

Megawati calls on Shahabuddin

Visiting Indonesian Vice-President Megawati Soekarnoputri yesterday paid a courtesy call on President Shahabuddin Ahmed at Bangabhaban and stressed the need for close cooperation between Bangladesh and Indonesia for socio-economic development of the two countries, reports BSS.

She said both Indonesia and Bangladesh have common identity and problems for economic development and hoped that the existing bilateral relations between the two countries would be further deepened and diversified in future.

Welcoming Megawati, Shahabuddin said the visit reflects her deep feelings for the people and the government of Bangladesh.

He observed that Indonesia as the biggest Muslim country holds a special place in the hearts of the people of Bangladesh and they have the highest esteem for Soekarno the founding father of the Republic of Indonesia.

The President hoped that the See page 11 col 8

Bangladesh a productive partner for cooperation: Megawati

Indonesian Vice-President Megawati Soekarnoputri termed Bangladesh a productive partner for cooperation, saying her visit would be an instrument in promoting Dhaka-Jakarta relations, reports UNB.

I am confident that we will Indonesia should become an even more exuberant and productive partner of Bangladesh in every field of cooperation," she said speaking at a dinner hosted by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at Ganobhaban yesterday evening.

Megawati, who came here yesterday on a 3-day official visit, said she had looked forward to availing of this opportunity after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to Indonesia in September 1997.

"Therefore I highly value this visit as I believe that it is very instrumental in the promotion of bilateral relations between our two nations," she told the function.

The Indonesian leader said both the countries offer more opportunities for mutual interests, which in turn will benefit the peoples of both the countries. She

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	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Jan 6		5.27 pm
Jan 7	6-43am	

Prayer Timings

January 6		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-30	6-10
Zuhr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-00	4-15
Maghrib	5-30	5-35
Esha	7-00	7-30



Indonesian Vice-President Megawati Soekarnoputri and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina waving to people after the former's arrival at ZIA yesterday. -- Star photo

Hasina, Megawati reach accord Joint body for greater economic cooperation

Bangladesh and Indonesia have agreed in principle to form a joint commission to further strengthen bilateral ties through greater economic cooperation, reports UNB.

The agreement came during a meeting between visiting Indonesian Vice-President Megawati Soekarnoputri and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the Ganobhaban yesterday evening.

Stressing the need for enhancing Dhaka-Jakarta cooperation, Megawati proposed formation of the joint commission which was readily accepted by Hasina.

Details of the proposed commission would be worked out at the official meeting between Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad and his Indonesian counterpart Dr Alwi Shihab today.

Briefing newsmen on the

Hasina-Megawati talks that lasted nearly an hour, Press Secretary Jawadul Karim said the two leaders discussed various bilateral issues "in a very warm and cordial atmosphere."

The Indonesian vice-president, who came at the helm of the world's largest Muslim country through a mass upsurge against authoritarian rule, shared Prime Minister Hasina's viewpoint that free and fair election is essential for establishing sustainable democracy.

She appreciated Bangladesh government's programmes of micro-credit and empowerment of women. Megawati conveyed Indonesian President Abdur Rahman Wahid's good wishes to Sheikh Hasina.

The prime minister informed the Indonesian leader that her

government was implementing extensive programmes in social sector with poverty alleviation as the main target. Hasina referred to micro-credit housing and literacy schemes to change the destiny of common people.

Referring to the tragic incident of August 15, 1975 when father of the nation Bangabandhu was assassinated and his elected government toppled, Hasina said the post-75 regimes ruined democratic institutions and denied the people voting right in their bid to consolidate their illegal power.

After her long-drawn struggle, the prime minister said, democracy and franchise was restored in the country where parliament

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Wrapped in warm clothes, a baby snuggles in father's lap in the city yesterday as a cold wave is sweeping the country. --

Cold wave claims 10 lives in N-dists

By Staff Correspondent

A cold wave sweeping the country claimed at least 10 lives in five northern districts in the last two days.

According to reports from our correspondents, two of the victims died yesterday and eight died the day before.

Three of them died in Pabna, two each in Sirajganj, Nilphamari and Kurigram and one in Rangpur.

The dead were identified as Helaluddin, 40, and Abdul Matin, 42, of Sirajganj; Tafiz Mia, 75, Sanu Mandal, 85, and Talu Sardar, 79, of Pabna; Purabi Rani, 45, and Sakhina, 60, of Nilphamari; Abdul Hye, 40, and Boiddyanath, 60, of Kurigram and Khodeza Begum, 68, of Rangpur.

The death toll however was not officially confirmed.

Meanwhile, BBC also reported last night that eight people died from cold in Rangpur, Nilphamari and Kurigram districts.

The first cold wave this winter would persist for the next 24 hours, a weather forecast said yesterday.

