

Hajj today

AFP, Jeddah
An estimated 2.5 million Muslims began their annual hajj or pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia yesterday with the authorities on high alert to prevent another tragedy after a deadly hotel collapse.
The pilgrims began the trek from the holy city of Makkah to the nearby valley of Mina after dawn prayers, tracing the journey made by the Prophet Hazrat Mohammad (SM) more than 1,400 years ago.
The rites, known as the hajj, started three days after a hostel in the heart of Makkah collapsed, killing 76 people, the latest deadly disaster to strike the pilgrimage.
Saudi authorities called off
SEE PAGE 15 COL 7

Fog blanket wrecks life

15 int'l flights disrupted; mercury drops; sky to remain overcast today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
An all-enveloping dense fog in the chilly early hours yesterday disrupted road and river communications across the country and forced flight operations at the Zia International Airport (ZIA) to be suspended for hours.
As the sun remained invisible until noon in most of the places, motor vehicles had to move with their fog lights on. Our Bogra correspondent reports: Two passenger buses collided head-on in thick fog at Mohipur of Sherpur upazila yesterday, leaving 10 people killed and 20 others injured.
Sources in the flight information centre at ZIA said arrivals and departures of 15 international and four domestic flights of different airlines were delayed due to poor visibility between 3:00am and 11:00am.
The met office warned the situation would remain the same today and might cause difficulties for the people bound for home on the occasion of Eid-ul-Azha.
"A blanket of fog entering the country through the north would be there today as well," said Akram Hossain, director of the met office. The weathermen forecast a spell of cold wave in the middle of the month.
The met office recorded the lowest temperature yesterday at 10.3 degrees Celsius in Jessore while it was 12.6 degrees in the capital.
The freezing temperatures caused huge problems for road communications across the country particularly in the places where the buses and other vehicles have
SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

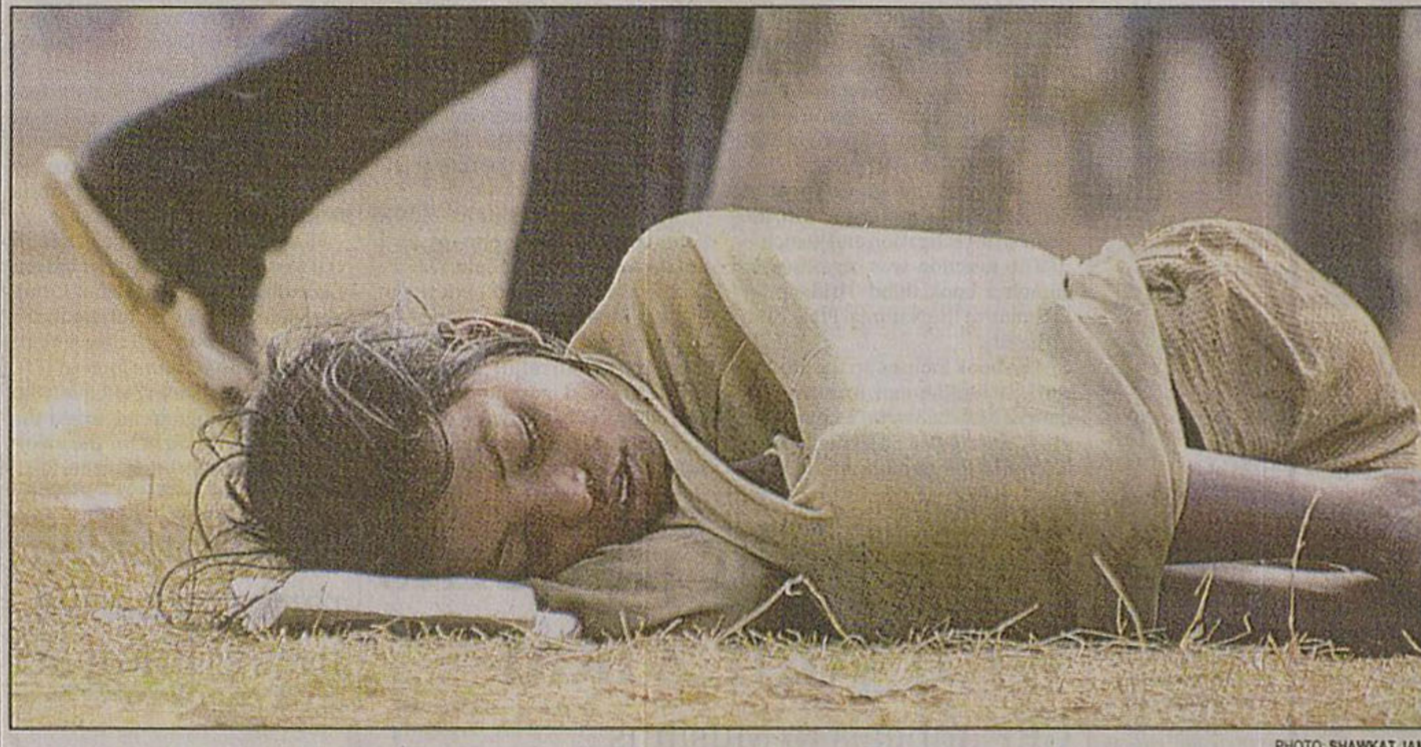
Wasa loses crores to cooked fuel costs

Staffs pocket huge sums showing inflated fuel consumption by generators, overtime work

