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Tk 27 lakh looted from Ctg chamber building

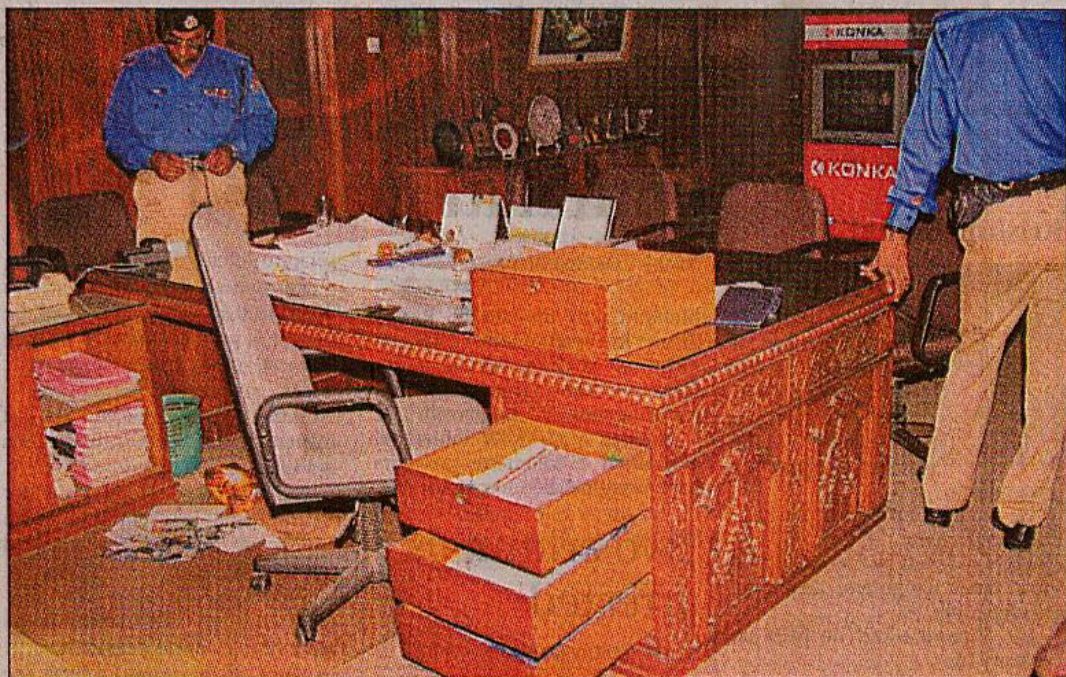
Forty-seven rooms of six offices pillaged in over 7-hour heist

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Masked robbers looted about Tk 27 lakh in cash and valuables from six high-profile offices in the Chamber building at Agrabad commercial heart in Chittagong in over seven-hour raid until early yesterday, holding guards hostage at gunpoint.

The gang plundered 47 rooms including those of Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI), the Export Promotion Bureau and four firms during the heist that police pegged as 'mysterious'.

Police arrested Abdur Rouf and Kamal Uddin, security guards of the



Policemen at work in the office of the president of Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry after the robbers ransacked it yesterday.

AC Akram asked to surrender to lower court by Feb 17

UNB, Dhaka

The Supreme Court yesterday ordered ex-assistant commissioner of Detective Branch Akram Hossain to surrender to a lower court by February 17.

Appellate Division of the Supreme Court passed the orders in disposing of a petition moved by the state seeking leave to appeal against the High Court order granting bail to Akram in a sensational murder case.

The plainclothes police officer was among a dozen cops awarded life imprisonment for bludgeoning to death a university student, Shamim Reza Rubel, in the city in July 1998.

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Govt to import 50,000 tonnes of TSP fertiliser

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has decided to urgently import 50,000 tonnes of TSP fertiliser (triple super phosphate) in the wake of a fertiliser crisis.

Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC), which will import the fertilisers, floats an international tender today, according to agriculture ministry sources.

The government has decided to import the fertilisers to ensure a fair price for farmers," said Agriculture Minister MK Anwar. He said the crisis would fizzle out once the fertilisers are imported.

Anwar admitted the prices of TSP here were higher than the international ones and warned of stringent actions against those found engineering the unusual price hike.

The TSP was sold at Tk 654 a bag this month against Tk 563 of last February. The prices of MOP also

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Mayor again pleads for putting DCC under PMO

MCCI suggests urban dev regulatory council for better coordination

STAR REPORT

The Dhaka City Corporation mayor yesterday again pleaded for putting the DCC under the Prime Minister's Office citing a serious lack of coordination among the services agencies.

"Practically, it is not possible for the DCC mayor to coordinate various agencies under different ministries. As the PMO is the centre point of all power in Bangladesh, only it can do it and I have drawn the PM's attention to the matter," said DCC

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Ensure safety or face tough agitation

Shop-owners give one-week ultimatum to govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The country's apex body of shop-owners threatened yesterday to go for a tough programme if the government failed to safeguard life and property from criminals.

