



PHOTO: STAR

### Ekushey Book Fair from tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia inaugurates the month-long Ekushey Book Fair at the Bangla Academy tomorrow.

The fair will attract 267 publication houses this time around, up from 240 last year. Professor Mansur Musa, director general of the academy, told a press briefing yesterday.

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# Europe split over US war plans for Iraq

## Russia sees strike end-Feb, Washington ready to arrange Saddam's exile

AFP, London

Eight European nations yesterday threw their support behind US war plans for Iraq, giving Washington the boost it seeks from Europe for a campaign to disarm Saddam Hussein's regime in Baghdad.

Also yesterday, a high-ranking Russian military source told the Interfax news agency that Russia expected the United States to attack Iraq in the last week of February.

Meanwhile on Wednesday, the US said for the first time that it was willing to help arrange exile for Saddam.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair and his Spanish counterpart Jose Maria Aznar led eight leaders in signing an open letter published in

newspapers across the continent, calling for action against Saddam.

"We must remain united in insisting that his regime is disarmed. The solidarity, cohesion and determination of the international community are our best hope of achieving this peacefully," they said.

"The real bond between the United States and Europe is the values we share... Our strength lies in unity," said the letter, signed by Blair, Aznar and the heads of Italy, Portugal, Hungary, Poland, Denmark and the Czech Republic.

Officials, however, downplayed talk of a rift while launching a flurry of shuttle diplomacy.

US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, who stirred anger last

week by dismissing France and Germany as the "old Europe", on Wednesday again insisted that Paris and Berlin did not speak for the whole of the continent.

In Berlin, officials insisted it was "plain wrong" to describe the Germans as isolated.

But in Greece, which has joined France and Germany in criticising the war plans of US President George W Bush, a foreign ministry spokesman said the Greek EU presidency had not even been informed in advance about the letter.

"We were not informed of this issue. We were not invited to sign that letter," the spokesman said.

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PHOTO: STAR

Officials of the Bangladesh Railway visit the land recovered from encroachers. They demolished a wholesale fish market at Mugdapara in the city yesterday.

### Polling at 3 centres postponed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The authorities yesterday postponed voting for the Union Parishad elections in three polling centres due to trouble.

The presiding officers suspended balloting in the Amrita Bazar Primary School centre in Jhikorgachha in Jessore, and Mohini Hafizia Madrassah and Mohini High School centers of Langolkot upazila in Comilla.

Armed miscreants looted ballot boxes and papers from these centers.

Elsewhere, at least 20 people were injured yesterday in pre-polls violence in Patuakhali and Madaripur districts, according to reports received from correspondents and district administrations.

Voting so far has taken place in 825 out of 4228 local councils.

# Bangladesh misses out on global container business

RAFIQ HASAN

The country's shipping services both in the public and private sectors are being gradually knocked out of global shipping with the container carrying services expanding.

Operation of local ships is now virtually limited to a few sea routes in the region as the country could not go for large-scale container service due to lack of 'mother vessels,' sources said.

As a result, shipment of local export and import cargo by ships of the public sector Bangladesh Shipping Corporation (BSC) and those of local shipping companies have greatly declined over the years.

The share of local ships in the

over two-billion-dollar annual shipping business in the country is now about 18 per cent. Their share was around 30 per cent a few years ago.

"The main line operators (MLOs) of foreign countries, which operate mother vessels, are now controlling the sea transport business in Bangladesh," one source said.

In the past, Bangladeshi ships used to go to various destinations of the world with export-import cargo in 'break bulk manner' (not in containers). But emergence of container service has almost put it to an end.

Exporters and importers now assign the MLOs to transport their cargo from one country to another. The ship owners get around 15 per cent of the nearly 15 billion dollar annual export-import of the country.

The MLOs give sub-contract to feeder vessel operators for loading and unloading goods from deep sea ports in Singapore, Malaysia and Sri Lanka, where the mother vessels anchor. So, all the 23 ocean going Bangladeshi ships 13 of the BSC and 10 of local companies -- now operate as feeder vessels, sources said.

Of the 13 BSC ships, only three are container carriers. However, the 10 private company ships now carry container-cargo.

Asked about the dominance of foreign companies in the shipping sector, shipping minister Akbar Hossain said this is because Bangladesh does not have any mother vessel and it cannot afford to buy such costly ships. Only a few

rich countries have such vessels, he added.

Sources mentioned that feeder service business is dominated by a Singapore-based powerful syndicate -- Chittagong Feeder Trade Committee (CFTC)-- comprising five major feeder vessel operators. Bangladeshi ships now get less than 20 per cent of feeder service business. These operate in Chittagong - Singapore, Chittagong-Colombo and Chittagong-Malaysia routes. The

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# Airport road to have 8 lanes

## PM okays Tk 25cr scheme

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday approved a Tk 25-crore project to transform the Airport-Mohakhali highway into an eight-lane boulevard for smooth vehicular movement from the international airport into downtown Dhaka.

