



Still they smile  
Endless seminars and symposia on prevention of child labour have not changed their lot. Still, they find reasons to smile in a cruel world.  
—Star photo: A.K.M. Mohsin

## Assaulted woman sues 18, decries role of media

By Staff Correspondent

The woman, who was assaulted at the TSC at Dhaka University during New Year's celebrations, filed a case yesterday with the Detective Branch of Police, according to official sources.

The 25-year-old victim whose name had been withheld by The Daily Star, accused Mamun, Mokhtar, Russel and 15 others of sexually assaulting her on that night, police said.

The victim claimed to have been able to identify the accused after seeing the pictures and names published in the newspapers. She also questioned the responsibility of the newsmen, who printed her 'nude' photographs during the month of the holy Ramadan.

Mamun and Mokhtar, book traders of the Nilkhet area, earlier told the special branch (SB) that they had actually 'rescued the victim' from the gang and brought her to the police van.

Russel, temporarily expelled from the DU on Wednesday on charges of assaulting the woman, was a second year stu-

dent of Botanical Science department of the university.

The victim, a fashion designer and model by profession, came to the office of Detective Branch Police and registered the FIR giving details of the incident, police said.

The victim came to the DB office at about 11:00 am yesterday and registered the FIR.

during which senior DB officials also spoke to her, sources said.

Accompanied by Zillur and Laltu, who were also her companions at the TSC on that night, the victim narrated her traumatic experience to the DB police authority.

The DB took over investigation. See page 11 col 5

## UK envoy laments lack of action

Says corruption, extortion need to be tackled urgently

By M Anwarul Haq

British High Commissioner David Walker feels that urgent action has to be taken to tackle corruption and extortion in Bangladesh. He hinted that the issue of corruption will be raised at the Donors meeting in Paris in April.

He also felt that much more was needed to be done in the domain of reforms to set the country on the path of development and good governance.

In an exclusive interview with The Daily Star, the British diplomat who has served as his country's envoy for three years, gave his views on a number of subjects relating to bilateral affairs, aid, trade, reform agenda and a number of other issues.

Walker was quite critical about the absence of any significant progress in the areas of reforms, combating corruption and fighting terrorism.

"In my view, the lack of action in these areas damages good governance considerably."

The Bangladesh government, he said, had only carried out limited reforms although it had pledged it would carry out speedily a comprehensive reforms package. The public sector, the bureaucracy, matters of privatisation, legal and financial sectors were among the re-



David Walker forms package programme.

Walker said Finance Minister Kibria had himself promised speedy reforms measures at a Paris meeting in September, 1996. On administrative reform, the government endorsed the key report called "Government that Works."

That was three years ago. But reforms have been carried out on a very limited scale. The donors are disappointed. This See page 11 col 7

## Cabinet cacophony gets louder

Another new minister; two sit idle while party discontent refuses to die down

By Nazmul Ashraf

The latest expansion of the Cabinet by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has not only made some of her party's leaders disgruntled, but reportedly caused widespread discontent among many other aspirants.

The Prime Minister, meantime, appointed another state minister yesterday. Syed Ashrafur Islam, raising the number of cabinet ministers to 46. He has been given the charge of the ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, one of the two portfolios held earlier by Engineer Mosharrif Hossain.

Mosharrif has now been left only with the Housing and Public Works portfolio, which he shares with a state minister.

The year-end changes brought nine new faces into the Council of Ministers but stripped some influential ministers of their 'important portfolios'. Apart from that the changes also frustrated those who had long been aspiring to get a place in the Cabinet, ruling party sources said.

Syed Ashrafur Islam, an MP from Kishoreganj, is the son the late Syed Nazrul Islam.

Bangladesh's acting President during the War of Liberation, who was killed during the August 15 military coup of 1975. Islam's appointment was said to have been on the day the nine new ministers were sworn in, on December 28 last year. This, however, could not take place as he was away from the country at that time.

The air was thick with speculations that Sheikh Hasina might go for further changes in the Cabinet to face up to 'more discontentment' brewing in the party's rank and file.

