

**ALERT!**  
Prison life becomes nightmarish not because of mere imprisonment but because of the hostile environment inside the jailhouses. Over 66,000 prisoners are cramping the country's 22 jails built to accommodate only 21,000 inmates.

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A four-page supplement on 'Dhaka Travel Mart-2002'

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**Massive privatisation plan to woo donors**  
SHAHRIAR KARIM

In a desperate bid to woo the donors for a meaningful aid commitment, the government is contemplating a massive privatisation drive with the aim to have 'some positive results' by June.  
In every meeting with the government, the donor agencies the World Bank and IMF are making it clear that before committing any fund they want to see the government's "good intentions and clear cut plan" for future reforms especially a "meaningful privatisation drive".  
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**Court rejects Shahriar's plea against personal appearance**  
COURT CORRESPONDENT

The Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka, yesterday rejected writer and columnist Shahriar Kabir's petition to exempt him from personal appearance in the court.  
Kabir has been accused in a sedition case.  
Magistrate Kazi Meraj Hossain passed the order following a petition by the defence lawyers.  
Shahriar Kabir along with his lawyers Barrister Shawkat Ali Khan, Advocate Ozayer Faruk, Abu Syed Sagar, Sahara Khatun, Khondaker Abdul Mannan, Abdullah Abu and Abdur Rahman Howlader appeared in the court.  
The lawyers stated that the accused was released on bail on January 20 after two months' detention at the jail. He is now physically and mentally ill. So, he is quite  
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**JS business begins behind schedule**  
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The New Year session of the Jatiya Sangsad began 32 minutes behind schedule apparently due to delayed arrival of Prime Minister and Leader of the House Khaleda Zia.  
The number of lawmakers present in the House at 10 am, when the session was due to begin, was much higher than the required minimum of 60. But Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar took the chair at 10:32 am, a few minutes after Khaleda's arrival.  
Absence of quorum less than 60 members in the 300-strong House delayed all but the opening sitting of the parliament's maiden session  
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## Gas gambit

Spending on snubbed gas schemes may pay off by saving millions, say experts

SHARIER KHAN

The country will not have to exhaust its already fragile foreign exchange reserves to buy gas from international oil companies if it commits more funds on study and development of long neglected Petrobangla gas fields, say energy experts.  
An immediate investment of around US\$ 30 million for three-dimensional and seismic surveys and drilling of three wells at Titas Gas Field can save at least \$75 million a year from 2005.  
The country is currently paying around \$15 million a month to Shell and Unocal for purchase of around 200

million cubic feet per day (mmcf) of gas.  
Petrobangla's gas development activities have been nearly nil for a decade, and as a result, the country will have to purchase more Shell-Unocal gas to meet the growing demand. It is projected that at least 200 mmcf additional gas will be required by 2005.  
The purchase of 100 mmcf additional gas from Shell will see the government splash out at least \$75 million a year. But if the production capacity of Titas can be enhanced, it can save the foreign currency, the dearth of which is now fuelling the strongest argument in favour of pipeline gas export.  
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ZAYADUL AHSAN

Suicide seems to be the only way-out for an increasing number of prisoners at the Dhaka Central Jail, who are faced with unfriendly treatment and hostile living condition.  
In the last two months, three prisoners committed suicide, while another one tried to kill himself Tuesday last. A number of prisoners made suicide attempts by jumping off the jailhouse roof in the last few months, sources said.  
They added that such tendencies were on the rise because of inhuman jail condition, which even makes a hardened criminal sap.  
The Dhaka Central Jail, set up in the late 19th century, can officially accommodate 2632 prisoners. But according to official statistics, their number

## Living death

Three huddled in space of one, forced to drink dirty water and eat stale food, not to speak of torture, prisoners tend to take their lives at Dhaka Central Jail

stood at over 8800 yesterday.  
Although it has been crammed for more than two decades, the authorities did not address the issue. No building expansion programme was taken up during that time and the number of jail officials to handle the overwhelming number of prisoners also remained the same.

According to the jail code, each prisoner is supposed to get a space of 36 square feet, but in reality, they get less than 12 square feet space.  
The food they get is typically one-day stale. And if luck smiles on him, a prisoner might get the chance to take a bath twice a week, at most. And then, they have to wash them-

selves with dirty water.  
Even getting to use the lavatory seems to be a Herculean task, as each prisoner has to wait in long queues for his or her turn.  
However, it's not all that bad for prisoners who can keep the jail authorities happy by paying  
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A striker armed with sticks attacks a rickshaw in the city yesterday during a three-wheeled auto-rickshaw and rickshaw strike by the drivers. PHOTO: STAR

