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## Euro is born

BRUSSELS, Jan 1: Europe entered a new era today as 250 million people in 11 countries adopted a single currency which will sweep away their national money and give the continent a powerful influence on the world stage, reports Reuters.

The euro was born as the stroke of midnight ushered in the New Year, giving a huge swath of Europe a common currency for the first time since the Roman empire.

European Union leaders hailed the launch of the euro, which many believe will come to rival the US dollar as a trading and reserve currency, as historic and a great day for Europe.

### See also page 8

Euro notes and coins will not circulate until 2002. Until then, the currency will be used mainly for electronic transactions, consumers will be able to have euro-denominated bank and credit card accounts, mortgages and travellers' and personal cheques.

Nonetheless, the euro is now the official currency of a vast area encompassing Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain.

## Bishwa Ijtema begins Jan 30

GAZIPUR, Jan 1: The Bishwa Ijtema of Tabligi Jamaat will begin on January 30 at Tongi here, Ijtema Committee sources told BSS today.

Lakhs of Muslim devotees including 10,000 foreigners, are expected to attend the three-day, religious gathering.

Ijtema Committee sources said the work to set up tents is going on in full swing on the bank of the river Turag, the venue of the Bishwa Ijtema. It will be the 33rd Ijtema in the country, the second largest Muslim religious congregation after the holy Hajj, since 1966.

## Another accused in Sohel murder case arrested

By Staff Correspondent  
Detective Branch of police arrested another accused in Sohel Chowdhury murder case from the city's Asad Gate area under Tejaon thana yesterday morning.

The arrested was identified as Harun-ur-Rashid alias Liton, 26, son of Tayab Ali Akand. Film actor Sohel Chowdhury was gunned down in front of Club Tramps in the city's Banani area on December 18.

Police said he will be produced before court today. The arrested person was charged with a number of cases, including terrorism, toll collection, and murder filed with Dhanmondi and Moham-madpur thanas, police added.

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## Business

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Pak economy enters '99 with fall in growth rate  
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## Prayer Timings

January 2

	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-17	5-22
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-00	4-15
Maghrib	5-27	5-29
Esha	7-00	7-15

Source: Islamic Foundation

## Shetri, Iftar timings

Ramadan	Jan	Shetri	Iftar
13	2	—	5-27
14	3	5-17	5-28
15	4	5-17	5-28

## Four city corporations and municipalities Polls schedules will be announced by Jan 20

By Nurul Kabir

Elections in the country's four city corporations and 147 municipalities are expected to be held sometime in the last week of February.

The Election Commission will announce the polls schedules before the Eid-ul-Fitr, likely to be observed on January 20.

"We are planning to hold the mayoral polls as well as the municipal elections in the last week of February", Chief Election Commissioner Mohammad Abu Hena told The Daily Star yesterday. "We will announce the schedules during the month of Ramadan."

The three member Election Commission will hold a meeting tomorrow to finalise the election schedules and the date when those will be announced.

EC sources said.

The EC is planning to hold municipal polls first. "Our preparations regarding the municipal polls are already there," a highly placed source in the EC Secretariat said. "Elections in the 147 municipalities will be staggered over three days and the mayoral polls will be held on a single day."

However, mayoral polls are to be held by April 3 this year. The municipal polls were due in February last year but could not be held in time due to a writ petition against a certain amendment to an electoral law. The last municipal polls were held on January 30, 1993.

According to the amended provision, the government would enjoy the right to appoint

a bureaucrat to run the municipalities for the period between expiry of the tenure of an elected body and taking over charge by another elected body.

The association of municipal chairmen found it unconstitutional and submitted a writ petition in the Supreme Court which is yet to be settled.

With the tenure of the elected municipal bodies over, the Attorney General's office and the lawyer of appellant prayed for an interim order of the court so that the polls could be held pending disposing of the constitutional contention.

The court entertained the appeal in September last year and asked the government to hold the polls by March 19 this year.

## Oust-govt movement after Eid: Khaleda

Leader of the Opposition in parliament Begum Khaleda Zia yesterday declared that a "patriotic government" would be formed by ousting the "autocratic and corrupt" regime through vigorous agitation after Eid, reports UNB.