The Hasina government is now facing what analysts term 'threats of ouster from the opposition combine led by BNP of Khaleda Zia. Apart from strengthening the cabinet, she has also planned a cross-country political tour by her party top leaders, due to be kicked off on January 15.

Opposition camp, meantime, tends to consider this rather unplanned extension of the cabinet to be a sign of a 'weak government leadership', which has begun to give in to pressure from within the party.

Insiders said the PM is also facing demands for appointment of more ministers from greater Dhaka, especially the metropolis. There is no minister from Narsingdi, Narayanganj, Munshiganj and Manikganj districts.

There is only one deputy minister from Dhaka city -- Saber Hossain Choudhury -- while Rahmat Ali from Gazipur has been made a state minister, that too only recently.

The latest expansion of the cabinet ensured adequate representation. See page 11 col 4

## Wait for the date

It's festival time but uncertainty rules as usual

By Rezaul Karim

The Eid-ul-Fitr, the greatest religious festival of the Muslims, will be celebrated in the country on Sunday if the Shawal moon is not sighted today.

Sources in the Meteorological Department and the Astronomical Society said the moon is 'unlikely to be visible' in the country today.

As in previous years, uncertainty over sighting of the Shawal moon prevails this year also.

The National Moon Sighting Committee meets this evening to give a decision in this regard.

The government has already announced a three-day public holiday from tomorrow on account of the Eid-ul-Fitr.

Meanwhile, preparations for the Eid are evident all around. Shopping malls and kitchen markets are crowded with last minute buyers. In banks, there were heavy rush for withdrawal of money.

Government and private of-

**Dhaka traders complain of unfair deal**  
Hartals, traffic chaos and then melas

By Mustak Hossain  
Political unrest, traffic congestion and private fairs are taking a huge toll on city businessmen, slashing customers and sales.

There are at least five fairs going on simultaneously throughout the city to celebrate the millennium, winter and the Eid," said Pear Mohammad, a businessman at the Poliwel Super Market. "We can't sell products at mill prices, which are always offered at fairs, because we have to pay establishment costs."

The business community was astonished when the opposition alliance called an "unexpected" half day strike on Jan. 3, 2000, to protest Chittagong's elections.

"The strikes hurt us a lot last month and at the start of the new year," said a businessman.

Businessmen said many prospective customers are reluctant to buy fighting their way through traffic. Some prefer to shop in less crowded fairs at the Sheraton, Shilshu Academy or the Sunderban Hotel.

## The 'Red Army' of Sadarghat

By Morshed Ali Khan

If you happen to be an inter-district launch passenger on the eve of the happy Eid festival, you are sure to become a victim of the red-shirted Kulis (porters, that carry your luggage by head-loads), who invariably charge you a sizeable portion of the cash on you.

They not only carry the luggage, but also ensure a seat for you and members of your family on board the over-crowded motor launches with the efficiency of the much too well known red shirted 'Red Army'.

Members of this 'Red Army' at the Sadarghat launch terminal net out a fortune for themselves during the eid rush. They are said to have the full fledged patronisation of the launch terminal authorities and the cooperation of the members of the crew of the motor launches.

An army of about 20 such men, on an average, stand on the small round-about under the pedestrians over-bridge in front of the Jagannath University near Sadarghat. As thousands of outgoing passengers See page 11 col 3



Seasonal piety  
Tupi (cap) traders do brisk business outside the Baitul Mukarram on the eve of the Eid  
—Star photo: Sk. Enamul Haq

## Fog forces int'l flights out of Dhaka

By Special Correspondent

Thick fog in the morning hours, yesterday forced diversion of five Dhaka-bound international flights to Calcutta and Chittagong.

Air traffic controllers at Zia International Airport diverted Biman flights from Bombay and Riyadh along with an Emirates flight from Dubai and a Qatar Airline flight from Doha to Calcutta.

A Biman flight from New York also had to land in Chittagong, sources concerned said.

