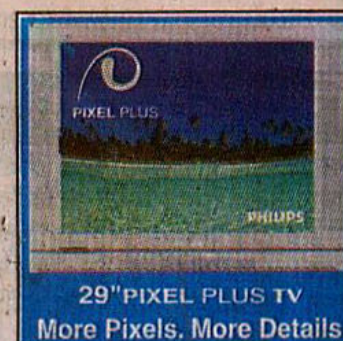




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## Blast at Shahjalal's shrine kills 2

### 37 injured, army cordons off place

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

A man and a boy were killed and 37 others injured in a bomb explosion at the shrine of Saint Shahjalal last night.

The bomb went off with a big bang at about 8:30pm in the middle of a huge crowd that gathered behind an under-construction madrasah building, about 60 yards off the main shrine.

People gathered there to listen to mystic songs (Marfati) at a programme organised in observance of Urs at the shrine.

Police could not find the motive behind the attack and none was

arrested. A truckful of army arrived at the shrine and cordoned it off. Mystic singers from around the country had gathered there to perform before 20,000 people under a huge canopy.

The dead, aged between 11 and 30, remain unidentified. Of the injured, 20 were taken to Sylhet Osmani Medical College Hospital.

"As the bomb exploded, a huge plume of smoke enveloped the area and panicky people ran for cover. I saw mutilated people groaning in pain. The ground was smeared with blood," said Rafiq Hasan, a witness.

Volunteers helped police take the injured to the hospital and clinics.

"The explosion opened a big hole in the ground. We suspect that the bomb was secreted there before. We cordoned off the spot," said a police official.

Additional police forces have been deployed at the shrine. The programme stopped after the bomb blast.

A volunteer was heard announcing on loudspeakers that the incident was preplanned. He requested the devotees and disciples of the saint not to leave and begin religious chants (Zikir).

## Slum dwellers attack ansars camp, loot bullets

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Hundreds of slum dwellers yesterday attacked an ansars camp at Kalyanpur in Mirpur and looted ammunition, cash and valuables, protesting construction of a boundary wall around a vacated slum land.

About 500 people armed with lethal weapons attacked the camp and ansars guarding the construction work at around 11:30am. At least 20 people, including 12 ansars, were injured in the incident.

The attackers looted 16 bullets from the camp and around Tk 130,000 in cash and other valuables, it was alleged.

Locals alleged that Mirpur police reached the spot an hour after the first attack and remained inactive.

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## Ten killed as train rams truck at Tongi

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 10 labourers were killed and 30 others injured when a train rams their truck at Tongi level crossing near Tongi early yesterday morning.

"The truck crashed into a ditch after being hit by the Dhaka-bound Noakhali Express train as it was passing through the unguarded crossing at around 6:30am," a railway source quoted witnesses as saying.

The deceased were identified as Moidan, 65, Rafiqul Islam, 30, Abdul Majid, 35, Suruj Mia, 37, his wife Rozina Khatun, 30, Motaleb, 60, his son Lablu, 35, Mojibor Rahman, 30, Nazrul Islam and Nurul Islam (ages unknown).

Seven of the victims died instantly while three others on way to hospital, hospital sources said.

The truck (Manikganj Ta 020095) was taking some 70 labourers to shovel earth at a construction site in Pubail, said Rehana, an accident victim undergoing treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

"The labourers were mostly from Mymensingh and Jamalpur," said Amir, a relative of one of the victims.

Nine of the injured are undergoing treatment at the DMCH and four at Tongi Hospital.

Tongi Police said the incident occurred due to the on-duty gate-keeper's negligence, who, they said, might have fallen asleep when the accident happened.

"Gatekeeper Mohammad Hanif has been suspended," said an official, adding that a departmental inquiry has been launched to identify the cause of and those responsible for the incident.

The government railway supervisor will also conduct a separate investigation into the accident.

Railway high officials visited the accident spot and the injured at Tongi Hospital.