She came up with the statement as her party colleagues at the celebrations of the founding anniversary of BNP's student wing billed 1999 as the year for removing Awami League from power.

The people have lost confidence in the tyrant government. It has failed to run the state, the BNP chief said.

Begum Zia was addressing a function on the occasion of 20th founding anniversary of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal at the Diploma Engineers Institution premises in the afternoon.

She asked her student activists to play a pivotal role in this "critical situation when country's economy and independence are in jeopardy because of the evil doings of hegemonist forces."

"Launch a vigorous movement defying all sorts of repression to save the countrymen from the clutches of this gov-

ernment and foil the ruling party's blueprint to make Bangladesh subservient to a neighbouring country," Begum Zia told the students.

"Only observance of founding anniversary won't do," she said and asked the JCD leaders to take the lead in mobilising other small student organisations.

"I believe you'll be victorious in anti-government movement as the people are with you," she said issuing the directive.

Hoisting national flag and releasing a bunch of coloured balloons she opened the anniversary celebrations amidst clapping and slogans at 3:50 pm.

Acting president of JCD Manjur Elahi hoisted the party flag.

She said the voice of JCD could not be gagged with repression and detaining its leaders and workers as is proven in today's spontaneous assembly.

Begum Zia said the ruling party thought that JCD would not be able to celebrate its founding anniversary if its president Habibun Nabi Sohel and general secretary Nasiruddin were arrested.

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## 2 factions of Demra BNP clash

Some leaders and activists of BNP including former MP Salahuddin Ahmed were assaulted yesterday evening by a group of young men in front of the official residence of leader of the Opposition Begum Khaleda Zia, reports UNB.

The attack was reportedly the result of an internal feud between Nabiullah and Salahuddin groups of the party's Demra thana unit.

City Ward Commissioner Nabiullah was made convener of the party's Demra thana unit on Wednesday, but Salahuddin reportedly refused to accept the new committee.

However, a party press release issued by Ehsanul Kabir, Information and Research Secretary of BNP, said government-backed miscreants carried out the attack.

The miscreants swooped on the BNP activists including Salahuddin Ahmed and damaged some vehicles parked on the road in front of the residence, it said.

Meanwhile, Our Staff Correspondent adds: BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan in a statement alleged

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## Opinion poll Shahabuddin top favourite to city dwellers

By Staff Correspondent

President Shahabuddin Ahmed is the most favourite personality to the people of Dhaka.

According to an opinion poll, he is followed by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, former president HM Ershad, Leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia and Grameen Bank founder Dr Mohammad Yunus.

The poll, conducted on December 25 and 26, 1998 by the Centre For Sustainable Development (CSD), says that 56.6 per cent of the city dwellers like Shahabuddin most, which is lower than 72.7 per cent in 1997.

Hasina is the second most liked person with 44.2 per cent, lower from 50.2 per cent in the previous year.

Ershad is most favourite to 34.7 per cent, compared to 23.5 per cent in the previous year, the opinion poll says.

Khaleda is most favourite to 31.4 per cent, against 31.8 per cent in 1997.

Yunus is the only non-political personality who is most liked by 31.6 per cent people.

The opinion poll covered 523 respondents from different professions and occupations but had from both the sexes in different areas of the city.

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Mad about you

This lehenga is up for grabs at a staggering Tk 1.25 lakh at a shop in the city's Gulshan area as Eid shopping gradually takes a frenzied turn.

—Star photo

## Pak bid to export power despite acute crisis?

ISLAMABAD, Jan 1: Pakistan's Power Minister, Gohar Ayub Khan, has expressed apprehensions about the possibility of exporting power to India as Islamabad is currently faced with acute power shortage, reports PTI.

While some consultants claimed that Pakistan had surplus power to export to India, a few say it would not be possible because WAPDA, Pakistan's main power distribution company, is catering to the needs of only 35 per cent of the total population, the power minister told official APP news agency.

Ayub Khan, who took over as power minister only a few months ago and is known for his hawkish approach to India, however, said experts from WAPDA were likely to visit In-

dia some time in January to discuss power supply deal with Indian authorities.

