

Five-day nat'l fair begins at Sagardari

SAGARDARI (Jessore), Jan 26: The five-day national fair and memorial celebrations of epic poet Michael Modhusudan began here today with the participation of country's poets, litterateurs and researchers, reports BSS.

Education Minister ASHK Sadique inaugurated the colourful fair which will include discussion and cultural functions.

Paying tributes to the poet, the minister said Modhusudan was one of those personalities who had greatly contributed to our society and literature in the 19th century.

Sadique said Modhusudan borrowed western trend to embrace modernism, but he never abandoned the sense of belonging to his roots.

He said the fair has been made a national one under the patronisation of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs to give state honour to the poet.

Two seminars will be held on the works of Modhusudan. Staging of drama and cultural functions will be held everyday.

Int'l confce on mathematical physics ends

From CU Correspondent CHITTAGONG, Jan 26: The fifth international conference on Mathematical Physics concluded at Chittagong University yesterday.

About 150 scientists from Japan, India, Pakistan, Uzbekistan and host Bangladesh took part at the three-day-long conference.

The inaugural session was presided over by Dr Jamal Nazrul Islam, Director of the Research Centre for Mathematical and Physical Science. Professor Mohammad Shamsul Haque, former chairman of the University Grant Commission (UGC), was present as chief guest.

The speakers expressed the hope that participation of the scientists, academicians and research workers from home and abroad in the conference would promote better understanding among themselves. The conference would help promote research activities of the teachers and students of the country and widen frontiers of knowledge.

Housewife dies of burn injuries

By DMCH Correspondent A housewife, who sustained critical burn injuries when her father-in-law allegedly threw a kerosene stove at her Friday, died at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) yesterday morning.

The dead was identified as Husne Ara, 30, wife of Billal Hossain, a resident of Old PG Quarter on the DMCH premises.

According to the victim's relatives, Husne Ara had an altercation with Satar Mia, her father-in-law, at her residence Friday afternoon on stage. Satar threw the burning stove at her.

Ramma police, however, could not confirm the incident till the filing of this report last night.

Wheat grown in 54,500 acres in Panchagarh

PANCHAGARH, Jan 26: Wheat has been cultivated in about 54,500 acres in five thanas of Panchagarh district in the current Rabi season, reports BSS.

Mustard has been cultivated in 6,200 acres in the five thanas this winter season.

More than 6,800 acres have been brought under potato cultivation in the district this year.

According to an official source, target of Boro paddy cultivation has been fixed at about 13,500 acres.

Meanwhile, the agriculture extension department has selected 500 plots in Panchagarh, Tetulia, Boda, Debiganj and Atwari thanas to demonstrate to the peasants modern methods of cultivation.

Body recovered

Police recovered the body of an unidentified man aged about 30 from a dustbin at Nurercala in city's Badda area yesterday, reports UNB.

They sent the body bearing marks of multiple injury to Dhaka Medical College Hospital for autopsy.

Qulkhwani

By Staff Correspondent The qulkhwani of Shamsun Nahar Huri will be held today after Maghreb prayers at her Arambagh residence in the city.

Shamsun Nahar, wife of late Ghasuddin Ahmed and sister of Rajuddin Ahmed Raju MP, died on Sunday at BIRDEM Hospital. She was 63.

Janaza

By Staff Correspondent The namaj-e-janaza of Shamsun Nahar, wife of late AF Shamsur Rahman, former District and Sessions Judge, will be held today after Jehr prayers at Elephant Road Katabon mosque in the city.

Her body was preserved at BIRDEM since her death on Saturday to await the arrival of her sons and daughter from abroad.

Her qulkhwani will be held at "Judge Kuthi", 230/1 Elephant Road, tomorrow after Asr prayers.



(Top) BNP activists lie down on the street protesting police action on their procession at Tophkana Road in the city during hartal hours yesterday. (Above) An angry Sadek Hossain Khoka, MP, takes a swipe at the policemen over the attack on the BNP procession. —Star photo

Vietnam slams US for alleged violations of human rights

HANOI, Jan 26: For the second time in a week, Vietnam on Tuesday sharply criticised the United States for alleged human rights violations, saying it should clean up its own act before lecturing others, reports AP.

