

### BNP MPs-elect take oath tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP lawmakers-elect will finally be sworn in tomorrow as almost all its policymakers are in favour of joining the inaugural session of the ninth parliament on January 25.

On receiving a request from BNP yesterday, Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar fixed the time for the oath taking ceremony.

The BNP sent a letter, signed by its vice-chairman MK Anwar, to the speaker urging him to take necessary steps to administer oath to BNP lawmakers-elect in the afternoon of January 15, sources in the parliament secretariat said.

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## Extortion back

### 'Aratdars' illegally collect no less than Tk 40 lakh a day from Karwan Bazar, Jatrabari, Shyambazar; vegetable prices go at least 5pc up for extortion

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and NAIMUL ALAM NOBIN

Greengrocers have to pay illegal toll to Aratdars in the city's three premier kitchen markets and, in turn, they force consumers to pay for that.

The crooked practice was absent for over a year due to market monitoring by a Bangladesh Rifles-led taskforce. It began again with the BDR personnel pulling out of the markets last September.

According to an estimate by The Daily

Star based on information gleaned recently from market sources, Aratdars (warehouse owners) at Karwan Bazar, Jatrabari and Shyambazar kitchen markets collect over Tk 40 lakh a day in toll from the retail traders in fruit and vegetables.

Officials of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), which owns the markets, said the warehouse operators' taking money from retailers is illegal. It is extortion, they added.

Usually, a wholesaler brings in goods

from outside the capital and stores those in the warehouses. Apparently, he has nothing to do with the toll popularly known as Koyeli. The extras that a retailer pays go to the Aratdars' purse.

The extortion in the name of toll collection stopped in September 2007 as the government began strict monitoring of the markets. But it started again a day after Eid-ul-Fitr last year.

Owners of fruit warehouse at Karwan Bazar started charging traders again on

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Koyeli (toll) changing hands at a warehouse in the city's Karwan Bazar at night. Aratdars make more profits charging this illegal toll but it is the consumers who end up paying more for their goods.

### Voter list to be updated in Apr-May

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) will update voter list in April and May for listing 18-year-old citizens as fresh voters and those who earlier failed enrol themselves, Election Commissioner Muhammed Sohul Hussain told reporters at his office yesterday.

Sohul said the commission will think of holding election to Dhaka City Corporation and all municipalities across the country after completion of January 22 upazila polls and added that the commission is

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## US-UK PROBE INTO OVER \$200M BRIBES

### Hawa Bhaban boys on list of 25-plus

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

More than 25 bigwigs including some ministers of the last BNP-led four-party alliance government and some Hawa Bhaban people were also allegedly involved in the raging scandal of laundering over \$200 million, paid by foreign businesses in kickbacks, sources in the Attorney General's Office said yesterday.

Former prime minister Khaleda Zia's younger son Arafat Rahman Koko's alleged involvement in the scandal has already been discussed internationally for about a month now.

From now on a team of FBI investigators dealing with the matter might also be visiting Bangladesh frequently for legal and other assistance from different government agencies, in connection with the probe into the

money laundering which has already become an international scandal, sources in the US embassy said.

The government agencies which are expected to help the investigation are the Attorney General's Office, Anti-corruption Commission (ACC), Ministry of Finance, Bangladesh Bank, and the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Two of the people of erstwhile 'alternative power centre' Hawa Bhaban, who were allegedly involved in the racket, are Khaleda Zia's elder son Tarique Rahman, and his business partner and close friend Giasuddin Al Mamun.

The sources, however, did not confirm who the other involved Hawa Bhaban cronies are.

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## Govt sees 90pc ADP implementation

Six months' achievement only 24pc

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The new government expects to implement 90 percent of the Annual Development Programme (ADP) by the end of the fiscal year, although only 24 percent has been implemented in first six months.

"The present government will be able to take the implementation to a satisfactory level by March-April and by the end of the fiscal year it will be about 90 percent," said Planning Minister Air Vice Marshall (ret'd) AK Khandaker after a meeting of the Executive Committee on National Economic Council (Ecneec) yesterday.

The first Ecneec meeting under the new government was held at the NEC conference room with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair.

The prime minister told the meeting that her government

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## First admin reshuffle by new govt

M ABUL KALAM AZAD

In its first reshuffle in the administration, the Awami League-led grand alliance government yesterday appointed Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTA) Chairman ASM Ali Kabir as acting establishment secretary.

Establishment secretary M Moslehuddin retired on Dec 31 last.

The new government, which assumed office on January 6, also appointed retired joint secretary Dina

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## EC in upazila soup

### Scores of disqualified candidates returning to race with court order

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) is looking at an avalanche of unexpected extra work with only eight days left for the upazila parishad elections, as many candidacy seekers previously disqualified by returning officers, are showing up with court orders reinstating them as candidates.

The EC faced a similar situation just 10 days before the recent parliamentary election, as many disqualified applicants were reinstated as candidates by court orders back then too.

But the magnitude of chaos is much bigger this time around, since the numbers of candidates and constituencies are much higher in upazila polls.

Sources in the EC Secretariat said they already received names of around 30 previously disqualified applicants who got reinstated as candidates after filing writ petitions with the High Court.

The EC now must take additional preparations to ensure their candidacies in the January 22 elections to 481 upazila

parishads.

Many reinstated candidates are going to the offices of returning officers (ROs) with the court orders to get registered as candidates. The EC Secretariat, however, is yet to determine the exact number of such candidacy seekers.

Meanwhile, the EC asked local administrations not to provide protocol privileges to any member of the cabinet of ministers if any of them visit any upazila during the polls.

In a letter to the cabinet division, it also requested the cabinet members to refrain from participating in any upazila election campaign since those are non-partisan in nature, sources in the EC Secretariat said.

