

## Saarc to limp if members

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invest our capital in re-building and upgrading cross-border infrastructure with each of them (neighbours)."

"We do expect that they (neighbours) demonstrate sensitivity to our vital concerns. These vital concerns relate to allowing the use of their territories for cross-border terrorism and hostile activity against India, for example, by insurgent and secessionist groups," Saran said.

He said India would deal with whichever government is in power in the neighbouring countries, but that it would prefer democratic and secular governments.

India, Saran added, would welcome more democracy in its neighbourhood. "But that too is something we may encourage and promote and it is not something that we can impose upon others."

At least some states in South Asia perceive security threats as arising from within the region, Saran said, adding that it is "regrettable that the countries of South Asia, while occupying the same geographical space, do not have a shared security perception and, hence, a common security doctrine."

"This is different from the European Union or Asean," Saran added.

The Indian secretary said New Delhi does not want some Saarc members to perceive the group "as a vehicle primarily to countervail India or to seek to limit its room for manoeuvre."

## Ruling MPs

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government's image by creating an artificial crisis of fertiliser.

Another BNP lawmaker, Mozammel Haq, echoed his party colleague and put the blame on dealers appointed unfairly. He demanded of the government to cancel the dealerships of these unscrupulous ones.

Jamaat MP Abdul Aziz said more than two of a family obtained fertiliser dealership in a single union, whereas "there are instances that no dealership has been given in many unions."

BNP member Mozammel Hossain Alal asked the government to print the retail price on every sack of fertiliser so that dealers cannot sell them at a higher price.

In reply, Industries Minister Matur Rahman Nizami admitted to some irregularities in dealer appointments but denied any fertiliser crisis has been there since the coalition came to office in 2001.

"There is adequate supply of all types of fertilisers including urea in the country," Nizami said, claiming that certain quarters had conspired to create a fertiliser crisis but failed.

He assured the House to take steps against the dealers involved in schemes to push fertiliser prices up.

Nizami said the total urea fertiliser production target of the country's six fertiliser factories for the current year is 19.75 lakh metric tons, against a demand of 26 lakh MT. "We'll go for import to meet the rest of the demand."

Meanwhile, responding to a call attention notice, Agriculture Minister MK Anwar also dismissed the allegation of a fertiliser crisis and said fertiliser prices are stable.

He said the government is going to offer subsidy in fertiliser to benefit the farmers.

Jatiya Party (Ershad) lawmaker Hafizuddin Ahmed asked the government to ensure uninterrupted power supply for irrigation in rural areas.

BNP member M Salek Chowdhury supported the opposition MP and said farmers in his constituency have been suffering from lack of irrigation due to power shortage.

In reply, State Minister for Power Iqbal Hasan Mahmud said his ministry would take action to arrange uninterrupted power supply for farmers in rural areas.

## Work on leather

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lakh people.

Addressing the foundation-laying function, the prime minister sought cooperation from all in maintaining a stable and peaceful atmosphere in the interest of the country and to accelerate the pace of national advancement.

"A congenial environment is imperative for advancing on the path of development," Khaleda told the function, attended by ministers, MPs, political leaders, bureaucrats and local people.

"Today the city that is being set up on the bank of the river Dhaleswari is a sign of the acceleration of our economy," the prime minister said.

Industries Minister Matur Rahman Nizami, State Minister for Labour and Employment Amanullah Aman, local MP Dewan Mohammad Salahuddin, Bangladesh Finished Leather, Leather Goods and Footwear Exporters' Association President M. Tipu Sultan and Bangladesh Tanners' Association President M Harun Chowdhury also spoke at the function.

The prime minister formally unveiled the foundation plaque and switched on land digging for construction work. Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (Bscic) is implementing the project.

Apart from modern facilities, a latest effluent-treatment plant will be set up in the leather industry city, the prime minister said. As result, there will be no health risks for workers and employees at their workplacea great relief from serious health hazards they are exposed to in the outmoded tanneries.

"Now the workers and employees of this field will feel much comfort at work that will increase skill and productivity of workers and factories alike," she told the audience.

ring."

"The challenge [for Indian diplomacy] lies in convincing our neighbours that India is an opportunity not a threat, that far from being besieged by India, they have a vast, productive hinterland that would give their economies far greater opportunities for growth than if they were to rely on their domestic markets alone."

He said it was India's expectation that "the dynamics of promoting cross-border economic linkages among South Asian countries would help them overcome mutual distrust and suspicion, which prevents us from evolving a shared security perception."

But "this remains our hope today, even though the record of Saarc in this respect has hardly been inspiring," he said.

