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Demonstrators disrupt WTO meeting

Emergency : Curfew : Troops called out

SEATTLE, Dec 1: City officials struggled to regain control of downtown streets ravaged by a handful of violent militants trying to disrupt a world trade meeting, reports AP.

Mayor Paul Schell declared a civil emergency, imposing a curfew until 7:30 am today across much of the business district after police battled protesters with tear gas and pepper spray.

At Schell's request, Washington state Gov Gary Locke called in as many as 200 unarmed National Guardsmen with crowd-control experience to help restore order today after protesters defied police. It was a day of fire, smashed windows and scrawled graffiti throughout downtown Seattle on Tuesday.

A few angry protesters smashed windows at a McDonald's, a Planet Hollywood restaurant, a jewelry store, a Nike Town store, a Gap clothing store, a US Bank branch and other businesses.

"We are winning," was a prominent graffiti message.

About 300 Washington State

Patrol troopers also were being pulled off duty to help relieve exhausted city police officers.

Chaining themselves together and lying down at intersections, about 5,000 demonstrators succeeded in preventing most of the delegates from getting to the talks and forcing a cancellation of the opening ceremonies of the World Trade Organization.

There were scattered reports of looting after dark Tuesday — one incident at a Starbucks coffee shop was televised locally — as police cleared the downtown streets.

Once police and the curfew cleared downtown streets of protesters, street sweepers and work crews worked through the night, clearing debris and boarding up broken windows.

Most of the tens of thousands of people — as many as 40,000 — who thronged downtown to protest the WTO's power and secrecy were peaceful, but the few exceptions were enough to throw the city into chaos. An AFL-CIO trade union rally poured more than 20,000 people

into the downtown core.

Police Chief Norm Stamper said members of his force met with activist leaders several times over the past few months and were assured the protests would be peaceful.

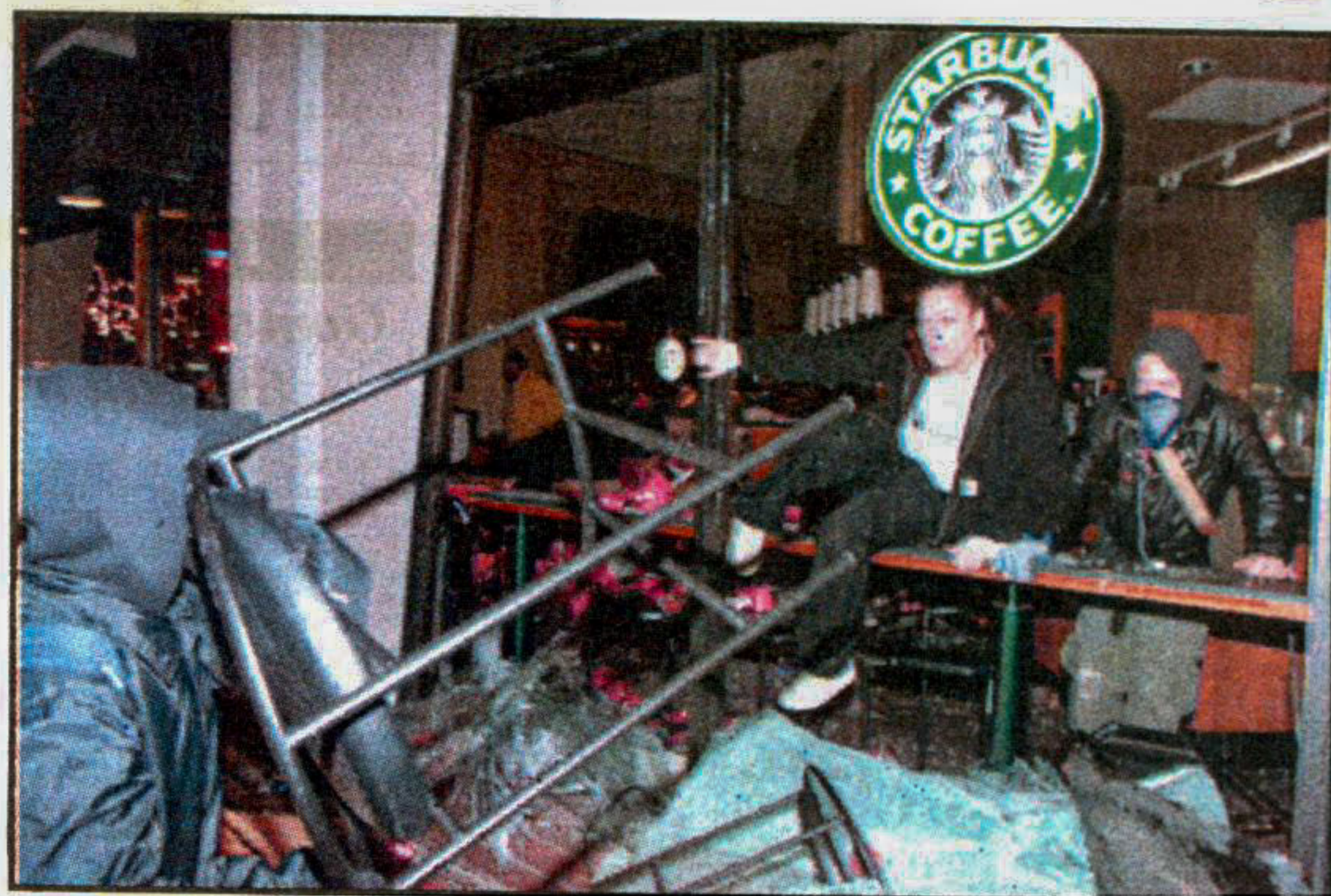
"We have demonstrators from all over the world who were not part of that planning process and have chosen to use much more aggressive means," he said.

