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Tsunami toll feared at 150,000

Strong quake rocks Sumatra; Floods in Sri Lanka prompt evacuations; Aid tops \$1b

AGENCIES, Banda Aceh, Indonesia

A legion of ships and planes has delivered aid to millions of Asian tsunami survivors after New Year revellers around the world paused to mourn victims of one of the worst disasters in living memory.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan called for a major logistical operation to help countries shattered by Sunday's tsunami, which by the latest count had killed 125,930 after India added another thousand fatalities.

The UN emergency relief operations co-ordinator said the death toll

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1



Members of the armed forces load medicines and other relief goods for the tsunami affected people in Sri Lanka and the Maldives onto a C-130 cargo plane yesterday on Bangladesh Air Force tarmac at Kurmitola. The relief supplies are being sent under a post-tsunami rescue and relief effort dubbed 'Operation Saarc Bandhan'.

Mahbubul Alam new president of Noab

BSS, Dhaka

The election of the office-bearers and members of the executive committee of Newspaper Owners Association of Bangladesh (Noab) was held at The Daily Star office on December 27, a Noab press release said yesterday.

The following office-bearers and members were elected unanimously for the year 2005.

President Mahbubul Alam (Independent), Vice-President Motiur Rahman (Prothom Alo), Treasurer Motiur Rahman Chowdhury (Manabzamin).

SEE PAGE 11 COL 8

Ministry 'ignorance' blocks Tk 43 crore farm funds

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

'Ignorance' on the part of finance ministry bureaucrats has resulted in their failure to release Tk 43 crore to the agriculture ministry that would be used to provide farmers with support and training in the use of hybrid seeds crucial to increased farm productivity, a senior official in the agriculture ministry has told The Daily Star.

The delay is despite the fact that in April 2004 the Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman and Agriculture Minister MK Anwar had formally

agreed that the government should encourage the use of hybrid seeds as a way of tackling the need to feed a growing population.

Even if the Finance Ministry approved the fund now, the ministry will not be able to utilise the seeds in the current season as half of the season is already over. Two consecutive floods last year caused colossal losses to the agriculture sector.

Following the April 2004 meeting, the agriculture ministry had sent a proposal to the finance ministry, seeking Tk 35 crore for training farmers on how to develop seeds

and provide them seeds and support for growing them. In addition, the proposal also sought Tk 8 crore for developing various types of seeds of rice, jute and other crops.

The finance ministry did not however consider the proposal till December 22 where it simply asked the agriculture ministry to revise it.

A top official of the agriculture ministry told The Daily Star that the finance ministry wanted a revised proposal because, "its officials are not much aware of various kinds of rice seeds. Their ignorance about

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Fresh dates for Saarc Summit to be decided in 'a day or two'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Pakistan, the current Saarc chair, will decide in 'a day or two' about fresh dates for the postponed 13th Saarc summit in Dhaka, Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan said yesterday and reiterated Dhaka's preference for February 7-10.

Morshed told reporters at his office that Pakistan and Bangladesh

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

Minor tremor jolts Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A minor tremor jolted Chittagong yesterday, according to the Bangladesh Meteorological Department, a week after an earthquake-triggered tsunami devastated several south and southeast Asian countries.

But there have been no reports of casualties or damage resulting from the tremor.

The country's lone seismic observatory in Chittagong recorded

SEE PAGE 11 COL 8

TSUNAMI RELIEF
2 navy ships off to Lanka, Maldives

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two ships of the Bangladesh navy, accompanied by a C-130 cargo plane and an airforce helicopter, left for Sri Lanka and the Maldives yesterday to take part in post-

SEE PAGE 11 COL 2

CHILD DELIVERY AT DMCH

Meant to be cheap, but not really so

NAIMUL HAQ with SHAHEEN MOLLAH

About 80 percent of pregnant women coming to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) expecting childbirth at a fairly low cost find quite the opposite is the reality.

