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The Daily Star

Today's issue
20 pages

VOL. IX NO. 324 REGD. NO. DA 781

www.dailystarnews.com

DHAKA MONDAY DECEMBER 20, 1999

11
days to the
3rd Millennium

POUSH 6, 1406 BS

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20 PAGES PRICE: TAKA 6.00

Speaker will send letter to Khaleda today

Speaker Humayun Rasheed Chowdhury decided to write a letter to Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Khaleda Zia requesting her to join the coming parliament session.

Talking to UNB, he said he did not contact any BNP leaders over phone yesterday as he decided to write to the BNP chief changing his earlier plans.

"I am writing a letter and would send it to Khaleda tomorrow requesting her to join the coming parliament session," he said.

Earlier on Saturday, the Speaker said that he would ring Deputy Leader of the Opposition Prof A Q M Badruddoza Chowdhury, Chief Whip Khan-dakar Delwar Hossain, Saifur Rahman or other leaders requesting them to join the parliament session.

Khaleda's Saudi visit cancelled

Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Khaleda Zia has cancelled her planned visit to Saudi Arabia in the last week of this month due to political reasons.

"Certainly, I will go to Saudi Arabia but not this time," she said.

Inside Today

Article

Chasing Osama: A Dangerous Obsession

Column: Perspectives by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz
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Supplement

Today's issue of The Daily Star contains a 3-page supplement on Launching of Communication Campaign on Arsenic Mitigation
Pages 17, 19

Sehri, Iftar timings

Ramadan	Dec	Sehri	Iftar
11	20	-	5-19
12	21	5-11	5-20
13	22	5-12	5-20

Prayer Timings

December 20			
	Azan	Jamaat	
Fajr	5-8	5-17	
Zohr	12-45	1-15	
Asr	3-42	4-00	
Maghrib	5-16	5-22	
Tarabi	7-00	7-45	

Source: Islamic Foundation

Twin blasts in Colombo kill 33, injure 180

Miracle saves Chandrika



Gruesome!
The severed hand of an unidentified victim lies at the blast site while a Buddhist monk chants prayers in front of the town hall in Colombo yesterday where a suspected Tamil Tiger suicide bomber detonated a device during a campaign rally.

COLOMBO, Dec 19: Sri Lanka's government began investigation today into the security lapses that enabled a suicide bomber to blow himself up at President Chandrika Kumaratunga's rally, leaving her wounded in the face, report agencies.

The government announced that the bomb blast, believed to have been carried out by Black Tigers — the suicide unit of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, would not affect the schedule of the Dec 21 presidential polls in which Kumaratunga is seeking reelection.

Editorial on page 4

Police took 15 suspects into custody. Two investigations committees were formed to probe the twin blasts which killed 33 people and injured at least 180. Media Minister Mangala Samaraweera told reporters.

The second blast took place at the rally of the main opposition party at Jaala, 15 kilometres north of Colombo, and also was set off by a suicide bomber, police said. The president's main rival, Ranil Wickremesinghe, was not present at that rally.

Mrs Kumaratunga was treated for shrapnel injuries in See page 11 col 7

A carbon copy

COLOMBO, Dec 19: The assassination attempt on Sri Lanka's President yesterday was a chilling replay of the attack that killed India's former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi eight years ago, reports AP.

"It was a carbon copy. The only difference was that in this case it was a man dressed as a woman," a police officer said.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga was wounded in the blast last night as she wrapped up an election rally in downtown Colombo, ahead of next week's presidential election.

The attack was similar to the one in 1991, when Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated as he was winding up an election campaign in southern India during a comeback bid. A woman tried to touch his feet See page 11 col 6



A vandalised poster of Chandrika, snapped on the day of the assassination attempt. — AFP photo



Two killed at CU in BCL-Shibir gunfight

From CU Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Dec 19: Two students were killed and eleven others injured today in a gunfight between activists of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) and Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS) at Chittagong University.

