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Chittagong braces for violent polls today

First day of 48-hour 'curfew hartal' sees 15 hurt

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Jan 2: Everything is set for holding the Chittagong City Corporation (CCC) polls tomorrow despite the boycotting Opposition's 48-hour 'curfew hartal' that began in the city this morning.

The 'curfew hartal', the four-party opposition alliance called it to keep voters indoors, left at least 15 people injured in clashes between law enforcers and pickets and in sporadic bomb explosions.

City dwellers fear widespread violence tomorrow because of the government-opposition stand-off over holding the polls.

Police said they foiled an attempt at snatching ballot boxes today from Kapasgola area. They resorted to lathi charge while the anti-polls activists blasted cocktails.

The Election Commission has identified 201 out of 350 polling centres as 'risky' and deployed huge security forces with orders for ensuring peaceful voting 'at any cost', sources said. Security has been tightened in and around the 'risky' centres.

The government earlier declared a public holiday in the port city tomorrow.

A total of 220 army, 550 BDR, 5400 Ansars and 4000 policemen have been deployed.

Army and BDR men have already started patrolling the city streets and they will work as 'striking force' during the polling. There will be around 28 policemen and Ansars in each polling centre and the rest will be in mobile duty.

A panicky situation prevailed in the city today while most of roads were deserted.

Bomb explosions were heard from 6 am today in most areas of city. Panicked residents hardly dared to come out of their houses in the morning while pickets were very active to chase the pedestrians, witnesses said.

Even female garment workers were driven back home by pickets. Both passengers and rickshaws were assaulted by pickets at different points, witnesses said. At least fifty rickshaws were damaged.

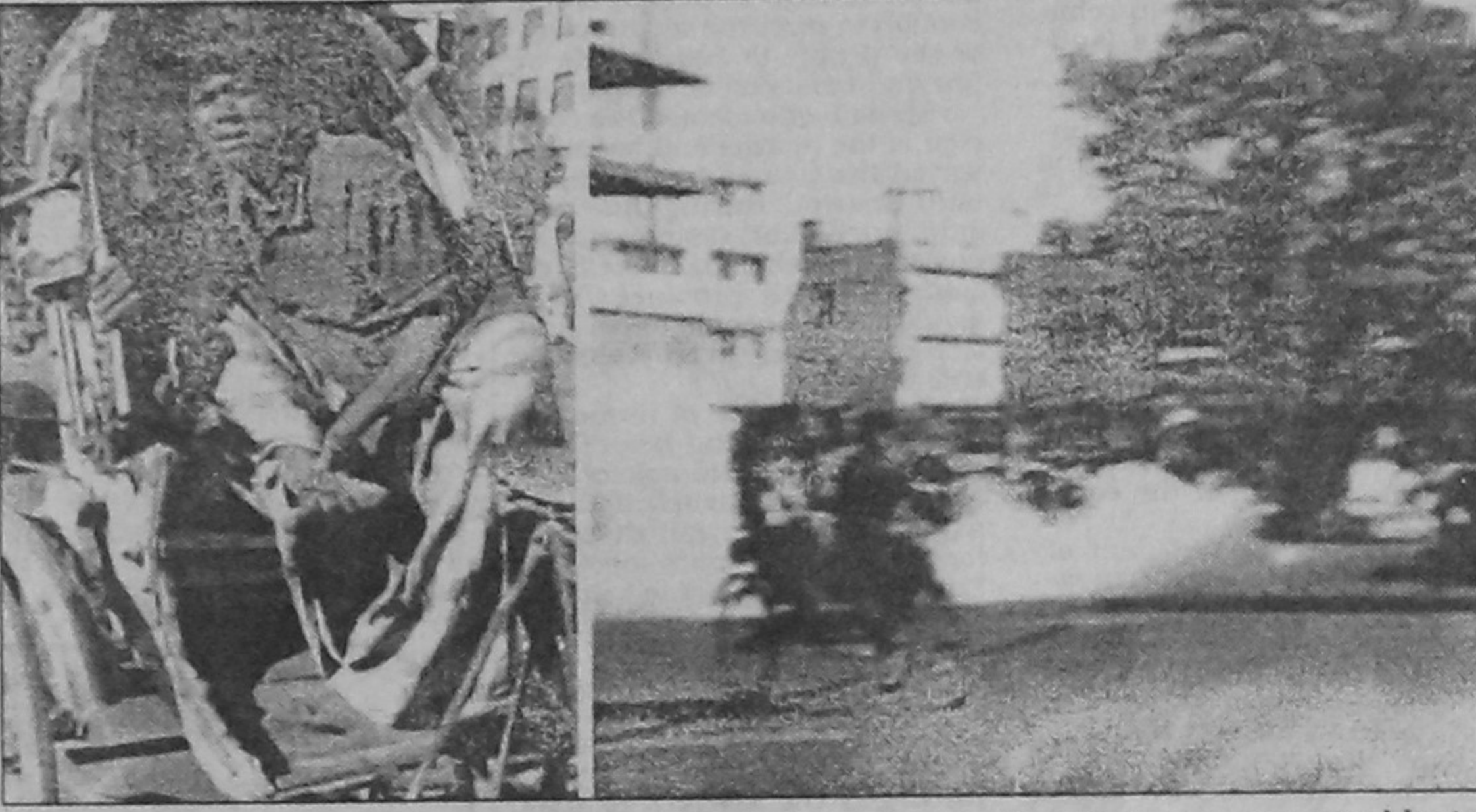
Bombs were exploded intermittently at different places till writing of this report at 7 pm. Police arrested 10 pickets.

