

## Hartals strike exports

SYED ASHFAQUL HAQUE

The business community braces for an ominous blow as the opposition parties yesterday called for yet another three-day dawn-to-dusk hartal in Chittagong for February 7, 8 and 9.

The fresh 3-day hartal call in the port city is destined to put exports and imports on the verge of collapse as two hartal series kept the industry wheels to a grinding halt for eight days in the last 10 days.

The ready-made garment exporters were the worst hit for the hartal, called first for January 29, 30 and 31 on a trot after former finance minister and Awami League (AL) leader SAMS Kibria was killed in a grenade attack in Habiganj on Jan 27.

The knit garment industries, in the middle of the peak season, could not actually take off after the Eid holidays for which 10 production days went down the drain.

"I have to export knit goods worth

about \$162,000 by February 11. If I can't reach the goods to Chittagong Port by the 10th, my container will not be loaded on the feeder vessel scheduled to depart on the Feb 11," moaned Sayed Azharul Haque, managing director of the Century Design and Fashion in Mirpur, yesterday.

"My buyer has warned me of air shipment if I fail to catch the February 11 feeder vessel," he said. "Now tell me, what's our fault?"

Annisul Haq, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), himself kept his fingers crossed for a miracle as his 16 truck-load of goods were supposed to head to the Chittagong Port tonight.

"The goods are ready and yet cannot be sent. And the vessel through which I am supposed to ship those goods is leaving the port tomorrow (Sunday)," he told The Daily Star last night.

"I've sent a letter to the leader of the AL Sheikh Hasina conveying our

sympathy about the killing of Kibria. But at the same time, I mentioned how terribly the RMG sector is being affected with this series of hartals in the quota-free regime," he added.

The RMG buyers have already become all too concerned about the future of their products, which they plan to sell in March and April.

"Our buyers are very, very worried already. If this situation continues, I'm afraid, despite our sympathy for our suppliers, the buyers might start to ask for air shipment," Andrea Frattini, the business development manager of an Italian buying company in Dhaka, told the newspaper.

"We are totally helpless under this situation. Our interests are suffering a lot right now. If this is the case, I don't know how Bangladesh can survive in the world apparel business as some of our buyers



The main opposition Awami League lawmakers bring out a procession under police escort at Russell Square in the capital on the first day of the 36-hour hartal yesterday.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

## 3 journalists hurt in bomb blast at Khulna Press Club

UNB, Khulna

A bomb exploded in front of the press club here last night, leaving three journalists wounded.

Witnesses said Sheikh Belaluddin, staff reporter of Dainik Sangram, lost both his hands in the blast that occurred at about 9:15pm. He was rushed to Khulna Medical College and Hospital. His condition was stated to be critical.

Jugantar reporter Zahid Hossain and News Today reporter Tutul were also injured.

The bomb exploded when the journalists were standing in front of the press club to return home in a motorbike.

## Kibria family wants Saifur, Nizami to be quizzed

Says ministers may have info about the killing

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Kibria family yesterday said Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman and Industries Minister Motiur Rahman Nizami should be interrogated, as they may have information about the January 27 killing of Shah AMS Kibria.

"I'm not accusing them of killing my father, but their press statements imply they have information about the killing and so this should be investigated," said Reza Kibria, son of the slain Awami League lawmaker.

Reza quoted Nizami from newspaper reports as saying that a certain organisation killed Kibria to foil the 13th Saarc summit and Saifur terming the killing a personal affair.

"I think they [Nizami and Saifur] may have information about the incidence... They should be interrogated by the international probe teams," Kibria's son told a press briefing at their Dhanmondi house.

At the briefing, Asma Kibria, the widow of the assassinated former finance minister, who has launched a non-violent movement demanding punishment of her husband's killers, yesterday reiterated independent international probe into the murder.

Asma alleged the government is lying about inviting foreign investigation teams and said, "They didn't make any formal request to any foreign agency so far." "I want to see a copy of any such invitation," she added.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

## HABIGANJ CARNAGE

# Cops pick up BNP leader as suspect

Two more BNP men shown arrested

JULFIKAR ALI MANIK

Law enforcers yesterday detained a senior BNP leader of Habiganj district in the capital as a suspect in the January-27 grenade carnage.

