

What's on today....

Wood and metal furniture exhibition: The time of an exhibition 'Wood and Metal Creative Furniture' has been extended till February 6. Venue: Museum Art Gallery. Time: From 10 am to 5 pm daily.

..... and tomorrow

Discussion meeting: Centre for Micro Studies has organised a discussion on 'Corruption in education sector'. Former secretary AM Mesbahuddin will preside over the meeting. Venue: Women's Voluntary Association auditorium, House-20, Road-16, Dhanmondi.

Weather

Night temperature may fall
Weather will remain mainly dry over the country with partly cloudy sky over Chittagong division during the next 12 hours till 6 pm today, reports UNB.
Met office said mild to moderate cold wave may sweep over Rajshahi, Khulna and Sylhet divisions and the regions of Tangail and Mymensingh.
Night temperature may fall by 1-3 degree Celsius during the period and further in the next two days.
Yesterday's highest temperature of 27 degree Celsius was recorded at Cox's Bazar and the lowest of 9.4 degrees at Satkhira.
The sun sets in the capital today at 5.44 pm and rises tomorrow at 6.40 am.
Maximum and minimum temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature in Celsius		Humidity in percentage	
	Max	Min	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	23.1	13.9	81	58
Chittagong	24.1	14.1	89	72
Rajshahi	24.8	9.5	86	65
Khulna	23.3	11.2	87	60
Barisal	20.0	13.0	96	82
Sylhet	23.4	12.6	71	71
Cox's Bazar	27.0	16.0	80	77

HERE and THERE

BCS General Edn body meet
A meeting of BCS General Education Promotion Co-ordination Committee was held on Friday at the Govt Science College. Md Sadat Hussain, convener, presided over the meeting which was largely attended by the teachers of the General Education Cadre from different govt colleges and institutions, says a press release.
The meeting urged the government to start promotion process without further delay. It also urged the BCS General Education Association and Bangladesh Govt College Teachers' Parishad to submit the 'Shamohota Smarak' by February 6, for the situation goes unfavourable to start promotion process.
The meeting regretted that many of the cadre teachers had to retire from service without their legitimate promotion during the last four years while bottle-necks emerged from unwarranted cases in the court and lapse of organisational far-sightedness of the association. The meeting opined that the govt should not enlarge its failure to solve the problem and drastic measures should be taken to save the education cadre from total disaster.
Md Abu Yusuf, Mahbubur Rahman, Md Moniuddin, Dr Azibur Rahman, Alamgir Bhiyan, Abdur Rahim, Ruhul Amin, A K M Gholam Mortuza, Md Sadat Hussain addressed among others.
BCSIR Scientists' assoc executives
Md Junab Ali and A K M Mozammel Haq have been elected president and general secretary of the BCSIR Scientists' Association respectively, says a press release.
The election of the executive committee for the year 2000 was held in the annual general meeting of the association recently.
Other office-bearers are Md Mokbul Hossain Mondol and Mazeda Begum - Vice-presidents, Shaifur Rahman - Joint Secretary, and Md Abdul Matin Sarker - Treasurer. And the members are Md Shahidul Islam, Dr Moazzem Hossain, Shah Md Masum, Md Ali Hossain, Dr Husna Parveen Noor, Dr Md Abdul Malek, Dr M Hasanuzzaman, Md Naimul Huq and Md Azizur Rahman.

Young man stabbed by muggers dies
By Staff Correspondent
A young man, who sustained serious stab injuries by a gang of muggers near the park of Sonagang Hotel Saturday night, died at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) yesterday.
The dead, identified as Mafiz, 20, son of Nuru Mian was a resident of Paribagh in Shahabagh in the city.
The incident occurred when Mafiz on board a rickshaw reached in front of the park. A gang of muggers stopped his rickshaw. Sensing the attack, Mafiz started to flee. The muggers caught him, took away valuables and stabbed him indiscriminately.
He was sent to the DMCH in a critical condition where he died at about 4:45 pm yesterday. The body of the victim was sent to the DMCH morgue for autopsy.
Meanwhile, an Assistant Director of Public Relations of Jatiya Shangsad was robbed of gold ornaments and valuables worth about Tk 35.5 thousand by a gang of muggers at road number 3 Dhanmondi residential area in the city on Saturday.
The incident took place when the victim Labaya Ahmed reached the west end of Road number 3 at Dhanmondi on board a rickshaw. A gang of three stopped her rickshaw and snatched away gold ornaments, cash and other valuables from her at gunpoint and fled.
A case was filed with Dhanmondi police, but none was arrested till the writing of this report late last night.

