A grisly reminder

FROM PAGE 1 boosted by the government's inac-tion, took another chance this time, killing former finance minister SAMS

Major bomb blasts that left 150 people killed and about 1,000 injured in the last six years still stand unresolved as the attackers remain unpunished revelling in the politicisation of the probes.

After each attack, the authorities started probes, sometimes several simultaneous investigations, but almost all of them stalled halfway for reasons not known.

Intelligence operatives, who on several occasions voiced suspicion that Islamist militants might have links to some of the explosions, said pressure from the government highups did not let them go ahead with the

An explosion at a cultural function of Udichi in Jessore on March 6, 1999, which left 10 people dead and more than 100 injured, set off the series of bloody blasts across the country that would go on to date. Mostly the Awami League (AL) activists and the progressive forces have been the targets of these attacks.

Each in the long string of blasts had sent a wave of shock and anger across the country sparking strong protests and prompting the authorities to promise tough actions against the killers. But as time passed the probes sink even deeper into blame-shifting keeping the victims' relatives as well as the people on the edge.

The same old tale unfolded on all

previous occasions when bomb attacks claimed human lives and inquiry committees were formed and cases were filed briskly. None of the criminals has yet been convicted and awarded punishment prescribed by law for such offences.

The political blame game over the blasts, however, continue unabated between the government and the opposition as the culprits remain out of the reach. In each incident during the last AL rule, the government blamed an 'alliance between the religious extremists and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party'. And similarly when they happened under the coalition rule, the government took no time to shift the blame onto

the main opposition AL.
In most of the cases, the authorities have even failed to find out the criminals responsible for the attacks. On October 8, 1999, eight people were killed and 30 others injured in a

Call money

FROM PAGE 12 The NCBs yesterday sold Tk 800 crore to fund-seeking private banks red to 30 to 70 percent charged by private banks and leasing companies.

Excessive lending by certain

aggressive banks has pushed up the rate, which normally hovers around only 5 percent. The situation has been prevailing for more than a

month now. The central bank's injection of Tk 350 crore through repurchase agreement yesterday could hardly cool down the market. In just four days after the Eid holidays, the Bangladesh Bank (BB) has pumped Tk 890 crore into the money market. Yesterday the exchange rate of US dollar soared to Tk 63.40, up by 20

paisas from the previous day. Interestingly, the dollar is being sold at an odd low of less than Tk 60 on the curb market. The rate also differs by Tk2 to 3 between the NCBs and the private banks who are sell-

ingitat the highest price.

The exchange rate of dollar remained mercurial although Sonali and Agrani banks released 10 million dollars at a rate of Tk 61 yesterday. They had sold it at around Tk 60 the day before.

Meanwhile a four-member delegation of Bangladesh Association of Banks (Bab) led by its chairman Syed Manjur Elahi met BB Governor Fakhruddin Ahmed yes-

terday to discuss the situation. Not all banks are abiding by the central bank's rules and regulations, the governor pointed out to the Bab team, adding actions will be taken against the violators, a Bab member

told The Daily Star. The call money rate has been soaring high because a number of banks are unable to manage their funds properly, Ahmed observed and urged the bankers to ensure

proper fund management. Service rule

FROM PAGE 12 directives. Educated but visually impaired people could not take part in the previous BCS exams due to government's indecision.

The PSC had issued a circular to the visually handicapped candidates, allowing them to take part in the 26th BCS (Special) exam through short-hand writer. The PSC decision came after a candidate submitted an application on December 26.

But the PSC issued the circular on condition that it will cancel their exam if the government includes recruitment of visually impaired in its

service rule. We allowed the visually impaired to sit for the 26th BCS exam following

the PMO directives," Abdur Rouf, a member of the PSC, told The Daily

"We'll now look into the rules and regulations regarding blind people's eligibility to be recruited in the jobs," Roufadded.

But another member told The Daily Star that they cannot take any decision about recruiting the visually handicapped until the establishment ministry does not include provisions

in the service rule.

