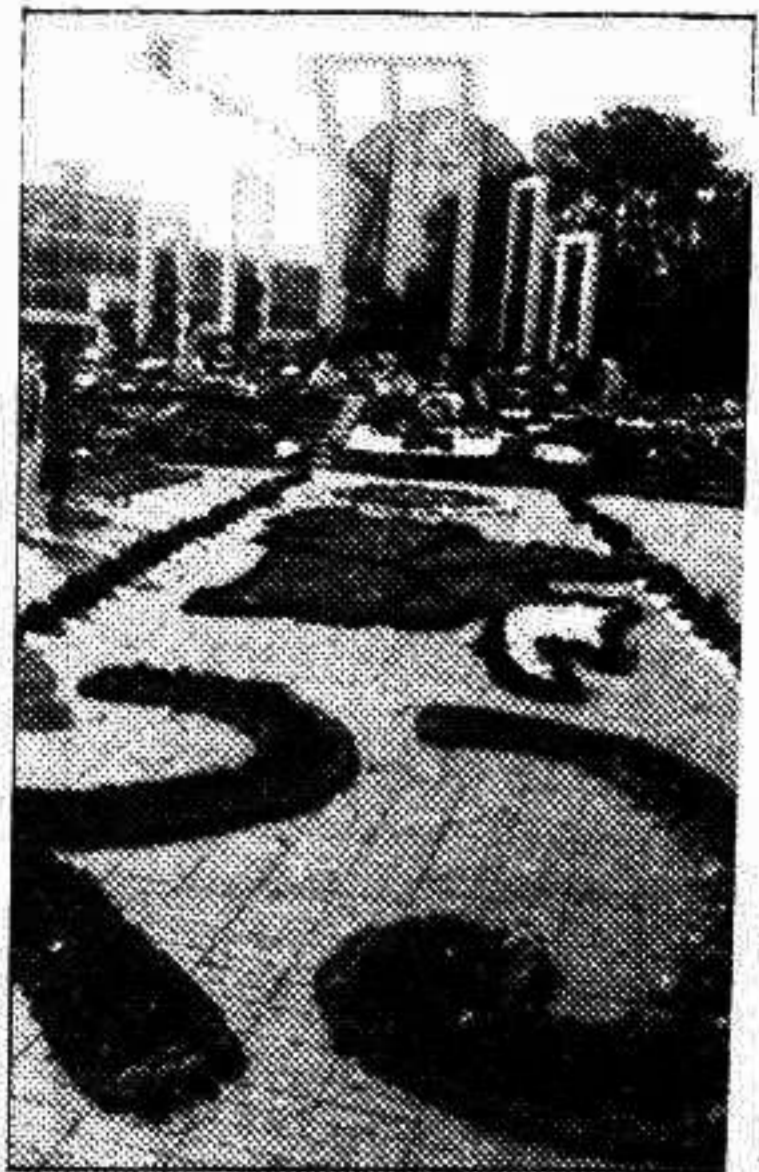




# The Daily Star



VOL. IX NO. 18 REGD. NO. DA 781 INTERNET: http://www.dailystarnews.com MAGH 22 1405 BS DHAKA THURSDAY FEBRUARY 4, 1999 SHAWAL 17, 1419 HIJRI 16 PAGES PLUS RISING STARS: PRICE TAKA 9.00



### Poetry festival from Feb 18

By DU Correspondent

The 13th National Poetry Festival will begin in the city on February 18 on the occasion of 'Amar Ekushey'.

Jatiya Kabita Parisad will organise the two-day festival at the TSC crossing on Dhaka University campus.

A good number of poets from home and abroad are expected to take part in the festival.

Details of the programme of the festival will be announced at a press conference of the Parisad on February 6.

Meanwhile, the Bangla Academy authorities have taken up necessary measures to hold the Ekushey Book Fair.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is expected to inaugurate the month-long fair beginning on the Academy premises tomorrow.

