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Dhaka, Beijing pen defence, economic agreements

BSS, Beijing
Bangladesh and China yesterday signed agreements to increase economic and defence cooperation. An umbrella defence cooperation agreement was signed to help institutionalise the existing agreements in the field. It would rationalise the existing peace-meal agreements to enhance cooperation in training, maintenance and in some areas of production. China will provide with a grant of about 7.25 million US dollars (RMB

60 million) for construction of the sixth Bangladesh-China Friendship Bridge over the Dhaleswari river. China also agreed to give Bangladesh an additional soft loan of over 6.04 million dollars (RMB 50 million). Foreign Secretary Shamsheer Mobin Chowdhury said here after the official talks between Bangladesh and China. Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and her Chinese counterpart Zhu Rongji led their respective sides at the talks, held at the Great Hall of the People. The talks lasted for about two hours.

Bangladesh and China agreed to further expand trade, investment and economic relations between the two Asian countries for the benefit of their peoples. The official talks were capped by conclusion of three agreements, including a protocol under which China would convert a 3.02 million dollars (RMB 25 million) credit into grant. Under the agreement, Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre was built at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar in Dhaka. Now the credit has been converted into

grant. The Conference Centre was given to Bangladesh as a 'gift' of the Chinese people. The talks were held in an extremely cordial and friendly atmosphere during which Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji assured Bangladesh of all sorts of support and cooperation in its forward march to peace, progress and prosperity. During the talks, the two Prime Ministers agreed to strengthen and intensify the existing special bilateral ties in all fields between the two countries.

Begum Zia, who flew in here on Monday at the invitation of the Chinese premier on a five-day high profile official visit, discussed with her counterpart the entire gamut of increasing cooperation in various fields, including economic, political and defence. The two leaders also exchanged views on regional and international issues of common concern. Welcoming Khaleda Zia in China, Zhu Rongji expressed the hope that

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Hasina invited to visit China

UNB, Dhaka

China has invited Awami League president and leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina to visit the country in the first half of the next year. The invitation was handed over to Hasina by Chinese Charge d' Affaires Duan Zhiquan when he called on her at her Dhanmondi residence yesterday. The invitation letter said that the visit would strengthen the mutual understanding and friendship between the peoples of Bangladesh and China. Sheikh Hasina has accepted the invitation. The date and time would be fixed later.

The CDA accompanied by an official of the Chinese Embassy here recalled China's great friendship with Sheikh Hasina and said her visit to Beijing in 1993 as Opposition Leader and first official visit to China as Prime Minister in 1986 were great occasions. Duan said Sheikh Hasina was given a state banquet during her visit, which was given only to US President George W Bush and

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Prime Minister Khaleda Zia (R) and her Chinese counterpart Zhu Rongji review a guard of honour during a ceremonial reception at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday.

Striking docs watch TV as patients cry for care

STAR REPORT

Chaos prevailed and patients suffered for the second consecutive day as some 100 Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) interns continued an indefinite strike yesterday in protest at the arrest of a fellow. Nurses and ward boys stood in for the interns as neither the hospital administration nor the health directorate made any effort to fill the void the strike had created. Patients' suffering was at the peak when they were left virtually on

their own after officer hours. There were some assistant registrars and honorary doctors as usual; however, their presence was far from enough to meet the needs of the 1,600-bed hospital. At 4:30pm, only one doctor was on duty in each of the neurosurgery and casualty wards, where patients are shifted to from the emergency wards almost every minute. It was sheer disorder after the outdoor services closed at 2:00pm, with nurses and ward boys struggling to attend to patients rushed in.

At 4:00pm, in Ward No. 30 (neurosurgery), the on-duty assistant registrar was found watching television as two ward boys attended to one Fakir Chand of Tikatuli, who had been admitted with head injury. Later in the evening, two nurses tried resuscitation to save one Fazlul Haq, who had been hit by a motorised vehicle and left bleeding in front of the Obhishar cinema hall. "We don't have any helping hand. So it is on us to see all the patients which is impossible as you

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Saleem gets bail but detained again

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Instead of freeing freelance journalist Saleem Samad, who got bail on Monday, the government yesterday put him on a one-month detention.

The Dhaka Central Jail authorities were ready to receive Saleem's bail order yesterday. Instead, the detention order issued under the Special Powers Act reached the jail in the evening.

The High Court (HC) on Monday granted an interim bail to Saleem for three months and directed the officials concerned to send the order to the jail authorities by a special messenger.

