

## Black Tuesday for industry

RMG labour violence spreads to Dhaka; over 250 factories vandalised, scores torched; 200 vehicles ransacked, 100 injured

### STAR REPORT

Over 250 factories and 200 vehicles were ransacked and at least 100 people injured yesterday, as garment workers in tens of thousands rampaged through the city and its suburbs to press home their 11-point demand.

They ran amok on streets, ransacking and setting fire to garment plants, other industrial units, and vehicles, besides some business establishments and a few houses along the Dhaka-Mymensingh Highway.

The violence that erupted Monday in Savar and Gazipur aggravated and fanned out to Uttara, Mirpur, Kafur, Tejgaon, and Old Dhaka.

The riot froze vehicular traffic from about 8am to 1pm on a number of city thoroughfares including the Farmgate-Mirpur and Farmgate-Uttara roads, Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue, and those in Mohakhali and Gulshan areas, trapping thousands of commuters.

Besides, the road link of the capital with the northern region via Mymensingh remained snapped for the first half of the day.

Twenty policemen were among the injured in yesterday's riots and arson. And at least 500 garment plants put up the shutters.

A large number of police, Rab and Ansar contingents have been deployed in the city areas having high concentration of garments factories.

A leader of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) said 300 garment factories including 21 of Dhaka EPZ in Savar were damaged in the two-day chaos and vandalism, causing a loss of no less than Tk 400 crore to the garment businesses.

The BGMEA filed a case with Ashulia Police Station yesterday accusing six garment workers of instigating the riot and rampage. The police arrested over 100 garment workers in Gazipur, Savar, and Sripur in this connection.

**SAVAR**  
About 50 factories and 30 vehicles including one belonging to the fire service were vandalised or burnt in Savar yesterday.

The workers agitating to realise 11 demands including better wage and payment of arrears set four more garment factories ablaze for continuing with production yesterday. Two factories were burnt in the area the day before.

The violence broke out at Chitrashile in Gazirchat at 9am with frenzied workers setting fire to Little Star Knitting

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7



Torched Little Star (Diamond) Spinning Mill at Savar in roaring flames along with piles of threads on the factory premises yesterday.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

## SC asks EC to update current voter roll

CEC's appeal turned down; HC issues contempt rule against Aziz

### STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court (SC) yesterday upheld the High Court (HC) directives and observations over the Election Commission's (EC) preparation of a voter list for the next general elections with modification of two HC directives.

After a five-day hearing on the chief election commissioner's (CEC) leave to appeal against the January

4 HC directives to consider the existing electoral roll as a major basis, the full bench of SC headed by Chief Justice Syed JR Mudassar Hossain rejected the CEC's appeal and delivered the verdict.

In a crowded courtroom, the court said the appeal is dismissed "with modifications on the findings and observations, and directives given by the High Court

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

## Tk 60 crore goes down the drain

### SHAKHAWAT LITON

Most of the Tk 60 crore already spent from the public exchequer for preparing a fresh voter list seems to have been wasted as the Supreme Court (SC) yesterday upheld the High Court (HC) directives for revising the existing electoral roll.

Moreover, the efforts of about three lakh-strong manpower for four months in preparing the list have virtually turned futile exercises mainly due to the Chief Election Commissioner's (CEC) stubborn attitude in going for a fresh electoral roll ignoring the January 4 HC directives.

Officials at the Election Commission (EC) Secretariat yesterday said the EC now has to start preparing a voter list based on the existing one. Implementation of the HC directives will involve fresh expenditures and preparations, they pointed out.

The SC yesterday rejected the EC's appeal against the HC's directives but the two election commissioners -- Justice Mahfuzur Rahman and SM Zakaria -- expressed their confusion about the spirit of the SC judgement.

Both of them declined to say if

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5



PHOTO: STAR

FROM LEFT... Agitated garment workers set fire to a fire engine which rushed to Savar to put out the flames in Little Star (Diamond) Spinning Mill; factory workers bring out a procession with sticks in their hands barricading Dhaka-Mymensingh highway in Gazipur; in the capital workers set ablaze three cars on the premises of a factory at Tejgaon; workers damage a bus in Tongi area.

## Trade bodies ask govt to deploy army, BDR, Rab

### STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leaders of different trade bodies yesterday asked the government to deploy armed forces, along with Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and paramilitary BDR, in industrial belts, specially in textile and garment factories, immediately for security reasons.

Presidents of 13 top trade bodies in a joint statement also said owners of garment factories are ready to sit

with the workers for a talk if there is any grievance among the workers regarding their wages.

Expressing deep concern at the violence at different factories in and around Dhaka, the business leaders said the trouble did not relate to labour unrest, rather there is a conspiracy to destroy garment sector.

"We believe that genuine workers of garment factories are not

SEE PAGE 15 COL 8

## Angry factory owners take to the streets

BGMEA members blame 'failure' of govt, their leadership

### STAR REPORT

Leaders and members of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) yesterday took to the streets and blocked the VIP Road at Hotel Sonargaon roundabout in the capital, protesting the attacks on their factories yesterday and the day before.

