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- AL revises mass contact programme**
Awami League revised its countrywide organisational tour from December 26 instead of December 23, as part of its mass contact programme. The AL leaders will address public meetings at all district headquarters from December 26 to 29 to gear up the movement for realising the demand for election under a neutral caretaker government, a party press release said yesterday, reports UNB.
- 25 injured in Savar clash**
MANIKGANJ, Dec 21: At least 25 people were injured, seven of them seriously, in a clash between the two rival groups at village Hatkora in Savar thana today. Local people said the clash occurred between the supporters of Mohiuddin and Mohammad Ali groups over land dispute, reports UNB.
- Israel hands over Bethlehem**
BETHLEHEM, West Bank, Dec 21: Israeli soldiers evacuated the West Bank town of Bethlehem today handing it over to Palestinian control in time for Christmas celebrations, reports APP.
- Dacoity in Sirajganj**
SIRAJGANJ, Dec 21: Armed dacoits stormed into a house at Nabagram village in Ujjapara thana and looted valuables worth about Tk 1.5 lakh early today. Police said the dacoits swooped on the house of one Abdul Matin at about 2 am and decamped with the booty, reports UNB.

First day of combing operation 83 arms recovered, 640 rounded up

By Staff Correspondent

The law enforcing agencies recovered 83 firearms, 74 rounds of ammunition and 20 explosives from different parts of the country on the first day yesterday of the country-wide drive for recovery of illegal arms, the Home Ministry said.

Six hundred and forty people were arrested during the drive, it said in a press release.

Of the arrested, 387 had chargesheets against them for various criminal activities, said a press release of the Election Commission (EC).

The EC initiated the combing operation to ensure law and order during the general elections, scheduled to be held on February 7.

The operation was launched following a directive by the Home Ministry for voluntary surrender of arms from December 10 to 20. The deadline went unheeded according to reports.

In the city, police seized three firearms and 60 rounds of bullet yesterday. The firearms included one pipe-gun and two revolvers, recovered from Mirer Tek under Ramna thana and Lalbagh and Dhanmondi thana areas, said a press release of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police.

Our Khulna Correspondent reports: A total of 38 illegal firearms was recovered from different areas of this division, according to the DIG of Police, Khulna Range.

In six thanas under Khulna district, police recovered two pipe-guns, three shutter guns and two locally made guns, nine rounds of bullet and a hand grenade.

In the city, the Metropolitan Police, however, failed to recover any firearms.

The six thanas where arms were recovered are: Fultala, Pikegachha, Dumuria, Batiaghata, Dakop and Rupsha. One person was arrested from his house in Rupsha thana with two pipe-guns, police said.

Our Correspondent in Kushtia adds: Four shutter guns, three pipe-guns and one pistol along with 14

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13-pt guidelines for electoral probe bodies

The Election Commission has formed an electoral enquiry committee in each district with judicial officials, reports BSS.

These committees will enquire into the pre-election irregularities and offenses and submit their findings before the Election Commission within three days, said an EC press release.

The 13-point pre-election irregularities are as follows:

1. Sanction of donations or public or secret commitments to any educational or their institutions by the candidates in their locality. And also commitment for taking development projects by any candidate before the announcement of the polls schedule till the day of polling.
2. Creating obstruction to any meeting, procession or other assembly of the opponents or their disruption.

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Bangladesh's gold hopes shattered Lankans emerge fastest man, woman of South Asia

MADRAS, Dec 21: Sri Lankan Chintaka De Souza and Susantika Jayasinghe emerged the fastest man and woman of South Asia to win the gold medals in 100 metre sprint from their respective groups of the SAF Games athletics at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium here today, reports UNB.

The 22-year-old Sri Lankan armyman, De Souza, clinched the top slot of men's 100 metre sprint with a new SAF mark of 10.49 seconds while Rajiv Bala Krishnan of India won the silver in 10.59 seconds, also bettering the previous record made by Bimal Chandra Tarafdar of Bangladesh in 1993 in Dhaka.

Despite leading the first 50 metres, Bimal, the fastest man of the previous meet, finished third to win the bronze with a timing of 10.60 seconds, shattering the gold hope of Bangladesh.

Bimal also improved upon his previous timing but was found injured on completion of the race. His previous time in the event was 10.61 seconds, made in the 6th SAF Games in Dhaka in 1993.

Another Bangladeshi sprinter, Mahboob Alam, finished 4th in 10.62 seconds among a field of eight competitors.

Susantika Jayasinghe of Sri Lanka, the silver medalist of the last Asian track and field meet held in Jakarta, won her expected gold in the women's 100 metre sprint in record time.