Saran said Saarc in its 20 years of existence "has shied away from undertaking even a single collaborative project and there is a deep resistance to doing anything that could be collaborative."

Unless Saarc countries promote cross-border economic linkages and prevent transit routes among member-countries from falling "prey to narrow political calculations," the foreign secretary concluded, Saarc would "remain a limping shadow of its true potential."

## Indigenous people to resist eco-park

**OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban**

Indigenous people in Bandarban yesterday declared that they would resist construction of a proposed eco-park on a 5500-acre land of Mro community in Bandarban.

The call for resistance came from a rally held at Empu Para, 36 kilometres off the Bandarban district headquarters. Committee to Protect Land and Forest Preservation organised the rally of 500 family heads of the Mro community.

Rang Lai Mro, president of Mro Social Council, said as many as 700 Mro families would be evicted if the government implements its plan to build an eco-park on 5500-acre tract of land in Sadar, Roangchhari, Ruma and Lama upazilas.

## Two BNP men

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District Magistrate Court yesterday after the completion of the five-day remand.

Meanwhile, Abdul Quiyum, vice president of Habiganj district BNP and president of Zia Gabeshana Parishad (Zia Research Council), as well as Joyal Abedin Momin, a BNP activist of the Baidyabazar area, are still being questioned in the JIC at Dhaka, sources said.

At the same time, Zahedur Rahman Zahid, general secretary of the Awami League Laskarpur union unit, picked up from Baidyabazar on February 7, is still in remand.

The joint team, who are investigating the carnage, picked up three AL leaders on Monday night, including Habiganj district vice president and former municipality chairman Shahiduddin Chowdhury.

The team questioned the three separately at the office of the district Superintendent of Police (SP).

Sources said the team inquired about the AL rally at Baidyabazar held on January 27.

## BB probe finds

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(IPO) of Premier Bank after around 25,000 suspected fake beneficiary owner's accounts had been found in a preliminary investigation.

The capital market regulator's move prompted the central bank to launch its own investigation into the scam from Sunday. BB investigators will visit all Premier Bank branches in phases and are directed to submit their findings within a few days.

Meanwhile, at a meeting of the Premier Bank board yesterday, some of the directors said the scam would seriously damage the image and credibility of the bank. They asked the management to take exemplary actions against those responsible for the irregularities, meeting sources said.

Sources said the Premier Bank management yesterday called all branch managers to the head office and warned them not to pass on any information to the press about the account opening or related to the scam.

The management also tried to coax written statements from the branch managers that the bank's chairman and managing director were not involved in the account opening irregularities. But the branch managers did not oblige the head office management, sources said.

When the central bank came to know of this stratagem, it warned the Premier Bank management that such ploy would not work, BB sources said.

Premier Bank in a press statement yesterday said it has formed an internal team headed by its deputy managing director to probe the allegations. The bank management has also asked the branch managers to extend all-out cooperation to investigators of the BB and the SEC in this regard, the statement claimed.

## Tifa draft

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tight-lipped about the contents of the final draft.

When asked, Ahmad also declined to say whether the final draft includes a clause relating to transparency, bribery and corruption that was in the earlier draft prepared by the Office of the US Trade Representative and opposed by the Bangladesh side.

However, sources said Dhaka later softened its stance on the issue.

The US government originally proposed the Tifa to Bangladesh in 2002. An inter-ministerial meeting in January 2003 assigned the commerce ministry to begin negotiations with the US on it. Since then, the two sides have held several rounds of talks and also worked to prepare a draft of the agreement.

According to the draft prepared by US, the areas Tifa is to cover include removal of non-tariff barriers, implementation of intellectual property rights, promotion of trade and private investment, improvement of workers' rights and pursuing WTO talks on the basis of Doha Development Agenda.

In the draft, the US side proposed that the two governments establish a 'US-Bangladesh Council on Trade and Investment' under the Tifa. The council is envisaged to meet at least once a year to discuss bilateral trade issues.

US has Tifas with more than a dozen countries including Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Bangladesh enjoys a favourable position in trade with the US. US exported \$281 million worth of products to Bangladesh in 2003-04, while it imported \$2.3 billion, making a more than \$2 billion trade deficit.

US is also the single largest investor in Bangladesh, with total investment topping \$1.4 billion, mainly concentrated in the energy and power sector.

## Magurchhara

**FROM PAGE 1**  
Responding to another question from Jatiya Party lawmaker GM Qader, the minister admitted the shortage of gas supply, saying that setting up of new industries and increased use of gas as well as wastage are responsible for it.