The dead were identified as Abdur Rahim, a third year honours student of Bengali and Mahmudul Hasan, a fourth year honours student of Finance.

Both of them were reported to be leaders of Islami Chhatra Shibir.

Of the injured, Abdus Shukur, Rustum Mian and Forkan Ali were admitted to Chittagong Medical College Hospital in a critical condition.

The clash erupted at around 11 am when Forkan, a BCL ac-

tivist, was beaten up at the Suhrawardy Hall reportedly by Shibir activists. Police later arrested three Shibir leaders — Didarul Alam, Zahed Hossain and S M Liakat — from the hall.

Following the incident, Chhatra League leaders and activists of Shah Amanat and Shahjalal halls went to the Suhrawardy Hall and clashed with the Shibir activists.

Abdur Rahim was killed on the spot during the gun battle while Mahmudul Hasan, who sustained bullet wounds, died on way to the hospital.

The university opens on January 15 after the vacation of Ramadan and holy Eid-ul-Fitr. Meanwhile, the authorities See page 11 col 7

Trade unions in EPZs

Americans won't come: Holzman Investors will leave: Tofail

A breach of trust: Investors

By Staff Correspondent

US Ambassador John Holzman has warned that Bangladesh will only be blocking American investment if it fails to 'protect workers' voices' in privileged industrial parks.

In response, Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed has cautioned that presence of trade unions (TUs) in these otherwise peaceful industrial zones will scare present and future investors away. And the minister has made it clear that Bangladesh will just succumb to pressures from powerful countries such as the US.

The ambassador has also warned Bangladesh could be risking its Generalised System of Preference (GSP) granted by the US and that chances of getting zero tariff access in future will be dim because of absence of workers' rights in the Export Processing Zones (EPZs).

The US investment in the EPZs is negligible. But, according to the ambassador, it buys 46 per cent of their EPZ output. The government says EPZs employ some 90,000.

"As consumers, we expect that goods sold to the United States will be produced by workers whose voices are protected, not suppressed," Holzman said in Dhaka yesterday, speaking at an investors' conference, in presence of Tofail Ahmed and Labour Minister M A Mannan.

Owners of factories located in the country's two govern- See page 12 col 1

DCC fears clash Gangsters still move around Nagar Bhaban

By Staff Correspondent

The Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) officials fear more fight between two feuding factions of Chhatra League may break out any time over awarding of work involving about Tk one crore in the zone-5 of DCC that covers the Dhaka University area.

At least 11 people were injured when armed activists of the factions had a shootout with police on the Nagar Bhaban premises on December 12.

Heavily armed members of both the groups — known as 'Rogkara' Shanim group and 'Five Star' group — were seen yesterday at the Nagar Bhaban. No uniformed policemen were seen during their presence at the entrance of the DCC office building. Sources concerned said that the gangs were enjoying "immunity from the law" due to strong connections with the high-ups.

"We had been hostage to a single group for the last three See page 11 col 2

Govt to keep 5pc free quota for garments export to US, Canada

By Staff Correspondent

The government has changed its decision on free quota for garments export to US and Canada, a BGMEA press release said yesterday.

According to the release, the government agreed to keep five per cent quota as free for distribution among the new garments entrepreneurs at the request of the BGMEA. The government had earlier decided to cancel the free quota system due to abuse of garment quota.

The five per cent free quota would again be distributed from 2000, the press release said.

The government also agreed to provide flood and cyclone coverage to the garment sector for the greater interest of the export-oriented business. The decision would be effective from January 1.

Most of Chandrima plots in Ctg go to ruling party men

From Our Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Dec 19: All most all the 182 plots in Chandrima housing project have been allotted to ruling party men, their supporters and relatives, an issue widely discussed in the city as an act of "massive irregularity and nepotism" by the authorities.

Even Chittagong City Awami League protested it twice and demanded its cancellation and probe into the alleged irregularities. The leaders sought the Prime Minister's intervention in this regard.