300 students of Shahjalal Varsity observe token hunger strike
From Staff Correspondent
SYLHET, Jan 30: About 300 students of the Shahjalal University of Science and Technology observed a day-long token hunger strike at the main gate of the varsity today with an appeal for immediate solution to the crisis.
The VC Professor Md Habibur Rahman, President of the Teachers Association Dr Jaijal Abedin, Assistant Proctor Dr Mushfiqur Rahman, Syndicate member Kazi Afjal Hossain along with other senior teachers and varsity officials visited the students who began the strike at 9 am.
The students also sent a memorandum to the Chancellor of the university President Shahabuddin Ahmed through the Deputy Commissioner, Sylhet on Friday last seeking his intervention in resolving the crisis.
The students in a press release today said they would stage a hunger strike in front of the Jatiya Press Club in Dhaka soon.
The Shahjalal University Teachers Association will soon meet the President to seek his intervention in resolving the crisis.
The All Party Action Committee (Opposition) has been agitating demanding withdrawal of names of halls and buildings of the varsity. They will hold a grand rally in Sylhet town on February 7.



Nobuo Matsunaga, an adviser to the Foreign Minister of Japan, called on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her office yesterday.

Israel, Palestinians begin talks to outline final peace treaty

JERUSALEM, Jan 30: In a last-ditch bid to meet a deadline for a peace treaty framework, Israeli and Palestinian negotiators were launching intensive talks Sunday, reports AP.
Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak was heading to Egypt to consult with President Hosni Mubarak about troubled peace efforts with both the Palestinians and Syria.
The Israeli-Palestinian talks, being held at a secret location, were aimed at meeting a Feb. 13 deadline for an agreement on the broad outlines of a final peace treaty. Under discussion are the toughest issues dividing the two sides: borders of a future Palestinian state, the status of Jerusalem, Jewish settlements and Palestinian refugees.
Despite the drive to meet the deadline, both sides acknowledge there is a good chance they will be unable to do so.
Barak's policy adviser, Danny Yatom, said Sunday that many hurdles remained, and he played down ramifications of missing the deadline.
"Even if we don't meet the date at hand and we need another month - possibly more or possibly less - it's not such a horrible thing," he told army radio.
Palestinian chief negotiator Yasser Abed Rabbo said the Palestinians might be willing to accept a short extension of the deadline, but only if real progress were being made in the talks.
"If Israel shows seriousness in these negotiations, then we can postpone the framework deadline by a short period of time," Abed Rabbo said.
Palestinian officials, who seek a strong American hand in the talks, have said that if no progress is made within 10 days, they may push to move the talks to Washington - a step Israel has resisted. Underscoring US involvement, however, the negotiators will be joined Wednesday by Dennis Ross, US President Bill Clinton's Mideast envoy.
Little progress has been made since these negotiations began amid much fanfare in November. The Palestinians have accused Israel of foot-dragging, especially while peace talks briefly resumed between Syria and Israel in December, after a four-year break.
Seeking to restore momentum to both tracks of the peace process, Barak was likely to ask Mubarak to try to use his influence with Arafat to soften some Palestinian positions - and to find out more about why talks with Syria floundered.
Meanwhile, the Palestine Liberation Organisation's policy-making Central Council was to convene Wednesday in Gaza City to discuss when to declare an independent Palestinian state.
Palestinian Cabinet minister Ziad Abu Zayyad said that at this stage, the Palestinians were not planning to issue a unilateral declaration of independence before September, the deadline for reaching a overall peace treaty with Israel.



