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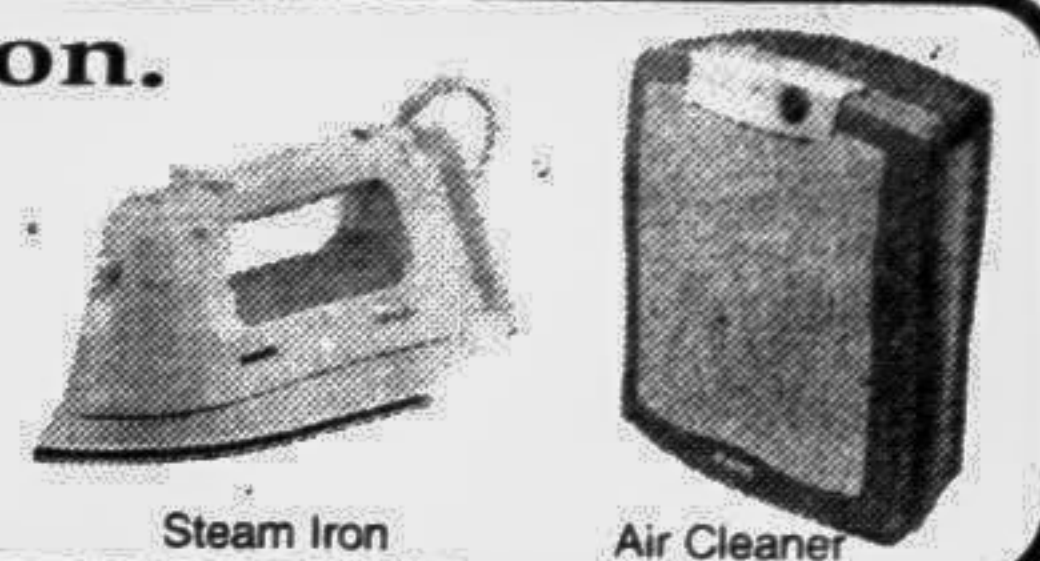
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## Power supply RPC alleges dilly-dally by PDB

By Staff Correspondent

Supply of electricity to the National Grid from the Rural Power Company (RPC) is being delayed due to dilly-dally by PDB in signing a power-purchase agreement (PPA).

Two power units of RPC with 35mw capacity each are ready to supply electricity to the National Grid and the company will start commercial production on the basis of the PPA, which is yet to be signed. RPC Managing Director Md Maq-sudul Karim said at a press conference at his office here yesterday.

RPC is a subsidiary of the Rural Electrification Board (REB).

Power Development Board (PDB) has been dilly-dallying in signing the PPA for last three months although the first unit of RPC started trial operation on November 20 and the second one on December 19, he alleged.

The donors as well as the Energy Ministry have asked the authorities concerned to take immediate measures for commercial operation of the power plant at Shambhuganj in Mymensingh, Karim said. "We, through the State Minister for Power, have appealed to the Prime Minister to inaugurate the power plants in February next."

Karim said RPC suggested PDB to buy electricity at the rate of 4.19 cent (Tk 2.09) per unit, which is PDB's lowest purchase price from private companies.

RPC procured 35.5 million US dollars credit from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to complete the first phase of the project. Two more units under the second phase will add another 70 mw electricity to the National Grid, he said.

The second phase is likely to be completed by August 2000 by the contractor on turn-key basis, he said.

## JCD protests in front of VC's office

By DU Correspondent

Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), student wing of main opposition BNP, yesterday staged demonstration in front of the office of the vice-chancellor of Dhaka University, protesting 'police harassment' on the JCD men.