Pakistan had expressed its willingness to sell around 2000 mw of power to India till the year 2010 and both sides had resolved to make a short term arrangements so that at least 500 mw of power start flowing to India within the next six months.

Gohar Ayub Khan, however, conceded that Pakistan had offered 100 mw power supply to India from Lahore to Amritsar or Ferozepur, which could be increased with nominal expenditure up to 400 to 500 mw in the next six months.

We are working on the project, our consultants are doing hectic job to assess the requirements and total electricity we can produce after putting all

our power producing projects in action, Gohar Ayub Khan said.

At present cost of electricity in Pakistan is more than the prevailing rates in India as the previous Benazir Bhutto government had entered into power purchase agreements (PPAs) with a number of independent power producers in the country at about six to 6.5 cents per unit.

The Sharif government, claiming that the rate was much above internationally prevailing rates, had tried to cancel the agreements but had to backtrack on the issue due to pressure from multilateral agencies, specially World Bank, which had funded a number of those power projects.

Pakistan is also faced with unprecedented power shortage recently due to various reasons,



The two faces of the New Year celebration

Jubilant youths hail the year 1999 in the city's Gulshan area shortly after zero hours Thursday, (Left). And its ugly side unfolds as some youngsters suddenly swooped on this young woman going by a rickshaw at around the same time in the area.

—Star photo by Anisur Rahman

## 'Battle' for admission in govt schools starts today

By Gobinda Bar

With admission tests in government high schools in the city nearing, guardians are anxiously preparing their wards for a 'battle' that would ensure them a place in a good school.

Distribution of application forms from the 24 government high schools in the city begins today. The forms will be available for Tk 40 each till January 7.

Admission tests will be held on January 9, 10 and 11. The schools have been divided into three groups namely A, B and C to 'effectively' handle the admission tests, sources said.

Tests in schools under group A will be held on January 9, group B on January 10 and group C on January 11.

Tests in each group will be held under the same set of question papers. Results will be announced within three days of tests.

Meanwhile the government has given directives to the school authorities to enrol 10

per cent students of their total vacancy in Class Six from those who passed from primary schools last year. The directive aims at discouraging business oriented schools, the sources said.

But the seats for outsiders appear to be too inadequate. In the Government Laboratory High School, 24 students will be enrolled in Class Six and 240 in Class One. Headmaster of the school Abdus Sobhan told this correspondent yesterday that they received 1800 applications for admission in Class Six last year. The number may rise this year.

We have to face tremendous pressure from political leaders and high-ups in the administration but the school's capacity is very limited," he said.

Many non-government high schools have already completed admission.

The Residential Model School and College has already completed admission tests to enrol 100 students in Class Nine and 180 in Class Three. Some 900 students applied, sources in the school said.

Vikarunnessa Noon Girls School and College started the admission process in November and will hold tests tomorrow and the day after. Results will be published on January 8.

The school will take 600 students in Class One in Bangla medium and 50 in class six in English medium. Principal of the school Prof Hamida Ali told The Daily Star that some 4000 applied for admission this year.

"We enrol most of the students on the basis of merit but have to reserve some seats for admission on request," she said.

Government primary schools will also start the admission process from today after reopening following yearly vacation, sources said.

## 'Manju made JP a B-team' Hasina's threat won't cow me down: Ershad

Former president Hussain Mohammad Ershad yesterday blamed his expelled leader for making his party "B-team" of Awami League and warned its MPs who would betray the JP election symbol "plough" with serious consequences, reports UNB.

"They'll not be pardoned," he said referring to a reported meeting of some MPs with Communications Minister Anwar Hossain Manju.

The JP chairman said if they forget that they won the election with plough, then he would go round visiting the constituencies of those MPs telling the electorate of their betrayal.

"If you have the courage, then resign from Parliament and contest elections without the party symbol," he apparently told the rebellious MPs addressing a discussion meeting organised on the occasion of the 13th founding anniversary of the party.

Ershad said Jatiya Party was once a "B-team" of the governing Awami League and squarely blamed Anwar Hossain Manju for putting JP into that garb.

