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Stepping into post-MFA era with hope

INAM AHMED

It is going to be a new experience for the country's readymade garment exporters from today -- no more will they enjoy the protection of US quota system to ward off fierce competitors like China and India. From now on, competitiveness and perfor-

mance will be the sole keys to their survival.

Bangladesh is not the only one to face this situation. All World Trade Organisation (WTO) member countries are bracing themselves for the same shift in trade of textiles and apparels in a more open trade regime dawning today

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PHOTO: STAR

Garment workers take out a procession in the capital yesterday, the day before beginning of the quota-free trade regime, demanding job security.

2004 IN RETROSPECT

Long list of violence as crossfire crosses line

ZAYADUL AHSAN and SHAMIM ASHRAF

The country last year witnessed an alarming escalation in human rights violations, especially with the introduction of law enforcers-sponsored murders, outranking by far any previous record and sending an ominous chill through the social veins.

Marked by the advent of special police forces christened Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), Cheetah and Cobra, and their criminal killing spree that also caused death to quite

a few innocent people, the year saw some brutal murders and bomb and grenade attacks.

The government's indifference to formation of a human rights commission continued in 2004 too, as it ordered arrests and detention of people in hundreds and thousands before the oppositions' anti-government programmes.

Law enforcers failed to arrest Bangla Bhai, the self-proclaimed operations leader of Islamist militant outfit Jagrata Muslim Janata, Bangladesh (JMB) that unleashed a reign of terror in the northern

region, coinciding with some frightful doings by outlawed communist groups.

The annual report of human rights watchdog Odhikar said the country witnessed a serious deterioration in law and order in 2004, with 522 people killed, 6,222 injured, 2,914 arrested and 28 abducted in incidents of human rights violation related to politics.

CROSSFIRE STEPS IN Desperate to contain the crime waves, the government introduced well-trained crime-busting forces of

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PHOTO: STAR

Truck driver Abul Kashem and his wife with their two-year-old daughter in his lap at Zia International Airport yesterday.

Truck driver Kashem returns home

BSS, Dhaka

Abul Kashem, the Bangladeshi truck driver who was abducted by an Iraqi guerilla group fighting the US and British troops in their homeland, returned home yesterday.

Kashem returned two weeks after the militants handed him over to a rights activists in Iraq, ending his 55-day confinement.

"I feel I am reborn," said Kashem as reporters surrounded him upon his landing at the Zia International Airport.

He expressed gratitude to Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan and all others for their efforts to get him released.

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Disco fire in Buenos Aires kills 175

AFP, Buenos Aires

At least 175 people were killed and 619 were injured in a fire at a Buenos Aires discotheque packed with 2,000 teenagers that had its emergency exits padlocked, Mayor Anibal Ibarra said yesterday.

"If the emergency exit had been open, so many people would not have died," Ibarra told reporters. He said the doors were "locked with chains and padlocks."

"This is a disaster. This is a disaster," a stunned Interior Minister Anibal Fernandez told reporters outside the discotheque.

Fernandez blamed the tragedy on overcrowding and also on blocked emergency exits at the club. The young people "were caught

inside a mortal trap," he said.

He also confirmed that most of the concert-goers were aged between 12 and 20, but even some under 10 years old as some Argentine nightclubs provide nursery areas for customers with children.

The blaze, one of the worst in Argentine history, broke out before midnight Thursday at the Cro-Magnon Republic disco club in downtown Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires Health Secretary Alfredo Stein said.

Stein said 18 police officers were among the injured. Ibarra said 619 people were injured in the blaze.

The mayor said the blaze started when flares were tossed during the

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The Daily Star wishes its readers, advertisers, patrons and well-wishers a Happy New Year.

Bad night for revellers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The city hot spots, except a few in the more affluent areas, looked forlorn last night, as would-be revellers kept away from going out to celebrate the

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Indonesia stops counting tsunami disaster dead

Death toll feared to reach 2,00,000 as frantic race on to save millions

AGENCIES

The world pumped aid into south Asia's tsunami zone yesterday in a frantic race to save millions of survivors from dehydration and disease, and stop a terrifying death count climbing further.

As relief efforts increased, bringing a glimmer of hope but facing huge obstacles, the toll rose too, five days after a quake below the Indian Ocean sent killer waves crashing ashore.

Some 135,000 lives were con-

firmly lost in an arc of suffering from Africa to Indonesia's Sumatra island, which alone accounted for two thirds of the dead -- and where officials said another 20,000 bodies were likely to be found.

Indonesia's health minister said yesterday that her country would give up trying to find a precise figure for the number of people killed in the earthquake and tsunami.

Siti Fadilah Supari said her officials would from now on give only general estimates since the number of dead was too large to provide an

exact tally. The ministry said earlier the final casualty number from Sunday's catastrophe would likely reach up to 100,000.

Swedish Foreign Minister Laila Freivalds, who returned to Stockholm yesterday from tsunami-devastated Thailand, said she believed the total death toll from the disaster in the region was rising towards 200,000.

"The whole area is still chaotic... dead bodies are being collected

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new dawn
new day
new horizon
new temptation
new promise
to build the nation

New Year's Greetings to All

SHAH CEMENT

Born to Build

নতুন বছর নিয়ে আসুক আনন্দ, শান্তি ও সমৃদ্ধি।

ঢাকা ব্যাংকের পক্ষ থেকে সবাইকে নতুন বছরের শুভকামনা।

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