Top Taliban leader visits Pakistan today

ISLAMABAD, Jan 30: Afghan Taliban regime's number two Mulla Mohammad Rabbani will arrive here from Kabul on Monday for talks with Pakistani leaders, the Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) said, reports AP.
The purpose of the visit is to strengthen bilateral relations and discuss issues of mutual concern, the agency quoted Taliban information minister Mulla Qudratullah Jamal as saying Sunday.
Jamal denied reports that the issue of suspected terrorist Osama bin Laden may be discussed during the visit.
Neither this issue nor any proposal for talks between the Taliban and their opponents are on the agenda, Jamal told the Pakistan-based agency from Kabul.
The United States wants bin Laden to be expelled from its Afghan sanctuary so he can be arrested and tried for allegedly masterminding the 1998 twin bombings of American embassies in East Africa.
The Taliban has refused the US demand and also rejected pressure by the United Nations which imposed financial and aviation sanctions against the Islamic militia in November after it refused to hand over bin Laden.
Rabbani, who is head of the Taliban council of ministers, will be accompanied by a delegation, including ministers.
He will drive across the border because of the UN ban on external flights of Taliban's Ariana airline, arriving here from the northwestern city of Peshawar, the agency said.
Last week Taliban foreign minister Wakil Ahmad Muttawakil held talks here with Pakistani foreign minister Abdul Sattar.
During the meeting Sattar emphasized the need to take "urgent measures for the establishment of peace in Afghanistan through dialogue and reconciliation," a Pakistani official statement said.
Pakistani military ruler General Pervez Musharraf has vowed to promote a negotiated settlement to the prolonged war in Afghanistan between the ruling Taliban and the rival northern opposition alliance.
Pakistan and Iran agreed to coordinate efforts on promoting peace between the warring Afghan sides when Musharraf visited Tehran in December.

BCL observes Repression Day today

By DU Correspondent
Bangladesh Chhitra League (BCL), students wing of ruling party, yesterday announced a day-long programme marking the 'Repression Day' at the Jagannath Hall of the Dhaka University today.
On the day in 1996 police attacked the students and arrested some 127 students during BNP regime.
The BCL programme includes procession on the campus, rally at Aperajog Bangla at 11:00 am, photography exhibition at DUCSU building and a discussion meeting at Jagannath Hall auditorium.
Among others, Abdul Jalil, Minister of Commerce, Dr Durgadas Bhattacharya, Abdul Mannan, A K M Enamul Haq Shamim, Bahadur Bepari, Ajay Kar Khokan, Sajjad Hossain and A K M Azim will take part in the discussion.

Chernobyl reactor shut down for repairs

KIEV, Jan 30: The only working reactor at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant has been shut down for five days of unplanned repairs to fix a faulty safety valve, officials said Sunday, reports AP.
The reactor was taken off line Saturday morning and is expected to resume operation early on Feb 3, the State Nuclear Regulation Administration said.
The No 3 reactor underwent repairs last year that lasted from July until Nov 26. Plant workers then reduced its generating capacity on Dec 10 after discovering a defect in a similar safety valve, which was later replaced.
Chernobyl officials say a total of eight French-made valves, which protect the reactor's cooling system, were installed in 1999 under a European Bank for Reconstruction and Development programme aimed at increasing the reactor's safety.
There were no reports of the fault causing any radiation leaks at the plant, whose reactor No 4 exploded and caught fire in 1986 in the world's worst nuclear accident that sent a radioactive cloud over much of Europe.
Ukraine had pledged to shut down Chernobyl by 2000 in accordance with a 1995 deal with the Group of Seven top industrialised nations.
Earlier, Khaleq inaugurated two bridges on Dakua Bari Canal at Beri Union under Rampal and Fakir Ali Channel at Rampal Sadar.

