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People's Right to Know

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## Saber falls unconscious as over 100 hurt in cop beating

AL MP Ahsanullah Master receives stitches for head injury

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former minister Saber Hossain Chowdhury and Awami League MP Ahsanullah Master sustained critical head wounds when police charged baton to disperse a pro-hartal procession near Dainik Bangla crossing in the city yesterday during the dawn-to-dusk countywide hartal.

Demonstrations by pro-hartal pickets during the shutdown escalated into pitched battles with police across the capital, leaving another 100 injured. Besides, at least 13 people were wounded elsewhere.

Police picked up at least 94 demonstrators from the capital during the hartal hours that include AL's Relief and Social Welfare Secretary Nazma Rahman and Habibur Rahman Mollah.

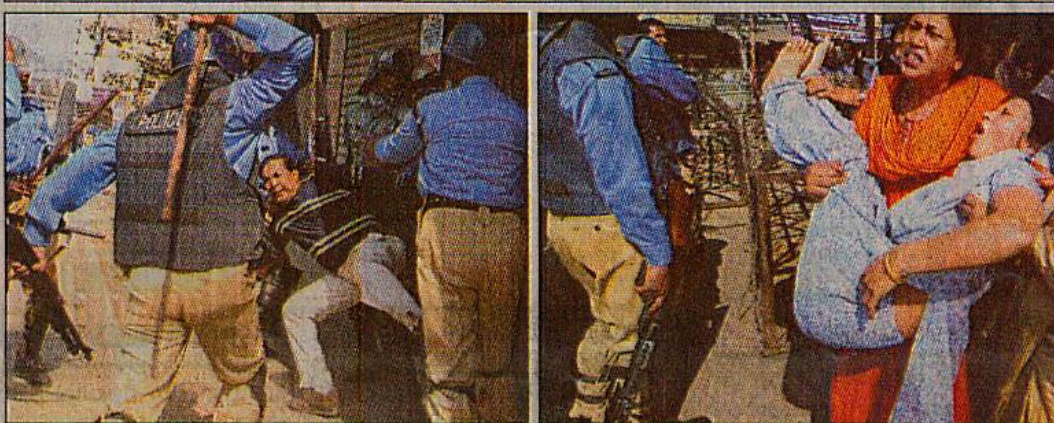
The main opposition party enforced the 12-hour shutdown to hammer its one-point demand for the government to step aside, bringing life and business in the city and elsewhere to a grinding halt.

Shops, schools, business centres and private offices remained closed and automobiles went off the road responding to the shutdown. Attendance in government offices was thin and although commercial banks were open, transaction was low.

Witnesses said the law enforcers in riot gear attacked without provocation the procession led by Saber and Ahsanullah Master from behind, clubbing the demonstrators and firing teargas canisters while it was crossing Dainik Bangla roundabout in Motijheel commercial area at about 12:30pm.

The procession was heading for the party headquarters at Bangabandhu Avenue through

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Party colleagues try to comfort senior Awami League leader Saber Hossain Chowdhury, who suffered head wounds in police clubbing that also injured lawmaker Ahsanullah Master, top far left. Police hit Ahsanullah, bottom left, and women activists, bottom right, of the main opposition party evacuate one of their fellow activists past riot policemen after she was injured in a clash with police during a day-long countrywide hartal in Dhaka yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR/APP

## Hartal tomorrow to protest attacks: AL

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League (AL) has called another daylong countrywide hartal tomorrow protesting attacks on its leaders and workers during yesterday's shutdown.

The decision was taken at a meeting of the AL presidium and central leaders chaired by AL President Sheikh Hasina last night at the party's Dhanmondi office last night.

Briefing journalists after the meeting, AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil said the government can still avert a political strife by realising the AL's 15-point demand.

"Otherwise, we will be compelled to go for a one-point oust-government agitation," he said.

"People want peace, stability and security. They want an end to bad

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## Doctors face 10yrs for malpractice

New law to hit parliament soon

NAIMUL HAQ

Medical practitioners face up to 10 years in prison and Tk 10 lakh in fines for malpractice under a proposed law, titled Private Clinic and Diagnostic Centre Ordinance 2004, to be placed in parliament soon.

The law proposes fines of up to Tk 50,000 if any government doctor, consultant, nurse or paramedic is found serving in a private clinic, hospital or diagnostic centre during office hours.