Jayasinghe clocked 11.34 seconds to better the previous mark of 11.72 seconds made by compatriot Damayanthi Darsha in 1991 in Sri Lanka.

Darsha took the silver of the event, also bettering her previous timing. She clocked 11.52 seconds. E B Shyla of India won the bronze clocking 11.78 seconds.

Shirin Sultan Kaniz of Bangladesh clocked 13.26 seconds to finish last among the eight participants.

In the men's 5000 metre, Bahadur Prasad of India won the gold with new SAF timing of 14:05.37 minutes, another Indian Gulab Chand took the silver and A Adhikari of Nepal bagged the bronze.

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Medals table

MADRAS, Dec 21: Final medals tally of the 7th SAF Games at the end of the day today:

Country	G	S	B
India	34	18	6
Sri Lanka	6	10	15
Nepal	4	4	3
Pakistan	0	8	12
Bangladesh	0	4	9
Maldives	0	0	1



Some of the 100 Bangladeshi workers who were sent back from Malaysia Wednesday, seen in front of the National Press Club yesterday.

Malaysia sends back 100 from detention camps

By Staff Correspondent

Some 100 Bangladeshis returned home Wednesday night leaving behind the nightmarish experience of prison life in Malaysian detention camps.

After being detained for a period ranging from 12 to 17 months in a camp in the Malaysian province of Zahr Bahr, a group of about 100 Bangladeshi workers were sent back on board a Malaysian Airlines flight on Wednesday midnight.

The returnees while narrating their pains and agony at the Jatya Press Club yesterday told The Daily Star that they were deprived by the recruiting agents of their promised jobs and became subject to ill-treatment in an immigration jail in Malaysia.

When contacted last night, the Secretary of the Ministry of Labour and Manpower Dr Haroon-ur-Rashid, said that the number of detainees in various camps in Malaysia was on the decrease. But he could not confirm off-hand about the returnees who arrived from Malaysia Wednesday.

He said there were now some 3,000 illegal Bangladeshi immigrants in Malaysian detention camps.

Return of these Bangladeshi workers from the detention camps by the Malaysian authorities is seen as a follow-up action of Bangladesh Manpower Minister's recent visit to Malaysia to secure their release.

During his visit to Malaysia last week, Manpower Minister Mir Shawkat Ali requested the Malaysian authorities to send back the detainees by air. They were earlier planning to send the Bangladeshi detainees back by ship.

When his attention was drawn to various allegations raised by the returnees, the Manpower Secretary said sometime in the past innocent unemployed people of this country were lured by a section of dishonest recruiting agents who used to export manpower to Malaysia managing "fluctuated demands" in league with their counterparts in Malaysia.

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S Arabia bans foreigners from trading fruits, vegetables

DUBAI, Dec 21: Saudi Arabia has banned foreigners from working as traders in wholesale fruit and vegetable markets, a Saudi newspaper said today, reports Reuter.

The Al-Eqtisadiyah said foreigners would be barred from trading farm produce and holding clerical jobs in the markets under a plan to gradually replace expatriate workers with nationals.

They can only be employed to clean the markets and load and unload goods, mental jobs shunned by Saudis. Employers violating the ban would have their licences withdrawn, it added.

Expatriates — mostly Indians and Pakistanis — account for 6.2 million of Saudi Arabia's 17 million population.

270 killed as two planes crash

At least 270 people were killed as two planes crashed with more than 280 people on board, report agencies.

An American Boeing exploded near the city of Cali, west of Bogota while the other — an Angolan one crashed in a remote part of southern Angola.

An American Airlines Boeing 757 carrying 153 people apparently crashed and exploded in mountains near the city of Cali, west of Bogota overnight, aviation officials said early yesterday, according to AFP.

There were no immediate reports of survivors.

Civil Aviation Deputy Director Alberto Davila said the plane was carrying 145 passengers and a crew of eight on a flight from the US city of Miami to Cali.

"A fireman living in Buga, 50 kilometers north of Cali... reported hearing a huge explosion at the time of the crash," Davila said.

Other witnesses also reported and explosion followed by a huge fireball in the vicinity of the crash site.

American Airlines spokesman Tim Kincaid told CNN in the United States that flight 965 was carrying 151 passengers and a crew of eight, adding that the airline will not speculate as to the

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AL to resist holding of elections unilaterally

By Staff Correspondent

An emergency meeting of the Awami League Central Working Committee (ALWC) yesterday decided to intensify the on-going agitation programme and resist any government move to hold elections unilaterally.