They will watch law and order for another week before launching the movement, business leaders told journalists.

A team of 30 leaders of

Bangladesh Dokan Malik Samity (BDMS) met Home Minister Altaf Hossain Choudhury at his office yesterday afternoon and expressed their grave concerns over the recent rise in killing, loot, extortion and abduction of businessmen and their family members.

After the meeting, the minister said the government had assured the business delegation of taking necessary steps for improving law

and order. "Necessary instructions have been given so that no further killing takes place," he told the journalists.

Avoiding a question whether he would resign, taking the responsibility for the law and order situation, the minister left hurriedly.

"Businessmen are ready to go for a movement protesting attacks on them," said Amir Hossain Khan,

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BDR deployed in Natore town

Villagers of torched houses spend sleepless nights under open sky

ROVING CORRESPONDENT, Natore

Two platoons of paramilitary BDR (Bangladesh Rifles) were deployed in the restive Natore town yesterday as tension brewed between the local Awami League (AL), whose supporters were recent targets of two nearby back-to-back arson attacks, and activists of local Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), the alleged perpetrators of the crimes.

The deployment was ordered after the district AL agitated in the town yesterday protesting the arsons in Naldanga and a subsequent threat by the local BNP to resist any further protest programmes.

"The BDR was brought in following apprehensions of violence after

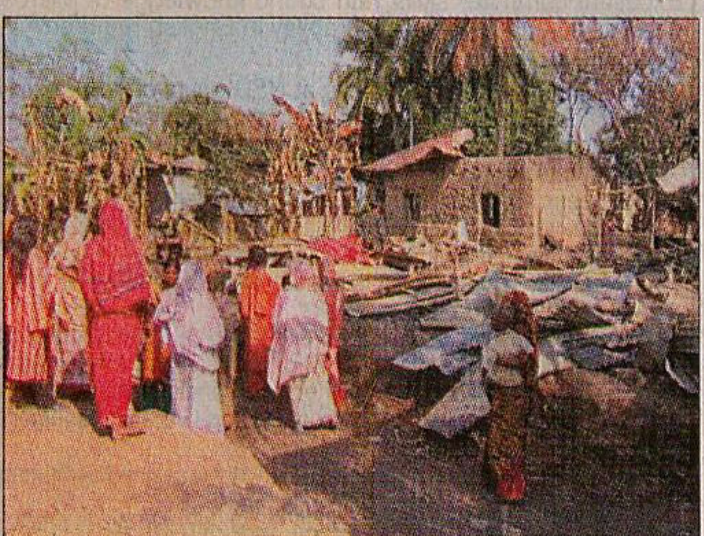
the murder of BNP leader Sabbir Ahmed and consequent arsons in Naldanga," said Natore Superintendent of Police (SP) Sayed Nazrul Islam.

Sources said 31 houses and 12 shops of AL adherents were burnt down at Shahpara and Amtali Bazar in Naldanga on February 7 and 10 to avenge the murder of Sabbir Ahmed Gama, nephew of Deputy Minister Ruhul Kuddus Talukder Dulu on the evening of February 7.

Over 200 hungry women and children of some 40 families in the arson-affected village have spent sleepless nights under the sky since their dwellings were burnt down.

The local AL said the arson attacks were acts of political revenge

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Women and children look at their houses reduced to rubble in arson attacks at Shahpara village in Naldanga, Natore. The victims are living in the open with no food for the last couple of days.

JP wants govt to meet four demands for its joining JS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Jatiya Party (JP-Ershad) yesterday made a four-point demand to the government for its return to parliament.

The demands include a stop to 'harassment' on party chief HM Ershad and expunction of all 'non-parliamentary speeches' made by the treasury bench members including Nazmul Huda and Salauddin Quader Chowdhury after the party staged the walkout on Sunday.

It also demanded facilities for the JP lawmakers equal to other ruling party MPs in development works and asked for putting TIM Fazle Rabbi Chowdhury, a senior JP lawmaker, on one of the parliamentary standing committees.

The demands were made at a meeting of the JP Parliamentary

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Rejoinder and our reply

The Coastal Forest Department of Noakhali in a rejoinder on a The Daily Star report headlined "Coastal forests stripped of Tk 4 Cr trees" run on February 8 denied involvement of the forest officials in the stripping of trees.

It said the forest department officials did not collaborate with the forest bandits and pointed out that more than 50 forest officials have been assaulted and one has been killed by the bandits.