Abdul Gafur, a visually impaired BCS candidate who graduated from Dhaka University, said they appealed to the prime minister for taking

immediate steps in this regard. "If our efficiency is proved through examination then it will be injustice if the PSC does not allow us to be recruited for the jobs, "said Gafur.

bomb blast at Ahmedia Masjid in Khulna. In the same year bomb blast

killed four persons at Alal Pak Darbarsharifar Faridpur. Seven people were killed in near-simultaneous bomb blasts at a rally of the Communist Party of Bangladesh at Paltan Maidan and near the Awami League (AL) headquarters on January

On April 14, 2001, 10 people were killed and about 50 wounded in a blast at a cultural function at Ramna

On June 3, 2001, 10 more were killed and 30 others injured in a bomb attack on a church at Baniarchang in On June 15, 2001, a bomb attack on

the Awami League (AL) office at Narayanganj left as many as 22 people On September 23, 2001, eight people were killed and more than one

hundred injured in a bomb attack on an AL public meeting at Mollahat in On September 26, 2001, four more people were killed in a blast near an

AL rally in Sunamganj.
On September 28, 2002, more than
100 people were injured in a series of
blasts at a cinema hall and circus

pandel at Satkhira. On December 6, 2002, bomb blasts in four cinema halls at Mymensingh town killed 27 and injured more than two hundred

On January 17, 2003 seven persons were killed and 20 others injured in a

bomb blastata fair in Tangail. Three people were killed and British High Commissioner to Bangladesh Anwar Choudhury was among at least 70 injured in a powerful bomb blast at Hazrat Shahjalal Shrine in Sylhet on 21 May last year.

On August 21, 2004 grenade attacks on an AL rally in Dhaka left 21 including top AL leader Ivy Rahman dead and over 100 injured. AL President Sheikh Hasina narrowly escaped the attack believed to an

attempt on her life.

Besides, in the last two months six incidents of bomb blasts in village fairs and cultural functions in Bogra, Natore, Jamalpur, Sherpur and Pabna districts had left two people dead and 145 injured. Intelligence men probing the blasts suspect that Islamist militants might have been involved in the explosions.

In most of the probes police have made little headway. Last year the law enforcers gave the final report in the CPB blast of 2001 without yielding anything against the persons responsible for the attack. Besides, they are preparing to submit final reports in the cases of Mymensingh cinema hall blasts, Tangail Shakhipur, Sylhet Shahjalal Shrine, Bagerhat and Baniarchang church blasts and these too without any result to punish the

Hasina accuses

PROM PAGE 12 addressing at an opening sharing meeting with the women committee of party's labour wing at its Dhanmondi office.

The opposition leader also expressed dissatisfaction over the sentences given to opposition men by a Speedy Trial Tribunal on Wednesday. That day eight activists of the youth and student fronts of opposition AL were sentenced to arying fail terms for ransacking the luxurious house of businessman Giasuddin Al Mamun in a backlash against the killing of Ashanullah

Hasina said the people of Gazipur had spontaneously protested the killing of Ahsanullah Master, adding

that it was a 'mass upsurge'. She added that while no headway has been made in the case of Ahsanullah Master MP, the people who protested the killing have already been punished.

Addressing the programme, the opposition leader also blamed the government for its failure to check the price hikes of essentials, unabated corruption by alliance men and the killing of people by special forces without trial.

Rowshan Jahan Sathi, Shamsunnahar Bhuiyan, Fatema Zohra and Rebeka Sultana were present at the programme.

Criminals

Dipak Kundu alleged Rashid and his men committed the misdeed, as the

committee did not act at his will. "Rashid asked the committee to remove the temple from the place five days ago. He went on rampage inside the temple for not complying with his orders," Kundusaid.

When asked, Rashid told The Daily Star that he did not damage any idol, but admitted he snapped the temple's electricity connection.

He also admitted he asked the temple committee to shift the temple, as it is on khas land (government land). He added that he wants to get lease of the land.

Kundu refuted Rashid's claim and said the temple stands on its own land. He said they did not call the police first as they tried to settle

it themselves. "Rashid never wanted to minimise it. Rather he has continued threatening the Hindu families," he

A huge number of police were deployed in the temple area yester-

RMG

FROM PAGE 1 Maldives, Nepal, Samoa, Solomon Islands, East Timor, Tuvalu, Vanuatu

Of these countries, only Bangladesh, Cambodia, Laos and Nepal have apparel manufacturing base and the rest have interest in the bill for exporting other products.