The Communist Party newspaper Nhan Dan (People) said it was unacceptable that "extremists" had been allowed to attack a Vietnamese native who put up a poster of Ho Chi Minh, the late Vietnamese leader, and a communist Vietnamese flag in his video-rental shop.

Up to 500 Vietnamese natives protested for several days last week against the action by Truong Van Tran in the Little Saigon neighborhood of Westminster, California. He was assaulted at one point.

Southern California is home to about 300,000 Vietnamese immigrants, two-thirds of them clustered around Little Saigon. Many of them fled South Vietnam after it fell to the communists in 1975.

"The violence by extremists against Mr Truong Van Tran in US territory is a gross violation of human rights, causing profound discontent," Nhan Dan said in a commentary.

"It is sad that the obstinate action, taking place right in a country which loudly lectures (others) on human rights and claims itself the champion of human rights elsewhere, was not prevented."

A judge ordered Truong to remove the portrait and flag after the owners of the shopping mall where his shop is located sought a court order, complaining the display was disruptive to other businesses.

A Foreign Ministry statement, quoted by the Vietnam News Agency, said Truong was acting in conformity with US and international law.

"Truong's acts should be protected by US law-related agencies, particularly the administration of the place where Truong lives," the statement said.

Nhan Dan used the incident to take a swipe at Washington for its continuing operations in Iraq.

"It is ironic that Americans use warplanes and weapons in a country tens of thousands miles away to protect human rights, but they remain silent and even ignore the brazen violation of human rights right in their country."

"Closing their eyes intentionally before this truth could only be understood as an attitude of tolerating crimes," Nhan Dan said in the incident was not conducive to promoting cooperation between Vietnam and the United States and would be condemned by public opinion in both countries and the world community.

The US State Department has included Vietnam on its list of countries with human-rights violations.

Nhan Dan last week slammed Washington for alleged human-rights violations against migrant workers at US companies in Saipan.

The criticism was based on three lawsuits filed Jan. 13 that claim Saipan workers face beatings, forced abortions, vermin-infested quarters, barbed wire and armed guards while making clothing tagged "Made in the USA" for American retailers.

Clash over land in Barisal: One killed, 15 hurt

From Staff Correspondent BARISAL, Jan 26: One person was killed and 15 others injured in a clash over land dispute at village Sarisha in Agailjhara thana of the district this afternoon.

According to witnesses, two rival groups of villagers were locked in the clash over harvesting paddy on a disputed land that left one Lalanpikie, 28, killed on the spot and 15 others injured.

The seriously injured six people were admitted to Barisal SBMC hospital.

The Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Deb Mukharji and Mrs. Purobi Mukharji held a reception yesterday evening in observance of the Republic Day of India, reports BSS.

Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad, Finance Minister S A M S Kibria, Food and Agriculture Minister Begum Motia Chowdhury, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Abul Hasan Chowdhury, politicians, diplomats, journalists and the elite of the city attended.

The High Commissioner of Australia to Bangladesh Charles Stuart, and Mrs Stuart held a reception here yesterday evening in observance of the Australia Day, reports BSS.

Ministers including Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad, Environment Minister Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, Finance Minister S A M S Kibria, Food and Agriculture Minister Begum Motia Chowdhury, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Abul Hasan Chowdhury, diplomats, journalists and the elite of the city attended.

The Senate hearings are scheduled to continue until March.

Military ties with the United States, which ruled the Philippines as a colony for nearly half a century, have remained a sensitive topic since the Philippine Senate forced the closure of the last US base in 1992.

The VFA generally gives the United States jurisdiction over US soldiers who commit crimes while on duty in the Philippines, and the Philippines jurisdiction over crimes committed while off duty.

The United States halted major exercises in the Philippines and visits by US military ships in December 1996, when the Manila government ended a legal loophole that had shielded US military personnel from prosecution by the Philippines for crimes committed here.

Senator Blas Ople, chairman of the Senate foreign affairs committee, said Monday the Senate might reject the VFA if the United States does not guarantee it will come to the aid of the Philippines in any military confrontation with Beijing over the disputed Spratly Islands in the south China Sea.

