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## Ramadan begins tomorrow

The holy Ramadan begins tomorrow as the moon of the Arabic month was not sighted anywhere in the country yesterday, reports UNB.

The holy Shab-e-Quader will be observed on the night of January 26.

The decision was taken at a meeting of the National Moon Sighting Committee held at the Islamic Foundation conference room yesterday with State Minister for Religious Affairs Maulana Muhammad Nurul Islam in the chair.

After reviewing the information received from district administrations and Met Office, the meeting observed that the moon of Ramadan was not sighted anywhere in Bangladesh yesterday.

AFP reports: The month of Ramadan began yesterday in most Arab countries.

The countries included Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria and the United Arab Emirates.

## Essentials' prices make 'holy' jump

By Staff Correspondent

Prices of essentials have increased sharply in the city's kitchen markets on the eve of the holy month Ramadan.

Beef price jumped to Tk 80 per kg yesterday from Tk 65-70 a day before.

Mentionably, authorities of the Dhaka City Corporation, at a meeting with beef sellers on Tuesday, had fixed beef price at Tk 65 per kg.

The Consumers Association of Bangladesh in a press release last night said mutton was being sold at Tk 120-140 against the DCC-set price of Tk 110 per kg.

Price of gram, the main item for *litter*, increased by 5 to 6 taka per kg and was being sold at Tk 28-32. Price of masur (pulses) however remained stable at Tk 35.

Consumers paid Tk 3-5 more for one litre of soybean which was sold at Tk 55-58.

Prices of tomato and khira, widely used to prepare salad, have increased significantly. Tomato was sold at Tk 20-24 per kg against Tk 10-15 a week ago. Lemon price increased by Tk 2-3 for each four.

Price of Muri (puffed-rice), increased by 4 to 5 taka, selling at the 36 per kg yesterday against its previous price of Tk 32.

Prices of onion and garlic See Page 12 Col 5

## Inside Today

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## A Prognosis for Bangladesh at 50

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## Sehri, Iftar timings

Ramadan	Dec/Jan	Sheri	Iftar
-	31	5:17	-
1	1	5:17	5:26
2	2	5:17	5:27

# ESCAP may be urged to reroute Highway thru' Astagram

By Mizan Ali

Bangladesh is likely to suggest rerouting of the Asian Highway (AH) that passes through its territory, sources in the Ministry of Communications said.

The ministry is considering proposing a route which would pass through Astagram in Sylhet on Bangladesh side then enter Karimganj in India and through Shilchar and Imphal reach Tamu in Burma.

The proposal will be placed before the ESCAP requesting it to change the previously suggested AH route through Tamabil in Bangladesh, which was to pass through Guahati in India and then reach Tamu in Burma.

"The change will reduce the distance between Myanmar and Bangladesh by about 400 km in the Indian territory," said a ministry source, adding that the terrain between Guahati and Tamu is almost inaccessible.

An ESCAP official told The Daily Star that rerouting of the AH would be possible only if an agreement among the neighbouring countries was reached and the newly identified routes fulfilled the set standards of the organisation.

Such changes are approved in the ESCAP review meeting held once every five years and the next is scheduled for

1999/2000.

Bangladesh side will also propose another route through Chittagong and Cox's Bazar for its AH link with Myanmar, while the Myanmar authorities have asked for 'only one link' with Bangladesh.

The ESCAP official said Myanmar had asked for its link with Bangladesh through Tamu, 490 km east of Sylhet, through India.

Myanmar has taken up a project for a motorable road to connect the capital its Rakhaine province with that of Yangon. The project is likely to be completed by the year

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## Deficit financing

# Big sale of savings bonds brings relief

By Inam Ahmed

The government's deficit financing received a big relief as its plan to rope in money from the sales of savings certificates clicked.

The net sale of savings certificates in the first two months of this fiscal year, 1997-98, stood at Tk 437.76 crore as against Tk 299.07 crore during the corresponding period of the previous year.

The outstanding level of borrowing through savings instruments at the end of August this year stood at Tk 9742 crore, denoting an increase of Tk 437.76 crore or 4.7 per cent over that in June.

This factor along with a lower ADP and current expenditure has enabled the government to retire its loans to the exchequer, a departure from the usual trend of borrowing from

the banking system. The significant sale of savings instruments spurred by an interest increase had even levelled off the effect of revenue shortfall for the time being.