Chaired by Awami League Chief Sheikh Hasina, the meeting suggested that the present crisis could be resolved only by the immediate resignation of the Prime Minister and a polls under a neutral caretaker government.

Only re-scheduling of the polls does not create an environment of national consensus, the ALWC said in a statement.

The consensus could be reached only after the government accepts the opposition demand for a caretaker government, it added.

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Jatrabari bus fire Driver gives statement to Detective Branch

Star Report

More than two weeks after the alleged patrol bomb attack on the passenger bus at Jatrabari which left at least 12 persons dead, the driver of the Noakhali-bound bus, Shamsu Miah (36), finally reported to the Detective Branch police yesterday.

Police officials are expecting to gather crucial testimony from the driver relating to the brutal attack on the bus.

Since the incident, early this month the driver was reportedly under protection by a vested group involved in fighting over the control of the Syedabad bus terminal in the city.

Police considered that the statement of Shamsu, the driver of Green Star bus, might open some avenues to find out the actual criminals involved in the heinous attack on the bus on Dec 4, according to a senior police official.

Shamsu came to the DB office at Mirza Road alongwith another person at about 3 pm, according to police sources.

The driver was not formally arrested till last night but police continued to interrogate him, the sources added.

Shamsu, who hails from Chakhal under Noakhali district, used to reside in a mess in Syedabad terminal area, according to sources.

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Student commits suicide in city

By Staff Correspondent

A student reportedly committed suicide by firing in his head with his father's firearm at his residence at Gopal Shaha Lane under Sutrapur thana in the city early yesterday.

Amanullah alias Tushar, 21, died on the spot when he fired in his head at about 4 am. Police recovered the body from the residence and sent it to the Mitford Hospital for autopsy.

The cause of the suicide could not be known immediately.

Tushar who studied at Madras in India came to Dhaka a couple of weeks ago, police said. He was seen frustrated for the last two days, said police quoting his family members.

Tushar's father has filed an unnatural death case with the Sutrapur thana.

Queen asks Charles, Di to call it a day



File photo dated July 29, 1981, shows Prince Charles and Princess of Wales on the balcony of Buckingham Palace on their wedding day. — AFP/UNB photo

LONDON, Dec 21: Queen Elizabeth II has told Prince Charles and Princess Diana they should divorce soon. The Sun newspaper reported in today's edition, report AP, Reuter.

Independent Television News said it had confirmation of the report and that the Prince's spokesman said Charles has agreed.

During her now-famous television interview a month ago Diana said she did not want a divorce. She indicated concern for her children was the main reason.

A Buckingham Palace spokesman was not immediately available.

Diana, 34, met earlier in the day with Prime Minister John Major at her apartments in Kensington Palace, but neither of their offices would reveal what was discussed. Buckingham Palace only said it was 'part of the regular contact' that the Princess and other royals have with the government.

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Pak army Gen, 3 others charged with sedition

ISLAMABAD, Dec 21: An army general and three senior officers arrested in September over an alleged plot to overthrow Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and impose Islamic law in Pakistan have been charged with sedition, the defence ministry said here today, reports AFP.

Major General Zabeerul Islam Abbasi, Brigadier Mustansar Billah, Colonel Muhammad Azad Minhas and Colonel Inayatullah Khan will face a court martial for violation of the Pakistan Army Act and the penal code, a ministry statement said.

They are accused of "conduct to the prejudice of good order and military discipline, conspiring to wage war against Pakistan and attempting to seduce any person from his allegiance to the government," it said.

The four arrested in late September will be given "full opportunity" to engage defence counsel of their own choice, it said.

The court martial, to be headed by a major general, will include four other officers of Brigadier and Colonel rank.

The alleged coup plotters intended to enforce a "self-styled shariah" (Islamic law) and Abbasi was to become the chief of army staff and Ameer ul Momeneen (head of a theocratic state), he said.

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Dec 21: Around 30 persons were injured and 100 vehicles damaged when a large number of agitating hawkers went into a rampage after a pitched battle with police who launched an eviction drive against the vendors this evening near Bipani Bitan, witnesses said.

The injured were admitted into hospital and private clinics for treatment.

The trouble, which began from 6:30 pm, lasted for over two hours in one kilometer area from Amtola to Station Road while traffic movement came to a halt as the agitating vendors stoned the passing vehicles indiscriminately, witnesses said.

There was also chase and counter chase between police and the hawkers. Police later resorted to lathicharge to disperse the protesting hawkers.

However, police said none was arrested in connection with the incident.