The United States has not taken sides in the competing territorial claims to the Spratlys, and the 1951 US-Philippine Mutual Defense Treaty does not clearly state whether Washington would defend the Philippines in any confrontation over the territory.

The Spratlys, a string of islands, reefs and atolls straddling vital sea lanes in the South China Sea, are claimed in whole or in part by the Philippines, China, Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia and Brunei.

"This ambiguity of the US position is a course creating a problem for the ratification of the Visiting Forces Agreement," Ople said.

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Raporta said exports would remain unchanged because the world arms market is shrinking and remains highly competitive, and Russia's economic troubles have forced it to produce less arms.

JCD, BCL hold rallies on DU campus

By DU Correspondent Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), the student wing of BNP, brought out a pro-hartal procession on the Dhaka University campus yesterday while the Awami League-backed Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) brought out an anti-hartal procession.

Both the student organisations also held rallies after marching through the campus.

At the JCD rally, the leaders condemned the ruling party for repression of the opposition activists throughout the country.

They alleged that the Awami League government after assuming power began to arrest the JCD leaders and workers.

JCD leaders Monjur Elahi, ABM Mosharraf Hossain, Manir Hossain and Mostafizur Rahman Mamun addressed the rally.

At the BCL rally, the leaders accused the opposition parties of hatching conspiracy to grab power through creating anarchy in the country.

They also alleged that the opposition parties were calling hartal to destabilise the country's democracy and peaceful atmosphere.

The BCL leaders urged the oppositions to refrain from such undemocratic activities for the sake of the country's economy.

BCL President Bahadur Bepari, General Secretary Ajay Kar Khokan and Sajjad Hossain addressed the rally.

Home Minister visits injured rickshawpuller

Home Minister Rafiqul Islam visited the injured rickshawpuller Mohammad Ali at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) last night, reports BSS.

The rickshawpuller was injured in an attack during the hartal hours yesterday.

The minister assured him of all medicare facilities and providing his family expenses during the treatment period from his (minister's) own fund. He also gave Tk 2000 to Mohammad Ali while enquiring about his condition.

The minister instructed the police to arrest the persons responsible for the attack on Mohammad Ali in the city.

