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VOL. IX NO. 296 REGD. NO. DA 781

www.dailystarnews.com

DHAKA SATURDAY NOVEMBER 20, 1999

41 days to the 3rd Millennium

AGRAHAYAN 6, 1406 BS

SABAN 11, 1420 HJRI

16 PAGES PRICE: TAKA 6.00

Tangail election EC asks RO to explain for post-poll statement

Amid raging controversies, the Election Commission has sent a note to the Returning Officer of the Tangail-8 by-elections seeking explanation for his post-poll statement, reports UNB.

Officials said yesterday the EC on Thursday faxed the urgent note asking RO Mollah Waheduzzaman, also Deputy Commissioner of Tangail, to send the reply immediately.

The Election Commission in the letter wanted to know what the Returning Officer actually told a post-poll press conference on November 17 and on what grounds he called in the journalists, a top EC official said.

He, however, made it clear that the note was not a show-cause notice.

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Tangail-8 polls AL to review situation today

By Staff Correspondent Ruling Awami League at a meeting today will take stock of the latest political situation in the country in view of the controversy raised over the just concluded Tangail-8 parliamentary by-polls and upcoming Opposition agitation programmes, party sources said.

Prime Minister and AL President Sheikh Hasina is scheduled to chair the meeting of the party Presidium and the Secretariat at Ganobhavan. The meeting will begin at 5:30 pm.

The joint meeting of the 15-member Presidium and 23-member Secretariat of the party is being held after a long time. Besides, there may be discussion on extending a formal dialogue offer to the BNP-led four-party opposition, which is demanding resignation of her government and early general elections.

Hasina returned home yesterday after a nine-day visit to South Africa and Saudi Arabia.

'4 party leaders to hold meeting this month'

By Staff Correspondent The Liaison Committee of the BNP-led opposition alliance yesterday discussed the preparation of the planned summit of chiefs of the four opposition political parties.

"Undoubtedly, the summit will be held this month as all preparations are almost complete for holding it," said a leader, who is represented the BNP in the committee.

Held at Jatiya Party central office with JP secretary general Nazim Rahman Manir in the chair, the meeting also elaborately discussed matters relating to finalisation of the joint declaration, which will be announced from the summit.

Sources said the meeting further discussed about the preparations of the components of

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Revitalising the Commonwealth

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First-ever packaging, accessories exposition begins

New WTO round to grapple with vexing e-commerce issues Pages 8&9

Star Literature

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Prayer Timings

November 20		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5:10	5:40
Juma	12:20	1:15
Asr	3:42	4:00
Maghrib	5:20	5:25
Esha	7:15	7:45

Source: Islamic Foundation

Khaleda to be invited for talks tomorrow

Door for dialogue always open: PM

By Staff Correspondent



Sheikh Hasina

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has said the door for dialogue on political issues is always open and it is up to the Opposition to come forward.

She told newsmen yesterday that she would invite Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Khaleda Zia at Dhaka Cantonment on the occasion of Armed Forces Day (November 21) and discuss the political situation with her.

"I will ask her if she is really interested to sit for political discussions," Hasina said while responding to questions at a press conference on return home after attending the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in South Africa and an official visit to Saudi Arabia.

Asked if she would extend formal invitation to the Opposition to sit for dialogue, the Prime Minister said, "It is up to them to decide for a dia-

logue and participate. In a democratic process, political issues should be settled through discussions."

She went on, "I have always asked for discussions. But it seems the Opposition has abandoned the path of discussions."

Hasina said that earlier she wanted Khaleda Zia to participate in a TV debate with her, but she did not respond. The TV authorities also invited her to participate in a programme to face questions from an independent panel, but she declined.

The Prime Minister said the Opposition is calling hartals, bringing miseries to the commonman.

"When I meet her (Khaleda Zia) on the Armed Forces Day, I will ask her why she is calling hartals."

The Opposition has no issue for a movement and that is why they are going for these

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Charges against Sharif to be framed Friday

'I'm not a hijacker, rather the govt has been hijacked'

KARACHI, Nov 19: Deposed Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif insisted he was innocent as he left an anti-terrorism court in Karachi under heavy police guard after a brief hearing today, reports AFP.

"I did not conspire in a hijacking," Sharif told reporters as he left the court and climbed into an armoured personnel carrier.

"Hijacking is done at gunpoint, in this case the whole democratic government has been hijacked," he said.

Although he has not been

charged he faces a string of accusations, including treason, conspiracy to murder, kidnapping and hijacking a plane.