During the first two months of this fiscal year, the government had been able to retire Tk 104.90 crore loan while it had borrowed Tk 268.10 crore during the corresponding period last year.

The government's net borrowing from the banking system peaked during 1996-97 when it reached Tk 1707 crore, surpassing the previous year's Tk 1696 crore.

Meanwhile, the total deficit financing of the government during July-August this year stood significantly lower at Tk 711 crore as compared to Tk

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## '97 saw 105 hartals

One hundred and five days of hartals, both at national and local levels, were observed in the country during the outgoing year, 1997, following the past tradition, reports UNB.

The number of country-wide hartals was six while it was 99 at the local level, according to figures compiled by the Coordination Council for Human Rights in Bangladesh (CCHRB).

The data shows that July-September was the most strike-prone period when four nationwide and 40 local hartals were observed in the country.

The hartals were called mainly by political parties, their student organisations, workers unions, business bodies and different local organisations.

Following is a list of country-wide hartals observed in 1997:

March 23: BNP called dawn- See Page 12 Col 8



Prokrichi brought out a procession in the city yesterday protesting the upgradation of 329 posts in the BCS Administration Cadre. — Star photo

## Brawing 'icy death' for a better life

LONDON, Dec 30: British customs officials yesterday discovered 16 illegal immigrants including one Bangladeshi hiding in a refrigerated lorry loaded with frozen chips at the southern port of Dover, the Home Office said, reports AFP.

Mike O'Brien, Home Office Immigration Minister, said: "These people could easily have met an icy death. They are extremely lucky to be alive thanks to the vigilance of the customs officers."

The 16 men — 15 from Sri Lanka and one from Bangladesh — were squeezed into a tiny space just 60 centimetres (two feet) high between the base of the truck and the refrigerated compartment.

The group was discovered during a search of lorries coming from France that were disembarking at the port.

# Prokrichi submits memo to PM 2 more cadre assocs to abstain from work on Jan 8

By Special Correspondent

The BCS (Economic) Officers Association and the BCS Association of Finance Services have decided to abstain from work on January 8 demanding parity between the BCS (Administration) cadre and other cadres.

The Association of Finance Services combines BCS cadres in Customs and Excise, Audit and Accounts and Taxation services.

Their programme will coincide with the Prokrichi-BCS Central Coordination Council's programme to abstain from work on January 8, announced on Monday.

The Prokrichi-BCS Central Coordination Committee sub-

mitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister yesterday demanding parity of pay scales for all cadre services.

A procession organised by the Prokrichi which groups engineers, agriculturists and doctors, marked towards the Prime Minister's office (PMO) to submit the memorandum but it was stopped by police near the PMO.

An eleven-member delegation was permitted to submit the memorandum which was received by the PM's political adviser Dr S A Malek. Dr Malek told the delegation that he would look into their demand and also meet separately with leaders of the cadres, sources

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## JRC team to monitor flow at Hardinge Bridge point today

PABNA, Dec 30: A four-member JRC team of Indian water experts, along with its Bangladeshi counterpart, will jointly monitor the flow at Hardinge Bridge point in the river Padma tomorrow, reports UNB.

Earlier, a four-member JRC team of Bangladesh water experts went to Farakka Point in India on Monday for joint monitoring of the Ganges flow.

Deputy Director Monwarul Islam and Assistant Director Anisur Rahman of Bangladesh Water Development Board will accompany the Indian team while monitoring the flow of the Padma at Hardinge Bridge point.

## Girl stabbed to death in city

By Staff Correspondent

A teenage girl was stabbed to death allegedly by a local youth near her residence at Zafrabad under Mohammadpur thana in the city yesterday, police said.

The dead was identified as Sadia Afrin alias Lovely, 18, who passed the HSC examination from Lalmatia Women's College this year. She was the daughter of one Abdur Razzak, reportedly an employee of the Public Works Department.

The youth, Nasir, intercepted her rickshaw, had an altercation, and at one stage stabbed her in the throat and abdomen and fled away. People nearby rushed to the spot and took her to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital but doctors there de-

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## Youth beaten up, thrown on road from car

By Staff Correspondent

Some unidentified people threw an youth out of a car at Road Number 3 of Dhanomdi Residential Area last night.