He said a well in Sangu gas field was closed and as a result, the government is receiving 112 mmcf of gas instead of 200 mmcf.

Besides, a well in Moulvibazar gas field, which was supposed to supply gas to the national grid, failed to do so because of last year's floods that damaged 78-km of gas pipeline.

The minister, however, said the shortage would not continue for long.

With the availability of gas from Moulvibazar field from March and another gas field in Feni, there will not be any shortage from April 2005 to 2010, he said, adding that rather, there would be surplus of gas during the period.

## Dinkal, Inqilab

**FROM PAGE 12**  
answer session, replying to a query from Jatiya Party (Ershad) lawmaker Golam Habib Dinal.

Of the other Bangla dailies, the minister said Manabjain received 2,470 government advertisements, Ittefaq 2,424, Khabarpatra published by BNP lawmaker Hafizuddin Ibrahim 1,490, Jangtanor 1,166, Aikar Kagoj 953 and Prothom Alo 506.

Among the English dailies, News Today topped the list receiving 1,651 advertisements followed by The Independent with 1,039, New Age 956, Bangladesh Today 942, New Nation 878, Financial Express 685 and The Daily Star 530.

On another query, Islam told the House a total of 119 newspapers have received licence across the country since the BNP-Jamaat-led coalition government came to office in October 2001. He said, at present, the total number of dailies in the country is 534.

## Hartal ends

**FROM PAGE 1**  
between AL and BNP activists in Bhanga.

The hartal followed a series of stoppages since January 29 enforced by the mainstream opposition 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 also demanding resignation of the BNP-Jamaat-led ruling coalition to pave the way for fresh polls.

In the capital, around 10,000 security personnel were deployed at different strategic points to ward off any violence.

Despite the shutdown, most passenger buses plied the city streets while rickshaws plied as usual. Educational institutions, shopping centres and most private offices remained closed or operated with thin presence. Transactions in banks were almost normal.

Police and anti-hartal elements searched a number of houses in Mohammadpur and picked up at least eight women activists who took part in a pro-hartal demonstration earlier.

As on the previous hartal days, police barricaded the roads around the AL central office at Bangabandhu Avenue throughout yesterday to prevent party activists and hartal supporters from gathering there. Only a few senior AL leaders were seen in the barricaded area.

Of the injured in police baton charge in Azampur, Hazi Selim was admitted to Bangladesh Medical College Hospital. Police picked up seven opposition activists from the spot.

Activists of Awami Jubo Mahila League damaged a vehicle at around noon in Mohammadpur. They fled when the police rushed to the spot.

Police along with some ruling party activists searched two nearby houses in a failed bid to arrest the activists.

Later, police picked up eight women activists from an apartment building at Prabal Housing and allegedly beat them up at Mohammadpur Police Station. The eight included Sathi, Sonali, Nasrin, Maya, Nilufar and Shammii, sources said.

Unidentified persons set a passenger bus on fire at Kutubkhali in Demra at about 1:00pm.

AL lawmakers and other leaders of the party brought out a procession from the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban area at around 11:45 am. The processionists paraded Mirpur road and held a rally at Russell square.

A large number of security personnel including plainclothes police kept vigil on the procession and the rally. Police tried to pick up some pickets from the area but failed as senior AL lawmakers intervened.

BNP-backed transport workers brought out an anti-hartal procession from Mukhtang and denounced the opposition for calling hartals frequently, crippling life.

Processions supporting hartal were brought out in Mohammadpur, Bangla Bazar in old city, Jagannath Development Agenda.

## Trade deficit

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week of January after the payment of Asian Clearing Union (Acu).

The BB official said the reserve was \$3.05 billion yesterday and it will drop to below \$3 billion after the Acu payment in the first week of March.

According to the central bank statistics, the volume of L/C for rice and wheat import increased 107 percent, scrap vessels 524 percent, petroleum products 50 percent and capital machinery 67 percent in the first six months of the current fiscal year.

A high official of a commercial bank said import of food grain increased significantly this year due to last year's devastating flood. The price of food grain also shot up in the international market.

The government's food stock plunged to 6.58 lakh metric tons (MT) in December 2004 which was 8.36 lakh MT one year ago.

The shortage in food stock has prompted the government to import food to take the stock to a secured level of 8 lakh MT.

The government has already approved import of 1.32 lakh MT of rice and is also planning to import one lakh MT more to overcome the

## Delhi's dealing

**FROM PAGE 12**  
"Natwar Singh, who presides over the ministry of foreign affairs, is the last person who should be, at least, has not been friendly. The comparison becomes obvious when her predecessor Sheikh Hasina was equally irritating, but not unfriendly," said the veteran Indian journalist.

