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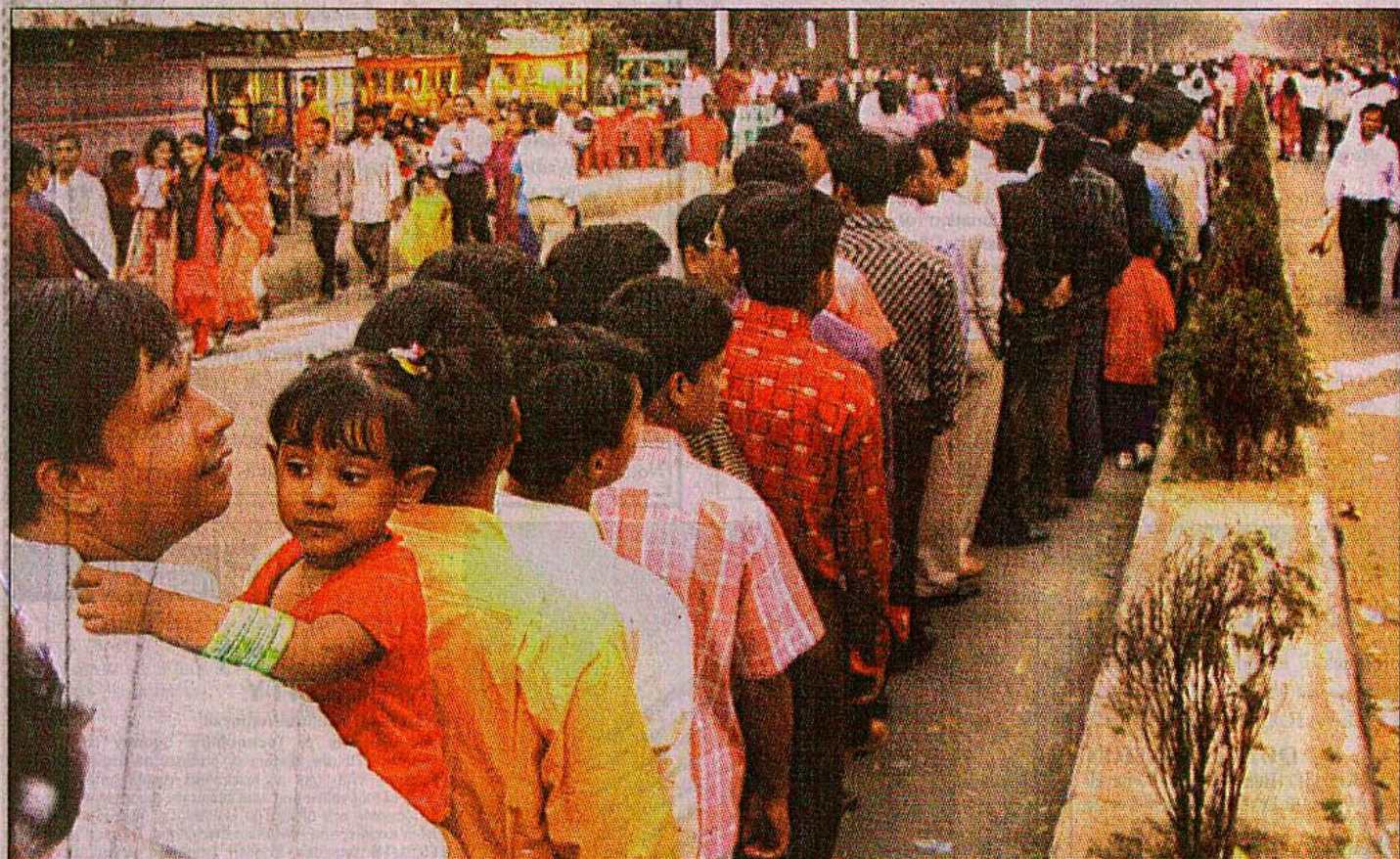
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People wait in long, agonising queues at the entrances to the Ekushey Book Fair at Bangla Academy yesterday. The lines stretched up to as far as Shahbagh to the north and Shishu Academy to the southeast, due to delays caused by law enforcers searching people as part of the stepped up security measures.

PHOTO: STAR

Journalist Belal succumbs to bomb injuries

PBCP-Maoist claims responsibility for the Feb-5 attack, police nab one

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Daily Sangram Khulna Bureau Chief Shaikh Belaluddin yesterday succumbed to the injuries sustained in the February 5 bomb attack, for which the outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP-Maoist) claimed responsibility last night.

Doctors at the Combined Military Hospital (CMH) in the capital declared the 48-year-old president of Khulna Metropolitan Union of Journalists (KMJU) dead at 11:00am yesterday.