"One person was responsible for making JP into 'B-team' of the ruling party. He is no more in the party and Jatiya Party from now on will not act as B-team," he said. His party had expressed solidarity with the opposition's programme of movement, he added.

Ershad said for the first time in last two years party workers were seen delighted as they saw all the leaders on one date.

"From now on, Jatiya Party will not act as 'B-team', rather will march forward with politics of development and welfare."

See Page 12 Col 2

## Files move to create office of Ombudsman

Star Report

Bangladesh will soon have an Ombudsman, an independent office that will hear public complaints, based on which public officials will face scrutiny.

The Constitution of the country provides for such an office, which has not come into being so far. Recent government efforts indicate that a specific proposal on who should be the first Ombudsman will go to parliament during its winter session, expected to start this month.

Officials said the Law and Establishment ministries were moving the files to draft the rules and the organogram for the high office. The finance ministry will be asked to make money available for the new office.

There is no doubt that the people of this country are get-

ting their first ombudsman within a short period," said a highly placed Law Ministry official.

"We are now preparing proposal for the appointment rules for employees of the Ombudsman's office. We'll send it to the Ministry of Establishment for approval. Then it will go to the finance ministry."

A lot depends on the finance ministry clearance. If the money comes, then only will the Ombudsman.

There are other issues to be resolved. "As the ombudsman concept is new for the country, the establishment ministry will have to determine the rank and status of the support staff for the Ombudsman's office," an establishment ministry official said.

Then comes the issue of

See Page 12 Col 8

## New Year's eve Nuisance, again!

By Staff Correspondent

People in the country as elsewhere in the world yesterday greeted the English New Year with enthusiasm and festivities, looking forward to a better and bright time during the 1999.

The New Year came in the Holy month of Ramadan but the fasting did not dampen the celebrations.

As the clock struck 00:01 yesterday, cheers greeted the New Year amid cacophony of blare of vehicle horns, beating of drums and songs on city streets. Sounds of cracker blasts and gunshots were heard from all corners of the metropolis.

Jubilant people, mostly youngsters, thronged the main thoroughfares of the capital and yelled "happy New Year".

Unlike on previous occasions, the midnight celebrations on the streets were less wild as police kept a strict vigil to ensure law and order. Extra police were deployed on city streets.

But at some points in the city, sections of crowds turned unruly.

Despite tight security mea-

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## Ershad's claim It's all damn lie: Tofail

A top leader of the ruling party brushed aside Ershad's claim that Awami League formed government with the deposed President's backing.

"It's all rubbish and damn lie," Commerce and Industries Minister Tofail Ahmed told UNB over phone yesterday.

Tofail said after '96 general election, Awami League had the required strengths to form the government.

Giving an arithmetical account of 284 seats at the time of formation of government, he said Awami League had 142 seats and another 142 went to BNP, Jatiya Party, Jamaat and others. He said JSD (Rab) and Islami Oikya Jote with one seat each had sided with Awami League enabling it to form the Cabinet.

"It's crystal clear that without support of Ershad, Awami League had gained the strength to form government," Tofail said, rebutting Ershad's statement that he could become Prime Minister as "ludicrous and imaginative".

In reply to a query, the Commerce Minister dispelled the notion that Awami League had a post-election understanding with Jatiya Party.

"We did not need his support at all, rather Ershad went mad to hobnob with Awami League so that he could come out of jail," Tofail said.

See Page 12 Col 8

## One killed, 25 shanties gutted at Kamrangir Char

By Staff Correspondent

A man was killed and at least 25 shanties were gutted in a fire that broke out at a slum in Kamrangir Char area in the early hours of yesterday.

The victim was identified as Fazlul Huq, 36, a rickshaw-puller.

Fazlul Huq came in contact with a live electric wire while he was trying to come out of his house.

According to witnesses, the fire originated from a stove at about 4 am and soon engulfed the adjacent shanties at Moslem Ali slum.

Fire fighters from Palashi fire station rushed to the spot and extinguished the blaze after one and half hours.

He was immediately rushed to DMCH where he died in the morning.