Currently, there is no law to punish medical practitioners, nurses or technicians of diagnostic laboratories for maltreatment.

"Although one can file lawsuits for malpractice but it is often too

lengthy a process and expensive, too. It is also hard to prove charges due to lack of proper documentation of treatment," a lawyer requesting anonymity told The Daily Star.

The Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council (BMDC), where patients and relatives of victims can lodge complaints, has not functioned for a number of years due to a court order.

According to the BMDC, only two doctors challenged for malpractice in government hospitals had their licences temporarily suspended in the last 30 years.

Clinics, hospitals and diagnostic centres not meeting government criteria for healthcare services face

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## Spring returns

UNB, Dhaka

The woes of winter are over, and the spring begins today

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

## AL spreading violence

Khaleda blames main opposition for political killings

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday accused the Awami League of fuelling violence in the name of anti-government demonstration and blamed a series of political killings on the main opposition party's internal conflict.

"The opposition is trying to mar government efforts to build the nation," Khaleda told a public rally in the RC College ground at Patahat in Barisal, which coincided with AL's countrywide hartal, called to kick off a drive to oust the government.

"The Awami League president (Sheikh Hasina) told a Chittagong public meeting in 1986 her party

would never join hands with autocrats, but closed ranks with the Jatiya Party (Ershad) in a few months. The party (AL) proved a traitor," Khaleda said.

The flow of foreign funds and inward remittances that she said slowed to a crawl during AL's tenure increased during the rule of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) that heads a four-party alliance.

"The Awami League distributed only nine ambulances during its rule, but the coalition has already handed out 300 ambulances," the BNP chairperson said in a litany of success stories of the alliance, voted into office in 2001.

Khaleda, who faces an oust-the-government agitation by the main

opposition that launched a campaign to forge a broad unity, accused the AL of spreading disorder in education and equipping students with firearms before it lost power.

"The alliance restored discipline to education," she said with a pledge that her government would recruit more teachers and doctors for people's benefit in rural areas.

She said the coalition took up projects, including construction of 71 more educational institutions, to develop the region that she alleged the AL turned into a den of criminals.

Khaleda promised that Mehendiganj would be linked with Barisal district headquarters by road.

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## MICRO CREDIT SUMMIT Queen Sofia, other dignitaries start arriving tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A number of foreign dignitaries including Queen Sofia of Spain will start arriving in the city from tomorrow to participate in the Asia Pacific Regional Summit on Micro Credit beginning Monday.

The dignitaries will arrive early to go on field visits to some micro credit programme areas in Bangladesh, according to summit organisers. They will see micro credit projects implemented by different non-governmental organisations including Grameen Bank, Brac, Asa and Padakkhep.

Queen Sofia arrives tomorrow morning. She will visit a Grameen Bank micro credit programme at Madhupur in Tangail and the bank's

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## Saber, Ahsan just stumbled, says Altaf

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury yesterday said two Awami League leaders were injured when they stumbled on the road 'during a melee' as the law enforcers charged baton to disperse an unruly procession 'engaged in creating anarchy' during the hartal.

"Awami League leaders Saber Hossain Chowdhury and Ahsanullah Master MP were not injured by police personnel, rather they hurt themselves by falling on the road in a melee during hartal hours," said the home minister in a statement in the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday.

He also said a patrol police inspector, who was suffering from heart disease, died yesterday after he fell sick.

Opposition Krishak Samik Janata League lawmaker Abdul

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## GAS PIPELINE SCAM JS body shocked at low quality job

STAR REPORT

Members of the parliamentary standing committee on energy ministry while visiting two gas pipeline projects around Savar Wednesday expressed their shock at the visible low quality construction works that pose hazard to public safety.

"We have heard and read in newspapers allegations of corruption and irregularities in these projects," said Shahidul Islam, chairman of the committee. "But we really did not expect to see such poor quality of construction. It is deep in corruption and irregularities and we will visit the projects again in a couple of days."

Although the committee members made prior-announcement of

their visit, the contractors concerned failed to impress them despite all preparations to project a better view of their work.

The Daily Star last month reported that Titas and Petrobangla officials along with these contractors were siphoning off Tk 30 crore from the over-estimated Bangabandhu Bridge Approach Road Gas Pipeline Project (BBARGP). The report also questioned the role of State Minister for Energy Mosharraf Hossain for his inaction on an investigation report clearly accusing officials involved in corruption.