Death anniversary

The first death anniversary of Asghar Hussain, a veteran freedom fighter and organiser of the Liberation War in Sector-2 will be observed today at village Wahedpur under Debidwar thana in Comilla district, says a press release.
On the occasion, quran-khwan, and a mlad mañfil will be held.
Asghar Hussain was also an educationist and politician.

'Steps taken to preserve mass graves of '71'
RAMPAL, Jan 30: State Minister for Disaster Management and Relief Talukdar Abdul Khaleq said yesterday that the government had taken steps to preserve the mass graves of 1971 as proof of the atrocities by the Pakistani occupation forces and their collaborators, reports BSS.
"A number of mass killing fields remained ignored across the country as the past governments did not take any steps to preserve those," he said while speaking at a discussion on Mass Killing Fields at Dhaka Multipurpose High School premises here.
But, he said, the government led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has taken steps to find out and preserve and unreported graves as historical records of atrocities for future generations.
Earlier, Khaleq inaugurated two bridges on Dakua Bari Canal at Beri Union under Rampal and Fakir Ali Channel at Rampal Sadar.

Russian army faces strong resistance in Grozny

STARIFE ATAGI, Russia, Jan 30: Russian forces advancing toward the centre of the Chechen capital Grozny Sunday met stiff resistance from entrenched Islamic rebels who are resorting to guerrilla tactics to keep their hold on a strategic square, reports AP.
Heavy fighting was reported on the approaches to Minutka Square in the centre of Grozny and in the adjoining Leninsky and Oktyabrsky districts, the military press service for the Northern Caucasus told the Interfax news agency.
The Russian advance on Grozny has concentrated for more than a week on the square, and taking it would give federal forces leverage for pushing rebels out of the city centre.
Rebel positions in the city centre were being shelled and bombed by Russian artillery and planes on Sunday, Interfax said. Despite inclement weather, Russian warplanes and helicopters flew more than 210 missions over the past 24 hours, the military command said.
The Russians' progress in Grozny has been fitful, with many positions changing hands several times. Russian servicemen often taken buildings by day only to abandon them at night for fear of military attacks.
According to Alexander Saprnov, a spokesman for the eastern group of federal forces, the rebels have realised they could not win in open fighting with Russian forces and have switched to guerrilla tactics.
"Small groups of militants scout weak points in the defence of crossroads and military routes," he said.
Gen Aslanbek Ismailov, chief of the Chechen defence headquarters, said rebels on rooftops with sniper rifles are in control of the approaches to Minutka Square, according to Interfax.
Their strategy, he said, "is to force the Russian command to draw the maximum quantity of personnel and equipment to the streets," where they could be boxed in and attacked by Chechen fighters from the rear, a tactic that inflicted severe losses on Russian troops in the last 1994-96 Chechen war.
In the foothills and mountains south of Grozny, Russian troops were battling militants as Russian artillery pounded suspected rebel bases in the villages of Benoi-Vedeno, Serzhen-Yurt and Khatuni, the military command told Interfax.
Moscow said it sent troops into Chechnya in September because of an invasion by Chechen-based militants into the neighbouring Russian republic of Dagestan in August, and because of deadly apartment bombings elsewhere in Russia that were blamed in Chechnya.

