickering candles and yellow-and-white Vatican flags showed the pontiff with an adoration he says he misses when back in Rome, he lined the streets of his route and packed the area surrounding the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Inside, the pope prayed to the virgin's image, which the church says appeared on the cloak of an Aztec peasant in 1531, helping make the European church accessible to Indians in the Americas.

The 78-year-old pontiff, on a six-day visit to Mexico and the United States, paused often during his homily but spoke relatively clearly in four languages: Spanish, Portuguese, French and English. He leaned on his bishop's staff topped with a silver crucifix, and aides supported him as he climbed and descended the stairs of the altar.

"The church must proclaim the gospel of life and speak out with prophetic dignity against the culture of death," the pope told bishops gathered from across North and South America.

He drew cheers by urging churches throughout the Americas to honour the Virgin of Guadalupe on Dec 12.

"That is very good," said 22-year-old Francisco Cevallos Hernandez, one of about 200 people watching the homily on a battery of television screens in Mexico City's main plaza.

"We needed a symbol of unity, brotherhood and relief for poor people. The Virgin of Guadalupe can be that symbol for the continent."

The document on the church's strategy in the Americas represents a major shift in emphasis reflecting the pope's concerns over unfettered capitalism and moves the church away from its earlier worries about Marxist liberation theology in the region.

It also contains a call to preach to the movers and shakers of society, in addition to the poor.

In his homily, he echoed some of the themes from that document, which condemned the "social sins which cry out to heaven" — drug trafficking, corruption, abortion, environmental destruction and the exploitation of women, children, minority groups and the poor.

"Dear brothers and sisters, the time has come to banish once and for all from the continent every attack against life," the pope said in an English-language portion of the homily interrupted by applause four times.

"No more violence, terrorism and drug-trafficking! No more torture or other forms of abuse! There must be an end to the unnecessary recourse to the death penalty!"

"No more exploitation of the weak, racial discrimination or ghettos of poverty! Never again!"

Dancing, singing and chanting, crowds overflowed with warmth despite the 43-degree chill. "It's very cold, but we are happy," said Maria Jesus Rio Frio as steam billowed from carts dispensing hot drinks.

Some faithful waited for days along the pope's route. At several points, the crowds surged past blockades of volunteers, almost shutting the streets before police pushed them back.

Following his basilica Mass, the pope rested, then met with President Ernesto Zedillo and Mexico's diplomatic corps at the presidential residence in Chapultepec Park.

There, the pope spoke of the role that religions can play in forging a "common ethical base" that included basic principles such as "thou shalt not kill," "thou shalt not lie" and "thou shalt not steal."

The pope waved to thousands of invited guests gathered on the lawn, some holding candles and chanting "El papa. El papa."

"In our capital and in our houses, be very welcome," Zedillo told the pope.

"Thank you very much for the warm reception," the pope told the crowd. "May God bless you."

On Sunday, he is to celebrate Mass at a racetrack and on Monday hold a music-filled celebration at Mexico's biggest soccer stadium before flying Tuesday to the United States, where he will meet with President Bill Clinton in St Louis.

More time for rest is built in to John Paul's schedule this visit than in the past. The pope's slurred speech, trembling left hand and sometimes absent expression could be symptoms of Parkinson's disease, but the Vatican has never offered an explanation.

At a restaurant along the pope's route Saturday, waitresses in peasant-style uniforms served breakfasts to patrons watching the Mass on televisions set up for the occasion. Waitress Isabel Maria Hernandez came in early to make sure she didn't miss any of the pope's appearance.

"It's something beautiful. It's difficult to express, but I just feel it here," she said, touching her heart.



A K Faezul Huq, Bangladesh Minister of State for Jute, receiving a portrait of Sher-e-Bangla from Jyoti Basu, Chief Minister of W Bengal, at a function in Calcutta recently.

Child rapist awaits severe punishment till execution

MANILA, Jan 24: A child rapist who is set to be executed on Feb 5 will fast starting this week in an effort to assert his innocence, a prison chaplain said Sunday, reports AP.

