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VOL. X NO. 2 REGD. NO. DA 781 www.dailystarnews.com DHAKA SATURDAY JANUARY 15, 2000 3rd Millennium MAGH 2, 1406 BS SHAWAL 7, 1420 HJRI 12 PAGES PRICE : TAKA 6.00

Biswa Ijtema from Jan 29

GAZIPUR, Jan 14: The 34th Biswa Ijtema will begin on the bank of the Turag river at Tongi on January 29. Ijtema Committee sources said today, reports BSS.

Biswa Ijtema, the world's second largest Muslim congregation after the holy Hajj, is being held every year at the place since 1966 under the auspices of Biswa Tablig Jamaat.

Thousands of devotees from most of the Muslim countries of the world are expected to participate in the three-day Biswa Ijtema.

About 10,000 temporary latrines and 200 tubewells will be installed at the Ijtema site.

Bangladesh army will install four Bailey bridges over the Turag river. Two helpads will be set up at Hariampur for ferrying devotees in case of any emergency, the sources said.

Special arrangements will be made to maintain law and order to ensure security of the devotees. Special trains will operate between Dhaka and Tongi, railway sources said.

The Akheri Munajat of the Ijtema will be held on January 31. The next preparatory meeting on the congregation will be held at Tongi Pourasava auditorium on January 17.

PM's grave concern at environmental degradation

By Staff Correspondent

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said her government is concerned at the rapid environmental degradation in urban areas and is taking measures to stop migration of rural people to cities to check it.

"Protecting the environment in this populous country is a very urgent issue. Otherwise, people will be affected by degradation of environment," she said.

The Prime Minister was inaugurating a two-day International Conference on Bangladesh Environment (ICBEN) at the Osmani Memorial Hall in the city yesterday.

She said everything was centralised in Dhaka during military rule and population pressure started to mount.

The conference has been jointly organised by as many as 70 organisations including POROSH, Bangladesh Environment Network, Bangladesh Engineering University and the Coalition of Environment NGOs.

Sheikh Hasina said her government has taken measures to rehabilitate city slum dwellers in rural areas. Allowances for elderly people, widows and distressed women have been introduced and employment opportunities are being created in rural areas to reduce migration to urban areas, she said.

"Unplanned urbanisation and indiscriminate growth of hospitals and clinics without facilities for waste disposal have contributed to environmental degradation," the Prime Minister said. "In fact, environmental degradation is the effect of our desired industrialisation of the economy."

A large number of people including non-resident Bangladeshis and foreign experts attended the inaugural session to bolster the environment-protection efforts in the country.

Minister for Environment and Forests Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury attended the inaugural session as special guest.

BUET Vice-Chancellor and Convener of the Conference Organising Committee Prof Nooruddin Ahmed, BUET Professor Zamulur Reza Chowdhury, former VC of Jahangirnara

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BNP to observe demonstration day tomorrow

By Staff Correspondent

BNP will observe country-wide demonstration day tomorrow protesting deterioration of law and order.

In the city, the party will organise a public rally at Muktangan at 3:30 pm to mark the day. The party will also bring out a procession after the rally, said a press release.

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan in a statement yesterday instructed all city, district and thana units of the party to make tomorrow's programme a success.

Meanwhile, a joint meeting of BNP and its front organisations will be held today at 11 am at 29 Minto Road official residence of the Leader of the Opposition in Parliament.

Vice chairmen, joint secretaries general, secretaries and members of the National Executive Committee staying in Dhaka, city BNP convenor and joint convenors and presidents and general secretaries of all front organisations will attend the meeting.

BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan will preside over the meeting.

Business leaders of 4 countries launch 'GBM Initiative'

NEW DELHI, Jan 14: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal here today launched 'Greater Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna Initiative' for economic cooperation on sub-regional plane, reports UNB.

The private sector effort, a follow-up on the 1998 Kathmandu meet, will pursue with the respective governments the actions required to achieve economic cooperation in the South Asia's sub-regional block comprising Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal and eleven states of India.

Key business leaders of the four countries sat in the Indian capital this morning for hours before making the Delhi Declaration launching the GBM initiative.

Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry President Abdul Awal Minto, who is leading a 10-member FBCCI delegation,

signed the Delhi Declaration for Bangladesh.

It was announced that GBM would arrange a major conference in Calcutta in March or April this year to have a greater awareness and participation by governments and industries through common forums.

