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## Khaleda plans to add 150 seats to JS

Ahmadiyyas won't be dubbed as non-Muslim; 50 reserved berths for women

REZAUL KARIM

The four-party ruling alliance in a landmark decision yesterday unveiled a plan to raise the Jatiya Sangsad (JS) seats to 450, including 50 reserved for women, to keep pace with the rising population.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia presented the plan at a meeting of top alliance leaders at her office, saying a bill proposing to raise the number of lawmakers from 300 would be passed in the upcoming session slated to begin on January 18.

In another development, she rejected the demand of a section of

Islamic fanatics for declaration of the Ahmadiyya sect as non-Muslim, meeting sources said.

But the meeting did not touch on law and order, price spiral of essentials, allegations of corruption, Communications Minister Nazmul Huda's call to recast a parliamentary sub-committee and former president AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury's and Dr Kamal Hossain's moves to put up a third political force.

Revealing the JS expansion plan, Khaleda said 400 lawmakers will be elected in direct votes while the 50 reserved seats would be distributed proportionately among parties

having representation in parliament.

A party commanding at least eight lawmakers in parliament will have a woman legislator, she explained.

A bill providing for the reserved seats would be passed in the current parliament and elections to the enhanced general seats will be held in the next parliamentary polls scheduled for 2006.

Replying to a question by Bangladesh Jatiya Party (BJP) Secretary General Kazi Firoz Rashid, Khaleda said her intention was to raise the JS seats to 500 in line with a poll pledge, but a study showed a maximum of 450 lawmakers could be

accommodated without changing the structure of the House.

"We don't want to make any architectural change in the House," an alliance leader quoted the prime minister as saying.

Currently, the Jatiya Sangsad can seat 354 legislators.

The process to enhance JS seats from 300 to 450 is almost final and a bill is likely to be placed at the next cabinet meeting for approval, BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan told The Daily Star yesterday.

Firoz Rashid said: "The prime

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## Amini defiant on anti-Ahmadiyya demand

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A ruling coalition partner yesterday challenged the prime minister's rejection of the demand for declaring Ahmadiyyas non-Muslim at a meeting of top alliance leaders and vowed to press on with its movement against the Muslim sect.

On a different front, Bangladesh Jatiya Party (BJP) and the Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ) decided to quit the alliance if their representatives were not included in the cabinet.

Fazlul Haq Amini, chairman of an IOJ offshoot, who was silent all through the two-hour meeting yesterday afternoon, told other leaders later that his party would compel the government to cave in to the anti-Ahmadiyya demand, meeting sources said.

"We will make it difficult for the government to run the country without agreeing to what we want," an alliance leader quoted Amini as telling him.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's rejection of the demand came after IOJ Chairman Azizul Haq raised the

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## Crowley worried by extremist presence

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

US Congressman Joseph Crowley is concerned about the presence of extremist groups in Bangladesh, but sees it as the country's own responsibility to deal with them, the visiting American told journalists yesterday following a close-door meeting with newspaper editors.

Although extremism in Bangladesh concerns him, Crowley said the problem is more acute in other countries.

The congressman, at the end of a four-day visit to Bangladesh, told journalists at Hotel Sonargaon that he wants to see closer co-ordination between Bangladesh and the United States. "Bangladesh has been a strong supporter of the US from the outset on the war on terror, as it

progresses we hope to continue the relationship we have with Bangladesh."

Crowley said he hasn't yet formulated the recommendations about Bangladesh that he will present to the Congressional Committee on International Affairs, on which he serves.

But, he added, "This country deserves the attention of the United States, and it already has it."

Earlier in his visit, the Democratic Congressman unleashed a series of criticisms of the ruling government's "wrong" and "unfortunate" decision to ban Ahmadiyya publications. He also stressed that the government must reign in endemic corruption if it hopes to brighten its negative image abroad.

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## Badruddoza to form convening committee

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former president Badruddoza Chowdhury is likely to form a 21-member convening committee next week, as a run-up to his move to launch a civil society platform to fight corruption and crime.

The committee members after scrutinising political strategies will float Badruddoza's political party by this month.

Sources close to Badruddoza told The Daily Star last night that the committee will comprise two front-line ruling BNP leaders, two former ministers of the Awami League, also retired army officers, two former secretaries, one renowned journalist and some dissident BNP leaders.

