

## Demra turns battleground

Highway barricaded for 13 hours in water, power demand; 100 injured as police-JCD swoop on agitators; locals blame BNP lawmaker for violence

SHAMIM ASHRAF and BISHWJIT DAS

Shanir Akhra in Demra turned turbulent yesterday as clashes erupted between locals and the police after the law enforcers swooped on the agitating people from different areas who blocked Dhaka-Chittagong highway demanding smooth supply of water and power.

As the police failed to bring the situation under control, a few hundred activists of Jatiyatbadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) armed with sticks went there and drove away the agitators to take control of the area in the evening.

Over 100 people, including the lawmaker from the constituency and 10 policemen, were injured in the clashes.

Vehicular movement on the Dhaka-Chittagong Highway remained stalled for around 13 hours and resumed at 7:35pm.

After a day of skirmishes and vandalism, demonstrators announced in the evening to continue with the agitation until their demands are fulfilled. But, at quarter to midnight, after a meeting with Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) Mayor Sadek Hossain Khoka, they withdrew the agitation programme on his assurance to solve the problems 'soon'.

Locals said they resorted to violence only after their lawmaker

Salahuddin Ahmed ordered the police to open fire on them instead of negotiating to solve the three-month-old water and electricity crises that had taken an acute turn in Demra and Shyampur in the last 15 days.

The BNP lawmaker was wounded in the head as the angry agitators hurled bricks at him and beat him with sticks.

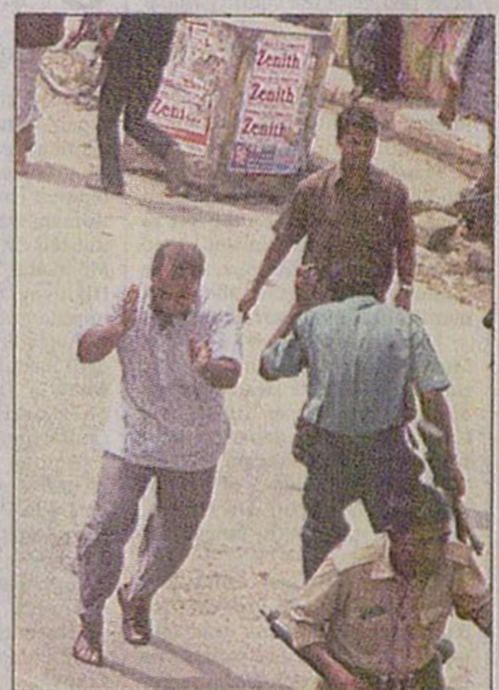
The police charged batons and lobbed teargas shells to disperse the mob who joined in hundreds

demanding solution to the water and power crises in the area.

The busy highway turned into a battlefield as chase and counter-chase went on between the locals and police after Salahuddin managed to flee the scene.

A seven-year old girl, Meemusa Chowdhury, died when a truck chased by the agitators hit her rickshaw at Matuail at 10:30am. Meemusa and her parents were heading for the Demra bus stand to

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From left, local BNP lawmaker Salahuddin Ahmed, circled, watches while police disperse the crowd demonstrating for uninterrupted supply of water and power at Shanir Akhra in the capital yesterday. The ruling party lawmaker runs for cover, as the agitators chase him after he fired in the air.

## TERRIBLE TRAVEL

### Fatality rate 50 times higher than in West

PINAKI ROY

The death rate in officially recorded transport accidents in Bangladesh is at least 50 times that in the developed countries.

In the last five years, over 20,000 travellers were killed and no less than 50,000 others maimed in road, train, and river accidents, according to government records.

But, experts believe the actual figures are at least twice as high, as our accident and casualty reporting and recording system is too inadequate to indicate even a near reality.

"Media channels don't cover all the accidents and casualties, while the police also don't record them all. The real number of accidents is

almost double the official one," says Prof M Mazharul Hoque, director of Accident Research Centre (ARC) of the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet).

The ARC estimates annually the officially recorded road mishaps alone eat away Tk 5,000 crore, or nearly 2 per cent, of the GDP. The frequency and severity of accidents are also on the rise.

