

## Glowing tributes

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bers and lawmakers were present at the time.

People from all walks of life thronged the memorial premises just after the departure of the president and prime minister.

Leader of the Opposition in Parliament and Awami League President Sheikh Hasina also placed wreaths at the memorial in the morning, accompanied by top leaders of the party.

The other political parties, which placed wreaths, included Communist Party of Bangladesh, Jatiya Party (Ershad), Gano Forum, Workers Party of Bangladesh, both factions of Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal and Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal.

Freedom fighters, educational institutions, various student bodies, socio-cultural organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) also placed wreaths. Industries Minister Matiuur Rahman Nizami and Social Welfare Minister Ali Ahsan Mohammed Mujahid of Jamaat-e-Islami were among the cabinet members present at the memorial, but no leaders of their party were seen there.

Jamaat collaborated with the Pakistani occupation forces during the Liberation War.

The day was a public holiday.

National flag flew atop public and private buildings. Main roads and road-islands in the capital and other cities and towns were decorated with national flag and festoons. Important government buildings were illuminated at night.

Newspapers published supplements and Bangladesh Television and Bangladesh Betar aired special programmes, highlighting the significance of Victory Day.

Bangladesh missions abroad also celebrated the day.

The president held a reception at the Banghaban in the afternoon, attended by political leaders, diplomats and members of the civil society.

The prime minister inaugurated

## 19 banks accept utility bills from Jan 1

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

The residents in the Dhaka and Tongi areas will be able to pay all utility bills to 185 select branches of private or public sector banks from January 1.

The government yesterday issued a circular after the decision of the finance ministry on Sunday that also okayed online bill payment -- through ATM and credit cards and other electronic systems accepted to the shortlisted banks.

The circular named 19 banks, branches of which in Dhaka and Tongi will accept telephone, electricity, gas, water and other bills to reduce people's inconvenience in clearing the bills.

Two international banks -- Standard Chartered Bank (SCB) and Hong Kong Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC) -- are not on the list but will provide electronic bill payment facility to their clients.

The finance ministry will decide on introducing a similar system in Chittagong later this month.

The circular also stated bills can be paid through internet banking system of the Eastern Bank. The remaining banks will allow payments through ATM and ReadyCash cards.

## B Chy prepares

**FROM PAGE 1**  
The former president refused to term his venture as a third force. "You can say it's an alternative stream," he told The Daily Star.

"I've already talked to some 200 people from various professions and 80 percent of them requested me to form a political platform," he went on, adding they contributed to his ideas.

Badruddoza will meet different professional bodies like the Federation of Chambers and Commerce and Industries, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, Supreme Court Bar Association and editors, teachers and senior citizens of society from next week.

"After taking opinion from all sectors I'll decide the next course of action," Badruddoza said on Tuesday.

According to his plan, the framework for programme-based politics and the new platform would be launched in January.

He will then declare his programmes and urge the government to implement them.

If the government does not act accordingly, he would try to create strong public opinion against it and push the government to quit.

The 74-year-old retired politician kicked off political activities on December 16 by setting up an office at Baridhara.

Badruddoza launched the office to exchange views with a cross section of people as part of his plan to mobilise people of all shades of opinion on a single platform to find solutions to national problems.

Badruddoza told journalists at

a colourful children's and juveniles' rally on the day at Bangabandhu National Stadium.

Mayor of Dhaka Sadeque Hossain Khoka organised a reunion of the freedom fighters who fought in Sector No. 2 during the Liberation War, at the Nagar Bhaban. Khoka also fought in the sector.

The freedom fighters recalled memories of the war at the reunion.

Political parties and various other organisations held discussions and cultural programmes across the country to mark the day.

In the capital, the main events of the day took place on Dhaka University campus and adjacent areas of Dhanomdi lake, giving the area a festive look. Thousands thronged the places and enjoyed the programmes including music, street drama, film show, art exhibition and recitation of poems.

