



### SUFI FEST BEGINS TODAY

Musicians from eight countries will perform in the three-day festival

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### COALITION GOVT IN GREECE

Alexis Tsipras of anti-austerity party Syriza is sworn in as prime minister

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# Blockade raises cost of business

## Exporters, importers face hard time with no sign of an end to political violence

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

Arifur Rahman, a cotton importer and spinner, is in deep trouble. He has been paying Tk 70,000 a day in port demurrage for over a week as he cannot have the imported cotton transported to his factory in Mymensingh from Chittagong port due to the ongoing blockade.

Rahman cannot continue production at this factory in Bhaluka for shortage of cotton. "If I fail to bring the fibre to my factory, I will lose buyers," said a worried Rahman, who had imported it from the US a few weeks ago.

Like him, hundreds of exporters and importers in the garment and other sectors face heavy financial losses due to the BNP-led alliance's non-stop blockade and a series of shutdowns.

The industrial sector is the worst hit by the ongoing political crisis that continues to hamper smooth transportation of goods to

and from factories and ports.

Now, fewer trucks and covered vans carry goods, as most operators are unwilling to run their vehicles fearing arson attacks by pickets.

In some cases, truckers agree to carry goods, but they ask for double the usual fares.

Rustom Ali Khan, general secretary of Bangladesh Truck and Covered Van Owners Association, said around 14,000 vans usually ply between Dhaka and Chittagong every day but the figure slumped to about 7,000 during the blockade.

Even the number of trucks carrying goods between the capital and Chittagong port went down by more than half from about 1,14,000 a day, said Rustom.

He admitted that fares have doubled due to unavailability of trucks and vans. "Drivers don't want to carry goods in fear of arson attacks on the road," he added.

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Hartal supporters, allegedly activists of Islami Chhatra Shibir, attack a convoy of trucks escorted by police and BGB personnel at Shantimor in Chapainawabganj town yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

**TRANSPORTATION COST NOW MORE THAN DOUBLE**

Narayanganj-Ctg truck fare rose to **Tk 30,000-35,000** from **Tk 15,000**

**SHORTAGE OF VEHICLES HAMPERS GOODS TRANSPORTATION**

Plying of covered vans declined to **7,000** from **14,000** a day

**BUSINESSMEN NEED TO PAY POLICE FOR ESCORTING GOODS-LADEN VEHICLES**

**Tk 1,000** per truck for every police station

**PORT DEMURRAGE ON THE RISE DUE TO DELAY IN UNLOADING IMPORTED GOODS**

**GARMENT EXPORTERS FEAR ORDER SHIFT TO OTHER DESTINATIONS DUE TO CONTINUING POLITICAL UNREST**

# BNP to invite PM to Koko's qulkhwani

SHAKHAWAT LITON and RASHIDUL HASAN

There seems to be a fresh possibility of Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia meeting as senior BNP leaders have decided to request the BNP chief to invite Hasina to Koko's qulkhwani.

On Sunday, a number of senior members of BNP's national standing committee in a meeting agreed that the party had lost some political ground and there was a public outcry after Hasina went to visit Khaleda to BODY ARRIVES TODAY - PAGE 16

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# 7 robbers beaten dead in Narsingdi

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and BELAL HOSSAIN BIPOB

Seven alleged robbers died in a mob beating in Narsingdi Sadar upazila early yesterday.

The incident happened around 3:30am, after a gang of 14 looted a house and attempted to rob another at Chakshal village in Pachdona union.

Police arrested one suspected robber while the others, including ringleader Dulal, managed to flee, said Abul Kashem, officer-in-charge of Narsingdi Sadar Police Station.

The arrested was identified as Abdur Rahim, 40, of Narayanganj. Identities of the dead could not be known.

The gang forced into the house of Ershad Munshi around 2:30am and started looting valuables.

"They first asked us to open the door by introducing themselves as law enforcers," said Ershad's son Azizur Rahman.