Indian envoy hosts reception

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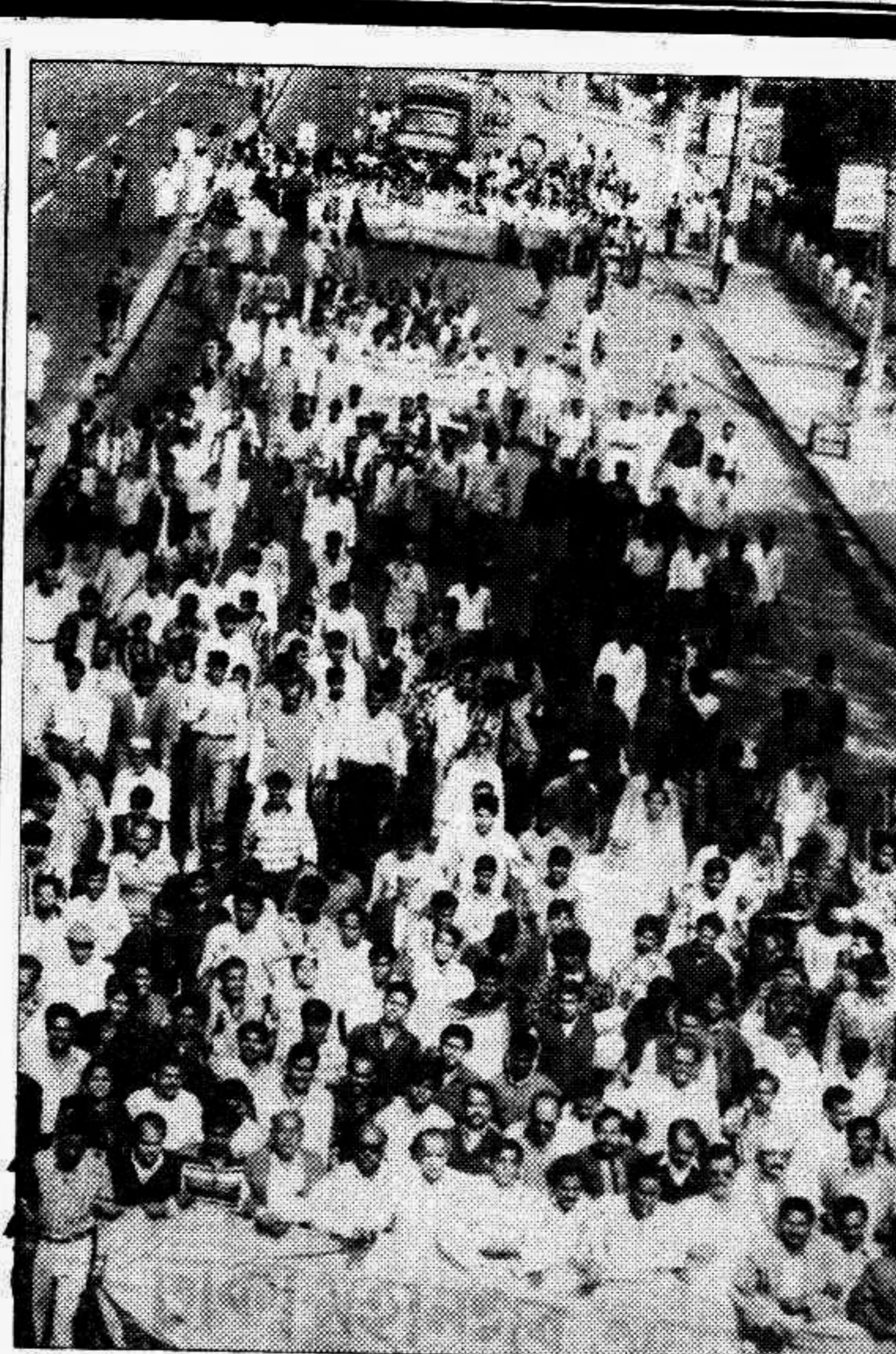
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City Awami League brought out an anti-hartal procession in the city yesterday. —Star photo

President's speech boycott Zillur blasts comments of B Chy

Awami League General Secretary and LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Zillur Rahman yesterday termed the comments of BNP leader Badruddoza Chowdhury on boycott of the President's speech in parliament as "unparliamentary, misleading and a blatant lie," reports BSS.

In a statement, he said former President Abdur Rahman Biswas in an interview with UNB on Monday gave details of how the President's speech was prepared during the BNP regime.

Badruddoza was the deputy leader of parliament when Biswas was the president, Zillur Rahman said, adding it is not unknown to the BNP leader how the President's speeches are finalised in parliamentary system of government.

The minister said Biswas' interview proves that the BNP leader made false utterances about the former president's speeches.

"In fact B Chowdhury and his party do not believe in parliament and parliamentary democracy as they have emerged from undemocratic process and represent autocracy," Zillur said, adding "their main target is not to protect democracy but to destroy it. This is why they have kept presidential form of government intact in their party's constitution."

In another statement, the Awami League general secretary expressed deep concern at the killing of Mohammad Ripon, the publicity secretary of Jessore Noapara Rajshahi High School unit Chhatra League, by BNP hitmen.

He urged all to build up united resistance against such anti-democracy and anti-social elements.

Drought hits 4m in Thailand

BANGKOK, Jan 26: More than four million people have so far been affected by Thailand's worst drought in decades, reports quoting the Civil Defence Ministry said today, reports AFP.

A total of 4.57 million people have been hit in 34 provinces across the country by the drought which has prompted officials to ration water for farmers and reduce water pressure in some areas, the ministry said.

A ministry report showed orders for farmers to restrict the year's second rice crop had been ignored as paddies under cultivation were equal to 180 per cent of permitted limits, The Bangkok Post said.

The drought followed a longer than normal rainy season and low rainfall over Thailand last year which some experts have attributed to the El Nino weather phenomenon.

Thailand imposed water rationing on Monday as the drought tightened its grip on northern provinces and farmers warned their rice crops would soon die without fresh rains.