Sri Lanka, a developing country in Asia, has also been included in the bill as it has been severely hit by EXISTENCE OF BANGLA BHAI

US embassy refutes foreign ministry views

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The US embassy yesterday refuted a foreign ministry official's comment that US embassy officials had reported that Bangla Bhai has no organised existence in Rajshahi.

Private News Agency UNB yesterday quoting a US Embassy source said that the embassy officials had visited the Rajshahi area only as part of routine visits. The officials periodically visit different parts of Bangladesh including Rajshahi division to 'assess at first hand local issues and circumstances", it continued.

UNB adds, the embassy source said, "This is a normal diplomatic practice. We do not, however, provide any reports on these visits to anyone other than the US gov-ernment, which is also a normal diplomatic practice."

Kibria's life

FROM PAGE 1 a news bulletin depicting the war

After independence, Kibria was called back home and given the responsibility of director general of political wing of the foreign ministry. He became Bangladesh's foreign secretary on March 11, 1972. He was appointed Bangladesh's ambassador and permanent representative to the United Nations in 1976. He discharged the responsibility of foreign secretary for the second stint in 1978 and in the same year he also took over as the executive secretary of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific

(Escap). SAMS Kibria joined AL as a member of its advisory council in 1992. He became political advisor to Sheikh Hasina in 1994. Besides, he served as the head of the central election conducting committee of AL.

He has left behind a son and a daughter. His wife Asma Kibria is a noted painter.

Wail breaks

FROM PAGE 1

politician was lying dead. Top AL leaders who sat at Sudha Sadan to decide the next course of action appeared at the hospital on information of Kibria's death. They tried to condole the shell-shocked relatives in vain.

"We have no place to go, people have no security in this country... this country has been pushed into destruction," AL Presidium Member Tofail Ahmed said.

The former minister failed to hold tears, shattered at the grisly incident that came only five months after another cruel grenade attacks on AL rally on August 21 when 23 people including AL's Women Affairs Secretary Ivy Rahman were killed.

Wiping his cheeks, Tofail said, This incident could never have happened if the government punished the people behind the Bangabandhu Avenue attack."

Police were guarding Birdem Hospital's main entrance since news came at 9:30pm that Kibria was being brought to the hospital.

Apart from journalists, Kibria's relatives and AL adherents started thronging to the hospital after TV channels aired the news.

While local AL activists were taking Kibria and other two grenadehit AL men, party leaders Abdus Samad Azad, Tofail Ahmed, Amir Hossain Amu, Mostafa Jalal Mohiuddin, Abdur Razzak, Asaduzzaman Noor, leaders of Bangladesh Chhatra League, Jubo League, Swechchhasebak League, Sramik League kept waiting at the

hospital gate to receive him. AL GS Abdul Jalil and JSD President Hasanul Haq Inu also ioined them later.

As soon as the ambulance reached there at 11:22pm, relatives and party men's wailing filled the

On three trolleys kept ready at the entrance, they were rushed to the third floor operating theatre. Failing to stop the rush of visitors.

the hospital staff closed the gates. But many forced open the gate and gathered in front the OT.

Every minute the visitors waiting for doctors' statement of their health appeared too long before one doctor made unofficial announcement of Kibria's death before reporters.

After undergoing surgery, Abdullah was shifted to a cabin while Jahid was kept in the OT till 12:30am

Talking to The Daily Star, senior AL eader Abdur Razzak came down heavily on the coalition government for not bringing to book the people behind repeated bomb and grenade attacks.

"The government's indifference to these incidents encouraged the perpetrators to carry out more attacks. How many more deaths it (government) wants to see to move to take action?" the former water

resources minister asked. "They (government) have no right to stay in power anymore because their attitude proves best that they had hands in the incidents," he said.

Insurgents

FROM PAGE 12 Ramadi, west of Baghdad, left one

In Mahmudiyah, a Sunni town in the Triangle of Death south of Baghdad, a roadside bomb exploded as another Iraqi military convoy passed local people selling

cattle on a main road. A doctor at the main Mahmudiyah hospital said five people had been killed and 15 wounded, including four soldiers.

