

What's on today....

Inauguration: A two-day national seminar on "State of the Art in Nutrition of Mothers and Children in Bangladesh" will be inaugurated. Organisers: Directorate of Family Planning, the National Institute of Population Research and Training (NIPORT) and the Integrated Community Family Health Development Programme (ICFHD), Bogra. Venue: Hotel Sonargaon. Time: 2:00 pm.

Annual general meeting: The annual general meeting of Mirsarraf Youth Forum will be held. Chief guest: Engineer Mosharraf Hossain, Minister for Civil Aviation and Public Works. Venue: Rajuk auditorium. Time: 2:00 pm.

Seminar: Policy Leadership and Advocacy for Gender Equality (PLAGE) in association with Public Administration Reforms Commission will hold a seminar on "Public Administration and Gender." Venue: CIRDP auditorium. Time: 2:30 pm.

Fashion exhibition: An exhibition of fashion apparels by Avalon is going on. Venue: Cafeteria of Alliance Francaise de Dhaka. Time: 3:00 pm-8:00 pm.

..... and tomorrow

BCPS lecture: Bangladesh College of Physicians and Surgeons (BCPS) will hold two lectures on "Reproductive health in developing countries" and "Evaluation of a child with congenital heart disease". Venue: BCPS auditorium, Mohakhali. Time: 11:00 am and 12:10 pm.

Weather

Dry weather to continue

Prevailing dry weather is likely to continue over the country during next 12 hours till 6 pm today, reports UNB.

Night temperature may rise slightly over the country during the period, according to Met Office.

The country's highest temperature was recorded yesterday at 30.0 degree Celsius at Khulna and Cox's Bazar and lowest 9.8 degrees at Srimangal.

The sun sets in the capital today at 5.16 pm and rises tomorrow at 6.37 am.

Maximum and minimum temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature in Celsius	Humidity in percentage
	Max	Min

Dhaka	27.2	13.5	72	55
Chittagong	28.8	15.0	79	62
Rajshahi	27.3	13.0	74	84
Khulna	30.0	13.4	79	67
Barisal	29.5	12.7	85	80
Sylhet	26.5	14.0	80	73
Cox's Bazar	30.0	16.0	66	67

HERE and THERE

UNICEF reception

UNICEF Dhaka office yesterday held a reception at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel in honour of the visiting Executive Director of UNICEF Carol Bellamy, reports BSS.

The reception took place following a press conference where Bellamy explained the purpose of her visit to Bangladesh and also the fruitful talks she had with the government and other organisations, dealing with child issues as well as arsenic problem in the country.

Ministers, members of parliament, senior journalists, government officials, diplomats, heads of UN offices in Dhaka, and NGO representatives attended the reception.

BCPFA

Bangladesh-China People's Friendship Association (BCPFA) has congratulated the Chinese nation on the historic

occasion of regaining the exercise of sovereignty over the territory of Macau with effect from December 20, reports BSS.

It has also expressed great satisfaction that the people of Macau who had been under colonial rule for the last four hundred years have finally been reunited with their motherland which will provide them with the opportunity of making great contributions to the social and economic progress of the entire Chinese people, the press release said.

Chittagong Samity

All the 31 members of executive committee of Chittagong Samity, Dhaka, have been elected unopposed for the year 2000-2001, reports BSS.

Azizul Haque Chowdhury and Jalal Uddin Ahmed were elected president and general secretary respectively, said a press release.

Serb general arrested on war crimes charges

THE HAGUE, Dec 20: NATO troops seized today a wanted Bosnian Serb general whose troops were alleged to have spent 44 months shelling and sniping to kill, maim and terrorise the civilian inhabitants of Sarajevo, reports AFP.

Soldiers of the NATO-led SFOR peace force smashed a car window, opened the door, and pulled General Stanislav Galic out of a car they had stopped, a witness said.

Announcing the arrest, prosecutors at the Interna-

E Timor mass

grave found

DILI, East Timor, Dec 20: Australian soldiers have found 14 bodies and were told by witnesses that another 38 are buried in a mass grave in Oecussi, East Timor, the commander of international troops in the territory said on Monday, reports AFP.

"If all these bodies are actually found, that would be a very big discovery," Major Gen. Peter Cosgrove, commander of the International Force for East Timor (Interfet), said.

In a briefing to visiting Australian defence department officials, Australian Captain Andrew Plunkett said the burial site was about 1.5 km from Passabe, in the southern part of Oecussi, an enclave which is surrounded by Indonesian West Timor.

