

## Editors for strong local govt bodies

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

Newspaper editors at a meeting yesterday underscored strengthened local government bodies for pluralistic governance and poverty alleviation.

They also called for a comprehensive awareness campaign so that people elect competent candidates to local government bodies.

The editors were taking part in a meeting, convened by the Local Governance Support Group (LGS), at the conference room of the Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC) in the city's Dhanmondi area.

While detailing the next course of the group's action, LGS convenor Professor Muhammad Yunus termed the local governments "the weakest link in our governmental chain".

The founder-managing director of Grameen Bank also pointed out that the central government takes little interest in local government bodies, which is evident from the allocation in the development

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## Trial of Muhuri murder case underway

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg**

Trial of principal Gopal Krishna Muhuri murder case began at the Speedy Trial Tribunal here yesterday.

Judge Mohammad Hasan Imam took the case into cognisance for trial of the accused under Section 302/120 (Kha) 34 of the Penal Code and fixed January 4 (Saturday) for hearing charges.

The judge ordered police to produce the four arrested convicts, now in jail, before the tribunal during tomorrow's hearing.

He also ordered arrest of the absconding accused.

Gopal Krishna Muhuri, principal of Nazirhat College under Hathazari than and a freedom fighter, was killed by terrorists at his Jamal Khan residence in the city on November 16 last year. The killing sparked widespread resentment in different circles.

The Detective Branch (DB) of the police submitted chargesheet of the case to the Chief Metropolitan

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## PM declares 2003 as 'Good Education Year'

**UNB, Dhaka**

Declaring the year 2003 as "Good Education Year", Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday called for attaining minimum standard of education in all educational institutions of the country during the year-long campaign.

"Now I'll not only hope, but also demand, that all educational institutions of the country ensure minimum standards of education, although it's not possible to achieve high standards of education at some government and non-government institutions. But minimum standards have to be achieved in one year," she told a function launching the campaign.

The prime minister also announced that a decision had been taken to constitute a National Education Commission to formulate a National Education Policy to

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## DOCTORS WHO CAME IN FOR A SMILE



Children with cleft-lips (left) await their turn at surgery by a visiting team of ten Italian surgeons (right) at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital yesterday. On its sixth visit to the country, the team, part of Interplast Italy, a non-governmental international charity, arrived in Dhaka on December 27 and is expected to perform surgery on 100 patients free during their two-week stay.



PHOTOS: STAR

## AL-BNP talks must to rid politics of criminals

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

Senior politicians, intellectuals and noted citizens at a seminar yesterday called for dialogue between the two major political parties to free the country from "criminalised and confrontational politics".

The present state of politics has made parliament virtually non-functional, democracy meaningless and economic activity crime-based, pushing the entire society towards ruination, they said.

Making overtures to Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abdul Hamid Advocate at the seminar, ruling BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan assured the opposition of floor in parliament and said it has to be effective to resolve all disputes.

There is no alternative to holding regular discussions and reaching a consensus on all national issues, he said.

Responding, former Speaker Hamid said, "There should be understanding and communication between the two major political parties".

Gono Forum leader Dr. Kamal Hossain, Workers Party leader Rashed Khan Menon, Prof Anisur Rahman, The Daily Star Editor Mahfuz Anam also spoke at the seminar on 'Society, Economy and Politics'.

Dhaka University teacher Dr Abul Barkat, General Secretary of Bangladesh Economic Association (BEA), presented the key-note paper at the seminar. FBCCI President Yussuf Abdullah Haroon

also presented a paper.

BAE President Dr Kazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad chaired the morning session of the seminar, jointly organised by FBCCI and BEA. It was held at the Osmany Auditorium in the city.

Bhuiyan, who attended the seminar as chief guest said, "We are caught somewhere in a crime syndrome. We have to think how to come out of this and achieve rapid development".

He said, "We have to make parliament a place to discuss everything. Then street-based politics will disappear," he said.

Bhuiyan also suggested lowering the election expenditure for eliminating crime from politics and society. "If election expenditure is

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## Clinic sealed over death of pregnant woman

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

Police launched a manhunt to arrest Israt Jahan Dipali for alleged involvement in the killing of a pregnant woman Wednesday.

Police also seized date-expired apparatus from the Dhaka Maternity and sealed the clinic yesterday afternoon.

The clinic staffers beat to death 30-year-old Amirun Begum for her failure to pay the 'fees' in full.

Harun Miah, Amirun's husband, filed a case with the Kotwali Police Station.

Dipali was running the clinic on the first floor of a six-storey building without any doctor.

Locals have alleged that Dipali is neither a doctor nor a nurse and the clinic lacked operation facilities.

