

Ten more killed in Kashmir violence

SRINAGAR, India, Dec 23: Ten people have been killed in separatist-linked violence in Indian Kashmir, police said today, a day after a daring attack by Muslim militants in New Delhi's historic Red Fort left three people dead, reports AFP.

Five people were gunned down late Saturday by militants of the Pakistan-based Hizbul Mujahideen rebel group near the southern Kashmir resort town of Kokernag, 70 kilometres (43 miles) south of the state summer capital Srinagar.

Police said the dead included three former separatist rebels who had turned pro-India. The Hizbul Mujahideen claimed responsibility, saying its members had ambushed a car in which the former rebels were travelling, police said.

Police said that elsewhere in the troubled Kashmir Valley, another five people, including a police informer, were killed overnight in separate incidents of violence.

Kashmir's Islamic militants have rejected a unilateral ceasefire by Indian troops in Kashmir, announced for the holy month of Ramadan and extended for four weeks on Wednesday, as a propaganda ploy.

Small two- or three-man Lashkar "suicide" squads have been responsible for sporadic attacks on security installations in Kashmir, often barricading

themselves inside a building and opening fire on soldiers.

On Wednesday, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee announced the Ramadan ceasefire would be extended for a further four weeks and said his government would take "exploratory steps" towards resuming a stalled dialogue with Pakistan.

The Muslim insurgency in Indian Kashmir has claimed 34,000 lives since its launch in 1989.

Behind the blast

From Page 1

age fills up a room, inmates would never get any hint that they are in a death trap," he noted.

Years ago, the authorities mixed artificial odor so that people could smell gas if case of leakage.

"In the early nineties, nine people were killed in an explosion at a house at Jurain in the city when an inmate lit a gas stove.

"Our investigation revealed that there were several illegal underground gas lines with leaks near the building. As a result, gas had accumulated in the house," he recalled.

Local people said some gas-related accidents took place in Mir Hazirbagh area in the last six months.

In one incident, two sweepers were injured in an explosion in a sewerage.



Indonesians carry a collapsed passenger at Jakarta's Senen railway station yesterday as millions of people packed trains, buses, planes and inter-island ferries in a traditional annual exodus from the capital to their hometowns to celebrate Eid-ul-Fitr. This year's mass people movement is compounded by Christmas and New Year celebrations falling in the same 10 days as Eid-ul-Fitr.

Roundtable on arsenic

From Page 12

Babar N. Kabir of World Bank said donors should not be blamed solely for the failure. "Please do not blame only the donors. They set programme after approval from External Resources Division (ERD)."

Kabir apprehended that arsenic might have impact on the food chain in Bangladesh. "If proved, it will be a threat to our food security."

Dr. Imamul Huq of Soil Science Department of Dhaka University quoting from his study report said there is a "mentionable amount of arsenic in rice crops and leafy vegetables in Bangladesh".

Noted economist Prof. Muzaffar Ahmed criticised the "single-ended mindset" of donors and said the amount spent for eliminating AIDS from the country is higher than that spent for removing the arsenic problem.

Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA) President Dr. Rashid-e-Mahbub said the methods used by donor agencies to free drinking water from arsenic is not effective. "These are ineffective tools".

Iftakharul Alam of Rotary Club called for creating public awareness about the problem and stressed the need for community participation to remove it.

He said donors and NGOs could try the Rotary-developed Continuous Arsenic Removal Plant, which has proved to be an effective method.

Prothom Alo Editor Motiur Rahman in his address of welcome called upon all concerned to take immediate step to familiarise alternative sources of drinking water to save the people from the deadly poisoning.

He also underscored the need for treatment and rehabilitation of arsenic patients on a priority basis.

He mentioned that out 1.10 crore deep tube wells in the coun-

try, water of more than 50,000 is contaminated with excessive amount of arsenic.

Noted water expert Dr. Alun Nishat said the government should frame a clear-cut policy for sinking new tubewells.

