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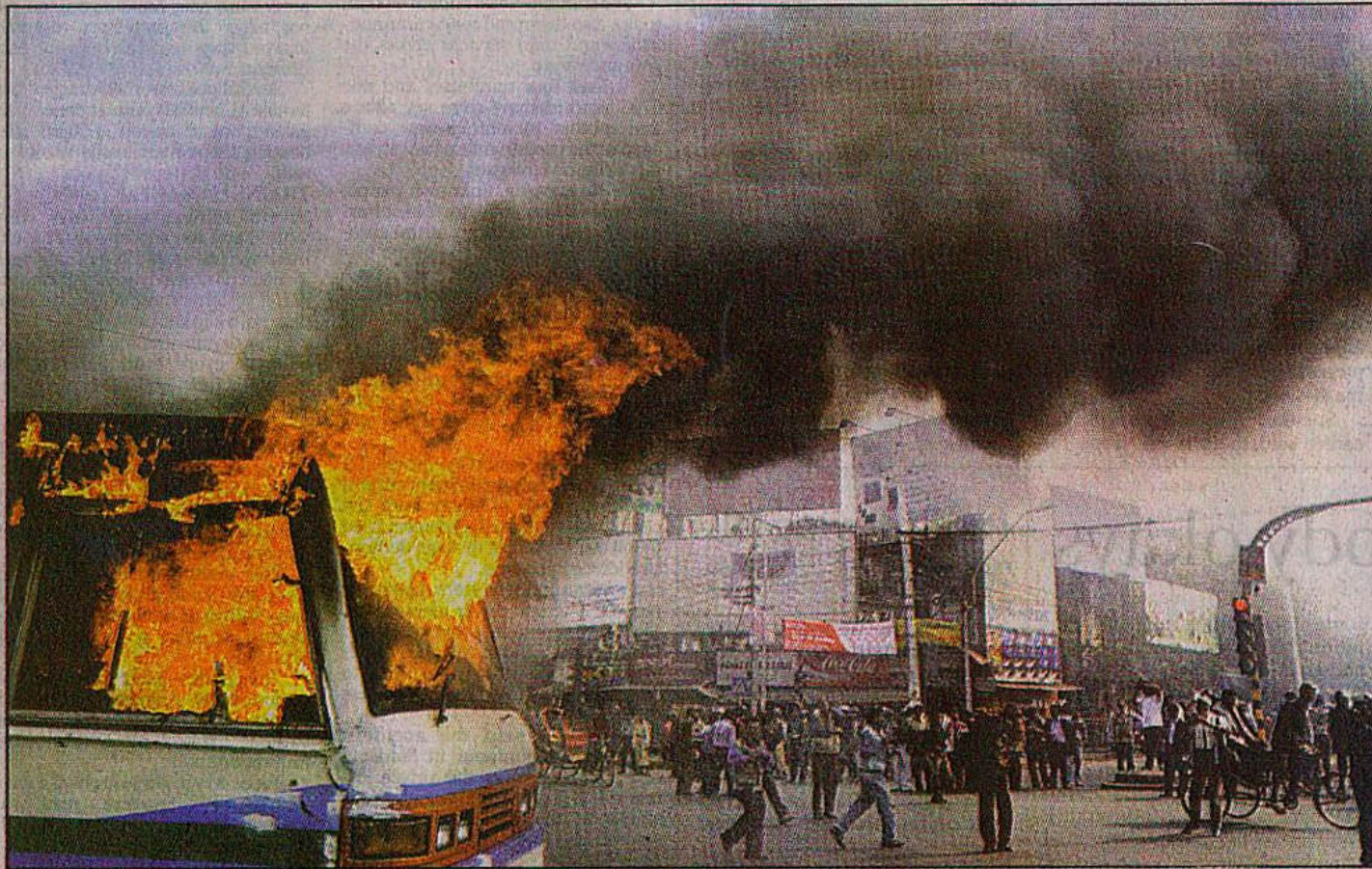
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Pickets make a bonfire of a bus at Paltan crossroads in the capital yesterday, the second day of the 60-hour non-stop countrywide shutdown enforced by the Awami League-led opposition line-up protesting Thursday's gruesome grenade attack in Boidder Bazar, Habiganj.