Sharif, who arrived at the courthouse amid heavy security and looking tired, was ordered to remain in police custody until charges are filed on Nov 26, said public prosecutor Feroz Mahmood Bhatti. Both charges carry the death penalty or life in prison, according to AP.

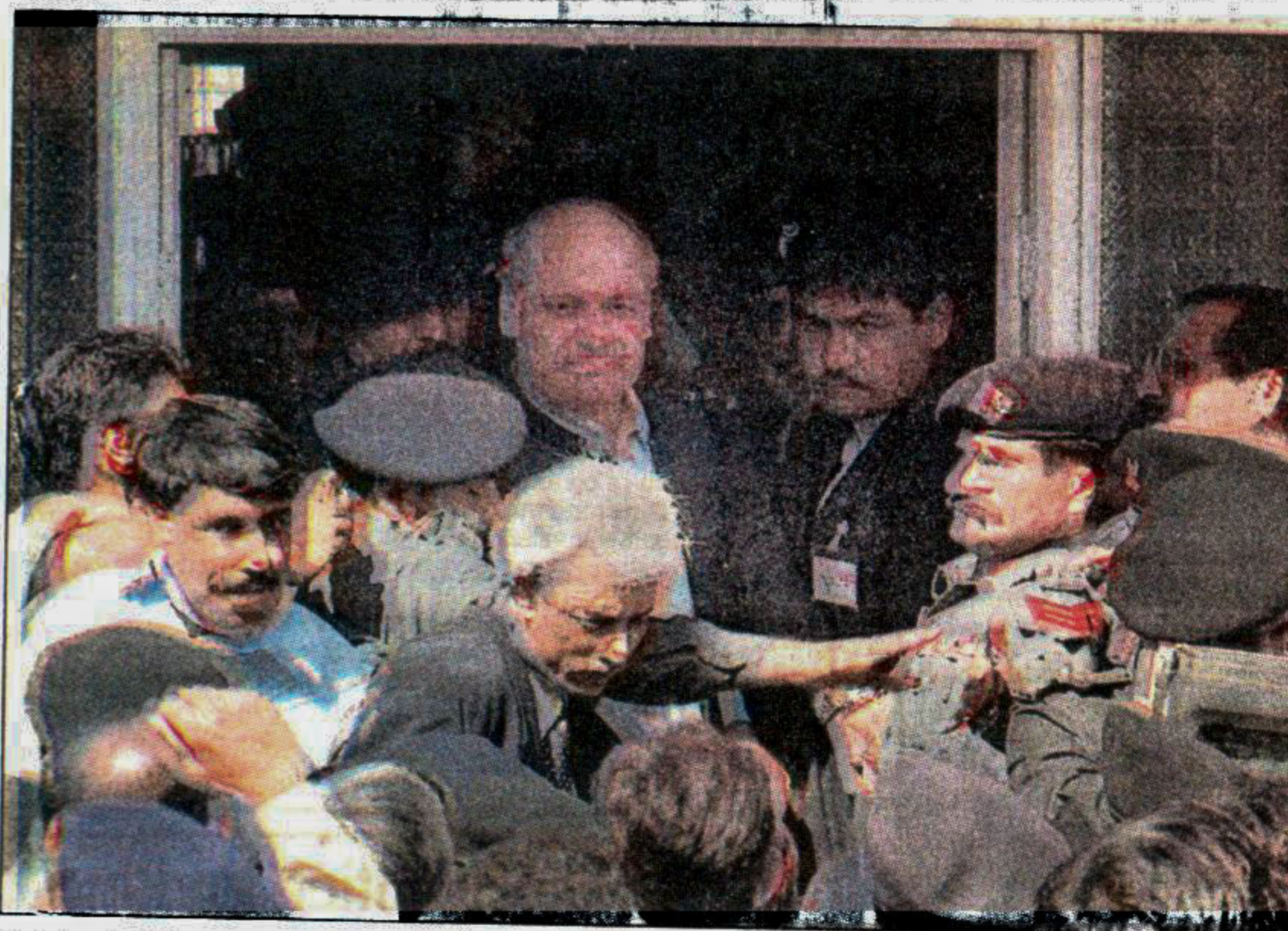
The first step in Pakistan's legal process was taken on Nov 10 when the army lodged a police complaint accusing Sharif

and seven others of treason and hijacking. He also is accused of conspiracy to murder and physical endangerment, two charges that carry lesser prison terms.

Sharif's court appearance was his first public appearance since his government was thrown out of power in a bloodless coup on Oct 12.