Govt slated for sitting Kibria, 4 AL men Moratorium on Jatra

FROM PAGE 12 Following the latest price hike of diesel that made irrigation costlier, the agriculture ministry had sought Tk 381 crore as subsidy for diesel but the finance ministry have not yet released the money, sources said.

Besides, the government is yet to channel the Tk 271 crore subsidy for fertiliser to the farmers. Officials of the agriculture ministry however told yesterday's meeting that necessary steps have been taken in this regard.

In a recent development, the finance ministry has agreed in principle to give subsidy for diesel but it asked the agriculture ministry to inform the finance ministry about the mechanism of reaching the subsidy to the farmers. The parliamentary body yester-

day asked the ministry to finalise the

mechanism in seven days and sub-mit a report to the committee and the finance ministry. The parliamentary body will then pursue the matter and review the situation. "We are also thinking about how the subsidy could be provided for the farmers. In absence of a proper mechanism, the middlemen may

told reporters after the meeting. The government has targeted boro cultivation on 40,20,000 hectares this season that would need about 12 lakh tonnes of diesel to run the irrigation pumps. Thirty percent of the diesel will be needed in

take the benefit depriving the farm-

ers," committee member GM Quader

February, 25 percent in March and 20

If the government decides to give the farmers diesel at subsidised rate, the farmers will get low-cost irriga-tion facilities as 85 percent of the irrigation pumps are run by diesel.

Economists are in favour of the agriculture ministry proposal for subsidy. They say irrigation costs must be lowered for upcoming boro crops and the farmers can offset the aman crop losses through massive production of boro.

Members of the parliamentary body also said irrigation cost is much higher in Bangladesh than that of any other country in the region.

They also discussed the high

prices of fertiliser and asked the ministry to provide the subsidy immediately so that the farmers can buyfertiliseratlowerprices.
"Farmers are facing a serious

crisis due to high prices of fertiliser,' committee member and Awami League lawmaker Dr Abdur Razzak

When the committee members asked the agriculture minister and ministry officials about the possible mechanism of providing fertiliser subsidy, they said that a national steering committee headed by the state minister for agriculture would determine the mechanism.

Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, the state minister, was however absent at

Meghna devouring Bhola

FROM PAGE 12 idea as that would significantly cut the cost and at the same time make the structure more durable.

The latest IWM report too recommends construction of bank revetment with geo-bag and CCB all along the vulnerable bank-line.

While the government attempts to minimise the erosion prove futile, the river has eaten up miles of farmland on the eastern part of Bhola and affected a part of the north changing the shape of the island. Some 15 densely populated unions have completely and many others partially disappeared in the Meghna.

Besides the river has eroded the coastal steamer jetty at Chaikirghat (Barisal), once widely used for the Chittagong-Chandpur water route, the launch jetty for the Dawlatkhan-Alexander route and many markets including Radaballab, Saiberhat, Talukdarhat, Talpata, Kajol Mian Hat, Saraigai and Chairman Hat The worst affected villages

include Tulatuli, Shibpur, Dhoinna, Bangachar, Nadir Mazhi and Elisha unions under the sadar thana, Saidpur, Madanpur and Kaliya unions under Dawlotkhan thana, Mirzakalu and Hakimuddi under Borhanuddin thana, Mongalsikdar, Lord Hardinz, Gurinda, Keyamullah and Char Piarimohan under Lalmohan thana, main Taiumuddin thana and Char Neuton, Hamidpur, Kangaliganj, Keramatgonj and Baribhanga under the Charfasion

The Shahbazpur gas field, one of the major gas fields in the country, is only a kilometre away from the

Meghna river, the local sources said. Losing farmlands, homes, cattle, and other belongings thousands of people are now living a miserable

Witness account

FROM PAGE 1

splinters." "I found all who were accompanying Sir (Kibria) lying in a pool of blood. I've never seen so much of blood in mylife," he said. "We've seen the photographs of the grenade attacks on Bangabandhu Avenue and it was not different from that," he

added. Anup and other witnesses who took Kibria and two others --Habiganj district AL General Secretary (GS) advocate Abu Jahid and upazila AL Organising Secretary Abdulah Sarder -- to the capital said they did not see who threw the gre-

"It was a planned killing and I've no doubt the killers were profession-als," said Abdur Rashid Talukder

Iqbal, GS of AL Sadar upazila unit. Another witness, Shajahan, finance secretary of Habiganj district BCL, told The Daily Star that they did not imagine any such attack in even

"The grenade thrashed Sir's left leg and the splinters cut his whole body. He was bleeding profusely, we failed to stop it," he said.

