

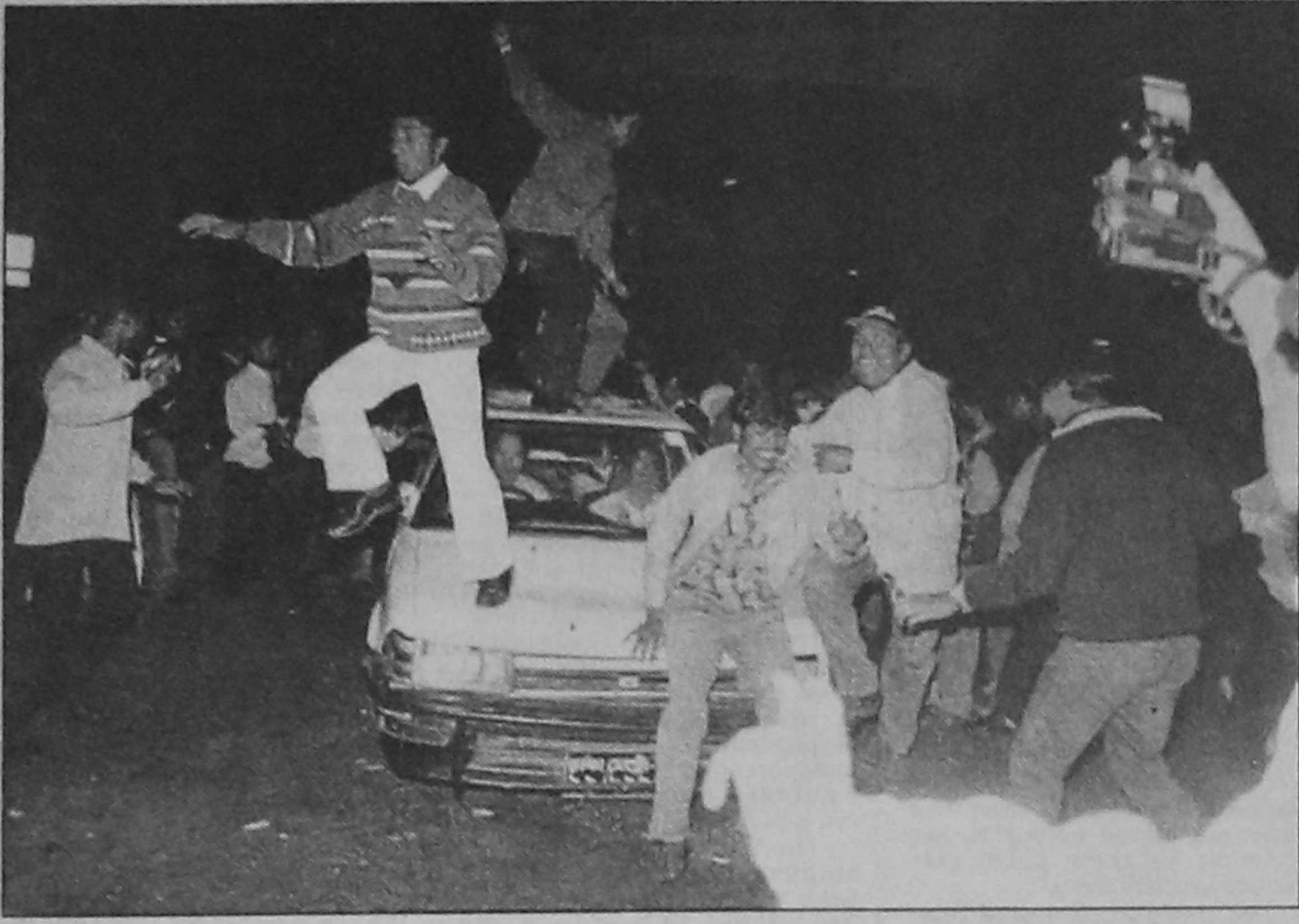
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Senselessness
For many, the city streets weren't safe during the midnight celebrations. This photo shows youngsters dance to their own tune at the cost of a car while some foreign nationals inside watch helplessly. Many others complained that they had similar experience in some parts of the city. —Star photo

Putin plans shake-up

MOSCOW, Jan 1: Vladimir Putin hinted of cabinet shake-ups on Saturday after plunging with a flourish into his new job as president with a New Year's Eve visit to Russian troops in Chechnya, reports AFP.