The victim, in his late teens, appeared to have been savagely beaten. Police took him to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

A white car slowed down at the kerb near the Mirpur Road and seriously injured youth was tossed out on the pavement. The car then sped away.

Police retrieved from him an empty wallet with some papers. Later, they traced the youth's parents at Lake Circus, Kalabagan. Further details were not available.

## Police warns New Year revellers

Dhaka Metropolitan Police warned of stern action against the New Year revellers who will engage in unruly activities during the celebration on 31st night, reports UNB.

This year's 31st December night coincides with the beginning of holy month of Ramadan.

On every New Year's Eve, some youths commit public nuisance by spraying coloured water, exploding crackers and behaving indecently with girls, specially in the posh Gulshan, Banani and Baridhara areas.

Such activities are punishable offences, a DMP press release said, adding that those will be dealt with strong hand.

# Sonia setting strategies to galvanise ailing Cong

NEW DELHI, Dec 30: Sonia Gandhi opened talks today on strategies to save the ailing Congress Party in upcoming national elections, report agencies.

Sonia Gandhi, who finally agreed on Monday to campaign for the once-dominant Congress, met its president Sitaram Kesari at her residence, witnesses said.

The Congress argues the charisma of Sonia Gandhi, who had been ignoring appeals to

See also page 8

join politics since her husband's 1991 assassination, would 'electrify and galvanise' the party ahead of the February-March polls.

Credited with fighting for India's independence, the Congress ruled the nation for almost 40 years after the country achieved its freedom from the British half a century ago.

But the party currently faces its biggest challenge from resurgent Hindu nationalists

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A Sikh supporter holding a poster of Sonia Gandhi during a rally outside her residence in New Delhi yesterday. — AP/UNB photo

# Bid to snatch ballot box Police firing kills one in Brahmanbaria

One person was killed and four others were injured in polls violence at a centre in Sonarampur union of Brahmanbaria district yesterday, reports UNB.

Police and witnesses said five supporters of a chairman candidate sustained bullet injuries when police opened fire to resist them from snatching ballot box from Kanainagar Primary School centre at 3:30 pm.

Of the injured, Babul Miah, 35, of Morichakandi under Bancharampur thana of the district died on way to Sadar Hospital.

The injured people were identified as Masud Miah, 18, Idris Ali, 40, Mominul Islam, 22, and Mostafa, 30. They were admitted to Sadar hospital.

Our Staff Correspondent quoting sources at the Election Commission reported that polling in at least eight centres

were cancelled due to electoral violence yesterday, the 22nd day of the ongoing Union Parishad election across the country.

Election was scheduled to be held in 690 centres in 73 unions of 10 thanas under nine districts on the day.

The centres where polling was cancelled are one in Dhukuria Bera union of Belkuchi thana under Sirajganj district, one in Niguary union of Gafargaon thana under Mymensingh, one each in Sonarampur, Sharfullah Kandi and Tejkhali unions of Bancharampur thana and three in Salimabad union of the same thana under Brahmanbaria district.

Meanwhile, repolling was held peacefully in 33 centres of 21 unions under nine thanas of six districts yesterday, the sources said.

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# Saga of Radio-TV autonomy-II Proposed private channels remain shelved

By Reaz Ahmad

Prospective media entrepreneurs will now have to wait a longer time than expected for starting private television channels in the country as the process is being lingered on the pretext of creating a 'level playing field' for the lone state-run television, BTV.

While the viewers fed up with boring BTV programmes for years, are desperately looking for other options for information and entertainment, the authorities concerned are delaying the starting of private television, in the fear that BTV would not be in a position to survive in the competitive environment that would follow.

Talking to The Daily Star recently State Minister for Information Prof Abu Sayeed said that the government would not allow entrepreneurs to seek licences for opening private channels before March next year. But the state minister had said on September 11 that private television channels would be allowed to operate as soon as reports of the two committees — one on legal aspect and the other on policy affairs — were finalised.

Both the committees, formed on August 21, submitted their reports about two months back. Things did not progress much since then. Taking the opinion of a good number of TV viewers,

chosen on a random basis, The Daily Star correspondent got an impression that with every passing day more and more people in Dhaka are opting for foreign channels because of what they said 'no-option' situation on the home channel.