Sources said, acting on information furnished by arrestees in the case, a joint team of detectives and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) picked up AKM Abdul Quaiyum, Habiganj

district BNP vice president and president of Zia Gabeshana Parishad, from his Segunbagicha home at 3.30am and took him to Habiganj.

Also on yesterday, Habiganj Sadar police showed two local BNP leaders as arrested under Section 54 of the Criminal Procedure Code and took them in 7-day remand. Law enforcers had picked one of the two

-- Lashkarpur Union BNP President Jamir Ali -- last Wednesday and the other, Jainal Abedin Momin, last Monday.

While investigators concerned refused to admit Quaiyum's detention, his wife Suraiya Afroza told The Daily Star a team of six to seven law enforcers picked him up without telling her why and where they were

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

## Hartal for Feb 7,8,9 called in Ctg

UNB, Ctg

The Awami League (AL) and its allies yesterday called for another three-day dawn-to-dusk hartal in Chittagong district on February 7, 8 & 9 (Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday) protesting what they said was police repression.

The fresh programme extending the ongoing countrywide hartal was announced after an alliance meeting in the afternoon with Mayor ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury in the chair.

Announcing the programme, Mohiuddin said garment units will remain out of the purview of the hartal and rickshaws will ply after

SEE PAGE 11 COL 8

# Over 100 injured in Hartal clashes

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Clashes between police and ruling alliance loyalists and hartal supporters in Dhaka, Kishoreganj, Mymensingh and Chittagong left more than 100 people including journalists injured on the first day of the 36-hour countrywide shutdown at the call of the main opposition Awami League (AL) and its allies.

The hartal shut most businesses, educational institutions, private offices and affected road communication, disrupting life across the country.

The shutdown also hampered cargo handling at Chittagong port. Long route vehicles did not ply but train services and flights operated normally.

In Dhaka, pro-hartal pickets damaged three vehicles and set fire to one.

Police picked up around 30 people from different parts of the capital during the hartal.

Although law enforcers barred hartal supporters from assembling on most of the city roads, demonstrators clashed with them in old Dhaka's Azimpur, Banglabazar and

Jindabaha Lane.

Police cordoned off the AL central office at Bangabandhu Avenue by putting barbed-wire fencing and did not allow anyone except some senior leaders to enter the area.

Apart from rickshaws, a good number of vehicles including minibuses, human hauliers and autorickshaws plied in the capital.

The AL, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD-Inu) and National Awami Party (NAP) called the hartal protesting the killing of former finance minister and AL lawmaker Shah AMS Kibria and four others in the January 27 grenade carnage in Habiganj, and demanding resignation of the BNP-Jamaat coalition government.

In the capital, at least 10 pro-hartal activists were injured when police charged baton and lobbed tear gas shells to disperse a procession led by former AL lawmaker Haji Selim at Azimpur at about noon, witnesses said.

The demonstrators later damaged an empty bus parked on a road.

Two of the wounded -- President of city AL's ward-66 unit Md Nasir and activist Mamun -- were admitted

to Dhaka Medical College and Hospital.

More than 15 hartal supporters were wounded as police and loyalists of the ruling alliance attacked a procession of Jagannath University College unit of AL-backed Bangladesh Chhatra League at Banglabazar crossing at about 11:00am. Hartal supporters hurled brickbats on police.

Anti-hartal elements later brought out a procession in the area.

Hartal supporters and police clashed at Jindabaha Lane as police intercepted a procession in the morning.

At Purana Paltan, pro-hartal pickets vandalised a passenger bus at about 10:00am while unidentified people set a maxi ablaze at Baridhara at about 3:00pm.

Police picked up Juba League Chairman Jahangir Kabir Nanak and General Secretary Mirza Azam MP from Mukhtangan in the morning and released them after about an hour.

Pro-hartal activists damaged an

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

## HABIGANJ ATTACK

# PM donates Tk 1 lakh for each family of 3 victims

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday donated Tk 100,000 each to the families of three farmers killed in the January 27 grenade attack on an Awami League (AL) rally at Boilder Bazar in Habiganj district.

Abul Hossain, Abdur Rahim and Siddique Ali were killed in the grenade attack, which also left former finance minister and AL leader Shah AMS Kibria dead.

Family members of the three victims, including Khudeza Khatun, wife of Abul Hossain, Achia Khatun, wife of Abdur Rahim, and Churta Banu, wife of Siddique Ali, came to the prime minister as she wanted to meet them at her office.

