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Action Council No headway in resolving disputes

By Staff Correspondent

The liaison committee of the four-party opposition alliance yesterday failed to make any headway in resolving fresh disputes over formation of the planned All-Party Action Council (APAC).

The APAC, planned to expedite the oust-government agitation, had become uncertain following a BNP-Jatiya Party bickering over the structure of the proposed body.

In an hour-long meeting yesterday, the liaison committee discussed the planned APAC and a joint circular by secretaries general of the four parties but failed to iron out the differences. The meeting also could

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Opposition's demonstration day today

By Staff Correspondent

The four-party opposition alliance will observe 'demonstration day' across the country today protesting deterioration of law and order.

As part of the programme, the four opposition parties — BNP, Jamaat, Jatiya Party and Islami Oikya Jote — will hold separate rallies and bring out processions in city, district and thana levels.

In Dhaka, the BNP will stage a rally at Mukhtangan at 3-30 pm which will be followed by a demonstration.

The Jatiya Party led by H M Ershad will hold a rally at its central office at 2-30 pm at Kalabagan from where it will also bring out a procession.

The Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oikya Jote will stage separate demonstrations to be followed by respective rallies at Baitul Mukarram north gate and in front of Paltan mosque in the afternoon.

Trial of Mummy Murder Case begins today

NARAYANGANJ, Jan 15: Trial of sensational Mummy Killing Case begins tomorrow at the District and Sessions Judge Court, reports UNB.

Her husband Abul Kalam Azad Ripon, her parents-in-law, one sister-in-law and two brothers-in-law will be produced before the court.

Housewife Mahmuda Sultana Mummy was killed at Bepari Para in the town on October 30 last year.

In a confessional statement, Mummy's husband admitted his involvement in the killing. Police submitted a charge sheet to the court in November last year.

Mummy's husband Ripon, her mother-in-law Monwara Begum, her sister-in-law Rokhsana Parveen Ruina were named accused in the case.

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Prayer Timings

January 16		
	Azhan	Jamaat
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

Launch social movement to protect environment

By Staff Correspondent

Speakers at an international conference in the city yesterday called upon the civil society to launch a strong social movement immediately to save the country and the people from an 'environmental disaster'.

If necessary steps are not taken on an emergency basis, the environment will become unsuitable for living in the days ahead, they said.

They were speaking on the 'Role of Civil Society in Environment' on the concluding

day of a two-day international Conference on Environment in Bangladesh, held at the BUET.

The conference was jointly organised by as many as 70 organisations and institutions including POROSH, Bangladesh Environment Network, Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) and the Coalition of Government NGOs. It was largely attended by noted environmentalists, NGO leaders, academicians and high officials.

Gramen Bank chief who

chaired the discussion termed the situation as an 'environmental hazard'.

"Don't wait for a united movement. Start your movement right now to save your countrymen from the vulnerable environmental hazard", he said making a fervent appeal to the civil society.

Each citizen of the country will have to play a vital role to protect the environment. A combination of all social forces will give a new momentum to environment-protection efforts

and put pressure on the government, said Prof Yunus whose micro-credit programme for the masses for poverty alleviation in the country earned international recognition.

By coalescing, the pro-environment sections can emerge as a potent force in the country's social scene and create a broad-based movement. "Only such a movement can save the country from an environmental disaster."

Terming the government as a conservative institution, he

said, "We can not expect much if we give the whole responsibility to it. As it is the problem of the masses, it is the responsibility of the civil society to create pressure on the government to become conscious about the issue."

Poverty is one of the main reasons for environmental pollution. If we can not eliminate poverty soon, we will not be able to protect the environment from pollution, he added.

Stressing the need for more effective role of the civil society,

other speakers also said it can create pressure on political parties and the government to make them more conscious about their role in protecting the environment.

In his paper on 'Protection of Bangladesh's Environment: The Role of Civil Society', Nazrul Islam from Emory University in the US, who is Coordinator of Bangladesh Environment Network (BEN), regretted that Bangladesh has no suitable policy to cope with the

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Members of the Indian Dance Society of London performing at the National Museum auditorium yesterday to raise funds for the Liberation War Museum. — Star photo

Govt to retain free quota system in garments export to US, Canada

By Rafiq Hasan

The government has decided to retain the free quota system in garments export to the USA and Canada for this year only in view of demands from the BGMEA, commerce ministry sources said.

In the free quota system, five per cent the total export quota is kept reserved. The government had earlier decided to cancel it from this year following recommendation by an official investigation report in May last year. The quota system was one of the major causes of corruption in garments export, it had said.

But following several meetings and with BGMEA leaders and strong lobbying by political high-ups, the commerce ministry revised its decision and ordered the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) to retain the system for this year only, sources in the ministry said. The BGMEA also used the good offices of the immediate past commerce minister for this, the sources said.