The forest department also claimed that the district administration has not handed over 30,000 acres of land to it. The department has so far taken charge of 2,39,091.32 acres from Noakhali and Laxmipur district administrations and has planted mangrove forests

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AL enforces dawn-to-dusk hartal today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The main opposition Awami League (AL) enforces a countrywide dawn-to-dusk hartal today as its one-month ultimatum to the government to realise the 15-point demand expired yesterday with no response from the ruling four-party alliance.

On January 10, Leader of the Opposition and AL Chief Sheikh Hasina announced the deadline at a public rally at Paltan Maidan and threatened to observe the 12-hour shutdown if their demands were unmet.

The demands include checking corruption and violence, closing down Hawa Bhaban, seen as an 'alternative power centre of the government', and reining in price spiral of essentials.

The AL and its front organisations have taken all-out preparations to make the hartal a success. Dhaka City unit of the AL exchanged views with different professional groups and held extensive meetings at different thana and ward units in the last few days.

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Altaf cautions tough action against pickets

UNB, Dhaka

Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury has warned that today's countrywide hartal called by the Awami League will be strictly dealt with to ensure security of public life and property.

"Necessary measures have been taken so that people cannot be made hostage and their life and property are not damaged," he told parliament yesterday.

The home minister made the remarks, responding to a question from BNP lawmaker Shaheed Uddin Chowdhury Anne.

The Awami League (AL) has toughened its stance as its ultimatum to the government to meet 15-point demand had gone unheeded, and warned of a one-point movement, starting with the shutdown, for an end to the BNP-led coalition rule.

47 die as bomb goes off at Iraqi army HQ

REUTERS, Baghdad

A suicide car bomb exploded at an Iraqi army recruitment centre in Baghdad yesterday, killing 47 people and taking the 24-hour death toll in attacks against Iraqis working with the US occupation up to 100.

"It was a suicide attack by a single male," US Colonel Ralph Baker told news agency at the scene.

"It was aimed strictly at Iraqis," he said, adding that the car had been laden with 300-500 pounds (140-230 kg) of plastic explosives mixed with artillery shells to maximise the "kill effect".

Major John Frisbie said the death toll was at least 36, including the

bomber, with 15 more wounded, but hospitals later said they had received 44 dead and 55 wounded. Three of the injured later died from their wounds.

Around 53 people were killed on Tuesday in a similar attack on Iraqis outside a police station south of Baghdad.

The police force and new army are central to Washington's plan to hand over power to Iraqis by June 30. Most of yesterday's victims were newly recruited soldiers reporting for duty.

The US military said the attack came at around 7:40am (0440 GMT) when a car drove into the Iraqi army facility in central Baghdad and

exploded. "We were standing in line waiting to start our shift in the new army and we saw a white car drive by us and then blow up. Many died. There were about 400 people in line," said Ghassan Samir, one of the wounded taken to Yarmouk hospital.

US troops cordoned off the area known as Muthana Airport, a long-dissused facility recently taken over by the new Iraqi army. Heavy rain and wind buffeted emergency workers, investigators and soldiers as they did the grim work of cleaning up and documenting the scene.

"I was driving and just 10 metres in front of me, a car was driving

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Tk 10,617cr health plan okayed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

After several rounds of review meetings, the government yesterday approved a Tk 10,617-crore health, nutrition and population sector programme (HNPSPP).

A meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecneec), with Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in the chair, at the Secretariat approved the three-year programme that also involves donors' participation.

The main goals of the programme are to reduce malnutrition among women and children, bring down the rate of deaths from pregnancy-related complications and make at least 60 percent of the programme budget available as essential service packages to the poor.

The programme will be executed through 29 annual operation plans (OPs). The Ecneec meeting decided to form a secretary-level committee to supervise implementation of the OPs. The committee will be announced by the Prime Minister's Office in a few days.

The HNPSPP will have 14 areas of

special focus including a primary healthcare service package, alternative medical care, quality assurance, introduction of user fees, national- and community-based nutrition services and improved management of the health budget.

The sector-wide programme gives highest priority to reducing the birth-related maternal mortality rate from 3.2 to 2.75 per 1,000 a year.

Other areas of special focus include reducing the rate of malnutrition particularly among women and children, birth rate from 3.3 per 1,000 to 2.8, percentage of underweight babies from 50 to 42, death rate of under-five children from 94 per 1,000 to 70 and the burden of communicable diseases.

The programme is supposed to spend at least 60 percent of its budget for the most vulnerable group of the society, especially children, women and elderly people.

Of the programme's Tk 10,617-crore budget, Tk 5,645 crore is allocated from the development budget and Tk 4,971 crore from the revenue budget.

The donors have pledged

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Two cops hurt in clash with criminals

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Two constables of Khulna Metropolitan Police were severely injured when they came under armed and bomb attack by operatives of criminal outfit 'Ahad Bahini' last night near Dakbungalow Babytaxi Stand at the heart of the city.