About inclusion of candidates reinstated by court orders in the race, EC Secretariat officials said the increase in the number of candidates will be an extra burden on them, complicating the electoral process more than it already is.

The EC already completed printing 80 percent of the ballot papers to be cast for electing chairmen, vice-chairmen, and

women vice-chairmen to reserved seats.

It is now printing the remaining 20 percent, for the upazilas where more than 10 candidates are contesting for each post.

Earlier, the EC printed 80 percent of the ballot papers with ten symbols on them for each post.

If the numbers of candidates increase to more than 10 in the upazilas where the numbers were 10 or below, the EC will have to print fresh ballot papers for those upazilas to accommodate the contenders reinstated by court orders.

"An increase in the number of candidates at the last moment might hamper the electoral process, it has already caused some extra burden on us," said an EC Secretariat official, seeking anonymity.

The official however said they will finally be able to manage the extra burden with much difficulty, but if the number keeps rising it will become too difficult to handle.

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## JRC meet to resume shortly

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The long-stalled Bangladesh-India Joint Rivers Commission (JRC) meeting is likely to be held soon to find a solution to water-sharing issues of a number of rivers flowing through the two neighbouring countries.

"Apart from bilateral issues, we have discussed water sharing and other outstanding problems. A JRC meeting is needed to resolve the issues," said Water Resources Minister Romesh Chandra Sen after meeting Indian envoy Pinak Ranjan Chakravarty at his office yesterday.

The Indian high commissioner made a courtesy call on the new minister at his ministry in the morning.

The minister said at the JRC meeting sharing the water of the Teesta will be discussed with high priority.

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## 9 out of 11 BNP bodies limping for years

RAKIB HASNET SUMAN

Nine of the 11 associate bodies that pump political lifeblood into the BNP have remained without valid committees for the last two to 12 years as the party ignored democratic practice within itself focusing only the top leadership instead.

Compelled by failure in the December 29 parliamentary election to reorganise itself, the BNP is now discovering how neglected its vital organs have been for a long time and realising that this shabby condition of these organs has contributed to the election debacle.

Not only that, the party has in fact failed to groom new leaders for its associate bodies, especially the important ones.

The only associate bodies of the BNP that have valid

committees are Jatiyabadi Muktiyoddha Dal and Jatiyabadi Tanti Dal, but these are two of its weakest fronts.

The two strongest fronts of the BNP--Jatiyabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) and Jatiyabadi Jubo Dal--have been running without valid committees since January 2007 and 2005.

The most ignored is Jatiyabadi Mohila Dal as its committee was formed in 1996 only for three months to elect a full committee through a council meeting.

The committee of Krishak Dal was announced about nine years ago and that of Matsyajibi Dal in 2000 while the Olama Dal committee was formed in 2006.

Interestingly, top leaders of Jatiyabadi Swachhchasebak Dal could not recall the date of the formation of their present

committee.

The committee of another strong front of the BNP, Sramik Dal, expired in 2005 while the Jatiyabadi Samajik Sanskritik Sangstha (Jasas) central committee expired in 2003.

The process for reorganising these associate bodies will start after the upazila elections scheduled for January 22 upon getting official order from BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia.

Khaleda at a meeting with party leaders at Comilla circuit house on January 9 said all committees of the party and its associate organisations would be dissolved and revamped through elections.

According to the BNP constitution, the party has 11 front organisations--JCD, Jubo Dal, Mohila Dal, Muktiyoddha Dal, Sramik Dal,

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## Mahbubey Alam new attorney gen

### Vows to resolve judges' appointment problems

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

After being appointed attorney general yesterday, advocate Mahbubey Alam stressed the need to work out solutions to the problems regarding appointment of judges to the High Court.

"A former chief justice had earlier commented that a storm swept the appointments of judges in the highest

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## Israeli airstrikes, tank fire pound Gaza City

### Fighting rages on streets; diplomatic efforts for truce drag on

AFP, AP, Gaza City

Israeli troops and Palestinian gunmen fought fierce night-time clashes around Gaza yesterday, with Israeli tanks making their deepest incursion yet into districts of Gaza City, witnesses said.

Israeli ground troops battled Palestinian militants in the streets of a densely populated Gaza City neighbourhood early yesterday, destroying dozens of homes and sending terrified residents running for cover as gunfire and explosions echoed in the distance.

Israel's push into Tel Hawwa neighbourhood was the farthest it has moved into Gaza City during its 18-day offensive against Hamas militants, and brought Israel's ground forces within a mile of the crowded city centre. Palestinian hospital officials say more than 900 Palestinians, half of them civilians, have been killed.

Israel launched the offensive on Dec. 27 to end years of Palestinian rocket attacks on its southern towns, and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has vowed to press forward with an "iron fist," despite growing international calls for an end to the fighting. UN chief Ban Ki-moon was headed to the region Tuesday to press for a ceasefire.

An army spokesman confirmed fighting in several areas, as

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Squirrels jump around on trees at Ramna Park in the capital. Population of the lively animal in the park is thriving as it is one of the few places in the city where large trees are left unharmed and where their food is not much of an issue.

## Dense fog halts ferry services

Hundreds of vehicles stranded

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

Several hundred vehicles, including passenger buses, got stranded on the both sides of Paturia-Daulatdia and Paturia-Kazirhat routes yesterday as ferry services were disrupted for over eight hours due to dense fog.

Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC) sources said the ferry services were suspended from 12:30am to 9:00am, causing a lot of trouble to thousands of travellers.

Besides, more ferries loaded with vehicles carrying goods and passengers anchored in the midstream of Padma for hours while other ferries sat out Paturia, Daulatdia and Kazirhat ghats, sources said.

Around 250 vehicles lined up at Daulatdia terminal while

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