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INSIDE TODAY

SOUTH ASIA

Pages 4-5

Fate of the South Asians is still decided by the ruling elite, writes Mansoor Mamoon in *The Missed Millennium*. Is Sri Lankan democracy in crisis? wonders S L Zain Manoon in *Castle in the Air*.

COMMENT

Page 6

M Abdul Hafiz's *End of an Epoch*. Ikram Sehgal's *Things Have to Change*.

PEOPLE

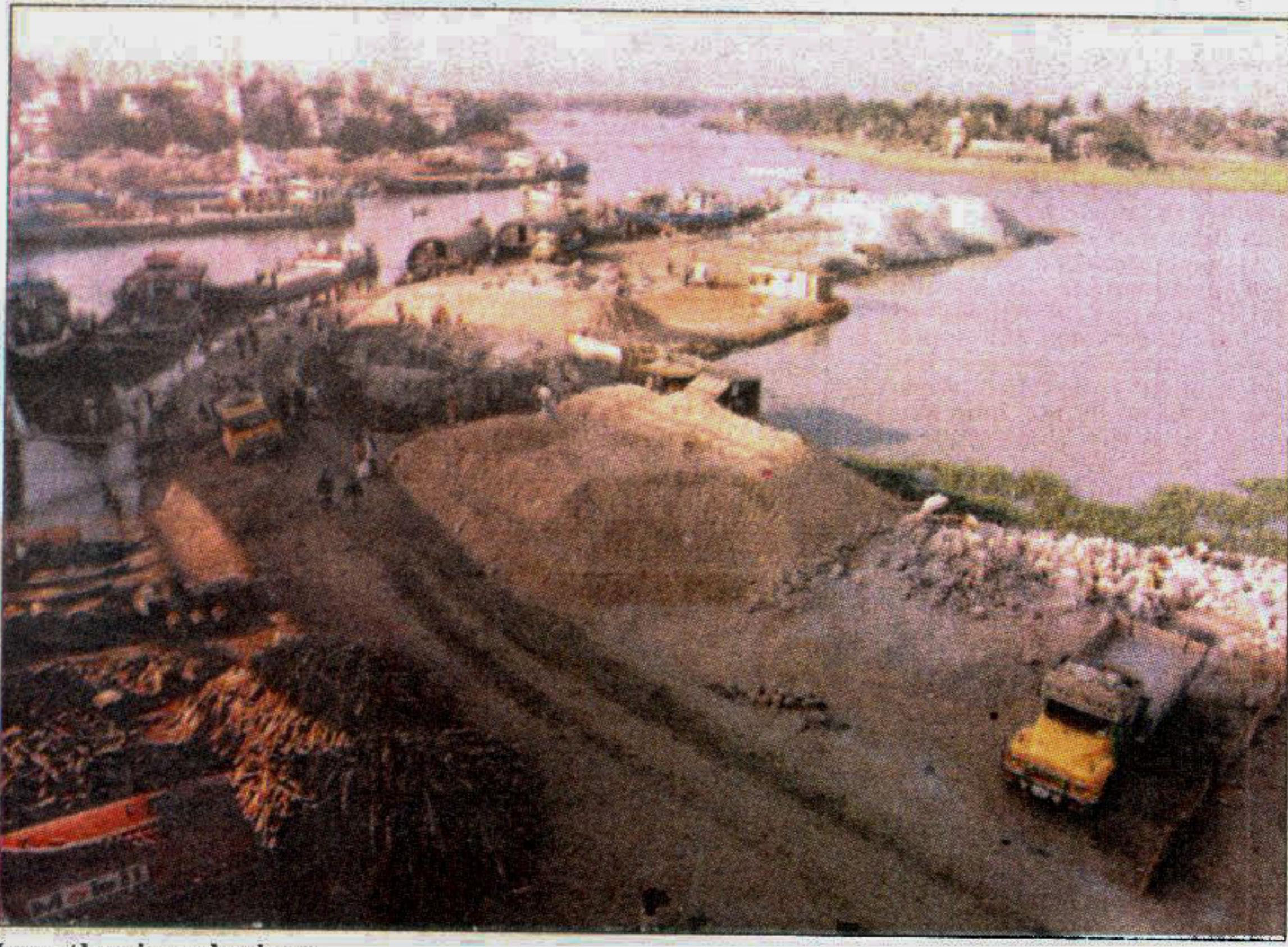
Pages 7

Navine Murshid talks to people who matter and those who don't about the year that was, the millennium hype and the future that awaits all in *Millennium Medley*.

