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Bomb kills Khulna journalist

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

An unidentified man bombed to death Manik Chandra Saha, staff correspondent of the daily Sangbad, in Khulna yesterday, sparking a string of demonstrations including hartal for tomorrow and Sunday in the city and a swell of panic among locals.

Police said the powerful hand-made bomb blew the head off his body at about 1:00pm on Mirzapur Road in the latest in a series of journalist killings in the district since 2002.

The 50-year-old journalist, also Khulna-based stringer of BBC and former president of Khulna Press Club, was heading home at Ahsan Ahmed Road by rickshaw. His body was sent to Khulna Medical College



Manik Chandra Saha

Hospital (KMCH) for autopsy.

Police seized bomb splinters, wires and a pencil battery from the scene, some 20 yards off the press club, after the incident that brought

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Security could not save his life

JULFIKAR ALI MANIK

Last year, Manik called his editor, Bazlur Rahman of Sangbad, and said he has been suffering from insecurity because of death threats. He sought help from his newspaper for his safety.

Steps were taken from his newspaper and police guard was posted at his residence. But that could not stop the killers.

Yesterday, they got him close to his workplace.

Khulna dwellers were stunned by journalist Manik Saha's murder just within four and a half months of the killing of Awami League leader Manzurul Imam.

Manik was a brave reporter, uncompromising in many aspects. He earned enmity with the corrupt and unlawful for his reports. But his

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Chronicle of press horror

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The southwestern region has emerged as a hotbed of violence against journalists in recent years with at least eight death counts in the last six years.

Manik Chandra Saha, bombed to death 20 yards off Khulna Press Club yesterday, was the latest addition to the chronicle of killings.

The killings continued to soar in the region despite government assurance of security, striking terror

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PM shocked

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday expressed her profound shock at the killing of journalist Manik Chandra Saha in Khulna.

She also directed the authorities to nab the killers and give exemplary punishment to them.

In a condolence message, the prime minister expressed deep sympathy to the members of the

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Hasina rejects JS seat addition plan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leader of the Opposition in Parliament and Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina yesterday rejected the ruling four-party alliance's decision to expand parliament by adding 150 more seats.

She said the move is but to shift people's attention from her party's 15-point charter of demands.

"The alliance is conspiring to divert attention of the people when the 15-point demand has created enthusiasm across the country," Hasina said while exchanging views with a group of professionals com-

prised of physicians, engineers and agriculturists at the party's Dhanmondi office last evening.

"The step is uncalled for as it's not a demand of the people," she observed.

The AL chief urged people to launch a united movement in favour of the 15-point demand that includes curbing violence and unabated corruption of the ruling alliance loyalists.

On the killing of journalist Manik Saha in Khulna and the murders of her party leaders in the region, the opposition leader alleged involvement of Hawa Bhaban.

She also claimed she was in possession of information about a plot to kill at least 25 of her promising and popular leaders in Khulna by criminals under the protection of ruling coalition.

She reiterated her party's stand on direct elections to the seats for women.

Hasina criticised the ruling alliance for taking such a decision without any consultation or having reached a consensus. She said, "It will not do any good to the people but only increase public expenditure."

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RESERVED JS SEATS FOR WOMEN Rights activists decry distribution blueprint

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The ruling alliance plan for proportionate distribution of 50 reserved women's seats in the Jatiya Sangsad among parliamentary parties yesterday drew flak from women's rights activists and voters who demanded direct ballot to the seats.

They said direct ballot in the reserved constituencies was necessary to send women with the experience of working with grassroots people to parliament to empower the neglected womenfolk.

Women want direct election of

women to the reserved seats as their position is still marginal in society although their contribution to the economy and social activities are no less than men," Ayesha Khanom, general secretary of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, told The Daily Star.

She urged the four-party alliance to reconsider the decision, a day after Prime Minister Khaleda Zia unveiled the blueprint to raise the JS seats to 450, including the 50 reserved for women, from 300 at a meeting of top alliance leaders at her office.

Roksana Rahman, who works for

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82 sarbaharas say bye to violence today

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

The government swears 82 underground operatives into normal life after years of gangland violence at a programme in Barisal today amid controversy over the event that legal experts say has no legal base.

Home Minister Ataf Hossain Chowdhury will attend the programme that begins at 10:00am in Agarpur village in Babuganj, a southern upazila believed to be a strong base of outlaws popularly known as sarbaharas.

"Tomorrow (today) will be a historic day for the people of Barisal."