The Liberation War Museum arranged a function for children on its premises.

Some organisations including Red Crescent Society, Rotaract Club and Badhon organised blood donation programmes at the TSC.

## US wants to help rebuild police

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

US has shown its willingness to back Bangladesh in modernising police and other law-enforcing agencies in a bid to fight drugs smuggling and terrorism.

US Ambassador to Bangladesh Harry K Thomas yesterday met Home Minister Atif Hossain Chowdhury at his office and offered to remodel the law-enforcement agencies including police, coast guards, Ansar and Village Defence Party, home ministry sources said.

Thomas also expressed US intention to assist Bangladesh in introducing machine-readable passports (MRPs), replacing the existing ones.

Sources at the home ministry said a team has carried out a feasibility study on introduction of the MRPs and they needed technical support for the success of the proposed project.

Existing passports, prepared manually, do not contain details of a passport-holder. The planned MRPs, readable in a specially designed machine, would carry all necessary information on the holder, they added.

## CIA takes over Saddam quizzing

**REUTERS, Washington**

The CIA has taken control of the interrogation of Saddam Hussein, Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said on Tuesday. And he defended releasing film of the grubby former Iraqi dictator after his capture.

Rumsfeld refused to say whether or not a bearded Saddam, pulled from a hole in the ground by US troops in Iraq over the weekend, was cooperating with his captors.

"I have asked (CIA Director) George Tenet to be responsible for the handling of the interrogation of Saddam Hussein," the secretary told reporters, stressing that the civilian spy agency was better for the task than the military.

## Saddam's family

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caged," she said.

But governing council member Muaffak al-Rubaie, one of the first Iraqi officials to meet Saddam after his capture, said Wednesday in Arabic newspaper Ashraq Al-Awsat. "Never, he was not dragged ... but he was demoralised, without hope and humiliated."

Raghad and her sister Rana are living in Amman, Jordan, where they were given asylum in July.

They said the family would appoint an attorney to try to contact Saddam, whose whereabouts have not been released.

Raghad told Al-Arabiya that the family wanted her father to be tried by an international tribunal, rather than a special court set up last week by the 25-member governing council to deal with crimes against humanity allegedly committed by Saddam and other members of his regime.

"We demand a fair and legal trial, not one held by the Governing Council which was appointed by the occupier," Raghad said.

## 7-yr-old girl slaughtered after failed rape attempt

**OUR CORRESPONDENT, Palma**

Miscreants at Shailapara in Ishwardi allegedly slaughtered a seven-year-old girl and critically wounded her playmate on Monday, having failed to rape them.

A six-member gang took Nitu, daughter of Noor-e-Alam, an expatriate to Saudi Arabia, and her eight-year old playmate to a nearby jungle when they were playing close to Ishwardi Railway Station at around noon and attempted to rape the girls at dagger-point, police said.

As the girls screamed in fear, the culprits slaughtered Nitu. They also tried to slash out the head of Nitu's playmate but locals rushed to her aid and held Ripon, a member of the gang, police added.

Ripon was turned over to police where he confessed his involvement and named the other accomplices -- Khokon, Lokon, Alaudin, Raju, and Rafiq. A case was filed with Ishwardi Government Railway Police.

## ZIA to get extra lustre by next March

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

Once the ongoing Tk 125 crore renovation of Zia International Airport (ZIA) ends by March 2004, the government hopes it will be one of the most attractive airports in Asia, said State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Mir Mohammad Nasiruddin yesterday.

"We are working to upgrade ZIA and hope the work will end by the next four months," said the state minister at a discussion organised by The Bangladesh Monitor, a fortnightly aviation journal. The British Airways sponsored the event to celebrate the centenary of aviation at a local hotel.

## Security service provider shot dead

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

Unidentified assailants yesterday shot dead a security service provider at Manipuriparain Tejoan.

Khandakar Masudur Rahman, 34, owner of Splinter Security Service, was shotpoint blank twice in the head at his Sangsad Bhaban Avenue office at around 2:15pm.