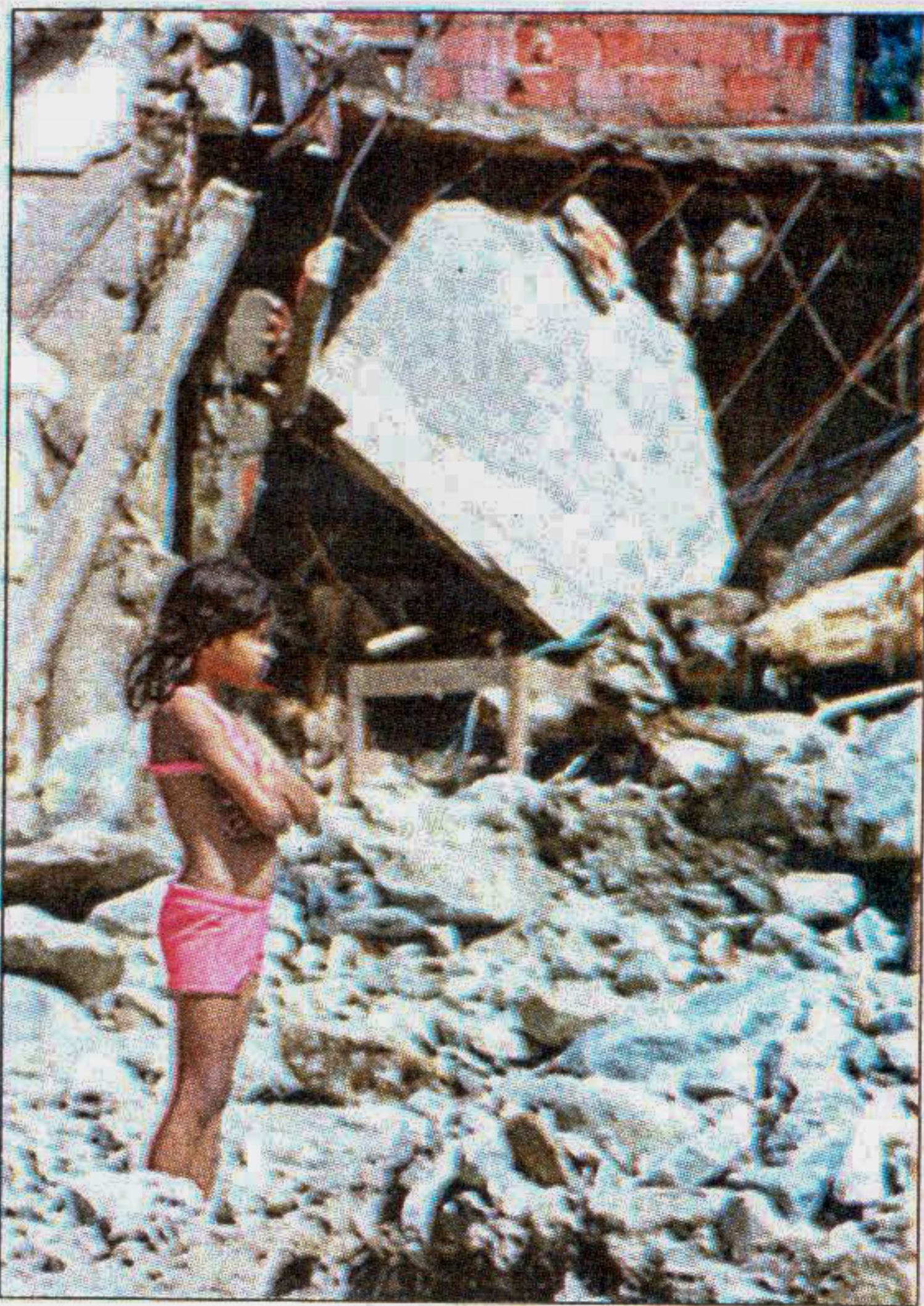
Following a procession on the campus, JCD leaders and activists gathered in front of the VC's office and held a rally there at noon.

The JCD leaders at the rally threatened the government with launching a 'greater movement' across the country if the 'repression' on the opposition activists were not stopped immediately.

They also demanded immediate release of arrested JCD leaders and workers including its president and general secretary.

Police arrested about 51 JCD leaders and activists on Friday prior to the 40th convocation ceremony of the university.