The legal committee headed by a joint secretary of the Law Ministry gave its brief report saying that there was no legal bar in operating private television channels in Bangladesh provided necessary approval is obtained from the International Telecommunication Union for specific channel frequencies.

The policy formulation committee headed by the Director General of BTV also submitted a detailed report covering various aspects of private TV channels. As per the report, licence for opening a TV channel could be awarded to both local and joint-venture entrepreneurs. The licence would be initially for a five-year term, subject to extension.

It recommended constituting a separate regulatory body to monitor whether the private channels properly follow the guidelines, set by the government, in telecasting programmes. The report suggested making it mandatory for private channels to air BTV's News at Eight or News at Ten. These

channels should also telecast government pressnotes and addresses to the nation by the President and the Prime Minister.

The report further said that there should be announcements by the government through the Bangladesh Betar, BTV and newspapers, when it starts giving licences to private TV channels.

It suggested that maximum 20 per cent of the total air time could be devoted to advertisements. For telecasting any foreign programme, prior approval from the government would be required, the report said.

Abu Sayeed said, "Bangladesh Television will not be able to compete if private channels are allowed now without improving the quality

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# Source of Biman's hijack alert still a mystery

By Special Correspondent

Bangladesh Biman has ordered an enquiry into the delay of its Dhaka-bound Airbus A 310-300 from Calcutta which was stopped from taking off on schedule on Monday following a security alert.

The security at Dum Dum airport asked the Captain of the aircraft not to take off, 10 minutes before he was preparing to fly back home, saying that suspected hijackers had boarded it.

Biman sources said all passengers with their hand luggage were off loaded and they underwent a thorough search including frisking of their bodies.

After the probe by police, the aircraft was allowed to take off, more than one and half an hour, behind schedule, which also delayed the aircraft's next flight to Kuala Lumpur.

But the source of the hijack alert were yet to be known.

The passengers had complained of a rough ride during the probing, including body search for the alleged hijackers, by Indian police.

Meanwhile, the six-member committee probing the crash-landing of the F-28 aircraft at Sylhet last week had interviewed the crew again for further information on the accident.

Two surveyors from Lloyds, undertaker of the F-28, had completed their preliminary inspection of the crash-landing site, a mud flat, eight km from Sylhet airport.

They are likely to meet the Sadharan Bima officials today to sort out the insurance of six million dollars.

The domestic service of the Biman, crippled by the accident, operated four flights yesterday to Sylhet, Rajshahi, Syedpur and Jessore. An Airbus

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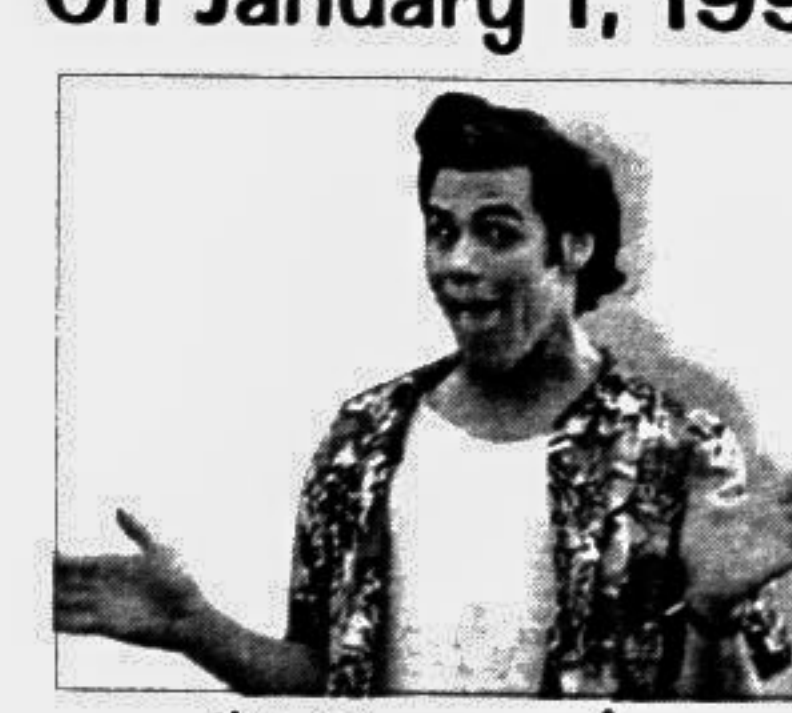


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