

## JS body demands reports on defence expenditure

By Nazrul Islam

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Ministry of Defence at its meeting yesterday discussed the country's defence budget and asked the authorities concerned to submit detailed reports on expenditures at its next meeting.

This was the first ever discussion on the country's defence budget in a parliamentary body meeting.

The meeting also approved a motion of thanks to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina who holds the defence portfolio for opening up such discussion.

Presided over by Committee Chairman K M Saifullah, the meeting selected four areas of expenditure and asked the ministry to submit reports on those. The areas are salary of the armed forces personnel, development of the armed forces, administration and training.

"We like to make the best use of our money for overall development of the armed forces by giving suggestions through the committee meetings," said a member of the committee who attended the meeting.

At the next meeting, the committee will review the reports and make suggestions for overall development of the armed forces. The committee yesterday discussed the budgetary allocation in

fiscal 1999-2000 for the defence ministry and the expenditures of the ministry, the three forces and their other offices. The allocation for defence was about Tk 3273.42 crore in fiscal '99-00.

"The discussion will continue as we could not complete it," said the committee chairman. In the next meeting, the committee will discuss the defence allocation and expenditure in fiscal 2000-2001, he said.

Opposition members at the meeting raised the question that the expenditure for maintenance was more than that for procurement. In reply, the chairman said it is equally important to maintain old equipment. "We have to save our weapons and equipment procured earlier," Shafiqullah was quoted as saying.

BNP's expelled lawmaker Maj. (Retd) Akhteruzzaman moved a motion of condemnation against the defence minister's absence from the committee meetings. But, the meeting rejected the motion.

The committee was informed that members of the armed forces engaged in the United Nations peace keeping missions earned nearly Tk 2,200 crore in the last 10 years, of which Tk 1,100 went to the public exchequer. Bangladeshi forces are now engaged in Sierra Leon, Kuwait and East Timor.

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## PSA being abused to detain opposition leaders, rig polls

Khaleda tells editors of national dailies

By Staff Correspondent

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia said yesterday the government has unleashed a greater degree of repression on the opposition and started blatant abuse of the Public Safety Act (PSA) since it has absolutely no chance to return to power in the upcoming general elections.

The Awami League government is abusing the 'black' law to detain opposition activists so that it can rig the polls, she observed while exchanging views with the Editors of national dailies and news agencies at Hotel Sheraton in the capital.

She said BNP plans to launch a movement to force the government to repeal the PSA without further delay to put an end to repression on the opposition so that a congenial atmosphere prevails before the national election. She sought the media's support to the movement to have the act repealed.

Khaleda, also the Leader of the

Opposition in Parliament, alleged that the government had abused the act to harass activists and leaders at grassroots level. But, she added, it has now started filing "false" cases under the PSA against senior leaders of her party, including MPs. In this context, she cited the instance of party MPs M Morshed Khan MP and Mujibur Rahman Sarwar.

Accusing the ruling party men including ministers and MPs of being involved in killing and other acts of terrorism, the opposition leader regretted that no case was filed against them under the PSA.

She recalled AL government's assurance that the new law would be used to curb terrorism and would never be misused to repress the opposition. But the PSA failed to curb terrorism, for it was not applied impartially.

The PSA was not applied against the ruling party activists who killed an auto-rickshaw

driver, damaged hundreds of vehicles and set some others to fire on December 14 even in the presence of ministers. Also, there was no case under the PSA after police recovered arms and ammunition from the possession of Bangladesh Chhatra League activists at Mohsin Hall of the Dhaka University.

If voted to power, the BNP chief pledged, she would repeal all black laws, including the PSA, and the Special Powers Act, which she claimed have never been abused during her rule.

During the one-and-a-half-hour meeting, most of the editors favoured BNP's joining the parliament session to press the government to repeal the PSA and raise other issues on the floor of the House.

Khaleda pointed out that her party was yet to resign from par

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## Akheri Munajat today

By Staff Correspondent

The Biswa Ijtema at Tongi near the city ends today with the offering of Akheri Munajat (concluding prayers) this noon, seeking divine blessings for peace, progress and prosperity of the Muslim Ummah.