People can not be barred from taking drinking water from red-marked tubewells as they become confused seeing sinking of new tubewells near the old (red marked) ones, Dr. Nishat said.

Health Secretary Alamgir Farook Chowdhury said grassroots level people should be involved in arsenic mitigation programmes.

Shafiqul Islam of Unicef, Ibrahim Khaled, Managing Director of Pubali Bank, Mustak R Chowdhury and Noor Jahan Begum of BRAC, SMA Rashid and Fariduddin Ahmed Mah of Bangladesh Arsenic Mitigation Water Supply Project (BAMWSP) and Shireen Hossain also took part in the dialogue.

Use of proper technology

From Page 1

Bangladesh technology, Prof. Yunus asked: "Can we not do what is happening to the neighbouring country?"

He said the government must create an environment by providing policy and infrastructural support.

"Creating a new ministry for information technology will not help much. Rather, it will help much if the government gives priority in practice to it," he observed.

"Information technology and biotechnology will bring about significant changes of our lives in near future," Prof. Yunus went on. "We have to sow good seeds and cultivate our land properly for getting good results."

In his speech, the BUET vice-chancellor said the convention would initiate a continuing process of technology transfer for the rapid socio-economic development of the country.

In today's world most of the

technologies are developed in the industrialised countries. Obviously the technology transfer process takes place from industrialised to developing countries, he said.

The science and technology minister assured the non-resident Bangladeshis of all-out cooperation from the government in transfer of technology as well as IT development in order to boost the economy.

In this regard he mentioned the government's plan to set up an IT Village on 47 acres of land in Mohakhali area but admitted that the land was still under illegal occupation.

The minister said the country could not yet meet the requirement of IT professionals although universities and engineering colleges are producing many professionals every year.

Prof. Jamilur Reza Chowdhury said NRIs could play very significant role in the field of software development and some other

areas of information and communication technology.

Citing examples of non-resident Chinese and Indians, he said they were now contributing to the technological and economic developments in their respective countries.

"Bangladesh technology has started going abroad over the past three to four decades. And now they have also started to contribute to the country's development," Chowdhury observed.

Dr. Abdullah of IBM said that the convention aimed at tying technologists, investors, entrepreneurs (TIEs) from both the resident and non-resident Bangladeshis.

"The sooner the government, business communities and entrepreneurs build a working partnership with the NRIs, the sooner the goals of TechBangla in the overall economic development of the country will be achieved," he added.

2 kidnapped businessmen rescued in Narayanganj

From Our Correspondent

NARAYANGANJ, Dec 23: Two businessmen were abducted by some miscreants in the town on Friday night.

Police rescued the businessmen and arrested two persons identified as Palash, 32, and Qamrul Hasan, 30.

A case under Public Safety Act (PSA) was filed against them. A group of miscreants abducted Amjad, 35, and Nazrul, 25, at gunpoint from Chashara area in the town, police said.

The miscreants took them to a house in a private car in Isdar area. They tortured the businessmen and later shifted them to a house in Godnail area. They demanded Tk 1.5 lakh from Amjad Hossain's wife. Amjad's wife Selina informed police headquarters about the incident. Later, police rescued the victims and arrested the two.

This is the second case filed under PSA in Narayanganj. The first case was lodged by police against the followers of Charmonal Peer last July.

-AFP photo



Picture shows an areal view of the Popocatepetl Volcano taken from Mexico City on December 22.

-AFP photo

Popocatepetl still poses eruption risk

MEXICO CITY, Dec 23: A decidedly quieter Popocatepetl volcano still poses an eruption risk, authorities said yesterday, leading to further recommendations that evacuees remain in shelters instead of returning home, reports AFP.

The volcano's 5,230-metre crater was quiet Friday compared to the belching and fiery eruptions earlier in the week that shot plumes of smoke and cascades of red-hot rocks at the site just 60 kilometres away from Mexico City.