Director General of Bangla Academy Dr Syed Anwar Hossain said the authorities have also taken up adequate measures to maintain sanctity and discipline and keep the fair free from chaos. He was speaking at a press conference at the

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## Hartal rejected, greater role of Opposition in JS demanded

'Set time for Opposition in TV, Radio'

By Staff Correspondent

Citizens at a Public Dialogue here yesterday rejected hartal as a means of political protest and demanded a greater role of the Opposition in the Jatiya Sangsad and a designated time for them in the state-owned Radio and TV.

They suggested that all political protests should be within the boundaries of the parliament. As an alternative to hartal, opposition political parties should be given greater opportunities in the electronic media to express their voice, they said.

They also demanded an end to politicisation of the administration.

The dialogue, held at the Jatiya Press Club, was organised by The Daily Star in collaboration with the Centre for Alternatives of Dhaka University.

The citizens, representing all walks of life, ventilated their frustration against frequent hartals and urged all newspapers to blackout news related to hartals.

Moderated by Prof. Imtiaz Ahmed of the Centre for Alternatives, the dialogue was participated by, among others, Dr Saleemul Haq, Ahmed Kamal, Habibul Alam, Dr Hanif and

### Public Dialogue on Political Protest

Editor of The Daily Star, Mahfuz Anam.

Besides journalist Mohammad Jahangir, former secretary Inam Ahmed Chowdhury, businessman Kazi Nuruzzaman, social worker Forkan Begum, teacher Nazmul Ahsan Kalimullah, physicians M Rashid Ahmed and Dr T Hossain, TV newscaster Shamim Ahmed, politician Syed Sirajul Huda, entrepreneurs Nurul

Alam Chowdhury, performing artist Aly Zaker, shopkeeper Keramat Ali, and students Mahmud Hasan and Rehana Ferdousi Sonia spoke at the dialogue.

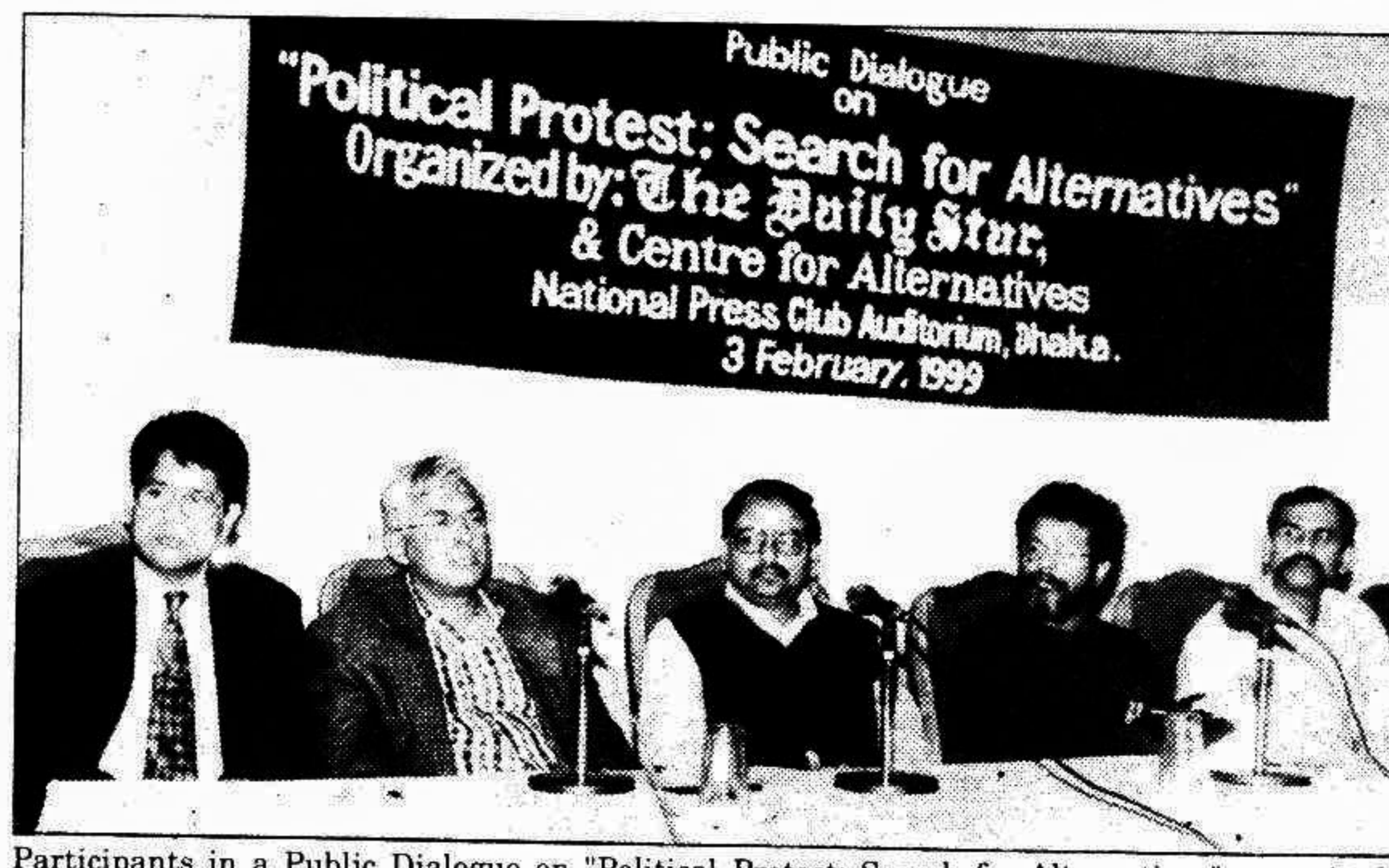
Most of the speakers agreed that a committee or a forum could organise a signature campaign against hartal.