The HC gave the special directive because of the instance of Pricilla Raj, an NGO activist, who was granted bail on December 18 but was freed on December 22 as the court order did not reach the jail authorities in time.

Notwithstanding the HC order, the bail order of Saleem did not reach the jail authorities yesterday, said sources.

When contacted over phone, an official of the Dhaka Central Jail said Saleem has been put on a one-month detention. Saleem's father and family

members were surprised to know his detention when contacted over telephone at 8:30pm yesterday. "We thought that it might take another day for Saleem to be freed," MA Samad, father of Saleem, said. "We don't know what kind of trouble he has landed into this time."

Expressing grievances, Saleem's lawyer Barrister Amirul Islam said the government was obstructing justice and denying Saleem the privilege of bail.

The High Court bench comprising justices Hamidul Haq and Salma Masud Chowdhury had also issued a rule upon the government to show cause why Saleem should not be granted regular bail.

Saleem was arrested on November 29 on charges of helping two foreign journalists allegedly in making a report negatively portraying Bangladesh. Sedition charges were brought against him, the two foreign journalists and their interpreter Pricilla Raj.

The two foreign journalists who were the main accused in the case were released and deported on December 11. Samad was sent to the Dhaka Central Jail on December 4.



Christmas today

UNB, Dhaka

The Christmas Day, the biggest religious festival of the Christian community, will be celebrated in the country as elsewhere in the world today. The day commemorates the birth of Jesus Christ.

Christian community has taken up elaborate programmes to mark the occasion. The programmes include decorating X-mass trees, offering special prayers and distribution of gifts by the Santa Claus

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PM invited to AL council

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The main opposition Awami League has invited Prime Minister Khaleda Zia to attend its triennial national council to be held tomorrow at the Paltan Maidan in the city.

The invitation was sent through BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, also invited to the council. The invitation was given by AL General Secretary Zillur Rahman.

BNP sources said two former leaders of AL's student front Chhatra League Shah Alam and Ashim Kumar Ukil -- met Bhuiyan at his official residence on Monday morning and handed over two invitation cards, one for him and the other for the PM.

Earlier, AL leader Abdus Samad Azad phoned Bhuiyan on Sunday night and fixed the time for handover of the cards.

AL sources said the invitation cards given to Khaleda Zia and Bhuiyan are the same as given to others including AL leaders and activists.

The common citation in all the

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Amu steps in for key Awami League post

Three general secretary contestants now

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League councillors from across the country have started arriving in the city to elect the party's next leadership in the Thursday's triennial council.

There are three contenders for the post of the party's general secretary.

The latest leader to announce his candidature is Amir Hussein Amu, one of the influential presidium members, whose formal announcement came yesterday, two days ahead of the council.

Earlier, Abdul Jalil and Obaidul Quader announced their candidature. The names of some senior AL leaders as aspirants for the post have also been heard; they are Abdur Razzak, Tofail Ahmed and Dr.

Mizanul Haq.

Nearly 6,000 councillors will elect the main opposition party's second-in-command from among those candidates. Sheikh Hasina, the incumbent president, will retain her position.

Party insiders hinted that the AL leaders are still split over the process of choosing their leaders. Some senior and young leaders want the issue to be settled by vote, while the others are in favour of selection.

The Awami League Central Working Committee (ALCWC) at a meeting yesterday, chaired by Sheikh Hasina, approved its manifesto, general secretary's report and economic policies proposed by the respective sub-committees.

These proposals that incorporated some new ideas in view of the changing geo-political situation will

be placed before the party's upcoming central council.

The meeting, scheduled to resume at 10:30 this morning, will also discuss some party constitution amendment proposals.

According to party sources, the Awami League is contemplating some changes in its organisational structure. These include creation of two more posts of secretaries -- for Liberation War affairs and religious affairs. Creation of five more posts of organising secretary, with sub-committees of five members each and increasing the number of central committee members are also on the agenda.

With the proposed change the existing 67-member central com

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Govt decides to allot city corp'n shops thru' lottery

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Ministry of LGRD and Cooperatives has decided that 90 per cent of the shops of all city corporations would be allotted through lottery.

The move is part of a policy prepared for allotment of shops in all the six city corporations.

According to the policy, the city mayor would allot the remainder from his quota.

"Previously, there was no such specific policy for allotment of shops which frequently raised allegations of irregularities," said LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan. He hoped that the new policy would eliminate the process of irregularities and controversy regarding allotment of shops.

A high level meeting of the ministry held yesterday at the conference room finalised the policy. Bhuiyan chaired the meet.

