

# The Daily Star

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### US concern over press freedom

WASHINGTON, Dec 5: US officials said yesterday that envoys in Dhaka had stressed the importance of media freedom with Bangladeshi leaders, following a rash of lawsuits levelled at the country's newspapers, reports AFP.

State Department spokesman Richard Boucher told reporters in a regular briefing that US diplomats had met Bangladeshi officials, whom he did not name, to press home their concerns.

They have met with the government of Bangladesh, they have discussed the situation with regard to freedom of the press, and stressed once again our strong belief that freedom of the press is a vital component of a free society," he said.

Editors and publishers of 16 leading Bangladeshi dailies last month expressed concern over a string of charges, mostly for contempt of court, facing newspapers in the country.

Five Bengali dailies Manabjani, Sangbad, Ittefa, Janakantha and Jangirant have been recently hit with the charges over reports on the functioning of the judiciary.

### Army deployed at port Police firing at Mongla kills 4

From Staff Correspondent.

KHULNA, Dec 5: Four people were killed and 58 others injured, 12 of them seriously, in a fierce armed clash between police and striking workers at Mongla Port at noon today.

The dead could not be identified as police took them in their custody at an unknown place.

But local people told this correspondent that names of the persons killed in police firing are Faruque, 30, Avi, 20, Nasir, 30, and Ripon, 26. Faruque and Avi are port workers while Nasir and Ripon are residents of Mongla town.

Mongla Port officials admitted death of two persons but refused to disclose their names.

Sporadic clashes were going on at different places of the port and Mongla town till writing of this report.

The injured were admitted to different hospitals in Bagerhat and Khulna districts.

Army and armed police battalion have been deployed at Mongla Port following the incident.

According to witnesses, the clash began when police intercepted a procession brought out by workers to protest lodging of an FIR with Mongla thana against some leaders of the striking workers.

The FIR was lodged today by a leader of Port Users' Association with the support of Dock Workers' Management Board.

Both police and the agitating workers used arms and hand bombs

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### Berlin's allout support for free access of items to EU market

BERLIN, Dec 5: German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder assured his government's all-out support for duty-and quota-free access of Bangladeshi goods to the market of Germany and European Union, reports UNE.

"I have promised the Prime Minister to extend full support for the free access of LDC goods, including those of Bangladesh to the European market," he told newsmen after official talks between the two leaders here today.

The Chancellor, whose country is a powerful member of the European Union, said he would strongly recommend the support of Germany for free market access of the LDC goods. He said he would also encourage the private entrepreneurs of Germany to invest in Bangladesh.

Schroeder said the private companies who are totally independent were keenly interested in that region of the world, including Bangladesh, for more investment.

More German people will be encouraged to invest in Bangladesh if a favourable investment climate continued and protection of the investors ensured, he said.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder review the honour guard outside the chancellery in Berlin. Sheikh Hasina arrived in Germany yesterday on a three-day official visit. --AFP photo

### Democracy Day today

By Staff Correspondent

Democracy Day, marking the fall of Bangladesh's longest serving autocratic ruler HM Ershad will be observed today. Ershad was forced to quit power amidst a people's uprising on December 6, 1990.

Sixth of December reminds the democracy-loving people of Bangladesh about the arduous struggle against General Ershad's dictatorial regime that lasted for little less than a decade. Ershad grabbed power in a bloodless coup on March 24, 1982 overthrowing the elected government of President Abdus Sattar.

This day 10 years ago, the General had to hand over power to a caretaker government led by the then Chief Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed who was chosen by the three political alliances that led the revolution. The autocrat's announcement of stepping down from power on December 4 had already sparked celebrations on the streets of Dhaka as elsewhere in the country.

Justice Ahmed, as acting President, supervised the country's first free and fair elections of the post-autocracy era on February 27, 1991. BNP was voted to power while AL emerged as the main opposition party.

Ten years down the line, people

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### BNP bows to JP pressure, demands Ershad's release

By Rezaul Karim

BNP has finally given in to pressure by Jatiya Party to demand release of jailed President HM Ershad.

The latest development marks a shift in the BNP stance regarding deposed President Ershad who is serving a jail term following his conviction in a graft. He was sent to Dhaka Central Jail for the second time on November 20.

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia at a public meeting on November 23 said her party had faith in the higher court and the judiciary. She hoped that Ershad would be released through legal procedures.

BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami have been repeatedly turning down JP's plea to issue a statement asking for Ershad's release. But the Central Liaison Committee (CLC) at a meeting yesterday demanded his release all on a sudden.

Held at 29 Minto Road, the official residence of the Leader of the Opposition in Parliament, the CLC meeting in its resolution said, "Former President and Jatiya Party Chairman Hussain Muhammad Ershad is now in jail falling prey to the wrath of the government."

It issued an unsigned press release last night, which had no letterhead and bore the name of BNP Chairperson's Press Adviser Anwar Zahid, and demanded withdrawal of cases filed against all political leaders and activists, including Khaleda Zia, and release of all leaders and activists, including JP Chairman HM Ershad before Eid-ul-Fitr.