Lakhs of devotees from home and from at least 65 countries are attending the three-day Ijtema, the second largest Muslim congregation next to Hajj.

The congregation venue on the bank of the river Turag turned into a sea of humanity yesterday evening and thousands more were still streaming to the venue, ignoring biting cold.

Organisers said yesterday that the Tablig Jamaat Supreme Consultation Committee would decide tonight (Sunday night) who would lead the Akheri Munajat. The committee comprises Sirajul Islam, Azizul Maqsood, Mahmudul Haq Mozammel Haq and Maulana Jobair.

President Shahabuddin Ahmed, Prime Minister Sheikh

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## Six die at Ijtema: 42 hospitalised

By Staff Correspondent

Four persons died at the Biswa Ijtema at Tongi yesterday and two died on Saturday, organisers said.

They died of heart failure or old age ailments.

The dead are Asadur Ali, 60, of village Bekamore kazir Bazar in Mirpur upazila, Moulavi Bazar; Sheikh Fazul Huq, 59, of Maddhya Badda Al Amin Bazar in the city; Nazimuddin, 55, of village Dev Raj in Shakkhipur upazila, Tangail; Kaemuddin, 65, of village Monoharpur in Tarash upazila of Sirajganj; Sabar Ali, 50, of village Islampur Samanta Bazar in Moheshpur upazila, Jhenidah and Abdul Ahad, 40, of village Jallar Par in Sadar upazila, Sylhet.

Two of the six were buried at Tongi municipal graveyard at Markoon and the bodies of four were sent to their respective village homes, said Adam Ali who looks after the ailing persons at

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## Mysterious boxes 6 crew to be brought to Dhaka for interrogation

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Jan 7: Chittagong metropolitan police today decided to send six crew including Pakistani national to Dhaka soon for further interrogation by joint interrogation cell in connection with mysterious boxes dropped in the Bay of Bengal on December 17.

Police said the Pakistani national Mohammad and five Bangladeshi crew now in jail custody, would be brought or remand for sending them to Dhaka.

They said step for sending them to joint interrogation cell (JIC) was taken following an order from higher authorities in Dhaka.

The mysterious boxes were dropped in the Bay of Bengal from two mechanised boats by 28 crew including a Pakistani national on December 17 when Navy patrol ship challenged them.

## Chinese-built FT-7 catches fire BAF jet crash kills Squadron Leader

By Special Correspondent

A Bangladesh Air Force FT-7 training aircraft crashed after take-off from Zia International Airport (ZIA) yesterday, killing one of the pilots and injuring the other.

One of the pilots, Squadron Leader Mohammad Mohsin, 32, failed to eject and died when the jet exploded into flames in the air, sources in the Air Force said.

Flight Lt. Mohammad Reza Emdad Khan could eject and parachuted on to the ground. He suffered burn injuries. He was taken to CMH for treatment.

The debris of the burning jet fell in a bush near the southwestern end of the runway. The jet was Chinese built.

Witnesses said smoke was seen coming out of the aircraft after take-off and it crashed into flames with a big bang in the air

at about 1-30 pm.

What had caused the crash could not be known.

Nor it could be known at what height the jet caught fire, when the pilots noticed the fire or what they told the control tower.

The control tower could not be reached by telephone as operators said they had instructions from the Air Force not to pass any civilian call to the tower.

The airport was closed immediately after the accident. It reopened at 3-30 pm.

Air Force personnel ringed the crash site soon after the accident. Airport authorities prevented journalists and photo-journalists from going to the spot or take photo.

Three photo-journalists who managed to sneak into the airport were caught and forced out

by security men.

A Bangladesh Biman flight from Abu Dhabi was diverted to Chittagong due to closure of the airport.

An Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) press release said that the twin-engine jet was on a training mission. It issued a 119-word press release that gave scanty details.

It said the FT-7 met with an accident immediately after take-off. "Both the pilots had ejected but Sqn. Leader Mohammad Mohsin died while Sqn. Leader Mohammad Reza Emdad Khan sustained minor injury".