In a statement, Mexico's National Disaster Prevention

Center said scientists continually monitoring the volcano have determined that Popocatepetl is in an "energy-charging phase, which could mean a continuation of its eruptive patterns."

Volcano experts fear that the eruptions and heating of the glacier-capped cone could trigger mudslides, causing more widespread damage than the eruptions themselves.

More than 40,000 people have been evacuated from the towns surrounding the base of the volcano, and travel within 13 kilometres remains prohibited.

Smaller parties

From Page 12

the very programme is due to take place for the sake of adequate preparations.

Announced at a press conference in the city on December 19, the hartal is aimed at protesting terrorism and corruption among other problems facing the public. Nevertheless, a faction of the Ganatantri Party, a component of the alliance, differed with other partners on the programme, calling it a move harmful to the people.

The call for a dawn-to-dusk hartal across the country is seen by political observers as a bid to shake off the slumber the left parties had so long been in, except in some cases when there was political turmoil.

These parties played a significant role in the anti-autocracy movement leading to the end of a nine-year autocratic rule by General HM Ershad. However, they firmly declined to take part in the Awami League-led agitation against the BNP government.

of Khaleda Zia and again, in the BNP-led agitation against the present government of Sheikh Hasina on the ground that autocratic and fundamentalist forces are also in the fold.

On several occasions in the past, both the ruling AL and the main opposition BNP made abortive attempts to secure support of the left parties only because of the fact that the two leading parties joined hands with the autocratic Jatiya Party and fundamentalist Jamaat-e-Islami.

Chances are still there that both Awami League and BNP may try to woo the left parties on their respective side ahead of the next elections, sources said.

There is a thinking in BNP to spare some parliamentary seats for top leaders in the 11-party alliance. AL plans to share power with such leaders once it gets re-elected, however.

But, the alliance leaders said they would prefer to remain in politics "only as an alternative force."

Gen Harun takes over

From Page 1

Commander-in-Chief of the Bangladesh forces during the War of Independence MAG Osmani was the first to be made a General after liberation. He held that position for a month and a half.

Called back from LPR, Mustafiz, an officer belonging to the Engineering Corps, was made army chief for a three-year term on contract.

Although there were speculations that Mustafiz's term would be extended by one year, the government finally decided to appoint a new army chief for what observers termed "a move to restore the morale of senior generals." Presently there are 25 Major Generals in Bangladesh Army.

On his last day as army chief, Gen Mustafiz was presented a guard of honour. Later, he made a farewell call on President Shahabuddin Ahmed.

The Chief of Army Staff will place wreaths at the Shikha Anurban today. He will be presented a guard of honour at the Senakunja.

He will later address senior officers at the Army Headquarters.

Harun, an Infantry Corps Officer, is known in military circles as an efficient commander and a "professional soldier".

He joined the Pakistan Military Academy (PMA) in 1970 as a member of the 24th War Course and was commissioned on September 6 that year.

He was commissioned in the Fourth Battalion of then East Bengal Regiment stationed in Comilla. He fought in the War of Independence and was awarded Bir Pratik for his gallantry. He attended the Staff College at Mirpur in the city and had higher training at the Royal College of Defence Studies in London, where he obtained "reds".

Harun was a Counsellor at the Bangladesh Embassy in Riyadh

for three years.

After the present government took over, he was appointed Principal Staff Officer to the Prime Minister in September, 1996 and continued in that post till early 1998. He was Chief Military Observer in Georgia, under the United Nations, for one year and nine months.

Harun was Chief of General Staff (CGS) before his present assignment.

There are five Major Generals senior in service to the new army chief. They are Amin Ahmed Chowdhury, now Ambassador to Oman; Hasan Mashud Chowdhury, Commandant of National Defence College, whose services are being placed under the Foreign Ministry; Abdul Munim Mansur, Commandant of the Staff College; Anwar Hossain, now Ambassador to Morocco and Fazlur Kabir, GOC, Chittagong, who is being made Commandant of National Defence College.