The former president, also founding secretary general of the BNP, stood down from presidency following deterioration of relations with the party in 2002.

He has triggered political speculations by publicly criticising the rise in corruption and crime during the first half of the BNP rule.



PHOTO: PID

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia presides over a meeting of the leaders of the ruling four-party alliance at her office yesterday to raise the Jatiya Sangsad seats to 450 from 300 in a landmark decision.

## Opposition criticises move for not consulting them

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League (AL) and other opposition parties yesterday criticised the government move to expand the number of seats in parliament because the crucial decision was taken without consulting them.

The chiefs and senior leaders of the ruling coalition yesterday agreed to raise the parliament seats to 450 including 50 reserved for women from 300 in line with the rising population.

AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil

smelt ill motives behind the step. "We think they (the ruling coalition) have some evil purposes as the decision was taken unilaterally. The ultimate aim is to demarcate constituencies in such a way so that the four-party voters in coalition's marginal seats increase."

Jalil was also critical of the idea of keeping 50 reserved seats for women.

"The Awami League as well as women organisations have been campaigning for direct elections to

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## Sergeant, businessman gunned down in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A police sergeant was gunned down on Ring Road at Mohammadpur last night, minutes after a businessman was shot dead just 20 yards away on Babar Road.

The victims are Sergeant Kazi Shahabuddin, 28, of Mohammadpur police, and Shaful Alam Firoz, 22, a businessman.

Police said the killers of Sergeant Shahabuddin came in a white microbus and fired on him and his companion Hanif as the two were on their way to make a phone call from a shop on Ring Road.

The incident happened at around 7:00pm. Shahabuddin, who

received a bullet in the chest, was taken to Dhaka Orthopedic (Pongu) Hospital where doctors declared him dead. Hanif is undergoing treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Police said Hanif had a dispute with a local gang over property and was the actual target.

Earlier, a suspected gang of extortionists gunned down businessman Firoz on Babar Road in Jahuri Mohalla a few minutes before the sergeant's murder.

"Firoz was talking to a man in front of the local mosque at about 6:40pm. Suddenly, I heard a gunshot and saw Firoz lying on the ground,"

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## Bigots to stage anti-Ahmadiyya agitation Friday

Hardliners from Egypt, India, London, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia will join

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An international outfit of anti-Ahmadiyya diehards and a local 'socio-cultural' organisation have scheduled demonstrations at Paltan Maidan for tomorrow and January 23 in the latest bid to force the government to declare the religious sect non-Muslim.

The post-Friday prayers demonstration by the International Majlis-e-Tahaffuz-e-Khatme Nabuwat Bangladesh will be followed by another round by Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis, a radical Islamist organisation and offshoot of the ruling coalition partner

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## Woman kills four in Gaza suicide attack

REUTERS, Erez Crossing, Gaza Strip

A Palestinian woman suicide bomber yesterday struck at the main border crossing between Israel and the Gaza Strip, killing four Israelis and wounding seven people.

Militant group Hamas, which claimed joint responsibility for the attack along with the al-Qasb Martyrs Brigades, vowed to escalate attacks in a more than three-year-old uprising.

The woman, identified by Hamas as a 22-year-old mother of two, blew herself up in a terminal where Palestinian labourers from the fenced-in Strip were being put through Israeli security checks

before entering a nearby industrial complex.

"Glass and black smoke flew everywhere. Arabs were screaming. Jews were screaming," said a Palestinian witness, her clothes stained with the blood of others.

A senior Israeli army officer said the dead included soldiers and least one Israeli civilian. Security sources said four Palestinians were among the wounded.

It was the first Palestinian suicide attack since a December 25 bombing that killed four Israelis near Tel Aviv, and raised further doubts about the prospects for reviving a US-backed peace "road map"

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## JS body to scan more graft allegations

Chairman rejects Huda's appeal to recast 3-wheeler probe body

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A parliamentary body yesterday rejected the communications minister's appeal to recast one of its sub-committees and decided to hold a special meeting to probe 'wide-spread allegations' in the ministry activities.

The parliamentary standing committee on the communications ministry will scan the allegations of

corruption in CNG auto-rickshaw sales, land allocation for CNG filling stations, purchase of Volvo buses and activities of Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC) and Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA).

Syed Monjur Hossain, chairman of the committee, told newsmen at his Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban office yesterday that the meeting might be

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