Leo Echegaray, who has been convicted of repeatedly raping his 10-year-old stepdaughter, will skip one full meal a day and eat less in his remaining meals starting Monday, said prison chaplain Roberto Olague.

"This is not a protest. It's mainly to reaffirm his devotion to God and partly to convey to people that he's innocent of that crime," Olague told The Associated Press.

Echegaray was originally scheduled to die on Jan 4, but the Supreme Court ordered a six-month delay just three hours before the planned execution to give lawmakers time to review the law that restored capital punishment in 1994.

The Supreme Court withdrew its order on Tuesday after the House of Representatives voted against reconsidering the law.

On Thursday, Echegaray's lawyers asked the Supreme Court to reconsider, arguing that a repeal of the death penalty law is still possible despite an overwhelming vote by the House of Representatives not to review it.

The court is scheduled to take up the appeal on Tuesday.

Echegaray's wife, Zenaida, said her husband has turned to prayers most of the time since learning of the new execution date. He remains healthy and normal, she said, but he is upset about news reports saying he was showing signs of insanity.

"He's very normal and calm and plays chess a lot," she said.

She said her husband and other death row inmates in a maximum-security cell compound have agreed not to listen and watch news programmes on television and over the radio.

Echegaray's execution, the first in the Philippines in 23 years, has triggered a debate that has divided many Filipinos.

The delay in carrying out his sentence has set off an uproar among many Filipinos exasperated by crime. Pro-death penalty protesters staged noisy rallies and the Supreme Court received bomb threats.

But Roman Catholic bishops and other civic groups have argued against the death penalty, saying there is no proof it reduces crime.

Ferry ghats inoperative in Patuakhali

PATUAHALI, Jan 24: Most of the ferries in different ghats in Patuakhali, Pirojpur, Barisal and Barisal districts have become inoperative, reports APB.

Sources told APB that there are 45 ferries and 36 pontoons in 24 ghats. Every ghat has more than one ferry, but in most cases only one can be put to use since the others are inoperative.

Five ferries are lying in a half-submerged condition in rivers, 2 in Patuakhali, and one each in Kalapara, Hajipur and Mahipur.

According to the sources, five 'utility' type ferries replaced A-type ferries in Khepupara, Hajipur and Mahipur in 1997. But three of those are now unfit for use.

Most of the inoperative ferries are lying in a dilapidated condition and may soon become junk metal unless these are repaired, the sources said.

Howladar Jute Mills workers deprived of wages for long

MADARIPUR, Jan 24: About 600 workers and employees of the A R Howladar Jute Mills are not getting wages for the last 8 months, reports APB.

Production has fallen drastically due to alleged mismanagement by the owners and less than 200 workers work in the mill now.

Sources in the workers' union while talking to APB claimed that their wages amounting to Tk 45 lakh is yet to be paid. Some workers also alleged that the owners embezzled more than Tk 2 crore of their gratuity money.

It is alleged that every time the workers approached the owners for their wages, they had to face insult and harassment, and even intimidation by hoodlums.

They said the situation in the mill started deteriorating when a dispute over ownership surfaced in 1991. The government tried to mediate in 1994 but the attempt failed as the owners fired many skilled hands violating labour law, they alleged.

Many workers alleged that the owners were not really interested in running the mill.

CLASS presents gifts to children suffering from leukemia

Children Leukemia A tance and Support Services (CLASS) has distributed cash and gifts on the eve of Eid-ul-Fitr among 11 children suffering from leukemia and undergoing treatment in the isolation ward at Bangabandhu Medical University Hospital, reports UNB.

CLASS, formed to support the child leukemia patients and their family, started different awareness and humanitarian activities in Dhaka and Chittagong from November last year.

The organisation also donated some equipment to the newly-constructed isolation ward of the Chittagong Medical College Hospital on January 18 and some other sports items for setting up a playing corner.

CLASS Chairman Osman Gani Mansur, Dhaka unit office-bearers Pavel Rahman, Mahbub Alam, Captain Shahrin Iqbal and Alhaj Mir Mozammel Hossain were present during the distribution of gifts among the children.