

A 'peaceful'  
welcome to  
New Year

By Staff Correspondent

The city dwellers welcomed the year 2001 amid jubilation and merry-making.

No untoward incident took place on the night of December 31 although there were revelries in different parts of the city. The government had taken adequate security measures.

As the clock clicked zero hour, sound of cracker blasts was heard all around. Thousands of people, mostly youngsters, came on the streets and also thronged prime open spaces and road intersections, many of them dancing and singing. Many were rushing for parties, mostly in posh hotels, restaurants and guest houses.

The Sangsad Bhaban, Dhaka University and some other areas became crowded.

Police stopped groups of youths from entering posh Gulshan areas from other areas. As the crowd swelled by 12:45 am and became desperate to enter Gulshan Circle-2 from different directions, police lobbed tear gas shells and used water cannons to disperse it.

The youths were released in the morning. The vehicles were handed over to their owners after

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	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Jan 2		5.24 pm
Jan 3	6-42 am	

Prayer Timings

January 2		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-14	5-20
Zuhr	12-45	1-20
Asr	3-45	4-00
Maghrib	5-23	5-30
Esha	7-00	7-30

Source: Islamic Foundation

## Fatwa illegal, declares HC

By Special Correspondent

The High Court yesterday ruled that any *fatwa* or 'legal opinion' not given by a court is unauthorised and illegal.

A Division Bench of the HC gave the ruling in its judgement in a case concerning a housewife at a Naogaon village.

The housewife, Shahida of Atikha in Sadar upazila of Naogaon, was reportedly given *talqiq* (verbal divorce) by her husband and was forced to marry his cousin following a *fatwa* for *hilla* (forced marriage) given by a local *maulana*.

"Fatwa means legal opinion which means legal opinion of a lawful person or authority. Legal system in Bangladesh empowers only the courts to decide all questions relating to legal opinion on the Muslim and other laws in force," the court said.

"We therefore hold that any *fatwa* including the instant one is unauthorised and illegal," said the HC Bench comprising Justice Mohammad Gholam Rabbani and Justice Nazmun Ara Sultana.

The judgement came on a *suo moto* rule issued by the court on the District Magistrate and Deputy Commissioner of Naogaon, Lutfur Rahman, on December 2 following a newspaper report on the plight of Shahida.

Subsequently, Ain-O-Salish Kendra and feminist groups filed a writ petition as intervenor. Eminent lawyer Dr Kamal Hossain represented the petitioners. The HC judgement said, "Marriage between

Shahida and her husband Saiful Islam was not dissolved and that for the sake of argument if it is taken that the marriage was dissolved, even then there was no legal bar for Shahida to remarry Saiful without an intervening marriage with a third person. The *fatwa* in question is wrong".

It went on, "Giving a *fatwa* by unauthorised person or persons must be made a punishable offence by the Parliament immediately, even if it is not executed".

The Division Bench observed, "We further hold that the respondent District Magistrate should have immediately taken cognizance of the said offence under Section 190 of the Code of Criminal procedure. We are, however, satisfied with the steps taken by the respondent as stated in his affidavit-in-opposition. Let it, we hope, be the once for all warning to the other district magistrates, the magistrates and the police officers."

The Bench further said, "Before parting with this matter, we find it necessary to answer a question as to why a particular group of men, upon either getting education from madrasah or forming a religious group, are becoming fanatics with wrong views. There must be defect in their education and their attitude."

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## Who'll be the next foreign secretary?

By M Anwarul Haq

Speculation is rife in the diplomatic circle over the appointment of the next foreign secretary. The tenure of the incumbent foreign secretary, CM Shafiq Sami expires on January 25.

Sami, who was the country's high commissioner to New Delhi from April 1995 till his retirement in 1999, was made the foreign secretary on a two-year contract.

It was not known till yesterday what the government had in mind. But, sources believe that a decision to this effect would be made soon.