According to police records, every year 4,000 people are killed and 5,000 others injured in transport accidents, marking a fatality rate at least 50 times higher than the rates in western countries, says Prof Hoque, who also heads the civil engineering department of Buet.

The ARC has been monitoring and analysing traffic accidents since end-2001. It is now implementing a comprehensive research on number and causes of road accidents and their remedial measures. Mazhar says the country needs well-integrated programmes including massive awareness raising of people about safe road usage.

**ROAD MISHAPS**  
According to the records of the Road Safety Cell of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority, 3,722 road accidents took place in 1999; 3,761 in 2000; 2,808 in 2001; 3,703 in 2002; 3,912 in 2003; and 3,322 in 2004.  
In total, 21,288 accidents were

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## Target terrorism, trafficking

Saarc home ministers meet in Dhaka May 11

SHAMIM ASHRAF

Terrorism and trafficking of humans and drugs will figure high in the forthcoming meet of the Saarc home ministers in Dhaka.

Sitting together for the first time on May 11, the home ministers will discuss ways to strengthen cooperation among the seven South Asian countries.

The ministers' meeting will be preceded by the first meeting of the Saarc home secretaries on May 10 and '5th Saarc Conference on Cooperation in Police Matters' the day before.

Besides, the member countries will also hold bilateral talks on the sidelines of the meeting to resolve issues of common interests.

According to sources, the home ministers will focus on the need for strengthening the Saarc institutional mechanism as per the rele-

vant conventions of the seven-country forum-- the Saarc Convention on Suppression of Terrorism, Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, and Preventing and Combating the Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution.

The meeting is also expected to discuss modalities to strengthen the Colombo-based Saarc Terrorist Offences Monitoring Desk (STOMD) and Saarc Drug Offences Monitoring Desk (SDMD) to curb crimes and check trafficking of women and children.

"We'll review how much the member states are making efforts to implement the conventions since all the member countries have agreed to follow these conventions," State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfozzaman Babar told The Daily Star Thursday. "We'll also

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## Bimstec vows to soup up fight against terror financing

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Bimstec countries -- India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Bhutan, Myanmar, and Nepal -- yesterday decided to strengthen cooperation on combating financing of terrorism and illicit drug trafficking and intelligence sharing.

At the second meeting of the Joint Working Group of Bimstec, the member-countries also agreed to increase cooperation on legal issues.

The two-day meeting reviewed the reports of the meetings of its four sub-groups on legal and law enforcement issues, intelligence sharing, combating financing of terrorism and illicit trafficking in narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals.

"The meeting agreed upon concrete steps to strengthen cooperation among the Bimstec countries to make these sub-groups more vibrant and effective," an external affairs ministry statement said.

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## Outstanding business leaders honoured



The recipients of The Bangladesh Business Awards 2005 given jointly by The Daily Star and DHL Worldwide Express, left to right, Kihak Sung, chairman and CEO of Youngone Corporation, Hasina Newaaz, proprietor of Orchid Printers, Fazlur Rahman, chairman of City Group of Industries and Mozibar Rahman, chairman of BRB Cable Industries Ltd.

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bangladesh Business Awards 2005 were presented in Dhaka yesterday to entrepreneurs and enterprises who achieved outstanding performance last year.

BRB Cable Industries Ltd, a leading wire and cable manufacturer of the country, received the Enterprise of the Year award, while Hasina Newaaz, proprietor of Orchid Printers, was awarded as the Outstanding Woman in Business.

Youngone Group received the Special Achievement Award and Fazlur Rahman, chairman of City Group of Industries, was honoured as the Business Person of the Year.

Jointly introduced by The Daily Star and DHL Worldwide Express six years ago, the awards are given every year in recognition of excellence of enterprises and businesspersons in different fields of business to felicitate and inspire them.

Selima Ahmad, president of Bangladesh Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry,

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## They're criminals of AL, not the common people

Says MP Salahuddin about agitators for water, power in Demra

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ruling BNP lawmaker Salahuddin Ahmed termed aggrieved Demra-Shyampur people 'criminals' and said he did not know that water and power crisis in his constituency was so acute.

