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16 PAGES : PRICE TAKA 6.00

## Pre-hartal clashes in city

Star Report

At least four mini-buses were set on fire, a number of other vehicles damaged and about a dozen people wounded as clashes broke out between pro- and anti-hartal activists last night in different parts of the city.

Opposition parties had earlier staged demonstrations, some with lathis, hockey sticks and torches, to garner support for their respective calls. It left the city streets virtually deserted in the late evening.

Gunfire and home-made bombs were used during the violence in Mahakhali, Tejgaon Industrial Area, Kamalapur, Dharmad and old quarters of the city.

Trouble broke out after gunmen had opened fire and hurled bombs near Golapshah mazar and Pir Yamani Market at a torch procession of BNP at See page 11

## Commercial bldg being built on Peelkhana Lake

By Staff Correspondent

A portion of Peelkhana, headquarters of Bangladesh Rifles (BDR), will be open to public for the first time as the authorities are constructing a six-storey commercial complex within its boundary.

About three acres of land will be sliced out from the famous Peelkhana Lake for the 22,000 square feet complex. The earnings from the project would be used for various welfare purposes of BDR, sources said. This is also for the first time that BDR has taken up a 'grand project to support welfare activities for its personnel', the sources said.

Having pumped out water from that part of the lake, workers are now doing the piling work on the lake's dry bed. An earthen barrage has been erected across the waterbody to See Page 12 Col 8

## Preparations for hosting D-8 summit reviewed

Preparations for hosting the second summit of the Development-Eight (D-8) were reviewed at a meeting in the city yesterday with Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad in the chair, reports BSS.

The meeting took stock of the overall situation with regard to the preparation of the summit, Azad told newsmen at his chamber.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will preside over a meeting today in this connection.

The meeting sought opinion of different ministers on the Dhaka declaration to be adopted at the conclusion of the summit.

The senior officials of the member countries will start arriving from tomorrow to take part in the commissioners' (officials) meeting. The two-day meeting of the commissioners will be followed by the council See Page 12 Col 7

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### Prayer Timings

February 23

	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5:27	5:31
Zohr	12:15	1:15
Asr	4:30	4:35
Maghrib	6:00	6:03
Esha	7:15	7:20

Source: Islamic Foundation

## Municipal polls begin today amid tension

By Staff Correspondent

A three-day staggered municipal election begins at 8:00 this morning amidst mounting tension and apprehension of widespread violence across the country.

The government and the ruling Awami League are determined to see that the elections are held as scheduled. But the opposition BNP and its allies are out to enforce a three-day countrywide hartal from today to resist the polls boycotted by them.

The government has taken all preparations to build a security net around the municipalities where elections will be held.

Elections are scheduled to be held in 136 municipalities, out of the 182 in the country, today, tomorrow and the day after.

Forty-six municipalities are not going to elections in the present phase. Court issued injunction on holding polls in 29 municipalities, there are disputes over delimitation in case of 10 municipalities and tenure of seven municipal bodies are yet to expire.

The elections in 54 municipalities with 900 polling centres will be held today, in 30 municipalities with 428 centres tomorrow and in 50 with 750

centres the day after.

More than 30 lakh voters, almost half of them female, are due to exercise their franchise in the elections.

According to EC sources, 516 candidates are in the electoral race for 136 posts of chairman, 5925 for 1296 ward commissioners (general seats) and 1678 are contesting for 432 reserved seats for woman ward commissioners. This is the first time direct election for the reserved seats is being held.

Meanwhile, 42 candidates including five for chairmanship, have already been elected unopposed. The five municipalities which have their chairmen elected are Gopalpur, Ghatail, Naria, Basurhat and Laxmipur. The number of general commissioners and female commissioners elected unopposed are 26 and 11 respectively.

A large number of law-enforcing agency personnel from police, Ansar and para-military BDR have been deployed at the polling stations. Army has been kept standby and will be called to assist the civil administration in case of emergency.