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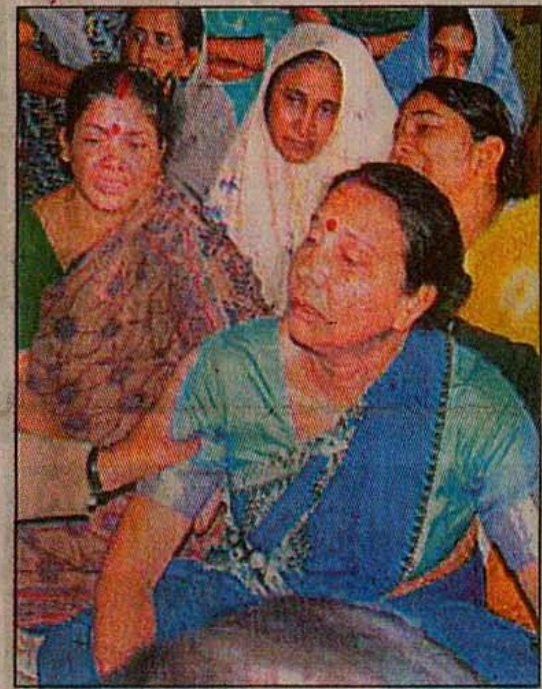


PHOTO: STAR

Fellow journalists carry the body of Daily Sangbad journalist Manik Chandra Saha, right, who was killed in a bomb attack in front of Khulna Press Club yesterday, and left, his grief-stricken family mourns him.

Private firm proposes 45km Dhaka subway

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A private company with foreign financial and technical cooperation has come up with a groundbreaking proposal for setting up an underground railway in Dhaka city to cut traffic congestion.

Contech Ltd proposed to build the 45 km underground single circular rail track from Saidabad to Gabtoli at a cost of Tk 2,000 crore.

The route will have 41 stations in the first phase and the number of stations and lines may be raised in future on the basis of necessity, the proposal said.

The company with financial assistance from Japan and some

donor agencies will implement the project on Build Operate and Transfer (BOT) basis.

The construction of the subway will be complete in three years from initiation.

"If our proposal is accepted, we will implement it without any financial involvement of the government," said Masud Reza, managing director of Contech Ltd, illustrating various aspects of the project at a presentation at the communications ministry yesterday.

"We have discussed the project with the World Bank and other donor agencies and they gave clear indication of supporting the project."

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Trader dies in police custody

Wife says Mirpur OC asked for Tk 2 lakh in bribes

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A clothes trader died yesterday at Mirpur Police Station allegedly due to torture while on remand as his wife refused to pay bribe for his release.

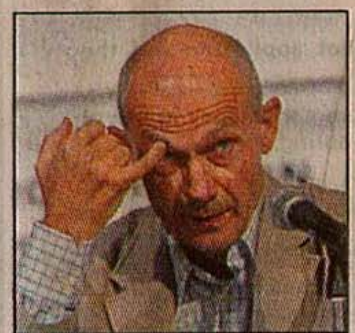
Moina, wife of Khorshed Alam, 60, the trader, alleged that Mirpur police beat him dead on her refusal to pay them Tk 2 lakh in bribes. But police said Khosru died of a cardiac

arrest.

"One police informant Mostafa came to our house at Khilgaon Tilpapa Tuesday evening and introduced himself as a detective police. He then took out my husband with him."

Moina went to Mirpur Police Station when she came to know that her husband was being held there. Officer-in-charge (OC) of the station

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Pascal Lamy to arrive in Dhaka

UNB, Dhaka

European Union Trade Commissioner Pascal Lamy will pay a two-day visit to Bangladesh Saturday on the occasion of the International Business Conference.

During his visit, Lamy will make a courtesy call on Prime Minister Khaleda Zia Sunday. He will also

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Terms of trade worse than in official record

INAM AHMED

Bangladesh's terms of trade is much worse than what the Bangladesh Bank (BB) claims -- less than 25 percent of its official estimate, according to an independent research group.

The central bank reported last month the country's terms of trade, which compares prices received for exports with prices paid for imports, dipped to 86.7 in FY03 from 99.9 in FY96. But the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) says the situation is much worse. It calculates Bangladesh's terms of trade has fallen to 66.1.

The central bank overestimated the price levels of exports at 191.7, says Dr Mustafizur Rahman, research director of the CPD. Export price change rates from the Export Promotion Bureau indicate the export price index should be 149.3, he said.

"It all indicates that the actual deterioration in terms of trade has not been captured in the central bank report."

The BB report also shows a rise in export prices in FY02 when, in fact, export prices fell by nearly 15 percent, Dr Mustafizur says. "It is untenable that export price index

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Thai PM flies in tomorrow to attend ICC meet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra will arrive in the city tomorrow on a six- and a half-hour visit to attend the international business conference organised by the International Chamber of

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