



# The Daily Star



COMMITTED TO  
People's Right to Know  
www.thedailystar.net

REGD. NO. DA 781

VOL. XIV No. 73

DHAKA THURSDAY APRIL 1, 2004

CHAITRA 18, 1410 BS

SAFAR 10, 1425 HIJRI

16 PAGES PLUS RISING STARS PRICE: Tk 10.00

## Open dialogue with govt 'by any means'

### Business leaders also ask Hasina to shun hartal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Business leaders at a discussion with opposition leader Sheikh Hasina yesterday asked the government and opposition to open dialogues 'by any means' to fight violence together and shun hartal as a political tool.

They said the country is witnessing a grim law and order situation and hartal is hitting business hard. The business delegation appreci-

ated the human-shield programme organised by the Awami League (AL) on Tuesday, saying it is a good substitute for hartal to register protest.

The meeting was held at a city hotel after the AL had called a countrywide back-to-back dawn-to-dusk hartal on April 7 and 8 demanding immediate resignation of the government and snap polls.

"The country will fall into an even worse situation if we fail to restore political stability. For politi-

cal stability, the two major parties-- ruling BNP and opposition Awami League-- must sit together to thrash out their disputes," remarked Annisul Haq, president of Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).

"I never felt so insecure as I feel now," he said, remarking that the situation was not so grave during the 1996-2001 rule of the AL, though it

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PHOTO: STAR

Businesspeople shout slogans in a procession in Patuati yesterday during a half-day strike against a spate of killings of traders in Old Dhaka over the last few months. The shutdown closed one lakh shops and filled roads in Kotwali and Sutrapur with rallies and processions.

## Strike jerks Old Dhaka to halt

### 1 lakh shops shut, political intimidation alleged

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A half-day strike yesterday whisked Old Dhaka to a standstill, as businesspeople shut over one lakh shops in protest at a spate of killings of traders over the last few months, shrugging off political intimidation.

In the outrage triggered by the grisly killings of Shamsul Haq and his son Russell Sheikh on Friday, the demonstrators turned a matrix of roads abuzz with rallies and processions in Kotwali and Sutrapur.

Sources alleged political interference in the form of threats from the ruling BNP stopped some leading businesses in Lalbagh joining the strike under the Sammilita Oikya Babosayee Pracheshita (SOBP).

Demanding urgent steps from the government, the demonstrators in procession shouted slogans -- "Why Did Our Brothers Die?" and "Break the Black Hand of Extortion," on their way to Nawabpur Road where they held a huge rally at about

1:00pm.

"How would you like to be asked for money at gunpoint every day? How would you like to leave home in the morning fearing death closer to you than expected?" asked an angry Jahangir Alam, a businessman from Radhikamohan Basak Lane.

The sudden appearance of main opposition Awami League leader Sayeed Khokon sent a ripple of murmurs among the crowd at the rally conducted by Nawabpur Dokan Malik Samity President Kamal Hossain.

"I am here as a businessman of Nawabpur and I think it is my duty to protest the killings of nine businessmen in the past one and a half months," Khokon said.

Khokon slated Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka and said: "Since he (mayor) described the murders of Shamsul Haq, Russell and Selim Reza as business-related, not as part of law and order downside, he is

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## Sharmin shoots second gold

SPORTS REPORTER

Shooting brought another gold for Bangladesh when Sharmin Akter won the 10m air-rifle event in the Ninth SAF Games in Islamabad yesterday.

The 16-year old from Pabna ensured that the Bangladesh anthem was played at the Shooting Range of Jinnah Sports Complex for the second consecutive day.

Another Pabna prodigy Asif Hossain Khan bagged the first gold for the country in the region's biggest sporting carnival on Tuesday in the same event.

Alike Asif, a BKSP student Sharmin, who made her first

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## Edn commission for radical reforms

### Prescribes single-discipline secondary schooling, decentralisation, watchdog for private universities

STAR REPORT

The National Education Commission asks the government to go for radical educational reforms including a single-discipline secondary education, raising teacher-student ratio, decentralisation of administration, satisfactory salary structure for teachers and setting up a regulatory body for private universities.

The commission in its final report recommends for a single-discipline education all through the secondary schooling instead of the current division into science,

humanities and commerce groups from class eight.

The commission, formed in January last year with former Dhaka University vice-chancellor Mohammad Moniruzzaman Miah as its chairman, handed over the report to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at her office yesterday.

The report maintains the current multi-disciplinary secondary education system creates socio-economic and intellectual divisions among the students coming from all strata and thus acts against social unity.

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DHAKA-YANGON ROAD LINK

## Final survey team goes to Myanmar this week

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A second group of engineers are going to Myanmar this week to finalise the survey for constructing a 55-km stretch of highway which will establish a direct road link between Dhaka and Yangon.

Dhaka has agreed to help Yangon build the highway at its own cost for establishing the road link, which afterwards will become a part of the Asian Highway.

Bangladesh already has upgraded its internal Dhaka-Teknaf highway to Asian Highway standard. Only the 55-km road from

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## 5 US troops bombed 4 foreigners killed, bodies mutilated in another Iraq attack

AP, Fallujah, Iraq

In one of the bloodiest days in weeks for the US military, five troops died when a bomb exploded under their military vehicle west of Baghdad yesterday. At least four foreign nationals, including one American,

were killed in a separate attack and some of the bodies were burned, beaten and hanged from a bridge.

The explosive device that killed the American troops blew up when their vehicle ran over it, US Army Col. Jill Morgenthaler said in

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## India in sight of history

REUTERS, Multan

Leg-spinner Anil Kumble returned to haunt Pakistan, taking India to the verge of their first Test victory on Pakistani soil on Wednesday.

The 33-year-old, who had picked up all 10 second innings wickets against Pakistan in New Delhi in 1999, grabbed his 24th five-wicket

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