Meanwhile, the EC has already imposed ban on carrying See Page 12 Col 1

## Schedule for municipal elections

(By Administrative Division)

February 23

Rajshahi Division: Panchgarh, Thakurgaon, Dinajpur, Nilphamari, Rangpur, Ulupur, Goidagari, Joyprahat, Bogra, Godagari, Tanore, Natore, Serajganj, Bera, Faridpur, and Shantia.

Khulna Division: Kushtia, Alamdanga, Kotchandpur, Maheshpur, Jessore, Narail, and Bagerhat.

Barisal Division: Patharghata, Mathbaria, Banaripara, Jhalakathi, Char Fashion.

Dhaka Division: Madhupur, Ghatail, Dhanbari, Gouripur, Ishwardi, Nandail, Mohanganj, Baitpur, Jamalpur, Sherpur, Munshiganj, Pangsha, Kalkini, Gopalganj, Naria.

Sylhet Division: Sunamganj, Habiganj, Shaistaganj, Moulvibazar.

Chittagong Division: Brahmanbaria, Barura, Laxmipur, Kabirhat, Bashurhat, Bandarban.

February 24

Rajshahi Division: Birampur, Fulbari, Lalmonirhat, Shantahar, Shahjapur, Chatmohor, Ishwardi.

Khulna Division: Patuakhali, Gouranadi, Burhanuddin, Doulatkhan.

Dhaka Division: Gopalpur, Bheupur, Muktagachha, Trishai, Bhaluka, Netrokona, Kishoreganj, Rajbari.

See Page 12 Col 8

## India, Pakistan vow to reduce risk of accidental N-war



Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif (L) shakes hands with his Indian counterpart Atal Behari Vajpayee (R) after signing a joint declaration at Governor House in Lahore on Sunday. —AFP photo

LAHORE, Feb 22: The prime ministers of Pakistan and India yesterday vowed to try to reduce the risk of an accidental nuclear war, reports AP.

They also promised to give advance warning of ballistic missile tests, but on the thorny issue of Kashmir they only agreed to keep talking.

Both Pakistan and India have missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads and capable of hitting populated areas in both countries.

"We shall take immediate steps for reducing the risk of accidental or unauthorised use of nuclear weapons, according to a joint declaration at the end of a two-day visit to Pakistan of Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee.

"On the thorny issue of Kashmir, the two governments shall intensify their efforts to resolve all issues," the declaration said.

On his return home Sunday, Vajpayee said he told his Pakistani counterpart that it would be very difficult to normalise relations if the slayings by pro-Pakistan militant groups continued in Kashmir.

I drew the attention of Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to the killings... and these must stop. If such killings of innocent civilians continued, it would be very difficult to normalise bilateral relations." See Page 12 Col 3

## Hartal now for 66 hrs

## Opposition vows to resist vote

By Staff Correspondent

Vowing to resist the municipal vote staggered over three days, the BNP-led alliance of opposition parties goes for a three-day hartal across the country from today.

The 66-hour shutdown, beginning at 6 this morning, is designed to protest holding of the municipal polls without considering their demands including resignation of the Chief Election Commissioner. The polls at 136 of the country's 182 municipalities begin today.

This will be the third phase in a series of Opposition-sponsored hartals on the issue of local elections.

Sources say the opposition parties feel that the hartal should be enforced more effectively at the municipalities where elections will be held.

However, they are not sure how far the hartals would be effective in obstructing the polling process.

This is due to their awareness that the opposition workers in the municipal areas are weaker in comparison to the law enforcing agents deployed in the polling centres, explained a top leader of the four-party opposition alliance.

Earlier, an 18-hour hartal had been enforced on the day of filing nominations on January 26 and then a 60-hour one, ending at 6 pm on February 11. On those two occasions, at least nine persons including a police constable were killed and hundreds others injured.

The liaison committee of BNP and three other parties -- See Page 12 Col 4

## Help hold free, fair polls: CEC

Chief Election Commissioner Mohammad Abu Hena yesterday sought cooperation from all irrespective of parties to make the municipal elections free and fair, reports UNB.

"The Election Commission has taken all possible effective steps for holding the elections free and impartial," he told the nation over Radio and Television on the eve of the polls to 136 municipalities of the country.

