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## Govt still has time to reschedule polls : BNP

BNP yesterday asked the government for rescheduling the municipal elections to void chaos and confrontation, reports UNB.

"Still you have the time to reschedule the municipal elections sitting with the opposition parties," BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan said.

Addressing a discussion meeting marking the 63rd anniversary of the birth of Ziaur Rahman, the founder of BNP, Bhuiyan cautioned the ruling party that they should not be dragged to the streets for dislodging it from the power.

Bhuiyan said the movement on four-point would be turned into movement on single demand of ousting the government after the countrywide hartal on Tuesday.

When all the opposition parties have expressed no confidence on the Chief Election

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## Natore election office set on fire

From Our Correspondent  
NATORE, Jan 24: The election office here on the second floor of Natore Collectorate Bhaban was set afire by some unidentified miscreants in the early hours of today.

No major damage was reported. The fire was extinguished immediately.

According to a general diary with Natore Sadar Thana, the incident occurred at about 3-4 am when the night guard Khademul Islam was in the toilet. Sensing the fire he came out and started shouting. A group of miscreants who sneaked into the office fled the scene leaving behind seven polythene packets containing three litres of petrol and four torches.

Khademul told this correspondent that he could not identify the miscreants in the darkness.

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## Over 100 weapons recovered, 26 arrested in Rangamati

From Staff Correspondent  
CHITTAGONG, Jan 24: Police recovered a huge number of illegal weapons from some vehicles at Kaokali area under Rangamati hill district today.

Police recovered 82 swords, 24 choppers, one Chinese axe and arrested 26 persons in this connection.

Police on a tip-off rushed to the area and intercepted some vehicles.

Forces were deployed at Betbunia Rubber Garden, Manikchhari, Bhedbhedi points on the Rangamati-Chittagong highway.

They said the weapons had been recovered from seven passenger buses, one microbus and an auto-rickshaw. Police also seized the vehicles.

The were identified as

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### Prayer Timings

January 25		
Fajr	5:22	5:26
Zohr	12:45	1:15
Asr	4:00	4:15
Maghrib	5:41	5:44
Esha	7:10	7:20

Source: Islamic Foundation

## Submission of nomination papers for local polls Opposition stretches hartal by 6 hours as EC relaxes deadline

By Staff Correspondent

Playing a cat-and-mouse game, the Election Commission (EC) yesterday gave five more hours for submission of nomination papers for municipal polls and the opposition parties responded by stretching hartal by six hours on the day.

The Election Commission said returning officers would accept nomination papers from candidates till 10:00 on January 26 (Tuesday) instead of the usual 5 p.m. The decision, understandably, came to facilitate the work after the hartal hours.

BNP, JP, Jamaat and IOJ had earlier called a daylong, countrywide hartal that would

have ended at 6:00pm.

The EC announcement prompted the opposition parties to go a step further. They decided in an emergency meeting that the hartal would continue till midnight.

The EC however kept date for scrutinising nomination papers and withdrawal of candidature unchanged - January 27 and February 3 respectively.

After the EC directive to the returning officers which came in the afternoon, leaders of the BNP-led opposition alliance met in the evening at the Minto Road residence of the Leader of the Opposition.

The hurriedly called meeting, chaired by BNP chief Khaleda Zia, decided to extend hartal hours till midnight of January 26 (Tuesday).

"The Commission decision clearly proves that it has adopted a deceitful strategy to foil the opposition objective," said BNP leader Anwar Zahid.

"The opposition response came in protest against such fraudulent means taken jointly by the government and the Election Commission," said Zahid, emerging from the meeting at 9:30 last night.

Kazi Feroz Rashid and Kazi

See Page 12 Col 6

## JP situation still remains unclear

By Special Correspondent

How many of the Jatiya Party MPs are going to abide by the whip of party chief General HM Ershad?

It remained an unanswered question till yesterday.

Even the known dissidents remained tight-lipped on whether they would be in the House when the President delivers his New Year speech this afternoon.

The party chief sent out letters on Saturday to all 33 MPs including the communications minister asking them not to be present during the presidential speech. Copies of the letter were forwarded to the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker.

Speaker Humayun Rashid Choudhury told The Daily Star last night that he had received the letter yesterday afternoon.

"But I have nothing to do in this regard," Choudhury said.

"However, if anyone raises any question or a situation

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## JS session opens today Opposition to boycott President's speech

By Nurul Kabir

The Jatiya Sangsad goes into its first session of the year this afternoon amidst a growing tension in the country's political arena.