# Suicide attacks mark Iraq polls

GI, 35 Iraqis killed, 72 percent turnout claimed

AP, REUTERS, Baghdad

Iraqis danced and clapped with joy yesterday as they voted in their country's first free election in a half-century, defying insurgents who launched deadly suicide bombings and mortar strikes at polling stations. The attacks killed 36 people, including a US soldier, four policemen and two Iraqi soldiers.

An Iraqi election official said that 72 percent of eligible Iraqi voters had turned out so far nationwide. The official, Adel al-Lami of the Independent Electoral Commission, offered no overall figures of the actual number of Iraqis who have voted to back up the claim.

After a slow start, men and women in flowing black abayas often holding babies formed long lines, although there were pockets of

Iraq where the streets and polling stations were deserted. Voters prohibited from using private cars walked, hitched rides on military buses and trucks, and some even carried the elderly in their arms, as officials said turnout appeared higher than expected.

Casting his vote, Interim Prime Minister Ayad Allawi called it "the first time the Iraqis will determine their destiny."

Turnout was brisk in Shia Muslim and mixed Shia-Sunni neighborhoods. Even in the small town of Askan in the so-called "triangle of death" south of Baghdad, 20 people waited in line at each of several polling centers. More walked toward the polls.

"This is democracy," said Karfia Abbas, holding up a thumb stained with purple ink to prove she had voted. Rumors of impending violence

were rife. When an unexplained boom sounded near one Baghdad voting station, some women put their hands to their mouths and whispered prayers.

In Ramadi, US troops coaxed voters with loudspeakers, preaching the importance of every ballot.

Security was tight. About 300,000 Iraqi and American troops were on the streets and on standby to protect voters.

Private cars were mostly banned from the streets.

Final results of the election will not be known for seven to 10 days.

A suicide bomber blew himself up at a polling station in western Baghdad, killing himself, three policemen and a civilian.

In a second suicide attack at a polling station, a bomber blew up himself, one policeman and two Iraqi soldiers. In a third suicide attack at a school in western

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## Aussie Open goes to Safin

REUTERS, Melbourne

Russia's Marat Safin wore down Lleyton Hewitt 1-6, 6-3, 6-4, 6-4 to win the centenary Australian Open on Sunday.

The victory earned Safin his second Grand Slam title and ruined Hewitt's dream of winning his national championship.

Safin lost the opening set and trailed Hewitt 4-1 in the third before he suddenly took control of the match, winning 11 of the last 15 games to seal victory.

## Panic driving kills 3 including Rab man, injures 30

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Nervous driving killed a Rab (Rapid Action Battalion) warrant officer and two garment workers, besides injuring 30 others at Zia International Airport (ZIA) roundabout last night.

Twenty-eight of the injured and the two workers killed, aged about 34 and 20, have been identified as staff of Liz Apparel Limited at Kumia in Gazipur.

The other two wounded in the mishap are Rab Corporal Mahbub

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## Manmohan expresses sorrow at death of Kibria

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has expressed profound sorrow at the death of former finance minister Shah AMS Kibria MP and his nephew Shah Manjurul Huda in grenade attack on an Awami League rally in Habiganj on Thursday.

In a condolence message to Kibria's wife Asma Kibria yesterday, Manmohan said Kibria was an eminent public servant whose contributions to the development of

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## PAY COMMISSION Saifur for staggered execution

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government is likely to implement the Pay Commission recommendations in different instalments, hinted Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday.

"We've recommended zero to 90 percent increase in the government basic pay," said Pay Commission Chairman Mujibur Haq who met the finance minister along with the commission member secretary yesterday.

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## HARTAL Poor victim of arson, bomb attacks

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Innocent and poor working people are falling victim to arson attacks on public transport and bomb blasts during the hartal hours.

In the first two days of the 60-hour hartal enforced by the Awami League and its left-leaning allies, one rickshawpuller was killed and at least seven others were injured.

