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## Country heading for highest GDP growth

### Bureau of statistics projects 6.86pc GDP rise in FY06 on strong agricultural performance

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The country may strike the highest-ever GDP growth of 6.86 percent this fiscal year thanks mainly to a strong performance of the agriculture sector, according to a preliminary estimate of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS).

The BBS made the estimation based on the data of the first half of FY06. Although the BBS previously used to make the yearly forecast on

the basis of data of the first three quarters, this time it made it earlier as part of its drive to develop a system of making quarterly economic growth projections.

The estimate will be tabled at the current session of parliament as well as sent to the Bangladesh Bank to assist it in its policy review, said a planning ministry source.

The average level of annual GDP growth was around 3 percent in the 1970s, 4 percent in 1980s and 5 percent in 1990s. The highest

annual GDP growth so far has been posted in FY04 at 6.27 percent.

The BBS also has made an upward revision of its GDP growth calculation for FY05 from 5.38 percent to 5.61 percent.

Agriculture contributes 17 percent to the GDP (gross domestic product). The BBS projects a 5.01 percent growth in agriculture in FY06, which was as low as 0.78 percent in FY05, due to the devastation by severe flooding.

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## COUNTER-TERRORISM Govt ready for structured ties with US: FM

UNB, Dhaka

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan yesterday said that Bangladesh is ready to accept the US offer to establish a structured cooperation in counter-terrorism activity to enhance the country's capability to effectively combat the menace.

"The US had given us the offer much ago, and we are ready to do that; but the modality of such cooperation has to be worked out," he told journalists at his office.

US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs Christina Rocca, who arrives on a 3-day official visit on January 26, is expected to discuss the crucial matter with top officials of the

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## 200 pickets injured in hartal clashes

### BNP-linked gunmen shoot 10 opposition members in Jamalpur

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sporadic clashes in the capital and elsewhere in the country during the countrywide dawn-to-dusk hartal enforced by the 14-party opposition coalition yesterday left more than 200 people injured, ten of them with bullet wounds.

Gunmen allegedly backed by the local chapter of the ruling BNP fired on a pro-hartal procession of

Awami League at Tarakandi under Sarishabari upazila in Jamalpur. Twenty people were injured during the violence including ten who sustained bullet wounds.

The 14-party coalition enforced the countrywide shutdown demanding immediate resignation of the chief election commissioner (CEC) and protesting appointments of two new election commissioners. About 100 leaders and activists

of the 14-party including Awami League (AL) leaders Faruq Khan MP and former lawmaker Dr HBM Iqbal were injured as policemen in riot gear charged batons on opposition leaders and activists at different points in the capital.

The law enforcers also detained 68 people during the clashes on charge of violent picketing as they hurled bricks at the police and

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## Final round talks with Tata deferred

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The fifth and final round talks between the Bangladesh government and India's Tata Group have been deferred until Feb 6, further delaying a final agreement on commissioning of four proposed projects worth \$2.5 to \$3 billion.

The Board of Investment (BoI) has proposed the fresh date to conclude the negotiations, citing "preoccupation" of officials of both sides, a government official said.

Tata has proposed to set up steel, fertiliser and power plants besides developing a coal mine, making it the single largest foreign direct investment so far in Bangladesh.

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## RU goes soft on attackers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rajshahi University authorities in a lenient mood filed only a general diary (GD) against Saturday's attacks on teachers apparently to appease the city mayor, who is supporting the 'controversial' employees, who launched the attack.

Following a decision of RU Syndicate on Saturday night, Registrar Abdus Salam filed the GD simply narrating the incident and without mentioning any name.

A senior teacher speaking anonymously said there is no plan to go hard against the employees when teachers' security is concerned. Besides, no action could be taken against them after previous incidents of violence due to their political affiliation.

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## AL seats at stake

### JS goes into session today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Jatiya Sangsad goes into session today forcing the main opposition Awami League to decide soon whether it will return to parliament or resign en masse as the opposition leader's seat will fall vacant if she does not join the House in next 13 workdays.

Still undecided about the matter, the Awami League (AL) along with its allies is holding a rally at the city's Paltan Maidan this afternoon, from where party chief and Opposition Leader Sheikh Hasina may clarify her party's position about joining parliament.