Police made 60 arrests, and Stamper praised their restraint.

Third World countries strongly oppose a world trade regime that includes the labour and environmental standards advocated by the protesters, saying it would take away their competitive advantages of lower wage scales and more lax environmental regulations.

But Pascal Lamy, the top trade negotiator for the European Union, said, "The reason why a number of protesters are here is because they believe that trade liberalisation is working against a number of values they care

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Protesters break and trash a Starbucks during widespread demonstration against the World Trade Organisation (WTO) meeting which began Tuesday in Seattle, US. Thousands of anti-WTO activists came to Seattle to disrupt the meeting. — AFP photo

Biman cancels 5 flights as pilots refuse to do extra duty

By Special Correspondent
Bangladesh Biman had to cancel five flights, including two internationals, since early hours of yesterday after its pilots refused to operate extra flights beyond their normal duties, Biman sources said.

Pilots said that they are often forced to take-off without mandatory rest of two days beyond their charter of agreement with the Biman, due to a shortage of pilots.

Biman sources said that the sudden cancellation of flights had left a number of passengers stranded at the airport.

It affected BG 039 to Riyadh during the early hours, BG 084 to Singapore. In the morning and three domestic flights yesterday.

Flights were resumed late night after a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed between the Bangladesh Airlines Pilots Association (BAPA) and the Biman management at the Biman headquarters.

A Biman press release said that Captain Mofidul on behalf of the BAPA and Director, Finance of the Biman signed the MOU.

Biman officials could not provide the details of the MOU, which would be placed before the board of management of the airlines at its next meeting.

Newsman assaulted by police

By Staff Correspondent
A group of Police constables yesterday assaulted a senior staff reporter of Banglabazar Patrika, after confining him to a room at the office of DC South, witnesses said.

The victim, identified as Azhar Ali Sarker, was confined and tortured by the constables for about half an hour. The group torturing Azhar, however, released him at the intervention by the orderly of the DC, the victim told reporters.

The incident took place at about 5:15 pm near the Rashmoh Hospital at New Circular Road, when police stopped Azhar's rickshaw and started beating up the rickshaw-driver.

When Azhar protested against the police action, five other policemen joined their colleague and dragged Azhar to the office of DC South in the neighbourhood.

The policemen confined him inside a room at the office and beat him up mercilessly even after Azhar had identified himself as a newsman. He reported the incident to fellow crime reporters at the DC office. When the news spread, leaders of Crime Reporters Association Bangladesh (CRAB) rushed to the office of DMP Commissioner and informed him of the incident.

The Commissioner assured to take necessary action by 12 noon today.

CRAB, which condemned the police atrocity also constituted a three-member committee to conduct an inquiry into the incident. The committee will submit its report by 4 pm today.

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Opposition to call hartal on Dec 5, 6

EU urges govt, opposition to work together for the people

By Special Correspondent
The European Union members yesterday urged the government and opposition leaders to work together for the country and its people, stressing tolerance for good governance.

A press release issued by the EU following the meeting with the BNP leaders last night said "EU partners recalled the EU declaration on March 3, 1999 on the political situation in Bangladesh. The declaration reaffirmed their strong interest in co-operation with Bangladesh for the purpose of the country's democratic, social and economic development. The declaration called upon all parties and political office-holders to show restraint and moderation and to abstain from the use of all forms of violence as a political weapon and to resolve their differences in parliament and through other legitimate ways."