The visitors, who included five parliamentarians, chairman of Petrobangla, managing director (MD) and general manager (GM) of Bangladesh Bank (BB) for

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## Top US Gen in Mideast survives Iraqi attack

AP/ REUTERS, Fallujah

Insurgents launched a brazen attack yesterday on an Iraqi civil defense outpost visited by Gen. John Abizaid, commander of all US forces in the Middle East. Abizaid and his party escaped injury in the gun battle.

Just moments after a convoy

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## Announcement

The next installment in our series 'The Strength Within' comes out Saturday. The story this week is how the dwindling saree-weaving industry in Tangail is getting a shot in the arm as loom-labourers are setting up their own independent business.

## FBCCI blames politics of conflict for law, order crisis

STAR REPORT

The Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) at an emergency meeting yesterday blamed the political 'culture of conflict' for deterioration of law and order.

The apex business body will open a cell today to monitor the killing, loot and extortion and other forms of harassment that the business community are facing across the country. It will use the information gathered by the cell for taking combined steps, meeting sources said.

The business leaders attending the meeting felt improving the relations among the political parties was essential for overcoming the

present law and order situation.

They also felt the two main political parties -- ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and opposition Awami League (AL) -- should come forward to improve their relations and start dialogue to correct the present crisis and make parliament effective.

The meeting, chaired by FBCCI President Abdul Awal Mintoo, decided to sit again tomorrow at 6:30pm to further review its recommendations before submitting to the government. The recommendations would be for short-, mid- and long-term programmes including strengthening of police, starting political dialogue and making parliament effective, meeting sources

said.

The FBCCI will also request the minister and the state minister for home affairs soon to sit with it to discuss the present crisis.

Among others, FBCCI Vice-Presidents Kamaluddin Ahmed and Abul Quasem Haider and Director A Rouf Chowdhury were present at the meeting.

Commenting on the country's political situation and law and order, Mintoo said he believed that in order to bring an end to this anarchy the problems must be resolved politically.

"The 140-million people of the country can no longer sit idle and watch the country go down the drain

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## Man kills self after slaying wife, 4 children

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

An indigenous man committed suicide after chopping his wife and four children dead and injuring another son critically at remote Manikchhari upazila in Khagrachhari yesterday.

Kasam Kumar Tripura, 45, ran a machete on his wife and five children early morning at Puccatila village, about 60 km north of the port city, after a family feud. He later took his life with the same weapon, police said.

Kasam's wife Suryabala Tripura, 35, daughters Lalmoni Tripura, 10, and Alhabala Tripura, 5, and sons Liye Kumar Tripura, 12, and Lal

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3rd International Apparel & Textile Technology, Fabrics & Accessories Trade Show

**OPENS TODAY AT 10.30 a.m**

Inauguration by : Mr. Amir Khosru M. Chowdhury M.P  
Hon'ble Minister of Commerce, Govt. of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

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## 11 banks lower rates since Jan

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

Eleven commercial banks have reduced various loan and deposit interest rates by 0.5-0.3 percentage points at the start of new year in line with the government and Bangladesh Bank (BB) efforts.

Most banks reduced their lending rates to the highest 15 percent and deposit rates to the highest 10 percent.

A few of the total 49 commercial banks that reduced the rate in November and December did not lower it further.

"Competition has intensified in the market, and greater intensification of competition will reduce lending rates in the months to follow," said M A Yusuf Khan, Managing Director of Premier Bank. "Customers are more aware these days, that's why banks will have to reduce their rates to keep good customers."

Information received from the BB shows that Agrani Bank has reduced various lending interest rates by 1 to 2 percentage points, and has fixed their term and working capital interest rates to between 9 and 11 percent, a 1 percent reduction.

Agrani Bank's largest cuts were in its commercial loan interest rates, down 2.5 percentage points to between 10 and 12 percent.

The private banks -- Uttara, Islami, City, NCCBL, Prime, Dhaka, Dutch-Bangla and Standard -- have reduced their lending rates by 0.5 to 0.3 percentage points.

Commercial Bank is the only foreign bank to reduce its lending rates, matching cuts by its rivals.

For depositors, Agrani Bank reduced its rates 1 percentage points, cutting its top deposit rate to 6.25 percent.

Among commercial banks,

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