Pickets clashed with police at different places including Aturar Depot, Dewanbazar Nur Ahmed road and Badamtoli, police and witnesses said.

A police man was injured in the leg due to misfire from his shotgun.

A ward commissioner candidate ward was reportedly assaulted at Badamtoli at noon by opposition activists, witnesses said.

Five powerful bombs were



An injured person cries in pain (left) while being taken to hospital as numerous blasts (right) marked what the opposition leaders called curfew hartal in Chittagong yesterday. —Courtesy: Prothom Alo

One killed while making bombs in Ctg?

From Staff Correspondent

Unconfirmed sources said that one person, identified as Forkan, 28, was killed in an explosion while making bombs in Pahartoli area today.

Police did not confirm the death, saying that one youth was injured.

The injured youth was undergoing treatment at Chittagong Medical College Hospital, police added.

Gayeshwar indicted in corruption case

The Divisional Special Judge's Court of Dhaka yesterday indicted BNP leader and former State Minister for Environment and Forest Gayeshwar Chandra Roy in a corruption case, court officials said, reports BSS.

Judge Mohammad Fazlul Karim has framed the charge after hearing the prosecution and the defence lawyers and fixed February 13 for examining the prosecution witnesses. Gayeshwar was present during the indictment.

The Anti-Corruption Bureau filed the case against Gayeshwar accusing him of wasting government money amounting to take more than 14 lakh by misusing power.

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Sehri, Iftar timings

Ramadan	Jan	Sehri	Iftar
25	03	—	5:28
26	04	5:17	5:28
27	05	5:18	5:29

Prayer Timings

January 3		
Azan	Jamaat	
Fajr	5:17	5:25
Zohr	12:45	1:15
Asr	3:42	4:00
Maghrib	5:28	5:32
Tarabi	7:15	7:45

Source: Islamic Foundation

Half-day hartal today

6am to noon countrywide

By Staff Correspondent

The BNP-led opposition alliance has called a six-hour, countrywide hartal beginning 6 a.m. to protest today's 'unilateral' polls in the Chittagong City Corporation.

Originally scheduled for seven hours, the hartal was reduced following a request from the country's business community. However, the duration of the hartal in Chittagong remains unchanged.

Anwar Zahid, a BNP leader, announced the decision at a press briefing on behalf of the four-party alliance.