The Noakhali Express reached its destination, Kamapur Rail Station, and no-one of its passengers were injured, railway police said, adding that train communication remained unaffected by the accident.

Communications Minister Nazmul Huda instructed railway

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## ZIA plunges into darkness for 10 mins

UNB, Dhaka

Zia International Airport (ZIA), excepting a new lounge on its southern part, plunged into darkness for 10 minutes yesterday evening.

The power disruption occurred at 6:12pm and the blackout continued until emergency supply could be made after 10 minutes, said officials at the ZIA.

But officials on duty said it took another 15 minutes to restore emergency electricity supply.

Flight operation, however, was not affected as no flight was due to land or take off during the blackout and 25-minute disruption.

"We were under darkness. People got panicked and we had to work hard to maintain discipline," said an on-duty security personnel when reached by phone.

Dhaka Electric Supply Company

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## Freedom fighters demand Huda's punishment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Several thousand freedom fighters (FFs) attending a rally at the capital's Paltan Maidan yesterday vowed afresh to launch a united movement to rescue the nation from the 'disastrous situation' and build it with the spirit of the Liberation War.

Speakers at the rally, including FFs and organisers of the Liberation War, said the BNP-Jamaat ruling coalition is leading the country to a disaster and stressed an immediate reversal of the process.

They also demanded punishment of Communications Minister Nazmul Huda for his recent remarks favouring Jamaat-e-Islami's anti-liberation role in 1971.

Freedom fighters from across the country joined the rally organised by a faction of the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) led by Hasanul Haq Inu.

Addressing the rally, National Awami Party President and the then

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## GULISTAN-JATRABARI FLYOVER Cabinet body okays jt venture proposal

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs yesterday agreed in principle on a joint venture company's proposal to set up the 5-km-long Gulistan-to-Jatrabari flyover with private investment.

The committee however laid out several conditions to the joint venture Belhassa-Acom JV and Associates and asked Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), the implementing authorities, to negotiate with the company.

According to a government estimate, the flyover will cost Tk 670 crore and it will be built within 30 to 36 months on a build, own, operate and transfer basis. The ING Bank of the Netherlands will give a loan of \$80 million and Commercial Bank of Dubai 75 million derham. The builder will have to arrange the rest.

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## JCD leader shot dead in Rampura

### Titas mechanic gunned down

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Assailants shot dead a local Jatiyatobadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) leader with alleged criminal records in front of his father on steps of their Rampura house yesterday.

Abu Saleh Mohammad Sohel, popularly known as Master Sohel, organising secretary of Khilgaon unit of the ruling BNP's student chapter, took three bullets in the chest, back and abdomen and died instantly at about 1:30pm.

The 26-year-old was accused in four criminal cases, including murder, filed with Khilgaon and Ramna police stations.

"I saw three youths moving suspiciously. I told Sohel about it and he came out. The three jumped forward and shot him dead point-