She used to lure special attendants of the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) into shifting its

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## Saifur shies away from free float of taka

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

Against the proposition of free float of taka, speakers at a dialogue in the city yesterday favoured continuation of the existing exchange rate regime in view of lack of institutional capacity and other financial weaknesses.

They also said the present exchange rate policy (an adjustable basket pegged exchange rate) is serving the country quite well and that the economic and institutional prerequisites, especially to deal with the volatility once the exchange rate is floated, are not visible in the country.

"I do not have any rigid stand but the current exchange rate policy is serving us better at least for the time being," Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman who was the chief guest told the dialogue.

Referring to the weaknesses of the country's financial market, Saifur said, "The depth and strength of our money market do not suggest that we should opt for a policy which we cannot handle and would create problem for us."

The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) organised the dialogue titled "Full Float of Taka: Is Bangladesh Ready for It?" at the CIRDP auditorium. Chairman of the CPD Professor Rehman Sobhan chaired

the session and Bangladesh Bank (BB) Governor Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed spoke as special guest. Economists, former BB governors, bankers and business people took part in the dialogue. CPD fellow and former bureaucrat Dr Mirza Azizul Islam presented the keynote paper titled "Exchange Rate Policy of Bangladesh Not Floating Does Not Mean Sinking".

The finance minister mentioned that the international agencies counselled Bangladesh to opt for free float of the exchange rate. But there are many factors that have to be looked at before opting for free exchange regime, he said.

Other than macro-stability and other economic factors, Saifur said, even the social considerations would have to be taken into account before the policy shift.

If the exchange rate soars after free float of the currency, investment would face a severe blow, he noted.

Mentioning that about US\$ 200 million is traded in the inter-bank forex market, Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed said a sort of market mechanism is working under the present exchange rate regime.

Referring to the aftermath of free float of exchange rate in the neighbouring countries, the BB governor expressed his belief that even in a

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Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at the prize-giving ceremony of the National Education Week 2003 at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in the city yesterday.

## Ctg up next for 2-stroke ban

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg**

After the complete withdrawal of two-stroke three wheelers from the capital, the government now plans a gradual removal of the polluters from the streets of the port city of Chittagong, Communication Minister Barrister Nazmul Huda said yesterday.

Addressing a meeting organised by Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI) at the auditorium of CCCI Bhaban yesterday, Huda said the government is sincere about the reorganisation and infrastructural development of Chittagong.

The Communication Ministry had already launched efforts for implementation of the Chittagong Development Proposals by the CCCI, the minister told the meeting attended by members of the CCCI and different trade bodies.

He said Chittagong has emerged

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## Mixed reactions greet new JCD committee

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

Formation of the new central body of the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) has elicited mixed reactions from its activists.

The activists of the student front of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), who were not included in the new committee, have alleged that irregular students and seniors were again placed in the leadership.

By contrast, new JCD leaders said non-students and criminals had been put off the committee declared Wednesday.

But sources said none of the JCD leaders either appointed or axed was regular student.

The leaders either enrolled in various professional courses at Dhaka University (DU) using political power or did not sit for examinations for years together to retain studentship. Most held studentship up to 16 years at the graduation level only for politics, the sources added.

Meanwhile, several hundred leaders and workers crowded the Madhu's Canteen on the DU campus yesterday, many distributing sweets and rejoicing.

The JCD activists from different DU dormitories and city colleges greeted the new leaders with flow-

ers.

But those who did not get any post in the new committee were in a glum mood, expressing anger or criticising exclusion of Monir Hossain, an aspirant for any of the top positions, from the new committee.

The new committee was formed Wednesday with Shahabuddin Laitu as its president and Azizul Bari Helal as general secretary.

The newly appointed JCD leaders placed a wreath at the mazaar of BNP founder Ziaur Rahman yesterday afternoon.

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and Students Affairs Secretary Amanullah Aman accompanied the JCD leaders.

Former JCD president Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu MP and immediate past joint convenors ABM Mosharraf Hossain and Monir Hossain were also with them.

The new office bearers, including President Shahabuddin Laitu, Senior Vice-President Sultan Salauddin Tuku, General Secretary Azizul Bari Helal, Joint Secretary Selimuzzaman Selim, Organising Secretary Shafiqul Bari Babu and new President of the DU unit Amirul Islam Khan Alim and General

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## 22 more NGOs quit ADAB

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

Yet another 22 NGOs have withdrawn their membership from the Association of Development Agencies of Bangladesh (ADAB) and expressed solidarity with the National NGO Coordination Committee (NNCC), said a press release signed by Shamsul Huda, member secretary of NNCC yesterday.

According to the press release the NGOs also asked the NCC to organise the national convention on February.