The conference, to be participated by legislators from both ruling and opposition parties in all the four countries as well as policymakers and business leaders, will highlight the ways and benefits of sub-regional economic activity aimed at shared prosperity.

Initially, the business leaders who sat under the steering committee for South Asian Sub-regional Economic Cooperation had planned to bring all the four heads of government in Calcutta conference.

But, sources said, they gave up the idea to avert political

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Experts warn Control air pollution without delay

By Staff Correspondent

An entire generation of children will face debilitating health problems unless urgent steps are taken to reduce the levels of lead and other pollutants in the country's air, warned experts.

Experts made the dire prediction on the opening day of a two-day 'International Conference on Bangladesh Environment' at the BUET last night.

In addition to air pollution, sessions on the first day focused on arsenic contamination, biological diversity, waste management, climate change, the preservation of wetlands and forests and sustainable development.

Booths set up by public and private sector agencies and NGOs featuring environmental posters, paintings and other displays also attracted large crowds.

Mahabul Islam, a senior official with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, re-

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Main accused in CCC commissioner Liakat murder case arrested

From Our Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Jan 14: One of the listed terrorists and the principal accused in Ward Commissioner Liakat Ali Khan murder case, Jasim Uddin alias Five-star, Jasim was arrested from Bahodderhat Bus Terminal under Chandgaon thana here this morning.

Detective Branch of police arrested him when he was boarding a Cox's Bazar-bound bus at around 9 am.

Ward Commissioner Liakat Ali Khan was shot dead in Chhatoli area in the city on June 2, 1999.

Police said Jasim is also an accused in two other murder cases.

Assault on woman at DU Russel arrested

By Staff Correspondent

Fazlul Haq Russel, the prime suspect in the assault on a woman on the New Year's day on Dhaka University campus, was arrested yesterday afternoon at a bus stand in Bogra, police said here.

He will be brought to Dhaka today and permission will be sought to interrogate him.

Russel, a second year botanical science student and a leader of the ruling party's student wing, Chhatra League, has been temporarily expelled from the university by the DU authorities. He was a resident student of Shahidullah Hall. When contacted over telephone, Quazi Anwar Hossain, SP of Bogra, said Russel was arrested on "concrete evidences".

The victim in her judicial statement earlier, accused Russel of assaulting her. She said she identified the accused after seeing pictures in newspaper.

The DU will verify whether the pictures of the incident of assault printed in newspapers is that of Russel, police said.

Announcement

Due to unavoidable reasons, today's Daily Star is a 12-page issue instead of normal 16-page. We regret the inconvenience to our valued readers.

Inside Today

Article
Let the New Year Give New Sense to Bangladesh Politics
by Muslehuddin Ahmad Page 4

Business
Globalisation key to poor states' rapid growth
Obuchi foresees Asian bounce-back in 21st century
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Prayer Timings

January 15

Fajr	5:18	5:25
Zohr	12:45	1:20
Asr	4:00	4:15
Maghrib	5:35	5:40
Esha	7:15	7:45

Source: Islamic Foundation

Vessel carrying wheat sinks near Mongla Port

BAGERHAT, Jan 14: A wheat loaded vessel capsized in the Pashur river near Mongla port early Thursday, reports UNB.

According to officials, the vessels 'Swarnal Moon Moon' carrying 485 metric tons of wheat of M/s Raising Enterprise of Khulna, sank in the river as water entered it through a crack.

A senior meteorologist said yesterday that the change in weather was due to a westerly low hovering above the Indian state of West Bengal and adjoining areas of Bangladesh. When the westerly system mixed up with a southerly system from the Bay of Bengal, it started pushing the mercury up.

Meanwhile, death of at least 50 people due to cold was reported so far from the northern, north-western and southern districts.

The lowest temperature of 5.5 degree C was recorded in Satkhira town on January 8.

The minimum temperature in the city yesterday was 15.8

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Bangabandhu Murder Case Move tomorrow seeking date for hearing of death ref

By Staff Correspondent

A move will be made before the High Court tomorrow seeking a date for hearing of the death reference in the Bangabandhu murder case and confirmation of the death sentences in the verdict.

Special Public Prosecutor Anisul Haq will make the move before the Criminal Bench of the High Court.

Fifteen persons were convicted and sentenced to death for murdering Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his family members on August 15, 1975.