The EPB is now preparing for giving an advertisement inviting applications for allotments under free quota. EPB

sources said.

Pressure from a strong group of fake exporters who are involved in quota business but play a key role in the BGMEA election was the main reason behind the decision, the sources said.

Talking to this correspondent, some BGMEA officials who deal with free quota also spoke against the system saying, it creates a lot of problems for genuine exporters.

The free quota system benefits neither the industry nor the buyers because it increases the cost of products. A lot of fake garments factories exist in the name of sick industries which get allotments from the reserve quota and sell those to genuine exporters, thereby increasing the cost of products, they said.

"BGMEA leaders want this system because a large number of its members are involved in quota business," one BGMEA official said.

"The government should take initiative to control misuse of free quota," he said.

As the free quota is distributed to all applicants

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Khaleda's 11-pt plan to protect environment

By Staff Correspondent

Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Khaleda Zia has stressed the need for urgent collective efforts for protecting the country from possible environmental disasters.

She suggested the undertaking of national development activities through integrating the environmental issue in all sectors.

The BNP Chairperson said environment should have to be included in the country's agriculture, industry, health, energy, water development and flood control, irrigation, land, forest, animal, fisheries, livestock, coastal atmosphere, communications, housing, population, education, science, technology and research to address the concluding session of International Conference on Bangladesh Environment as the chief guest, the former Premier put forward eleven key points to address those nationally, to save Bangladesh from a possible environmental disaster. The function was held at the Osmani Memorial Auditorium.

She said there are proper directions in the Environment Policy 1992 as to how to co-ordinate activities to protect the environment. The 11-issues

Son's wedding

Nasim meets
Khaleda to
invite her

By Staff Correspondent

Home Minister Mohammad Nasim went to the Cantonment residence of Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Khaleda Zia yesterday afternoon to invite her to the wedding ceremony of his eldest son, sources close to Khaleda said.

A close aide to the minister confirmed this. Nasim could not be contacted.

The wedding ceremony takes place at the BDR auditorium in the city at 7 pm today.

It could not be confirmed if Khaleda would attend the ceremony.

The two are learnt to have exchanged pleasantries during their brief meeting. But details were not available.

The influential minister and ruling Awami League stalwart met Khaleda when her party BNP along with three other opposition parties are demanding resignation of the government. AL had earlier authorised Nasim to arrange a dialogue with the Opposition. But a dialogue is yet to take place.

Two left leaders gunned down at Jhenidah

From Our Correspondent

JHENIDAH, Jan 15: Two left political leaders were gunned down by some unidentified assailants here this evening.

The victims, Mir Elias Hossain Dileep, General Secretary of the central committee of Sramajibi Mukti Andolon and editor of local daily Beer Darpan and Alfaz Hossain, 49, convener of the party's district committee, succumbed to bullet injuries in Jhenidah Sadar Hospital.

The assailants numbering four opened fire on them while they were gossiping at a timber shop at Pagla Kanai gate in the town.

The bodies of Dileep and Alfaz were sent to the Sadar hospital morgue for autopsy.

Police suspected that the two were murdered due to intra-party feud.

Police were deployed in the area.

India urges Pakistan to hand over 5 plane hijackers

NEW DELHI, Jan 15: India called on Pakistan today to hand over five hijackers of an Indian plane who it said were believed to be in Pakistan, reports Reuters.

The Pakistan High Commissioner to India, Ashraf Jehangir Qazi was summoned to the Foreign Office and told that Pakistan had legal obligations to take the hijackers and their accomplices into custody and extradite them to India.

"Given that a large number of terrorists whose release was sought by the hijackers are Pakistani nationals and the first destination chosen by the hijackers was Lahore. There were strong grounds for believing that the hijackers were currently in Pakistan," India's Foreign Office spokesman said.

The hijack, which started on December 24 as the Indian Airlines jet flew from Kathmandu to New Delhi, ended after India agreed to demands from the hijackers that it free three prominent pro-Kashmiri militants.

Pakistan, which has fought three wars with India, has denied the hijackers entered its territory.

Russel, Tutul remanded for questioning

By Staff Correspondent

Two students of Dhaka University, who are also leaders of the Bangladesh Chhatra League, were taken on five days' remand for interrogation in connection with the assault of a woman at the TSC during the New Year's eve celebrations.

Fazul Haq Russel, the prime suspect, was arrested from a bus-stand at Sherpur under Bogra district on Friday and brought to the capital yesterday morning.

Khan Mesbahul Alam Tutul, another suspect in the assault case, was arrested from the university area Friday night.

Both of them were produced

before the CMM's court yesterday. The court placed them on five days' remand.

The victim in her Judicial statement earlier, accused Russel and some others of assaulting her. The victim also identified the accused after seeing their pictures in newspapers and said that she would be able to identify the rest.

