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8 days to the  
3rd Millennium

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## 9 posts of envoys vacant

By M Anwarul Haq

At least nine positions of ambassadors or high commissioners fell vacant following recall or end of contract of Bangladesh envoys abroad.

Several career diplomats, retired government or ruling party officials are now lobbying intensely for fill up the positions. In some cases, serving diplomats are trying to secure extensions on contracts.

The positions that fell vacant include those in Malaysia, Nepal, Belgium, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Morocco.

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## Inside Today

### Article

## Syria-Israel Peace Talks 'Got off to a Good Start'

Column: Spotlight on Middle East  
by Muslehuddin Ahmad  
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## Sehri, Iftar timings

Ramadan	Dec	Sehri	Iftar
14	22	-	5:21
15	23	5:13	5:21
16	24	5:14	5:22

## Prayer Timings

December 23		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5:12	5:22
Zohr	12:45	1:15
Asr	3:42	4:00
Maghrib	5:21	5:28
Tarabi	7:15	7:45

Source: Islamic Foundation

# Opposition won't join JS session

By Staff Correspondent

Chiefs of the BNP-lead opposition alliance yesterday decided not to attend the "millennium session" of the Jatiya Sangsad beginning January 1, 2000.

The decision was taken at a post-iftar meeting among BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad and Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Golam Azam. Islami Oikya Jote chief Azizul Haq could not attend the meeting, but his deputies Fazlul Haq Amini and ARM Abdul Matin represented the party at the meeting.

JP hosted the iftar in honour of the politicians at Asiatic Printers at Tejgaon at which top leaders from the alliance and some other smaller parties attended. JP, however, did not invite the ruling Awami League and left-leaning political parties.

The iftar over, Khaleda Zia, HM Ershad, Golam Azam and high ranking leaders of the four parties sat for about 20 minutes and discussed various issues, mostly relating to the upcoming parliament session, *en masse* resignation from Sangsad, formation of all-party action council, Chittagong City Corporation polls and post-Eid out-governance movement.

After the meeting, JP secretary general briefed newsmen in presence of Ershad, Golam Azam and senior BNP leaders. Manjur said the chiefs of the parties have unanimously decided not to join the forthcoming parliament session as the government had ignored the opposition's demands.

He said the top leaders also discussed the *en masse* resignation of BNP, JP and Jamaat MPs from parliament, but no final decision in this respect

had yet been taken. The matters will first be discussed in the respective party forums and later a collective decision will be taken.

The chiefs of the parties have also finalised the Liaison Committee's decision to form the All-party Action Council at union, ward, thana, district and city levels to further expedite the current one-point movement.

He said the structure of the planned action council will be announced within a couple of days and a letter of instruction of the council will be sent to all units across the country. Four secretaries general of the parties will put their signatures on the letter and the Action Council will be formed within this month.

Talking to The Daily Star, Ershad said "four leaders have

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## Central working committee meeting

# AL remains firm on UZ polls

By Nazmul Ashraf

The ruling Awami League is determined to go ahead with the Upazila elections, planned for late January or early February next year, even if the major opposition parties stay away.

The party will also ignore opposition resistance to holding elections to three other city corporations in Dhaka, Khulna and Rajshahi.

AL leaders, at a meeting of the party's central working committee (CWC) yesterday, held that these elections without the participation of local opposition leaders would frustrate the current anti-government campaign and put the so-called opposition unity into

disarray. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina chaired the meeting at Gana Bhaban, her official residence.

The meeting hailed the Speaker's move to bring BNP back to parliament and resolved to extend co-operation to him in his efforts, sources said.

The sources said the PM bitterly criticised the BNP's unity with three other opposition parties, which was reflected in the meeting resolution adopted later.

The BNP is jealous of the AL success and popularity. No party in the past could complete

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## Full-moon full of rumour and hype

Star Report

A rare lunar occurrence drove the world's stargazers loony yesterday, but for all the wrong reasons.

In an unusual celestial two-step, the full-moon and the winter solstice fell within hours of each other, creating more hype and misinformation than the last time the Earth and its heavenly companion lined up. A chain-email, based on an article in the *Old Farmer's Almanac*, lit up the Internet with heavily exaggerated predictions that the full-moon on Dec. 22 would be the brightest in 133 years.

So bright, in fact, that "even your car's headlights may seem superfluous."

The *Almanac* also claimed the unusual combination of lunar perigee, solstice and full-moon would cause abnormally high tides and coastal flooding for the first time since 1966.