It said the days of the ruling party is numbered and it cannot avoid inevitable consequences by filing cases against Khaleda Zia or throwing Ershad into jail.

Sources said the CLC meeting was attended by four BNP leaders, who are known to be hardliners. They are M Shamsul Islam, Dr Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, Anwar Zahid and Mirza Abbas.

Two other BNP representatives, Tariqul Islam and Sadek Hossain Khoka MP did not attend the meeting, the sources said.

The CLC in its resolution also sided with the Daily Inqilab and strongly condemned "BKSAL-style white terrorism" on the daily and its editor. It demanded withdrawal of "conspiratorial" case filed against the Inqilab editor.

The meeting said hired goons of the government have been setting afire "people's popular" newspaper in different parts of the country, and condemned this policy of the government.

Meanwhile, the resolution adopted by the CLC

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### A decade after case against Ershad Home Ministry yet to lift embargo on investigation

By Reaz Ahmad

Ten years have gone by since former president H M Ershad stepped down this day in 1990, but investigation into one of the most sensational cases against the former military dictator has remained stayed for over five years now.

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) general secretary Hasnul Haq Inu filed the case with Mujibhel police station on December 12, 1990, accusing Ershad of taking over power through unconstitutional means on March 24, 1982.

On the eve of the Democracy Day today, Inu told The Daily Star that a Home Ministry stay order on the investigation into the case should be lifted immediately to pave the way for trial of Ershad for taking over power illegally.

The former dictator is facing 16 more cases on a wide range of charges, starting from possession of illegal arms to murder.

Out of 18 cases filed against him since December 6, 1990, Ershad was acquitted of charges in two cases while two others are under investigation. He was awarded punishment in three cases, one case is under trial in lower court while the process of 10 other cases has been stayed upon the High Court orders.

The High Court on August 24 this year lowered his punishment in Janata Tower graft case from a seven-year jail sentence to a five-year imprisonment with a fine of Tk five and a half crore.

Ershad was sent to jail on November 20 this year following his surrender before the trial court. Three days later, a full bench of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court modified the HC verdict, taking into account the fact that Ershad had served most of his jail term since he was convicted by a trial court in 1993.

It said he could come out of the jail on payment of the fine, failing which he will have to serve a six-month jail term.

The case in which Ershad was charged for illegal take-over of power was formally accepted for police investigation on March 9, 1991.

However, on June 25, 1995, the Home Ministry stayed investigation into the case. Subsequently, Ershad got bail in the case at the court of the then Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Habibur Rahman on November 13, 1996.

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### Complaint case against SI of Kafrul thana

By Court Correspondent

A complaint case against a sub-inspector of Kafrul thana was filed with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court, Dhaka yesterday.

The case was filed under section 10, 11 and 12 of the Public Safety Act (PSA) on charge of demanding toll.

The Court of Metropolitan Magistrate Mohammad Nurul Islam directed the concerned thana to take legal action against the accused after investigation.

Mohammad Matiur Rahman, Manager, Operations Control of Bangladesh Biman, in his plaint

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Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Dec 6	5.10 pm
Dec 7	6-28 am

Prayer Timings December 6		
	Azhan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-03	5-15
Zohr	12-45	1-20
Asr	3-45	4-00
Maghrib	5-14	5-22
Esha	7-00	7-30

Source: Islamic Foundation

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Sheri, Iftar timings			
Ramadan	Dec	Sheri	Iftar
9	6	5-03	5-14
10	7	5-04	5-15
11	8	5-05	5-15

### Azhar, Sharma exiled, Jadeja banned for five years

Match-fixing verdict

MADRAS, Dec 5: India's cricketing authorities today handed down a life ban to former Indian cricket captain Mohammad Azharuddin and suspended Test star Ajay Jadeja for five years for match-fixing, reports AFP.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) said ex-Test player Ajay Sharma, who still plays first-class cricket, was also dismissed from the game for ever.

Another former international Manoj Prabhakar, who blew the lid on the match-fixing scandal three years ago, was barred from holding any official post in Indian cricket for five years.

All Irfan, former physiotherapist of the Indian team, was also banned from associating himself with the game.

All four players and the physio were implicated in a match-fixing probe by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and another internal inquiry by the BCCI.

Wicketkeeper Nayan Mongia, who was exonerated by the CBI, was let off without a penalty.

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Azharuddin Ajay Sharma

### JS body to discuss Ershad's takeover at next meeting

By Staff Correspondent

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Ministry of Defence is likely to have a detailed discussion on the military takeover by former Army chief Lt. Gen. H M Ershad in its next meeting scheduled for December 17.

The committee in a meeting on Monday took up for discussion the issues of three military coups on August 15 and November 7, 1975, and October 2, 1977, but failed to arrive at any conclusion.

Presided over by committee Chairman Lt. Gen. (retd.) K M Shafiqullah, the meeting also discussed upgrading of the rank of the Chief of Army Staff from Lieutenant General to General.