A board of inquiry has been formed to probe the incident, the ISPR said but gave no details.

It said Sqn. Leader Mohsin had left behind his wife and a daughter

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## Cracker blasts, clashes with police mark Ctg hartal: 29 held

48-hour hartal from January 10

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Jan 7: Sporadic cracker blasts, chase and counter chase between police and opposition activists marked the day-long hartal in Chittagong today.

BNP-led All-Party Action Committee called the hartal in the port-city demanding withdrawal of case filed against BNP central leader M Morshed Khan, MP.

Morshed Khan and his son Faisal Morshed Khan were sued under Public Safety Act (PSA) for 'ransacking' of a restaurant at GEC crossing in the port-city on December 26.

Police arrested 29 pickets from different parts of the city during hartal hours.

All-Party Action Committee (APAC) alleged that police intercepted processions of hartal supporters at different places of the city and clubbed opposition activists.

It claimed that at least 70 opposition activists were arrested during the hartal.

Protesting the arrest of its activists, APAC announced a 48-hour hartal in the port city beginning at 6 am on January 10.

Addressing a pro-hartal rally at Laldighi Maidan this afternoon, APAC leaders threatened of a greater movement if opposition activists were not released immediately.

Police said at least 20 people were injured in sporadic cracker blasts in the city.

Explosions rocked Circuit House, Agrabad, Jalalabad, Rampura,

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## BNP plans to call hartal for repeal of PSA

By Staff Correspondent

Main opposition BNP is contemplating calling a country-wide dawn-to-dusk hartal in the middle of this month in a bid to force the government to repeal the Public Safety Act (PSA).

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia is expected to announce the hartal programme at a public meeting at Paltan Maidan on January 11. Sources said BNP has already announced a series of public meetings up to January 30 in and outside Dhaka to drum up people's support prior to launching a 'militant' agitation programme to topple the Awami League government.

They said a section of BNP leadership favours calling hartal side by side with holding of public meetings and other mass contact programmes, which the party chief has agreed to.

## Reply to Speaker's letter BNP iterates demand for a 'conducive atmosphere'

By Staff Correspondent

BNP has again turned down Speaker Humayun Rasheed Chowdhury's request to end the boycott of parliamentary proceedings by joining the upcoming session.

The main opposition party however reiterated its demand for fulfilment of five conditions and implementation of the four-point agreement to create a conducive atmosphere for its return to the House.

The 21st session of the parliament begins on January 11. BNP and its allies in the four-party opposition combine have been staying away from parliament for 18 months now.

In a reply to the Speaker's letter dated January 2, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia expressed the hope that immediate steps would be taken to meet her party's

demand provided the Leader of the House, the ruling party and the Speaker honestly wanted the opposition in the House.

Speaker Chowdhury had earlier written three letters to the opposition leader, requesting her party to join the parliament session. But every time the BNP refused to go back to the House on ground that there was no such 'congenial' atmosphere.

The five conditions put by BNP earlier include, an apology by the prime minister for her 'indecent' remarks about the opposition leader and expunging of the same from the parliamentary proceedings, and ensuring a neutral role by the Speaker.

The four-point accord signed between the government and the opposition in January 1997 and

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## Ticket touts beat schoolboy to death

By Staff Correspondent

Ticket touts beat a student to death and severely injured another one at one stage of altercation at Modhumita Cinema Hall in the city's Motijheel area yesterday, hospital sources said.

The dead was identified as Sajal Hossain Mahin, 15, son of Mokbul Hossain, a resident of RK Mission Road while the injured was Rifar Hossain Rana. Both are students of class eight of Mitali School, sources said.

The incident took place when Sajal and Rana went to the Modhumita Cinema Hall to enjoy a film. They contacted a ticket tout for tickets but soon locked in an altercation during bargaining. At one stage the ticket touts started beating them. When they fainted and fell to the ground they were sent to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital where the attending doctors declared Sajal dead, hospital sources said.