## Venezuelan floods: Death toll may reach 50,000



A young girl stands amidst destruction by torrential rains in El Teleferico, 28 kilometers north of Caracas, Venezuela yesterday. — AFP photo

CARACAS, Dec 21: Between 30,000 and 50,000 may have died in Venezuela's torrential rains, though the exact toll "never will be known," Civil Defence agency chief Angel Rangel told AFP today.

AP adds: Foreign Minister Jose Vicente Rangel said the death toll could be anywhere between 5,000 and 20,000, but said the true magnitude of the catastrophe may never be fully known.

"There are many people covered by mud and rocks. There are cadavers in the sea," Rangel told reporters.

The National Guard fired shots, mostly into the air, and

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struck people with swords to quell looting today in La Guaira. Thousands of hungry residents raided containers left on the port, some stealing fish and fruit and others making off with goods including toys to cellular phones.

Helicopters swirled overhead, and one looter was shot in the foot.

Military helicopters filled the skies at La Guaira airport Monday, dropping off refugees from the disasters and quickly taking off in search of more.

Forty thousand people have been evacuated from areas hit by torrential rains last week, national civil defence chief Angel Vargas told The Associated Press. He predicted 15,000 more would be transported to safety in the next 48 hours.

Troops continued to search "meter by meter, house by house" for survivors who might still be trapped by mud and rubble.

## Ctg city corpn polls Mobile security units to protect voters, army to be kept standby

By Staff Correspondent

Acting Chief Election Commissioner Mushtaq Ahmad Choudhury has asked the administration to ensure "visible" improvement of law and order ahead of the Chittagong City Corporation elections scheduled for January 3, 2000.

He said all concerned have to be convinced that there is "proper" improvement of law and order in the port city.

"The administration will have to inspire the people so that they vote (in the polls) in a large number," he told a meeting of the heads of different government agencies responsible for law and order in the country at the EC Secretariat in the capital yesterday.

Choudhury also told the meeting that the EC had taken appropriate steps to help the people to elect their representatives in a free, fair and peaceful voting.

"Mobile security units will work for protection of the voters and army units will be kept

standby in case of any emergency. Polling will be postponed in case of any terrorist acts."

The acting CEC further said both the state-owned and private media were being used to keep the voters informed and elections observers from home and abroad were being encouraged to oversee the polls in Chittagong.

Election Commissioner Abdur Rahman, Home Secretary Shafur Rahman, EC Secretary Abdullah Harun Pasha, IG of Police AYDI Siddiqui, DG of Ansar and VDF Major General Khondakar Mohammad Nurunnabi, DDG of Bangladesh Rifles Brigadier Shah Mohammad Mohiuddin, Divisional Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner of Chittagong, Director of the Coast Guard, heads of intelligent agencies and other senior officials attended the meeting.

The acting CEC said the mayor and seven commissioners including three from the re-

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## Bomb scare at DU

By DU Correspondent

Panic gripped students and teachers at the Arts building of Dhaka University yesterday after a 'fake' bomb was found at the examination hall on the third floor of the building.

According to sources, the second floor of the building was almost empty when the students and teachers heard the news of the bomb.

An orderly found it on the table right after an in-course examination of Public Administration Department at around 11:15 am and informed and informed the examination controller's office about it. The bomb was wrapped with red tape and placed in a container of condensed milk. It had four alkaline batteries and a digital watch and looked like a time bomb.

An official of the examination controller's office called the Proctor's office and the senior assistant proctor sealed all the gates of the examination hall.

Being informed, Vice-chancellor AK Azad Chowdhury asked the police to look into the matter.

Later, the army bomb squad and police officials reached the spot and found the container filled with earth.

## A larger full moon tonight

By Staff Correspondent

Romantics of the world unite, there's an unusually bright full-moon tonight!

The moon will come within 356,658-kilometres of the earth tonight, thousands of kilometres closer than normal, as it passes the closest point to the sun along its orbit.

