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BNP begins membership renewal drive today

By Nazmul Ashraf
 The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) begins a membership-renewal-and-collection drive from today with a view to strengthening and consolidating the main opposition party.
 Party chief and Leader of the Opposition in Jatiya Sangsad Begum Khaleda Zia is scheduled to kick-off the drive by renewing her own membership at her Minto Road official residence in the city at 3 pm. BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan said.
 Other central and city unit leaders of the party are expected to attend the programme, to be followed by an Iftar party.
 Talking to The Daily Star last night, Mannan Bhuiyan further said that the drive, beginning from the capital, would be gradually expanded all over the country.
 Asked about the purpose of the programme, the BNP leader said, "It's a yearly programme of the party taken with the aim of bringing about discipline and injecting fresh vigour in the rank and file of the party as well as to attract new members."
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Micro-credit summit opens in Washington today

WASHINGTON, Feb 1: Bangladesh comes into the spotlight on global plane when Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina opens the first-ever World Micro-credit Summit beginning here tomorrow report agencies.
 The three-day summit is seen as a global campaign with a boost from US President Bill Clinton, to raise billions of dollars to provide credit to the poor.
 A fund of 21.6 billion US dollars is expected to be announced from the summit to provide small loan to world's 100 million poorest people by the year 2005.
 Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, one of the co-chairpersons of the summit, will arrive here this (Saturday) evening from Miami.
 US First Lady Rodham Hillary Clinton, who has taken a personal initiative for the meet, is also one of the four co-chairpersons to the summit. Two others are Queen Sophia of Spain and Former Japanese prime minister Tsutomu Hata.
 The organisers said the summit would discuss the Grameen Bank model to eradicate poverty from the world by providing loan to 10 crore poor families of the world through micro-lending system, a success story of Bangladesh.
 The summit is expected to attract more than 2,000 people from 100 countries who believe making small loans, often no more than a few hundred dollars, is a good way to help the poor improve their living standards.
 Micro-credit programmes provide small loans to the very poor to help them start or expand small self-employment enterprises. The loans are usually for less than 1,000 dollars and sometimes for as little as 4 dollars. According to the World Bank, microenterprises are typically informal sector businesses with five workers or fewer and with fixed assets valued at less than 10,000 dollars.
 The summit "Declaration and Plan of Action" that participants will be asked to approve, notes that despite impressive results in countries like

Bangladesh and Bolivia — and extremely low default rates worldwide — existing programmes reach only about eight million of an estimated 100 million families who could benefit from access to even tiny amounts of credit.
 The goal outlined in the summit declaration and plan of action is to make microenterprise lending available to the remaining 92 million needy families — 88 million from developing countries and four million from industrialised nations. It defines the "poorest" families in the developing world as the bottom 50 per cent of those living below the poverty line. In industrialised countries, the plan of action focuses on all persons living below the poverty line.
 The plan also pledges to target the world's poorest women, many of whom earn far less than their male counterparts and own no capital or land. Experts stressed that providing credit to mothers is one of the most effective ways to alleviate poverty.
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 See Page 12 Col 7

We have to learn to dream together, says Prof Yunus

From A Correspondent
 NEW YORK, Feb 1: Professor Muhammad Yunus received a standing ovation at the United Nations, where he spoke on Friday to a packed audience on the creditworthiness of the poor.
 "We have to learn to dream together. Soon we will find the possibilities are limitless," he said, referring to the challenges he faced in setting up the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh and the successes he has achieved there in bringing credit to the poor.
 The speech, made at the United Nations Trusteeship Council chamber, was sponsored by several United Nations agencies, NGOs and the Bangladesh mission in New York.
 Yunus used the occasion to vigorously defend credit as a human right and the need to extend it even to the poorest segments of the society, two days before the micro-credit summit scheduled to take place in Washington. "This gives the poor self-respect, this empowers them, and in the process creates new job opportunities and removes poverty," he said.
 Professor Yunus said the Grameen experience was being replicated in other countries.
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Month-long Ekushey programmes begin