"Identified criminals of the Awami League were carrying out destructive activities in the name of agitation in a planned way," the lawmaker, who came under attack

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## Power-hungry people storm Palli Bidyut office

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Four people were injured when an angry mob stormed the complaint centre of Palli Bidyut in Batiaghata upazila of Khulna last night.

Police said over two hundred people of Batiaghata Bazar demonstrated before the complaint centre against frequent power cuts. They later pelted bricks at the

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## 50 hurt in Barisal as tempo workers try to defy transport strike

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

At least 50 people were injured in a clash between bus and three-wheeler tempo workers on the Barisal-Patuakhali highway at Bakerganj under Barisal district yesterday.

The trouble began at noon as the tempo drivers were running the vehicles, ignoring the indefinite strike enforced by the bus, minibus and truck owners associations in southwestern districts from Wednesday.

At around 1:00pm, transport workers reached Bakerganj from Barisal in three buses and started damaging tempos, forcing the tempo drivers and workers to retaliate.

During an hour-long clash, 50 people from both sides were injured. Of them, six were admitted to Barisal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College and Hospital while the rest

to Bakerganj Upazila Health Complex.

Witnesses said the transport workers damaged at least 50 tempos from 15 districts with the Barisal-Patuakhali highway.

Police brought the situation under control at about 2:00pm.

Soon after the incident, bus owners and workers brought out processions and held rallies at Rupatali and Dapdapia bus stands. They blamed the tempo drivers for the clash. On the other hand, the tempo drivers staged a rally at Bakerganj protesting the attack on them by the striking bus owners and workers.

Our staff correspondent from Khulna reported that transport strike from 15 districts was called off yesterday, while it will continue in six other districts of Bagerhat, Pirojpur, Patuakhali, Barisal, Barguna and Jhalakathi.

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## BREATHING PROBLEM Saifur taken to hospital in Hyderabad

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Bangladesh Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman, who is in India to attend the annual ADB meet in New Delhi, was hospitalised in Hyderabad yesterday following complaints of breathlessness.

Rahman has a urinary tract infection and he is now in a semi-conscious state, Dr Raghy, one of the physicians attending the minister, said.

Doctors attending on the visiting dignitary said that they suspected signs of septicemia (infection of the blood) while the minister has a medical history of urinary tract infection, reports Press Trust of India.

"We are conducting a battery of investigations on him," a doctor attending on him at Yashoda Hospital said.

A decision on the course of treatment would be taken on the basis of the results of the diagnostic

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## Talk directly with Iran over nuke concern

Annan asks US

REUTERS, AFP, United Nations/Baku

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan urged the United States on Thursday to enter direct talks with Iran over Tehran's nuclear ambitions, saying this step could lead to an acceptable resolution of the crisis.

He said the Iranians may have been holding back in previous negotiations with EU powers Britain, France and Germany, and might be more forthcoming if the United States were at the table.

He made the suggestion in an interview on The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer on US public television stations.

Annan has long been pushing for a diplomatic solution to Iran's nuclear activities. While Iran insists it wants only to produce nuclear power, the West accuses it of seeking nuclear arms under cover of a peaceful nuclear programme.

Britain, France and Germany, with US backing, on Wednesday

circulated a draft UN Security Council resolution demanding that Iran suspend its nuclear activities.

The draft text is written under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter that would make its demands legally binding under international law, and sponsors have warned they would push for targeted sanctions if Tehran continued to defy the demands.

"If everybody -- all of the stakeholders and the key players -- were around the table, I think it would be possible to work out a package that would satisfy the concerns of everybody," Annan said when asked whether it was time for the United States to get involved in direct talks.

In the earlier EU-Iran talks, Annan said he had the impression the Iranians had been hesitant to fully engage because whatever they discussed with the Europeans had to be checked with the United States.

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Amrit opening within 33 hours

Amrit, a Hotel Sarina restaurant, designed to offer the best finger licking Indian cuisine in the city is going to open soon to give you the divine taste of more than 50 items of Indian foods at a price less than you can afford.

Get prepared to give your life an unforgettable treat...

**Amrit**  
a taste of Indian Cuisine

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