

## Aftermath of a disaster



PHOTO: STAR

Clockwise: Rescuers pull out a man from under the debris that crushed his shanty, killing his wife; a woman scavenger killed on the spot while taking a rest; a trapped victim appeals for help; a rescuer over a megaphone asks trapped victims to respond; and curious people through the collapse scene.



## Loan default shrinks in '05

Banking reforms show results

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The ongoing banking sector reform programme had pared down the amount of loan defaults by 4.08 percentage points over the last calendar year to 13.55 percent of the total outstanding loans, according to Bangladesh Bank statistics.

The defaulted loans of the nationalised commercial banks had shrunk by 3.95 percentage points to 21.35 percent, private commercial banks by 2.91 percentage points to 5.62 percent, foreign commercial banks by 0.24 percentage points to 1.26 percent, and development financial institutions by 8.49 percentage points to 34.37 percent.

On December 31 last year, the country's total bank loan default stood at Tk 17,509 crore, down by Tk 1,217 crore from that on end-2004, while the total outstanding loan was Tk 129,251 crore on end-2005.

In case of the nationalised commercial banks (NCBs), though the loan default had declined in terms of percentage of the total outstanding loan, it had actually increased in volume over the year.

But, in other cases, of the private commercial banks (PCBs), foreign commercial banks (FCBs) and development financial institutions (DFIs), loan default had abated both in percentage and volume.

While the NCBs saw a rise in loan default by Tk 68 crore, the PCBs achieved a decline by Tk 651 crore, the FCBs Tk 5 crore and the DFIs Tk 630 crore.

An NCB source said the increase in the defaulted loan amount was mainly due to addition of interests. A government directive to avoid using any pressure to realise farm loans also contributed to

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## Iraq govt warns of 'civil war'

35 people killed in attacks despite curfew

REUTERS, AFP, Baghdad

A car bomb in a Shia holy city and bloody battles around Sunni mosques in Baghdad that breached a second day's curfew on the capital heightened fears yesterday that Iraq was heading for civil war.

Iraqi insurgents killed 35 people, including 13 members of a family and 14 police commandos, in separate attacks in Iraq yesterday despite extension of curfew.

Iraqi Defence Minister Saadoun al-Dulaimi called for calm and told a live televised news conference on state television: "If there is a civil war in this country it will never end."

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## Sit-in to protest fuel, fertiliser crises

Hasina reiterates demand for electoral reforms at 14-party rally

HASAN JAHID TUSHER and KONGKON KARMAKER, from Dinajpur

Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina yesterday reiterated the 14-party opposition combine's demand for implementation of the proposed reforms in the caretaker government system and the Election Commission (EC) before holding any election in the country.

Addressing a grand rally in Gora Shaheed Maidan in the northern district of Dinajpur, Hasina, also the

president of Awami League (AL), said, "The prime minister must make it clear whether she will implement our proposed reforms. If she does not, the people know very well how to get it implemented."

The opposition leader placed the reform proposals in parliament on February 12.

Protesting the ongoing crisis of electricity, fuel, fertiliser and seeds, and price hike of everyday essentials, the AL president announced a

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## 2 bills to be placed in JS today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two important bills, one to check corruption in public procurement and the other to expedite separate the judiciary from the executive, will be placed in parliament today as the session resumes after a two-day recess.

Later the two bills -- Public Procurement Bill 2006 and the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) Amendment Bill 2006 -- will be sent to the standing committees concerned for scrutiny, parliament sources said.

The House will sit at 11:00am in the morning for two and a half hours and again at 4:30pm.

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## India reports 2nd bird flu outbreak, expands cull zone

Human samples test negative

AFP, New Delhi

Animal health officials have expanded the zone for slaughtering chickens in western India after the discovery of a second outbreak of bird flu, government officials said yesterday.

On the other hand all 95 samples collected from people suspected of carrying bird flu in India have tested negative, an official said Friday, easing fears that the infection may have spread to humans here.

Officials said 94 of the samples had tested negative Thursday and that a final one sent for further testing had proved negative on Friday.

"The last sample has also tested negative. So far, we have not found

any case of avian flu in humans," senior health ministry official Vineet Chawdhry told AFP.

