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# Speaker gives up millennium plan

By Nazmul Ashraf

Speaker Humayun Rasheed Chowdhury has abandoned his plan for a "millennium session" of the Jatiya Sangsad as he is convinced that the major opposition parties including BNP are not going to attend it.

"That (the initiative) has failed ... I've given up the idea as the Opposition is not going to join the ceremony," an apparently frustrated Chowdhury told The Daily Star last night.

"Now, it will be an ordinary session. The House will be adjourned after the President's address," he said about the parliament's coming session due to commence on January 1, 2000.

"This is unfortunate that we will miss a unique chance to welcome the new millennium," said Treasury Bench Whip Abdus Shahid.

Talking to this correspondent, the Whip blamed the Opposition for frustrating the "exceptional" idea. "Yet, we can fix up a day during the coming session to talk about the new millennium," he said. "The plan to illuminate the parliament building on the first day of the millennium is still there."

The Speaker earlier wrote to

Leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia explaining the significance of the "millennium session" and urging her to attend it. But in reply Khaleda's BNP set five preconditions to go back to parliament.

Soon after his invitation on December 20, the Speaker had said he was ready to talk with the ruling party about BNP's demands. The demands include implementation of its previous agreement with the ruling party, a public apology from the Prime Minister for her indecent remarks about Khaleda and creation of a favourable atmosphere for a dialogue.

The Speaker wrote to Khaleda again on Tuesday reiterating his request to join the session and offered to mediate a government-opposition dialogue to end the political crisis.

It was planned earlier that the opening session on January 1 would be a different one to welcome the new millennium. The Speaker had planned to deliver his "millennium speech" and then allow the Leader of the House and the Leader of the Opposition to speak before the

President's address.

It was planned that the lawmakers would be greeted with flowers while entering the House. Such an arrangement to welcome the new millennium could probably be the only example in the world, according to the Speaker.

Meanwhile, the JS Business Advisory Committee in its meeting yesterday decided for a usual session as the plan for a "millennium session" failed, sources said.

After the Presidential address, the session will be adjourned till January 12. It will then resume to continue for the rest of the month, they said.

Eleven pending bills will be taken up for discussion during the session, for which no new bill has been submitted so far.

None of the opposition members joined the BAC meeting.

**Khaleda repeats conditions for talks**

By Staff Correspondent

The BNP will sit down and talk to the government if its five preconditions are fulfilled. Opposition Leader Khaleda Zia said yesterday.

The reply of the Speaker's second letter will be given. We will sit around the discussion table if an atmosphere is created and the five preconditions are fulfilled," Khaleda Zia told reporters as she left her official residence last night. "We have asked the Speaker to create an atmosphere for dialogue. We will join the dialogue if those are met."

In its reply to the Speaker's first letter, the BNP set five preconditions that must be fulfilled before it will consider an offer to join the next session of parliament.

The preconditions are:

(i) the release of all arrested BNP leaders and activists as per parliament.

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CHITTAGONG, Dec 29: Incidents of violence and crime including murder, abduction for ransom, toll collection and mugging increased in the port city in the last one month due to deterioration in law and order, triggering concern among the city dwellers.

Hardly a day passes without any such incident, but police are inactive, they alleged.

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# Criminals thrive in port city

Residents complain against nonchalant cops

From Nurul Alam

When contacted, Chittagong Metropolitan Police Commissioner ATM Ahmedul Huq said incidents of crime and violence increased due to release of identified and listed terrorists. He however said four check-posts have been set up at the entry points of the city with additional police force to check those.

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Members of Projonmo '71 burn an effigy of Jamaat chief Gholam Azam in the city yesterday.

—AFP photo

# Hijackers start giving in

KANDAHAR, Dec 29: The hijackers of an Indian Airlines plane have dropped their demands for a 200 million dollars ransom and the body of a Kashmiri militant, in the first breakthrough in negotiations aimed at ending a grueling six-day hijacking episode, the Taliban's foreign minister said today.