Bhatti told reporters that Sharif will return to court on Monday. He did not give any explanation for the delay in the formal laying of charges. However, Pakistan's legal system is

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Detained Pakistani prime minister Nawaz Sharif (C) coming out of court after his first appearance in an anti-terrorist court in Karachi yesterday.

Ctg port: No step to check oil slicks

From Nurul Alam

CHITTAGONG, Nov 19: Cargo vessels responsible for oil spillage at Chittagong port channel and outer anchorage mostly escape action from the authorities due to lack of proper monitoring system, sources concerned said.

Cases of oil spillage are hardly detected or recorded.

Over 1200 cargo vessels are handled at Chittagong port per year as 80 per cent of the country's import and export cargo is routed through this port.

Oil spillage frequently occurs at the port channel and

outer anchorage, causing a massive pollution that threatens marine resources.

Oil slicks are frequently found there but steps were hardly taken for a survey, the sources said.

Last week, oil slicks stretching over an area of about two km were caused by a cargo vessel. Besides, oil slicks sometimes can be seen there during high tide.

When contacted, port officials said it is difficult to trace ships responsible for oil

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Mongla port: Ship flees without paying duty

From Staff Correspondent

KHULNA, Nov 19: A Chinese ship MV Huzo has 'disappeared' from Mongla Port allegedly without paying port dues and customs duty.

The ship which anchored at Mongla Port on September 15 this year with machinery for Meghna Cement Company and 2,200 tonnes of soda worth about Tk 3 crore, disappeared on November 17 without informing the authorities concerned, sources said.

The captain informed the Mongla Port Authority 23 hours after the ship left the port

with the imported soda and machinery.

The imported soda belongs to Pengxi Corporation owned by Shaikh Nazim Alam, president of Khulna Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

He told The Daily Star that the ship is now on way to Vishakhapatnam port of Chennai and the captain has been ordered by Chinese embassy officials to return to Mongla Port.

The soda was imported for Khulna Newsprint Mills, he

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Jyoti Basu puts party above health

From Pallab Bhattacharya



NEW DELHI, Nov 19: Months of speculations about veteran Marxist leader Jyoti Basu's retirement from active politics ended on Thursday when he gave in to his party's request to stay on as Chief Minister of West Bengal.

The CPI (M) politburo deliberated on the subject after it was raised by Basu, 86, himself at its meeting here yesterday.

The issue was not on the official agenda of the politburo which met to review the party's performance in recent parliamentary elections. But it came soon after the meeting began.

A statement issued later by

the politburo said CPI (M) appreciated Basu's 'difficulties' owing to his health problems but felt the party needed his services because of the 'complex political situation' and in view of his 'vast political and administrative experience.'

Basu, who has been insisting for quite some time on his retirement because of his failing health, accepted the politburo request to stay on saying in his characteristic style "What can be done? I have to listen to the party and continue to be Chief Minister as long as my health permits."

The politburo request to

Basu to stay on was expected as his sudden exit from political scene at this juncture would certainly come as a blow to CPI (M) in West Bengal where there are clear signs of Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress and BJP making inroads even in rural areas which have been traditional Marxist strongholds, as was evident in recent Lok Sabha polls.

Besides, Basu, India's longest serving Chief Minister who is at the helm for 22 years at a stretch has been the most charismatic politician in West Bengal and Left Front's best

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Journalist held for trying to stop Speaker from delivering speech

By Staff Correspondent

The sergeant-at-arms of Speaker Humayun Rashid Chowdhury handed over an assistant editor of daily Inqilab to Khilgaon police as he allegedly tried to obstruct the Speaker from delivering a speech at a milad mahfil at West Rampura in the city yesterday afternoon, police said.

The assistant editor, Abdul Hai Shikdar, was under the custody of Khilgaon police till filing of this report at about 8:45 pm.

The OC of the thana told The Daily Star that they were yet to arrest Shikdar and were awaiting a decision from senior officials.

The milad mahfil (religious function) was arranged at a local community centre to mark the death of National Professor and philosopher Dewan Mohammad Azfar.

The Speaker told The Daily Star last night that during the programme, he was requested to speak briefly on the life of Pro Azfar.

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Sec 144 imposed

AL factions clash at Chhatak

From Staff Correspondent

SYLHET, Nov 19: Section 144 has been imposed in the Chechak Bazar area in Chhatak thana under Sunamganj district following a clash between the rival groups of the ruling party this afternoon.

