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VOL. X NO. 322 REGD. NO. DA 781

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DHAKA MONDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2000

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for the
3rd Millennium

AGRAHAYAN 27, 1407 BS

RAMADAN 14, 1421 HJRI

16 PAGES PRICE : TAKA 6.00

Fitra fixed at Tk 25

The rate of fitra has been fixed at Tk 25 for Dhaka and adjacent areas this year, an official press release said, reports BSS.

The rate was fixed at a meeting of the Islamic Foundation Bangladesh in the city yesterday with its Director General Maulana Abdul Awal in the chair. Khatib of Baitul Mukarram National Mosque Maulana Obaudul Haque and leading ulemas were present.

The rate of per capita fitra for Dhaka and adjacent areas was fixed on the basis of the market price of 1.65 kg of wheat or flour.

The rate of fitra for other areas per head will be equivalent to the market price of 1.65 kg of wheat or flour in that area, added the release.

For every capable Muslim, paying fitra is wajib. It is also wajib for fathers to pay the fitra on behalf of their children.

JS membership EC to hear Akhter's case today

By Staff Correspondent

The Election Commission today will hear the controversial issue of parliamentary membership of Major (ret'd.) Akhteruzzaman who has recently been expelled from BNP for joining the 19th parliament session in defiance of a party decision.

The hearing will begin at 10.30 in the morning, official sources said.

The hearing may conclude as soon as today since the matter is not so complicated. Election Commissioner Moshitq Ahmed Chowdhury told The Daily Star last night. He, however, said length of the hearing depends upon arguments of the lawyers of both sides.

Chaired by Chief Election Commissioner M A Syed, the four-member commission which also includes the three Election Commissioners Abidur Rahman, Moshitq Ahmed Chowdhury and Shafiqur Rahman is expected to pass a judgement on whether Akhter's Kishoreganj-2 parliamentary seat will fall vacant or not.

The Election Commission hears the dispute at a time when

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	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Dec 11		5.12 pm
Dec 12	6-31 am	

Prayer Timings December 11		
Fajr	5-06	5-15
Zuhr	12-45	1-20
Asr	3-45	4-00
Maghrib	5-14	5-22
Esha	7-00	7-30

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Sehri, Iftar timings			
Ramadan	Dec	Sehri	Iftar
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15	12	5-07	5-16
16	13	5-08	5-17

Third round bidding for 'leftover' & reserved blocks proposed

Second Round Block Bidding still remains incomplete

By Sharier Khan

Petrobangla has proposed to the government to float the Third Round Block Bidding for oil and gas exploration in different 'leftover' and 'reserved' blocks as well as in areas relinquished earlier by companies.

If implemented, this would open up at least seven blocks and several prospective but reserved areas for bidding.

The proposal has been made at a time when the Second Round Block Bidding remains incomplete. It was floated in June 1997 with a target for signing Production Sharing Contracts (PSCs) with companies by December that year. Twenty-two companies had submitted 36 proposals for 12 blocks.

The Petrobangla Chairman in a letter to the Energy Ministry has proposed floating of the third round, saying more exploration activities

are needed to increase the country's energy reserves.

Sources however said the proposal was not "approved or endorsed" by the Petrobangla Board of Directors.

Fifteen blocks were opened for oil and gas exploration in the Second Round Block Bidding. The 15 included Block 9 which was originally kept reserved for Bangladeshi company BAPEX.

Block 9, which was the root cause of the delay in the second round bidding, is likely to be included in the third round as on-going negotiations with Chevron, Texaco and Tullow have not yet produced any positive result, the sources said.

The third round will include blocks 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6 and may include Block 11. Blocks 1, 2 and 4 did not attract any bidder in the second round. See page 11 col 1



Martyred Intellectuals' Memorial at Mirpur being cleaned as the nation prepares to pay homage to the martyrs on December 14. -Star photo

2 murdered, Tk 6.88 lakh snatched in city

By Staff Correspondent

Two persons were gunned down in separate incidents in the city's Motijheel area yesterday.

The victims were identified as Iqbal Hasan, 41, son of Abdul Hamid and Basir Uddin, 15, son of Abdur Samad.

Iqbal, an employee of Firoz and Company, came under attack by a gang of muggers on RK Mission Road at Tikatuli at around 9-30 am. He was going to Motijheel from Wari by a motorcycle to deposit Tk 6.88 lakh with a bank.

When Iqbal reached near Abar Khabo restaurant on the road, he was stuck in a traffic jam. At that time, a gang of six muggers appeared before him and snatched the money at gunpoint. They shot him in the left chest and fled the scene.