Besides, there would be two service lanes on both sides of the boulevard for bus-stops.

The prime minister approved the Zia International Airport Road Improvement Project while chairing a review meeting on the activities of Communications Ministry at the ICC of PMO complex and directed the authorities to complete the project in a year.

Another similar project to expand and improve the Mohakhali-Bangabhaban road under the Dhaka Urban Transport Project (DUTP) will follow, the meeting decided.

The project will also involve construction of more foot-over bridges across the highway at Airport, Nikunjo, Banani and other points.

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### DMC student leader Javed nabbed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police arrested former vice-president of Dhaka Medical College (DMC) Students' Union Dr Javed Ahmed at his Bangshal residence yesterday.

Also a former Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) leader, Javed is alleged to be the mastermind of various criminal offences at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

He was kept at the Ramna Police Station custody and will be produced before court today.

Ramna police said he was arrested under Section 54 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

Sources said Javed was arrested as per the instruction of the higher authorities as his was damaging the image of the government through

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### Rajshahi City Corporation engineer mauled over tender

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

An engineer of the Rajshahi City Corporation (RCC) was critically injured when an armed group attacked him and ransacked his office for his refusal to concede to their demand for use of low grade tubewell parts in a sanitation project.

The victim, assistant engineer Parvez, suffered bone fractures in his chest and face and other injuries. He was not hospitalised fearing further attacks there and was undergoing treatment elsewhere, his family members said.

Witnesses said about 15 armed people -- all BNP cadres-- led by Mithu, brother of ward commissioner and BNP leader Rabiul Alam Milu, attacked the engineer in his office Wednesday noon. At the time, he was preparing an official order to

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PHOTO: STAR

Wholesalers sell fish imported from Myanmar at Swarighat in the city yesterday. People depend largely on exotic fish now, although fish farming in Bangladesh has become wider than before.

### MiG purchase scam Case sent to Sessions Judge's Court for trial

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The MiG-29 Purchase Scam Case against former prime minister Sheikh Hasina and six others was sent to the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court, Dhaka, yesterday for trial.

The Bureau of Anti-Corruption (BAC) on Wednesday submitted a charge sheet against Sheikh Hasina and six others to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka.

In the case filed with Tejgaon police station on December 11, 2001, it was alleged that Sheikh Hasina along with some top defence officials caused the public exchequer count Tk 700 crore (\$123 million) in loss in the purchase of eight MiG-29 fighter jets.

# Bangla-Myanmar shipping begins

## Service to save cost, time

AFP, Chittagong

A shipping service began yesterday between Bangladesh and Myanmar, marking the first legal sea vessel between the neighbours since a 1988 coup in Yangon.

The Singapore-flagged container ship left Bangladesh's main port at Chittagong for a two-day journey to Yangon.

"The launching of this service would reduce cost and save time," said Nelum Attanayake of Orient Express Lines, the ship's owners.

Earlier, most sea trade between the neighbours was routed via Singapore, a 10-day journey, said Ahsanul Huq Chowdhury, Orient Express Lines' local representative.

The step comes a month after Myanmar Senior General Than Shwe came to Bangladesh, becoming the first leader of the Yangon

junta to visit since the 1988 coup. The two countries agreed to boost trade.

Myanmar, then known as Burma, was one of the first countries to recognise Bangladesh after it won independence from Pakistan in 1971.

But relations were strained in the early 1990s when around 250,000 Rohingya Muslims flooded into Bangladesh from Myanmar, claiming atrocities by the junta.

Ties have improved since then, with the repatriation of most of the refugees under a United Nations agreement, but more than 20,000 still live in camps in Bangladesh.

The neighbours have a small amount of bilateral trade, with Myanmar exporting timber, maize, rice and fish and Bangladesh selling fertiliser, cement and medicine.

### Poisonous liquor kills 3 in Bogra

UNB, Bogra

Three people died after taking poisonous liquor at Dupchachia upazila headquarter here on Wednesday night.

Locals said Shayamol Bhattachariya, 40, Mohon Lal, 45, and Sukumar Bashak, 34, fell sick at about 8 in the morning after taking homemade liquor and died at night.

Local police, however, said they were not aware of the incident.

	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Jan 31		5-44 pm
Feb 1	6-40 am	

Prayer Timings		
Jan 31		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-45	6-15
Juma	12-15	1-20
Asr	4-15	4-30
Maghrib	5-50	5-55
Esha	7-15	7-45

Source: Islamic Foundation