Instead of the usual full moon, people will see a larger, more luminous moon. If you miss tonight's event, you'll have to wait until 2052 for the next spectacular show.

To mark the last, extraordinary full-moon of the millennium, the Bangladesh Astronomical Association will set up a telescope at the BUET playground from dusk until 10 p.m. today. They have also arranged a discussion on the moon featuring Dr. A.R. Khan, Monalisa Rahman and Hamidul Haq.

In addition, Sammilito Sangskritik Jote have organised a moonlit cruise on the Meghna tonight.

Let the days of the next millennium shine like the brightest ever moonlit night and wash away the pain, sorrows and sufferings of the commoners," said Afzal Hossain, Jote leader and organiser of the Purnima Utsav '99.

## Dhaka reaffirms LDCs to continue to press their demands

By Staff Correspondent

Dr Iftekhar Chowdhury, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Bangladesh in Geneva, affirmed that despite failure of the WTO Ministerial Meeting in Seattle, the least developed countries would continue to press their demands in all international fora.

Dr Iftekhar chaired a meeting of the LDC delegations in Geneva on Monday, according to a message received here yesterday.

Chowdhury briefed the LDC delegations on the events in Seattle, especially those at the "Green Room", where a limited number of delegates met on the final day of the Meeting.

The Bangladesh Ambassador said LDC delegates held a "very successful" meeting which was chaired by Commerce Minister Tofiq Ahmed, who had transmitted a document to the WTO.

He asserted that LDCs demand for "bound zero-tariff quota-free entry of all their products to the developed countries markets" was a fair demand, and would be made again and again.