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# 3 outlaws killed in 'crossfire'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Three top cadres of outlawed Janajuddho faction of Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP-MI) were killed in two incidents of 'shootout' with police and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) in Chuadanga early yesterday.

Two Janajuddho cadres were killed in reported 'shootout' with Rab men at village Nilmaniganj in Alamdanga upazila, while another cadre of the outfit was killed in 'crossfire' with police at village Singhoria in Sadar upazila.

A joint team of Rab and police arrested Janajuddho cadres Hasibul Alam and Ekramul Haq Santoo from the Fantasy Kingdom area of Savar on Thursday night.

Both were brought to Chuadanga

where a joint interrogation cell of Rab and police quizzed them.

Rab men went to the village Nilmaniganj with the two to seize hidden firearms following their statement, Rab sources said.

Janajuddho men ambushed their microbus when they reached Nilmaniganj with the two criminals at about 3:30 am, prompting them to retaliate.

Hasibul and Ekramul tried to escape from the microbus, were caught in the 'line of fire' and died on the spot, Rab said.

Rab retrieved two shutter guns and five bullets from the spot.

The bodies were sent to Chuadanga Sadar Hospital for autopsy.

Hasibul was an accused in 24 cases including 15 for murders,

while Ekramul in 28 cases including 21 for murders filed with different police stations in Chuadanga, Meherpur and Jhenidah districts, police said.

Both had fled from Chuadanga after Rab launched its drive several months ago.

Kushtia police arrested Idrish Ali, another listed criminal and also a top Janajuddho cadre from the Islamic University area on Thursday night.

Idrish, son of Manir Uddin hailing from village Kutubpur in Sadar upazila, was an absconding accused in several murder cases, police said.

The criminal was handed over to the Chuadanga Sadar police on Friday.

During interrogation, Idrish

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## Kibria's son wants free international investigation

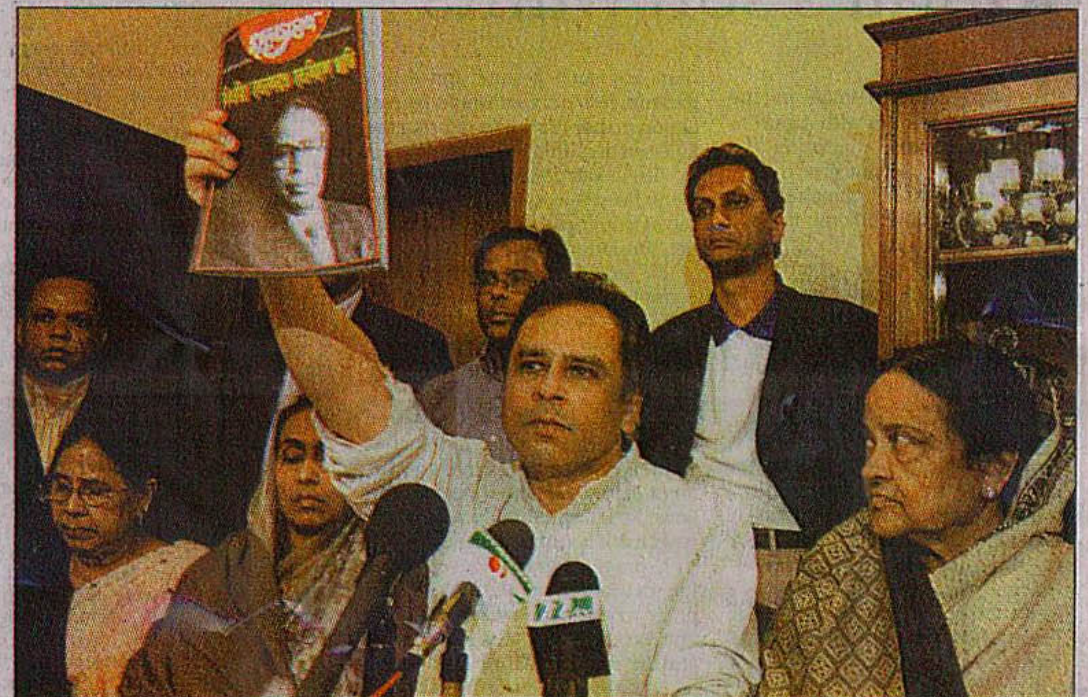
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dr Reza Kibria, son of the slain former finance minister Shah AMS Kibria, yesterday reiterated his call for an international independent investigation into the killing of his father without any government interference.