One of the criminals identified as Abdul Ahad, 30, was also severely wounded when police retaliated. Ahad was caught with a revolver loaded with five bullets and is undergoing treatment at Khulna Medical College Hospital prison cell.

The injured policemen Kripa Shindu, 30, and Ashish Kumar, 32, were admitted to police hospital. They have received both bullet and bomb injuries.

According to eyewitnesses, a patrol police of the Detective Branch came under bomb and armed attack when they challenged the criminals hiding in an abandoned house behind Ashiana Hotel at Upper Jessore Road.

The criminals and police traded fire for over 15 minutes and the criminals exploded at least 10 bombs during the clash, eyewitnesses added.

Four terrorists have been arrested from the spot-- Asad, Abul, Korban and Quddus.

According to the deputy commissioner (South) of the KMP, the

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AL, BSD join hands to oust coalition

UNB, Dhaka

The Awami League (AL) and Bangladeshes Samajtantrik Dal (BSD) at a meeting yesterday agreed to forge a unity in a bid to force the coalition government out of office to save the country from what they said was lawlessness.

After the meeting at the Topkhana Road office of the BSD in the evening, AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil told journalists that the discussion was "fruitful and cordial."

He said: "Both parties are worried over the misdeeds of the coalition government. A country cannot run in such a way... more discussions will be held later to find out ways and means to free the country from the misrule of the BNP-Jamaat alliance."

BSD Convener Khalequzzaman

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JOURNALIST REPRESSION Newsmen form human chain Feb 25

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ) and Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ) yesterday jointly announced to form a human-chain in front of Jatiya Press Club on February 25, demanding an end to repression on journalists across the country and trial of the killers of Khulna journalist Manik Chandra Saha.

A joint meeting of the BFUJ and DUJ urged media men to join in the programme which would begin at 11:00am.

Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury,

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Microcredit summit starts February 16

Aim to provide finance to 100 million ultra poor of the world

RAFIQ HASAN

A high-profile regional summit on microcredit will begin in Dhaka on Monday aiming at bringing 100 million ultra poor of the world under the microfinance programme by 2005.

More than 1,300 top government and non-government delegates from 44 countries, including Queen

Sofia of Spain, will attend the Asia Pacific Regional Conference on Microcredit to be held on February 16-19.

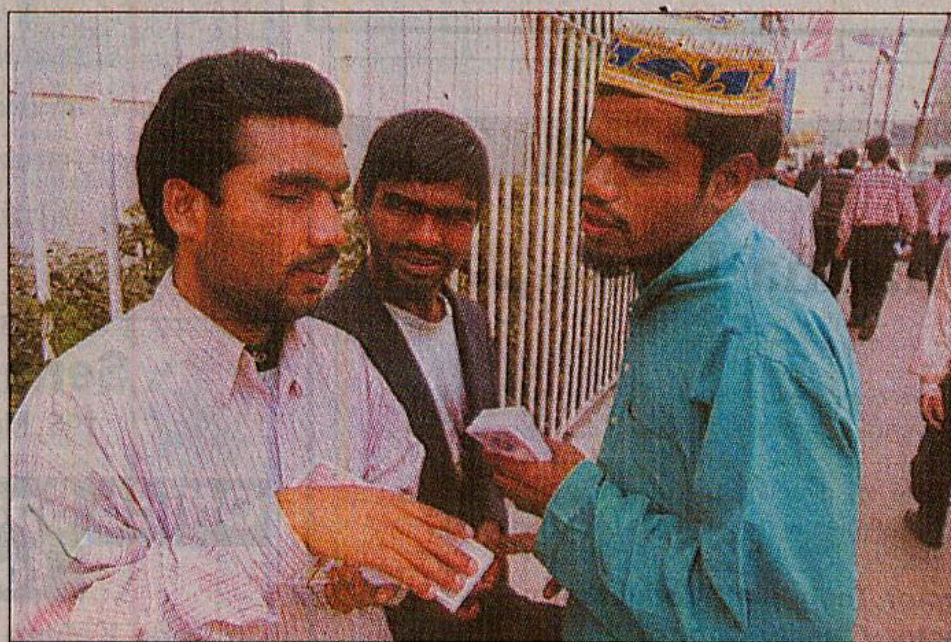
Prime Minister Khaleda Zia is scheduled to inaugurate the conference at Sheraton Hotel on Monday afternoon. Economists and microfinance experts will also join the conference and take part in the discussion.

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman, Managing Director of Grameen Bank Dr Muhammad Yunus, economist Dr Wahiduddin Mahmud and British High Commissioner in Bangladesh David Carter would also address the opening session.

Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF), an institution to finance

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VISION BETTER THAN MANY



Visually challenged Nizam, Faruk and Aminul (from left) check the proceeds from the sale of lottery tickets at Motijheel yesterday. Friends for many years, the trio raises funds this way for humanitarian causes.