Rahman's business partner Iqbal, a retired major, informed Rahman's family about the incident over telephone around 2:30pm.

Abdur Rashid, Rahman's driver, said he along with Rahman's mother and sister rushed to the office and found him lying on the floor.

He was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) at 3:00pm where he died at 4:00pm.

"I don't know if Rahman had a feud with anyone over anything," Rahman's uncle Aslam told The Daily Star.

Nocase was filed till 7:30 last night.

## 7 Bangladeshis

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Sunday night.

When the attention of a foreign office spokesman was drawn to the incident, he confirmed the death of seven Bangladeshis but could not give identity of the victims.

He said Bangladesh embassy in Jordan which looks after the affairs in Lebanon is in touch with the Beirut administration as well as Bangladesh Honorary Consul, Dandan, to get their identity.

The fire killed 14 labourers that included nationals from Egypt and India, an AFP report said earlier.

The fire, the report said, broke out at the factory in Brummana that had metal shutters and door. The workers inside might have been suffocated in their sleep, it added quoting a police source.

## Nepalese PM

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Airport (ZIA) at 9:00pm.

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan, the ministers, chiefs of the three services, dean of diplomatic corps and diplomats of the Saarc countries were present at the airport.

The two prime ministers are expected to discuss matters relating to the 12th Saarc summit, scheduled for next month, in the Pakistan capital of Islamabad.

Bilateral issues of mutual interest will also be discussed at a meeting between Khaleda and Thapa today, said a foreign ministry press release.

During his stay, the Nepalese prime minister will also pay a courtesy call on President Iajuddin Ahmed.

Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina will make a courtesy call on the visiting prime minister at his Dhaka Sheraton Hotel suite.

Thapa will leave Dhaka for the Maldives tomorrow.

## Iraq reconstruction

**FROM PAGE 1**  
allies in Iraq war -- the UK and Spain and some Asian countries like Japan, Thailand, South Korea and Singapore.

Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Morocco, Afghanistan and Egypt are also on the list.

The full list has Afghanistan, Albania, Angola, Australia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bulgaria, Colombia, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Egypt, El Salvador, Eritrea, Estonia, Ethiopia, Georgia, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, Iraq, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Moldova, Mongolia, Morocco, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Oman, Palau, Panama, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Romania, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Slovakia, Solomon Islands, South Korea, Spain, Thailand, Tonga, Turkey, UAE, Uganda, Ukraine, United Kingdom, the United States and Uzbekistan.

On whether Dhaka would approach Washington for its inclusion on the list, Morshed said: "We are observing the situation. We have to look at it from the South Asian context. We have to consider the political aspects of the issue and positions maintained by other South Asian countries."

Responding to another question about the possibility of sending troops to Iraq, or Bangladesh's

participation in peacekeeping there, the foreign minister said the issue is not in discussion now.

He said Dhaka is closely watching the developments in Iraq.

Foreign ministry officials said Bangladesh still holds on to its position of not sending troops to Iraq without UN endorsement.

Police said their informer Abul Kashem was abducted from near his house at north Guza village in Raozan at around 10:00am Monday and shot dead sometimes in the evening.

Police recovered his body from Laxmikanta in Kadalpur at around 11:30pm the same day.

In another incident, muggers stabbed to death auto-rickshaw driver Abdur Rahim, 25, near Patenga Police Camp at around 10:30pm.

The gang intercepted Rahim and stabbed him when he refused to turn off the vehicle's engine.

The victim, hailed from West Dabua of Raozan upazila, died on the spot.

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## 13 die in road accidents in Jhenidah, Savar

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

Thirteen people were killed and 55 others injured in separate road accidents in Jhenidah and Dhaka Tuesday night

Of them, 11 were killed in Jhenidah and the rest in Dhaka

Our Jhenidah Correspondent report: Eleven people were killed and 40 others injured in a road accident at Kharakhali, 10-km off Jhenidah town, on the Dhaka-Khulna Highway.