Russel, a second year student of Botanical science was temporarily expelled from the university by the DU authorities. He was a resident student of Shahidullah Hall of the DU.

Tutul was a third year student of statistics.



Russel, the prime suspect in the assault on a woman on the DU campus, being taken to the court from DB office yesterday. — Star photo

Rising crimes, unemployment most serious problems

By Special Correspondent

Survey report

The most serious problems facing the nation are rising crimes and unemployment, followed by terrorism and political instability, an opinion poll has revealed.

Of the respondents in the survey, 22.4 per cent felt that the major problem in the country is increasing crimes while 20.6 per cent considered unemployment/underemployment/job loss as the major problem. Thirteen point two per cent identified terrorism as the major problem and 13 per cent thought political instability needed to be addressed first.

The opinion survey found that in India, unemployment is seen as the major problem followed by inflation. In Sri Lanka and Nepal, inflation is considered as the most serious

problem followed by unemployment.

The survey, the latest conducted by "ORG-MARG South Asian Mood Monitor", has covered four South Asian countries — Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka. The main purpose of the Mood Monitor is to track every six months a few key aspects of the public mood in South Asia.

ORG-MARG is the largest independent social and market research company in South Asia, based in Mumbai. Its subsidiary company in Bangladesh is ORG-MARG QUEST.

Inflation, the survey revealed, is considered to be of lesser concern in Bangladesh

and India. The poll analysts noted that in India this might be indicating that the economy is moving in the right direction. Corruption seems to be bothering the Indians and the Nepalese more.

In Sri Lanka, terrorism is considered to be of highest concern by 11.7 per cent and in India by 1.3 per cent.

The analysts also observed that as regards terrorism in India and Sri Lanka, the figure might have been higher had the survey been conducted a few days later, when Sri Lanka was rocked by the assassination attempt on President Chandrika Kumaratunge and an Indian Airlines plane was hijacked by terrorists having links with a Kashmiri separatist outfit.

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South Asian bourse bosses set to launch SASEF

From Toufique Imrose Khalidi

CHITTAGONG, Jan 15: A new regional outfit styled South Asian Stock Exchanges Federation (SASEF) is ready for launch tomorrow after a two-day conference of leaders of the subcontinent's bourses that began here today.

Policymakers of Chittagong Stock Exchange (CSE), the hosts of the first ever such meeting in the region, said they were on way to reaching a common ground for kickstarting the regional forum with such long term goals as cross border listing and joint memberships.

The conference is expected to adopt a declaration articulating

the decisions including the birth of SASEF.

Senior representatives of stock exchanges from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh are also discussing the agenda for cooperation in the light of the latest trends and practices on the global markets.

CSE President Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury, MP, drove home the point that it would be crucial for the regional players to come to a common platform.

Regional cooperation among us would enable us to compete with the developed

markets in Europe and North America," the CSE president said. "If we work together we can make this South Asian zone a lucrative centre for western and fund managers in bulk."

Collaboration, he said, would be key to "strengthening the emerging and pre-emerging markets" and "ensuring the stability and quality of our markets".

Guests, who included Federation of International Stock Exchanges (FIBV) Secretary General Gerrit De Marez-Oyens, agreed and praised the CSE initiative.

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Tremor kills 4, injures 400 in China

BEIJING, Jan 15: Two earthquakes killed at least four people, injured 400 people and collapsed thousands of buildings in a quake-prone region of southwest China early today, officials said, reports AP.

Yao'an county in Yunnan province was hit first by a 6.0 magnitude quake that sent people scurrying out of their homes, followed one and a half hours later by an even stronger aftershock with a magnitude of 6.5, said a county seismologist who gave just his surname, Su.

Four people were killed, said a Yunnan government seismologist, surnamed Wu. Another 220 were injured and 4,000 buildings collapsed, said an official also surnamed Wu at the State Seismology Bureau in Beijing.

The main compound of Yao'an's government headquarters was seriously damaged, the state-run Xinhua News Agency said. Power in the area also was cut, it added.

But there was no damage to a valuable historical site 50

kilometers from the epicenter where remains of China's oldest fossil man were found in 1965, Xinhua said. The site of Yuanmou Homo Erectus, who dated back 1.7 million years, is now a tourist destination.

The authorities and media did not specify which tremor caused which damages and injuries. Quakes in China often produce high figures for building damage, because officials may count smaller structures other than homes and because of fragile building materials.

Outside of cities, one-story homes, sometimes made of mud bricks, are common.

In the town of Guantun, 30 kilometers from Yao'an, the early morning quakes woke tens of thousands of people and sent residents flocking into the streets, Xinhua said. Guantun started up 10 generators to produce electricity, it added.

Authorities moved in 10 tons of building material, 5,000 rolls of woolen felt and food into affected areas, Xinhua said.