"After the attack, we could manage only one ambulance although many were lying seriously injured. We took Sir, Zahid and Abdullah in the ambulance and got another ambulanceat Madhabpur, "he said. PLANNED ELECTRICITY CUT? Witnesses said electricity went out

just after the meeting ended. "The meeting venue plunged into darkness with a sudden power cut just before the attack," Anup Kumar Dey, district AL office secretary, said.

"We had nothing to doubt when electricity suddenly went out. But then we heard the blasts and the electricity returned in a few seconds," said Anup. 'We're sure it was the killers who

deliberately cut the power supply," ADB okays

mid July to collect key information and liaise with other development partners. After the joint needs assessment mission in September, the government asked the ADB and the World Bank to finance \$250 million each for emergency rehabilitation of damaged infrastructure.

Rahmat Ali once had about 10 acres of land by the side of the river. This would provide him food and shelter. But six months ago, the river took away everything he owned. He with his family now lives in a tent on the temporary embankment of

"We have no other land on which to build a house and we are bound to live a refugee's life," says 40-year-old Amena Begum, who too has lost her house. She with seven other family members now seeks to live at the mercy of relatives and neighbours. 'It's impossible to stop the ero-

sion without having an embank-

ment built with CCB on the eastern

side of the district," said Kiron, chairman of Bhola Municipality. Lately the water resources minis-try has tabled a Tk 85 crore proposal to set up a permanent embankment inclusive of road infrastructure. It now waits for the Planning Commission to forward it to the Executive Committee for National Economic Council's (Ecnec)

executive engineer of the Bhola District Water Development Board. December is the perfect month to begin the project. But delay in the approval of the project might eventually lead to the work being taken up during the rainy season. "We will need at least two months for the preparation of the project," Akon

approval, said Abdur Rahman Akon,

Back in 1992-93, a WDB project failed due to lack of funds. Soon afterwards, another project funded by the Netherlands government failed as the embankment was built during the rainy season. In 1997-98, the WDB pushed a pilot project to save a few areasbut it did not con-

Top criminal

FROM PAGE 12 returned fire, said the superinten-dent of police of Jhenidah.

Asad attempted to flee the police van but was killed in the shootout that continued for about half an

hour, police claimed. Assistant Sub-inspector Tahajuddin and constables Mansur Ali, Abdul Malek and Ariful Islam were wounded in the croosfire. A gun and three bullets were seized from the spot, police added.

NY TIMES REPORT

Govt looking for local aides to reporter

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government is looking for local sources, who assisted the New York Times journalist Eliza Griswold for her report titled 'The Next Islamist Revolution?' published in the NYT magazine Sunday.

Intelligence agencies have already been assigned to trace the sources in and outside of Dhaka. The wanted include those who worked for the NYT reporter and gave her interviews and information, said

The government refuted the "baseless, partial and misleading" report that Bangladesh is becoming safest place for Islamist militants and raising fundamentalism and said it will not be able to destroy the country's image.

The sources said the report angered the government so much that it has assigned intelligence officials to identify its local sources. "We're looking for the report's sources who provided information

and gave interviews to the US jour-

nalist," said an intelligence source. ernment) have started to aim at the To make a list of suspects, intellisenior leaders. gence officials are tracking past records of those who helped foreign Hinting at Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, the opposition chief wondered as to 'how much blood journalists earlier, he added. The intelligence men are trying would it take to fulfil the lust of the to track down those who were mother and the son.' arrested in November 2002 for

She said there hardly any sense of helping two foreign journalists of British television Channel Four. The security prevail among the people under the coalition regime and agencies are also examining their past records including those of journalist Saleem Samad, who was alleged that many opposition activists could not even visit their own constituencies in last three years because of political persecution.