ABDUL KADER
A section of Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) staff has been pocketing crores of taka every year by showing inflated fuel consumption by power generators to run the water pumps during electricity blackouts or low-voltage supply.
Sources said these unscrupulous staffs including some engineers have swindled the Wasa out of around Tk 3 crore in just four months since July.
The Wasa has 263 diesel-run power generators for its 425 water pumps to continue water supply during power outage and low-voltage supply to its six zones in the city and one in Narayanganj.
In July to October, the officials concerned showed an average of 500-hour operation of the 263 generators a day and 22-litre diesel consumption per generator per hour. With diesel costing Tk 30 a litre, their claimed monthly fuel cost for the generators was to the tune of Tk 1 crore, Wasa sources said, adding the real consumption would not be more than one-fourth of the claimed figure.
Of the Tk 9 crore fuel cost allocated for the generators for the current fiscal year, more than Tk 4 crore has been shown as spent in the first four months alone. But, the city dwellers have seen no end to the lack of water supply during the periods of power blackout and low-
SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

Outlaw killed in 'shootout' with cops

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail
A top leader of the outlawed Purba Banglar Communist Party (ML-Red Flag), was killed in an "encounter" between police and his accomplices on Saturday midnight on Tangail-Baghil Road at Laojan in Tangail Sadar upazila.
On information that Sobel, 25, and his accomplices were preparing for a big criminal operation, Tangail sadar police raided Laojan Chilarbari area at around 1:00am, police said, adding that some 15 outlaws opened fire on
SEE PAGE 15 COL 5



With scanty clothing, street urchin Saleha sleeps out in the open at Paltan Maidan in the city yesterday amid cold weather. PHOTO: SHAWKAT JAMIL

Grenades found from Satkhira Jamaat leader

PM's tour cancelled on bad weather

STAR REPORT
Police yesterday recovered two grenades from the house of a Jamaat leader on the outskirts of Satkhira town and arrested his son.
During the raid on the house of Jamaat Rokan Moulana Yunus Ali at Dhalipara yesterday noon, they also seized some books on Jihad and Shibir. Yunus' son Abdullah Al Mamun, 21, is an activist of Islami Chhatra Shibir, student wing of ruling coalition partner Jamaat-e-Islami.
Militant kingpin Asadullah-al-Galib, chief of a faction of Ahle Hadith Andolan, Bangladesh, also hails from the same area.
Meanwhile, Prime Minister (PM) Khaleda Zia's scheduled visit
FROM PAGE 15 COL 7

India, Pakistan press for Khaleda's visit

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT
Foreign secretaries of India and Pakistan are expected to visit Bangladesh shortly to work out the schedules of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's tours to the countries.
Highly placed sources said the Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed both India and Pakistan that the prime minister may be free to visit the countries at the end of January, mid February and in early March.
However, they could not confirm which country she will visit first. "We have conveyed our intention to the governments of India
SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

4 of a family murdered in Naogaon

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogra
Four members of a family including two children were murdered at Chachapur in Mohadevpur upazila of Naogaon early yesterday.
The victims are Umir Chand, 35, his wife Popy Rani, 33, and their two children Chhabi Rani, 4, and Pappu, 2.
Locals and police sources said a gang of criminals entered Umir's house around 1:00am scaling the wall of the house and slaughtered the four.
SEE PAGE 15 COL 8

VOTER ROLL CONTROVERSY

EC meet on HC order uncertain as CEC falls sick

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
An immediate meeting of the Election Commission (EC) to decide on the next course of action on the voter roll in light of the High Court (HC) directives appears uncertain as the chief election commissioner (CEC) suddenly fell sick yesterday.
The HC directives, which asked the EC on January 4 to revise the existing roll, also stressed the need
SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

Citizens' body slates govt for shady energy deals

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
A citizen's commission yesterday blamed the government for making shady deals with foreign companies in the energy sector and urged it to discuss such issues in the parliamentary standing committee before signing any agreement.
The speakers of the Citizens' Commission on Gas-Oil-Coal at a press briefing at the Jatiya Press Club also blasted the government for promoting another "Niko-like deal" with the Asian Energy.
A section of political leaders and bureaucrats are misleading the people, working against the country's interest and to benefit themselves from such non-transparent agreements, the commission noted.
SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

Spiking politics poses risk for economy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
The Bangladesh Bank (BB) has identified four risk factors, including heightened political confrontation in the run-up to the next general elections, in the way of realising Medium Term Macroeconomic Framework (MTMF).
The BB annual report for 2004-'05, titled "Near and Medium Term Outlook for the Bangladesh Economy" released yesterday, also noted high international oil price, unfolding post-MFA shocks and slow progress in implementing structural reforms as the three other risk factors.
The MTMF in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper outlines various targets including the GDP growth in a three-year term.
The report said Bangladesh is likely to face competitive pressure from lower prices in the international market in the post-MFA world with the possibility of an adverse shock on balance of payments, output and employment.
To withstand the possible future unfolding of shocks, measures are being taken by both public and private sectors to reduce costs and improve external competitiveness. The measures include improving
SEE PAGE 15 COL 2

Correction

The Daily Star's January 5 report headlined 'Warid Telecom eyes supremacy in 3-5yrs' inadvertently mentions that Pakistan bagged \$6 billion in fees from two licences. It should read \$600 million fees from two licences. We regret the error.

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