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VOL. IV NO. 337 REGD. NO. DA 781 POUH 18, 1401 BS, DHAKA SUNDAY JANUARY 1, 1995 RAJAB 27, 1415 HIJRI 16 PAGES: PRICE TAKA 5.00

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Fighting near Chechen presidential palace

GROZNY (Russia), Dec 31: Russian armoured vehicles fought Chechen defenders in front of the presidential palace in central Grozny today after launching a massive ground and air assault on the separatist republic's capital, reports AFP.

From about a kilometre away, a huge fire, gushing black smoke, could be seen coming from the centre near the presidential building.

However, a Chechen television camera left running in the window of the building continued to transmit grainy pictures of Russian armoured vehicles firing in all directions around the main square.

Chechens fought back with grad ground-to-ground rockets positioned in the city centre and with heavy machine guns against helicopter gunships that attacked the city for the first time since Russian troops were ordered into Chechnya on December 11 to crush the Muslim republic's independence drive.

A Moscow report says Russian troops entered Grozny at nightfall today and took control of several administrative buildings, Russia's government press centre said, adding that fighting continued inside the city.

A high-ranking Russian Defence Ministry source had earlier denied reports in the Russian media that the thousands of besieging troops would storm Grozny on New Year's Eve, Interfax news agency said.

Terrified remaining residents hid in cellars and bomb shelters as shells slammed into the city at the rate of two or three a minute at one point, according to AP.

Thick smoke from at least nine fires burning at an oil refinery and elsewhere in the industrial district turned the ravaged city as black as night soon after the attack began at midday.

One Russian bomb struck a prison in the capital and killed 26 prisoners, a Chechen spokesman told the Moscow Echo radio station. No further details were available.

Bloodied and dazed Chechen fighters ran for cover but said they would not give up.

"Despite the great might of the Russian army which is attacking Grozny, the people of Chechnya have already won a moral victory," Dudayev said in a New Year's address to the people of Chechnya and Russia, according to the Interfax news agency.



The setting sun bidding farewell to 1994 yesterday. — Star photo by AKM Moinin

Bosnia signs ceasefire accord

SARAJEVO, Dec 31: The Muslim-led Bosnian government today signed an agreement for a four-month cessation of hostilities in Bosnia, the United Nations said, reports Reuter.

The Bosnian Serbs, the other main warring faction, were expected to sign the agreement later today in their headquarters at Pale, near Sarajevo.

UNited Nations special envoy Yasushi Akashi said: "We finally managed to agree on a comprehensive cessation of hostilities."

He added: "I am proceeding with General Rose, (the UN military commander in Bosnia) to Pale to have them (the Bosnian Serbs) sign an identical agreement."

The four-month ceasefire, which arose from a peace mission to Bosnia earlier in December by former US

President Jimmy Carter, is intended to pave the way to a negotiated settlement of Bosnia's 33-month war.

Akashi and his military commander for Bosnia, Lt. Gen. Sir Michael Rose, visited the Bosnian presidency for talks with government officials and transmitted new ideas to the Bosnian Serb headquarters village of Pale.

The proposal for the four-month truce was part of a larger package, including possible resumption of peace negotiations.

Rose's furious shuttle diplomacy of the last few days reflected the United Nations' apparent determination not to let momentum for peace slip after Carter's visit.

The two sides would agree to stop fighting until May 1, 1995. Frontlines would be frozen and some troops withdrawn.

The Bosnian government was insisting that before it signs an extended broader truce, fighting in Bihac must stop. It also wanted wording in the calls for at least a partial demilitarization of Sarajevo.

According to the Carter-brokered package, negotiations should be based on an international peace plan drafted by the United States, Russia, France, Germany and Britain.

PM addresses nation today

By Staff Correspondent
Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia will address the nation over radio and television today at 7:15 pm.

Informed sources said she will explain the causes of the abortive dialogue with a fresh call to opposition parties to return to the 'democratic process'.

The draft of her speech was finalised at a meeting with her senior colleagues yesterday night.

Dissolve illegal parliament: AL

By Staff Correspondent
A meeting of the Awami League Presidium yesterday resolved that the solution to political crisis lay in the dissolution of the present 'illegal' Parliament and holding of a fresh general elections under a non-party caretaker government.

The meeting, held at the party's central office with party chief Sheikh Hasina in the chair, said the Fifth Parliament elected under a caretaker administration with the ruling BNP bagging 31 per cent votes and the combined Opposition 69 per cent votes had become illegal and non-existent following the en masse resignation of lawmakers representing the majority voters.

The persisting political stalemate has been caused due

See Page 8 Col 7

No alternative to fresh polls, says JP

By Staff Correspondent
There is no scope to interpret otherwise the resignation letters submitted by Opposition MPs, the Jatiya Party leaders said yesterday demanding immediate dissolution of Parliament and hold fresh election within 90 days.