The verdict was given by Sessions Judge, Dhaka, Kazi Golam Rasul on November 8, 1998 after 149 days of hearing.

He ordered that the 15 be executed in an open firing squad, if that is not possible for some reason, they be executed by hanging.

When contacted yesterday, defence lawyers who appealed to the HC against the verdict expressed their despair saying, how the case could be scheduled for hearing breaking the serial of pending capital punishment cases.

But Anisul Haq said, "In my judgement, we have not superseded any death reference case. The death reference should be heard at the earliest in the interest of the people and establishment of rule of law."

The incident took place on August 15, 1975. In normal course, the case should have been disposed of by 1978.

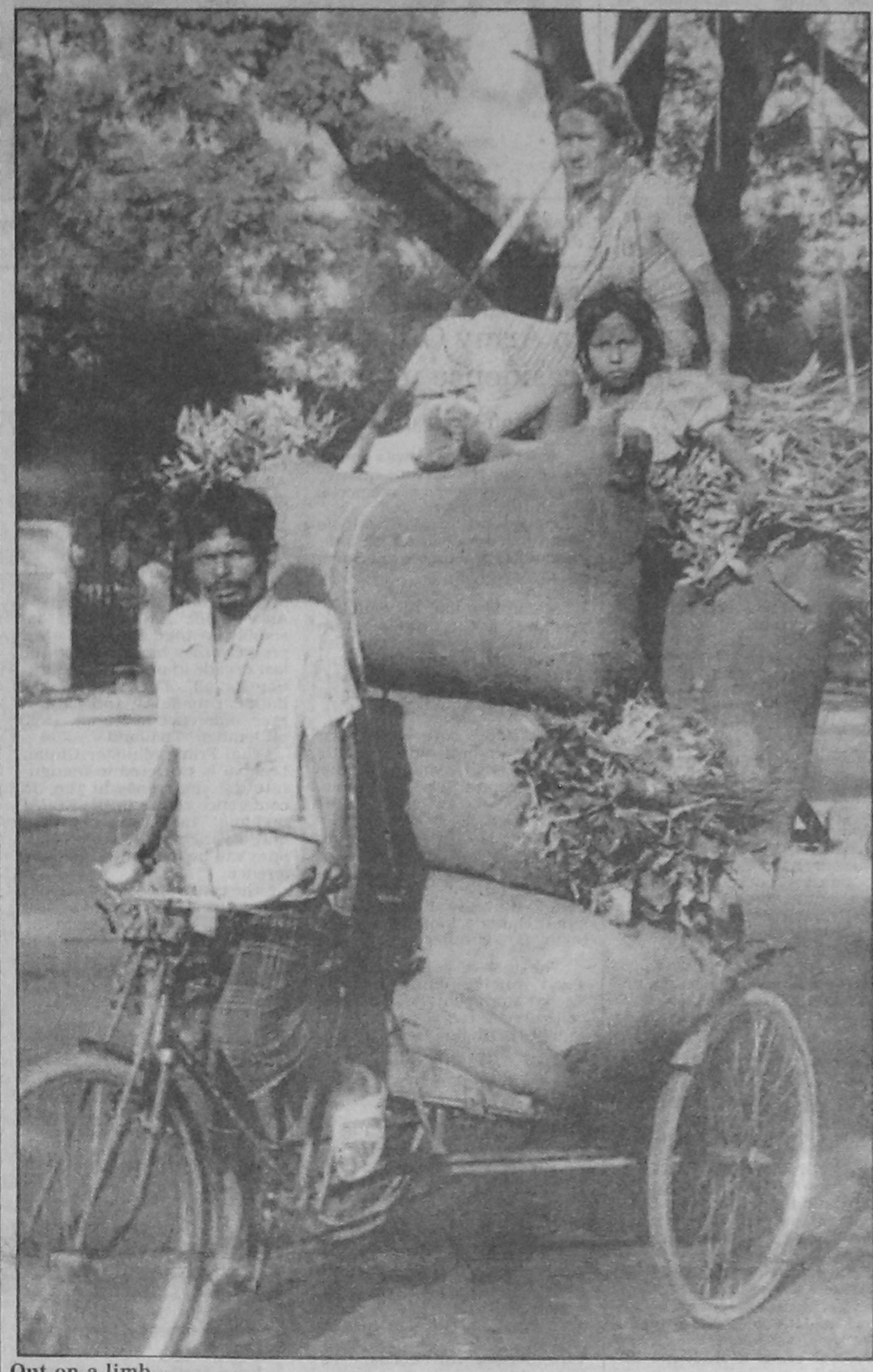
The case was ready for hearing in May 1999. All necessary formalities including preparation of papers were completed. The prosecution was taking time so that the listed death reference cases could be heard by the court.