"Any mechanism, any collective is in the process of constant perfection," Interfax quoted Putin as saying. "So these (changes in government) are possible."

The comments appeared in character for Putin, who spends little time talking to the press about his government and whose advisers are secretive as well.

But the new Russian president is big on showmanship. Within hours of becoming Russia's acting president, Putin, 47, flew to the North Caucasus for a morale-boosting visit to troops fighting rebel forces in Chechnya, ringing in the new millennium while flying in a military helicopter.

"We opened the champagne in the helicopter," Putin told Russian television. The pilot said we did not yet have clearance to land, so we had to turn back, but we opened the bottle by midnight.

As the youthful new acting president was visiting soldiers in the war zone, national television broadcast a pre-recorded New Year's address to the nation which made clear that he was in charge.

"There will not be a minute of power vacuum in the country," Putin said. "I would like to warn that any attempts to exceed the limits of Russian laws, the limits of the constitution of Russia, will be firmly prevented."

Putin's current popularity has been attributed largely to his commitment to bring Chechnya firmly back under Moscow's control, and he declined Saturday to set a deadline for achieving that objective.

"The goal is peace on Chechen soil, prosperity for Chechen people," Putin told troops in Gudermes, Chechnya's second city Russian troops recently recaptured from the rebels.

As heavy fighting continued in the republic, Putin also repeated his stock offer to negotiate with the rebels.

"We are always ready for talks," he said, according to Interfax news agency. If Chechen leaders denounced terrorism, extradite criminals and free

BNP defines politics

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mistakes."

Bhuiyan said the politicians are engaged in endless and fruitless debate and fratricidal fight to kill each other claiming false successes.

"The political friction and chaos have led not only brothers killing each other but it proved suicidal for the nation. The nation must be saved from such a situation," he said. So, apart from unity, it is more necessary to take the future in consideration of the politicians, he added.

BNP organised the discussion on Bangladesh facing the challenges of 21st Century held at 29 Minto Road.

Chaired by BNP standing committee member Prof AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury, opposition Chief Whip Khandaker Delwar Hossain, former vice-chancellor of Dhaka University Prof Moniruzzaman Mia, Dr Khalilur Rahman among others spoke at the discussion.

Prof Moniruzzaman in his key-note paper said Bangladesh would have to face two main challenges in economy and environment globally like economy in agriculture and industry and global warming and arsenic problem.

"We can always face the challenges if we can use science and technology for which it needs broad based culture of education, development of science and technology and its application," the former VC told the discussion meeting.

In this regard, he said the information technology is the key-point for advancing the nation.

Prof Moniruzzaman said that political commitment is pre-requisite for the progress of the country and cope with the challenges of the modern world.

DESA steers clear fear

By Staff Correspondent

The Dhaka Electric Supply Authority (DESA) did not have any shortage in power supply yesterday in the area under the command of DESA, save a two-hour long load shedding in Lalbagh area in the evening, because of 'technical reasons' said a DESA source.

"The power supply of that area had to be suspended for some time because of weak supply line," the source said.

Except Lalbagh area the city and suburban areas had an almost load shedding-free day at beginning of the third millennium. The DESA's highest consumption was 901 Megawatt yesterday.

The Power Development Board (PDB) supplied electricity to the DESA, to meet its requirement, the DESA source pointed out. The power supply situation in the whole country could not be known despite repeated attempts over telephone. Nobody picked up the phone at the PDB control room last evening.

JS panel of chairmen

Speaker Humayun Rasheed Chowdhury yesterday nominated a 5-member panel of chairmen to conduct the House in absence of the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker, reports UNB.

They are: Prof Ali Ashraf, K M Shafiqullah, Taslima Hossain, Prof Ethin Rakhain and Syeda Zebunnessa Haq.

Editor: Mahfuz Anam
Published by the Editor from City Publishing House Ltd., 90 Kakrail, Dhaka-1000 on behalf of Mediaworld Ltd., 52 Motijheel C.A., Dhaka-1000. Editorial, News & Commercial Offices: House No. 11, Road No. 3, Dhanmandi I/A, Dhaka-1205. PABX: 8616772-4. Commercial: 8616771. Fax No: 88-02-8613035, GPO Box No: 3257, Cable: DAILYSTAR, DHAKA. Internet edition address: http://www.dailystarnews.com and Email address: dstar@bangla.net

Time to go for commercial farming

By Reaz Ahmad

The 'Millennium challenge' before the Bangladesh agriculture is to graduate itself from the level of subsistence farming to commercial farming and feed a population growing bigger every day with limited resources.