All the five flights later landed at ZIA when the fog started disappearing in the early afternoon.

Services of ferry vessels, launches and long-distance buses were also disrupted for the third day consecutive day

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Off the harm's way  
Motorists skirt the latest accident on Airport Road in the city yesterday. The truck ended up on its side after the driver lost control of the vehicle. —Star photo: Sk. Enamul Haq

## Road accidents kill 9

By Staff Correspondent

At least nine people were killed and 14 others injured in separate road accidents in Dhaka and Faridpur yesterday.

Of them, three were killed in the capital city while six in Faridpur.

In the city, three people were killed in separate road accidents yesterday, hospital sources said.

An unidentified woman aged about 35 was hit by a speeding vehicle at Naya Palitan at around 3:30 pm. Her identity could not be known immediately.

She was rushed to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital

(DMCH) where the attending doctors declared her dead.

In another incident, a helper of a truck driver, identified as Jasim, 25, was killed when the truck overturned near Khilkhet over bridge under Demra Police Station at about 1:30 pm.

The victim was taken to the DMCH, where the doctors declared him dead.

Another victim, identified as Sadek, 60, was hit by a speeding vehicle while crossing the road at Killermore under Lalbagh thana, witnesses said.

He succumbed to injuries soon after admission to DMCH. Our Faridpur correspondent

writes: Six people were killed and 14 others injured when a truck collided with a passenger bus on Faridpur-Jessore highway yesterday morning.

Police said the accident took place in thick fog near Kanaipur bazar, six miles from the district headquarters.

Four died on the spot while two other succumbed to their injuries at Faridpur Medical College Hospital.

Three of the dead were identified as Anis, 50, Jiten, 45, and Joyonal Sheikh, 50 while the rest could not be identified immediately.

## Task force to expedite activities at Ctg Port

From Nurul Alam

CHITTAGONG, Jan 6: A high powered task force has been formed by the government to expedite the activities at Chittagong port in view of the growing load of cargo.

The task force was formed on January 2 in Dhaka with SA Samad, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, as its convener, official sources said.

There were frequent dislocations in cargo handling and repeated congestion at the port.

The task force was assigned to identify major problems at the port suggest short and long term measures to solve those and monitor implementation of the measures.

Representatives from Shipping Ministry, port users forum, Chittagong port, federation of chamber bodies and other related bodies were included in the task force.

Meanwhile, the 'turn around period' for ships calling at Chittagong port went up recently as severe congestion gripped it again. The waiting time for ships at the port has now crossed eight days on an average as against 3 to 4 days one month ago, port sources said.

They attributed this to frequent hartal programmes, labour unrest and shortage of equipment at the port.

About 50 ships are now anchored at the outer anchorage and jetties of the port.

## Better breeds better yields

New wheat varieties to hit market next season

By Reaz Ahmad, back from Dinajpur

New varieties of wheat will help farmers improve their yields even if they plant late in the season, a perennial problem in the country.

Sourav and Gourab — the two new breeds developed by the Wheat Research Centre — come when Kanchan, the most popular variety, is losing its potency and becoming more susceptible to diseases.

Kanchan, created 15 years ago, covers over three-quarters of the country's wheat fields. Dr Craig A Meenan, a representative with the Interna-

tional Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre, said yield declines at a rate of 1.3 percent per day if wheat is sown after December 1.

Farmers must often delay planting of wheat because their fields are too wet or the aman harvest is behind schedule.

However, Dr A B S Hossain, the centre's director, said Sourav and Gourab demonstrate the same potential yield, sometimes more, compared to Kanchan, even if they're planted late.

The two new varieties passed

the 'late-sowing' tests in the centre's experimental fields. The seeds will be supplied to the Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation for seed multiplication.

The centre has already given some seeds to BRAC, which is trying to produce seeds on 60 acres of land in Dhukurjhari, Biral thana, Dinajpur.

Scientists said they expect to make the new seeds available to farmers by the next wheat season. The corporation may take longer to conduct its own field See page 11 col 6