"We believe the people responsible for murdering them and burying them made a mistake in that they probably thought they were in West Timor, because of the closeness of the location," Plunkett said. Witnesses told Interfet that in September, two groups of East Timorese militia, Indonesian soldiers and police moved along a road targeting pro-independence figures.

The case is now being investigated by civilian police from the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor.

The militias, who wanted East Timor to remain part of Indonesia, went on an unchecked spree of violence and destruction across East Timor following the September 4 announcement that the territory's people had voted overwhelmingly for independence.

Israel, Palestinians still divided on settlements

RAMALLAH, West Bank, Dec 20: Israel and the Palestinians emerged from a new round of final peace accord talks today still sharply divided on the key sticking points of borders and Jewish settlements, reports AFP.

Palestinian sources said the Israeli team failed to meet their demands for a halt to construction of new homes for Jews in occupied territories and did not answer concerns that Israel was trying to redraw borders.

Under the interim Sharm el-Sheikh accord, the two sides are to reach a framework agreement in mid-February and a final deal in September, but their negotiations have been dogged by a row over Prime Minister Ehud Barak's settlement policy.

During the meeting in the West Bank town of Ramallah between teams led by Oded Eran for Israel and Yasser Abed Rabbo for the Palestinians, Israel presented its positions on the two key questions, the sources said.

They said Israel wanted the final borders to take into account its security demands and "facts on the ground," referring to settlements in particular.

"The Palestinians insisted that the aim of the negotiations is to implement 242 and 338 which should lead to a complete Israeli military and civilian withdrawal to the pre-June 4,

1967 borders," the Palestinian information ministry, led by Abed Rabbo, said in a statement.

It was referring to UN resolutions calling for Israel to withdraw from land occupied during war with the Arabs.

"All settlement activity should be stopped, including construction based on old tenders and the issue of new tenders. There should also be a halt to land confiscation and the demolition of houses," the ministry said.

Barak, accused of allowing more Jewish homes to be built in the West Bank than his right-wing predecessor Benjamin Netanyahu, has promised a temporary freeze on the issue of new tenders, a decision that failed to satisfy the Palestinians.

Palestinian officials have expressed fears that the revival of peace talks between Israel and Syria last week, set to determine the fate of the occupied Golan Heights, could eclipse the Palestinian track.

Hosni Mubarak said Monday he had assurances from Barak that he would not favour one track at the expense of another.

"I hope the peace process will move forward on all tracks, Syrian, Lebanese and Palestinian, which are at the heart of the conflict," he told the Qatar-

based Al Jazeera satellite television station.

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat told the Spanish newspaper El Mundo that a final status agreement could be reached even before next September, despite the difficulties.

"In any case I intend to declare Palestinian independence next year -- no matter what," Arafat said.

The Hebrew newspaper Yedioth Aharonot on Monday quoted an Israeli army assessment saying a full Golan withdrawal to the borders that existed before Israel's capture of the region in the June 1967 war could diminish Arafat's willingness to compromise.

"A full withdrawal from the Golan within the framework of a peace agreement with Syria will make it harder for Arafat to make a territorial compromise in the negotiations with Israel and is liable to toughen Palestinian demands on the issue of Jerusalem," the paper quoted an army intelligence document as saying.

Arafat left for Jordan Monday for talks with King Abdullah II on the peace process.

Arafat had been expected to meet Barak on Sunday but the meeting was postponed, apparently after the Palestinians announced the venue for the encounter.



A police officer watches over election workers as they load ballot boxes onto a bus yesterday on their way to polling centres in the capital Colombo. Sri Lankans go to the polls today to choose a president, days after a bloody assassination attempt against current President and People's Action Party candidate Chandrika Kumaratunga that left 21 dead.

AFP photo

Taliban, opposition exchange prisoners

BARIKAU FRONTLINES, Afghanistan, Dec 20: Sitting cross-legged on a sunny hilltop, the Afghan Taliban commander surrounded by his armed soldiers was talking with his opposition counterpart on the radio, reports AFP.

Mawlawi Habibullah Reshad, chief of interrogation for the Taliban Intelligence Department, was arranging to swap 14 prisoners with the opposition.

"Prisoner-swapping between us has been an ongoing process. In the past two months we have swapped 350 prisoners from both sides," he said.