By Staff Correspondent
 Programmes of Amar Ekushey began yesterday.
 On the 21st day of February in 1952 some valiant sons of this land embraced martyrdom for establishing Bangla as the state language of the then Pakistan.
 On the inaugural day of the month-long programmes, the Bangla Academy organised a painting competition for children yesterday morning. Artist Kazi Abul Kasem inaugurated the competition while Prof Monsur Musa, director of the Bangla Academy delivered the address of welcome.
 The week long lecture series will conclude on February 8. There will be no programmes on February 9, 10 and 11 because of the Eid-ul-Fitr.
 The Ekushey Book Fair which has now become the main attraction of the Academy's programmes will be opened on February 16.
 Meanwhile, a two-day poetry festival organised by Jatiya Kabita Parishad, was inaugurated yesterday at the Teachers Students Centre of Dhaka University with the slogan: "Poetry, the eternal power of freedom."
 The inaugural session was addressed by poet Belal Chowdhury, Sazzad Kadir, Muhammad Samad, Rabiul Hussain, Ragib Ali and Mohan Rathan. A message from Begum Sufia Kamil was read out in the inaugural session. Poet Sayed Shamsul Haque presided.
 A number of poets from the festival will be invited to participate in the Ekushey Book Fair.
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Draft nat'l policy on AIDS approved

The draft national policy on AIDS has been approved at a meeting with Health Minister Salahuddin Yusuf in the chair, reports BSS.
 The approval was made at the second meeting of National AIDS Committee held in the city yesterday.
 The meeting decided to launch a "media campaign" on the negative aspects of "professional blood donation" at different hospitals.
 It also decided to submit a full-fledged recommendation to the National AIDS Committee on safe blood transfusion in the country by February 25.
 National AIDS Committee member and State Minister for Health Prof M Amanullah, Health Secretary Mohammad Ali, Dr Mustafa Jalal Mohiuddin and National Professor Nurul Islam were present in the meeting.
 Tax officials' ultimatum
 Tax officials yesterday gave a 48-hour ultimatum to arrest the people responsible for assaulting one of their colleagues, reports UNB.
 The ultimatum was declared at a rally of tax officers and employees at their head office at Kakrail in the city. Later, they brought out a procession that ended in front of the Jatiya Press Club.
 On Tuesday, an assistant tax commissioner was assaulted allegedly by Ansanullah Moni, a renowned film producer and owner of Rajmoni Complex, over his reported non-payment of tax.
 7 GF leaders resign
 Seven central leaders including two former members of parliament of Gano Forum (GF) yesterday tendered their resignations to the party president, a press release signed by Nuh-ul-Alam Lenin said last night, reports BSS.
 Those who resigned from the primary membership of the party are president member and former MP Shamsuddola.
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 Pak elections tomorrow
 ISLAMABAD, Feb 1: Pakistani politicians hurled themselves into a final day of election campaigning today, but voters seemed unconvinced that they will tackle rampant corruption or solve Pakistan's economic problems, reports Reuter.
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Abahani opener Javed Omar Belim Golla makes an abortive attempt to sweep Mohammedan leg-spinner Shahed Mehmood (not in picture) during yesterday's Premier Division super league match at the Dhaka Stadium. Abahani won by six wickets. (Story on Page 10). —Star photo

BB governor tells ERF workshop Taka may be made fully convertible next fiscal

Bangladesh is expected to go for full currency convertibility in capital account in a bid to attract full confidence of overseas investors in a maximum liberal atmosphere, the Bangladesh Bank Governor said yesterday, reports UNB.
 "We are preparing grounds this financial year for the capital account convertibility. If everything goes well, we are hoping to step in the full convertibility of the Taka in capital account next fiscal year," Lutfar Rahman Sarker said.
 Opening a workshop on Convertibility of Taka at the National Press Club, the central bank governor ruled out any immediate plan of devaluation as it may adversely affect the current low level of inflation, now 2.6 per cent.
 The overall economy is also doing well with exports marking rise and imports, mainly of consumer goods, registering fall. "We may consider adjustment in future for further growth in export," he said.
 Referring to the allegations that foreign portfolio investors siphoned off a huge amount from the capital market, the governor said the outflow of portfolio investment had totalled 123 million US dollars against inflow of 23 million in three months of boom.
 The total inflow of portfolio foreign investment had amounted to about 200 million US dollars since the country's capital market was opened for foreign investment in early 1992.
 On the convertibility issues Sarker said the conditions for full convertibility would be set if the political stability continued and the economy faced no internal or external shock.
 The government is trying to build a foreign-exchange reserve of 2.3 billion US dollars to protect the economy from any potential risk in the fully convertible currency regime, the central bank chief said.
 "If we can build a foreign-exchange reserve of two billion dollars, we will consider it safe and a go-ahead signal," he told the workshop, arranged by the Economic Reporters Forum (ERF).
 See Page 12 Col 7

