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Sangsad session resumes today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The winter session of the Jatiya Sangsad resumes at 4:00pm today after a 10-day halt due to the Eid-ul-Azha.

The session began on January 18 and will continue till March 14. The main opposition Awami League, which has been abstaining from the proceedings of parliament since June 25 last year, has declined to join the session.

Before the Eid recess, Bangladesh Employees Welfare Board Bill-2004 was passed and three bills were tabled in its seven working days. The bills are Sangsad Rules of Procedure (Amendment) Bill-2004, Court Reform Implementation (Assisting Rules) Bill-2004 and Salish Ain (Amendment) Bill-2004.

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Jewellers strike in city today, demand gold recovery

STAR REPORT

Four jewellers' associations go on a daylong strike in the capital today demanding immediate recovery of gold worth around Tk 5.5 crore that was looted on February 4.

The leaders of the associations will hold a press briefing at the end of the strike, also protesting the deterioration of law and order, and give the government a 72-hour ultimatum to recover the looted gold.

"If there is still no progress in the

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SC stays IGP's conviction for court contempt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court (SC) yesterday stayed the High Court (HC) verdict that convicted the inspector general of police (IGP) for contempt of court.

The HC on January 27 fined IGP Shahidul Huq Tk 2,000 and ordered that he would have to serve one month in prison should he fail to pay up the fine.

Chamber Judge of the Appellate

SEE PAGE 11 COL 8

18 guns seized in Bandarban

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) recovered 18 light guns from Menthon in Chakdhala under bordering Naikhongchhari upazila Friday night.

A BDR team led by Major Mohsin launched a drive at 11:00pm to a forest-covered hill, 22-kilometre off from Naikhongchhari Upazila headquarters and near Lemuchhari Border Out Post to recover the guns from an abandoned state.



Free fall of law, order mocks govt measures

ZAYADUL AHSAN

Crime waves continue to strike terror into people despite a range of government steps to check the slide in law and order.

Hideous killings, robberies, arson attacks, rapes, outlaw and extremist violence, abductions and a set of other crimes are rising to new highs, making speedy trial law, Operation Clean Heart, Operation Spider-web, a combing operation in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and the Rapid Action Team in Dhaka sub-

jects of parody.

Speedy trial tribunals have sentenced over 300 people to death, the anti-crime Operation Clean Heart by joint forces including army saw deaths of over 50 suspects and Operation Spider-web netted scores in the restive southwest, but little changed for better.

Unprecedented incidents of arms-running came to light last year when police luckily recovered 100,000 bullets and about 200 kilograms of ammunition in a single case in Bogra. Police and army have

recovered unbelievable caches of arms and ammunition this year.

But the killing of an officer-in-charge (OC) of police in Rajbari and scores of police casualties in the southwest have eroded the confidence of police, who go to patrol the streets under the shadow of ambushes.

Improvement in law and order dominated the election plank of the four-party alliance government, but the home ministry's performance two and a half years into the

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48-hour PCJSS programme begins today

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

The Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS) and its front organisations yesterday brought out a procession and street rally in support of its 48-hour seize programme beginning today.

The PCJSS leaders asked the people to assist their agitation programme at the rally on Bandarban Press Club premises in the evening.

Different Bangalee organisations also

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

BIMST-EC MEET

Grouping signs free trade deal today

AFP, Phuket, Thailand

Trade ministers from South and Southeast Asia have agreed on a draft free trade deal which will abolish tariffs and unleash their "enormous potential and resources", the Thai hosts said yesterday.

The seven-nation BIMST-EC

grouping, which has a combined population of 1.3 billion people, will sign the agreement today, said Thai Commerce Minister Watana Muangsook.

"I am convinced that our success in establishing the free trade area will greatly increase both our inter-regional and intra-regional trade," he said as he opened the afternoon discussions.

"It is clear that we are yet to tap

into our enormous potential and resources, and for this to happen, we will need to establish a more substantive and meaningful economic framework."

Negotiations to complete the deal are expected to take about 18 months, allowing trade liberalisation to begin in mid-2005.