"I believe the reason why Bangladesh has been drifting away from India lies in the message Kibria (assassinated Awami League leader) sent to his Indian friends two days before his assassination. He said that India had abandoned its liberal and secular friends in Bangladesh to face fanatic and fundamentalist forces," Nayyar said.

"This is true to some extent because we have been paying very little attention to Bangladesh since the return of Khaleda Zia. It may sound harsh but there is hardly any mention to Bangladesh in India and its media in positive terms," he added.

"Our main problem is that we

College area and some other places.

A correspondent from Madaripur reports : At least 50 people including six journalists and several police men were injured as AL and BNP activists clashed at Bishwar Road intersection in Banga thana of Faridpur.

Witnesses said OC Abdur Rouf, a sub-inspector and several other cops were injured while trying to bring the situation under control.

About 20 shops were ransacked during the clash.

Our staff correspondent in Chittagong adds: The second day of the 36-hour hartal passed off peacefully in the port city.

The shutdown was observed partially as plying of vehicles, excepting long distance ones, was almost normal. Business activities increased yesterday though large shopping centres remained closed.

Loading and unloading of cargo inside the port was normal and delivery of goods to and from the port resumed after 2:00 pm.

## Add SP closed for outlaw link

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna**

An additional superintendent of police in Khulna was disciplined yesterday for allegedly harbouring an outlawed party operative and assaulting Rapid Action Battalion men.

Additional Police Super Mofazzel Hossain was closed to Dhaka Police Headquarters following a probe by Deputy Inspector General Abdul Aziz Sarker.

Mofazzel assaulted a group of Rab men when they went to his office at around 10:00pm on Monday night to arrest Hasan, an alleged cadre of PBCP Janajuddho faction, said Superintendent of Police in Khulna Habibur Rahman.

As Rab men got hold of Hasan, Mofazzel flew into a rage and shouted at them to let go of the Janajuddho cadre. He hurled abuses at the Rab men for entering his office without permission. He even shot two blanks to scare them into freeing Hasan, said Mofazzal's bodyguard.

Rab took Hasan to Khalishpur Rab Headquarters, where he was being quizzed till yesterday.

Sources said Mofazzel, who joined Khulna district as additional police super early last year, used to maintain a close contact with underground parties and criminals for financial gains. He was boozing with Hasan when the incident happened on Monday night, added the sources.

## JS RESERVED SEATS

## Bill seeking extension of time for polls

**UNB, Dhaka**

A bill was introduced in parliament yesterday seeking extension of the time limit from 45 days to 90 days for holding elections to 45 women's reserved seats in the House.

The 14th amendment to the constitution has introduced 45 reserved seats for women increasing the strength of parliament to 345 from 300.

Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Moudud Ahmed introduced the Jatiya Sangsad (Reserved Women Seats) Election (Amendment) Bill, 2005.

## Student strikes

**FROM PAGE 1**  
DU students were injured in the blasts at the TSC road island on the campus. DU students and teachers have expressed surprise that police did not guard the spot after the incident nor preserve evidence of the explosions. The place was found cleaned and washed yesterday and some 'tokai' took away things that could be valuable evidence, they mentioned.

Commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police Mizanur Rahman claimed however that all pieces of evidence were 'properly preserved'.

When contacted, DU Vice Chancellor SMA Faiz said, "So far as I know, police were deployed at the spot after the incident."

He also said he did not know who cleaned the spot or whether the pieces of evidence were necessary or not.

**INVESTIGATION**  
Dhaka University authorities yesterday formed a seven-member probe body headed by Prof AFM Yusuf Haider, pro-vice chancellor of the university, to investigate Monday's bomb blasts at TSC, reports BSS.

The committee, formed at a syndicate meeting held at the DU registrar building last night with Vice Chancellor Prof SMA Faiz in the chair, will submit a report 'within shortest possible time.'

President of Dhaka University Debating Society (Duds) Mehdi Hasan Tamim lodged a case with Ramna Police Station in connection with the blasts.

Mahbubur Rahman, officer-in-charge of the police station, said they have started investigating the incident and collected evidence from the spot.

**BLAME GAME**  
The ruling BNP's student front Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) and the AL-backed BCL have blamed each other for the incident.

The JCD brought out a procession and held a rally on the campus yesterday demanding immediate arrest and punishment of BCL activists who 'hurled the bombs in a planned way' to destroy the congenial academic atmosphere on the campus.

The BCL laid a siege to the VC's office yesterday demanding 'peaceful coexistence' of all at the DU halls.