## Rowdy autorickshaw strikers damage 50 vehicles

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Unruly demonstrators damaged about 50 motor vehicles and 200 rickshaws in the city yesterday on the second day of an indefinite strike called by the Dhaka Auto-rickshaw Employees Union.  
Hundreds of tempo and auto-rickshaw drivers, owners and employees took to the streets protesting a government decision to ban all such vehicles that have no fitness certificate and other relevant documents.  
Officials of the Bangladesh Road Transport Authorities (BRTA) said a planned inspection of fitness certificates and other relevant documents of motor vehicles in the city was supposed to begin yesterday. "They (the strikers) went on the strike to avoid such

checking as most auto-rickshaws and tempos are not roadworthy," said an official.  
Several hundred rickshawpullers also joined the striking auto-rickshaw and tempo employees at many places, demanding withdrawal of the ban on movement of rickshaws on some city roads and against the government plan of what they said banning movement of rickshaw in most of the city roads soon.  
Leaders of the auto-rickshaw and tempo owners, drivers and employees yesterday said they would continue the strike until their 12-point demand is accepted by the government.  
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## 7 more NSI men fired

STAR REPORT

The government terminated seven more deputy assistant directors (probationer) of the National Security Intelligence (NSI) last week.  
On December 27, the government fired 12 NSI officials and on January 28, action was taken against the rest on political counts.  
These 19 officials joined the NSI after passing through the process of appointment in July last year.  
With the BNP-led four-party alliance having formed the government, a quarter allegedly targeted  
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## Second JS session begins AL asked to join House

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The second session of the eighth parliament began yesterday with a special presidential call to the boycotting main opposition party to attend the House "in the greater interest of nation".  
"I am extremely pained to note that seats of main opposition party remain vacant in this parliament today. In parliamentary democracy, the opposition party is an indispensable part of the state system," he said in his New Year as well as maiden speech in parliament that convened yesterday morning for its second session.  
Awami League, which also stayed out of the inaugural session of the eighth parliament alleging that the October 1 general election was

not fair, continued their abstention saying that the right atmosphere was not yet created in and outside the parliament for them to join the



AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury

House.  
Requesting the main opposition party to come to the House, the President in a passionate note said, "No problem is insoluble for a nation which can win independence through a struggle. Animated by the unconquerable spirit of patriotism, we should work together irrespective of party and opinion."  
Excepting former ruling Awami League, other opposition groups of Jatiya Party (Ershad) led by Rowshan Ershad, Jatiya Party (Manzu) led by Anwar Hossain Manzu, Bangladesh Krishak Samik Janata League of Qader Siddiqui and independent MPs were present in the opening sitting of the second session of the new parliament.  
Diplomats, high civil and mili  
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## Last month sees 261 killings, 23 in mob beating alone

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A total of 261 people were murdered in the country last month. Of them, 23 were beaten to death, 10 women were murdered for dowry and nine others were killed following rape. Bangladesh Society for the Enforcement of Human Rights (BSEHR) gave these figures on the basis of newspaper reports.  
It also said 38 incidents of rape took place in the country last month. Of the victims, nine were minor girls and 10 were killed. Besides, 37 women and girls fell prey to acid

attacks.  
Twenty-four women and children were trafficked, 35 people were abducted and three were killed in bomb explosion.  
Seven persons died in Jail custody and one in police custody. Two died due to alleged negligence of physicians.  
During the period, 54 people committed suicide.  
Besides, 16 journalists were injured in different incidents, BSEHR said.  
Meanwhile, Odhikar, a coalition  
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## President blasts AL gov't for suppliers' credit burst

UNB, Dhaka

President AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury yesterday heavily came down on the previous government for unrestricted increase of suppliers' credit that exerted unwarranted pressure on balance of payment.  
In his maiden address to the parliament, he said in order to remove this pressure undesirable, unwanted and non-transparent contracts of suppliers' credits are being terminated after proper review.  
Prof B Chowdhury told the legislators that new guidelines had been formulated to bring discipline and  
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## Factions fight in Afghanistan



## 38 killed as Afghan factions battle

REUTERS, Kabul

Afghan factions are battling for control of a southeastern town, adding weight to a call by interim Afghan leader Hamid Karzai for an expansion of an international security force in the country.  
While the war is close to having been won in Afghanistan, lawlessness is threatening to undermine Karzai's fledgling government and hopes for lasting peace.  
Underlining the difficulties facing Karzai as he attempts to set his country on the road to reconstruction, heavy fighting erupted in the southeastern town of Gardez between rival Pashtun tribal factions. The Pakistan-based Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) news agency said 38 people had been killed.  
"There is street fighting inside the town," one resident told Reuters by telephone from the town, the capital of Paktia province.  
"We can see smoke rising from several locations... Both sides have suffered lots of casualties," the resident said.  
Abdul Wali, a member of the town's tribal council, told Reuters by satellite telephone the fighting, which began on Wednesday, had intensified on Thursday.  
"There is fighting on three sides of the town. There were clashes last night,  
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