FROM PAGE 1 the rights of some 10 lakh people

least 15 other establishments, vanda-lising some of them, in the northeast-

ern district town, 15km off the spot.

Additional police forces were

called in to quell the tense situation prevailing in the district.

Habiganj Superintendent of Police Abu Musa Fakhrul Islam said

primarily they were suspecting it to be a grenade attack. But an investiga-

tion could confirm whether those

Wednesday on an organisational tour. His elder brother Shah Shamsul

Huda and nephew Shah Manjurul

Huda accompanied him.

He spoke as the chief guest at the meeting organised by Laskarpur Union unit of AL.

The namaj-e-janaza of the late AL leader will be held today after Juma prayers at the Baitul Mukarram

National Mosque, A decision on his burial will be taken on arrival of his

Witnesses said the first grenade was hurled at the end of the rally at

Boidder Bazar Primary School play-

ground when Kibria was about to

board his car after speaking at the

said the grenade was hurled at Kibria

at about 7:05pm. "It was a close call," he said as Kibria sustained serious

Pourashava Shahid Uddin

Chowdhury, a witness to the grisly incident, told newsmen later that

when leaders were getting down from the dais after the meeting, the

first grenade was thrown at them and

then the second one came when they

Hit by splinters, the former finance minister and others fell to the

ground. Kibria became unconscious

sustaining injuries on different parts

of his body with his two legs fatally

Sadar Hospital where resident medi-cal officer Dr Abdullah gave primary

treatment to an unconscious Kibria

After consultation with party

President Sheikh Hasina, local lead-

ers decided to send him to Dhaka by

an ambulance as they failed to man-

Secretary Alamgir, Organising Secretary Rajan Chowdhury and

General Secretary of district Awami

Ainjibi Parishad advocate Abdul

Ahad Faruq were also reported criti-cal. They along with scores of other wounded AL leaders and workers

were admitted to Habiganj Sadar

At Habiganj Sadar Hospital, where 37 people with splinter injuries were

rushed in, was overcrowded with the

friends and relations of the victims. Relatives alleged of lack of proper treatment and absence of doctors at

Hearing the news, AL's student, youth and volunteer wings --Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL),

Jubo league and Swechchhasebak

League -- took out a joint protest

procession from the party central office on Bangabandhu Avenue in

the avenue. Swechchhasebak League General Secretary Pankaj Debnath,

Dhaka City AL Joint Secretary Hazi

Selim and BCL President Liakat

Sikder addressed the rally, with Jubo

League Chairman Jahangir Kabir

of AL working committee, the oppo-sition party called for a hartal tomor-

row and accused the BNP-Jamaat

The meeting, chaired by AL chief Sheikh Hasina, deplored the grenade

attack and said it was pre-planned to

The main opposition party lead-ers said the attack on Habiganj public

meeting was part of a blueprint to kill

The August 21 grenade attack in

Dhaka and yesterday's one at Habiganj proved that there was no security of life of the opposition

leaders, activists and the people in

tions in the capital this afternoon.

The party also sent a delegation led by opposition Chief Whip Abdus Shahid from Dhaka to visit the place

Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB), Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal (BSD) and Jatiya Party (Manju)

condemned the grenade attack and

Tearful Hasina

and another blast at Mohila AL meeting, she said that none of the

masterminds behind those attacks

She announced demonstration

programmes across the country for

today, a daylong hartal across the

country for tomorrow. She said a

series of programmes would follow

and others, Hasina sobbed as she

recalled the memories with her

former political advisor. She

described Kibria as polite and a person of international stature.

to get united and intensify the move-

three years the government had

killed many grass-roots level oppo-sition workers and now they (gov-

ment till the fall of the government.

She called upon the countrymen

AL president said that in last

Shocked at the death of Kibria

was brought to justice.

Saturday's hartal.

killing of Kibria and three others

The AL will also stage demonstra-

general, they said.

of occurrence.

annihilate the political adversaries.

At last night's emergency meeting

The protestors later held a rally on

The conditions of district AL Joint

He was first rushed to Habiganj

wounded.

age a helicopter.