Meanwhile, Maj Gen Ahsan N Amin, Adjutant General, has been appointed as Chief of General Staff (CGS).

JCD-BCL clash in Sylhet: 4 shot

From Staff Correspondent

SYLHET, Dec 23: Four people were shot during a clash between Bangladesh Chhatra League and Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal this afternoon here.

BCL leader Shahbul came under attack by the JCD activists at mobile phone store at Choubhatta area at 3 pm. He received injuries in his head and is now under treatment at a local clinic.

As a sequel to the incident, the BCL activists attacked the house of JCD activist Manik.

Manik and three of his associates were shot during the attack.

The incidents took place over collection of extortion in the area, sources said.

Student politics in Sylhet

From Page 12

Party Convenor Abdullah Siddiquee and Member-Secretary Abdus Shahid Lashkar Bashir, district BNP Vice Presidents Aheza Reza Chowdhury and Noman Mahmud Advocate and Joint Secretary Abul Kabir Shamim, City Jamaat Ameer Dr Shafiqur Rahman and Moulana Rezaul Karim Jalali of Islami Oikya Jote, addressed the meeting.

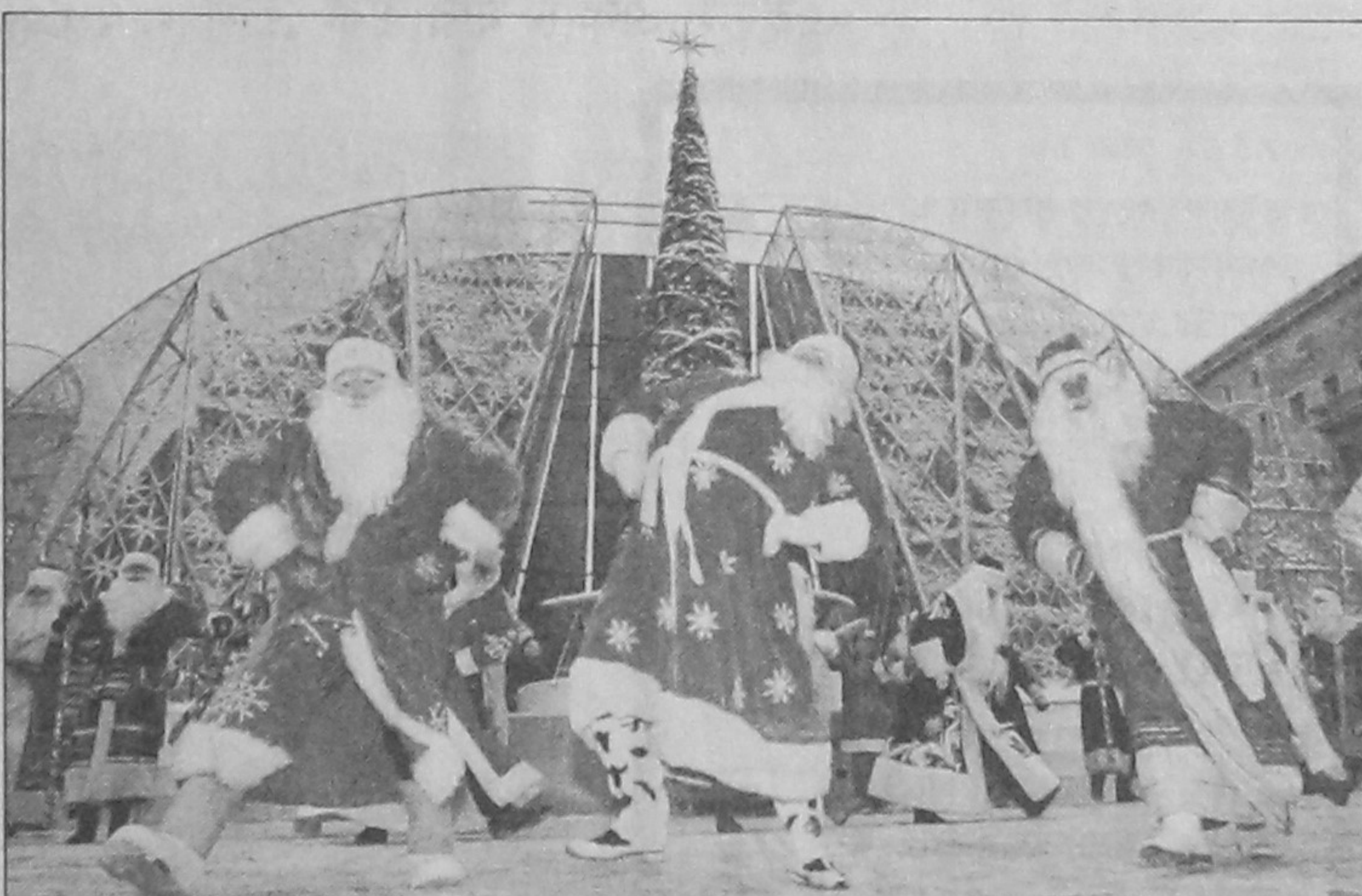
The meeting was moderated by the Coordinator of the Steering Committee, Sylhet Press Club President Mughlatis-Un-Noor.