When they did not open the door, the gang broke it open.

"They then snatched my mobile phone and asked me not to shout."

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# Police asked to intensify raid, watch

## Home orders more arrests to foil anti-govt agitation

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

Police might launch a door-to-door hunt for BNP-led alliance leaders and make more arrests following a home ministry order and recommendation by an intelligence agency.

The ministry has asked law enforcers to keep a close watch on opposition leaders engaged in planning and leading the anti-government agitations and make pre-emptive arrests before enforcement of any such programme.

Police have also been directed to monitor phone calls of the alliance high-ups to know the opposition's strategy, ministry sources said.

The order was issued to the police headquarters yesterday in line with a National Security Intelligence (NSI) report that recommended intensifying patrol at the entry points of the capital and carrying out raids on houses of opposition men.

"We asked the police to take necessary measures in keeping with the NSI report," a senior official of the ministry told The Daily Star, wishing anonymity.

The order comes at a time when the BNP-led alliance

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Garment worker Mahfuza, second from left, heading to work in Kakrail from her Mughdapara home at 7:30 in the morning yesterday ignoring the hartal and the risk of getting hurt if the bus was attacked.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

# Blockade takes one more life

## Convoy of trucks attacked in Chapainawabganj

STAR REPORT

One more burn victim in Rangpur died yesterday raising the death toll to 31 in the ongoing political violence since January 5.

At least two drivers and a helper were burnt in arson attacks on two vehicles in Rajshahi and Thakurgaon Sunday night and yesterday -- the second day of the 36-hour hartal.

Alleged activists of Islami Chhatra Shibir once again attacked an escorted convoy of 60 trucks in Chapainawabganj, smashing windshields of at least eight vehicles.

The convoy was heading towards Sonamasjid Land Port and other areas of Shibganj under the protection of police and BGB forces. It came under attack around 9:30am at Shantir More where Shibir activists gathered after a rally. They hurled brick chunks at the trucks and blasted crude bombs, reports our Chapainawabganj correspondent.

No one, however, was injured in the incident.

Police arrested at least 15 persons from different areas of the town in this connection. Earlier on Sunday, law enforcers had arrested nine BNP and Jamaat men from these areas on charges of arson and vandalism.

At least three vehicles were torched in the capital

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# Another arson case against BNP men

## Khaleda accused as mastermind

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and 31 other BNP-Jamaat leaders were sued on Sunday night for an arson attack on a covered van in Chaudhagram of Comilla.

Chaudhagram police filed the case accusing Khaleda of masterminding the attack, Uttam Chakrabarty, officer-in-charge of Chaudhagram Police Station, told The Daily Star last night.

Hartal supporters, said the OC, torched a goods-laden covered van near Haidarpool area in Chaudhagram upazila

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# Commuting in fear

## Thousands of working women take risk to reach workplace, return

WASIM BIN HABIB and TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Sharmin Akhter has many safety concerns, especially with commuting between her home and office every day. The fear of being burned grips her as soon as she takes her first step out of her Mirpur home.

Whatever transport she decides to travel in, a sense of insecurity haunts her all the way to her office in Gulshan-1.

"While travelling to and from my office, I pray to God. I feel panicky as if a petrol bomb or a cocktail would fly in through the window of the vehicle," said Sharmin.

She is only one among thousands of working women who go through such a mental stress to reach their destinations daily as the countrywide indefinite blockade continues.

Only a few employees enjoy pick up and drop-off service provided by their offices. However, many employers have recently stopped the service amid rising incidents of violence during anti-government agitations.

For women, catching a public transport in the capital has always been a tough job. Things get worse for them during blockades and hartals when the number of vehicles drops sharply.

Political violence, especially bomb and arson attacks on vehicles, has killed 31 people, burned scores of others and

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**3 WEEKS OF VIOLENCE** amid nonstop blockade

**31 DEAD**

Around **950 INJURED**