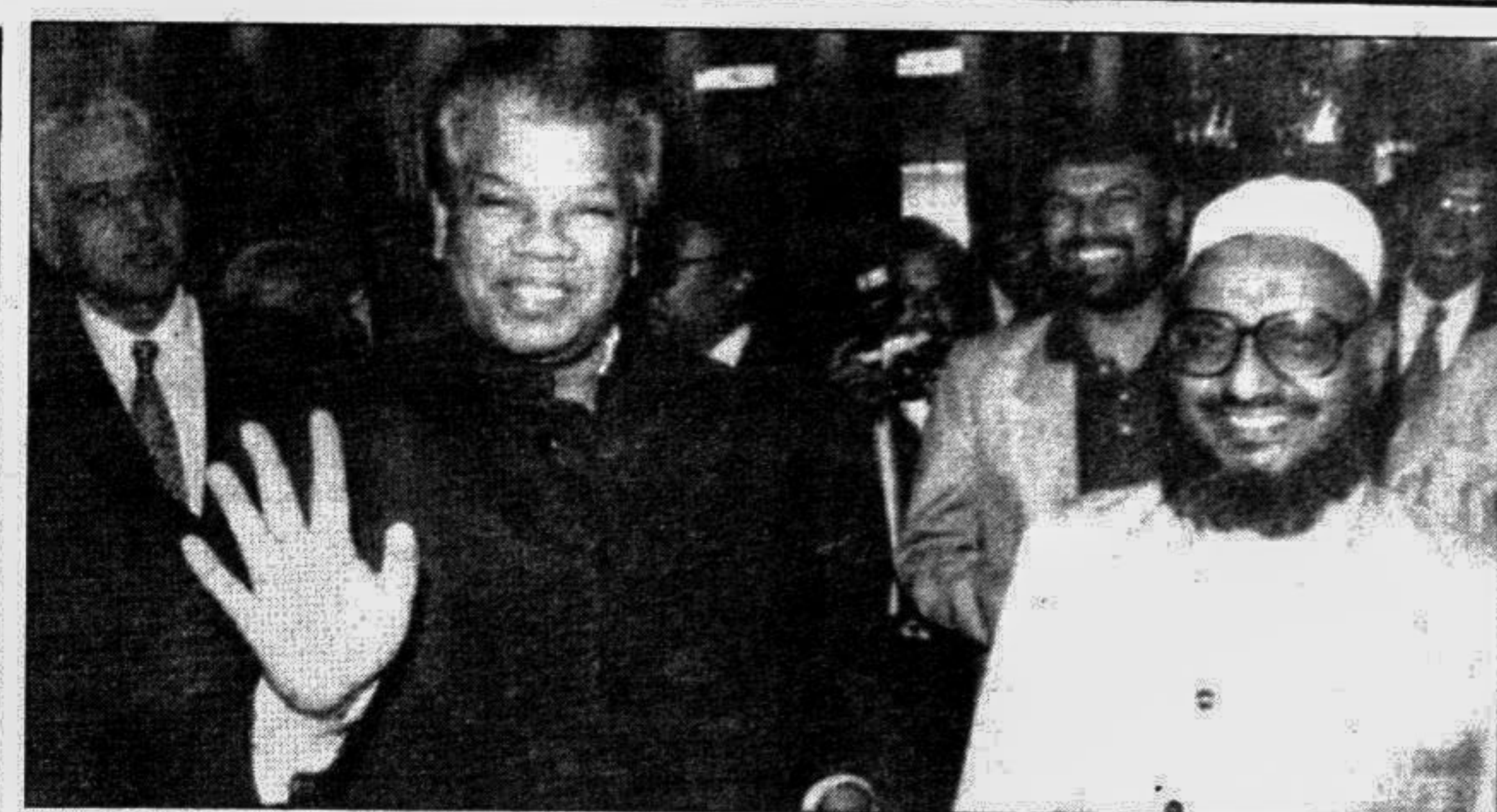
## 150 shanties guttured in Ctg

From Our Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Dec 21: At least 150 shanties were gutted at a slum in Ambagan area under Double Mooring thana in the early hours of today.

Fire service sources said, the fire originated from a kerosene lamp inside a shanty at around 1 pm and soon engulfed the entire slum.

Fire fighting units rushed to the scene and extinguished the blaze at around 3 pm.



Friends, not foes!

Awami League Presidium member Amir Hossain Amu and Jamaat-e-Islami Publicity Secretary Abdul Kader Molla are all smiles at the iftar party yesterday hosted by the French ambassador in Bangladesh. BNP leader Anwar Zahid is also seen (extreme left). — Star photo

## The unique 'Krishi Clinic' in Sailkupa

By Reaz Ahmad with Delwar Kabir

Farmers in Sailkupa thana in Jhenidah district can get their soil and seeds tested for nutrients, diseases and other pests at the neighbourhood 'Krishi Clinic'.

Shahidul Alam, Sailkupa's agriculture officer, came up with the idea for the unique clinic, which opened at the thana's headquarters on Oct. 22. It charges Tk 60 for tests, which includes a Tk 20 consultation fee.

"If there can be clinics for human beings and livestock, why shouldn't there be one for seeds, plants and crops," said Alam.

Alam said he opened the clinic to help poor peasants who pay a high price when their crops fail. Early detection of disease and nutritional deficiencies in the soil can save crops from unexpected damage, he said.

Poor farmers can't always follow the field inspectors' advice, "but if we can give them specific solutions to specific problems, farmers can take sufficient precautions in advance," said Alam.

Since opening its doors, the clinic has conducted 51 soil tests and 13 tests for diseases,

such as root rot and banana 'caloka'.

Alam invested about Tk 50,000 in the clinic, installing a pH metre, soil testing kits, chemicals and a microscope.

The pH metre measures the soil's acidity and alkalinity, while testing kits are used to measure the levels of nutrients, such as nitrogen, zinc, organic manure and sulphate.

Sources said the Krishi Clinic's facilities are also available at the Soil Resource Division in Dhaka and the Bangladesh Agricultural University in Mymensingh. However, poor farmers can't afford to use the facilities, they said.

Abdul Hamid, a farmer from Sailkupa village, said the agricultural clinic will be very helpful to the community.