On the other hand, the government side said they will not take any formal initiative for return of

the main opposition to the House and if the AL members lose their membership the government will act as per the constitution, which means by-elections in the vacant seats.

"If any seats fall vacant the government will act according to the constitution and which will be beneficial for the country and its people," LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan told reporters yesterday.

Deputy Speaker Akhter Hamid Siddique, who will chair the inaugural day of the session as Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar is now abroad, termed the session as a crucial one and said there the president will deliver his last speech in the Eighth

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## Maj Gen Shakil new DG of BDR

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday appointed Major General Shakil Ahmed the director general (DG) of Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) replacing Maj Gen Jahangir Alam Chowdhury, who was appointed the principal staff officer (PSO) of the Armed Forces Division (AFD).

Gen Shakil was previously the general officer commanding (GOC) of Rangpur.

The post of the PSO became vacant with the departure of Maj Gen Ali Reza Noor on December 27.

The appointment for the next PSO was followed closely as the AFD coordinates all three forces and their deployment during elections.

When the caretaker government takes charge the new AFD

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An Awami League activist struggles hard to free himself from the clutch of policemen at Zero Point in the capital during hartal hours yesterday.

## Two killed in attack over minority land

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Two Hindus were killed and 10 others injured, three of them critically, as alleged grabbers of minority community land attacked them in Churer Bhatta village in Dhubaura upazila yesterday.

The dead are Bimol Chandra Sutradhar, 26, son of Gouranga Chandra Sutradhar, and Haridas Sutradhar, 35, son of Chandra Kumar Sutradhar.

Police and locals said Omar Ali, an alleged land grabber, along with 25 men equipped with sharp weapons attacked them when they were cultivating boro on a 40-decimal piece of land around 7:00am.

The attackers left two dead on

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## EU troika due today to talk polls, extremism, governance

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

A European Union (EU) troika arrives here today on a three-day visit to hold talks with government and opposition leaders, representatives of civil society and international diplomatic community on a broad range of issues, including next general elections, fundamentalist extremism, governance, corruption and human rights.

This will be the first ever visit to Bangladesh by an EU troika, which carries a mandate to speak on behalf of all 25 EU member states: Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany,

Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

The EU troika is made up of representatives from the EU Presidency, the next member state to hold the Presidency, the European Commission and the High Representative.

The troika visiting Bangladesh will be led by Nikolaus Scherk, director for Asia Pacific at the Austrian Foreign Ministry, representing the EU Presidency. He will be accompanied by James Moran, acting director for Asia, representing

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## Khaleda goes to Pakistan Feb 12, India in March

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia is expected to visit Pakistan on February 12-13 and India in the third week of March, Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan said yesterday.

This will be her first bilateral trip to the two important member countries of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) after assuming the chair of the forum at Dhaka summit last November.

The prime minister's trip to India at the invitation of Indian Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh will also be her first visit to the country since her government came to power on October 10, 2001.

Diplomatic sources said the

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## VOTER LIST PREPARATION

## One EC decision contradicts other

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission last week took two decisions contradictory to each other on voter list preparation and then put the first decision opposing the chief election commissioner's stance on the issue.

Both the decisions were made by majority view. The first one made on January 16 by a majority view of the then 3-member EC gathered through a file was for stopping the ongoing work for a fresh voter list and instead revising the existing roll as per the January 4 High Court directives. But, the

decision appears to be a stillborn, as no step has been taken in its line.

The second decision made by the first meeting of the expanded 5-member EC on January 19 was to appeal against the HC directives. However, the meeting neither cancelled the January 16 decision nor discussed the voter-listing issue, although, sources said, it was high on its agenda. It was CEC MA Aziz, chairman of the meeting, who did not allow it to discuss the agenda, sources added.

"We wanted to discuss the status of voter list preparation, but the chief election commissioner

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## Tea giant Finley sells up business to local group

RAFIQ HASAN

James & Finley, one of the oldest foreign tea companies in the country, is winding up its business due to changes in government policy and internal management problem.

A business consortium, comprising eight leading local entrepreneurs, has bought 17 large tea gardens and other properties of the UK-based multinational company in Sylhet at Tk 380 crore, sources said.