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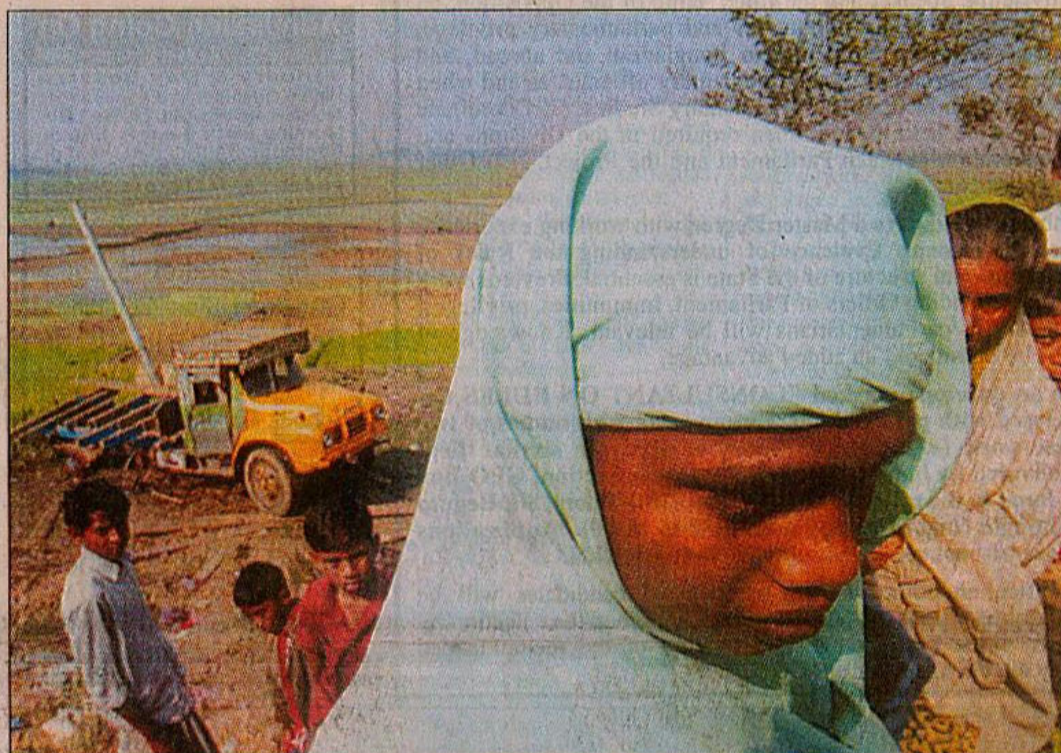


PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

With a tear-streaked face, Firoza Begum searches for her husband among the dead and injured in a collision of a truck with a train killing 10 at Nimtali, Tongi yesterday. Seventy workers were travelling in the truck.

## Benapole AL leader killed in bomb attack

UNB, Benapole

An Awami League (AL) leader was killed in a bomb attack here yesterday evening.

The victim, Fazlur Rahman, 45, was joint secretary of Sharsha upazila unit of the AL and president of Benapole Transport Owners Association.

Witnesses said a gang of miscreants, wearing black masks, hurled bomb at Rahman while he was sitting at his business firm at about 6:35pm. He died instantly.

The gang left the spot setting off bombs, which also left at least six pedestrians injured.

Police visited the spot. District Awami League leaders condemned the killing of the party leader and demanded immediate arrest of the killers.

## Khulna SI suspended on graft charge

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

The Police Headquarters yesterday suspended a sub-inspector (SI) of Khulna Police Station on graft charges.

SI Anis Ahmed was also closed in Khulna Police Lines for his alleged bribe-taking from those accused, neglect of duties and failing to improve law and order.

Departmental proceedings will start against Anis for his alleged link with criminals and graft charges, said Khulna police commissioner.

Two officers-in-charge, three SIs and two constables of Khulna police were closed for the same allegations last month.

## Decrease in joblessness hardly dents poverty

### City seminar on employment told

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Partial unemployment of Bangladesh's labour force has come down to 32 percent over a decade from 43.4 percent in 1989, but it could hardly add speed to poverty reduction, economic experts told a seminar yesterday.

They blamed stagnant real wage rate and gender inequity mostly for drawing back poverty cuts despite economic growth.

Although the real wage rate increased in non-agricultural sectors in the 1990s, it suffered stagnation and sometimes decline in agriculture, said Dr Rushidan Islam

Rahman, research director of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) that organised the seminar.

The stagnation kept the majority of agricultural workers, engaged in wage employment, poor, Rushidan told the seminar, "Employment Growth, Unemployment and Labour Market: Linkages with Poverty Alleviation".

A lack of demand for hired labour in agriculture caused stagnation in wage rate in the second half of the 1990s despite the growth of gross domestic product (GDP) and a spike in self-employment in the sector, Rushidan said.

The daily wage rate of a male agricultural worker can help a 2.5-member family survive above poverty line, while the wage of a female worker is too insufficient to sustain a two-member family, she said quoting the Labour Force Survey-2000.