ALTERNATIVES

Pages 8-9

Professor Dr. Golam Mowla's *Contemplating Food Hazard Situation*. Dr. Sirajul Islam Khan's *Bottled Water: Microbial Quality of Alternative Water Supply*.



Lengthening shadow

The encroachers continue their dirty deed. Along with the Buriganga, the Turag is also paying for human greed.

—Star photo: A K M Mohsin

From Tu-rag to riches

The moribund river has brought fortunes to opportunist few

By Shehab Ahmed

Encroachers have overrun a vast stretch of the Turag River near the Mirpur Bridge since they leased the south bank from the Dhaka City Corporation to handle construction materials arriving by boat.

Their activities are changing the course of the Turag, which connects the Buriganga and the Balu along the city's northern outskirts, hampering its flow and seriously threatening the bridge.

"The bridge might be affected, since a change in the river's course would increase the depth," said an engineer with the Water Development Board.

The DCC leased part of the south bank to traders unloading construction materials,

such as stone chips, boulders, gravel, sand, bricks and wood, extracted illegally from the Sundarbans.

What started as a landing bay has slowly expanded at the Turag's expense, complained some local people.

As winter set in, the encroachers expanded their operation, building structures that extended further into the river. Encroachers are also gobbling up land on the north western bank, endangering the bridge.

However, an official said the Water Development Board and the Dhaka district administration are responsible for the other side of the river, not the

See page 11 col 8

Y2K alert

By Staff Correspondent
With New Year's Eve less than 24 hours away, the Bangladesh Computer Council announced the formation of Y2K control cells to deal with any crises that could occur if the bug strikes at midnight.

The BCC also suggested that Internet users not download any software or open unknown e-mails.

In the name of providing Y2K solutions, some IT miscreants may take the opportunity to send computer viruses," said Dr. Abdus Sobhan, the national Y2K co-ordinator.

The BCC also said Bangladesh is well prepared to deal with the Y2K bug and that there is no reason for anyone to panic.

The emergency control rooms are:

PDB: Tel: 9564668, 9560875

Fax: 9564764, PABX: 9566061-5, 9566170-9, Ext-453, 304.

BTB: Tel: 9339191, 416115, 8322977, 416075

Biman: Tel: 8914460, 8914771, Ext-340, 8917400 Ext-2232, Fax: 8913353

Bank: Tel: 9555578, 9667859

Defence: Tel: 9881994, 9880150-9, Ext: 3066, 9881994

Civil Aviation: 8914735, 8917451, 8918709

Hasina wary of 'seasonal birds'

AL local leaders take ministers, MPs to task

By Staff Correspondent

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday advised her ministers and MPs to care for the old and dedicated party workers, instead of entertaining the 'seasonal birds'.

She also asked the workers to strengthen the party further. "If you fail to further consolidate the organisation at the grassroots level, the party would not remain in power," the PM was quoted as having told her party-men.

The prime minister made the observations while addressing a day-long gathering of her party's thana and district level leaders in the city. The gathering, held at the Gano Bhaban, the official residence of the Prime Minister, was also attended by the party's central

working committee members, ministers, MPs, members of the party's national committee and advisory body.

On the other hand, the district level leaders of the party blasted the ministers and party MPs for 'ignoring' the sentiment of the grassroots workers in running the affairs of the state.

The most of the seven district level leaders and three thana level ones who spoke strongly criticised the ministers and the MPs for ignoring the party workers in formulating as well as implementing development projects at different areas. Some of them accused 'some ministers' of becoming hostages in the hands of the bu-

See page 11 col 7

Walker denial

The British High Commissioner in Bangladesh, David C Walker, yesterday denied his recent assertion that by dint of being a donor, a country has the right to interfere in the internal affairs of another country, reports BSS.

The British High Commissioner clarified that his statement to the press was not intended to interfere in the internal affairs of Bangladesh, when he was called in to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs yesterday afternoon.