Hena hoped that people would extend all out cooperation to the Election Commission for the greater interest of the country and socio-economic development of their respective areas.

The CEC said the Election Commission has taken effective measures to ensure that voters could cast their vote without any fear and obstruction. The district administration and others engaged in conducting the elections have been asked to perform their duties cautiously without any bias. See Page 12 Col 1

## Land development for Meghnaghat plant Ministry favours a Chinese firm ignoring 'dispute'

By Shahrier Khan

The Energy Ministry is likely to place its recommendations to the Cabinet's Purchase Committee today to award the contract for land development for Meghnaghat power plant to a Chinese firm, apparently without resolving the issue of lowest bidder, sources concerned said.

The project, to be implemented by the Power Development Board (PDB), was delayed for the last two months as the project consultant was indecisive on who had offered the lowest bid. Two companies -- CWHEC of China and Hyundai of South Korea -- were claiming to be the lowest bidder.

CWHEC quoted Tk 141 crore to develop the 100-hectare site

while Hyundai quoted Tk 147 crore. But it soon turned out that none of the bidders had clearly included all duties, levies and taxes in their proposals. And a dispute arose over which bid was actually lower.

The energy ministry is now pushing forward a recommendation in favour of a bid that excluded value added tax (VAT). But the project consultant had recommended that VAT should be included in calculations to determine the lowest bidder, one source said.

In August last, PDB invited tenders for the design and build turn-key contract for reclamation and embankment protection work at the 100-hectare site on the north bank of the

Meghna.

The bid was participated by four companies -- China National Water Resources and Hydropower Engineering Corporation (CWHEC), Hyundai Engineering and Construction Co of South Korea, China Harbour Engineering Company, China and Kumpulan Meda Liziz Berhad of Malaysia.

The confusion over lowest bidder arose when it was found that CWHEC specifically excluded all taxes including duties and levies while Hyundai made no mention of taxes.

Later, Hyundai clarified that except import duties, it had included all taxes, VAT and levies in its bid and asked the authority. See Page 12 Col 7

## Police find clues to Aref murder

KUSHTIA, Feb 22: The blueprint for the killing of five JSD leaders, including Kazi Aref Ahmed, had been chalked out in the house of Israil Hossain in village Kalidaspur on February 15, reports UNB.

Sources investigating in the incident said Israil who provided shelter to the killers was killed later.

Two groups of 20 or 25 people were involved in the killing incident, they added.

The first group of 10 terrorists, equipped with firearms, was in the public meeting in disguise. They were to help another group to execute the plan, sources said.

In accordance with their plan, two terrorists of the first group ran away from the meeting immediately after Kazi Aref stood on the dais to deliver his speech and gave the identity of JSD leaders seated on the dais.

After receiving the green signal from the two of the first group, the second group of about 8 gun men came close to the dais and opened fire. The See page 11

## DU student commits suicide?

By DU Correspondent

A female student of Dhaka University allegedly committed suicide by jumping from the rooftop of her dormitory in the early hours of Sunday.

The victim was identified as Jaharat Ara Rahman Shahana, 20, a second-year student of English literature and a resident of Bangladesh-Kuwait Moitri Hall. Daughter of a retired principal, Mahfuzur Rahman, Shahana was the third of two sons and two daughters of her parents.

Police and hospital sources said that the reason behind the suicide could be a triangle affair. They said Shahana had an affair with one Jamal, who is a resident of Munipuri Para at Mirpur in the city. However, she later developed another relationship with an MBA student of DU when they met at a birthday party few days back.

Her friends said that Shahana seemed very upset during the last few days as she was in a dilemma about taking the crucial decision of choosing one of her two boyfriends.

On Sunday, Shahana went to the city's Munipuri Para in the morning to meet Jamal. But See Page 12 Col 3

## Pabna College closed

From Our Correspondent  
PABNA, Feb 22: Pabna College was closed after the principal of the college was gheraoed and assaulted by a group of BCL activists today.

The Principal, when he went home, had to open four rounds of gun fire after he was again attacked by them.