Turkish president warns against drawing army into politics

ANKARA, Jan 30: President Suleyman Demirel has warned in a newspaper interview against drawing Turkey's powerful generals into political rows such as one over Islamic militants, reports AFP.
"It is necessary to make an effort not to pull the army into political discussions because the soldiers are not a political party," Demirel said in Sunday's edition of the liberal Radical newspaper.
"If (the soldiers) are forced into self-defence, they will not respond like a political party because they have more facilities than a political party," he added.
The general staff has lashed out at the pro-Islamic Virtue Party (FP) which had accused the military of ignoring the Turkish Hizbullah, an underground group which wants an Iranian-style regime.
Police have unearthed 42 bodies in shallow graves across Turkey in a massive crackdown against Hizbullah since January 17 when the group's leader was killed and two senior commanders were captured in Istanbul.
Turkish Hizbullah, which is not believed to be associated with the Lebanese guerrilla group of the same name, emerged in the early 1980s with the initial aim of countering the separatist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in southeast Turkey.
Amid the macabre discoveries, FP leader Recai Kutan on Tuesday accused the army of turning a blind eye to Hizbullah in a bid to indirectly encourage its armed campaign against the PKK.
The next day, the army hit back at Virtue Party, saying "the representatives of this mentality are the source of Muslim extremism in Turkey and have the biggest share in the stage it has reached today."
Demirel said such rows gave the image that the Turkish army cast a shadow over Turkish politics.
"Everyone should avoid acts that will disturb the country's soldiers and force them to defend themselves," he warned.
The president again ruled out claims of state backing for Hizbullah, but said some officials might have helped the group without the state knowing.
"There may be some people who may have opted to use illegitimate methods. These are individual mistakes. There is no point in accusing the state," he told Radical.
The army, which wields considerable political influence, is a staunch defender of the secular constitution and has vowed to fight movements which it sees as the primary threat to the Turkish state.
In 1997, it forced the downfall of an Islamist-conservative coalition by issuing non-negotiable rules for the government which it accused of following Islamist policies contrary to the country's decades old western-oriented outlook.

Public Safety Bill

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and gave a note of dissent to the proposed Public Safety Act.
As soon as the public safety act comes into effect through a gazette notification, the government plans to initially set up five or six special tribunals in terrorism infested southern regions of the country and in big cities like Dhaka and Chittagong, sources said. It is also thinking of measures for protection of tribunal judges, the sources added.
Dubbed as "millennium session", it began on January 1 and had 16 working days during which the House also passed 10 other bills including those increasing salaries of the prime minister, Speaker, ministers, Deputy Speaker and MPs.
On most of the working days, the House was dull with the Opposition keeping away and many ruling party lawmakers remaining absent or coming late. Sittings were delayed on most of the days due to lack of quorum. However, most of the Treasury Bench members attended the session yesterday.
Before prorogation of the session at 2:30 pm, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina assured that the Public Safety Act would not be abused in any way.
There is no scope of abuse of the law which also provides for punishment of the abusers."
Describing provisions of the Public Safety Act, she said it will deal with crimes like hijacking, extortion, damage to cars and properties, obstruction to vehicular movement and tendering process. She wondered how opposition parties termed it a black law.
"Do they want such crimes to go unpunished? The law is for the interest of the people, their peace and safety. It aims at trying the criminals who used to get released through loopholes in the existing laws or through bribe. It will also expedite the process of trial, ensure justice and help the administration."
"Only those involved in such crimes can be afraid of the law," the prime minister said and requested all concerned not to encourage the criminals by speaking against it.
"We're not afraid that the law will be used against us if we are back to the Opposition. Because, we'll never commit such crimes. That's why we did not give any time frame for the law as the BNP did to the Anti-Terrorism Act."
Seeking passage of the law, Home Minister Mohammad Nasim also promised that the Public Safety Act would not be used for political purposes.
"They (the opposition parties) are afraid of the law as most of them are extortionists and terrorists, and are engaged in obstructing tender process."
Before reading out the Presidential order of prorogation, Speaker Humayun Rasheed Chowdhury regretted absence of opposition MPs and requested them to return to the House in the next session. A similar call also came from Leader of the House Sheikh Hasina, JP leader Anwar Hossain also spoke earlier.
Public Safety Act
Under the Act, a one-member special tribunal will try the accused in nine specific acts of crime. These are hijacking, extortion, obstruction to tender process, damage to cars and properties, obstruction to free movement of vehicles, realisation of ransom by kidnapping, terrorising through explosion and arson, filing case on false charge and incitement to criminal acts.
Convicts in such cases will be given rigorous imprisonment varying from two to 14 years with financial penalty.
All such offences under the new law are non-bailable but the tribunal, if it is satisfied that the person concerned is not involved in the crime he/she is accused of, can grant only after the investigation is over.
A convict or an aggrieved person can go to the appeal court against the verdict, acquittal or any other order passed by the tribunal in 30 days from pronouncement of the order.
Besides, it also provides for action against the investigating officer (IO) if the IO is found guilty of trying to protect an accused, wilful negligence in the process of investigation or making a witness an accused.
If the tribunal deems it fit for the sake of justice, it would have the power to consider an accused as a witness after reviewing the investigation report.
Unlike other courts, the special tribunal will accept audio-video records and still photographs as evidences. The law has provision for trial in absentia.
Investigation must be completed within 75 days and trial in 120 days. Investigation and trial will go non-stop.
The tribunals will be set up in district headquarters or in metropolitan cities with judicial department officials of the rank of district judge.