Referring to the remarks attributed to Walker in an exclusive interview with UNB and published in a section of the

See page 11 col 8

Fair price to pay?

Extortionists raid International Trade Fair organisers

By Staff Correspondent

Work for setting up stalls and providing utility services at the International Trade Fair at Agargaon in the city is being hampered and delayed as extortionists are intimidating contractors and Public Works Department officials for toll.

Gangs of toll collectors are warning the contractors not to do any work before meeting their demands, some officials and contractors told this corre-

spondent.

The one month long fair is scheduled to open on January 29.

Two contractors were kidnapped and beaten up by extortionists recently for toll, the victims alleged.

During a visit to the venue and the Agargaon PWD office yesterday, some of the contractors were found carrying licensed pistols hidden under

clothes for safety against terrorists' attack.

Asked whether they complained to police, they said police were called in the area four times in the last one month.

Four policemen were also shot by the extortionists near the PWD office during a chase and counter chase last month, police sources said.

Two gang leaders - Zulu and

See page 11 col 8

Tofail's exit from Commerce stuns business

By Inam Ahmed

The sudden handing over of the commerce minister's portfolio to Abdul Jalil from Tofail Ahmed has taken the business circles by surprise, who have begun to express scepticism about the wisdom behind this move.

Even the ruling party politicians were caught by surprise when the new portfolio was announced Wednesday, as it was widely believed that Tofail would retain the commerce minister's post while that of industry would go to somebody else.

At this juncture of world trade talks, Tofail's exit from the commerce ministry was widely resented.

Things have turned worse since the commerce secretary's post had also changed hands recently.

See page 11 col 7

Army pack awaits shuffle

By M Anwarul Haq

The Bangladesh Army will witness a few changes in key positions shortly as some senior officers go for retirement while some others await promotion.

Most of the promotions would be from the rank of brigadier, sources said.

Three officers of the rank of major general are due for retirement shortly. They are Major General Azizur Rahman, long time area Commander, Chittagong and Director General of BDR, Major General Amsa Amin, Bangladesh ambassador to Jordan on deputation and Major General A M Siraj, Military Secretary to the President.

A M Siraj is an officer of the Artillery Corps. Both Azizur Rahman and Amsa Amin belong to the Infantry Corps.

Among them, Major General Siraj was given one year extension last year at the recommendation of the President.

Major General Azizur Rahman would retire on January 1, followed by Major General Amsa Amin on January 3 and Major General Siraj on January 9, the

See page 11 col 7

Notice

With a 48-page Star Weekend Magazine, The Daily Star on Friday has been priced at Tk. 12.00.

Management

52 burnt alive in Pak bus fire

ISLAMABAD, Dec 30: Fifty-two people were burnt alive and 16 injured when a bus caught fire after overturning in Pakistan Thursday, the official Associated Press of Pakistan news agency reported, says AFP.

The accident occurred near the town of Kallar Kahar, about 120 kilometres (75 miles) east of Islamabad, on the Lahore-Islamabad motorway on which the official speed limit is up to 120 kilometres per hour, the agency said.

"The bus turned turtle and caught fire, burning 52 passengers alive," it said.

The bus was bound for the city of Rawalpindi, former Pakistan capital close to Islamabad, and was carrying a total of 70 passengers.

Most of the passengers could not get out of the flaming bus, while the others received multiple burn injuries, APP said.

The dead included women and children.

The bus was burnt to ashes, the agency said, adding the victims were charred in the inferno and could not be identified.

A state of emergency was declared in hospitals in Chakwal, the city nearest to the site of the accident, it said.

The motorway police, soldiers and administration officials jointly carried out the rescue operation.

It was the worst accident on the 330-kilometre (205 miles) motorway, which was built by South Korean firm Daewoo at a cost of one billion dollars and opened to traffic in 1997.

In June 1998, about a dozen people were killed when a bus plying the motorway plunged into a ravine, also near Kallar Kahar.

Due to unavoidable circumstances the branch is now opening on 4th January, 2000



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SIP TIPS FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM



Whatever your taste - Hi Cal or Lo Cal, we do make a couple of great pals.

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From the United Kingdom
Virgin