A Daily Star investigation reveals that doctors at the biggest public hospital in the country are reluctant to perform less expensive normal delivery, and instead go for caesarean section that multiplies the cost.

In addition, a section of the hospital staff and employees are engaged in pilfering drugs and medical accessories and the patients are forced to buy these. This adds substantial amounts of 'hidden cost' to the expenses for childbirth.

A normal delivery at the hospital now costs roughly Tk 2,500 on average, including payments for drugs. Delivery through caesarean section costs between Tk 5,000 and Tk 10,000.

Eighty percent of the patients,

spoken to by The Daily Star, who had come to the DMCH Gynaecology and Obstetrics department for delivery, complained they are compelled to spend much beyond their expectation. Most of the patients are poor, and they come to the public hospital since it is 'supposed' to provide treatment free of cost.

According to sources, a section of ward boys, nurses and doctors at the department are involved in pilfering drugs and other related items of

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

PM asks JCD to rid politics of vices

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday directed the leaders and activists of the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) to work towards cleansing student politics of vices and removing chaos from campuses.

She cautioned that anyone who indulges in wrongdoing and injustice would not be spared even those who belong to her party or are loyal to her.

"So, acts of terrorism won't be tolerated...there is no place for terror in the party," the prime minister told the leaders and workers of her party's student wing at a grand meet at Shatayu Angon at Ramna Park in the capital.

"Doing politics is not enough, your prime task is to acquire knowledge through studying attentively," Khaleda, also chairperson of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), told a huge gathering of students marking the 26th anniversary of the student front.

She asked the JCD leaders and workers to groom themselves as worthy citizens to steer the future leadership of the country.

The prime minister inaugurated the function by hoisting national flag and releasing pigeons.

Party song 'Prothom Bangladesh Amar, Shesh Bangladesh' was rendered as the prime minister appeared on the dais.

SEE PAGE 21 COL 3

Major reshuffle in admin

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday brought important changes to the top level of civil administration by transferring seven officials to their equivalent post of acting secretary.

Secretary in-charge of the Ministry of Information ANM Nasiruddin has been transferred as a member of the Privatisation Commission.

Director General (DG) of Bangladesh Television (BTV) Zafar Ahmed Chowdhury has been appointed as secretary in-charge of the Ministry of Information while none has yet been appointed as DG of BTV.

Director General of Land Records and Survey Mohammad Abdul Alim Khan has been appointed as secretary in-charge of the Ministry of Land.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3



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দেশ ও মানুষের কল্যাণে

SEISMIC SURVEY IN BLOCK 10 French firm fires 1,700 staff without notice

STAR REPORT

A French contractor conducting a seismic survey in Noakhali region under block 10 for British oil company Cairn has fired 1,700 local staff out of the blue, reports our correspondent in Noakhali.

The employees, who performed their duties on Thursday as usual, came to their workplaces in Noakhali, Laxmipur, Comilla and Chandpur yesterday morning only to find their jobs terminated.

They later assembled at the local office of the contractor, Grants, at the district headquarters in Majdee

SEE PAGE 11 COL 5

Govt agrees to constitute 6th Wage Board

BSS, Dhaka

The government in principle has decided to constitute the Sixth Wage Board for the newspaper industry.

Information Minister M Shamsul Islam yesterday told the leaders of Sangbadik-Sramik-Karmachari Oikya Parishad (SSKOP) that the government would continue its necessary efforts to implement the decision.

The minister held a meeting with the SSKOP leaders at his office, an official release said.

He said discussion with all concerned in this regard will also be continued.

SSKOP leaders Gias Kamal Chowdhury, Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury, Fazle Imam, Ruhul Amin Gazi, Motiur Rahman Talukdar, Manjurul Ahsan Bulbul, Abul Hasem, Altaf Mahmud and Elahi Newaz Khan attended the meeting.

Information Secretary AMM Nasir Uddin and Principal Information Officer Khandaker Monirul Alam were present.