Zahid said the opposition has no plans to call another hartal before Eid, but will not hesitate if compelled to do so

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Obscene indifference

Law-enforcers sleep as 'revellers' rule

By Special Correspondent

A K M Shamsuddin, the DMP commissioner, said police have been ordered to arrest the 'culprits involved in assaulting a lady on DU campus on the 31st night. It was a barbaric incident and we cannot tolerate it.'

The commissioner said the DC (South) has formed a committee to investigate the attack. Police didn't arrest anyone during the attack because there were too many people, said Shamsuddin. He said the number of police deployed on New Year's Eve was adequate.

Shamsuddin said they couldn't trace the culprits until yesterday, but they will be taken to task for the attack.

Speaking to The Daily Star yesterday, the officer-in-charge of Ramna tried to justify the police's inaction when he suggested the woman was 'improperly dressed and dancing.'

'What is so big to you is nothing to us. We have seen it in the newspaper. If someone dances nakedly we have nothing to do. You are trying to play it big,' said Rafiqul Islam. No one complained about the incident, said Islam.

Shamsuddin said it's not a question of who is dressed in what kind of attire. The question is whether the police are providing safety and security to the person concerned.

A huge contingent of police was posted throughout the city, including the university, to prevent trouble.

Only two organisations have protested the attack on the woman: The Sexual Harassment Resistance Committee and the United Peoples Democratic Front.

To err are rice prices

Silos run out of space thanks to high yields

By Reaz Ahmad, back from Dinajpur

Erratic pricing of rice marked the seasonal trading in the northern zone despite large government stockpiles.

Having grown two bumper crops in succession, farmers did not wish to sell their produce in order to get a reasonably fair price.

Farmers in the northern rice markets said they were up and down in *aman* prices this year.

At Poothul wholesale market in Dinajpur, coarse *aman* rice was being sold at Tk 400 per maund (37.5 kg). Swarna at Tk 440, Pajam between Tk 500 and 550, Kataribhog at Tk 600 and Chaugura at Tk 1050.

At Teromile Bazaar, 13 kilometres north off Dinajpur town, *aman* paddy was on sale between Tk 550 and 600 per sack (75 kg).

Rabiul Hossain, a farmer from bordering area of Khanpur in Dinajpur, said, 'Initially the prices offered to farmers were too low, but now prices started picking up gradually although they are yet to touch the expected level.'

Dinajpur farmers snubbed the government's procurement drive as 'horrible', saying there were no rooms for stockpiling in the silos.

Officials in Dhaka said an all-time high reserve of one and a half million tonnes (MT) of foodgrains in the silos have put the government in a tough situation.

The government is going to immediately offload a big chunk of food reserves to deal with the problem. To start with, it is offloading 40,000 MT in the form of special Eid 'food bonus' for the poor and is aiming at downsizing the reserves to one million MT from 1.5 million by April.

Subsequent bumpers in last *boro* and current *aman* flooded rice markets. But the well-off farmers took a slow-go approach towards the season-opening sale and stockpiled some to get a high price.

'Late sale of farmers' own stocks would provide them with necessary cash to buy inputs for *boro* planting starting from mid-January', explained one farmer.

Ashok Kumar, a wholesaler at Poothul, said price might pick up gradually as demands from Dhaka and Chittagong were on the slide.

However, officials allayed fears about price fluctuations. They said at the beginning of the season farmers usually sell 'wet *aman*' which could earn relatively lower price for them.

'But now that farmers are coming up with relatively better quality grains that are well sun-dried, good prices definitely wait for them.'

Meanwhile, southern farmers doubted the government's projection of high *aman* output across the country, saying this year's yield is hardly anything near that of the previous year. *Aman* production did not mark any growth in northern zones, they added.

Sources in the agriculture ministry, however, justified the bumper projection of *aman* which is well over 10 million MT, saying paddy grew in plenty in *aman* season in the south and central districts.

Quoting some southern farmers, a Novartis news bulletin also projected good *aman* yield in Barisal and Satkhira.

According to the ministry officials, there have been very good yields also in the central districts of Faridpur and Gopalganj.