The Taliban interceded at the request of the Indian negotiators, Wakil Ahmed Muttawakil told reporters at the Kandahar airport. The Taliban convinced the negotiators to drop the ransom demand telling them that it was against Islam, as exhuming a body and removing it from its burial ground.

"In fact the Taliban have refused to budge on the numbers of Kashmiri fighters they want released from jail.

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He also said that the Taliban would not allow the aircraft to remain indefinitely in Afghanistan.

"If the two sides are unable to solve their problems soon the Taliban will force the hijackers to leave Afghanistan," he said. But Muttawakil didn't say how the Taliban would make them leave or when.

On Tuesday, when the hijackers spelled out their demands, they insisted on 200 million dollars, the release of 35 Kashmiri militants and a Pakistani cleric from Indian jails and the body of a militant Kashmiri killed earlier this year.

Muttawakil said the hijackers have refused to budge on the numbers of Kashmiri fighters they want released from jail.

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# BOI back to business

After PM assures of meeting demands

By Staff Correspondent

The week-long deadlock at the Board of Investment (BOI) ended yesterday as the agitating officers and employees called off their action programme following assurance from the prime minister about fulfilling of their demands.

The agitating employees and officers of the Board joined their office yesterday noon and their leaders held an hour-long meeting with the executive chairman Mokammel Haque, whose removal was the main demand behind their action

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## Inside Today

### Article

Kader Siddique's Convention and Storm Troopers

Column: Currents and Crosscurrents by MM Rezaul Karim Page 4

### Supplement

A two-page supplement on 'Plastic Money' on Pages 5 & 6

### Sehri, Iftar timings

| Ramadan | Dec | Sehri | Iftar |
|---------|-----|-------|-------|
| 21      | 30  | -     | 5:25  |
| 22      | 31  | 5:16  | 5:26  |
| 23      | 01  | 5:16  | 5:27  |

### Prayer Timings

December 30

|         | Azan  | Jamaat |
|---------|-------|--------|
| Fajr    | 5:16  | 5:25   |
| Zohr    | 12:45 | 1:15   |
| Asr     | 3:42  | 4:00   |
| Maghrib | 5:25  | 5:30   |
| Tarabi  | 7:15  | 7:45   |

Source: Islamic Foundation

# Tofail loses commerce

PM shuffles Cabinet portfolios

By Staff Correspondent

Minister Tofail Ahmed lost the key commerce portfolio as Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina reallocated some of the important ministries yesterday to make room for the nine new

### Another on way to Cabinet

Yet another new face Syed Ashraful Islam, MP, is likely to take oath as Minister of State soon on his return from abroad, reports UNB.

The eldest son of Late Syed Nazrul Islam, President of the government-in-exile during the country's Liberation War, Syed Ashraf is an MP from Kishoreganj-3 constituency.

A top ruling party leader told UNB yesterday Islam is now in London and would take oath on his return in a day or two.

### BNP chief under AL fire for ignoring PM's phone call

The ruling Awami League blasted Opposition leader Khaleda Zia yesterday for ignoring the prime minister's telephone call for opening talks to resolve political disputes, saying they were out to grab power through backdoors, reports UNB.

An emergency meeting of the Awami League Working Committee, held at Ganobhaban with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair, urged countrymen "to resist the anti-Liberation, terrorist and evil forces and protect people's right to food and vote."

The meeting regretted that even for the sake of courtesy, the Opposition leader did not ring the PM back.

Khaleda Zia intentionally got the phone received by another person and ignored the prime minister's good gesture, it observed. "It's certainly indicated BNP's unwillingness to solve existing political problems."

The meeting hailed Sheikh Hasina for the expanding her Cabinet and her personal call to Opposition leader as part of her goodwill to solve political tangles.

It also discussed preparation and details of the scheduled special extended meeting of the party to be held today.

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