"The murder case does not relate to any ordinary citizen. It is a case which concerns the Father of the Nation and his family," Haq said.

The case was filed with Dhanmondi thana on October 2, 1996, about 21 years after the murder. The CID started investigating the case on October 3, 1996 and the trial began on April 8, 1997.

Among the 19 accused in the case, four were acquitted. Of the 15 convicted, only four are in custody now while 11 others, all of them army personnel, are absconding.

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Out on a limb
Perched precariously on the bunches of branches and twigs they hope to sell, an old woman and a young girl risk their lives for a living. —Star photo by Enamul Haq

BNP to reply to Speaker's letter

By Staff Correspondent

BNP has decided to reply to the Speaker's third letter to the Leader of the Opposition in Parliament requesting the main opposition party to return to the House.

Speaker Humayun Rashid Chowdhury sent the letter to Khaleda Zia on Thursday.

When contacted last night, BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan told The Daily Star that the reply to the Speaker's letter would be given in a couple of days.

BNP sources said Khaleda Zia sent the letter to Deputy Leader of the Opposition Prof AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury yesterday for preparing a reply.

Chief Whip of the Opposition Khandaker Delwar Hossain will send the reply this time also as in the case of two earlier letters.

The sources also said there is no possibility of BNP's return to the Parliament till its demands and preconditions are met.

A top BNP leader said last night that there was nothing to discuss with the ruling party leaders about the four-point demand of his party because agreement in this regard was signed twice in the Parliament but it was not implemented.

He said the Speaker in his third letter didn't mention the five preconditions relating to the Prime Minister's indent

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Saifur stands for dialogue

'But govt must mean business'

BNP Standing Committee member Saifur Rahman strongly stands for dialogue to resolve the political deadlock between the government and the opposition parties.

"Democracy means dialogue, dialogue is a prerequisite to any democratic process," he told United News of Bangladesh yesterday when his attention was drawn to the Speaker's initiative to bring the Opposition back to Parliament.

Rahman, the former finance minister and a heavyweight in the BNP's policymaking body, said there is no alternative to discussion or dialogue where the disputing parties must sit to resolve problems.

He appreciated the Speaker's current initiative to bring the ruling party and the Opposition to a negotiating table, but insisted that the government must show positive indication that they mean business and is sincere about a solution to the nagging problem.

"Political disputes must be settled through dialogue, not by muscle power or any other means," said Saifur.

In reply to a question about BNP position regarding the Speaker's third letter to Opposition leader Khaleda Zia, he said he did not have any discussion with the party leadership. He, however, observed a fruitful dialogue needs a proper environment, which he said could be created if the government could meet one or two issues the opposition raised before talks start.

Editorial on page 4

It is not possible to meet all the demands beforehand, but what I feel is that the government must demonstrate a fair amount of goodwill and spirit of accommodation. The government must show flexibility and resolve one or two minor issues to create a congenial atmosphere.

About the business of Parliament without Opposition, he said even Awami League MPs felt the urge of Opposition's presence in the House to make Parliament effective and lively.

"But in this peculiar political situation the government will have to act to ensure our presence."

BCL leader stabbed to death at Comilla

COMILLA, Jan 14: A local leader of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) was stabbed to death in the town today due to intra-party conflict, reports UNB.

Witnesses and police said three BCL workers chased Jahid Babu, 23, President of Sheikh Russel Kriya Chakra and a BCL leader while he was riding a motor cycle on Mogultoli Madan Patti lane at about 1 pm.

They said the attackers stabbed him indiscriminately and severed tendons of his hands and legs. He died at Sadar Hospital at 2:15 pm.

On hearing his death news, hundreds of BCL workers thronged the hospital. Tension was prevailing in the town after the incident.

The body of Babu, son of Shafigur Rahman, was handed over to his family after autopsy.

FLY EMIRATES Emirates

Rain gives one point

From Al-Amin

GALLE, Sri Lanka, Jan 14: Bangladesh earned their first point in the World Youth (Under-19) Cricket Championship when their second group encounter against New Zealand was rained out at the Galle International Cricket Stadium today.