Chickens at two farms in Gujarat state four kilometres (2.5 miles) from the Maharashtra state border town of Navapur, the epicentre of the initial outbreak, were confirmed positive with the H5N1 strain of bird flu Saturday.

"Samples from two farms in Utchal (in Surat district) have been confirmed for avian influenza," Upma Chawdhry, joint secretary in the national animal husbandry department, told AFP.

Confirmation of the new outbreak came two weeks after samples were taken.

Chawdhry said all chickens had already been killed at the two farms, which were within the 10-kilometre

zone where officials had by Wednesday finished slaughtering all farm birds after the initial confirmed outbreak.

"The poultry have already been culled ... and operations completed at these farms," she said, adding, "It is not a cause for concern."

Officials will now widen the slaughter zone by a few kilometres and kill several thousand more backyard chickens Saturday at a few more villages, Surat district senior administrator Vatsala Vasudeva told reporters.

"We will now take Utchal as the epicentre ... a few extra villages will be added and culling is being undertaken today (Saturday)," she said.

Animal health officials in

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## Criminal killed in Rab 'encounter'

UNB, Dhaka

A criminal was killed in an encounter between his cohorts and members of the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) in Eastern Housing Project area under Pallabi Police Station in the capital early yesterday.

The criminal, Al Amin Shikder, was arrested near Arong shop at Lalmatia early Friday.

RAB headquarters sources said Amin, was the ringleader of a gang in Mirpur-Pallabi area and wanted in six murder and several other criminal cases.

On his confessional statement, the members of the elite force along with Amin went to the project area at about 4:10am yesterday to arrest his accomplices and recover the hidden firearms.

Sensing presence of the police, Amin's cohorts opened fire, forcing the law enforcers to retaliate.

Amin was caught in the shootout while trying to flee and died instantly. Rab men recovered one AK47 rifle, three pistols and 23 bullets from the spot.

## CPB calls hartal for Mar 2

BDNEWS, Dhaka

Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) has called a countrywide half-day hartal for March 2 protesting the negligence of owners of RMG factory in Chittagong that caused deaths of 54 workers in a fire.

The CPB also demanded adequate supply of power, diesel and fertiliser. The party made the hartal call at a press conference at the party office yesterday afternoon.

CPB General Secretary Mujahidul Islam Selim read out a written statement while President Manjurul Ahsan Khan addressed the press conference.

Prayer Timing		
February 26		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-15	5-50
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-30	4-45
Maghrib	6-05	6-10
Esha	7-30	8-00

Source: Islamic Foundation

## Benapole land port standstill

UNB, Benapole

No truck with Bangladeshi goods moved to India through Benapole land port yesterday, as Indian C&F agents and transport workers at Petrapole enforced an indefinite strike.

C&F Agents Welfare Association, Truck-lorry Workers Union and Transport Association at Petrapole went on the strike demanding access of Indian goods to Bangladesh through Benapole on weekly holidays--Friday and Saturday.

Officials said the government has not permitted imports through the land port on the holidays.

Strike at Petrapole left some 150 trucks loaded with Bangladeshi goods stranded.

Officials said exports through the land port amounted to Tk 300 crore in the last four months, which is insignificant compared to the volume of imports from India.

## Sangakkara slays Tigers as Lanka win series

SPORTS REPORTER

Sri Lanka brought Bangladesh down to earth with a huge 78-run victory in the third and final one-day international and lifted the series 2-1 at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium yesterday.

A full house at the country's fourth international venue was expecting another signature performance from the Tigers after their first-ever triumph over the Lankans -- a four-wicket success in the second ODI at Bogra on Wednesday.

But the soaring spirit died quickly after Kumar Sangakkara buried the hosts under a pile of runs with a magnificent 109.

Sangakkara's fabulous hun-

dred and two beefy half-centuries by skipper Mahela Jayawardene and Kaushal Lokurachchi saw the visitors post a massive 309-7 in allotted 50 overs.

The home side responded with 231-9, but Habibul Bashar's men were never in the hunt despite Mohammad Ashraf's back-to-back fifties.

Bangladesh, after electing to field on the international debut of this new venue, revived memories of their famous win at Bogra when Mashrafe-Bin-Mortuza removed both Sri Lankan openers Upul Tharanga (0) and master-blasted Sanath Jayasuriya for a struggling four off 22 balls.

But coming at number four with

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