"It started a few days back under the impact of northeast wind which originated from Siberian wind. Such cold spell is usual during winter," a weather expert said.

The districts in northern and central regions and parts of southern region of the country have been experiencing cold spell. Temperature is normal in Chittagong, Barisal and other coastal districts, official sources said.

The lowest temperature in the country yesterday was recorded at Chuadanga - 8.5 degree Celsius.

Due to severe cold, people especially at the northern tip of the country Tetulia and Panchagar - have been in misery. The sky was overcast with fog and the sun was visible for some time only at around noon.

No step to address problems of wage earners in ME

JS committee recommendations go unheeded

By Reaz Ahmad

Hundreds of Bangladeshi wage earners in the Middle East are facing a hostile situation due to lack of job security, cheating by recruiting agencies, and non-cooperation from the country's mission staff, sources concerned said.

More than half of Bangladesh's three million remittance senders work in countries of the Middle East, mostly in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA).

Back at home, Labour and Employment Ministry has virtually taken no step so far to address their problems in the light of a parliamentary team's recommendations following its visit to KSA, Bahrain and UAE nearly three months back.

Asked about implementation of the team's 18-point recommendation at a meeting of the Parliamentary Sanding Committee on the Ministry on Thursday, it was told that the Committee would

be apprised of this at its next meeting.

Four manpower recruiting agencies which were served with show cause notices by the Ministry for illegal sending of some 1000 Bangladeshis to the Middle East have not yet replied to those, the Committee meeting was told.

The agencies are Meridian International, Paradise International, Sarkar Recruiting Agency and Silverline Associates.

In its report on the visit, the parliamentary team said that these unscrupulous recruiters sent many Bangladeshis to Middle East countries giving them false promise for jobs.

These ill-fated people were now facing legal problems in staying there and suffering badly, sources said quoting the report.

During its two-week visit to the countries, the team found that difference of opinion between Bangladesh's envoys in those

countries and labour attaches on important labour issues sometimes added to miseries of these people.

These Bangladeshis who became victims of cheating and found no job also did not get required legal aid, sources said.

The parliamentary team recommended recruitment of two Saudi lawyers for the Bangladeshis facing legal problems there.

It suggested raising the staff strength in the country's missions in Jeddah and Riyadh and opening of a counselor wing in a third Saudi city, Dammam.

The team also recommended expansion of labour market, which means Bangladesh to look for new destinations for its foreign wage earners and explore new opportunities.

It found that because of unholly competition among recruiting See page 11 col 6

One shot dead, 2 hurt by terrorists in Feni

From Our Correspondent

FENI, Jan 5: One person was shot dead and two others were injured by bullets when a gang of terrorists opened fire on them at village Char Chandia in Sonagazi upazila of the district last night.

The dead was identified as Abdus Sattar, 40, son of late Abdur Rashid.

The gang took away gold ornaments and other valuables worth Tk 3 three lakh from the victims' house.

Police and relatives of the victims said a gang of terrorists stormed into the house at 2 am asked Sattar and his younger brother Abdul Halim to pay Tk one lakh as toll.

As Sattar and Halim refused to pay toll, the gang opened fire leaving Sattar dead on the spot and Halim and his wife Zarina Begum injured.

Sattar and Abdul Halim returned home recently from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait respectively.

Halim was admitted to Feni See page 11 col 8

Deadlock at Hilly land port ends

NILPHAMARI, Jan 5: The deadlock at Hilly land port in Dinajpur ended Thursday as Indian exporters and C&F agents called off their strike following fruitful talks with the Border Security Force, reports UNB.

However, official sources said, Indian trucks could not enter Bangladesh through the land port due to a dawn-to-dusk hartal called by Trinamul Congress in India today (Friday).

Indian C&F Association had called the indefinite strike on the other side of Hilly land port from December 31 protesting the alleged harassment by BSF in the name of checking goods carriers.

Meanwhile, some 150 Bangladeshi importers suffered financial loss of over Tk 2 crore following the four-day strike.

Local importers told the UNB that most of the 400 trucks stranded on Indian side contained perishables, which include fish, fruits, onion and vegetables.

Abul Khasem Azad, president See page 11 col 3

Biswa Ijtema begins at Tongi today

By Staff Correspondent

Several lakh devotees from home and abroad attended the Juma prayers at the Biswa Ijtema at Tongi yesterday.

The three-day Biswa Ijtema, considered the second largest congregation of Muslims next to Hajj, formally begins today on the eastern side of river Turag, about 22 kilometers from Dhaka city.

The Ijteam ground was filled up with devotees during the Juma prayer. There was hardly any space under the huge canopy built on more than 100 acres of land.

A large number of people from Dhaka city and nearby areas joined the Juma prayer. Some ministers, high civil and military officials also joined the prayer.