"Given the enormous challenges facing Bangladesh, the EU partners expressed their concern about the deteriorating political situation in the country."

The decision to call hartal was taken at a meeting of the Liaison Committee of the al-

liance recently, a committee leader said. After December 6, there will be no more hartal before the Ramadan, he added.

As part of the earlier announced programmes, the four parties will organise meetings and bring out processions in all cities, district and thana headquarters today to observe "Demonstration Day".

In the capital, BNP will hold a public meeting at Paltan Maidan at 3pm and bring out a procession later.

JP, Jamaat and IOJ will hold separate rallies at Mukhtang, North gate of Baitul Mukarram and Purana Paltan crossing respectively this afternoon.

Some smaller parties like Jagpa, Democratic League, PNP and NDA also have similar programmes today.

The municipal polls were held 11 months behind the original schedule and the Union Parishad polls nine months.

"We've already proposed that the government (again) amend relevant laws in the parliament extending the current deadline for the city corporation polls," said Aziz Ahmed Choudhury, Additional Secretary to the EC, to the Daily Star yesterday.

The EC proposal did not mention any fresh deadline for the city corporation polls, he added.

"We also need to further extend the deadline for Upazila Parishad voting, which the Election Commission itself can do."

The EC is not ready for election, he said.

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City corp'n & UZ polls EC going to set new deadline

By Nazmul Ashraf
The Election Commission, having earned the dubious distinction of missing many a deadline for the local government polls, is going for fresh deadlines to hold the crucial city corporation and Upazila Parishad elections.

Its existing deadlines are January 27, 2000 for the city corporation polls and December 27, 1999 for the Upazila Parishad elections. It had missed deadlines twice for the former and once for the latter.

The EC has now initiated the process of setting itself yet another set of deadlines for these elections.

The original deadline for city corporation polls was April 4 while that for Upazila polls July 30, this year.

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Beximco to ask its investors to reschedule Tk 40cr in debentures

By M Shamsur Rahman
Beximco Group will ask its investors to reschedule about Tk 40 crore in debentures after seven of the conglomerate's companies fell behind on their payments.

"We will ask our trustee shortly to convene a meeting of debenture holders," said Salman F. Rahman, vice-chairman of Beximco Group. "If the majority of the debenture holders approve then we will reschedule."

The Beximco Group defaulted on payments to the Investment Corporation of Bangladesh (ICB), Bangladesh Shilpa Rin Sangstha (BSRS), Agrani Bank and Janata Bank.

Thirteen companies have issued debentures, which are traded in the stock markets. Seven Beximco companies have raised large amounts of money through debentures.

ICB alone claims the companies owe it Tk 21.80 crore including principal and interest

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Taka devaluation A positive step, say economists and industrialists

By Inam Ahmed
Economists and industrialists welcomed the Bangladesh Bank's decision to devalue the taka by over three per cent Wednesday, convinced the move will help boost exports.

But how will the devaluation affect the domestic manufacturing sector? Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry already warned such a move would hurt the garment sector but hurt the domestic industry.

Mahbub Jamil, the chamber's president, said the devaluation will force prices up, widening the gap between the people's purchasing power and their income. Demand will shrink, while business will slash production.

However, a former MCCI president and adviser to the last caretaker government said the devaluation was a positive step.

"I would not call it devaluation, it is adjustment of taka against dollar," said Manzur Elahi, one of the country's top entrepreneurs. "World wide dollar has become so strong that even the strongest economies include Germany, Japan and Italy were forced to devalue their currency in recent times. In such situation, we just can not sit tight."

Elahi said the Italian lira, which was 1700 to a dollar and German mark, which was around 1.6 to a dollar about two months back, have fallen to 1900 lira and DM 1.78 to a dollar.

"Whenever we made export offers importers objected that our prices were 10 to 15 per cent higher than our neighbours," said Elahi, a leading leather goods manufacturer and exporter. "Unless we realigned our currency, we would have been out of the race."

Economist Dr Zaid Bakht See Page 11 Col 4

PM tells Nal't Youth Festival function Post-75 military rulers supplied arms to youths

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday unveiled her government plans to rescue the youth from the vicious influence of drugs and arms and groom them as an educated and skilled force for economic development of the country, reports UNEB.

She alleged post-75 military rulers had handed down arms and drugs to youths and used them as pawns to serve their political ambition and consolidate illegal power.

"They had been reared as musclemen for last two decades. But we can't destroy their future handing them arms and drugs," she said while inaugurating the National Youth Festival '99 at Paltan Maidan in the city yesterday.