When the issue of military takeover by former army chief H M Ershad was tabled for discussion, Jatiya Party member and Ershad's younger brother GM Gader objected. He pointed out that the matter was legalised through the Seventh Amendment of the Constitution.

Later, the committee asked the ministry to let it know whether a discussion on the matter is valid, meeting sources said.

Chief of Army Staff Lt. Gen. Mustafizur Rahman informed the meeting that a mutiny had taken place in the army on August 15, 1975, the day Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was assassinated. The mutiny took place first and Bangabandhu was killed later," the Army chief was quoted as saying.

He said the trial of Bangabandhu killing was going on, but that of the mutiny has not taken place. The Army had constituted a Court of Enquiry regarding the killing of Lieutenant Sheikh Jamal and Colonel Jamil, he told the meeting.

The report of the Court of Enquiry is likely to be placed in the next meeting of the Committee, he informed.

However, committee chairman and former Chief of Army Staff Shafiqullah said no mutiny had

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### Banks to remain open Dec 30

Star Report

In order to avoid a holiday of 10 consecutive days, the central bank yesterday decided that banks will remain open on December 30.

The decision was taken following a meeting between the central bank and the managing directors of different banks.

As banks will also operate on December 26, the duration of the holiday is now reduced to eight days from the previous 10-day period.

Holidays will begin from December 22 and continue till December 25. After a working day on Tuesday, December 26, the holidays resume from December 27 and continue till December 29. Banks will remain closed on December 31 due to bank holiday.

### ঢাকা সিটি করপোরেশন, ঢাকা

আপনার পরিবেশ সুন্দর ও পরিচ্ছন্ন রাখুন  
আপনার শিশুকে টিকা দিন।

### রোগী পরিবহণে গ্র্যান্ডুলেস সার্ভিস

- ঢাকা সিটি করপোরেশন নগরবাসীর স্বাস্থ্য সেবায় দিবা-রাত্রি ২৪ ঘন্টা গ্র্যান্ডুলেস সার্ভিস চালু করতে যাচ্ছে।
- গ্র্যান্ডুলেস সার্ভিস সেবার জন্য নিম্নলিখিত টেলিফোন নম্বরে ঢাকা সিটি করপোরেশনের নিয়ন্ত্রণ কর্মকে যোগাযোগ করতে হবে।
- নিয়ন্ত্রণ কর্মকের ফোন নম্বর-৯৫৫৬০১৪ এবং ৯০০৪৭৩৪।
- শুধুমাত্র জরুরি রোগী পরিবহণে সম্মানিত নগরবাসী গ্র্যান্ডুলেস সার্ভিস সুবিধা গ্রহণ করতে পারবেন।
- আগামী ৭ই ডিসেম্বর, ২০০০ইং বেলা ১২:০০ ঘটিকায় নগর ভবন চত্বরে মাননীয় মেয়র মহোদয় গ্র্যান্ডুলেস সার্ভিস উদ্বোধন করবেন।

কর্তৃপক্ষের আদেশক্রমে  
প্রধান স্বাস্থ্য কর্মকর্তা  
ঢাকা সিটি করপোরেশন, ঢাকা।

ডিসি/পিআরডি/২৩৮/০০-০১  
ক্রিড-১১২১

### Extortionists 'make merry' at ferry ghats

By Staff Correspondent

With the Eid-ul-Fitr just weeks away, ferry operators at the Aricha and Daulatdia terminals have started collecting tolls from drivers of trucks, buses and private cars with the help of hired local goons.

It is being alleged that operators at the big ferry points of the country normally extort between Tk 10,000 to Tk 20,000 everyday but with the Eid festival just round the corner, they have intensified their activities over the last few days.

Victims revealed to this correspondent that they had to pay from Tk 100 to 200 depending on the size of the vehicle. If it is a private car, the 'charge' is Tk 100. A goods carrying truck is charged in the range of Tk 150 to Tk 200. For passenger buses, the rate is fixed at Tk 200.

"If you refuse to pay, the ferry operators would deliberately delay your departure from the jetty or create problems while disembarking from the ferry. Sometimes they throw you out of a queue while you wait to board the ferry which means you have every chance of missing the boat," said a frustrated driver at Aricha.

A fellow driver informed that he had just spent 150 taka to board a ferry even after obtaining the

serial number, and paying for the terminal charge and ferry ticket to reach Daulatdia.

A bus driver who commutes between Dhaka and Khulna said that the extortionists often purposely pick up quarrels with drivers.

"This is their way of threatening and warning us. We are hostages once we reach the ferry ghats (jetties). You either pay or face the consequences. About six months ago, I refused to comply with their demands on one occasion. Later, hoodlums blocked the 52-seater bus which I was driving and deflated two of its tyres."

Private cars are not spared either.

"I had my wife and children travelling with me. As usual I completed all the necessary formalities and boarded the ferry. After the boat had left the port, a ferry worker came to me and demanded money as bakshish (tips) for the upcoming Eid. I said no and the man stayed away until we reached Daulatdia ghat when he returned with three accomplices and told me in a rough manner that if I didn't pay up, my car would not leave the ferry.

"Had a mind to see the end of it but my children

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