The city AL leaders termed it a "biased and heinous act" as the "favoured" plot winners are from the areas of Housing Minister Engineer Mosharraf Hossain and AL MP Rafiqul Anwar who was convenor of the 4-member allotment com-

mittee.

AL leader Nurul Islam B Sc called it a "dacoity", party sources said.

The plots in the project under the Chittagong Development Authority (CDA) were supposed to be allotted through lottery. But only 30 plots were learnt to be allotted through lottery and the rest 152 were given dividing the applicants into 13 groups of different categories where some 'special quotas' were created violating rules.

Moreover, most of those who got the plots already possess plots in the city area or in other CDA housing projects in their names or in the names of their See page 11 col 7

Police question detained students

By Staff Correspondent

Police yesterday continued questioning 42 of 44 student leaders and activists taken on remand on Saturday, according to police sources.

Of the 42, 14 are from the BNP's student wing JCD, while the rest are from Jatiya Party-backed Jatiya Chhatra Samaj and Jamaat-e-Islami's front Islami Chhatra Shibir, police said.

Habibun Nabi Sohel and Nasiruddin Pintu, president and secretary of the JCD, were also on a two-day remand, but the court sent them to jail on grounds of their illness.

Party workers, lawyers, and MPs were seen yesterday visiting the Motijheel Police station, which remained out of bound for all including lawyers of the detained from Friday night till yesterday morning.

MPs Amanullah Aman and Nazimuddin Alam, among those at the thana, told The Daily Star last night that Sohel and Pintu were tortured by po-

See page 11 col 6

CWHEC rejoinder

China National Water Resources & Hydropower Engineering Co. (CWHEC), the land-site developer of the 450 MW Meghnaghat Power Plant has issued a rejoinder against The Daily Star report, "Meghnaghat Plant: Handing over of project delayed again," on December 14.

The CWHEC clarified its position regarding delays in im-

See page 11 col 8

Ramadan longest in 300 years

DUBAI, Dec 19: This year's Muslim fasting month of Ramadan will be the longest in more than three centuries, a newspaper said today, quoting a meteorologist in the United Arab Emirates.

David Naughton said the moon would take some seven hours longer than usual to complete one revolution, making this Ramadan the longest since 1672, the Gulf Today reported.

"The dimensions of the lunar orbit and its relation to our sun are factors which combine to cause the month's orbit to be slower than normal. It is really a complex gravitational interplay," he said.

The lunar calendar determines the start and end of Ramadan, during which Muslims abstain from food, drink, smoking and sex from sunrise to sunset.

BNP demands apology from PM for remarks

By Staff Correspondent

BNP set five pre-conditions yesterday the Prime Minister must fulfil before it considers any invitation to attend the next session of parliament, which begins on Jan. 1.

"We will respond positively and must consider the invitation if the five issues are resolved," Prof. A.Q.M. Badruddoza Chowdhury, deputy leader of the opposition, told newsmen at a press briefing at 29 Minato Road.

The pre-conditions are: (1) Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina must withdraw the "indecent" remarks she made about Khaleda Zia during the last session of the Jatiya Sangsad.

(2) The Prime Minister must apologise unconditionally to the nation for the indecent remarks.

(3) The remarks must be expunged from the parliamentary records.