Police and locals said the accident occurred at about 10:30pm when a Dhaka-bound night coach from Khulna hit a roadside tree, killing seven on the spot and injuring 44 others. Four of the injured died on the way to Jhenidah Sadar Hospital.

According to our Our Staff Correspondent, a road accident at Amin Bazaar under Savar upazila of Dhaka left two people killed and 15 others injured on the same night.

The incident took place at about 9:30pm when a Dhaka-bound bus of Shyamoli Paribahan from Kolkata tried to avert a collision with a truck. The bus skidded off the road into a ditch, injuring 17 passengers.

## Drizzle, cloud brings chill

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

Clouds amid unusual winter drizzle yesterday concealed the sun in most of the places in the country.

Sources in the Met Office put down the dismal weather to the depression in the Bay of Bengal that was heading towards the Andhra coast in India. The gloomy weather forced many to stay indoors and hampered normal activities to some extent.

The sources said the situation will improve tomorrow but the temperature will have a fall of two to three degrees Celsius.

The lowest temperature in the country was recorded at 15.5 degrees Celsius at Dinajpur and the highest 28 degrees Celsius at Cox's Bazar and Teknaf. The lowest temperature in the capital was recorded at 19.2 degrees Celsius.

The Met Office forecast said there will be drizzle today in some places of Barisal, Dhaka, Sylhet and Chittagong divisions and the weather is likely to remain dry with partly cloudy sky in other parts of the country.

Our Chittagong office reported that the drizzle yesterday recorded a rainfall of six millimetres, while the sea was stormy.

## Dhaka Asia's

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Programme) and WHO (World Health Organisation) on AQM capabilities of 20 major countries in Asia, which was carried out in 1996.

As part of the project, a benchmarking exercise of air quality management, a tool of improving performance by learning from good practices, initiated in 2002, will be complete in March 2004.

Dhaka's score was pegged as "limited" in the five-category index, Cornie Huiuzenga, one of the researchers of benchmarking AQM, told the three-day workshop on better air quality 2003 that began yesterday.

Other categories of the index are minimal, moderate, good and excellent, with the scores of other cities are mostly "good".

About 800 people including air quality and transport experts and government officials from 50 countries are attending the workshop, launched under the Clean Air Initiative for Asian Cities in association with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and World Bank (WB).

Chris Hoban, WB portfolio and operations manager, the Philippines, in his presentation said the level of average particulate matter in Dhaka went down 50 percent in 2003 after two-stroke auto-rickshaws were phased out.

The average particulate matter level decreased from 300 microgram/m3 in 2002 to 150 microgram/m3 in 2003 that is also above the standards prescribed by the United Standard Environmental Protection Agency.

Air pollution is the result of increasing migration, motorisation and uncontrolled urban growth in Asia, the speakers said, adding human health, quality of life and the urban poor are mostly affected by air pollution.

The speakers underscored coordination among the government, private sector and civil society to keep the skies of the cities clean and said constant monitoring is necessary for air pollution cuts.

The participants also stressed managing high-polluting buses and trucks and controlling dust to reduce air pollution.

## Cyclone kills 50

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This was the first winter cyclone in the stein 18 years.

At least 10,000 people died in the neighbouring state of Orissa when a cyclone hit its coastal areas in 1999.

## Hasina again asks

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present situation marked by violence, corruption and misrule," said Hasina, also the leader of the opposition in parliament.

She was addressing a rally of party men in front of the AL central office at Bangabandhu Avenue before leading a massive Victory Day procession on Tuesday, in one of the biggest showdowns of the main opposition in recent days.

The former prime minister urged people to vow afresh to unseat the government to establish a 'corruption and violence-free' democratic nation as dreamt of by the martyrs of the Liberation War. "Removal of the alliance government is a must," she said.