Call to try 1971 war criminals by 2000

By Staff Correspondent

A Cabinet minister has demanded of the prime minister that she take steps to begin trial of the 1971 war criminals including Jamaat supremo by 2000.

'Since Independence no Rajakars have been killed although innumerable freedom fighters murdered. We would like to hear the prime minister announcing date of trial of all Rajakars including Golam Azam within year 2000,' JSD president and fisheries and livestock minister A S M Rab said yesterday.

Rab echoed leaders of the seven-year-old campaign to force trial of the war criminals who raised demands for their immediate trial.

Water resources minister Abdur Razzaq was among the speakers who complained about the failure to put the criminals on the dock.

The national coordination committee of the *Ghatok-Dalal Nirmul Committee* organised the rally at Paltan Maidan in the city.

The Rajakars (collaborators of Pakistan army) can never be pardoned, they said. They were forgiven in the past but failed to show any respect to that.

Trying the Razakars and the autocrats is needed to honour the Constitution as well as save democracy.

'We declare war against the Razakars, Al-Badr and Al-Shams. They are carrying out anti-Islam activities. We cannot build the nation if they continue to exist,' said minister Abdur Razzaq, a top leader of the committee.

'There are clear evidences of mass killing. We have already dug out the human remains. Such killings were carried out in a planned way. We demand graves of the collaborators by 2000,' said Sammillito Sangskritik Jote leader Ramendu Majumdar.

'They have already got united to destroy democracy and now plan to gradually take over state power. It is time we, the freedom fighters, got united to resist their bid.'

'In 30 years we have failed to bring them to justice. Let us take renewed pledge to resist the Rajakars' activities,' said

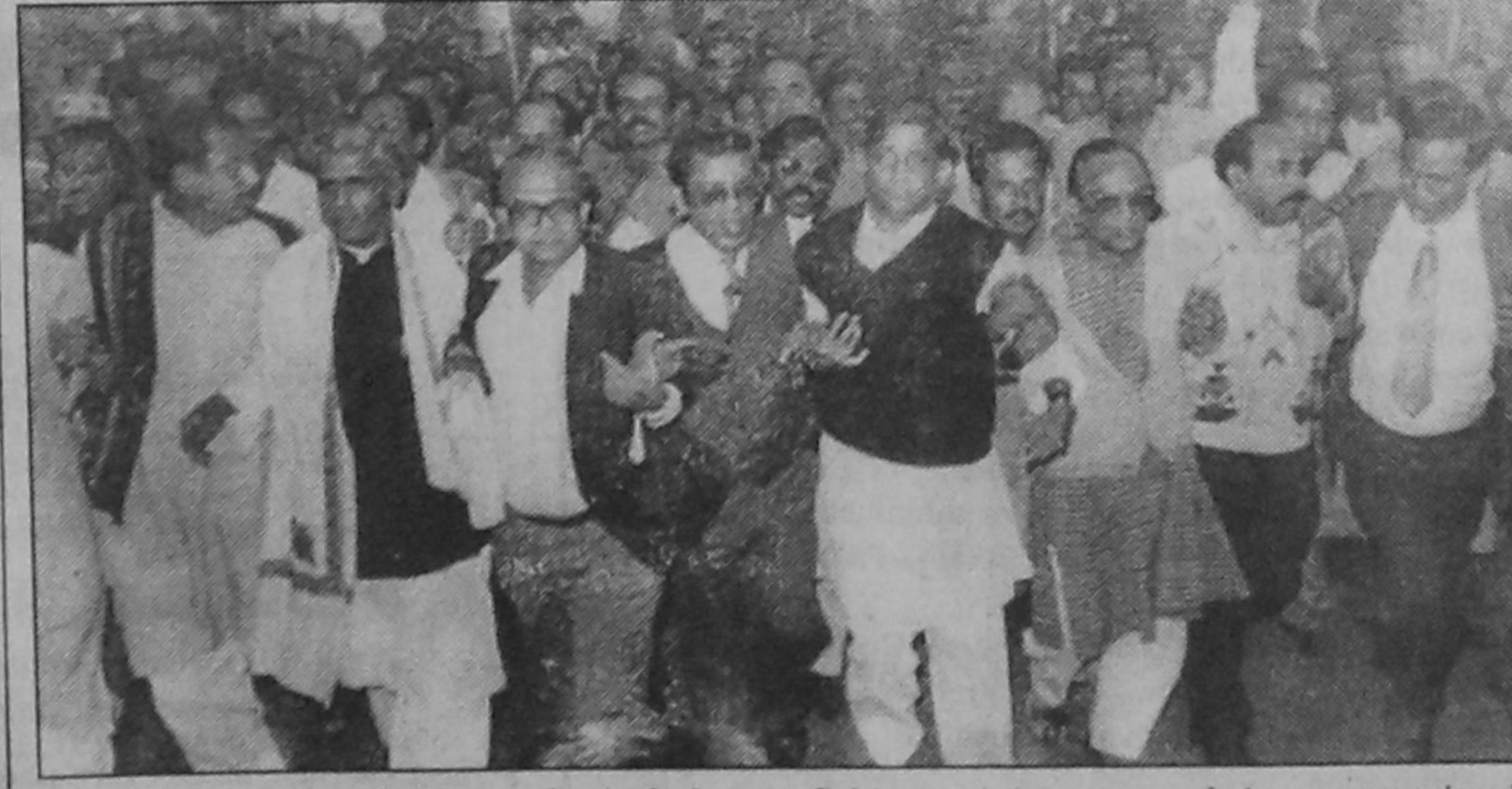
Women's rights activist Ayesha Khanam.