Rashidul Hasan, a local seed, fertiliser and pesticide dealer, said the clinic will change the socio-economic status of the farmers.

Abdur Razzaque, deputy director of the Department of Agriculture Extension, applauded the initiative. He said he hoped similar clinics would open in other thanas across the country.



INNOVATIVE: Shahidul Alam tests a soil sample at the 'Krishi Clinic' in Sailkupa. — Star photo by Delwar Kabir

## Youth Dev Dept JS body to probe 'irregularities' in recruitment

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Youth and Sports yesterday discussed reported irregularities in recruiting manpower for the Youth Development Department, reports UNB.

The meeting, held at Parliament office with committee chairman Joyanal Hazari in the chair, was told that a committee would be formed to look into the allegation in the next meeting.

"As committee members Abdur Rashid Sarker, Mosharraf Hossain Mongu and Alhaj K M Abdul Khaleq Chontu demanded probe into irregularities, the committee chairman took the decision," a meeting source told the news agency.

Rashid Sarker placed some specific charges of corruption in recruiting manpower in the youth department.

## 3 alleged terrorists held at Barisal

BARISAL, Dec 21: Three alleged terrorists were arrested from different parts of the town on Monday night and today, reports UNB.

Masud, an accused in sensational Masud killing case was arrested from Nathullabad area today while Munna and Titu were from Ishwarbasu and Gorachand Das road Monday night, police said. They all are accused in a number of cases.