Around him the desert frontlines of Barikau, 45 km north of the capital Kabul were quiet, as Taliban troops and opposition fighters loyal to Ahmad Shah Massoud observe the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

Talking on a wireless set attached to a home-made antenna fixed on the top of an underground bunker, Reshad asked the opposition commander if he could do him any more favours.

He was driving his car when a NATO-led Stabilisation Force (SFOR) jeep stopped him, a witness told journalists in Bosnia.

The arrest was confirmed in Brussels by Lord Robertson, the NATO secretary general.

"This latest arrest of a retired major general in the Bosnian Serb Army is in line with my policy of targeting senior figures in the chain of command for crimes committed during periods of armed conflict," said ICTY chief prosecutor Carla del Ponte.

The prosecutor confirmed that Galic was on a secret wanted list of indicted war criminals.

A statement said the court had sought the arrest of the officer on charges of crimes against humanity and war crimes while he was commander of the Romanija army corps between 1992 and 1994 during the siege of Sarajevo.

The witness, who did not wish to be named, said troops bound Galic's arms and pushed him into the jeep. He declined to divulge the nationality of the SFOR soldiers.

Banja Luka is the headquarters of the SFOR southwest division, under British command. The SFOR Banja Luka garrison is composed mainly of British soldiers.

Galic was commander of a brigade based in the western Bosnian town of Jajce for a few months at the beginning of Bosnia's 1992-95 war before taking over the command of the Romanija corps.

He retired in 1994, but was called on to become military adviser to the Bosnian Serb presidency by Nikola Poplasen when he was elected president of the Republika Srpska (RS) in September 1998.

Poplasen was sacked by the international community in March, but the entity's vice president, Mirko Sarovic, has refused to take over.

New parliament opens in Malaysia

Opposition stages walkout

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 20: Malaysia's new parliament opened acrimoniously today with the opposition staging a walkout in protest at what one called Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's attempts to "bulldoze" the constitution, reports AFP.

Opposition MPs, whose numbers doubled to 45 in the November 29 election, complained that the parliament had been summoned unconstitutionally.

Mahathir's National Front coalition, in power since independence in 1957, holds the remaining 148 seats.

This is another sign of the National Front's political hegemony, said Kerk Kim Hock, secretary general of the Opposition Democratic Action Party (DAP).

"It shows the arrogance of the power they have been enjoying, which is manifested in the way they were bulldozing their way

this morning," he told AFP.

Another opposition leader, Fadzil Noor, said: "If they can breach the laws at the first sitting we are very worried that they will continue to violate the constitution in subsequent meetings."

We are staging a temporary walkout as a sign of protest," Fadzil told reporters before the opposition members returned to be sworn in.

Fadzil leads the Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS), the largest non-government group with 27 seats. He is due to become the new opposition leader in the house.

Mahathir hit back, telling reporters the opposition "seems to be bringing street brawling into parliament."

The king must act on the advice of the cabinet in summoning parliament. But he issued the notice on December 13, two days before Mahathir's new cabinet held its first meeting.

Mad-cow disease can cause human brain disorder: Study

PARIS, Dec 20: British and American scientists announced Monday they had established the clearest evidence yet that mad-cow disease can cause Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (CJD), a fatal brain disorder in human beings, reports AFP.

The two diseases are caused by the same infectious agent, they say -- a conclusion that deals a huge blow to those who had hoped a "species barrier" could help protect human beings from the mad-cow epidemic.

In their study, published in the US journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, the researchers warn that "a large section of the population in Britain may be at high risk."

Mad-cow disease -- bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) -- is an ailment in which cows' brains become porous, like a sponge. The animal becomes disoriented and then demented; death follows.

The cause of the disease has been pinned to a rogue protein called a prion.

The scientists, from the University of California at San Francisco and Britain's National CJD Surveillance Unit, based in Edinburgh, Scotland, first created genetically-altered mice so that they carried prion-controlling genes from cows.

These transgenic mice were then injected with prions from

diseased cattle. After about 250 days, the mice developed the same disease.

A second group of mice was then injected with prions from the first group of mice and also fell sick -- thus proving that the disorder could spread unchanged within a non-cattle species.

The researchers then injected transgenic mice with prions from diseased human brains -- people with new variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (nvCJD), as the suspected sister illness to BSE is called.

The results were identical, which suggest that BSE and nvCJD are interchangeable, they said. Introduced in transgenic mice, nvCJD prions assumed an identity "indistinguishable from BSE prions."

They added: "That human nvCJD prions so precisely duplicate the properties of native bovine BSE prions in their behaviour on transmission into ... (transgenic) mice creates a compelling argument for an etiological link between BSE and nvCJD."