Principal Mahtabuddin Biswas said he opened the blank shots in self-defence.

Earlier, the same group of 10 or 12, identified mostly non-students, attacked the college, ransacked several classes leaving the Principal, 3 professors and some students injured. They were demanding election to the students union of the college.

The police arrested April, son of Amirul Islam of Sargaria, for leading the attack on See Page 12 Col 4

## Defence continues questioning Shazneen's father

By Staff Correspondent

Latifur Rahman, father of murdered teenager Shazneen, was cross-examined by Mohammad Ali, lawyer of supervisor Badal, an accused in the Shazneen murder case, for the fourth day in the Metropolitan Sessions Judge Court yesterday for more than two hours starting from 11:15 am.

All the six accused were produced before the court yesterday.

Shazneen Tasnim Rahman, 15, youngest daughter of Latifur Rahman, was raped and murdered at their Gulshan residence on April 23 last year. A murder case and another case under the Woman and Children Repression Prevention Act 1995 were filed with Gulshan thana regarding the brutal killing.

In the charge sheets of both the cases, police accused seven persons -- domestic help Shahid, contractor Hasan, supervisor Badal, carpenter Shani Ram, guard Humayun Kabir, maids -- Parveen and Minu.

Of the accused guard Humayun Kabir died of a cardiac arrest on January 11.

During yesterday's proceedings defence lawyers prayed for See Page 12 Col 7

## WTO chief backs LDCs' bid to get market access

By Staff Correspondent

Director General of World Trade Organisation Renato Ruggiero yesterday agreed with Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed to say that industrialised nations should open up their markets to the Least Developed Countries (LDCs).

"Your minister have referred to a proposal I made in a WTO meeting in Leon. [British prime minister] Tony Blair agreed to my proposal last May. I do not see much resistance to the proposal. I agree that this should be the objective of the next ministerial meeting scheduled to be held in December this year," Ruggiero told a meeting of the business community held in the city yesterday.

Commerce and Industries Minister Tofail Ahmed told the meeting that there were commitments from the WTO chief for giving market access to LDCs.

"This was your dream, we

hope and believe, made honestly and sincerely. We are anxiously waiting to see the outcome of the next ministerial meeting to be held in the US," Tofail said.

Ruggiero said that the implementation of the proposal for market access would mean "a zero obstacle to export of LDCs".

"Together with the access to developed countries and integrated technical assistance from World Bank, IMF, ITC and UNDP, we would move together in enhancing economies by capacity building."

He praised Bangladesh for successfully fighting the recent devastating flood. He said that Bangladesh was making progress in spite of facing natural calamities.

"Bangladesh is seen as a country facing most of the natural calamities. It teaches other See Page 12 Col 6"

## 5000 passports looted from Ctg office

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Feb 22: A group of armed miscreants today stormed into the Divisional passport office here and looted 5,000 pieces of passports ready for delivery, police said.

The gunmen broke into the passport office at about 4 am after overpowering the guard, police added.

The looted passports bear serial number from 0-332001 to 0-337000.

"An organised international terrorist gang might be behind the looting," UNB said quoting a police official.

Abdul Quader Khan, ASF of the Criminal Investigation De-

partment and investigation officer of the case, said a massive hunt has been launched to round up the racketeers.

Twenty-nine foreigners, including United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) leader Anup Chetia, got Bangladeshi passports through forgery from the passport office in collusion with a racket, the ASP told the agency.