The suspension on politics in the educational institutions was slapped to ensure a congenial

atmosphere on the campus by the All Party Steering body for three months initially which was later extended twice.

The meeting thanked the leaders and activists of student organisations, and general students for implementing the decision.

The meeting, however, expressed its concern over the deterioration of law and order in the town for the last few weeks and called upon the authorities concerned to take special measures in this regard. The committee also decided to hold a meeting with the student leaders in January.



Father Frost figures in a frolicking good mood entertain passing shoppers from a stage set up in central Moscow yesterday during a meeting with the main Russian Father Frost in downtown Moscow.

-AFP photo

Press Club polls: Monir, Swapan reelected

From Page 12

The elected members are Kazi Rounaq Hossain (direct), Yusuf Pasha (Janakantha), Parveen Sultana Musa Juma (Janakantha), Shehabuddin Ahmed Nafa (Daily Star), Shafiqul Karim Sabu (BSS), Mostafa Kamal Majumder (Independent), Syed Abdal Ahmed (Janakantha), Zahiduzzaman Faruque (Arhanit), Muzaffar Hossain Manik (New Nation), and Rosy Ferdous (Inqilab).

Announcing the results at the Press Club early in the morning, Tajul Islam thanked the candidates, polling agents, club members and staff for their cooperation in conducting the election peacefully.

Results rejected

Meanwhile, Shafique-Swapan Panel has rejected the election results alleging "manipulation of ballot papers and other irregularities".

Speaking on behalf of the panel, Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury told newsmen yesterday at the Jatiya Press Club (JPC) that besides ballot paper manipulation, a number of irregularities and foul games were resorted to in the election to announce a certain quarter the winner.

Shafiqur Rahman, who contested the election as a president candidate on behalf of the panel, also made a brief statement before newsmen.

"Our victory was hijacked," Chowdhury said while claiming

that the conscious voters gave clear mandate in favour of Shafique-Swapan Parishad. He demanded fresh polls to maintain the dignity of the Press Club.

Chowdhury said, "a section of election commission officials resorted to ballot manipulation, replacing a bundle of 25 ballot papers when the Shafique-Swapan Panel was leading with a good margin after counting of 450 ballot papers out of the 487 votes cast."

He said immediately after this "misdeed", both Shafiqur Rahman and Swapan Kumar Saha lodged a written protest with the election commission late Friday night.

Among other things, Chowdhury said despite demands raised by a number of

voters, the election commission supplied ballot papers without any serial number and counter-foils.