"Any such investigation should be genuinely independent with no participation by any government agency in its management or supervision. The government should cooperate when requested, and any report should be made available in its entirety to the public," Dr Kibria told reporters at his residence.

"We have no confidence in a government-supervised 'joint' investigation," he said, adding,

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Reza Kibria shows a copy of the January 31 issue of Mridubhashan, the weekly his slain father Shah AMS Kibria used to own and edit, at a press conference in the city yesterday, with his mother Asma Kibria on his left.

## Next week may see another hartal spell

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The main opposition Awami League (AL) is considering declaring another marathon hartal next week, determined to stage continuous and tougher agitation against the assassination of its lawmaker Shah AMS Kibria, sources said.

The AL senior leaders yesterday at a meeting with Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina discussed fresh programmes, as the non-stop 60-hour hartal ends at 6:00pm today.

AL lawmakers at the meeting agreed in principle to enforce another three-day hartal to bring momentum in the ongoing movement involving

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## JS body worried about grenade attack trend

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A parliamentary body yesterday reiterated its concern over frequent grenade attacks across the country and described the trend as a threat to national security.

The parliamentary standing committee on the defence ministry yesterday condemned the January 27 grenade blasts that killed Awami League lawmaker Shah AMS Kibria and four others. The committee asked the government to identify those responsible for the grisly

crime. "We are worried about frequent grenade attacks. We once again ask the government to nab the criminals to ensure national security," Committee Chairman former army chief Mahabubur Rahman told reporters after the meeting at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban.

Earlier after the August 21 grenade attack on an AL rally in Dhaka, the parliamentary committee had expressed its worry about such incidents and asked the government

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## BNP accuses AL of cashing in on Kibria's death to create crisis