As the country is well poised with a record high food volume in stock, The Daily Star talks to experts, policy planners and farmers to know the nation's aspiration in agriculture sector at the doorkill of a new century beginning today.

Agriculture sector employees, two third of the country's workforce, and agriculture accounts for over 30 per cent of the country's GDP. Subsequent bumper crops in last year and the current aman seasons salvaged a flood-ravaged economy when other sectors including industries, failed miserably.

Former agriculture minister AZM Obaidullah Khan gives his view in favour of establishing better linkage between credit and market, saying that "if organized even small farmers can grow high-value agro-products and upgrade themselves to the level of commercial farming from subsistence farming".

He sees loss in soil fertility, organic materials and scarcity of water as main roadblocks in hindering agricultural growth in the new millennium.

"Although we may have to go for biotechnological maneuvering, the question remains whether we become a new colony of multinationals," he apprehended. A former ranking official of the UN body for Food and Agriculture, Khan, sounds urgency in preserving biodiversity and establishes patent rights on own plant resources.

Dr Mahabub Hossain, head economist of the IRR, says that countries do not necessarily require self-sufficiency in rice to achieve or sustain food security. He cites the following examples - Malaysia imports 40 per cent of its rice, and wealthy Singapore and Hong Kong have better records of food security than the major rice-growing neighbours do.

The critical factor for food security is "self-reliance", the economist says, which requires favourable export growth so that those with rice deficit can import food from those with surplus. "Self-reliance also requires 'entitlement'," as coined

by Nobel laureate Amartya Sen, which is the assurance of productive employment so that people can buy food from the market.

Obaidullah Khan fully agreed with Hossain. Khan said, "employment generation should be the main thrust if we do not want to see more and more unemployed farm labourers in the rural Bangladesh".

"The first sign of civil unrest can often be traced to rising rice prices", says IRRI head economist Dr Mahabub Hossain. Poor distribution and lack of purchasing power are also often responsible for hardship, as experienced in the famines in Bengal in 1943-44 and in Bangladesh in 1974-75, says Hossain.

Abdul Hakim, a farmer in Dinajpur, told The Daily Star how he cherished agriculture to grow in the country in the days to come. To him, pricing of the produces was one of the main factors. Besides, Hakim says that "farmers can always gift the nation with good harvests provided quality seeds and inputs are made available and in time".

Officials in the Agriculture Ministry say that government wants to create an environment where private sectors come up and join efforts in growth of agriculture, till date, the main fuel of the engine of the Bangladesh economy.

Private sector representatives told this correspondent about their willingness to take up the millennium challenge of agriculture. "Lot of possibilities surfaced before us - biotechnology, gene revolution and modern agro-machinery development. What we have to do only is to reach the benefits of these developments to our hard-working farmers", opined one of them.

Experts say that feeding an ever-increasing size of population would be one of the major challenges before Bangladesh after the millennium. Though the country has long been controlled by its otherwise high birth rate over the years, they explained, because of a broad population-base that we already have, more new mouths to be fed will be added to put stress on valuable foods that we grow on scarce land.

BNP processions in city today

By Staff Correspondent

BNP has drawn up elaborate programmes to muster support for tomorrow's (Monday) hartal throughout the country.

BNP-led opposition alliance has called the hartal to protest holding of Chittagong City Corporation (CCC) polls scheduled for tomorrow.

According to a BNP press release issued yesterday, the party will bring out separate processions from 11 points of the city.

BNP chairperson and leader of the opposition Khaleda Zia also issued a statement yesterday urging all to make hartal a success.

Pre-poll violence

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office at Anderkilla at about 5 pm, was admitted to Chittagong Medical College Hospital.

Bombs were exploded at Sirajuddallah Road, Anderkilla, Chawkbazar, Bahaddarhat, Muradpur, Probarat crossing, Agrabad, Barik Building crossing, Kadamtoli, and in front of the Chittagong Press Club and the stadium where an 'election control office' was set up, police and witnesses said.

The torchickshaw and the bus were torched this evening at the EPZ crossing by anti-polls demonstrators, police said. Police dispersed the demonstrators by resorting to lathi charge.

