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## Germany gathers first-hand info on Saber's trial

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Reiner Mühlig, first secretary of the German Embassy in Dhaka, was yesterday present at a Mymensingh court that placed Awami League leader Saber Hossain Chowdhury on a seven-day police remand in the December 7 Ajanta cinema hall bomb blast case.

Explaining his presence Reiner told journalists in the court: "The arrest and detention of Saber Hossain Chowdhury and leading members of the opposition Awami League received growing attention

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Freed after a month, columnist Shahriar Kabir yesterday embraces daughter Arpita, son Dip and wife Fatema Kabir in front of the Chittagong Central Jail. (Right) AL leader Saber Hossain Chowdhury raises his hand in defiance while being taken away on a fresh police remand at Mymensingh yesterday.



PHOTO: STAR

## Shahriar, Shafi freed Saber placed on a week's remand

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Writer-journalist Shahriar Kabir and Awami League (AL) leader Shafi Ahmed were freed from Chittagong and Rangpur jails respectively yesterday evening after each were detained in prison for one month.

But writer and columnist Professor Muntasir Mamun was not released because the Dinajpur Jail officials did not receive his release order issued by the High Court on January 4 till yesterday evening. His family members waited expectantly at the jail gate for several hours. He is supposed to be freed today.

Meanwhile, AL Organising Secretary Saber Hossain Chowdhury yesterday was placed

on a seven-day police remand in connection with the Mymensingh cinema blast case.

Police arrested all of them on December 8 with no specific charges. Later, they were implicated in different cases. When they obtained bail from the High Court, they were given a one-month preventive detention under the Special Powers Act. But the High Court later declared the detention orders illegal.

Family members and well-wishers received Shahriar at the Chittagong Jail Gate yesterday. Immediately afterwards, he went to the Chittagong Shahid Minar and placed a wreath there. Different organisations and prominent per-

sonalities came to the Shahid Minar to greet Shahriar.

"I have stepped into a bigger jail from a smaller one," said Shahriar. "The coalition government has turned the country into a bigger jail through their misrule," he elaborated. Shahriar said he has become the victim of political vendetta of the present government. Some other journalists are also suffering similar fate, he added.

Earlier, Shahriar was arrested on November 22, 2001 and released following a High Court order after being put in prison for two months.

Shahriar told The Daily Star that the government cannot tolerate any sorts of difference in political opin-

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## CPJ concerned at detention of journalists

UNB, Dhaka

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) has condemned the prolonged detention of journalist Saleem Samad despite a High Court order granting him bail.

In a letter to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia on Monday, CPJ Executive Director Ann Cooper also expressed concern at the continued detention of journalist Shahriar Kabir in the same case without giving further explanation for his arrest.

Saleem Samad and Shahriar are being detained under the Special Powers Act that allows the authorities to detain anyone suspected of anti-state activities for up to 90 days without trial.

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## Polls sans army guard won't be fair: CEC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Election Commissioner MA Syed yesterday stood his ground on army deployment for the upcoming Union Parishad elections, saying fair polls were not possible without presence of troops.

"It is not only an Election Commission decision but has now become a public demand (to deploy army)," he told a group of journalists at the Election Commission Secretariat.

The candidates, election observ-

ers, media and people in general want army deployment, he added. "People want a peaceful atmosphere during the polls."

Syed's comments look set to heighten the tussle between the EC and the government over army deployment.

The government decided on Monday to provide all logistic support to the EC, except deployment of troops, for the UP polls.

The government cited high cost of deployment and improvement of law and order over the last couple of

months since the Operation Clean Heart began on October 17 as the major reasons behind its reluctance to entertain the EC request.

Still, the CEC and his colleagues in the commission are hopeful that the government would change its mind, keeping mind its constitutional obligation.

"It shall be the duty of all executive authorities to assist the Election Commission in the discharge of its functions," reads the constitution.

An EC law and order review

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MA Syed

## Saifur smells rats in food figures

BSS, UNB, Dhaka

Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday called for proper investigations into "major doctoring of national statistics" in the last couple of years, aimed at projecting the country as self-reliant in food.