Mercury News tried to stop the flood of misinformation but several other organisations had already picked up the rumor and generated even more hype. But Stephen Maran, the author of "Astronomy For Dummies" said the whole situation is pretty loony.

"The moon will be brighter, about 16 per cent brighter. But you can't tell that amount of difference with the naked eye."

That unfounded notion, See Page 12 Col 5



Coming closer

As their unity consolidates, Khaleda Zia and H M Ershad are in their third meeting in just over three weeks at an iftar party hosted by the latter yesterday. In the middle is Khondker Delwar Hossain, the opposition chief whip in parliament.

— Star photo by Amran Hossain

## Bid to enter Shahjalal Varsity foiled

# Police-processionists clash leaves 30 hurt at Sylhet

From Staff Correspondent

SYLHET, Dec 22: At least 30 people, including ten policemen were injured in a clash between the supporters of All-Party Action Committee (Opposition) and police in the town today.

Police also arrested two Shibir activists with a dagger near the official residence of Shahjalal varsity VC.

The trouble began when the supporters of All-Party Action Committee (Opposition) hurled bricks at the police at Court Point area.

Police resorted to lathicharge to disperse the agitating workers of the action committee.

The supporters of the action committee retaliated with hurling crackers and brickbats on the police. Police also fired tear gas shells and 29 rounds of shots to disperse the agitators.

The clash spread to the adjoining areas and continued for one and half an hours.

Earlier, several hundred people under the banner of All-Party Action Committee (Opposition) were marching towards Shahjalal University of Science and Technology as part of their agitation programme.

The committee has been agitating demanding withdrawal of names of different halls and

buildings of the university. The processionists were intercepted by police near the main gate of the varsity. Later, they held a meeting near the main gate.

Sylhet-Sunamganj highway remained blocked for an hour during the meeting.

After the meeting, the demonstrators brought out a procession and were marching towards the Court Point area. They also attacked Mukti-joddha Sangsad office and shops at Zindabazar while going to the Court Point in a procession.

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## Ctg AL holds rally amid bomb blasts at Laldighi

From Our Correspondent  
CHITTAGONG, Dec 22: Chittagong City Awami League held a public meeting amid explosion of a crackers at Laldighi Maidan here this afternoon.

The meeting was organised to drum up support in favour of the Chittagong City Corporation election and celebrate re-election of incumbent CCC mayor A B M Mohiuddin Chowdhury to the post of mayor.

A number of crackers were exploded around the meeting venue when Mohiuddin Chowdhury stood on the dais to deliver his speech at around 3:50 pm.

Speech of Civil Aviation, Public Works and Housing Minister See Page 12 Col 4

## ROK envoy tells PM

# Allowing trade union in EPZs may fringe FDI

South Korea has expressed its concern about allowing trade union in the Export Processing Zones (EPZs) in Bangladesh and said that it might fringe foreign direct investment in the country, reports BSS.

Seoul's concern was conveyed to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina when the newly-appointed envoy, Jung Young-Jo, made a courtesy call at her Ganothaban residence yesterday morning.

Young-Jo said allowing trade union might have an adverse affect on the foreign direct investment in Bangladesh.

The envoy renewed the invitation of the South Korean President Kim Dae Jung to Sheikh Hasina to visit Seoul.

## BOI employees' allegations against Chairman

By Staff Correspondent

The Officers and Employees Welfare Council (OEWC) of Board of Investment (BOI) yesterday demanded removal of its Executive Chairman Mokammel Haque for his alleged activities against the interest of the organisation and its employees.

The demand was made at a meeting of the OEWC at the BOI office in the city, its leaders said.

The OEWC earlier placed a four-point demand to the executive chairman, which includes promotion of some officials and employees and finalisation

See page 11 col 7

## Chandrika takes oath, vows afresh to end war

COLOMBO, Dec 22: Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga was sworn in for a second six-year term today following her narrow election win days after she survived an assassination attempt, reports Reuters.

Chandrika who suffered facial wounds in a Saturday attack by a suspected Tamil rebel suicide bomber, won 51.12 per cent of votes cast in yesterday's balloting. She needed to get more than half of the votes to avoid a preferential vote count.

Her nearest rival Ranil Wickremesinghe of the United National Party (UNP) got 42.71 per cent. There were 11 other candidates.

But Chandrika's victory margin was sharply lower than See Page 12 Col 2

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