

STARS GATHER FOR STAR

Photo features on The Daily Star's 24th anniversary celebration

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'DESH GHAR-ER GAAN'

Chhayanaut pays musical homage to Waheedul Haq

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KNOCKING AT RAHUL'S DOOR

Congress accuses govt of political spying after police visit his house

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Doing business getting tough

Cost spirals on hartal-blockade

SAJJADUR RAHMAN

The ongoing blockade and a series of shutdowns are pushing up costs of doing business in Bangladesh, say businesspeople.

A combination of rising transportation cost, supply chain disruption and delay in work -- be it project implementation or day-to-day activities -- has been eating up Bangladesh's competitive advantage as "low-cost maker and exporter", they said.

Cost escalation is not the only fear now. Many private firms face bigger problems such as cancellation of export orders and trips by foreign investors.

"Two top investors from China and Singapore were scheduled to visit Bangladesh to discuss their investment plans with us. They deferred the trips several times due to the non-stop blockade and shutdowns," said Mostafa Kamal, chairman and managing director of Meghna Group of Industries.

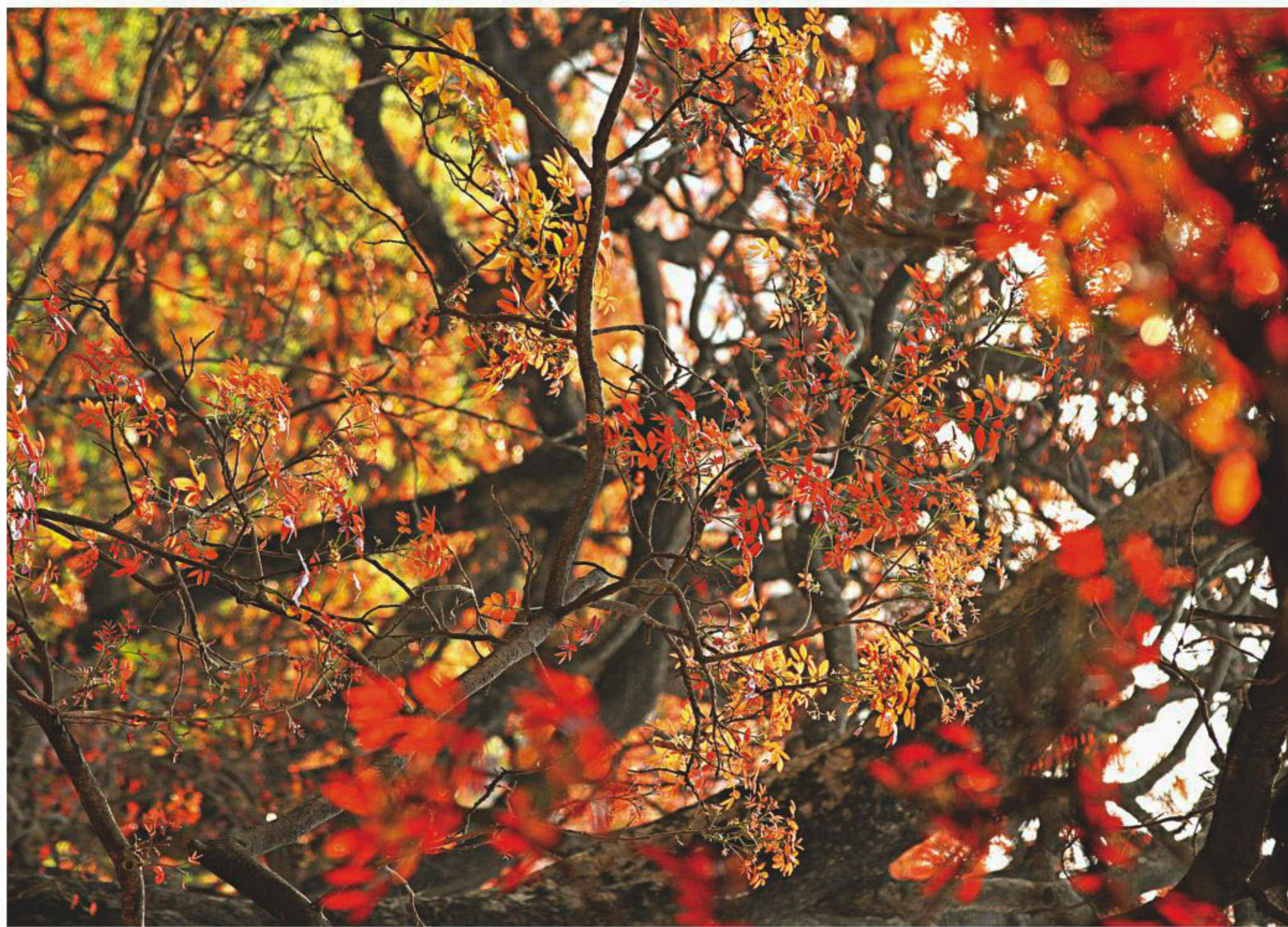
The conglomerate recently inked a deal with PM Group of Thailand to set up a polypropylene factory in Bangladesh. The Thai company wants to invest \$150 million. It intends to borrow a portion of the money as foreign loans from banks.