The AL chief inaugurated the colourful procession that started from Bangabandhu Avenue at 4:10pm and paraded various streets of Purana Paltan, Bijoynagar, Kakrail, Suhrawardy Udyan, Shabbagh, Elephant Road and Mirpur Road. It ended at the Bangabandhu Memorial Museum at about 6:00pm.

Boarding an open jeep, Hasina waved to people who lined up on both sides of the streets.

The processionists carried drums, banners and festoons and staged mock-shows on different aspects of the Liberation War on bullock carts and trucks. They also showed mock victims of violence under the present government.

## Huge funds spent

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without a well thought out defence policy. The absence of such a policy raises the scope of fund abuse, it pointed out.

The standing committee mentioned the absence of a defence policy 32 years into independence and asked the Armed Forces Division, responsible for such task, to work out a policy soon for the better management of the forces.

Officials of the Armed Forces Division told the committee that they were working on the policy.

The committee also discussed alleged corruption and anomalies in the Trust Bank and Sena Kalyan Sangstha, run by the army authorities, and asked the authorities to make the organisations profitable by removing the anomalies.

About the loss of Tk 24 crore incurred by the bank in dealing with foreign currency coming from peacekeeping missions, the committee asked the authorities to take

## PM urges

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opment and dented the country's image".

"It is not wise of any to speak against the country when abroad. We hope the opponents will shed the practice and help the government ensure progress," she said.

Khaleda, listing achievements of the coalition in its first two years in office, said people were reaping the benefits of development programmes and have more in stock for them in future.

The government shored up the economy and curbed state patronised and party-based crimes, the prime minister said, adding: "We went to extraordinary lengths to reduce human-rights violations."

Moving on to post-war Bangladesh, Khaleda accused the then ruling party of remaining busy advancing their own ends rather than the country in a trend leading to famine and lawlessness.

## MCCI review

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deceleration in the growth of inward remittances, and a slower growth of investment credit to the private sector," the review reads.

Although the domestic investment has started to increase, the predictions of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the central bank in January 2003 that the economy was on its way to recovery from the previous year's slump have not thus fully materialised, it adds.

The chamber said the industrial sector has recorded positive growth during the period but remains lower than what was realised in the corresponding period of the previous year. Except for jute and cotton textiles, apparels, leather and metal products, all manufacturing sectors have registered negative growth.

"The adoption of the easy money policy in recent months is likely to lead to a revival of domestic demand. Local investment has already started picking up in response to the lower lending rates of commercial banks. Imports of capital equipment and industrial raw materials have increased considerably, which is a sign of growing investor confidence."

The major task for the government now is to maintain a congenial business environment by removing the impediments like infrastructure bottlenecks, deteriorating law and order, bureaucratic inefficiency and corruption that bedevil the economy, rising the cost of doing business, and dampening entrepreneurial initiatives, the chamber suggests.

The switch to a liberal monetary policy in the recent months is an encouraging first step, it observes. What is now needed is to put in place an appropriate strategy which will make the banking sector responsive to the changed monetary policy regime.

The inflation rate, as measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI), was 4.71 percent in September 2003, compared to 3.61 percent in September 2002 and 1.83 percent in September 2001, the review cites. The accelerated inflation rate was generated by higher prices of both food and non-food items. Approximately 60 percent of the inflation, experienced in 2003, was due to the rise in the food prices, compared to 35 percent in 2002 and 39 percent in 2001, the review explains.

The participants shouted anti-government slogans and carried banners reading "Resist misuse of alliance regime" and "Step down Khaleda". Top leaders of the party and its front organisations also took part in the procession.

Earlier, the leaders and activists thronged Bangabandhu Avenue, coming in processions from far and wide of the capital.

Hasina warned the government of dire consequences in case of any attempt to obstruct the January 10 rally. She castigated the government for not allowing the AL to organise victory fairs at Paltan Maidan and Ramna Batamul.

She blamed the BNP for giving 'state recognition' to the collaborators of Pakistani occupation forces.</