"Every year we import a huge quantity of food... it is people of the country, neither ghosts nor rats, who consume the imported food," he said while inaugurating the two-day

eight National Statistical Conference, organised by the Bangladesh Statistical Association (BSA), at the National Museum auditorium.

"Statistics are fundamental for any planning process, but wrong statistics are harmful."

The government is now re-examining the development statistics of FY95, FY96 and FY97, as many

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## AL mulls hartal to slate fuel price hike

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The main opposition Awami League yesterday decided to enforce a dawn-to-dusk countrywide hartal in protest at the fuel-price hike.

But the AL presidium meeting could not fix a date for the hartal as the party leaders were discussing the issue with "like-minded political parties".

"In principle, we have decided to go for hartal in protest at the abnor-

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PHOTO: STAR

Wounds still festering in his legs and pain of torture fresh in his memory, 16-year old Swapan covers his face as The Daily Star photographer takes his snap.

## Innocent yet tortured

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

On November 18, barely 16-year-old Mohammad Swapan was standing in front of their house at Shahinbagh in the city's Tejgaon area when a team of joint forces arrived there in a pickup van. Swapan said he was blindfolded and taken to the army camp in the Sangsad Bhaban area. He did not know what was his crime.

Swapan was confined to the army camp for four days. Every night, six or seven people beat him with iron rod and baton. On several occasions, he was also given electric shocks. They wanted information on illegal arms although he knew nothing about it, he told this correspondent.

After four days, a seriously ill Swapan was handed over to the Tejgaon Police Station. Police officials said the boy needed nine bags of blood immediately. As they did not know anything about his parents or relatives, a police official paid for the blood from his own pocket.

His sister Jhuma said the family thinks the 'army' picked up Swapan as he had an altercation with another restaurant owner having links with officials of the civil aviation authorities.

Jhuma further said they did not know Swapan's whereabouts for five days and thought he was 'dead'.

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## Quota for the disabled

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kusthia

The Islamic University has introduced a new quota for the physically impaired to provide them with an opportunity to pursue higher education.

This is the first time that a university taken such an initiative.

The university has decided that if a physically disabled person has the necessary qualifications that includes at least two second division at HSC and SSC and is able to score pass marks in the admission test, he would be qualified for admission in the first-year honors course.

The decision taken at the 166th syndicate meeting, chaired by Vice-

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## Alleged mugger killed as mob sets him afire

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

One person was killed when a mob beat him up and set him afire, pouring kerosene on his body at Mirpur Section-13 on Monday night.

Witnesses said the mob caught Enayet Ali, 30, suspecting him a mugger near the Badsha Community Centre at about 9:45pm.

They mercilessly beat the man up, doused him with kerosene and set him afire.

Being informed, police rushed to the spot and doused the flames with sands. They took the badly burnt man to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) where he succumbed to his injuries at about 2:30am yesterday. His body was sent to the hospital morgue for

autopsy.

Local people alleged that Enayet was involved in criminal activities in the area. But police said there was no case against him. "However, we received several complaints against him," the duty officer of the Kafrul Police Station said.

Enayet's wife Beauty Begum denied the allegation and claimed that her husband was a machine operator at the local Opex Garment.

Sources said Enayet was engaged to a female worker of the garment factory and promised to marry her. But the girl complained to the local people when he married Beauty eight months ago.

A murder case was filed with the Kafrul Police Station.

## One for all, all for one

A CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

About ten thousand voters of 33 villages in Moudubi area under Rangabali thana in Patuakhali district will not cast vote in the forthcoming Union Parishad election as there is no candidate from these villages.

The villagers have long been demanding formation of a separate union comprising these villages, but it is ignored. So they have decided that none of them will run in the polls race or cast vote this time, sources said.

In the last Union Parishad election, there were 20 candidates from these villages, which are under Barobishdia union but situated on one side of the union. The UP has nine posts of member, one reserved seat for women and one post of chairman.

As UP chairman was never elected from these villages in the past, there was no development work there, some of the villagers alleged.

The Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) said higher authorities have been apprised of the situation.