PROTESTS

Nanak in the chair.

government for the attack.

Former chairman of Habigan

injuries all over his body.

District AL Joint Secretary Alamgir

son from abroad.

THEATTACKS

Kibria went to Habiganj on

were grenades, he added.

involved in the Jatra industry. "This is not a logical solution. The government is prohibiting us instead of addressing the real issue

[by arresting the people responsible for the bomb attacks]," he added. Excepting a few amendments the security measures for the 13th South Asian Association for

Regional Co-operation Summit rescheduled for February 6-7 will remain the same as decided before the Tsunami. The Saarc summit was originally scheduled for January 9 to 11 but was deferred on December 30 con-

sidering the devastation of the December 26 Tsunami in three Saarc The inaugural ceremony of the summit will be held at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre on February and the concluding session at the International Conference Centre at

the Prime Minister's Office on February 7. The Special Security Force (SSF) tasked to co-ordinate the security orces during the summit will ensure the security of the VVIPs and all the

eight summit venues. Law enforcers already have begun raids in and outside the capital and Rab (Rapid Action Battalion) men have started patrolling in and around Dhaka Sheraton Hotel and Hotel Sonargaon where some of the foreign delegates will stay. CCTV (close circuit television) cameras and scanners will also be

installed in those hotels. The home ministry has also ordered to boost up operations to arrest listed criminals across the country to check criminal activities during the summit.

Paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) will tighten security along the porder and intensify border patrol, especially in Chouddogram, Feni Chittagong, Panchagarh and Thajurgaon. The superintendents of police

(SPs) in all the districts will also remain on high alert to safeguard the countrywide security parapet. The home ministry has also ordered to increase raids in Dhaka metropolitan area to arrest listed criminals and tasked the Special Branch of Police to monitor the

About 11,000 trained policemen will be brought into the capital from outside to beef up the police strength and about 20,000 security men will be posted in the city as part of the foolproof security for the regional leaders, sources said.

manned by 10 law enforcers, will be set up at the strategic points in the city including all the entry and exit Law enforcers will soon begin searches at all bus and launch terminals and railway stations and special police forces Cheetah. Kobra and Rab will start patrolling in the capital

A total of 35 checkpoints, each

from January 31.

Apart from the SSF, police, Rab, Cheetah and Kobra, all intelligence agencies and some of the defence forces will also be involved in the security operation. Meanwhile, an advance team from India is now in the capital to

see the security and other arrange-

ments for the summit, sources said.

milar teams had come from other

Saarc countries before the postponement of the summit due to the Tsunami catastrophe. TRAFFIC CONTROL The Dhaka Sheraton Hotel-Kakrail Mosque section of the VIP Road will

be kept offlimits to heavy vehicles from 7:00am on February 5 to 7:00pm on February 7. The road section will be totally off-limits to vehicles when Saarc leaders and other summit guests will

move along it. Security will also be intensified at

the National Memorial at Savar and former president Ziaur Rahman's grave at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar during

the guests' visit there on February SECURITYATZIA The Zia International Airport (ZIA) will be put on Orange security alert on February 4 and 5, during the

arrival of Saarc leaders, ministers and other dignitaries, followed by a Yellow alert on February 6, the first day of the summit. The Orange alert will resume again on February 7 and 8 to cover the departure of the visiting digni-

Entry was restricted and baggag and check-ins closely monitored at ZIA that was put under the Yellow alert from yesterday.

To prevent unwanted crowd at the airport, the home ministry yesterday decided to propose the civil aviation and the religious affairs ministries to take the returning hajj pilgrims after their arrival at the airport straight to the haji camp at Ashkona in Uttara. SECURITYSATISFACTORY

Following a meeting on Saarc summit security at the home ministry yesterday, State Minister Babar expressed satisfaction at the security measures. "We apprehend no threat to the summit. We have taken all-out

security measures," he said. The home secretary, acting foreign secretary, director general of BDR and heads of the security and intelligence agencies were present

at the meeting.
"We have discussed the security
measures taken so far and found those very satisfactory," Babar said. He brushed aside Bangla Bhai

and his outfit Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh as security threats and said, "We don't take him [Bangla Bhail as a threat to security at all." On apprehension of sabotage or suicidal attack by relatives of the outlaws killed in law enforcers' operations, Babar said: "We have taken into consideration all possible and anticipated threats and have taken special measures accord-

However he refused to disclose the measures. Traffic will be diverted from some routes in the capital and the government will make prior announce ments. "Public life will not be ham pered," he added.

