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## UK minister for int'l development arrives today

UNB, Dhaka

British Secretary of State for International Development Douglas Alexander MP arrives in Dhaka today to visit the cyclone-hit areas.

Alexander will visit the Sidra-affected areas to see the practical

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## Naser's wife freed on bail

UNB, Dhaka

Rezina Rahman, wife of convicted former BNP lawmaker Naser Rahman, was released on bail last night in a corruption case she is facing along with her husband.

"Rezina Rahman was freed from PG Hospital's prison cell after she

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Prayer Timing		
December 18		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5:20	5:55
Zohr	12:45	1:15
Asr	3:45	4:00
Maghrib	5:22	5:25
Esha	7:00	7:30

Source: Islamic Foundation

## LOANS OF TOP 20 DEFAULTERS

## NCBs achieve 21pc of year's recovery target

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The three nationalised commercial banks (NCBs), converted to public limited companies recently, have so far managed to achieve only 21 percent of this year's target of recovering loans shirked by the top 20 defaulters.

During the same period, the first nine months, they have attained 68 percent of the target for other defaulters.

The banks--Sonali, Agrani and Janata--have trouble recovering the money from the defaulters since they can easily take out court

orders to halt the loan recovery drives, observed bank officials at a meeting with the Bangladesh Bank (BB) governor yesterday.

First of its kind since the NCBs were turned into government-owned commercial banks (GCBs) last month, the meeting discussed how to improve the financial situation of the banks.

BB Governor Salehuddin Ahmed said he would request the law ministry to look into the legal complexities that confront the banks trying to recover large loans.

Chief executive officers (CEOs) of the banks requested the central

bank boss to liberalise for them the conditions in the memorandums of understanding (MoUs) aiming at better performance of the financial institutions.

Briefing newsmen after the meeting, the BB governor said the MoUs were signed back in 2003, but things have changed now with the NCBs converted to public limited companies.

"The Bangladesh Bank will ease various rules set in the MoUs," he said adding that it would take some time though.

Talking about concern that the

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## Russia starts nuke fuel deliveries to Iran

AFP, Moscow

Russia yesterday announced the start of nuclear fuel deliveries for Iran's first atomic power station, brushing aside US and Israeli claims that Tehran harbours secret bomb-making plans.

"On December 16, 2007, Atomstroieksport began delivery of the fuel for the initial installation at the future Bushehr power station," the state-run corporation said in a statement.

The delivery process will take up to two months to complete, Atomstroieksport said, with the Russian-built station starting to generate electricity in approximately six months time.

The still-unfinished Bushehr is

the jewel in the crown of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's nuclear power ambitions.

Israel and Western governments, led by the United States, have long argued that Bushehr is being used as cover for a bomb-making project.

However Russia's insistence that Iran has no such plans were bolstered earlier this month when the US intelligence community contradicted the White House with a report saying that Iran halted its drive for nuclear weapons in 2003.

The US report provided Russia with its "final argument," Pyodor Lukyanov, at the journal Russia in Global Affairs, told AFP.

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## Suicide attack kills 9 Pakistani troops

Pak troops net 17 militants in Swat

AP, AFP, Islamabad

A suicide bomber blew himself up among a group of Pakistani soldiers returning from a soccer game in northwestern Pakistan on Monday, killing nine of them, the army said.

The attacker struck near an army communications centre in Kohat, about 30 miles from the city of Peshawar. Army spokesman Maj Gen Waheed Arshad said nine troops were killed and four were wounded.

Pakistan has suffered a string of suicide attacks in recent days, most of them targeting security forces.

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## UK envoy hopes for fair polls in 2008

UNB, Dhaka

British High Commissioner Anwar Choudhury has said 2008 is the year of election and hoped that a free and fair general election will lead to a more sustainable democracy in Bangladesh.

"Bangladesh government seems to be keeping in the roadmap despite the cyclone," he told reporters after a meeting with Foreign Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury along with two other west European envoys yesterday.

The British high commissioner, German Ambassador Frank Meyke and Netherlands Ambassador Bea

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## Arrest warrant against Manju, wife for bribery

Graft charges pressed against ex-forest boss Gani, wife

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday issued arrest warrants against Jatiya Party (JP) Manju Chairman Anwar Hossain Manju, his wife Tasmina Hossain and his cousin Mahmud Hossain in cases filed for taking Tk 1.75 crore bribe from two construction companies.

Meantime, Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) pressed charges against detained former chief forest conservator Osman

Gani and his wife Mohsen Ara Gani in a case filed for amassing wealth through illegal means.

CASE AGAINST MANJU Judge Mohammad Azizul Haque of the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court issued arrest warrants against Manju and other two following the prayer of investigation officers (IOs) of the cases.

The court passed the order as the accused have been absconding since the cases were filed against

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## Convict of Aug 17 serial blasts held

UNB, Jyppurhat

A fugitive convict of August 17 serial bombings was arrested in the district bus terminal area yesterday morning.

Acting on a tip-off, members of Rab-5 arrested Mansur Rahman, acting regional commander of outlawed Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), when he was trying to flee from the district by a bus at about 6.30am.

Rab sources said Mansur was made JMB regional commander after the arrest of regional commander Montezar Rahman. He was trying to organise the JMB

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