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## Sporadic incidents mark first day of transport strike

By Staff Correspondent

A transport strike for an indefinite period began Saturday severely disrupting road communications across the country.

The first day of the strike was marked by stray incidents of violence in which several buses were damaged around the country while most buses, trucks, mini-buses and tank-lorries went off the roads. Only a handful of the state-run BRTC buses and government vehicles engaged in emergency food supplies operated on the day.

The strike called by the Bangladesh Road Transport Association, a platform of owners, began at 6 am Saturday to press for their 19-point charter of demands. The 45,000-member strong Association demands reduction in fuel prices to the pre-Gulf war level, reduction of duty on spare parts, stoppage of illegal toll collection, increase in the time frame for payment of presumptive tax and decentralisation of the route permit issuance system.

The strike was called Friday

after a series of meetings between the leaders of the Association and the government failed. No further negotiations with the government took place since the beginning of the strike and Association leaders expressed their strong determination to continue the programme.

In the capital, all city buses did not operate while only a few packed BRTC buses were seen carrying passengers.

Commuters faced tremendous difficulties in getting transports during office hours. Many were seen walking towards their destinations. It was a heyday for the rickshaw pullers and the autorickshaw drivers as they raised their fares. Thousands of passengers on the inter-district routes were stranded as they failed to reach their destinations before the strike began.

The inter-city bus stations at Gabtoli, Syedabad and Mohakhali were a desolate look and buses, trucks and mini-buses were seen parked at various alley-ways around the city.

Several passenger buses came under attack and a number of people were injured during the day. One person was injured when a Dhaka-bound night coach from Chittagong was damaged at about 10.30 am at Kanaspara on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway.

Demra police said that the passenger bus of M R Parbaban was heavily damaged and its driver Md Habibullah injured. The attackers also took away Taka 820 from the conductor of the night coach, police said.

A BRTC press release Saturday night said that nine of its buses and two trucks were damaged during the strike.

Demra police said that a BRTC bus driver was assaulted Saturday afternoon at Syedabad station, near the capital.

A night coach carrying newspapers also came under attack in Khulna, our staff correspondent reports. The strike was observed in the district and all buses and trucks stayed off the roads.

Meanwhile, private car owners queued-up in front of

the fuel stations in the capital fearing short supply as the tank-lorries also joined the strike.

Supply of vegetables, fish and other farm products was also hampered due to the strike. Prices in the city bazaars recorded a slight increase.

Organisers of the strike claimed that the first day of the strike was observed "peacefully".

They said that a peaceful strike was observed in Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna, Mymensingh, Faridpur, Pabna, Bogra, Tangail, Jamalpur, Rangpur, Dinajpur, Panchagarh, Jessore, Kushtia, Comilla, Noakhali, Feni, Rangamati, Barisal, Patuakhali and Cox's Bazar districts.

The Executive President of the Bangladesh Road Transport Association Alhaj A K Joynul Abedin told The Daily Star that they would continue the strike programme until the government reduced the fuel prices to the pre-Gulf war level, their foremost demand

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Rickshaws reigned the city streets yesterday as buses were off the roads due to the countrywide transport strike.—Star photo

## Degree exams uncertain as talks fail

By Masud Arif

The teachers have decided to go ahead with their work abstention programme ignoring a call by the government to conduct the ensuing Degree examinations.

The three-hour negotiations between the government and the different teachers associations failed last night with no immediate prospects for solution.

The holding of Degree examinations under the Dhaka and Chittagong universities, scheduled to begin from February 10 and 12 respectively, remains uncertain.

The Ministry of Education, in a press note issued last night, urged the teachers to conduct the examinations and hoped that the teachers would withdraw their strike programme.

Following the failure of talks the teachers have decided to convene a grand rally in Dhaka on February 15 to press their

demands. Besides, protest rallies will be held in all district headquarters from February 10.

The negotiation held in the Ministry of Education was participated by 18 representatives of different teachers associations. Those who represented the teachers, among others, are: Sheikh Amanullah, Chairman, Bangladesh Federation of Teachers Associations, AKM Shahidullah, Secretary General of the Federation, Kazi Farooq, Secretary General, Bangladesh College Teachers' Association, Qamruzzaman, Secretary General, School Teachers' Association, Dr M Akhtaruzzaman, President, College-University Teachers Association. The government side was represented by Jamiruddin Sircar, the Education Minister, Abdul Matin Chowdhury the Home Minister, Rafiqul Islam Mia,

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## Countdown to Shaheed Day

Star Report

In the late 1940s and the early 1950s when there was no television, and few homes had radio sets, the role that a high-circulation newspaper could play in mobilising public opinion on any issue was crucial.

In the same way as the English-language Pakistan Observer exercised a great deal of influence on the elite of the East Bengal society, Maulana Akram Khan's Dainik Azad, by virtue of being the largest-selling Bengali daily, had a major impact.

While the Observer took on an increasingly anti-government role from 1950 onwards, the Azad's role vacillated between a fascination for Urdu and a recognition that Bengal's claim could not be ignored either.

The Azad led the attack on Khwaja Nazimuddin after the then chief minister of East Bengal claimed in parliament on February 25, 1948, that "it is the feeling of most inhabitants of East Pakistan that only Urdu can be accepted as (Pakistan's) state language".

Nazimuddin made the comment after Dhirendranath Dutta, a member of the

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## Nervous Myanmar junta tightens hold over civilian population

From A Special Correspondent

BANGKOK, Feb 8: The international community has reached a dead-end in its efforts to force the military junta in Myanmar to give up its power in favour of the democratically elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi, according to well-informed diplomatic sources here.