He further alleged that although Jatiya Press Club is an organisation of professional journalists, many of the working journalists including Editor of the Prothom Alo Motiur Rahman and Editor of The Daily Star Mahfuz Anam were not given membership of the club.

Shafiqur Rahman demanded re-polling and fair inquiry into their allegations.

He also urged the election commission not to announce the poll results before settlement of the issue. Otherwise, he warned that the election commission alone would be held responsible for any consequence.

Noor Jehan

"She was a true Pakistani and sang some memorable patriotic songs, which would ever remain in the hearts of the people."

Jehan started her career as a child singer at the age of eight from India.

She remained Pakistan's most popular singer for more than four decades and sang around 20,000 songs in Urdu and Punjabi language films in both Pakistan and India.

Family sources said she stopped singing for films after she developed cardiac problems in 1989.

"We will always miss her as a mother of singing," said prominent Pakistani singer Mehnaz Begum.

"We will always remember her patriotic songs during the 1965 war with India," said retired army officer Hasan Akhtar Zaidi.

The deceased was to be buried at a graveyard in Karachi, family sources said.

Pintu, Laltu

From Page 1

Harunur Rashid Shishir, Sayeed Iqbal Mahmud Titu, Sheikh Abul Halim Khandaker, Ahsanuddin Khan Shipon, Asaduzzaman Palash, Tariqul Islam Titu and Walid Khan.

BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia suspended the activities of central executive committee and Dhaka University unit following a clash between Pintu and Laltu groups on DU campus few months back.

In a meeting on last Monday, Khaleda revived the DU unit of JCD, led by Manir Hossain and Mostafizul Islam Mamun.

UNB adds: Several hundred JCD activists at DU last night protested the new central committee formed with Pintu and Laltu.

Within hours of the announcement of the committee, the angry protesters brought out processions from different halls chanting slogans against the committee announced by BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia, witnesses said.

Forensic report

From Page 12

organisation, UDP, was raped by an official of her organisation and he hanged the body with ceiling fan in a bid to divert the killing as suicide.

When the body was sent to local hospital, doctors getting bribe from the criminal, issued a motivated report terming the death as suicide.

Challenging the report, BNP leader Shafi appealed for a second time autopsy and lodged a case with Kotwali police against three people, including Office Manager of UDP.

The second time postmortem at the Forensic Department of Rangpur Medical College Hospital proved that the first time report was wrong. The report said Farida was raped and strangled.

Following the report, Shafi Ahmed made complaint with the concerned authority against the three doctors and appealed for punitive action. Following the appeal and examining the post-mortem report, the Home Ministry issued the notification against the accused.

Mamata: Speculations

From Page 12

share the BJP views. Interestingly, shortly before Mamata attended Sonia's Uttar Pradesh Congress chief, while addressing her party's lawmakers, had attempted to drive a wedge between BJP and its "secular" allies.

"We leave it to the conscience of the secular elements in the NDA alliance to determine how long a rope they intend to give BJP leadership now that the BJP's hidden agenda (an apparent reference to Vajpayee's remarks on Ram temple) has come out in the open," she had said.

Mamata, however, sought to play down her absence from Vajpayee's Uttar party, saying she had been occupied with ministerial engagement outside Delhi.

It may be recalled that it was Mamata who had taken an initial-

ative early this year for a "mahajot" (grand alliance) with the Congress in West Bengal to put up a joint fight against ruling Left Front there in the assembly elections in the first quarter of next year. However, the Congress high command shot down the idea, passionately championed also by veteran Congress leaders from West Bengal, on the ground that there could be no move with Trinamool Congress until it severed ties with BJP. Mamata had at that time rejected snapping relations with BJP.

It is too early to say if Mamata will part company with BJP before assembly polls in West Bengal. Her party is divided on the assessment about its effect on the electorate in that state and whether it will help her party and, if so, to what extent.