The Constitution has clearly stated how a Parliament member will resign and how a seat falls vacant. We acted as per the Constitution," acting chief of the Jatiya Party Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury told newsmen at a press conference.

He alleged that Speaker Shaikh Razzak Ali was misinterpreting the Constitution and had committed an offence.

He said that his party decided to hold the press conference.

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This parliament is legal, says PM

PANGSHA (Rajbari), Dec 31: Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia said here today that democracy and the constitutional process in the country would be maintained at any cost, reports BSS.

The Prime Minister was addressing two public meetings — one at Ballakandi Zia Sarani under Ballakandi Thana and the other at Pangsha College ground under Pangsha Thana of Rajbari district. She said that by submitting the letters of resignation, the Opposition MPs had shown disrespect to the people's verdict.

Criticising the Opposition's statement that following the submission of their resignation letters, the present Parliament had become illegal, Begum Zia said, "This Parliament is totally legal and constitutional. There remains 172 elected MPs in this Parliament. So this Parliament is legal. We will continue our functions as per Constitution and rules."

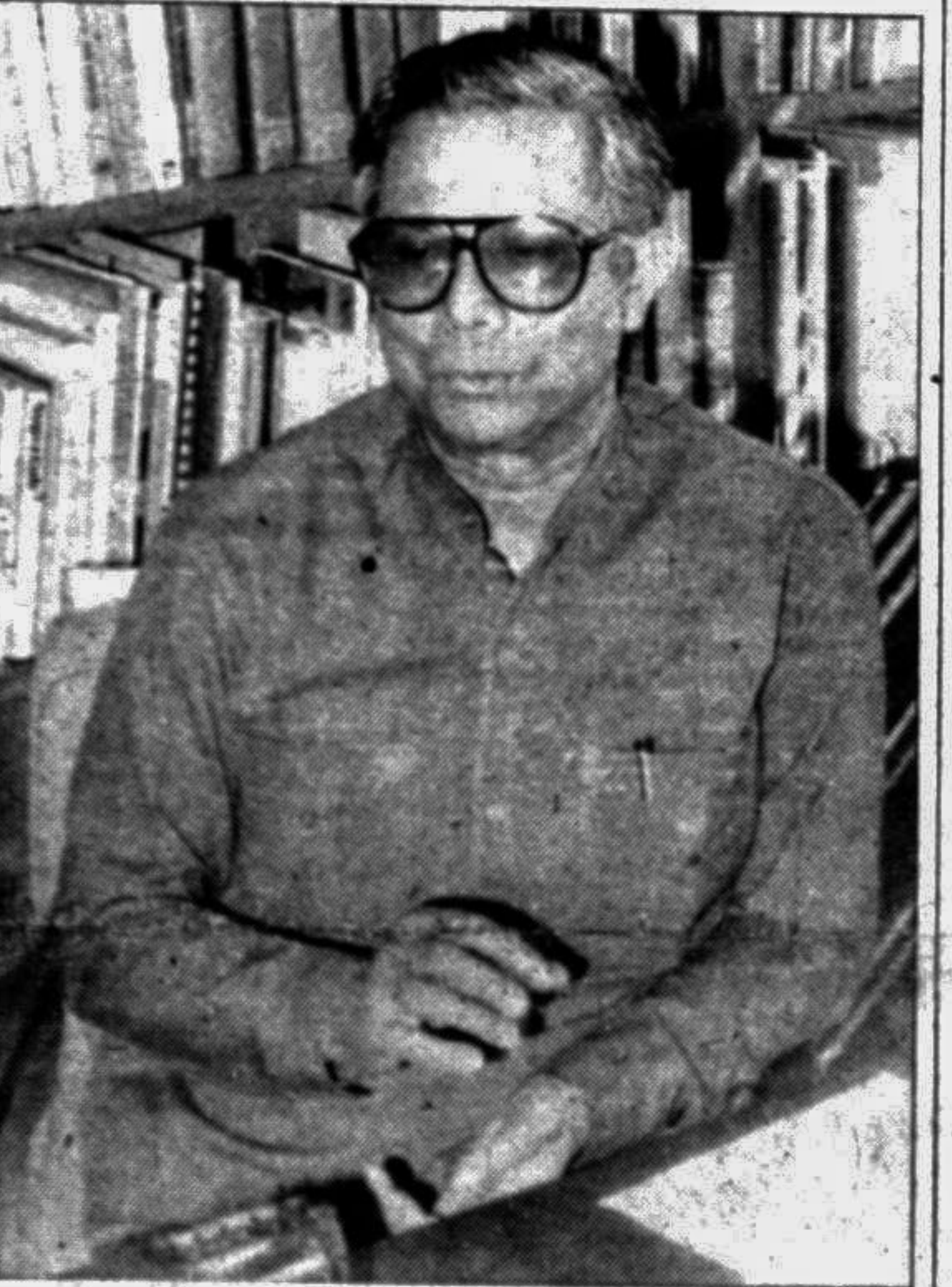
The Prime Minister said the Opposition did not want to see the flourishing of the democratic process and the existence of Parliament.