The open unemployment rate that indicates the country's overall unemployment went up from 1.5 percent to 3.3 percent in 1991-2000, she said.

"Conscious policy efforts are required for reducing unemployment among the educated poor. Otherwise, the bleak prospect of employment may discourage school

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## UP chairman hacked to death in Naogaon

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

A gang of operatives allegedly belonging to outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) yesterday hacked to death a Union Parishad (UP) chairman at Raninagar in Naogaon.

Firing blank shots, 10 members of the gang circled Afzal Hossain, 55, Chairman of Ekdala Union Parishad and former vice-president of Raninagar Awami League (AL), when he was gossiping at Abedpukur Market, police and witnesses said.

They hit Afzal with lethal weapons and later slaughtered him at about 10:30am, said Harunur Rashid, additional superintendent of police.

Later, the gang fled to Atrai and Singra chanting slogans in favour of the PBCP, he added.

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## Intolerance has taken hold in Bangladesh

### US congressman tells meeting at Dhakeswari Temple

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

US Congressman Joseph Crowley yesterday warned that Bangladesh's image abroad might be tarnished due to recent incidents of religious intolerance in the country.

"The image of Bangladesh as a moderate Muslim country is very important, but it is increasingly coming under threat because intolerance has taken hold in the country," he told The Daily Star.

During a meeting with the congressman at Dhakeswari National Temple last night, minority leaders informed him that the country's minorities are persecuted, oppressed and marginalised in

society.

Asked if he had conveyed his thoughts on the state of minorities in discussions with the government, the congressman answered, "I have brought up specific occurrences while speaking with all levels of government up to the prime minister."

He also told the minority leaders at the meeting that he had met with members of the Hindu-Bouddha-Christian Oikya Parishad and those of Ahmadiyya community in New York, and added that the US will keep a watchful eye on the developments concerning the country's minorities.

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## Govt-opposition talks must for effective JS

### Crowley tells Hasina

UNB, Dhaka

US Congressmen Joseph Crowley and Gregory Meeks, who had a meeting with Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina, yesterday observed that the government and opposition should open dialogue to make parliament effective.

"Politics is politics. A similar picture prevails in the USA. But they (government and opposition) should come closer for betterment of Bangladesh and democracy. Democracy should survive," Joseph Crowley told newsmen.

Crowley, also the founder and co-chairman of the Congressional Caucus on Bangladesh, along with Congressman Gregory W Meeks, had a two-hour meeting with the

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PHOTO: MCCI

The office-bearers of Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Dhaka (MCCI) and its former presidents, led by the incumbent President Kutubuddin Ahmed, called on Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at her office yesterday.

## Public parks may go to private sector

### PM tells MCCI delegates

UNB, Dhaka

The government is likely to hand over some public parks in the capital to business people for their long-time maintenance and beautification.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday gave an assurance to this end to the leaders of the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) who requested her to allow them to provide the city dwellers with more recreational facilities, marking celebration of the centenary of formation of the chamber in 2004.

"The matter will be finalised after discussion with Dhaka City Corporation (DCC)," said an official.

The newly elected office-bearers of the MCCI, led by its President Kutubuddin Ahmed and Secretary General CK Hyder, called on the prime minister at her office at noon.

The chamber leaders hailed signing of the South Asian Free

Trade Area (Safta) agreement in the recently concluded Saarc (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) Summit in Islamabad.

They also stressed the need for signing bilateral free trade agreement with countries having economic potential for mutual benefit.

The business leaders appreciated "bold and pragmatic steps" taken by the government to improve trade and commerce, law and order and environment as well as attain positive economic and industrial growth.

They also praised reduction of interest on credit for export sector and expressed satisfaction over the present state of remittances. They, however, stressed the need for more initiative to encourage expatriates to make remittances in a legal way.

Khaleda urged the business people to invest in a bigger way for

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