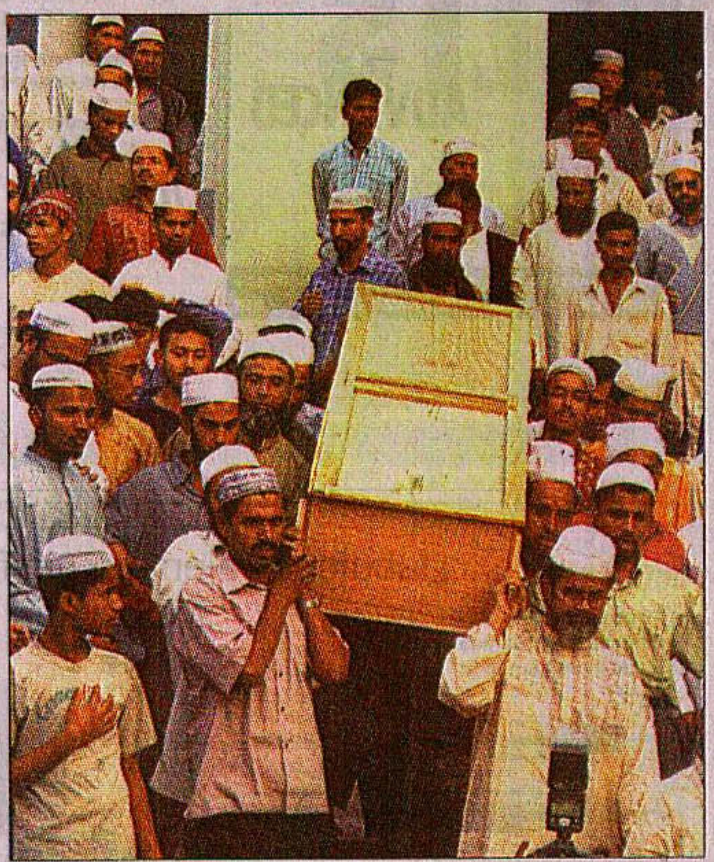
With this, the death toll of journalists in Khulna district rose to six and in the outlaw-infested southwestern region to 14 in the last 10

years.

Khulna Metropolitan Police last night arrested a man, who confessed to being involved in planting the bomb on Belal's motorbike parked on the at Khulna Press Club (KPC) premises, said Deputy Police Commissioner M Akbar Ali. However, he did not disclose the name or any further details about the identity of the arrestee.

Belal has been on life support system at the CMH intensive care unit since he was helicoptered there from Khulna Medical College and Hospital on February 6, one day after the powerful bomb had exploded on KPC premises leaving

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The coffin of slain journalist Shaikh Belaluddin being carried away from Baitul Makkarram National Mosque after a namaj-e-janaza yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

FBI man leaves assured of 'full cooperation'

Dhaka awaits next US steps

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) agent Trung Vu yesterday left Dhaka on assurance by Bangladesh government to provide full access to evidence and witnesses for FBI assistance in January 27 Habiganj carnage probe.

"The FBI's involvement in the probe now depends totally on Washington," a top police official told The Daily Star asking not to be identified, confirming Bangladesh's nod to the Washington's condition for FBI assistance.

Trung Vu, a special agent, flew in Dhaka Wednesday evening, two days after the US ambassador had

met the prime minister in response to the government's request for FBI assistance in the probe into the grenade attack on an Awami League meeting. The attack left five people including AL lawmaker and former finance minister Shah AMS Kibria killed and about 70 others injured.

The prime minister on Monday gave assurance that all cooperation to the US government would be provided if it decides to assist in the investigation, said sources.

The FBI special agent met different government high-ups and held meetings with home ministry officials Thursday to discuss terms of reference specifying the assistance requested for and its parameters.

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PM's envoy to meet Rice, other top US officials

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister's special envoy Reaz Rahman will meet US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and other high-ranking officials of the Bush administration to apprise them of the current situation in Bangladesh.

Reaz, also adviser to the foreign ministry, left Dhaka Thursday night for Washington. His trip will be the first political level visit from Bangladesh after George W Bush was sworn-in as the US president for the second time last month.

Officials here told the news agency that Reaz-Rice talks would mainly focus on the current political situation in Bangladesh, particularly in the aftermath of the killing of former finance minister Shah AMS

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Abduction of cops remains a mystery

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Mystery surrounding the Wednesday's alleged abduction of two traffic sergeants and their release for Tk 2 lakh remains unresolved as police till last night were yet to be sure whether it was an abduction.

The body to verify the two sergeants' claim yesterday interrogated them at Detective Branch office.

Additional Commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Faruq Ahmed, tasked with the probe, yesterday said, "I'm still interrogating them and will continue till tomorrow."

Asked about the line of interrogation, Faruq said he was quizzing the sergeants to be sure about, among other possibilities, involvement in illegal dealings. He added that hopefully, he would be able to elabo-

rate on the incident today.

Faruq has been asked to submit report within 48 hours that end in the evening today.

The two sergeants, Asad and Monirul, who were allegedly abducted from Kafur, were freed at Kachukhet Bazar on Thursday noon, 16 hours into their abduction, after Asad's brother Moniruzzaman paid a ransom of Tk 2 lakh.

Asad and Monirul were relieved of their duty on Thursday for absence from work and also for the 'suspicious' statement they made explaining the absence, said sources.

Sources said the two were asked why they used CNG-run three-wheeler instead of their motorbikes and why they went out in the evening in plainclothes while they had duty at night.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 2

Govt plans to kill AL leaders, activists in the name of crossfire

Hasina tells professionals

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leader of the Opposition and Awami League (AL) chief Sheikh Hasina yesterday said the BNP-jamaat-led coalition government is planning to kill her party's grassroots leaders and activists.

"We've come to know the government will kill our dedicated leaders and workers by Rab (Rapid Action Battalion) in the name of crossfire," Hasina alleged. She was exchanging views with different professional bodies at Institution of Engineers auditorium in the city.

Hasina said the government is

filing 'false murder cases' against the AL leaders and activists in a bid to prove them criminals.

Referring to the killing of former finance minister SAMS Kibria, Hasina alleged the government is killing the popular AL lawmakers to claim the next general elections.

She accused the government of masterminding the bomb and grenade attacks on AL rallies across the country.

The AL chief said violation of human rights and politicisation of administration have surpassed all previous records.

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