Motijheel police quoting FIR said the two were travelling the area in a rickshaw. As they

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## The way they're grabbing the parking lot

By Staff Correspondent

A group of dishonest traders have built 51 shops on a designated parking lot in the Karwan Bazar area during the Eid holidays after obtaining a High Court rule.

On October 10 last year, the Mayor allocated the parking lot to 51 shops. The mayor's allotment not only defied a Prime Minister's directive but violated a law titled 'Preservation of Playground, Open Spaces, Parks and Natural Water Body in the Metropolitan, Divisional Towns and Municipalities'. The law was passed by the parliament on September 18 last year.

After The Daily Star reported the matter on November 23, the Prime Minister ordered the mayor to cancel the allotment and restore the parking lot. On November 29, the DCC cancelled the allotment letter and served a notice on the 51 shops to move out or be evicted.

After the eviction notice, the new 'shop owners' demanded the 'bribe money' back from the DCC officials, said business sources at Karwan Bazar. The DCC officials including several top-ranking ones were alleged to have taken money for the allotment.

Briefed by the same DCC officials, the shop owners moved to the High Court on December 7 and obtained a rule nisi which asked the DCC to "show cause" by January 18, 2001 why its eviction

notice should not be declared unlawful. Shop owners, who possess legal documents, said some people have occupied a children's park in the area exactly the same way, in connivance with DCC officials.

The DCC Law Department has mysteriously kept away from the courts as the illegal occupation continues. Another group has started occupying a public road on the eastern side of the DIT Market, they revealed.

Law Officer of DCC Mozammel Haque could not be contacted for comments. He was busy with the Biswa Ijtema and would not be available until the end of the Ijtema, his PA said.

When asked who was in charge of the department, she replied, "No one."

At least a dozen children's parks, parking lots, open spaces, roads, footpaths and public parks have been grabbed in the city the same way. It is alleged that top DCC officials assist the illegal occupiers.

The preservation law forbids construction, land filling or any kind of land use, change in open spaces, parks, natural water bodies and playgrounds. It also prohibits allocation, leasing out or rental of such spaces. If found guilty, a person is liable to five years in prison or Tk 50,000 in fine or both.



Curious crowd (right) tries to get a clear view of the rescue operation from outside the fences of Zia International Airport where a Bangladesh Air Force (BAF) fighter (left) crashed yesterday, killing a squadron leader and injuring his co-pilot. The authorities kept the crash site off limits to photojournalists. --Star photo

## Megawati's press confce not held

By Diplomatic Correspondent

Vice President of Indonesia Megawati Soekarnoputri did not appear at a scheduled press conference yesterday morning at the end of her visit.

The reason for the abrupt change in decision could not be known from the Indonesian side which set the programme or from the hosts.

More than three dozen reporters and photo journalists of national and foreign dailies and news agencies who turned up at the heavily guarded Songargon Hotel for the press conference came to know from officials of the Indonesian Embassy that it would not take place.

The officials insisted that the programme for the press conference was 'tentative' and was not included in the official programme.

However, the scheduled press conference was incorporated in the official itinerary prepared by the Foreign Ministry. Officials of the ministry said it was done in consultation with the Indonesian side and the programme was cancelled by them.

The Indonesian Embassy claimed that it had informed the Foreign Ministry's protocol wing about this last night but ministry officials denied it.

Sonargaon Hotel staff said a

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## 200 sr asst secys to be promoted

By Special Correspondent

The Superior Selection Board (SSB) at a meeting yesterday decided to promote at least 200 senior assistant secretaries to the vacant posts of deputy secretary.

The decision followed the Supreme Court's vacation of an injunction on the promotions and the High Court's rejection of another prayer by a special batch of 1982 for another injunction.

Those who will be promoted are from the 1982 batch of the Administrative Cadre.

The SSB which ended its meeting yesterday evening also considered promotion of deputy secretaries to 74 vacant posts of joint secretaries, sources said.

Details were not available till last night.

## Inside Today

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	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Jan 8		5.28 pm
Jan 9	6-43am	

### Prayer Timings

January 8		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-30	6-10
Zuhr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-00	4-15
Maghrib	5-35	5-40
Esha	7-00	7-30