They further maintained, if the political parties themselves practised democracy in electing their leaderships and taking decisions, the hartal trend would automatically drop.

Nurul Alam Chowdhury said, the nation must clearly decide whether it wants hartal or not. "In the next election, we can have a separate ballot paper asking whether we want hartal or not. If the result says 'no', we won't need further discussions."

Ahmed Kamal said, due to lack of mutual trust among the

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Participants in a Public Dialogue on "Political Protest: Search for Alternatives", organised by The Daily Star and Centre for Alternatives at the National Press Club Auditorium in the city yesterday.

## Municipal polls Over 1000 withdraw from race

More than 1,000 candidates for coming municipal polls have withdrawn from the race, reports UNB.

Election Commission Secretariat officials said, a total of 135 chairman candidates in 140 poulrasavas withdrew their candidature yesterday, the last date for withdrawal of nomination papers.

The non-party election is going to be held February 23-25 in 140 poulrasavas across the country. Elections in the rest 42 municipalities will not take place for various reasons.

The EC officials said 755 general commissioner candidates and 119 woman commissioner aspirants withdrew their candidature yesterday.

Despite an 18-hour hartal on January 26, some 9,511 candidates submitted nominations for 140 chairman, 1,333 commissioner and 441 woman commissioner posts.

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## Kafco continues to cause clamour

By Toufique Imrose Khalidi

Dubbed the Deal of the Year in 1990, later fabled as Bangladesh's first flagship investment, the crisis-ridden Kafco is continuing to confront problems.

The latest is a controversy regarding the acceptance of the plant from its general contractors, who, amazingly, are also the shareholders of the US\$ 600 million ammonia-urea fertiliser company.

The plant should have been handed over to and accepted by the company more than four years ago but, as a Kafco document has it, "numerous technical problems" and low-quality equipment forced a series of shutdowns before a required performance test.

The closures caused huge financial losses for the company, estimated to be more than US\$ 120 million. The contractors were insisting on a settlement that would give Kafco only US\$ 16 million in cash, with no option to ask for compensation in future.

The controversy deepened after one of the company's former chief executives had come

up with a strong plea for the Bangladesh government, the largest shareholder, not to accept the plant.

The Plant Acceptance, hence at the core of the current round of high conflicts between the shareholders and the contractors, will now depend more on the government.