Iqbal was rushed to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital where the attending doctor declared him dead. See page 11 col 2

Jubo League worker shot dead at N'ganj

From Our Correspondent

NARAYANGANJ, Dec 10: One Jubo League activist was shot dead during a gunfight between two factions in the town this noon.

Tofazzal Hossain alias Liton, 30, was killed in the clash in front of the residence of Deputy Commissioner at 12.15 pm.

Five people including former Jubo League general secretary Golam Sarwar were arrested in this connection. Police arrested them in a special raid in Chashara area at 8.30 pm after the murder of Liton. Four fire arms were recovered from their possession.

The arrested are Golam Sarwar, 35, Iran, 35, Babu, 34, Faruk, 32, Monowar, 34, from Chashara area. Three pistols and a revolver were recovered from them. See page 11 col 6

Home Minister tells journalists

Raja involved in anti-state acts, must quit Dhaka

Home Minister Mohammad Nasim yesterday charged errant Pakistani diplomat Irfan Raja with anti-state activities in Bangladesh and demanded he immediately quit Dhaka, reports UNB.

"As the home minister I clearly want to say that this person (Raja) by lingering over his departure from Bangladesh is still continuing activities against the country's independence," he said.

Talking to a group of journalists at his office in the evening, the Home Minister said the Pak Deputy High Commissioner was still maintaining contacts with identified anti-liberation groups and persons.

"We under no circumstances want to see this person in Bangladesh. Under no system can a national of a country or a foreign national do anything that goes against independence and sovereignty of a country," said Nasim.

He said this Pak diplomat is not only unwanted in Bangladesh but is also creating law and order problem.

"As per diplomatic rules, we are ensuring security for Pakistan High Commission and its officials. But it can't continue for an unwanted person for a long

time," he added.

"This man has to go immediately. We hope that the Pakistan government and the Pak High Commission in Dhaka will be respectful to diplomatic norms and take necessary steps to withdraw this recalled diplomat."

Nasim said the Pakistan government was compelled to recall him (Irfan Raja) following demand of the people of Bangladesh.

"We heard that he would leave Bangladesh anytime. But the delay is making people more angry," he said.

The home minister linked the Pak diplomat's swipe with that of some local intellectuals and opposition politicians. Citing "anti-liberation" comments of journalist Gias Kamal Chowdhury and Prof Aftab Ahmed, he said all this is part of the same game of Irfan Raja, Ghulam Azam, Khaleida Zia and Ershad.

"Their conspiracy is yet to be over. By his comment Gias Kamal Chowdhury disclosed how much he is in favour of the razakars and also unmasked his leader, General Ziaur Rahman," Nasim said.

Sharif also to stay out of politics

Ex-Pak premier arrives in Saudi Arabia for indefinite exile

DUBAI, Dec 10: Former Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif arrived in Saudi Arabia today for an indefinite exile after being released by the army which overthrew him 14 months ago, Saudi officials said, reports Reuters.

A plane carrying Sharif and his relatives landed in the Red Sea port of Jeddah and the ex-premier pledged to his Saudi hosts that he would stay out of politics, the officials added.

"Sharif will perform Umra and will later be admitted to hospital for treatment," one official told the news agency by telephone.

21 years.

A Pakistani statement said earlier that Sharif, who received a life sentence on charges including corruption, had been sent into exile to Saudi Arabia. Sharif, 51, had complained of heart problems.

The statement said that, under terms agreed with military leader General Pervez Musharraf, Sharif would not have to serve any further time on his sentences but would have to forfeit 500 million rupees (\$8.3 million) in property and stay out of politics for the next

21 years.

A Saudi official said Sharif would be flown to Riyadh for medical tests at Prince Sultan Cardiac Centre, which specialises in open-heart surgery.

"Everything is ready. We are waiting for him, but we don't know when he will show up," an official at the centre said.

No politics

Qatar's television channel al-Jazeera said that the deal to release Sharif had been

See page 11 col 1



Eid shopping is gaining momentum. People were seen crowding different markets in the city yesterday. This photo was taken from Gausia Market. -Star photo

Eid shopping gaining momentum

By Staff Correspondent

City dwellers have started thronging different shopping centres of the city to buy gift items for their near and dear ones ahead of the Eid-ul-Fitr.

Entrepreneurs are also doing their bit in attracting the customers by colourful decoration and lighting of the shops and malls. Besides, some reputed stores are offering prizes by introducing lucky coupons.

The shopping centres are remaining open till late hours of the evening to accommodate the Eid shoppers.

At least two of the popular shopping destinations have introduced lucky coupons and their prizes range from cars to microwave ovens.

Karnaphuli Garden City at Shantinagar has offered lucky coupons for shoppers and lungi. See page 11 col 7

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