The Duds brought out a silent procession and held a rally at the Central Shaheed Minar demanding arrest and punishment of the culprits.

Left-leaning Bangladesh Chhatra Union (BCU) blamed 'fundamentalist groups' for the bomb attacks.

## 900 makeshift

**FROM PAGE 12**  
mechanics were busy repairing CNG scooters, produced flames that quickly spread to a dismantled fuel tank.

"The blaze quickly spread to nearby polythene sheets and petrol kept in containers for cleansing purposes," said Md Mazid, a salesman of a shop next door who witnessed the devastation.

"We ran for cover as the blaze grew larger," said Shaheen, a garment factory worker, adding, "There were at least 75 CNG scooters inside one of the garages belonging to Mosharraf. Some of the scooters were saved as a few of us helped to pull them out, but the rest were burned to ashes."

Firemen from Khilgaon and other fire stations arrived within fifteen minutes, but all their vehicles could not reach the spot of the fire - Mirretok colony (no. 16) - due to narrow lanes. Firemen were forced to proceed on foot, carrying hoses to the spot.

As the fire spread it engulfed some 900 slums made of bamboo and wooden planks. Most of the slums house female garments workers, but the majority were at work at the time of the blaze, accounting for the absence of casualties.

It took approximately an hour to douse the fire, which sent neighbours in nearby buildings panicking and rushing away in fear.

During the fire, the electricity supply in the entire neighbourhood went out for approximately two hours. Police later blocked commoners from entering the area to prevent pilfering of valuables from the rubble.

## Postponement

**FROM PAGE 1**  
This is the first time Khan made any comment on the Bangladesh-India bilateral ties since the Dhaka summit, scheduled for Feb 6-7, was put off following India's decision not to participate on the plea of political developments in Kathmandu and "security concerns" in Dhaka.

In reply to a question about the holding of the stalled summit, the foreign minister said Bangladesh has requested current Saarc chair Pakistan to find a date which is convenient "beyond doubt" to all the member states of the seven-nation forum.

Khan said he was not aware of any consultation initiated by Pakistan for rescheduling the summit.

## US, EU, India recall

**FROM PAGE 12**  
headed by himself and declared a state of emergency in the Himalayan kingdom.

Boucher said the United States had "made clear the point" that the king needed to restore and protect civil and human rights.

Gyanendra should also release those detained under the state of emergency and move quickly toward restoration of civil liberties and multi-party, democratic institutions, he added.

"We will consult with our ambassador and others will consult with their ambassadors about how best to achieve those goals, how we can support those goals," Boucher said.

"And we'll be sending our ambassador back after a (week) in order to convey that message even more clearly," he said.

Whatever steps taken by the international community would be aimed at "supporting the Nepalese people's quest for democracy, peace, security and development," he added.

India's envoy to Nepal, Shiv Shankar Mukherjee, who returned to New Delhi on Monday, had called on the foreign minister Natwar

Singh, and briefed him on the latest developments in the restive Himalayan kingdom and his talks with King Gyanendra last week.

Analysts say that among the first actions to be taken if the Nepalese king refused to budge would be freezing military aid to the impoverished nation fighting an uphill battle to suppress a Maoist insurgency, which has claimed more than 11,000 lives so far.

The United States, Britain and India, Nepal's giant neighbor India have been key backers of Nepal in its drive to crush communist insurgents wanting to set up a republic.

The United States had allocated 45 million dollars in aid for Nepal in the year to September 2004, 10 percent of which was for security, a US official said. For fiscal 2005, 44 million dollars has been set aside with only one third for security related activities.

Britain reportedly is also reviewing defence assistance of 6.5 million pounds (about 12 million dollars) while New Delhi has supplied the ill-equipped Nepalese army with helicopters, guns and other equipment.

## Hasina says clues

**FROM PAGE 12**  
post-hartal news briefing at Awami League's Dhanmandi office.

Hinting at involvement of a special section, she said it takes trained people to carry out grenade attacks. International investigation would be useful to unearth the identity of the perpetrators, she added.

Hasina, also the president of AL, alleged that the ruling BNP is resorting to political persecution to hold on to power.

"They are torturing our leaders and activists because we have demanded investigation and trial of the killers," she said adding, "Is it a crime to seek justice in a democratic country?"

Hasina blasted the law enforcement agencies for failure to ensure security for people's lives. She said they have turned the Dhaka University campus into a security zone by deploying a huge number of police, detectives and Rab personnel, but they still could not stop bomb attacks.

The opposition leader accused Prime Minister Khaleda Zia of killing people in 'crossfire by Rab'. "Killing people without trial is a flagrant violation of human rights," she added.