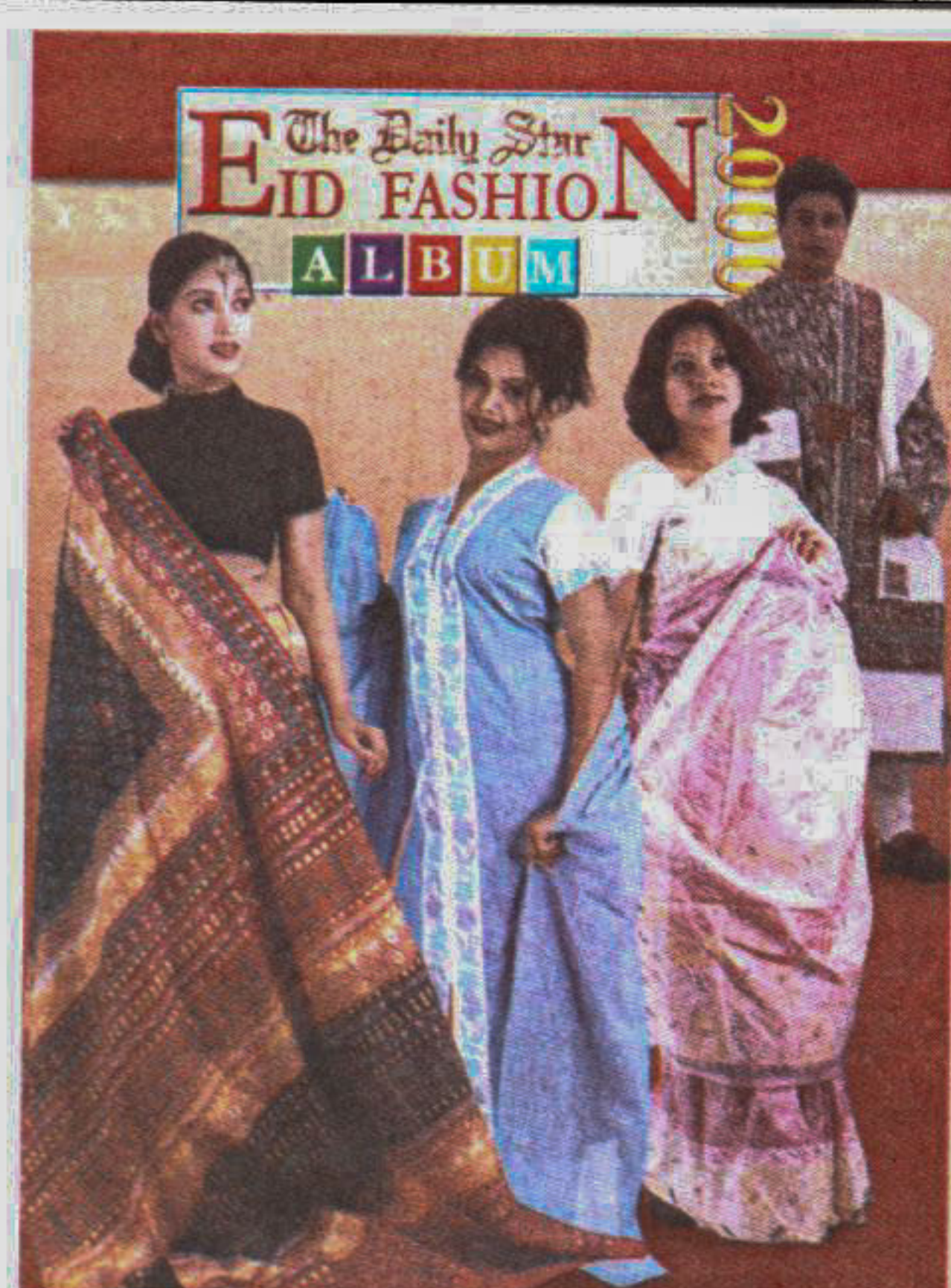
(4) The Prime Minister must assure the nation that neither she nor any of her party members will ever make such indecent remarks about Khaleda Zia again, and

(5) The Prime Minister must reaffirm the Speaker's sovereignty and his right to oversee the Jatiya Sangsad. The Prime Minister must also assure the nation that her members of parliament will not obstruct the Speaker's ability or the smooth operation of the Jatiya Sangsad.

Prof. Chowdhury said the opposition was announcing the pre-conditions so the Speaker could address the issues before See page 12 col 5

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