President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed is scheduled to deliver his inaugural address in the House at 4:00 p.m. today. The session is the 12th of the country's 7th parliament.

The mainstream opposition parties, which recently forged an anti-government stance among themselves, have already announced that they would boycott the presidential speech.

Explaining reasons behind the decision, the parties - BNP, Jatiya Party and Jamaat-e-Islami - said that the President was ready to deliver a speech full of false praises about the government's performance.

The session beginning today can prove to be fatal for the JP's parliamentary wing, specially because the party chief, H M Ershad, has already

asked party MPs to abstain from joining the session on the opening day.

Anwar Hossain Monju, a JP legislator and Communication Minister in the Awami League Cabinet who was recently expelled from the party, is learnt to be serious to make sure that his supporters join him in the House on the first day. If he is successful, the session will witness a split in the JP's parliamentary group.

The opposition parties have also announced that they would abstain from attending the JS Business Advisory Committee meeting, scheduled to take place at 11:00 this morning.

The Advisory Committee, an all-party parliamentary body headed by the Speaker, decides the length of a session and the major issues to be discussed.

However, it is a constitutional obligation of the President to address the parliament in its first session of the year, while the convention is that

parliament members discuss various aspects of the presidential speech in a thanks-giving motion, moved by the Treasury Bench.

The Cabinet headed by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina approved the 'presidential speech' after more than four hours' discussion at a special meeting last week.

According to JS Secretariat sources, the House is expected to take up ten pending bills during the session. The bills include Bangladesh Laws Revision and Declaration (second amendment) Bill, 1998 and Transplantation of Limbs and Organs in Human Body Bill, 1998.

The rest of the bills sought legal provision for appointment of 'more than one vice chancellor' in the universities. Introduced in the last session, all the ten proposed legislations were sent to the parliamentary standing committees concerned for scrutiny.

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Members of Kendria Khelaghar brought out a procession in the city yesterday protesting killing of one of their members, Shujan, by terrorists.

— Star photo

## Cairn's plea to transfer half of its 'operational rights' to Shell

By Sharier Khan

### Blocks 15 & 16

British company Cairn is seeking government permission to transfer half of its 'operational rights' to Shell Oil in blocks 15 and 16.

Cairn had earlier sold half of its concerns in Bangladesh to Shell without government permission.

For this the British company came under fire from Petrobangla few months back and so it has now started the procedure to accommodate Shell Oil in the production sharing contracts (PSCs), sources said.

The two PSCs signed between Cairn and the government in 1994 and in 1995 however do not have any provision for transfer of 'operational rights', the sources said.

So, the law ministry recently refused to clear modification of Cairn's PSCs. The ministry said that the PSC could only accommodate partnership between the operator and other companies. But the operator or the PSC signatory can not transfer the operational right to another com-

pany. The ministry has asked Cairn to clarify its position on this issue.

The sources said that the government had, in principle, agreed to accommodate Shell Oil in Cairn's PSCs back in October-November.

Shell Oil became Cairn's partner in late 1996 when the British company was looking for a financial partner for development of the Sangu gas field.

Prior to that, Cairn purchased the shares of Holland Sea Search, the small Dutch company which jointly signed PSCs with Cairn for blocks 15 and 16. Shell Oil had then purchased shares that belonged to Holland Sea Search.

At that time, Petrobangla did not object to this deal as Shell remained a silent partner. Cairn had also brought in another partner-Brown and Roots-to develop the Sangu well. But that partnership re-

mained confined within the Sangu system, the sources added.

In mid-97, Cairn-Shell's partnership in Bangladesh became "visible" in the Second Round Block Bidding when they submitted proposals for six blocks.

But in mid-98, Cairn's situation changed due to "over-expenditure" and "careless spending" and the British company became financially weak. Its share price in the London Stock Exchange came down to around

1 Pound from 6 Pounds. To bail Cairn out of the situation, Shell made a package deal under which Cairn received a 115 million dollar boost and other financial benefits. At the same time, Shell took over half of Cairn's concerns in Bangladesh as a joint operator.

"Cairn's position in Bangladesh is now not at the peak because of its other weaknesses. But Shell will gradually start playing the key role and things will start moving on for them," said a source.