They were also given saris, lungis and winter clothes.

As the family members burst into tears, the prime minister consoled them and told them that "the perpetrators would be punished".

She informed them that a probe committee has been formed to find out the culprits. She also sought cooperation of all including the

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3



The Kanchpur Bridge on the river Shitalakhya remains in such a dilapidated condition with broken railings. Hundreds of vehicles cross the bridge every day risking the passengers' lives.

PHOTO: STAR

## BSF kills 1 in B'baria

UNB, B'baria

A Bangladeshi national was shot dead by the Border Security Force (BSF) of Indian, while a teenage boy was kidnapped by a gang of Indian miscreants yesterday.

Javed of Purbo Kalachhara village of Brahmanbaria fell victim to the BSF who claimed that the young man intruded into Kalautta tea garden on the Indian side with an intention to lift cattle.

As the BSF wanted to return the body, the BDR (Bangladesh Rifles) was trying until the evening to ascertain the nationality of the victim, officials said.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

## PRSP aims to keep inflation within 7.5pc for first year

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The government has targeted a 7.5 percent inflation rate for the first year of the three-year Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), up from 6.5 percent targeted earlier.

The target was revised considering the effects of last year's twin floods and the rising prices of food and fuel, sources in the Planning Ministry said.

The higher annual average rate of inflation has been targeted in the government's latest 'Alternative Macroeconomic Projections' under

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

# Rice prices spiral

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

While rice prices are spiralling upward throughout the country creating economic woes for the urban poor, the government is unlikely to start Open Market Sale (OMS) this month, sources said.

Except for pulao, the prices for all other types of rice, both in retail and wholesale markets, increased sharply in the last few days in comparison even to the fourth and third week of January, sources and traders said.

The recent spate of hartals in the short term, coupled in the long term with non-availability of trucks, trader's inability to open letters of credit (L/C), and the continued rise of the dollar price against taka have

together created an instability in the rice market not experienced in recent times, sources explained.

The government said it may start the OMS in the first week of next month after completing the collection of 2.5 lakh tonnes of rice through domestic procurement and imports.

"We are thinking of starting OMS but it will not happen immediately," said Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf, minister for food and disaster management, yesterday while talking to journalists.

When his attention was drawn to reports of soaring rice prices in the market, he said it was normal because of several relevant factors, including the recent devaluation of

local currency against the dollar, price hikes of rice in the international markets and increasing transport costs.

The minister, however, did not agree with the opinion that shortage in government stocks was the cause behind delaying OMS at this moment, and insisted the government has sufficient food stocks to face any situation.

Pressed further on the question of OMS, the minister said, "Let the price go up further, then we will decide."

According to sources, the government is not much worried about the soaring rice price because it believes

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

# 12 Iraqis, 4 US soldiers killed in Iraq violence

Insurgents issue 72-hr deadline for Italy to quit Iraq

AFP, AP, REUTERS, Baghdad

Insurgents killed four US soldiers in two separate attacks near Beiji and seven Iraqi troops in a motorcycle bomb in city of Basra and Samarra yesterday, as violence elsewhere also left another five Iraqis dead.

"The booby-trapped motorbike exploded as the patrol passed by. Four soldiers were killed and their vehicle destroyed," captain Farid al-Tamimi told AFP.

The attack took place behind the general hospital in the Hay al-Rissala neighbourhood, in the centre of Basra, which is the country's second largest city.

The four Americans were killed in two separate bombings Friday night near Beiji, 225km north of Baghdad, the US military said yesterday.

The deaths raise to 1,441 the number of US military personnel whose lives have been lost in Iraq

since Washington invaded in spring 2003.

Three other Iraqi servicemen died in two separate incidents in Samarra in the restive Sunni triangle region north of Baghdad, the Iraqi military said.

A member of the Baghdad city council, Abbas Hasan Waheed, was killed yesterday in a drive-by shooting, police said.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

## SAARC SUMMIT

# Major Indian dailies critical of Manmohan's decision

BSS, Dhaka

Some major Indian daily newspapers are critical of their government's decision not to attend the Saarc summit scheduled for February 6 and 7 in Dhaka.

Widely circulated English daily, The Indian Express, in its editorial yesterday (February 5) said, "India's decision to have the Saarc summit in Dhaka postponed seems more an

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7