US report critical of HR abuse in Bangladesh

From A Correspondent
 NEW YORK, Feb 1: The 1996 human rights report issued Thursday by the US State Department in Washington gives Bangladesh a mixed review. It praises Bangladesh for holding peaceful transfer of power and strengthening democratic institutions, but chides for police brutality and denial of many fundamental rights.
 Describing Bangladesh as a multi-party parliamentary democracy, the report noted the high turnout in the June 1996 elections, which it said were deemed "free and fair".
 The report lauded the judiciary for displaying a high degree of independence, especially at the higher levels. "The judiciary often rules against the government in criminal, civil and even politically controversial cases," it said. It noted that the government generally respected freedom of the press. It also gave the government marks for making efforts to improve the status of women and children.
 However, it pointed out that violence, often resulting in killings, was a pervasive element in the country's political process. Although the constitution prohibits torture, police routinely employ psychological and physical torture and other abuse during arrests and interrogations. "Police brutality occurs regularly and government inaction allows it to continue," the report noted. It cited several incidents in which police used abusive practices and tortured.
 See Page 12 Col 1

Col Waliur Rahman new IG (Prison)

Star Report
 Col Waliur Rahman has been appointed Inspector General (IG) of Prisons on deputation, according to sources in the Ministry of Establishment.
 The letter of his appointment was issued by the ministry on January 30 and he is likely to take over soon, the sources added.
 The post of the IG (Prisons) was vacant since August last year. The DIG (Prisons), Dhaka Central Jail, had been discharged.
 See Page 12 Col 7

Cross-border insurgencies Dhaka, Delhi agree to exchange information

By M Anwarul Haq
 Home secretaries of Bangladesh and India will meet in New Delhi this month for detailed discussions on cross-border insurgencies, terrorism, smuggling and related issues.
 This was decided at the meeting of the Joint Working Group (JWG) that concluded in the Indian capital on Friday. The four-day meeting was held from January 28 to 31 between officials of the home and foreign ministries of the two countries and representatives of the BDR and BSF.
 According to official sources, an agreed minutes were signed after the conclusion of the JWG meeting, the first after it was re-activated recently.
 The meeting reviewed the existing situation relating to cross-border insurgency, border crimes and smuggling. The meeting decided to exchange information between the two countries to "take proper measures to combat and contain the situation involving insurgency and terrorism," said an official source.
 At the meeting, detailed discussion was also held on eliminating insurgencies like those of the ULFA, NSCN and Bodo in the seven northeastern states of India and that of the Shanbhahini in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Steps for "intensifying the return" of the Chakmas staying in camps in the Indian state of Tripura were also discussed, the sources said.
 Officials of both the countries decided to draw up a detailed policy-paper for eliminating...
 See Page 12 Col 8

Illegal Bangladeshis in Malaysia No deportation till repatriation deal

By Reaz Ahmed
 There are about 1200 Bangladeshi workers in detention camps in Malaysia, he added.
 Referring to repatriation of some 25,000 Bangladeshi workers from the United Arab Emirates few months back, the state minister said, the government had arranged special flights to bring them back home.
 If not arrested or penalized for offences other than illegal stay, all Bangladeshis, having no valid documents would be brought back home "to pave the way for fresh export of manpower to Malaysia," Mannan said.
 "We can't afford to sympathize with the illegal migrants at the cost of suspension of fresh manpower export to that country through legal process," he said.
 See Page 12 Col 3

7 GF leaders resign

Seven central leaders including two former members of parliament of Gano Forum (GF) yesterday tendered their resignations to the party president, a press release signed by Nuh-ul-Alam Lenin said last night, reports BSS.
 Those who resigned from the primary membership of the party are president member and former MP Shamsuddola.
 See Page 12 Col 8

BOC Bangladesh Limited
Shareholders' Announcement
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING POSTPONED
 Due to circumstances outside the control of the Company, the 24th Annual General Meeting scheduled for Sunday, 2 February 1997 at Senakunja, Dhaka Cantonment, has been postponed until further notice. Shareholders will be notified of the fresh date, venue, etc. in due course. The Board deeply regrets the inconvenience.
 By order of the Board
Azizur Rashid
 Company Secretary
 30 January 1997
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 Dhaka-1212

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