'Rajakars should be barred from taking part in any elections. Some vested quarters are trying to stand in the way of our movement. We will resist them at any cost,' pledged Professor Khan Sarwar Murslid, a former vice chancellor.

Committee president Hasan Imam announced plans for countrywide protests, processions and rallies on January 22 in order to rejuvenate the campaign.

The rally over, they marched to Jatiya Press Club and burnt a number of effigies of Jamaat-Islami chief Golam Azam.

The speakers also included JSD general secretary Hasanul Huq Inu, Chairman of Bangladesh MuktiJoddha Command Council Prof Ahd Choudhury, freedom fighters Kamal Pasha Choudhury and Rowshan Jahan Sathi, Dr Wajedul Islam, Habibur Rahman Khan, Dilip Barua and Prof Abdul Mannan Choudhury.



Nirmul Committee leaders, who include two Cabinet ministers, march in a procession in the city yesterday chanting demand for trial of 1971 war criminals including Jamaat leader Golam Azam. —Star photo

DU to probe New Year assault

By DU Correspondent

Dhaka University authorities yesterday condemned the sexual assault of a young woman at the TSC during New Year's celebrations.

The authorities announced the formation of three-member committee, headed by pro vice-chancellor Prof M Shahdat Ali, to investigate the attack.

The other members of the committee include the university's treasurer and Proctor A K M Nurun Nabi. The committee has been asked to submit its report on the attack as quickly as possible.

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Arsenic detector at Dhaka Community Hospital

By Staff Correspondent

An arsenic detector was installed at the Dhaka Community Hospital (DCH) yesterday to test water from tube wells across the country.

The detector can measure concentrations of arsenic much lower than the permissible level of 0.05 milligram per litre or 50 parts per billion. The hospital used to test its water samples at a laboratory at Jadavpur University in Calcutta.

Dhaka Community Hospital is testing water samples from tube wells in villages across the country where arsenic contamination is very acute. The hospital, with technical support from Jadavpur University, was the first to identify presence of arsenic in the country's ground water.

A surveys, funded by the UNDP, the World Bank and Jadavpur University, is attempting to determine the severity of arsenic contamination in the country.

Musharraf and the Pakistan army had reservations on the Lahore Declaration which followed a symbolic cross-border ride that Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee undertook to Lahore in Pakistan

sharraf said: 'The slight change in our policy on Kashmir is that we have made it clear to India and other people that dialogue with New Delhi would be first on Kashmir and then on other issues.'