At present, there are seven regular secretary-level officials working at home and abroad under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Four of them are due to retire this year. Principal of the Foreign Service Academy Mohiuddin Ahmed retires on January 30, 2001; Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Mahbub Alam on June 13, 2001; Ambassador to Iran Tofail Karim Haider on July 3, 2001; and Ambassador to France Syed Muazzem Ali on July 17, 2001.

Of the rest, Ambassador to Belgium and the European Union Muhammad Zamir will continue till September 3, 2002; Dr Toufiq Ali, a full-fledged secretary in charge of economic and multilateral affairs, till June 26, 2003; and Ambassador to Vietnam

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Shazneen Case  
Investigation officer cross-examined

By Court Correspondent

Mojibur Rahman, ASP of CID, first prosecution witness as well as complainant in the Shazneen rape case, was cross-examined at the Special Court for Prevention of Women and Children Repression, Dhaka yesterday.

After two hours' cross-examination on behalf of accused Minu and Parvin, judge M Shah Alam Miah adjourned the proceedings till January 16. He will be cross-examined again on January 16.

During the cross-examination, Mojibur Rahman said that he could not remember the date when he got Shazneen's autopsy

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## Three boys burnt alive in city

By Staff Correspondent

Three boys were burnt alive in a fire at a waste paper warehouse at R K Mission Road in the city in the early hours of yesterday.

Two of the dead were identified as Sujon, 12, and Masud, 14. Identity of other could not be known.

Fire Brigade sources said the boys were locked in the warehouse. The caretaker had left for the night.

Fire fighters recovered the bodies from under the bundles of waste paper. The bodies were sent to Mitford Medical College Hospital for autopsy.

The sources said the fire might have originated from a burning cigarette, left in the warehouse at about 1:40 am. The fire engulfed the Saddam Cutting Press, Progati Printing Press and Super Printing Press nearby.

The loss of property was being ascertained, Fire Brigade officials said.

Fire fighting units rushed to the spot and put out the blaze at about 4:30 am yesterday.

A case was filed with Sutrapur thana in this connection.

## Most launches lack safety measures

By Naimul Haq and Aroop Talukdar in Barisal

The government has no mechanism whatsoever to run safety checks on some 2,200 passenger-carriers plying in nearly 40 inland riverine routes that stretch 8,000 kilometres across the country.

The under-strength and ill-equipped Shipping Directorate is simply not up to its avowed commitment to ensure safety and security on the inland riverine route, complain many. There are only three surveyors and five inspectors on the directorate who hardly conduct any visual inspection.

However, the director general of the directorate, Abdul Malek, brushed aside the complaints.

"We inspect every vessel including documents and with this intention we are giving our best efforts," he said.

However, "there is a hide and seek game going on which we cannot check," he added. "I do admit that many vessels ply without documents and for that we cannot have inspectors located at every corner like road traffic police."

There have been a series of major mishaps in recent times, claiming hundreds of lives, due to faulty vessels or unqualified personnel at the helm. However, the authorities have hardly taken any stringent measures against the offenders.

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## 23 more bodies recovered from Meghna

By Staff Correspondent

Twenty-three more bodies of the victims of Thursday night's launch disaster were recovered from the river Meghna near Chandpur yesterday, raising the death toll to 87.

Our Chandpur Correspondent quoting officials said, of the bodies recovered yesterday, 19 were found floating in the river at Eklaspur point where ML Rajhonsi sank following a collision with MV Jalkapot-2.

Four bodies were found floating in the river near Safarnali village, about five km away.

Chandpur river police who recovered the bodies said six of those were of adult males, seven of females and 10 of children.

Police administration told this correspondent that over 100 people might still be missing.

Meanwhile, relatives of the missing passengers, mostly from Shariatpur district, were seen searching for bodies in the Meghna even yesterday.

Earlier, 64 bodies were recovered from the disaster site.