## Who is this Abu Nasir?

By Staff Correspondent

Relevant government ministries and intelligence agencies are looking into reports in two foreign newspapers that a Bangladeshi, Sayed Abu Nasir, worked with international extremist groups and planned to carry out bomb attacks on US consulates in Calcutta and Madras.

The New York Times Service published a report from Delhi that the Indian police had foiled a plot to bomb US consulates in Madras, and Calcutta with the arrest of a Bangladeshi, Sayed Abu Nasir, 27, who confessed working with an Islamic extremist group. The report was also carried by the International Herald Tribune in its January 21 issue.

Officials in the Home and Foreign ministries on condition of anonymity told The Daily Star yesterday that they had seen the reports and were trying to verify Nasir's background.

A team of American counter-terrorism experts arrived in Delhi on Tuesday last to further investigate the matter.

A source however said the government has not as yet received any request from the US or Indian intelligence agencies

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## Another cold wave in 5 days likely

Another cold wave is likely to sweep across the country within 4-5 days, weathermen forecast, reports APB.

An expert at Dhaka Met Office told the news agency that a westerly low, now lying over northern India, is expected to pass through the northern Bangladesh in the next few days, creating a high-pressure area over Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal and adjoining Bangladesh.

He said the high pressure is likely to bring cold wind from the Himalayas, leading to a moderate cold spell when the mercury could fall to 6-8 degree Celsius mainly in Rajshahi, Khulna and Sylhet divisions.

But the rest of the country would have mild to moderate cold wave with 8-10 degree Celsius temperature, the expert said.

Temperature will rise gradually after the first week of February, he said.



A view of the office of Monthly Jago Mujahid at Khilgaon in the city wherefrom activities of Harkat-ul-Jihad were reportedly conducted.

— Star photo

## Madrasah at Lalkhan shut, all absconding

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Jan 24: Police and intelligence agencies have started keeping watch on 'a khariji madrasah' at Lalkhan Bazar and some other places following reports of arms training by an Islamic extremist group, 'Harkatul Jihad'.

Police said they have not yet raided those places. They are keeping watch following the incident of attack on poet Shamsur Rahman in Dhaka in which some activists of Harkatul Jihad were arrested.

The madrasah is closed now and all its men including peon and guards have gone into hiding, police said.

Police sources said that they earlier received reports that students were given training on karate inside the madrasah.

Talking to The Daily Star Lalkhan Bazar Ward Commissioner Badiul Alam said that he informed police two years ago about allegations that students inside the madrasah were given training with sticks and lethal weapons.

But police did not pay heed to it, he said. "I myself saw the students taking training with bamboo sticks," he added.

When I asked the superintendent of the madrasah about it, he simply replied that it was done for self-defence," Alam said.

He also said that the madrasah students used gun and cocktails during a clash with local people few years ago.

Moreover, a tight security was maintained in and around

See Page 12 Col 3

## Ulema Parishad calls for united movement against 'terrorists'

By Staff Correspondent

The Jatiya Ulema Parishad yesterday expressed concern at the attack on poet Shamsur Rahman called upon the people to launch a united movement against 'terrorists'.

Leaders of the Parishad in a statement also expressed concern at the 'inclusion' of the name of Maulana Abdul Awad, Director General of Islamic Foundation in the 'hit list' of religious radicals.

They also expressed grave concern over the recent rise of 'anti-liberation forces and pro-Pakistani extremists' in the name of Islam.

Islam is a religion of peace and progress and there is no scope for terrorism and anarchy in Islam. A vested quarter has long been involved in activities to promote terrorism for their political gain, they said.

Signatories to the statement include Maulana Ruhul Amin Khan and Maulana Wahiduzzaman, Vice-president and Secretary respectively of the Jatiya Ulema Parishad, Maulana Abu Sufyan, Maulana Ruhul Amin Seraji, Maulana Abdul Quayum and Maulana Abdur Rahim

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## 2 children burnt alive, over 200 shanties gutted

By Staff Correspondent

Two children were burnt alive and more than 200 shanties gutted in a fire at Civil Aviation Colony at Kasabari under Uttara thana in the city on Saturday night.

Police identified the victims as Shamim, 8, and Sohel, 12. Fire Brigade sources said the fire originated from a kitchen and soon engulfed the Fourth Class employees' colony at around 10:15 pm.

Police and Fire Brigade sources estimated the loss in the fire at Tk 20 lakh. Five firefighting units from Tongi, Kurmitola and Teigaon rushed to the spot and extinguished the blaze after two hours.

A case has been lodged with Uttara thana in this connection.