Musharraf and the Pakistan army had reservations on the Lahore Declaration which followed a symbolic cross-border ride that Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee undertook to Lahore in Pakistan

Fierce debate rages India

New Delhi tries to defend hijack handling

SRINAGAR, India, Jan 2: Indian security forces fighting separatists in Kashmir fear the release of militants in exchange for hostages in a hijacked Indian Airlines jet last week may encourage guerillas, reports Reuters.

Some 154 hostages including passengers and crew walked to safety last Friday after India released three militants.

The release has sparked an intense debate in India, with critics accusing the government of setting a bad precedent in the war against separatism.

A security official in Srinagar, summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir, told Reuters today that police and paramilitary forces fighting separatism were unlikely to lose heart. 'But to some extent it will raise the morale of the militants,' said the official, who did not want to be identified.

India said the five hijackers were all Pakistani nationals, a charge denied by Pakistan, which disputes Kashmir. New Delhi said the hijackers and the militants headed for Quetta in Pakistan.

India said its negotiators found the going difficult after they discovered that the plane had been wired up with explosives.

'There was no option left for the government but to release these dreaded terrorists,' Shyam Kumar, a paramilitary official, told Reuters, adding that it may have adverse consequences.

'It will have its implications,' he said.

The release of the militants had taken place after a tough protest by relatives of the hostages, some of whom cited the release in 1989 of an interior minister's daughter in exchange for Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) guerrillas.

Rubaiya Sayeed, daughter of then Indian Home Minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed was freed in exchange for five militants of the JKLF, which is 1994 declared a ceasefire and launched a 'political' movement for Kashmir's independence.

Police have recorded of at least 3,650 abductions since separatist militancy broke out in the Himalayan region.

However, the release of separatists in exchange for the Indian Airlines hostages has left its mark on the minds of soldiers.

'We are fighting them in such cold conditions, kill them and get killed too. And they release their leaders... it is not a good trend at all,' said a soldier patrolling a highway in Srinagar.

New work permit rule causes crisis

By Rafiq Hasan

Several dozen foreign workers have been 'stuck up' at the two Export Processing Zones (EPZs) due to a sudden change in work permit rules, according to sources.

The Export Processing Zones Authority (BEPZA) on December 23 last year issued a circular that only foreigners coming to Bangladesh with Private Investment (PI) visa will get work permit. It was made effective from the date of issuance, the source said.

Earlier, BEPZA used to give work permit to foreign workers

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Pakistan hardens Kashmir stance

ISLAMABAD, Jan 2: Amidst conflicting propaganda over the hostage drama at Kandahar in Southern Afghanistan, Pakistan's army ruler Pervez Musharraf has toughened his stand on the Kashmir issue with India, reports IPS.

Both the countries have, since the Christmas Eve hijacking of an Indian Airlines airbus, been accusing each other over the media of masterminding the incident and holding

hostage 155 passengers to forward their respective lines on the disputed territory.

Discarding the relative soft-peddling of the Nawaz Sharif government, which he ousted in a coup in October, Musharraf has declared that finding a solution to the Kashmir issue was his first priority in any dialogue with India.

During a visit this week to Muzaffarabad, capital city of Pakistan-held Kashmir, Mu-

sharraf said: 'The slight change in our policy on Kashmir is that we have made it clear to India and other people that dialogue with New Delhi would be first on Kashmir and then on other issues.'

Musharraf and the Pakistan army had reservations on the Lahore Declaration which followed a symbolic cross-border ride that Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee undertook to Lahore in Pakistan

in February this year.

The army was also against the Nawaz-Clinton accord of July 4 under which Pakistan announced withdrawal of Mullahideen (Islamist freedom fighters) who had infiltrated into Kargil on the Indian side of Kashmir.

'If the US will support us on Kashmir in the next year as she is doing now, then negotiations on Kashmir would positively

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