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**Sircar reveals seating plan at Sangsad**  
*Brushes aside chief whip's proposal*

RASHIDUL HASAN

The treasury bench is annoyed as Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar overruled the chief whip's seating arrangement and made a new arrangement for the opposition ahead of today's parliament session.

"The chief whip has wrongly made the seating arrangement, which is righted by the Speaker being empowered by the rules of procedures [article 7]," said Sircar, who contested the December 29 national polls from BNP but couldn't win.

The Speaker also said BNP lawmakers led by Leader of the Opposition and party chief Khaleda Zia will attend today's inaugural session in parliament.

Sources say the treasury bench allocated three seats for the opposition on the front

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## JS rides on hope, goes into session today

SHAKHAWAT LITON

The long awaited ninth parliament begins its journey this afternoon with the responsibility to deliver on people's high expectations that it will put the country on the right track towards prosperity.

The magnificent Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban comes to life at 3:00pm after over two years as the new parliament sits in its first session with enormous crucial tasks, including taking decision about the fate of the 122 ordinances promulgated by the immediate past caretaker government within 30 days.

The ninth parliament, which was supposed to be formed around two years ago, will have to deliver on people's expectations for changes in the culture of destructive politics and letting the corrupt and criminals go unpunished, which largely paralysed the country's economic progress.

The constitution empowers parliament, the focal point of all activities, to

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- Election of speaker, deputy speaker
- President's address
- Decision on 122 ordinances
- Election to presidency
- Defining MPs' role in upazilas

### Khaleda talks JS strategy with BNP MPs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson and Leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia at a meeting with party lawmakers yesterday discussed

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## 6 more given ministerial job

HASAN JAHD TUSHER

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday appointed six new faces as state ministers expanding her council of ministers formed 18 days ago.

The new state ministers are Advocate Md. Shahjahan Miah, Advocate Abdul Mannan Khan, Advocate Md. Quamrul Islam, Advocate Shamsul Haque Tuku, Md. Motahar Hossain and Advocate Jahangir Kabir Nanak.

The council of ministers now has 24 ministers and 14 state ministers.

President Iajuddin Ahmed administered their oath of office in a simple ceremony in Bangabhaban at 7:10pm. Hasina, Awami League's presidential nominee Zillur Rahman, ministers and civil and military high officials were present at the swearing-in ceremony.

The new state ministers' portfolios are: Advocate Md. Shahjahan Miah- Ministry of Religious Affairs, Advocate Abdul Mannan Khan- Ministry of Housing and Public Works, Advocate Md. Quamrul Islam- Parliamentary Affairs under the Ministry of Law, Justice & Parliamentary Affairs Ministry, Advocate Shamsul Haque Tuku- Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources, Md. Motahar Hossain- Ministry of Primary and Mass Education and Advocate Jahangir Kabir Nanak- Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development & Cooperatives.

Highly-placed sources in the government said the number of people in the cabinet could exceed 50 as Hasina plans to expand her cabinet after the inaugural session of the ninth parliament. Hasina, also the president of Awami League (AL), is expected to

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## Ordinance on RTI not on JS bill list

Unlikely to be ratified soon

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Right to Information Ordinance proclaimed by the immediate past caretaker government appears unlikely to be ratified by parliament anytime soon.

Speaking to reporters yesterday, Law Minister Shafique Ahmed did not reply directly to queries if the newly elected legislature convening today will ratify the ordinance.

Instead, he said the caretaker administration promulgated many ordinances-- some out of necessity and some without consultation with the stakeholders.

"You journalists are major stakeholders in the matter [Right to Information], but did they discuss the ordinance with you before promulgation?" he asked.

In response to growing demands from civil society

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## Beckoning of fortune traps Rohingyas

Refugees from Myanmar get on boats; go for horrific sea journey to seek better life abroad

PORIMOL PALMA, back from Cox's Bazar

Driven by abject poverty, Rohingyas living in Cox's Bazar camps and adjacent areas undertake perilous sea journeys in search of better lives in Malaysia via Thailand.

Although the practice has been going on for nearly five years, the issue came into the spotlight when Indian and Indonesian coastguards rescued several hundred Rohingyas and some Bangladeshis a few weeks ago. Many others were feared dead in the Indian Ocean.

Denied citizenship and persecuted in Myanmar, an estimated 2 lakh Rohingyas infiltrated the Bangladesh border since the early 1990s, only around 23,000 of whom living in two camps in Cox's Bazar are registered as refugees, while the rest are deemed illegal. And the influx is still continuing.

The Rohingyas are a Muslim ethnic group of the Northern Rakhine State of Western Myanmar, whose population is mostly concentrated in two northern townships of the state formerly known as Arakan.

In Myanmar they are forbidden to get married or to travel without the state's permission, and have no legal right to own land

or property, although the population has been living there for hundreds of years.

As they are physically, linguistically and culturally similar to South Asians, especially the Bangladeshis, and since Bangladesh shares a border with Myanmar, hundreds of them cross into Bangladesh every year, living illegally in Cox's Bazar area.

In further search of fortune many of them embark on journeys through the sea towards Malaysia, often ending up dead without reaching the destination, while the luckier ones get rescued or end up in sweatshops of Malaysia.

On December 28 last year the Indian coast guard rescued 105 illegal migrants from the high seas off the coast of Andaman.