Hafiz Moulana Jobaer from India delivered Khutba and led the Juma prayers.

Delivery of religious sermons by Islamic scholars started after the prayers.

Moulana Tariq Jamil from Pakistan spoke after the Juma prayer. His speech was translated into five languages including

Bangla, English and Arabic. Moulana Amanul Huq made the Bangla translation.

According to the organisers, 1450 devotees from 56 countries joined the Ijtema till 8 am yesterday.

Of them, 525 are from 19 Arab countries, 608 from 35 non-Arab countries, 124 from Pakistan and 140 are from India. Co-ordinator for Foreign Delegates Prof. M A Hannan, told The Daily Star.

Over 2000 foreign delegates are expected from 70 countries before the Ijtema concludes on Monday noon with an akheriee monajat (final prayer), he said.

One devotee -- Haji Nurul Islam from Narayanaganj -- died at the Ijtema ground yesterday. His janaja was held after the Juma prayer.

Tongi Purashava has set up a control room near Monno Textile Mills.

Talking to newsmen, Advocate Ajmat Ullah Khan and Ashhan Ullah Master MP said all necessary steps have been taken by the government to help the organisers hold the Ijtema smoothly.

They said Gazipur district Civil Surgeon's office has provided six medical teams and socio-cultural organisations have set up over 20 medical camps for free treatment if devotees fall sick. Thirty beds have been added to the 50-bed Tongi Hospital.

Eight ambulances have been kept stand-by to shift serious patients to hospitals in Dhaka, they said.

An additional police force of 1000 personnel has been deployed around the Ijtema venue and in surrounding areas to maintain law and order.

Plying of all types of motorized vehicles will be banned on the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway from Tongi bridge to Joydevepur crossing from midnight tonight till Tuesday to keep the area free from traffic jam, police said.

Dhaka Electric Supply Authority (DESA) has set up four camps around the venue to maintain smooth supply of power. A number of generator and transformers have been kept stand-by.



Thousands of devotees from different parts of the country streaming to the Biswa Ijtema venue at Tongi yesterday. The second largest congregation of Muslims next to Hajj begins on the bank of river Turag today. -- Star photo

Syndicate bank Depositors demand Kajol's release

From Our Correspondent

Jhenidah, Jan 5: The people who deposited money with Kajol's syndicate bank have demanded his release by January 15 and threatened of a two-day hartal on January 16-17 at Kotchadpur town for non-compliance.

The decisions were taken on Thursday at a meeting of the Depositors Sangram Parishad (DSP), a forum of the depositors. The DSP members are of the view that Kajol can return their money if he is freed.

At the meeting, the DSP leaders said they have no confidence in the Survey Committee formed with Kotchadpur Municipality Chairman Sirajul Islam Siru as its convener to realise the depos See page 12 col 1

BNP urges President to take initiative for repeal of PSA

By Staff Correspondent

BNP has urged President Shahabuddin Ahmed to take an initiative so that the ruling Awami League places a bill in the Jatiya Sangsad seeking repeal of the Public Safety Act (PSA).

"We are urging the President to take an initiative since the AL government has been ignoring our demand for repeal of the repressive law since its enactment," said Prof Badruddoza Chowdhury, Vice Chairman of the party and Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Sangsad.

Addressing a press conference at the official residence of Leader of the Opposition in the Sangsad and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia yesterday, party leaders also called upon the people to build up a strong resistance against this 'black law' and launch a movement to compel the government to

repeal it.

The press conference was arranged to protest filing of 'false cases' under the PSA against BNP lawmaker M Morshed Khan, his son Faisal Morshed Khan and other leaders and workers of opposition parties across the country.

Prof Chowdhury said that the government was using the law against opposition leaders and activists, particularly those with BNP, and not against 'miscreants, terrorists and killers' in the ruling party. "If the law is applied properly, a good number of AL leaders, ministers and MPs will be in jail."

He mentioned that activists of AL and its front organisations damaged a large number of vehi See page 11 col 1

Unfair practice by travel agents, Saudia & embassy officials alleged

By Special Correspondent

Unfair practice by certain travel agents in collusion with Saudia Airlines and a section of Saudi Embassy officials here are forcing manpower exporters to send Bangladeshi workers to the Kingdom through the Saudia Airlines, aviation sources said.

This has heavily reduced the business of Bangladesh Biman and other airlines in lucrative Dhaka-Jeddah-Riyadh routes, they said.

Similar allegations have also been made against the Malaysian Embassy where a section of officials insist on travelling to Malaysia by Malaysian Airlines.

There are unwritten rules that travelling by Saudia and Malaysian Airlines is a precondition for visa of those countries. This practice has been going on for some time, they alleged. But See page 11 col 6