Match referee Graeme Labroy called off the match at 1:30 pm without a single ball being bowled at the fantastic venue, which experienced heavy overnight rain and incessant drizzle throughout today.

The decision of Labroy, the former Sri Lankan fast bowler, however could not satisfy both the teams, who were rather keen to go for maximum two points.

The Kiwis were not at all amused as the splitting of points made their chances of qualifying in the next round uncertain. But that was not the case for the under-rated Bangladeshis.

"We would have loved to have a game against the Kiwis today. Playing against a Test-playing nation would have been a good experience for our boys. They hardly get this sort of chances," said Dipu Rai Chowdhury, the Bangladesh coach.

His boys however can fancy a chance for a place in the Super Eight if they win their final group league match against Holland.

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Action council faces fresh setback

By Rezaul Karim

Issuance of a circular containing the guidelines regarding formation of All Party Action Council (APAC) has become uncertain as a section of Jatiya Party leadership declined to accept the modalities of its formation.

The Liaison Committee of the BNP-led opposition alliance, after nearly one and half months of discussion, had finalised and approved the structure of the APAC on Thursday last.

The APAC committee would be constituted with not more than 101 members, headed by a convenor. The committee will be formed at all cities, districts, pourashavas (municipalities), thanas, wards and unions of the country to expedite the on-going one-point movement.

Sources said though the JP Chairman HM Ershad had okayed the composition of the APAC, a section of his party leadership, including the JP secretary general Nazimul Rahman Manjur, were opposed to it.

They said Manjur and his associates demanded a provision for having co-convenors in the APAC and a smaller APAC committee. They opposed a big

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Nikunja murder: Five more arrested

By Staff Correspondent

Police arrested five more people yesterday in connection with Tuesday's killing of a joint secretary near Jagannath Hall on Dhaka University campus.

The arrested are Lutfor, Gonesh, Dalim, Krisna and Momen.

Ramna police taking the five and another person arrested earlier, Sukkur, went to hunt for another suspect in the killing.

Meanwhile, the case was officially transferred to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) yesterday. When contacted, CID officials said that they were yet to receive any official order in this regard.

Ramna police, have so far picked up 90 people in connection with the killing of the joint secretary. Twelve have been shown arrested.

Police, however, failed to trace Ohi, main suspect in the killing. Detective Branch of Police yesterday picked up a student named Tutul from Shahidullah Hall of Dhaka University.

Nikunja Bihari Debnath, 55, joint secretary of the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development was stabbed to death by muggers near the 'Swadhinata Sangram' (struggle for independence) sculpture at the road intersection between S M Hall and Jagannath Hall.

The secretary was returning to his Azimpur residence from Kamalapur railway station in a rickshaw.

Clash at Jatra show: 50 hurt 5 girls abducted

SAVAR, Jan 14: Some 50 people were injured and five girls abducted when gamblers fought each other at a late night show here on Thursday, reports UNB.

Of them, Russell, 28, Mofiz, 26, Razzak, 27, Kabir, 22, Faisal, 30, Fakir Chan, 24, Qudus, 21, and Jallil, 25, suffered injuries.

Sources said the fighting began following a brawl in the middle of a gambling session at a 'variety show' at Fulbaria Bazaar.

During the fight, the rivals reportedly abducted at gunpoint owner of the Jatra team Abdul Baker and five female performers — Beauty, Aleya, Jahura, Akli and Swarna.

There have been no reports of their whereabouts till this evening.

Sources said owner of the Jatra opera show arranged the gambling and variety show alongside staging the opera.

The situation was reportedly tense in the area.

Magnet smuggling Six Indians arrested at Bagerhat

BAGERHAT, Jan 14: Police today arrested six Indian nationals, who are alleged members of an organised group involved in smuggling of 'pillar-magnet', reports UNB.

The arrested are identified as Bivuti Biswas, 46, Djendra Mallik, 62, Sushanta Tribedi, 45, Tapan Kumar Sarker, 54, Biswasanath Laskar, 38, and Sajal Chowdhury, 26. All are inhabitants of various thanas of 24 Pargana district in West Bengal.

DB police searched a microbus in front of the district police office at noon and caught them.

The Indian nationals entered Bagerhat through Be-

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