Following the rescue the Indian authorities sent a list of 67 names of the rescued people to the Bangladesh government saying they were claiming to be Bangladeshis.

Cox's Bazar police checked the identities of the 67 and found that only 36 of them are Bangladeshis.

The rest are most probably Rohingyas who were living in Bangladesh illegally, said Matir Rahman Sheikh, police superintendent of Cox's Bazar.

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### Commentary

## The PM is being embarrassed by her own party

'Digital Bangladesh' requires a 'Digital Awami League'

MAHFUZ ANAM

Even if her enemies had tried they couldn't have done a better job of embarrassing Sheikh Hasina and her barely two-week-old government. First the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), student wing of Awami League (AL), and now the party's grassroots leaders, including a cabinet minister and an MP, have done precisely the things that she has promised, and is trying to, totally move away from. Their actions have brought blemish upon her and her party's brilliant electoral victory and raised unnecessary doubts in the public mind as to how serious is the AL chief's commitment to bring "change" in politics and in governance.

The mayhem caused by the Chhatra League and its continuance for 11 days in spite of repeated warnings by no less a person than Sheikh Hasina herself, was a clear sign that when it came to money, tender manipulation, hall 'capture' to indulge in extortion during seat allocation, and other related crimes, party ideology or national interest did not have much impact on those responsible for denigrating the sanctity of university campuses and indulging in violence and destruction of public and private property.

In fact many of those involved are "fair-weather friends" who

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## Desperation lost in sea

PORIMOL PALMA, back from Teknaf, Cox's Bazar

Madina Begum still cannot accept the fact that her husband Abdul Malek, a day-labourer, will ever return.

"It was ten days before Eid. He left home around 4:00pm without uttering a word. Then in the evening he called me from Nayapara to say he was going to Malaysia," Madina told this correspondent at their home in Falangpara, Teknaf.

Malek, 40, only earned between Tk 60-100 a day to support his five-member family.

"He always wanted to give our children a better life but he never explained how he

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## Thailand calls regional conference on refugees

AP, Bangkok, Thailand

Thailand offered yesterday to host a regional conference to prevent the mass migration - and resulting suffering - of refugees after the Thai navy was accused of brutally mistreating boat people from Bangladesh.

Foreign Ministry officials met envoys from India, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Malaysia and Myanmar to discuss the exodus of refugees from camps in the impoverished South Asian nation, ministry spokesman Thani Thongpakdee said.

"We are also in talks with the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees both in Thailand and in Geneva to help alleviate what these people are facing right now," he said.

Thousands of Bangladeshis and Rohingyas - members of a stateless, Muslim ethnic group

that fled to Bangladesh to escape persecution in Myanmar - leave Bangladesh aboard rickety boats each year in hopes of finding work elsewhere. One of the most popular migration routes in recent years was by boat to Thailand then overland to Malaysia.

Thailand has recently come under fire for allegedly mistreating those migrants.

Two migrants told a refugees' advocacy group they were among hundreds detained and beaten by Thai authorities on a remote island and abandoned in the Indian Ocean in boats with no engines and only a few bags of rice.

The Bangkok-based Arakan Project provided transcripts of the migrants' accounts to The Associated Press on Friday. It was the second time the group has released testimony from Bangladeshi and Rohingya illegal

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## 2 judges tipped for Appellate Division

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two senior most judges of High Court Division of the Supreme Court (SC) -- Justice Shah Abu Nayeem Mominur Rahman and Justice Md Abdul Aziz -- will be appointed judges of Appellate Division of the SC, law ministry sources said yesterday.

They are being appointed as per recommendations of the Supreme Judicial Commission.

The sources said appointment of the two judges would

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## Wealth cards to be published by Feb

Finance minister writes to PMO, NBR

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

Finance minister AMA Muhith has written letter to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and National Board of Revenue (NBR) regarding publication of wealth statements of the prime minister, ministers, members of parliament and other 'powerful persons' within next month.

Sources said the letters sent last week mentioned that the ruling Awami League's election manifesto said wealth statements of powerful persons have to be published every year for the sake of transparency.

Wealth of family members of these persons also has to be included in the statements.

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## Frozen bank accounts won't be freed in a week: Muhith

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance Minister AMA Muhith yesterday said the bank accounts frozen by the National Board of Revenue (NBR) would not be restored in a week.

"I didn't say that the frozen accounts would be opened in seven days. I said a decision about the frozen accounts would be taken in a week," he told reporters at his

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PHOTO: SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

## The lost parakeet

Alexandrine Parakeet, locally known as Chandana, is now on the verge of extinction in Bangladesh because of loss of habitat, poaching and pesticide use. A flock of eight pairs of the parakeet was recently found at Beelbharat village of Bhayadanga union in Sreebordi of Sherpur by Dr Reza Khan. Explaining the reasons for their near extinction from Bangladesh, Prof Anwarul Islam of zoology department of Dhaka University said these birds compete with other hole nesters like barbet and woodpecker. So they are vulnerable to the loss of nesting sites and competition with other nest dwellers. Trade in parrot also led to the swift decline in their numbers. But at Beelbharat village, these eight pairs have found a safe haven although one of them had been captured as a chick and caged by a resident. These emerald green birds are larger than the common parakeet found elsewhere and have reddish streak on wings, but from a distance they are hard to recognise.