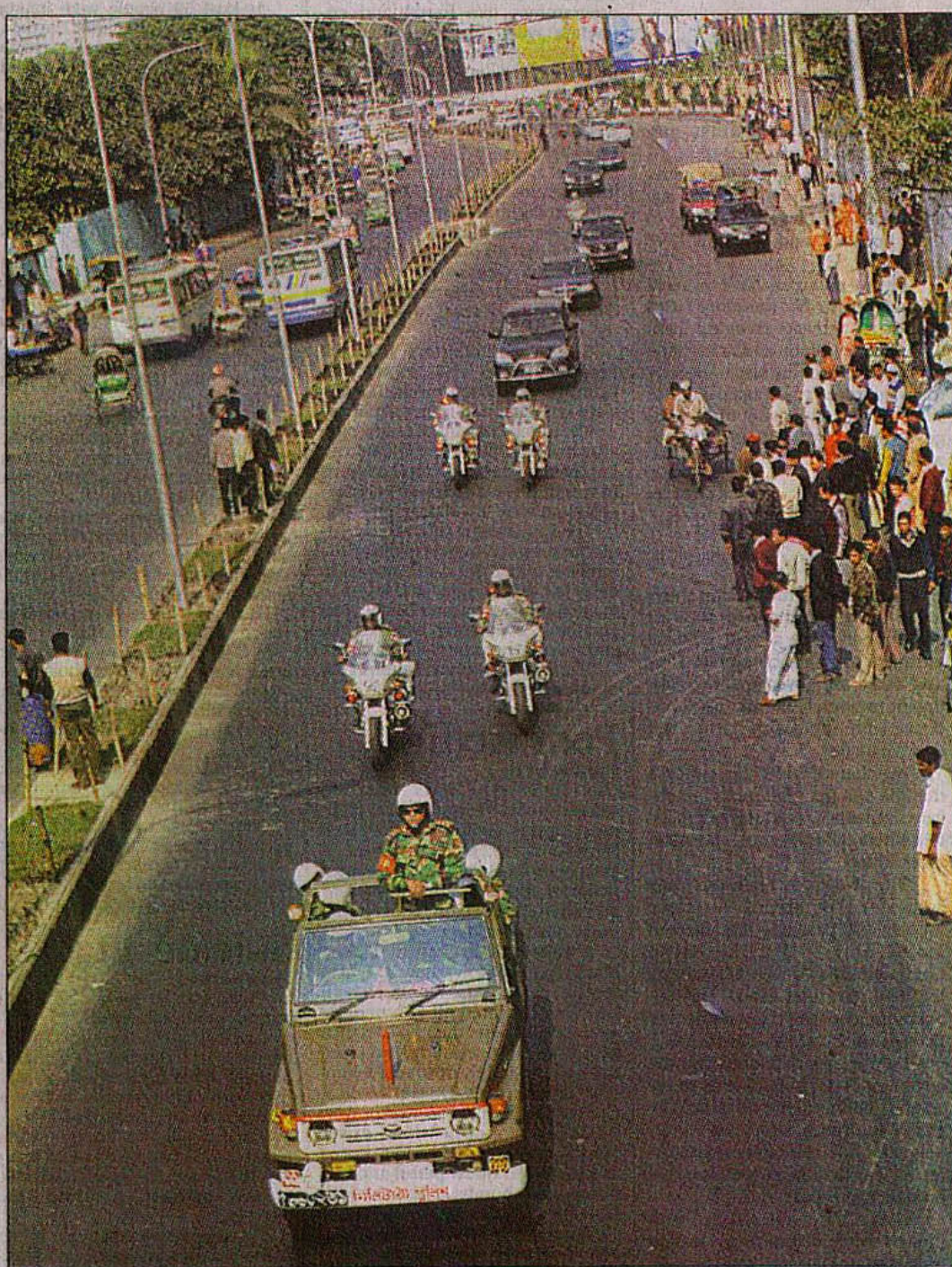
UNB, Dhaka

The ruling alliance leader BNP yesterday blamed Awami League for trying to create a political crisis in the country, capitalising on the assassination of former finance minister Shah AMS Kibria.

In a statement, BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan alleged AL leaders are trying to destabilise the present situation by misleading people by 'irresponsible' statements at a time when a sensible stand is expected from all sides against the backdrop of the killing.

"By enforcing a three-day non-stop hartal, the opposition party has only inflicted sufferings on people. The hartal has also caused trouble to

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Army troops yesterday carry out a security drill on VIP Road near Dhaka Sheraton Hotel, where a section of the participants of the 13th Saarc Summit slated to begin on February 7 will stay.

## BTRC top posts fall vacant today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Top posts at the Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulatory Commission's (BTRC) fall vacant today as the government did neither appoint new chairman and commissioners nor renewed the earlier contracts.

The chairman and the commissioners of the telecoms watchdog were appointed on January 31, 2002 on a three-year contract that expired yesterday, sources said.

BTRC Chairman Syed Marghubur Murshed, who did his last office yesterday, went to the Prime Minister's Office for a courtesy call.

"It was indeed a privilege to work for the commission and our success and achievements were considerable," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

The government has initiated the

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

## Cabinet body okays controversial telecoms deal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Cabinet Purchase Committee yesterday approved a controversial \$9.40 million deal with a Chinese company to provide telecommunications equipment on supplier's credit.

The committee at yesterday's meeting also deferred approval for the proposal of the project to install the Cox's Bazar-Chittagong Optical Fibre Link. The project if implemented would require the Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTB) to pay Tk 47 crore to Siemens. BTB controversially picked the German company, the highest bidder, instead of Nortel that offered Tk 30 crore for the same job.

Sources said that the committee, however, did not reject the pricey

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Prayer Timing		
January 31		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-35	6-10
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-15	4-30
Maghrib	5-46	5-50
Esha	7-15	7-45

Source: Islamic Foundation

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