Under the new policy, there will be an eight-member shop allotment committee headed by the chief executive officer of city corporation.

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BDR men stabbed in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) personnel were stabbed yesterday at Hazaribagh Bazar in the city yesterday.

The two -- Asgar and Mizan -- were stabbed by a butcher when they went to buy meat, sources said without giving details.

Police said BDR men arrested the butcher, identified as Selim. He was in the custody of BDR till the writing of this report last night.

BDR sources said Selim and his two brothers are 'listed criminals.' Police however could not confirm identity of the attacker and said he might be a mentally unsound person.

400 buses to hit city roads in January

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 400 buses will be introduced in the city in January, as the two-stroke three-wheelers will be banned from next month, Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC) officials claimed.

A BRTC team will also fly to China on January 2 to 'pre-check' 200 human haulers and 1,000 four-stroke auto-rickshaws, which will also hit the city roads 'soon'.

Moreover, a new circular bus service will be launched in January for the poor. The buses under the service will not have any seats. Old and rundown buses are being repaired at the BRTC workshop to be put into the service.

These preparations are part of the government's plan to clear the city of 18,000 two-stroke polluters.

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Police stand guard at a church at Tejgaon in the city yesterday as part of strict security measures taken for peaceful celebration of Christmas today.

AI for independent probe into deaths in custody

Departmental inquiry not enough: Irene Khan



Dr Irene Khan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Amnesty International (AI) Secretary General Dr Irene Khan has said the government must run an independent investigation into the reported custodial deaths during the anti-crime crackdown to prove what is claiming is true.

"Findings of such an investigation must be made public and the persons responsible for the 42 custodial deaths punished. This should be done for the sake of credibility of the army as well as the government, who are denying the custodial deaths," she said in a lecture in the city yesterday.

"Departmental inquiry as stated by the government is not enough. An independent investigation is needed to find out the truth. The army should be more concerned about its credibility as they have

been blamed for the deaths."

Dr Irene, who is now on a private visit to Dhaka, gave her lecture on "Human Rights in the Context of Bangladesh and South Asia". The Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) arranged the lecture at its auditorium with its Chairman Ambassador Mufleh R Osmany in the chair.

Academics from various disciplines asked the AI chief executive questions about human rights issues. Director General of BISS Major General SM Shahabuddin delivered the session of welcome. After the lecture session, Irene also replied to queries from reporters.

The Bangladesh-born international human rights campaigner noted that large-scale violation of human rights took place during

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Grameen Telecom eyes GP majority shares

ABU SAEED KHAN

Grameen Telecom (GT) of Grameen Bank has given a legal notice to Telenor regarding a provision in the Articles of Association which gives GT the authority of gaining the majority shares of GrameenPhone, the country's largest cellular mobile network.

The legal notice was served by GT to Norwegian Telenor on November 27, 2002.

GrameenPhone is composed of Telenor Mobile Communications of Norway (51 per cent shares), Grameen Telecom of Bangladesh (35 per cent shares), Marubeni Corporation of Japan (9.50 per cent shares) and Gonofone Development of USA (4.50 per cent shares).

In the legal notice, GT claims while GrameenPhone was incorpo-

rated on October 10, 1996 it was stipulated in the Articles of Association that Telenor would retain 51 per cent shares for the first six years and then transfer the control by selling its minimum 16 per cent shares to GT under a first right of refusal.

GT further claims the matter of share reduction in GrameenPhone was raised with Telenor in October 2000 and in August 2002.

But the Norwegian investor is yet to make its Bangladeshi partner the majority shareholder of GrameenPhone. GT considers it as "a breach of obligation" under the Articles of Association and served the legal notice to Telenor through Barrister Omar Sadat.

GrameenPhone is Telenor's very first venture in Asia. It joined hands with Grameen Bank, the globally acclaimed micro lender, and hit

international headlines soon after launching GrameenPhone in March 1997.

Part of GrameenPhone's business plan was to alleviate poverty using the most sophisticated digital cellular mobile technology. A female micro-credit borrower of Grameen Bank obtains a mobile phone under the lease-financing programme and provides telephone services to the people in her village.

Numbers of such Village Phone (VP) operators have increased from 28 in 1997 to 9,222 in 2001 an impressive 219 per cent compound annual growth rate (CAGR). Annual revenue per VP Operator was US\$ 227.10 in 1997 and it became US\$ 1,089.03 in 2000, an outstanding 48 per cent CAGR.

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