BIMST-EC's more developed

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Coastal forests stripped of Tk 4 cr trees

Foresters, bandits allegedly commit the crime over past 8 years in Noakhali

MD NURUL AMIN, Noakhali

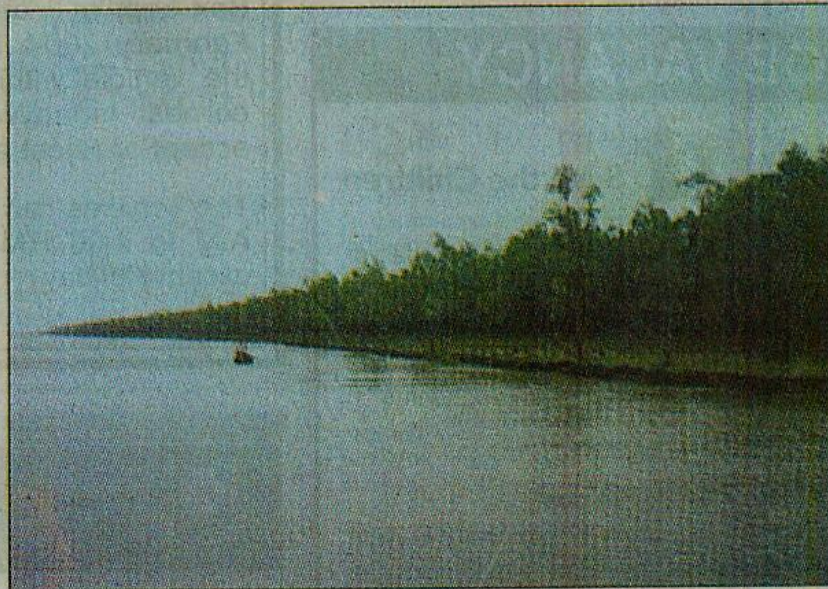
Foresters and bandits have stripped the forests in the coastal Noakhali of trees worth nearly Tk 4 crore during past eight years, according to local people.

They alleged the forest officials teaming up with the bandits have systematically cleared the forests of thousands of shal, mahogany and other trees and carried the logs off in trucks and trawlers.

The pilferage went unchallenged as the roads and waterways they used were unguarded by the law-enforcing agencies.

"The loss of forest resources would amount to no more than Tk 2 crore," admitted Regional Forest Official Ashit Ranjan Pal.

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Massive deforestation has denuded vast areas of Noakhali's coastal areas of precious forest resources (right); a strip of forest land lined with rows of trees that have been spared the axe so far.



PHOTO: STAR

MANIK SAHA MURDER Monitoring cell suspends OC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The home ministry's monitoring cell yesterday ordered the suspension of the officer-in-charge (OC) of Kotwali Police Station in Khulna for neglect in the investigation into journalist Manik Saha's killing and asked law enforcers to immediately arrest the guilty in six other sensational cases.

The cell recommended formation of a high-powered committee in next 10 days to work out a policy on recruitment of civil security service staff and agreed to suggest amendment to a law to track down cellphones used in crime.

The 34th meeting of the cell pored over 11 sensational cases and asked the authorities concerned for quick investigation and disposal of the cases that include the killing of Saha, Karnafuli Garden City heist, Banshkhali bloodbath, the killing Chittagong magnate Jakir Hossain, twin murders at Dhaka University and the killing of schoolteacher Jayanti Reza.

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Prime Minister Khaleda Zia opens the Ekushey book fair on the Bangla Academy premises amidst demonstrations by BCL and SCF activists in the city yesterday.

Ekushey book fair opened amid protests

DU CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) and the Samajtantrik Chhatra Front (SCF) yesterday staged demonstrations on the Dhaka University campus protesting the prime minister's visit to the Ekushey Book Fair while the pro-government JCD welcomed her as she arrived on the Bangla Academy premises to open the month-long fair.

Earlier, thousands of JCD (Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal) leaders and activists began to gather at Madhu's canteen on the campus since morning and brought out processions throughout the day. They also held a rally chaired by JCD President Sahabuddin Laitu.