The Prime Minister said her government wants to train up the youth force with education and proper training to engage them in national development. She said youth force, which is a

lifelong of a nation, can steward the nation to its prosperity. "We are a poor country with limited resources, but we have a vast manpower. If we could exploit the energy and talent of this force under proper planning, I am sure we would be able to build up as a developed nation," she told the function.

Identifying unemployment and poverty as crucial problems for Bangladesh, the Prime Minister said her government had already taken up comprehensive programmes for educated, semi-educated and illiterate unemployed youths so they could take up self-employment and income-generating projects.

She said some youth-training centres had been set up in 470 thana headquarters for imparting vocational training to the youths. Besides, 69 computer-training centres were established in 64 districts.

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Tk 17cr revised project for Dhanmondi Lake

By Morshed Ali Khan
The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC) yesterday approved the Tk 16.62 crore revised Dhanmondi Lake Development Project proposal and decided to remove all illegal establishments from the lakeside area, sources said.

The decision will enable the authorities to complete about four kilometres of walkway unfinished due to encroachment by 42 individuals on 98 kathas of public land along the lakeside. The revised proposal includes a Tk 1.8 crore component for development of land to set the path for the walkway, sources said.

The approval would also help the authorities to restart work on the project that has remained almost stalled for the last three months.

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ADB presses DESA 'Cut system loss to 18pc to make company viable'

By Staff Correspondent
Asian Development Bank is pushing the Dhaka Electric Supply Authorities to cut system losses to 18 per cent from the existing 25 per cent by 2003 to make the company financially viable without a power tariff hike.

The bank is processing a \$157 million loan for the proposed Dhaka Power System Upgrade Project, designed to remove power distribution bottlenecks. Poor power transmission and distribution are the main problems in the sector.

At a press conference yesterday, Phiphit Suphaphiphat, the bank's resident representative, said the project is likely to be approved next month.

Once the project is complete in 2005, it would allow transmission and distribution of

2000 MW of power in greater Dhaka, which currently consumes more than 40 per cent of country's total generated power. Suphaphiphat said Bangladesh must increase power consumption in order to alleviate poverty. To achieve that goal, the efficiency of public power utilities should increase so profitability increases, he said.

Khalid I Rahman, manager of the bank's Energy Division West, said his organisation supports competition for the sake of efficiency and cost cutting, while making cheap power available to all people in Bangladesh.

Lower power tariff offered by the private power schemes like the Meghna and Haripur See Page 11 Col 4

The Month of Victory back again

By Staff Correspondent
The Month of Victory is back again with the nation pledging afresh to uphold the spirit of the Liberation War and materialise the ideals and dreams of those that made supreme sacrifice to liberate the motherland.

On December 16, 1971, the freedom loving people of Bangladesh emerged victorious in the nine-month war against the Pakistani occupation forces.

The war imposed on the unarmed people of this country by the then Pakistani regime on the night of March 25, 1971 cost the nation three million lives.

On the first day of the Month of Victory yesterday, various socio-cultural organisations took up elaborate programmes to observe the Month and the Victory Day, December 16 in a befitting way.

Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) will organise a lecture series in this connection on December 4 in the city.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Liberation War Commemorative Festival '99, which was scheduled to begin on December See Page 11 Col 5

Construction of bridge at Bhairab Bazar begins Monday

By Staff Correspondent
The construction work of the 1.15 kilometer road bridge over river Meghna at Bhairab Bazar will begin from Monday next, officials of the communication ministry said yesterday.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will formally inaugurate the construction work through a 'ground breaking' ceremony at Bhairab Bazar in Narasingdi district. The bridge will be constructed at a cost of Tk 533 crore.

The bridge will make surface communication between the capital and Sylhet easier, by reducing the travel time by an hour, the officials pointed out.

According to communication ministry officials, the Bhairab bridge will be constructed along the existing railway bridge and that would be the country's second largest bridge, after the Bangabandhu Jamaat bridge.

The bridge is being constructed with financial assistance from the government of United Kingdom. It is likely to be opened for traffic from sometime in August 2002.

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Prayer Timings

December 2		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-15	5-45
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	3-42	4-00
Maghrib	5-18	5-23
Esha	7-00	7-30

Source: Islamic Foundation



The under-construction bridge over Dhanmondi Lake at Road-8. — Star photo

Announcement

Read this week's Cover Story in the Star Weekend Magazine on the much talked about Y2K problem. How is Bangladesh tackling the issue? Are we ready to fight the bug or be plagued by it?