The Board of Directors, in its latest meeting on January 25, left the issue unresolved while trying to deal with "financial restructuring" of a company languishing in deep debts.

The debts are mostly guaranteed by the government of Bangladesh. Kafco began with more than US\$400 million in liabilities with various lenders and is still burdened with "just over US\$ 300 million" loans, roughly two-thirds of which are in the Japanese currency.

The entire amount of export credit was guaranteed by the government after a lot of wrangling with its foreign partners. Today, more than US\$ 190 million - including some 15-16 million in suppliers' credit, still forms the part of the loans secured with the government

guarantee.

"We are trying to spread out the repayment period," said David Horn, the company's finance director, speaking of the financial restructuring.

The poor state of the company's financial health is also attributed to price plunge in the international market. "There are all sorts of external factors which are beyond our control," Horn explains.

Adds Anatul Fateh, the company's legal counsel: "There is very large yen borrowing. We have no control on yen-dollar exchange rate."

Fateh says the urea plant is running at 114 per cent and ammonia at above 100 per cent of the design capacity. But the market is making a mockery of everything, he reasons.

In 1998, the company made as much as "US\$ 21 million less than what we would have earned" compared to the situation during 1986-97, according to estimates by Fateh. "This loss of profit is enormous for a company with US\$ 120 million net equity."

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## Attempt on poet Fazle Hasan gives confessional statement

By Staff Correspondent

Fazle Hasan, who was caught red-handed while attempting to kill poet Shamsur Rahman at his Syamoli residence on January 18 night, yesterday gave a judicial statement before the CMM's court yesterday.

Fazle Hasan and Mahtabuddin -- both caught from near the poet's residence during the attempt -- were placed on a three-day remand on Sunday last. Both were charged with having had illegal arms in their possession in a case filed with Mohamadpur thana the same day.

Police found a "pipe gun" in their possession.

Hasan took about one and half hours to give his confessional statement to a metropolitan magistrate yesterday evening, our court correspondent reported quoting sources.

In his statement, Hasan con-

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## SC orders PM's reply in two weeks

By Special Correspondent

The Appellate Division of the Supreme Court yesterday passed an order asking for a statement from the prime minister within two weeks concerning her alleged remarks on granting bail to 1200 people by the High Court Division in two days in August last year.

"We want signed statement from the Honourable Prime Minister with regard to the said alleged statements which will be supplied to us by the learned Attorney General to be submitted within two weeks from the date. The matter is adjourned till 17.2.1999," the brief order said.

The order was passed after hearing on a contempt petition filed by the President of the Supreme Court Bar Association against the Prime Minister.

The full bench of the Appellate Division headed by Chief Justice A.T.M. Aziz heard Bar President Habibul Islam Bhuiyan who moved the petition on Monday and Attorney General Mahmudul Islam before passing the order.

"Heard the applicant Mr Habibul Islam Bhuiyan, President, Supreme Court Bar Association, and the learned Attorney General. Perused the application for drawing up the con-

## BNP, allies hold separate rallies in city today

By Staff Correspondent

The BNP-led opposition parties will hold public rallies at four separate venues in the city today to press home their 4-point demand, including resignation of the Chief Election Commissioner and cancellation of municipal polls schedule.

The rallies are being organised a day ahead of the end of 30-day ultimatum given to the government to accept the 4-point demand. The BNP, Jatiya Party, Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oikya Jote gave the ultimatum simultaneously through separate press conferences on January 6.

Dhaka city unit of BNP will organise the public rally at Paltan Maidan at 3 pm. BNP

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## 4-point demand BNP's mass contact programme starts Feb 11

By Staff Correspondent

Senior BNP leaders and party MPs in 36 teams will launch a five-day mass contact programme across the country on February 11 to drum up support in favour of 4-point demand and cancellation of municipal polls schedule.

During the programme, BNP standing committee members, advisory council members, vice-chairmen, joint secretaries general, central executive committee leaders and leaders of its front organisations will

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## Second Test starts today

Sports Reporter

The crucial second Test between arch-rivals India and Pakistan starts at the Ferozeshah Kotla Stadium in New Delhi today.