SAARCPREPARATION

WRAPPINGUP On the sidelines of the Saarc summit, a conference of the South Asian Free Media Association (Safma) will take place on February 4 and 5 in Dhaka, the foreign ministry announced yesterday.

Most of the paper work prepara-tory to the summit is completed and the focus is now on to nitty gritty of the ground preparation foreign ministry spokesman rul Haque told reporters yester

As a part of the ground pre tions, Foreign Minister M Mo. Khan and foreign ministry ad Reaz Rahman visited the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre yesterday to check on the rehearsals for the inaugural ceremony. The Pakistani High Commission

meanwhile informed the foreign ministry yesterday that, besides the foreign minister and the prime minister, three other Pakistani ministers would also be part of the Pakistan's delegation to the summit. The three are Information Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed, Ports and Shipping Minister Babar Khan Ghauri and Social Welfare and Special Education Minister Zubaida

The three ministers are scheduled to contribute in the summit discussions as well as holding bilateral meetings with their Saarc coun-

Probe body blames

different points in Tengratila area. But we are not ruling out internal

mental damage, he said. An expert team of the environment ministry is assessing the extent of environmental damage

will pay for such damage," the committee member pointed out.
"We are still preparing our final report containing our findings and recommendations. But it's beyond our doubt that Niko had taken

target of reaching 1,700 metres. Sources had earlier told The Daily Star that the company did not take proper safety measures and it went on drilling up to 800 metres through the well that had only 300 metres of concrete casing. In case of the Magurchhara blowout, US company Occidental had also resorted to similar faulty operation with smaller

Thousands of people around the field had to leave their homes and they are still living outside their houses in utter miseries.

to work with similar risky casing. But it used heavy mudding to control the pressure and thus reduced the risks. But Niko did not go for heavy mudding while using such an old method. And this is wrong," said

terparts, especially those of

Tengratila to start drilling a relief well to seal the damaged gas well and ensure safety of the locality. Following the disaster, the government on January 9 formed a sixmember committee headed by Additional Secretary of the energy

ministry Ehsanul Fattah to investigate the blowout. Members of the committee included Petrobangla Chairman SR Osmani, Strategic Policy Expert of Hydrocarbon Unit Moinul Huq, Managing Director of Sylhet Gas Field Rahman Morshed, and repre-

sentatives of the environment ministry and Sunamganj district administration. The committee was earlier scheduled to submit its report by

January 20. The government later changed the deadline to January 30 and put another member on the committee from the BUET. Niko had committed to invest

Niko was given this field although it was ring-fenced for future operation of Petrobangla, and US company Unocal had the right to get the call for exploration first as it operates in that area. Niko was

\$15 million in the gas field.

block bidding in 1997. Previously, US company Occidental was found responsible for the Magurchhara blow out but the company was allowed to sell out its concerns to Unocal and leave Bangladesh in 1999 following an extension of its PSC through a sup-

found disqualified by Petrobangla's

evaluation in the second round

Petrobangla demanded \$685 million in damages from Unocal in

plementary contract.

another probe committee member. Niko has now installed a rig in

damage, " said a committee mem-Niko Resources will have to pay for the gas loss as well as environ-

"The joint venture contract between Niko and Bapex that allowed Niko to work in Tengratila gas field provides that the company

excessive risk while drilling the Tengratila well," he said. Niko started drilling in this aban-doned field in December last with a

concrete casing. In the evening of January 7, Niko operators first sensed volatile gas pressure when they drilled up to 800 metres. They tried to control the pressure but by next morning, there was an internal explosion in the gas field causing a fire with the flames leaping about 300 feet.

"Decades ago, Petrobangla used

2002 but Unocal is yet to pay anything. Instead, it claimed that the compensation has been "paid" through the supplementary contract. Petrobangla estimates say the field had a gas reserve of over 245 billion cubic feet.