These sources, in regular contact with foreign missions in Yangon, rule out any possibility of such a change "even within a year or so," one observer puts it.

Meanwhile, there are all the indications that the junta has tightened its hold over the civilian population, especially students, teachers, monks and even civil servants.

"What was until recently an authoritarian regime has now turned into a police state," says a diplomat who has just returned here from a trip to

Yangon.

With the university in Yangon, a foothold of the pro-democracy radicals, scheduled to reopen next Friday, the junta is likely to introduce new measures to thwart any up-

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**Yangon may drag heels over Rohingya issue**

By A Special Correspondent

BANGKOK, Feb 8: The Myanmar authorities are in "no hurry" to solve the Rohingya problem, but they rule out the danger of an armed conflict with Bangladesh, according to diplomatic sources here.

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## No room for killers in AL: Hasina

By Staff Correspondent

Sheikh Hasina has said that the Indemnity Act must be repealed to uproot the politics of killing, conspiracy, coup and terrorism for ever.

Hasina, the Awami League Chief and the Leader of the Opposition in Parliament, was addressing a workers' meeting Saturday afternoon held at the central party office.

Presided over by the City Unit President Muzaffar Hossain Palui, the meeting was addressed, among other AL leaders, by Abdus Samad Azad, Abdur Razzak, Tofael Ahmed, Mohammad Nasim and Begum Matia Chowdhury.

"The valiant workers of Awami League are being killed by agents inside the party (AL) or by terrorists sheltered in their own party," the Opposition leader said in an oblique reference to the ruling party.

Hasina said: "The killers of Shamsul Alam have been sheltered in Mohsin Hall (of Dhaka)

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## 800 cyclone shelters in phases: PM

HATIYA, Feb 8: Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia today said 800 multi-purpose cyclone shelters would be constructed, in phases, in the coastal areas under the Taka 1,500-crore Post-Cyclone Rehabilitation Programme, reports BSS.

"Under the programme, 100 kilometre embankment would also be constructed and more than 600 damaged educational institutions and mosques would be repaired", she said while laying the foundations stone of a cyclone shelter in Sunnar Char here.

The shelter is one of the six to be constructed in the district by the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society under its Disaster Preparedness Programme. The shelter is being constructed with the financial help from the Japanese government. Besides, the Netherlands, the United

## Milon murder case: Four examined on first day

By Staff Correspondent

The trial of the accused in the Dr Milon murder case began Saturday in the court of the Additional Sessions Judge in Dhaka.

Dr Shamsul Alam Khan Milon was shot dead by some miscreants November 27, 1990, during the mass upsurge against the autocratic Ershad regime.

On the first day of the trial M Joynul Abedin, a Sub-Inspector (SI) of police, who registered the case on November 27, 1990 at Ramna police station, was examined and cross-examined in the court of the additional Sessions Judge, M Ismail Mia.

Selina Akhter, Mahmuda Alam and Tawhid Alam Khan, mother, wife and brother of the victim respectively were also examined.

Though Dr Mostaq Hossain, plaintiff in the case was asked to be present before the Judge

## Solanki retracts statement on N-bomb

NEW DELHI, Feb 8: India, after years of insisting that its nuclear programme was for peaceful purposes, hinted strongly today that it was a threshold nuclear power, reports Reuters.

External Affairs Minister Madhavtinn Solanki told a news conference: (A) bomb is part of defence preparedness and we have our defence preparedness.

Another reports says, Solanki today retracted his statement.

He initially refused to elaborate on the statement in response to persistent questioning, saying it was primarily a defence ministry matter.

"We would not like to go into details," he said.

But his ministry said later that Solanki had meant that Pakistan had a bomb as part of its defence preparedness while India had its own forms of defence.

"Their bomb, our preparedness," a ministry spokesman said.

India, which exploded a nuclear device in 1974, insists that its nuclear programme is for peaceful purposes. The ministry said that policy was unchanged.

Diplomats say both India and Pakistan, which have fought three wars since independence from Britain in 1947, are threshold nuclear powers.

Solanki was replying to a question on whether India would consider developing a nuclear weapon in the light of

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**A New Service For The Daily Star**

We are pleased to announce that The Daily Star has made an arrangement with the Third World Network to use its features on a regular exclusive basis. The first report of the Network appears today on Page 6.

The Malaysia-based Network offers features written by top-ranking journalists from within the region and outside on problems and issues facing the Third World, with particular reference to Asia.

DO NOT MISS IT!

Editor

**NEWS BRIEFS**

**Goodwill team to visit CIS**

The government will dispatch a 20-member delegation to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) on February 18 on a three-week goodwill mission aimed at renewing political and economic rapport with the newly emerged independent offshoots of the former Soviet Union. A Foreign Office source told UNB yesterday that State Minister for Textiles Major (Retd) M A Mannan will lead the delegation composed of representatives from both public and private sectors.

**BDR team leaves for India today**

A seven-member Bangladesh Rifles delegation leaves here today for India to participate in the four-day border coordination conference beginning today at Shilliguri. Brigadier Muhammad Iftekharul Bashar, Deputy Director General, BDR, will lead Bangladesh team while Indian side will be led by Ranju Das, Inspector General, Border Security Forces of North Bengal Frontier, Shilliguri, reports BSS.

**Extended meet of BNP EC Feb 25**

The two-day extended meeting of the national executive committee of BNP will begin here on February 25, BSS.