At least five crackers were exploded during yesterday's rally at Muktagan, organised by the new committee of the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal to mark the student organisation's 23rd founding anniversary. Five people were injured.

## Cracker blasts, chaos mark JCD rally in city: 5 injured

By Staff Correspondent

Violence marked the 22nd founding anniversary of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), student wing of the main opposition BNP, yesterday.

A series of explosions just before the start of the rally at Muktagan, organised by the beleaguered new committee of the student body, left at least five people injured including a photojournalist.

Three out of the five could be identified. The New Nation's Salimullah Selim aside, the two others were Arif, an activist of JCD's Matuail unit, and Ishak Warder, a government official who was passing by.

At least five crackers were exploded, one at the heart of the rally, at 3:50pm, touching off a reign of panic in the area. While activists and pedestrians ran helter-skelter for safety, a huge contingent of riot police deployed around Muktagan and Paltan areas played silent onlookers.

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The rally finally got underway at around 4:00pm

## 4 business bodies condemn case against Morshed Khan

By Staff Correspondent

Leaders of four business organisations including two leading chamber bodies in a joint statement yesterday condemned the indictment of one of the leading entrepreneurs of the country M Morshed Khan under the Public Safety Act (PSA).

The business leaders are Benajir Ahmed, president of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industries (DCCI), Tapan Chowdhury, acting president of Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI), Dhaka, ASM Quasem, president of Bangladesh Employers Feder-

ation and Samson H. Chowdhury, president of Bangladesh Aushad Shilpa Samity. Expressing shock and deep concern over the case accusing Morshed Khan, the presidents of the business organisations observed that it was hard to believe that a person of his stature could indulge in such activities.

Morshed Khan was president of Bangladesh Chamber of Industries, Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI), Dhaka and Bangladesh Employers Association.

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## JS body for action against BLRI chief

By Nazrul Islam

### Alleged corruption, nepotism

to the Standing Committee at its meeting held at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban yesterday with A SM Ferj in the chair.

As in the previous nine meetings, Fisheries and Livestock Minister A SM Rob did not attend yesterday's meeting despite heavy criticisms by the committee members. The minister's absence from 10 consecutive meetings triggered resentment at yesterday's meeting.

Several members, both from

the Treasury and the Opposition benches, condemned the "reckless" abstention of the minister. It was adopted by the committee, meeting sources said.

Taking part in the discussion on the corruption and nepotism by the BLRI Director General, the committee recommended immediate implementation of the suggestions of the sub-committee.

The three-member sub-committee interviewed 19 offi-

cials and scientific officers of BLRI and others concerned during its three months' investigation that started in September last year.

"As the DG's activities went against national interest, he should be removed from his position immediately," one of the sub-committee member told The Daily Star adding that most of the allegations against him were proved.

The sub-committee in its report recommended filing of a criminal case against Dr. Emdad soon after his termination for garbing public money and hampering national interest.

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Police arrested an activist of the ruling party-backed Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) and his relative from Dhaka University's Mohsin Hall and recovered five firearms and 250 rounds of bullet after a raid on the university dormitory yesterday.

Campus sources said that a joint team of SB and DMP cordoned off Mohsin Hall at about 7:15am and arrested Sheikh Ariful Islam and his relative Selim from room 457. Police recovered one cut-rifle, one shotgun, one double-barrel homemade rifle, one nine shooter, one .38 pistol and 250 rounds of bullet from the room. They also searched almost all other rooms of the hall and checked ID cards of residents during the raid that continued till 8:30am.

Sheikh Ariful Islam, son of Sheikh Ali Ahmed of village Kochua of Bagerhat district, is an activist of BCL faction Bagerhat group. Arif is a third year student of the university's History Department.

The arrested were taken to the Ramna police station. A case has been filed with Ramna police in this connection.

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## No decision yet on proposal of 4 pvt telephone operators

By Mustak Hossain

The Ministry of Post and Telecommunications (MOTP) has not yet taken any decision on the proposal of four private