At the rally, JCD leaders blamed a "certain student organisation for destroying the congenial educational atmosphere in collusion with criminals and outsiders". They also urged their party men and general students to keep outsiders and criminals off the campus.

On the other hand, the BCL, Awami League's student wing, and the left-leaning SCF protested the

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US to ask Musharraf about Khan's pardon

Pakistan seeks to put lid on nuke fiasco

AFP, United Nations

US Secretary of State Colin Powell has said that Washington accepted Pakistani leader Pervez Musharraf's decision to pardon a top nuclear expert who passed secrets to Iran, Libya and North Korea.

But Powell added that he would raise the pardon of Dr Abdul Qadeer Khan, the father of Pakistan's nuclear bomb, in talks with Musharraf in the days to come.

"This is a matter between Mr Khan, who is a Pakistani citizen, and his government. But it is a matter also that I'll be talking to President Musharraf about," he told reporters at UN headquarters in New York yesterday.

"The action he took with respect to pardoning Mr Khan is something that he felt it was appropriate for him to do and he has explained his position thoroughly," Powell said.

"I expect to be talking to President Musharraf over the next several days to make sure that there is a full understanding of what the A

Q Khan network has done over the years so that there are no remnants of it left, and then there's no possibility of further proliferating activities coming out of that network."

Powell said the desire to make sure there was no more proliferation was "goal number one with respect to his accountability."

Powell refused to be drawn by a reporter's question about whether the pardon sent the wrong message to other would-be proliferators of sensitive nuclear technology and expertise.

"The biggest (proliferator) is now gone," the US diplomat said, "so I think that is a remarkable success."

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said the Khan affair indicated that nuclear proliferation is "alive" and said that Musharraf was faced with a "difficult situation" because of Khan's hero status to many in the country.

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Probe body on Meghna launch disaster formed

RAFIQ HASAN

The government has formed a three-member committee to investigate Thursday's launch disaster in the Meghna in Barisal.

The collision between passenger-launches MV Asha Jaoa and MV Sattar Khan-1 happened in the small hours Thursday at Charmonia under Hilla upazila, leaving at least 15 dead and scores of others injured.

The committee headed by Nautical Surveyor and Examiner Captain K M Jashimuddin Sarkar of the shipping department has been assigned to ascertain the actual causes of the accident and identify the persons responsible.

The two other members of the committee are Special Magistrate and Marine Safety Officer Fazlur Rahman and Mohammad Shafiqur Rahman of Inland Ship Survey Office, Khulna.

The team has been briefed to visit the place of occurrence and submit its report within two weeks.

It has also been asked to evaluate any violation of rules of the Inland Shipping Ordinance and make specific recommendations for

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Tough law to clip NGO wings soon

Development activities to suffer, fears NGO federation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Federation of NGOs in Bangladesh (FNB) yesterday protested a government move to introduce a new law to regulate NGO (non-governmental organisation) activities, saying it will severely hinder their development efforts.

"We have reasons to believe that the draft is now being finalised. If so, it appears that the process of finalising the law is being carried out disregarding the views of the NGO community," the FNB said in a statement.

Sources said The Foreign Donation (Voluntary Activities) Regulation (Amendment) Act 2004 now lying with parliament secretary prior to being placed in the parliament next week.

The new law will jeopardise independent activities of the NGOs by establishing full control and authority over all NGO personnel,

their activities and funds, NGO leaders alleged.

The FNB said it believes the existing law regulating NGO activities is adequate. But should there be any perceived complexity or ambiguity in it, the matter should be dealt with in a spirit of cooperation between the government and the NGOs concerned. Otherwise, it said the ultimate goal of poverty alleviation and uplift of the disadvantaged section of the society will remain unfulfilled.

Signed by Abdul Mueyed Chowdhury, chairperson of the FNB, the statement said a detailed discussion was earlier held between NGO representatives and the cabinet committee set up to review NGO activities and the existing laws governing them.

The government had assured the FNB of consulting its representatives before finalising the draft, the

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