Pakistan, who won the first Test in Chennai by 12 runs, will be looking forward to sweep the two-match series as the two bitter neighbours resumed rivalry in the longer version of the game after 10 years. For India it will be a must win situation to go level after their heart-breaking defeat at the Chidambaram Stadium on Sunday.

Satellite TV channel ESPN will cover the match live.

## Code of Civil Procedure Bill placed in JS for reconsideration

The Code of Civil Procedure (Amendment) Bill, 1998, was tabled in Parliament yesterday for reconsideration, report agencies.

Passed in the last session of Parliament, the Bill was sent to the President for his assent. But he returned it to the House asking for reconsideration of certain provisions.

Speaker Humayun Rashid Chowdhury tabled the bill under rule 97 of the Rules of Procedure.

Laying the bill on the table of the House, Speaker Humayun Rasheed Chowdhury said the bill, passed by the House on November 10 last year, was sent back by the President for reconsideration on December 6 last with a message. But, he said, as the House was not in session,

## JS snippets

By Nazmul Ashraf

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina 'enjoyed her comment she had made to Home Minister Rafiqul Islam during her discussion with a group of Treasury Bench members prior to the starting of yesterday's Jatiya Sangsad sitting.

"We came to know that your dog squad had started biting the policemen. Take care so that the dogs don't bite you," she told the home minister jokingly and burst into laughter. Rafiq and others in the group also shared the joke.

With the bell ringing to remind the members of the schedule for starting the day's sitting, Hasina was seen discussing a number of issues with the party lawmakers including the House Chief Whip and ministers standing on the passage

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## Sit-in protesting 'misbehaviour' by ruling party MP

By Staff Correspondent

Teachers and students of Azimpur Girls High School staged a sit-in in front of the headmaster's office yesterday protesting alleged misbehaviour of the local MP with the headmaster.

They alleged that local member of parliament Haji Selim who is also Chairman of the Governing Body of the school came to the school and directed the headmaster to share his office room with the principal of the Azimpur Girls College, both in the same compound.

When contacted later, Haji Selim claimed that during a visit he found some teachers

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## Depression over Bay intensifies

The depression in the south-west Bay intensified into deep depression and was centred at about 1520 km south-west of Chittagong at 6 pm yesterday, reports UNB.

Storm Warning Centre said it is likely to move in north-north-easterly direction.

## Dacoity, extortion unabated in Ctg

From Nurul Alam

CHITTAGONG, Feb 3: Law and order has deteriorated alarmingly in the port city and its surrounding areas with the increase in the incidents of dacoity, illegal toll collection and other terrorist acts.

Two sensational incidents of dacoity in the city in a gap of only two days created panic among the people.

In one of the incidents, armed dacoits stormed into the well-fortified bungalow of the chairman of Chittagong Development Authority (CDA) at Badshe Meah Chowdhury Road in the heart of city Thursday night by overpowering six night guards.

Police and family sources said they kept the wife and family members of the CDA

chairman hostage at gun point and looted 45 tolas of gold ornaments and cash. The CDA chairman, Col (rtd) Jalalabadi, was not at the house at that time.

Another daring dacoity was committed at the house of a neuro surgeon Dr Kamal Uddin Ahmed at Chittagong Medical College Staff Quarters in the early hours of Monday, police said.

The armed dacoits stormed into the house of Kamal, kept his wife Dr Fatema Begum hostage at gun point and took away Tk five lakh in gold ornaments and cash, police said.

The dacoits entered the house at about 3 am immediately after Dr Fatema returned

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## Inside Today Article

Miracle Unmade: Lessons for Bangladesh

Column: Window on Asia

by Shahed Latif

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## Supplement

Independence Day of Sri Lanka on Page 10

Prayer Timings February 4

	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-24	5-28
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-10	4-20
Maghrib	5-50	5-53
Esha	7-10	7-20

Source: Islamic Foundation

# BENSON & HEDGES.