Around 4,000 northern farmers reportedly rallied on Monday to demand a cancellation of the rationing which they say will ruin their crops.

Under the rationing rotation, farmers will be able to water paddies for three days and then stop for six days.

The capital Bangkok has also been feeling the heat. A number of roads have caved in along dried up canals and a million households have already suffered from reduced water supplies in a pilot project which could be expanded as water becomes even more scarce later in the year.

Philippine Senate begins hearing on US visiting forces agreement

MANILA, Jan 26: The Philippine Senate began hearing Tuesday on the ratification of an agreement that would allow US troops to resume large-scale joint military exercises in the country, reports AP.

The Visiting Forces Agreement, signed last year by US and Philippine officials, provides legal protections to US troops in the Philippines. Critics say it would severely limit the Philippine government's right to prosecute American soldiers who commit crimes and also would promote prostitution.

Outside the Senate, about 200 protesters shouted "No to US bases" as government officials urged the senators to approve the pact.

"In a perfect world, our country would not need a Visiting Forces Agreement," said Defense Secretary Orlando Mercado. "Unfortunately, ours is not a perfect world."

The Senate hearings are scheduled to continue until March.

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Colombia

From Page 1 Manizales, he said. Without refrigerator trucks to store the hundreds of rotting corpses, epidemics could break out, worried Giraldo.

Guiza said 60 per cent of the city was destroyed. Worst hit were the poor southern districts. Some 340 bodies were collected at a makeshift morgue but it would be hours before hundreds more could be recovered, he said.

"There's no way to measure this crisis," said Alvaro Patino, Armenia's mayor.

As Colombians reeled from the worst tremor to hit the country since a 1994 earthquake killed 800 people, relief efforts continued through the night.

Landslides — which had slowed the arrival of rescue equipment and supplies — were cleared, and convoys of government vehicles with cranes and other heavy equipment converged on the disaster zone.

An air force plane shuttled rescue equipment, medical supplies, food and blankets to the region late Monday.

Schools and stadiums were converted to makeshift shelters and morgues.

More than 350 people were treated at the Southern Hospital in Armenia, where blood smeared the floors and walls and patients spent the night huddled on rusted gurneys. Doctors said at least 40 people had been pronounced dead at the facility.

Armenia's three-story fire station tumbled in pieces onto its 14 vehicles. At least nine people were killed when the building's concrete floors and pillars came crashing down. Officers were also feared killed in the collapse of a police barracks.

Five members of the Colombian professional soccer club Atletico Quindio — three Argentinians and two Brazilians — were also feared dead in the ruins of a hotel in downtown Armenia.

"There isn't a point in the city's geography which was not affected by this horrific tragedy," Patino told RCN radio.

"We need everything ... medicine, clothes ... electric generators," he said, urging Colombians in the United States to send aid.

Monday's quake was the deadliest since 1975, when about 1,000 people died in a tremor near Cucuta, a border city with Venezuela.

Angolan forces shell UNITA positions

MALANJE, Angola, Jan 26: Government forces fighting to regain the upper hand in Angola's month-old renewal of civil war shelled rebel UNITA positions outside the northern city of Malanje today, a senior commander said, reports Reuters.

"We want to push them (UNITA) out of Malanje region. They do not stand a chance, we are much more powerful," said the commander as heavy artillery fire echoed across Malanje.

Angola, an oil-rich southern African country battered by more than 20 years of civil war, has seen fighting between government and rebel forces in the past month that has shattered a four-year-old peace accord.

Last week, UNITA seized a key bridge over the River Kuanza. Opening a route from the rebel headquarters at Andulo in the south through Malanje towards the fortified west coast capital held by the government.

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Russia's main arms exporter won't increase sales

MOSCOW, Jan 26: Russia's chief arms exporter will not increase sales this year because of more competition on the world market and Russia's economic troubles, the company's director said in an interview published Tuesday, reports AP.

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Kuwaiti Foreign Minister, Sheik Sabah al-Ahmed al-Sabah (Right) meets with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, Monday, the day after Arab League foreign ministers met in Cairo to discuss the Iraqi crisis. — UNB/AP photo