Opposition leaders said the programme of a "curfew hartal" was announced to keep voters inured during the polling.

However, the ruling party Awami League held a meeting at Laldighi Maidan this afternoon amid tight security. Police and BDR were deployed in and around the ground where all entry points were closed. Some cocktails were exploded near the meeting venue, witnesses said.

The Opposition activists and supporters could not go to the Laldighi Maidan and hold its planned rally as police and BDR put up barbed wire barricades and intercepted their processions at Cinema Palace crossing, Bexirhat crossing, Lovelane and Port Road, witnesses said.

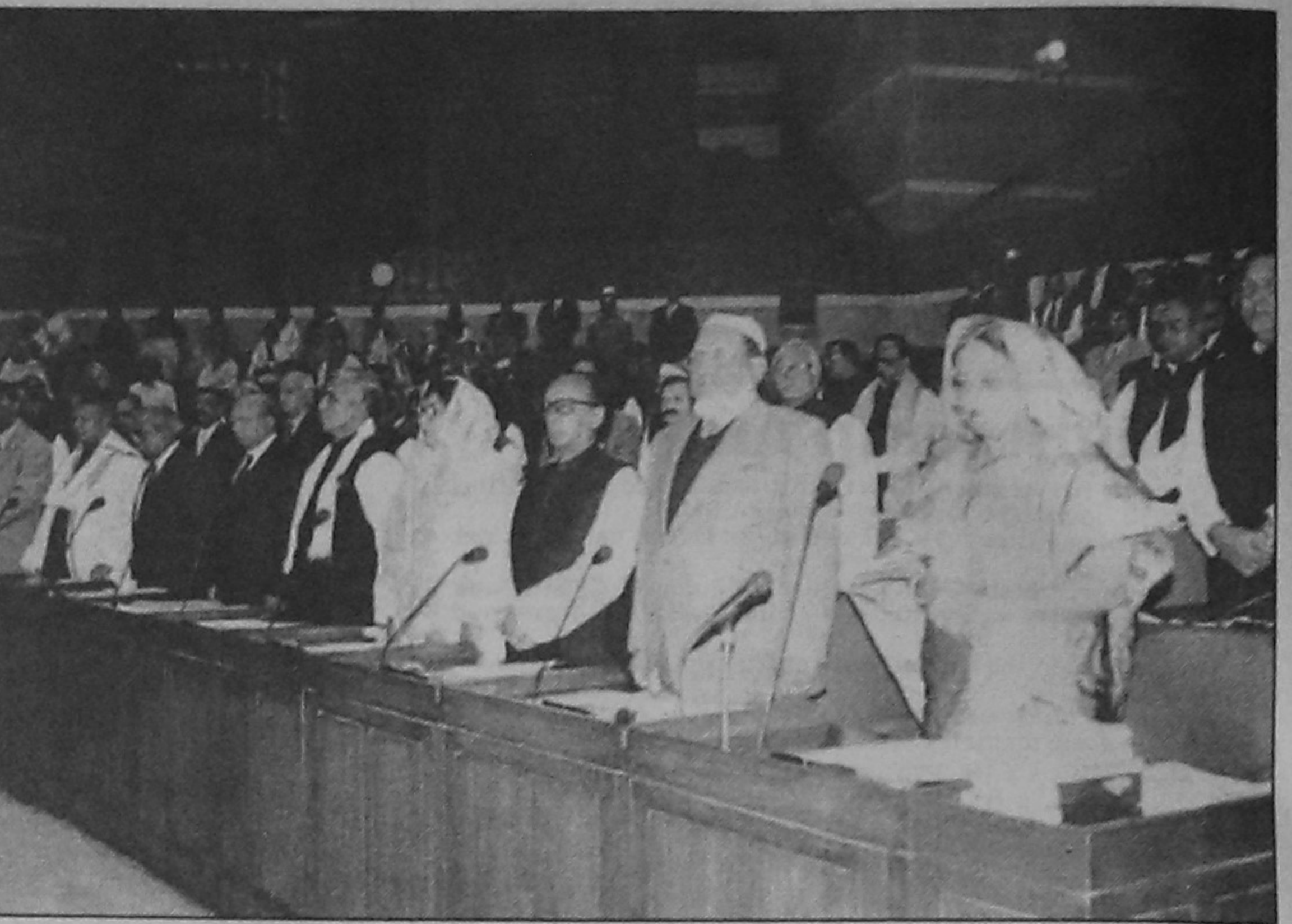
Angry processionists exploded a series of home made bombs and put up a barricade on the Port Road, halting traffic movement for about two hours.