Police fired 10 rounds of tear gas shells and 10 rounds of shots to disperse the clashing groups, official sources said.

One of the rival groups also put up a barricade on Sunamganj-Sylhet Highway. Police removed the barricade after an hour.

The trouble erupted over holding a meeting on the premises of CBP Junior High School today.

Ruling party MP Muhibur Rahman Manik-backed group arranged a meeting on the school premises to accord a reception to the MP while the rivals opposed it.

Both the groups chased each other and blasted several crackers and used lethal weapons. On information, additional police force from the district headquarters reached the troubled area and brought the situation under control.

Later the administration imposed Section 144 in Chechak Bazar where the feuding groups were ready to hold meetings.

BCL activist chopped to death at Sylhet

From Staff Correspondent

SYLHET, Nov 19: An activist of Bangladesh Chhatra League was chopped to death in Mirzajangal area of the town this afternoon.

Jhutan Majumder, 24, an activist of the town unit of BCL, was called out of a mess by a gang of assailants at around 3 pm. They took him to a place nearby and chopped him

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Prof Muhammad Yunus (R) receiving the 1998 Indira Gandhi National Award for Peace from Indian President K R Narayanan at the Presidential Palace in New Delhi yesterday.

'Mahatma would have hailed Yunus as liberator of the poorest of the poor'

Prestigious Indira Gandhi Peace Prize for Prof Yunus

From Pallab Bhattacharya

NEW DELHI, Nov 19: Bangladesh's Grameen Bank founder Dr Muhammad Yunus was today conferred the prestigious Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development for 1998 by Indian President K R Narayanan who said Mahatma Gandhi would

'have hailed Prof Yunus as a liberator of the poorest of the poor in the Sub-continent.'

Presenting him the award at the Rashtrapati Bhawan here, Narayanan commended Prof Yunus' 'invaluable contribution' to the methodology of abolition of poverty in the developing world.

The President said Prof Yunus has brought micro-credit to the doorstep of the poorest of

the poor and endowed them with the power of becoming self-reliant human beings capable of contributing to the good of the whole society.

"Gandhiji would have hailed Prof Mohd Yunus as a liberator of the poor and the poorest of the poor, the women of our Sub-continent," Narayanan said.

Recalling that Grameen Bank has inspired people and institutions in 58 countries across Asia and Africa, he said new banking ideas were required to wage a war against poverty and to enlarge the "oncoming agricultural revolution."

Stating that banking operations should be informed by a larger social purpose, the presi-

dent said the traditional insistence on collateral security of documents of land ownership will rule out millions of small farmers and tenants.

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, in his speech at the function, said women in traditional societies like India and Bangladesh were "amazing agents of development" and Prof Yunus, by re-orienting banking with focus on villages and women, had "redefined development to mean progress of poor and disadvantaged."

"When women are economically and educationally empowered, the beneficiaries are not women alone. Rather, they transmit many tangible and in-

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European treaty to reduce conventional arms by half

ISTANBUL, Nov 19: Heads of state today signed a treaty halving the numbers of warplanes, tanks and other heavy non-nuclear weapons in much of Europe. But US President Bill Clinton said Senate ratification depends on a Russian pull-back from Chechnya, reports AP.

Clinton was the second leader to sign the 30-nation Conventional Force Europe document — a modification of a pact first agreed on nine years ago, when the continent was still divided into the Soviet bloc and rival Western nations.

The signing took place

within the framework of the 54-nation two-day summit of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which ended today.

Separately, all 54 leaders adopted two key OSCE documents.

A Charter for European Security restated and strengthened the organisation's main tasks: human rights monitoring, conflict prevention and mediation, and postwar reconstruction.

A final summit statement delicately sought to balance the dispute on Chechnya between Russia and most other summit

participants. It "fully" reaffirmed Russia's territorial integrity and condemned terrorism — Moscow had said Chechnya was its internal affair and a battle against terrorists.

At the same time, it said a "political solution" — not a military one — was essential to cooperate with the OSCE in finding an end to the conflict.

Clinton, in a statement on the arms treaty, urged Russia to quickly honour its pledge to reduce its heavy arms in the North Caucasus — the Chechnya

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10 Years Anniversary of the Child Rights Convention

CHILD RIGHTS CONVENTION

Ten years ago it was decided that all children in the world have rights. Bangladesh was one of the first countries in the world to sign the United Nations Child Rights Convention. This means that the Government of Bangladesh as well as almost all other governments of the world have promised to always think of what is best for children when making their decisions, and to listen to what children say.

We are partners in its realization.

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