"Although earlier proposals of an etiological link between BSE and nvCJD were disquieting, the investigations reported here raise greater concern that a large section of the United Kingdom may be at considerable risk."

Britain has seen by far the biggest incidence of BSE and nvCJD of any country. More than 175,000 British

cattle, primarily dairy cows, have died of BSE over the past decade, the report said, adding it was still unclear how many more cattle had been slaughtered and entered the human food chain while they were still incubating the disease.

"Given the enormity of the affected cattle population in the United Kingdom, a means of assessing risk to the human population is paramount, and more sensitive methods for detection of prions are urgently needed."

BSE is suspected by some scientists to have been caused by feeding cows with the ground-up carcasses of sheep with scrapie, a brain disease similar to BSE.

The report said that transgenic mice were also highly susceptible to infection from the scrapie prion.

Even though the biological results were "dramatically different" than with BSE and nvCJD prions, the theory of sheep-to-cattle transmission of the disease could still be valid, the researchers said.

Britain has reported 46 confirmed cases of nvCJD and two probable cases, according to a web site run by the National CJD Surveillance Unit.

The British government says that a rigorous cull of suspected cattle, launched in 1996, and improved inspection of herds has made it impossible for a BSE-infected cow to enter the human food chain.

Ershad Shikdar

From page 1

was recorded with Sonadanga thana on May 30. But five others were included in the chargesheet after re-investigation by Detective Branch Inspector Haripada Das. There are 18 prosecution witnesses in the 'triple murder' case.

Meanwhile, some political organisations have expressed concern over the alleged reluctance of the police to recover illegal arms and ammunition possessed by Ershad Shikdar and his accomplices.

Leaders of these political parties alleged that armed cadres of Shikdar are trying to regain their lost ground at the Skid Ghat.

The intra-party rivalry in the ruling AL has, of late taken an alarming turn over taking control of the Handling Workers' Union at the Skid Ghat.

The faction led by the state minister for Disaster Management and Relief Talukdar Abdul Khaleque favours normalcy to return there while the other faction led by the Whip Mostafa Rashidi Shuja wants Sramik League to take control of the Skid Ghat.

The smugglers and black marketers have increased their activities taking full advantage of the double-standard of the ruling party leaders, sources said.

Hundreds of quintals of Indian sugar are allegedly being unloaded at the Skid Ghat off and on from barges.

The sale of phensidyl and other drugs are on sharp rise there right under the nose of the police and a group of ruling party leaders and activists who get share of the sale proceeds, sources alleged.

Full moon

From page 1

the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET).

The camp will be open to lunar-watchers from the evening until 11 p.m. The Astronomical Association said that telescopes would be provided to those interested in watching the moon, subject to a clear sky.

It said that the moon will be full and there will be a sharp impact on high and low tide as the moon will pass by the earth at a distance of 356,654 km. Normally it moves round the globe from a distance of more than 400,000 km.

Tofail

From page 1

He said Bangladesh has enormous potential for investment with the government offering an equally attractive incentive package to both local and foreign investors.

"Let us share our complementarities and resources for the economic development of both the countries," he said, adding that private sector initiatives would be the most effective at this end.

Appreciating highly the initiatives in forming this joint chamber, Jyoti Basu said through this trade body both the next-door neighbours would be able to avail the opportunity of sharing the resources to the mutual benefit.

It would also strengthen the spirit of regional cooperation among the South Asian nations, he observed.

Tofail observed trade gap exists and would remain as entrepreneurs, mainly garment producers, are importing huge cotton, yarn and fabrics from India to produce export-oriented apparels.

It is driven by market force, so there should not be any ambiguity. But, time will come when there would be no trade gap as Bangladesh can increase export to India substantially, he said.

Chandrika

From page 1

bomber had not yet been identified.

Initial police reports said investigators had found a wig at the site and suspected the assailant had been a man in a woman's clothing. That view was changed after the bomber's severed head was found intact.

Y2K: Biman

From page 1

"The test flights will take place to check whether any system is affected by the millennium bug. Any problem will not lead to anything big. This will be done just to make complaint if anything is found to be defective."

Sources said the Biman informed all of its aircraft would be at Zia International Airport by 6 pm on December 31 to take part in the trial run on the first day of year 2000.

The national flag carrier at present has 13 aircraft with a recent addition of a DC 10-30. Category-wise the number of the aeroplanes are five DC 10-30, three Airbus, three F-28 and two ATPs.