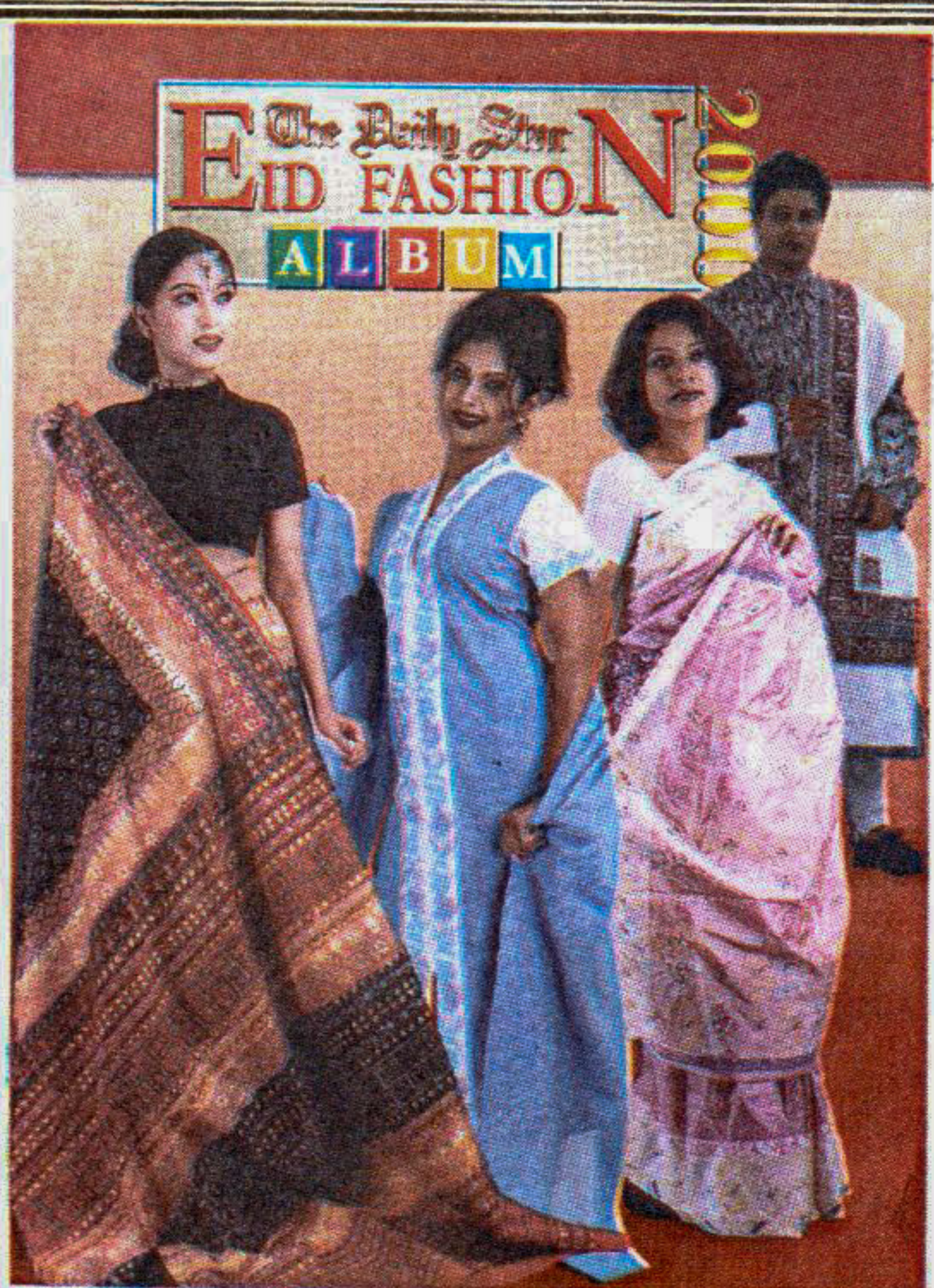
## 2 BCL leaders held in Feni

From Our Correspondent

FENI, Dec 21: Local police arrested two BCL leaders from Nangalmoa village in Chhagalnaiya thana of the district this morning.

The arrested are: Abul Kalam Azad, 25, and his brother Abul Hasnat Liton, 22.

Police said, the two were arrested on charge of dacoity, extortion and assault on policemen.


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## Sherpur jailbreak 3 wardens suspended, 2 probe bodies formed

SHERPUR, Dec 21: Three Jail Wardens of Sherpur District Jail have been suspended, two of them transferred to Mymensingh, for negligence of their duties, reports UNB.

Nine prisoners escaped Sherpur district jail with 3 rifles, 100 bullets and a sword Monday morning. In a chase, one of them was killed, 7 were captured while the rest remained at large.

Two inquiry committees were formed today.

Meanwhile, 17 prisoners, including 7 escapees, 4 condemned prisoners and 6 convicts were today transferred to Mymensingh district jail.

The body of Mujibur Rahman, a jail escapee killed in exchange of fire with police Monday, was handed over to his wife Jelekha Begum at 3-30 pm today.

Hailing from Kakilakura village in Sreebordi, Mujibur had barely 8 months to be released from seven years conviction for committing dacoity.

One member committee with DIG (Prison) Abdul Zahir was formed today to investigate the jail escape incident. The second committee comprising three officials will be headed by ADM Mujibur Rahman. CID of police was inquiring into the incident separately.

Jail wardens suspended are Mir Shahjahan, Mofazzal and Abdul Halim. Mofazzal and Halim were given stand release

to join the Mymensingh District Jail.

The main person responsible for the incident, jailer Mohammad Amanullah, remained untouched, sources said.

An accused recently came out of Sherpur Jail on bail said that Amanullah and his associates used to supply drugs in the jail. He has also hands in supplying explosives to the escapees, he alleged.

## Voting ends in Sri Lanka

COLOMBO, Dec 21: At least four people were killed as balloting ended today in Sri Lanka's presidential election, a contest that will decide the course of efforts to end a brutal 16-year war with Tamil separatists, reports AP.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga took a marginal lead as the postal vote count began, the private ITN television network reported. Out of the 3,784 postal votes counted so far, she won 1,889 votes against 1,679 votes for her rival Ranil Wickremesinghe of the United National Party. Other candidates polled 216 votes.

Kumaratunga earlier cast her ballot inside her fortified home where she is recovering from minor injuries from a suicide bomb at her final campaign rally on Saturday.

Editor: Mahfuz Anam

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