Women and Children Repression Prevention Act

Under the Act, a one-member tribunal will try the accused for crimes against women and children. The crimes are: murder, attempt to murder or serious physical damage, throwing or attempt to throw something burning, destructive or poisonous which cause physical or psychological damage, trafficking, abduction, rape and rape to death, sexual assault, harassment and indecent gesture, murder or attempt to murder for dowry, crippling for use as beggar and detention for realisation of ransom.
Crimes like murder or attempt to murder, damage to face, breast or sexual organ, trafficking, kidnapping for ransom, rape to death and crippling are punishable with death or life imprisonment with financial penalty. The law provides for rigorous imprisonment for various terms for other offences.
All crimes under the law are non-bailable but the tribunal can grant bail if it is satisfied that the bail will not affect the process of trial.
The law provides for appeal against the verdict, acquittal or any other order passed by the tribunal within 60 days of pronouncement of such order.
In case of death penalty by the tribunal, all relevant documents must be sent to the High Court and the penalty can not be executed without approval of the HC.
The new law provides for punishment for publication of any material by the news media, which reveals identity of a victim. It also provides that the rapist will bear all expenses for the upbringing of any offspring. Trial should be completed in 180 days and only written complaint will be cognisable to the tribunal.
Anybody found guilty of filing case with the motive of harming another or without any legal cause will also be punished.
Investigation into a case must be completed in maximum 90 days with an extension of 30 days. If trial does not end in 90 days, the tribunal will prefer a new investigating officer granting the IO another 30 days. It will also enjoy the right to consider an accused as a witness for the interest of fair trial. The law also provides for trial in absentia.
If the tribunal deems it fit, it can order for safe custody of a woman or a child outside the jail. Medical test of a rape victim should be done at the earliest and action can be taken against a doctor for his negligence to duty.

Fortune of Prince Charles

LONDON, Jan 30: The fortune of Britain's Prince Charles has risen to an all-time high of 290 million pounds, The Sunday Times newspaper reported, says AFP.
It said the figure will be revealed in accounts to be published for the first time later this year.
His Duchy of Cornwall estate, set up in the 14th century to provide for the heir to the throne, has never before revealed officially how much its extensive farmland and commercial assets are worth.
As the Duke of Cornwall, Charles holds in trust an estate created by Edward III in 1337. He is allowed to keep only the income from the estate and cannot touch its capital.
The weekly said the disclosure had prompted some Labour members of parliament to call for Charles's tax exemption to be revoked and for his estate to be treated as any other commercial enterprise.

Wahid meets with Saudi president

RIYADH, Jan 30: Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid met with Saudi King Fahd and Crown Prince Abdullah to discuss increasing Saudi investments in Indonesia, a Saudi official said Sunday, reports AP.
In the late Saturday meeting, Fahd and Abdullah told Wahid that Saudi Arabia would encourage Saudi businessmen to invest in Indonesia, said the official, speaking on condition of anonymity. He was also told that the kingdom would look into his request to employ more Indonesians in Saudi Arabia.
The are currently some 300,000 Indonesians working in Saudi Arabia, mostly as nannies and maids.
Wahid, who is on a 16-day tour of the Middle East, Europe and Asia, is accompanied by a high-ranking delegation which includes the ministers of oil and foreign affairs.