The 22 NGOs are Gono Kalyan Trust (GKT), Songkolpo Trust (ST), SEDS, Bachte Chai Shamaj Unnayan Samity, Development Centre International (DCI), Development Society (DS), Borendra Development Organisation (BDO), Shrijoni Bangladesh, Bridge, TACD, Nazeer, Manoshika, Bangladesh Rural Improvement Foundation, Shapnil, LDRO, Agrani Mohila Samity (AMS), Sakrio Sangha, Alo, Soumik, Shadow, Jono Kalyan Shangstha and Ankur.

In a written statement, the 22 chief executives said for past one year leaders of several NGOs had been trying to transform the ADAB to a democratic, neutral organisation. However, they could not succeed because of the negative attitude of ADAB leaders.

They said their membership withdrawal was a protest against ADAB's 'undemocratic', 'unethical' and 'unconstitutional' activities.

Among others, the signatories of the statements are Mollik Md Ayubi, Md Sirajul Islam, Md Shafiquddin, Bhagabati Ghosh, Fakhrul Ferdous, Zaheerul Haq Bali, Akhter Hossain, Md. Joyal Abedin and Nadira Begum, chief executives of ST, SEDS, GCT, DS, DCI, Bridge, BDO, TACD and AMS respectively.

## Robbers in army guise loot house

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

Dacoits in the guise of army personnel looted more than Tk 8 lakh in cash and gold ornaments from a jewellery trader's residence-cum-shop at Tanti Bazar in old part of the city on Tuesday night, police sources said.

The gang members, dressed like army men and boarding a vehicle like the ones used by troops, went to the trader's residence at about 10 pm and entered it on the plea that there were illegal firearms in the house.

The elements then confined the family members in a room and robbed cash 30 tolas of gold ornaments and about Tk 80,000 from the first floor of the house, according to a case filed with the Kotwali Police Station on Wednesday.

The trader, Bikas Ghosh, further complained in the case, "They (dacoits) then blindfolded and dragged me to the ground floor and

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## Road in Sierra Leone named Bangladesh

**BSS, Dhaka**

A new road in Sierra Leone, linking three of its provinces, built by Bangladesh troops in UN peace-keeping operations, has been named after Bangladesh, Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan said yesterday.

The newly elected government of Sierra Leone, he said, also made Bangla one of the official languages of the country.

The Foreign Minister said the Bangladesh troops shared their food with the people of Sierra Leone and for their dedication and commitment other countries in the region contributed the funds for construction of the road.

## Northern growers brace for costly Boro Fuel, power tariff increase ups production cost

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi**

Growers of the northern regions, Barind in particular, are to incur higher costs for the irrigation-based Boro cultivation in the upcoming season because of increased electricity and fuel rates.

The Boro cultivation starts from mid-January and for growers of the Barind region the irrigation cost this season will increase by Tk 300 per bigha.

Last August, the Power Development Board (PDB) increased the irrigation power tariff.

The rate was fixed at Tk 2.00 per unit and the Rural Electrification Board (REB), on purchasing from the PDB, will supply power to consumers in rural areas at a rate of Tk 1.91 per unit.

The growers of the Barind region, comprising Chapainawabganj, Rajshahi and Naogaon districts, are likely to be the worst hit as the 6,000 irrigation machines of the region are electricity driven.

The Barind Multipurpose Development Authority (BMDA) (that distributes power on buying from the PDB or REB), increased its power tariff from Tk 75 to Tk 100 per hour a few months back.

Shahidul Islam of Paramandapur in Godagari upazila in Rajshahi said, About Tk 1300 will be needed to irrigate a bigha of Boro land as opposed to Tk 1000 in previous years," he said.

Arman Ali, another farmer of the area said, but due to breaches in the water supply line they suffer from water shortage as well.

Sources in the BMDA informed that three varieties of the power tariff exist. According to the demands of their lands, growers purchase water at rates of Tk 100, Tk 90 and Tk 75 per hour.

There is also provision for repairing water supply canals followed by a 10 per cent repairing cost provided by growers, the sources said.

At least 6,000 deep tube-wells, about 400,000 shallow tube-wells and 7,500 low lift pumps are expected to be used during crop cultivation this year. About 20 per cent of the irrigation machines are electricity driven.

The Agriculture Extension Department is expecting 52,08,080 metric tons of rice cultivating Boro paddy on 15,31,100 hectares of land (about 300,000 hectares higher than previous year) in 16 districts of the northern region this year.

## 16 more listed criminals in army dragnet

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

The joint forces arrested 64 people including 16 'listed criminals' from different areas of the country in the last 24 hours ending at 8:00am yesterday.

They also recovered nine two pistols, one revolver, five country-made guns, one rifle and 168 bullet.

With these, the number of arrested people rose to 10,681 including 2,345 'listed criminals' and that of firearms to 1,939 since the army, BDR and police jointly launched the anti-crime drive on

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