Asked whether the newly added DC 10-30 is Y2K compliant, M Abdul Maleque, a deputy general manager at CMIS of the Biman, yesterday replied in the affirmative.

"We had no need to recheck the new aircraft as the suppliers confirmed it. However, we checked and rechecked other planes," he said.

Asked whether the regular flight operation will resume immediately after the test flights, he informed that it might take some time.

"We are confirmed that the test flight will reconfirm that all the aircraft are Y2K compliant. But we will take several days to resume operation after getting reports from other countries."

However, the DGM informed that there is low ticket demand for the early days of the New Year. "On the contrary, the demand is huge for tickets before December 31," he said.

Grand nat'l rally in city Jan 1

A grand national rally will be held in Dhaka on January 1, 2000, to take a fresh vow to launch a countrywide campaign for the trial of war criminals who unleashed atrocities during the War of Liberation, reports BSS.

The rally to be held at the Paltan Maidan (ground) will also take a pledge to bring an end to the communal politics as well as the conspiracy of the anti-liberation reactionary forces in Bangladesh.

It was decided at a rally at the Central Shaheed Minar yesterday afternoon in which students, youths, professionals and cultural activists took part under the banner of "Ekattur Ghatak-Dalal-Nirmla Committee." It was also organised to resist the fundamentalist forces.

Different political parties including Bangladesh Awami League, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD), Left Democratic Front comprising the Communist Party of Bangladesh, Workers' Party, Bangladesh Sanyabadi Dal and Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (BSD) and their student, youth and professional fronts joined the rally.

Speakers at the rally urged all progressive forces, irrespective of party affiliation, to come forward with a fresh vow to free the country from the activities of "Razakars and Sairachars" (anti-liberation forces and autocrats).

Convenor of the Nirmla Committee Syed Hasan Imam chaired the rally. Dr Anisuzzaman, Water Resources Minister, Abdur Razzaq, Home, Post and Telecommunications Minister, Mosharraf Nasim, Fisheries and Livestock Minister, ASM Abdur Rob, JSD General Secretary, Hasanul Haque Inu, CPB General Secretary, M. Jahidul Islam Selim, WCP General Secretary, Rashed Khan Menon, Principal, Ahad Chowdhury, Khushi Kabir, Rawshan Jahan Sati, Rekha Chowdhury and Prof. Abdul Mannan Chowdhury addressed the rally.

In the rally, BCL General Secretary Ajoy Kor Khokan,

with injuries, the DC said. "It appears that the jailbreak by the convicts was pre-planned", the DC said after preliminary investigation.

Three prisoners of Ward No. 2, each serving over 10 years' RI, gathered near gate No. 2 for a briefing on their routine daily work inside the prison compound.

But suddenly they attacked guard Mofazzel Hossain when he opened the door of the godown to distribute tools among them. They disarmed him, beat him and snatched the keys. They broke open the armory, took away the three rifles and about 100 bullets, released six others and escaped through the gate, firing blank shots, the DC said.

The three rifles are the only firearms in the prison which accommodates about 444 prisoners, four times its capacity, the DC said.

Asked whether the prisoners had any grievances, the DC said it is being investigated.

There was no additional guard at the jail gate when the convicts escaped. Jail Super Biswanath Das said. Nine other guards were deployed in other areas inside the jail compound at that time. There are 41 guards at the prison now, which is inadequate for the prisoners, he said.

The Sherpur district jail has seven wards including one for female prisoners, he said.

UNB added from Sherpur: Senior officials visited the jail soon after the incident. Brigadier Waliur Rahman and DIG (Prison) Abdus Zahir were also here yesterday.

Two prison wardens -- Meer Shahjahan and Mofazzal -- were suspended. A case was filed in this connection with the sadar thana.

'No alternative to education'

State Minister for Land Alhaj Rashed Mosharraf has said there is no alternative to education as independence and development of a country is meaningless without an educated society. The educated nation can only flourish civilization, reports BSS.

He was addressing a reception given to the newly-admitted students and those passed out with credit at the Jagannath Hall at the Dhaka University yesterday, an official handout said.

Mosharraf said the knowledgeable people should create an environment in Bangladesh so that the whole nation could foster the hard-earned independence in a free and fair atmosphere.

Appreciating highly the initiatives in forming this joint chamber, Jyoti Basu said through this trade body both the next-door neighbours would be able to avail the opportunity of sharing the resources to the mutual benefit.