This is going to be the biggest takeover of a foreign company by local entrepreneurs, according to the country's private sector busi-

ness circle. No such previous business takeover ever crossed Tk 300 crore in a single deal.

The James & Finley is one of the biggest tea companies in the country with over 16,000 officials and employees under its umbrella and producing tea since the time of British rule in the subcontinent.

Recent policy changes of the government regarding leasing of land for tea gardens may have forced the foreign investors to wind up business from the country, sources pointed out. The government used to lease out land to tea gardens for 99 years but now the period has been cut to 35 years.

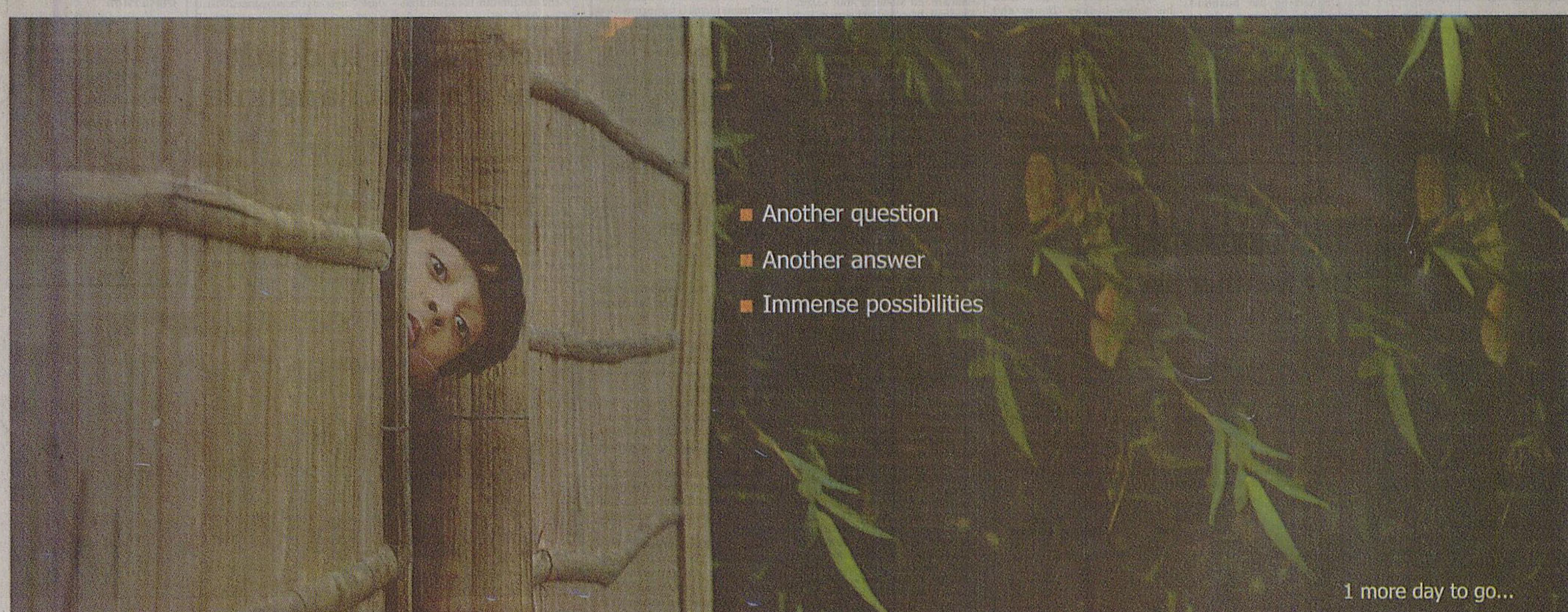
The government also recently

withdrew the subsidy for rationing of food for the tea workers, causing additional expenditure for the company. The company's internal management problem might be also causing the closure, the sources observed.

Asked about the authenticity of the news, Shafiq Chowdhury, chief executive officer (estate) of James & Finley in Moulyvibazar, however, said, "I have heard it but I am yet to be officially informed."

Although the company authority is keeping the deal secret, sources inside confirmed the fact. The selling of the company's tea gardens and other properties has

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Another question  
Another answer  
Immense possibilities

1 more day to go...

COGITO