Earlier, top leaders of different trade bodies gathered at an emergency meeting of BGMEA to

express their solidarity with its members.

Facing severe property losses due to the attacks, angry garment factory owners said it seems that there is no government in the country and all the incidents happened despite assurance of peace from State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfozzaman Babar and other senior ministers on the previous day.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

## Bhuiyan smells local, foreign conspiracies

### UNB, Dhaka

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan yesterday said local and foreign conspiracies might be behind the sudden outbreak of violence in the garment industry, saying that the perpetrators must be detected.

"If mills and factories are closed down following these incidents, it'll create social problems. Whoever has done it, all political parties and citizens will have to be united to resist this quarter," he said.

Talking to reporters at his Mintoo Road official residence in the afternoon, Bhuiyan said the incidents damaged Bangladesh's image abroad and the foreign buyers left the country with a bad impression. "We must restore our image."

The LGRD minister offered condolences to those killed and injured and lost property in the

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

## No need for army, situation under control: Babar

### STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Apprehending a massive fall in the number of buyers and investors if the vandalism in the garment factories continues for some more days, State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfozzaman Babar yesterday asked the garment workers to refrain from violence in greater national interest.

"Foreign buyers will not come...foreign investors will be disappointed if this situation continues," Babar said.

He also said the government is determined to go to any length to protect 'the industry which is the lifeline of earning foreign exchange,' as well as public life and property.

Babar also asked the agitating garment employees to sit at a table for settling their problems and grievances, if there is any.

"The situation is now under control," the minister said when reporters met him at his office yesterday after a renewed spate of violence in the apparel hubs in Gazipur and Dhaka.

Babar said the motive behind this recent violence might be to destroy the booming sector of the country. He, however, declined to reply when asked whether the opposition, Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) or any foreign groups are

involved with the violence, saying he would not comment without being confirmed first.

The garment sector is the largest moneymaking sector in the country with around 10-12 lakh direct employees and about 1 crore indirect workers, he said. "We're presently exporting goods worth Tk 10 billion (a year) and people's purchase capacity has increased a lot. There are many success stories in this sector."

Many apprehended a collapse in the industry following withdrawal of quota system in 2004, but on the contrary, garment exports doubled in the post-MFA period, he added.

The government showed much patience to contain the violence yesterday and the day before, he said. "But now the government will be forced to do whatever is necessary to protect garment industry, economy and public life and property," he affirmed.

Asked whether the army will be deployed, he said, "I don't think the situation reached that level." Reinforcements have been sent and the authorities were able to bring the situation under control by noon yesterday, he added.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6



## Iajuddin ill, admitted to CMH

### STAFF CORRESPONDENT

President Iajuddin Ahmed was admitted to Combined Military Hospital (CMH), Dhaka yesterday afternoon, said a press release issued from the Bangabhaban.

Sources at the CMH said the president is seriously ill. He is under observation by a five-member medical board headed by Brigadier (retired) Abdul Malek.

Talking to The Daily Star last night over telephone, Dr Malek said the president is undergoing treatment. "The president will be under observation for two to three days."

The news release issued from the president's house said, "He was admitted to the hospital at 3:30pm for medical check-up." It however did not mention the reasons for the check-up.

LGRD and Co-operatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, State Minister for Health Mizanur Rahman Sinha, Political Secretary to the Prime Minister Harris Chowdhury and chiefs of three services visited the president at the CMH last night.

## Wahiduddin for management review, Debapriya for quick control

### STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Expressing concern at the ongoing troubles in the Readymade Garment (RMG) sector, eminent economist Prof Wahiduddin Mahmud said it needs to be examined if mismanagement by some 'incompetent' garment owners has led to such a situation.

"It needs to be unearthed if the problem has arisen due to their [garment owners] own faults or

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

## UAE to supply oil at low prices

Nahyan assures Khaleda of recruiting more workers

### UNB, Abu Dhabi

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) yesterday assured that it would recruit more Bangladeshi workers, provide development assistance and supply oil at concessional prices.

The assurances came during formal talks between Prime Minister

Khaleda Zia and UAE President Shaikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan at Al Batin Palace on the first day of the prime minister's two-day tour of the oil-rich Gulf country.

Lasting more than 45 minutes from 1:30pm (local time), the talks covered all aspects of bilateral relations, Foreign Secretary Hemayetuddin told journalists.

"Bangladeshi people will always be welcome in the UAE...They are very industrious, contributing to the development of the UAE," President Nahyan was quoted as telling the prime minister.

Presently, 4 lakh Bangladeshis work in the UAE. The UAE will

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

## Correction

In our yesterday's report headlined "EPZ workers go berserk: 2 RMG units set ablaze, 100 damaged, 1 killed," it was inadvertently mentioned that garment worker Rana killed in the violence was a worker of Dhaka Export Processing Zone (DEPZ). In fact, Rana was not a DEPZ worker. He was a sewing operator at Newtext Knit Fashion Ltd of Gorai industrial area in

SEE PAGE 15 COL 5