Hunger procession by businessmen in Chittagong

CHITTAGONG, Jan 1: A rally organised by the members of business community here today urged all political parties to find out alternatives to hartal and not to make hostage the business community in the name of the politics, reports BSS.

The rally was held prior to a 'Vukha Michhil' (hunger procession) in the city protesting frequent hartals and deteriorating law and order.

Presided over by convener of greater Chittagong Shop Owners' Association Mohammad Yunus, the rally was addressed by member-secretary of the association Abdus Sabur and leaders of different shopping centres in the city.



The Leader of the House and treasury bench MPs stand in silence yesterday in memory of the important personalities who had died since the previous session parliament. MPs from the four-party opposition alliance were absent. —Star photo

DSE probing Tk 4 cr share purchase scam

By Staff Correspondent

The Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) has launched an investigation into alleged purchase of shares worth Tk 4.1 crore by unfair means by some outsiders.

The DSE investigation follows a complaint by a brokerage house, M/s Mohammad Ullah and Shabbir Ahmed. It alleged that a group of four to five men entered the sub-brokerage house and tactfully brought them out of the office, M A Karim Khan rented the sub-brokerage firm.

Mohammad Ullah said in the complaint before the Chief Executive Officer of DSE that

one of his former employees was with the group who in the absence of others purchased two lakh shares of Paper Processing at the rate of Tk 205 each.

Explaining the situation, Mohammad Ullah also sought cancellation of the particular trade.

After the incident, owner of the sub-brokerage firm and another employee have been reported missing.

Two separate FIRs and one General Diary were lodged with the Motijheel police in this regard on December 31, 1999.

DSE member Mohammad Ullah lodged an FIR and a General Diary while the other FIR was lodged by wife of M A Karim Khan.

Talking to The Daily Star, a DSE official confirmed that they received the complaint after trading hours on Thursday.

"An investigation has already been initiated in this regard," the official said.

Justice Latifur Rahman takes oath as CJ

President Shahabuddin Ahmed administered the oath of office to the newly appointed Chief Justice, Justice Latifur Rahman, at a simple ceremony at Bangabhaban yesterday, reports UNB.

Cabinet secretary Qazi Shamsul Alam conducted the oath-taking ceremony.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was present on the occasion.

Former chief justices Justice Moazzam Hossain, Justice ATM Afzal and Justice Kemaluddin, cabinet ministers, judges of the Supreme Court Appellate and High Court Divisions, members of parliament, attorney general, senior advocates, president and general secretary of Supreme Court Bar Association, vice president of Bangladesh Bar Council and high officials were present on the occasion.

Midnight

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ing winter on the Dhaka streets as soon as the clock struck zero hours.

Some simply roamed about the city streets on tricycle-rickshaws, blowing whistles and shouting welcome to the new year.

Most 'noisy' parties were held at the posh Gulshan area where police had to break up two such parties as the revellers turned violent, damaging at least 20 vehicles, passing by the area during the celebrations.

Earlier, police mobilised water cannon and riot-cars, sealed off entries to the Gulshan and Banani to prevent revellers getting out of hand.

But the revellers suddenly poured out in to the streets, from restaurants and hotels in the Gulshan area, and went into partying on the streets, bursting crackers and indulging in fire works into the night sky welcoming the new millennium.

Most of the casualties were reported from the Gopibagh, Gulshan, Demra and old city areas.

In Dhaka University, a young woman was abused by a group of unruly youths soon after the clock struck zero hours, witnesses said. Police later rescued the woman whose identity could not be known immediately.

Unruly youths divided into groups, also used abusive words towards the young girls who gathered at the TSC area of DU to welcome the new millennium.

Thousands of jubilant young boys and girls thronged the TSC Friday night and welcomed new the millennium by singing and dancing throughout the night. The celebrations started early, well before the zero hours. The hails of residential students had parties that ran through the whole night.

Explosions of series of crackers, they also lit ranged fireworks, which heralded the advent of the new millennium. Sound of gunshots were also heard from inside different residential halls.

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