"The people are above all of us. We shall do and are doing everything necessary to establish the rights of the people," she said.

Referring to the people's rights to franchise, Begum Zia

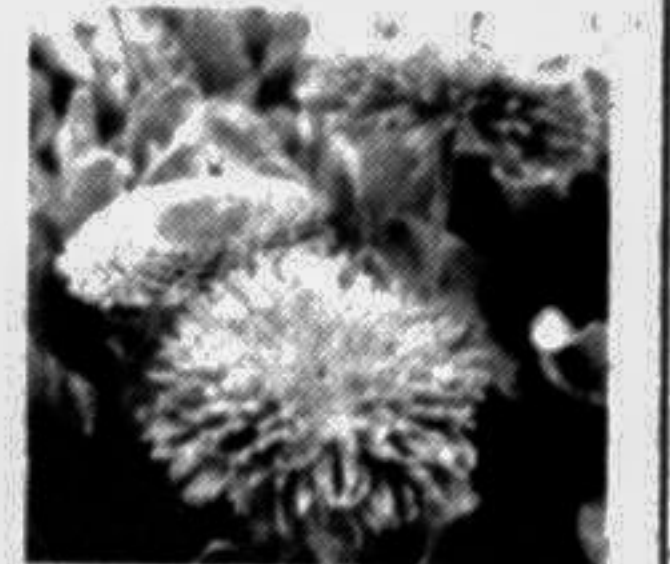
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The man who kindles hope in us all



Prof. Mohammad Yunus
The Daily Star Man of The Year
Story on page 9

Greetings



The Daily Star wishes its valued readers, well-wishers, patrons and advertisers a Happy New Year.

Cost of living up by 4.5pc

By Staff Correspondent
For consumers in the country, 1994 was a bad year. According to an estimate of the Consumer's Association of Bangladesh (CAB), the cost of living has shot up by 4.5 per cent while prices of essentials by 9.55 in comparison to those of 1993.

According to the CAB report on annual prices and cost of living released yesterday, the prices of fish and rice have shot up to the highest, which are 40.98 and 26.32 per cent respectively.

The price of edible oil has soared by an unappetising percentage of 17.98, of which butter oil rose by 50 per cent, soyabean 14.21, dalda 24.14 and coconut oil 3.12 per cent.

The CAB, comparing the commodity prices between December 1993 with the corresponding period this year, See Page 8 Col 1

1000 flats for govt employees by June

Some 1,000 flats will be allotted among government employees by June this year, said an official announcement here yesterday, reports UNB.

The decision was taken in the 31st meeting of Parliamentary Committee on Ministry of Housing and Public Works with Housing Minister Rafiqul Islam Mia in the chair.

Besides, 1000 flats will be constructed at Mohammadpur and Savar in Dhaka district for the government officials and employees, who will become owners of the flats following payments in instalments.

It also urged the RAJUK authority to implement the Jhinal Project immediately.

FBCCI reviews political situation today

Business community leaders will meet today to discuss the latest political development arising out of the mass resignation of Opposition MPs, reports UNB.

The executive committee of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry will take stock of the country's current political situation and its impact on the national economy, FBCCI sources said.

They hinted that Salman F Rahman, president of the apex trade body would once again make a plea to the political leadership of the country to

See Page 8 Col 8

US threatens trade bans on China

WASHINGTON, Dec 31: The United States listed today 2.8 billion dollars in Chinese goods that could be hit with sanctions unless China moves to halt piracy of US compact discs, computer software and other copyright goods, says AFP.

A statement by US trade representative Mickey Kantor's office said the list would be open for public comment for 30 days and that he would make a final decision on trade sanctions on February 4.

Kantor also tied the dispute to China's request for admission to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and its successor, the World Trade Organization. The United States has opposed Chinese membership.

"It would be difficult to support its accession if China does not comply with US demands over the copyright issue," Kantor said in a telephone conference, call with journalists.

"China has been unwilling to take the necessary steps to

protect American intellectual property," Kantor said in a statement earlier. "American companies are suffering losses annually to piracy in China. This cannot continue."

"We are prepared to protect US industry. It is critical that China demonstrate serious resolve eradicate rampant piracy."

Tiwari quits as UP party chief

NEW DELHI, Dec 31: A senior Congress Party leader and rival of Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao resigned from a key post today as Rao prepared cabinet changes to invigorate the organisation, party officials said, reports Reuter.

Narain Dutt Tiwari quit as the party's chief in Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state, in protest over Rao's refusal to withdraw the party's legislative support to the state's opposition party government.

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