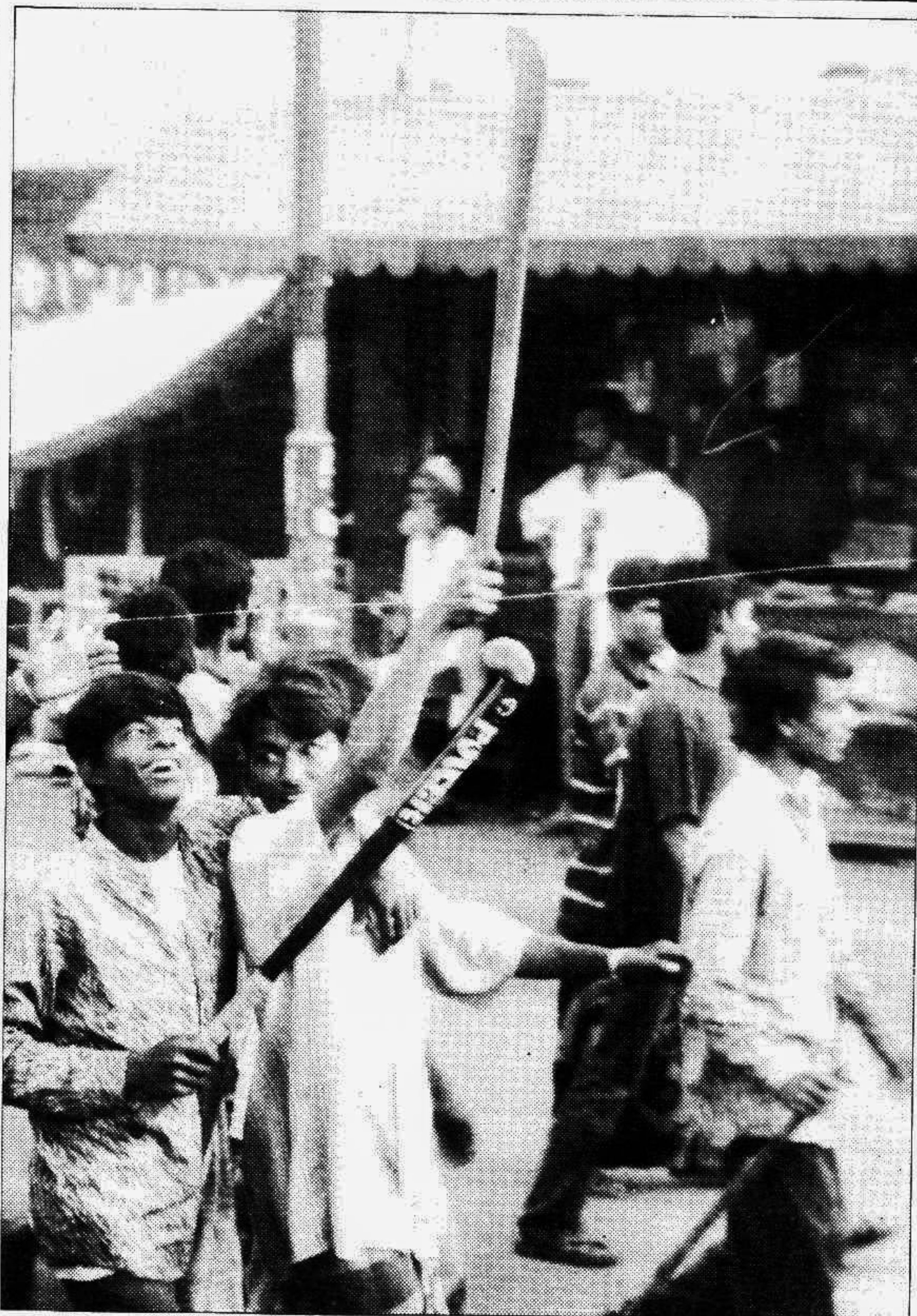
The passport office is situated in the city's Panchlaish residential area, barely 1000 yards from the police station.

Narrating the incident police said a gang of 7-8 masked youths tied down night guard

Mongal Dev at gunpoint. They went to first floor office of a Deputy Director where the passports were kept for delivery next week. The looters broke open one of three steel almirahs and decamped with 5,049 international passports.

"The passports were ready for delivery with signatures of the Deputy Director, only the photographs of holders were yet to be pasted," said an official.

Police, meanwhile, picked up three suspects -- guard Mongal Dev and two passport middlemen named Zahed Hossain and Abdul Quader -- for interrogation.



A lesser sport

Anti-hartal activists display their weapons - hockey sticks to be precise - as they march through the Bangabandhu Avenue yesterday evening. — Star Photo