But lenders now demand higher country risk charge from PM Group for the loan, as the money would be invested in Bangladesh that is going through a political turmoil, Kamal said.

"It is a shame for us."

The Daily Star talked to a number of business groups -- both big and small -- to know the extent of the impact of hartals and the non-stop countrywide blockade that the BNP-led alliance launched on January 5 to press for an early national election.

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In city life, amid all sorts of visual pollutions, colours of nature come as a relief for the eyes. At least some greenery is still there in this concrete jungle. Also, seeing the new leaves in the middle of spring someone might find solace and again start to believe: life is beautiful. The photo was taken at Ramna Park in the capital recently.

PHOTO: STAR

No talks with Khaleda

Reiterates PM, says BNP chief should surrender to court

UNB, Dhaka

Ruling out once again the possibility of dialogue with Khaleda Zia, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said the best option for the BNP chief was to surrender to court.

"What dialogue with her? What dialogue with the person who is a killer and whose hands are stained with blood and smell of burnt people?" she asked.

The prime minister was speaking at a rally of Bangladesh Peshajibi Samannay Parishad at Krishibid Institution at the city's Farmgate.

Hasina, also president of the ruling Awami League, alleged that Khaleda Zia had even killed infants, expectant mothers as she does not



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No law enforcement agency arrested Salahuddin

Says IGP

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Inspector General of Police AKM Shahidul Hoque yesterday said none of the law enforcement agencies had arrested BNP leader Salahuddin Ahmed, who remains traceless for more than four days.

"Police did not arrest him ... no law enforcement agencies arrested him," the IGP said.

He was speaking at a seminar organised by "Journey," a voluntary organisation that researches on liberation war and education sector, at Nabab Nawab Ali Chowdhury Senate Bhaban at Dhaka University.

According to Salahuddin's family, some plainclothes men showed identity cards of the Detective Branch of police and picked up the BNP joint secretary general from a house in the capital's Uttara on Tuesday night.

Later, law enforcers and State Minister for Home Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal told

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FLU PREVENTION TIPS

WASH YOUR HANDS

Wash them often with soap and water.

KEEP SANITISER CLOSE

Use it often and tell children to do the same

GET VACCINATED

Influenza is the only respiratory virus preventable by vaccination.

DON'T TOUCH YOUR FACE

This is the easiest way for germs to get into your body.

STAY HOME

Stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever goes away.

EAT RIGHT

Eating healthy, balanced meals can strengthen your immune system.

EXERCISE

It boosts your immune system and speeds recovery from illness.



SWINE FLU RISK

Govt to vaccinate 3,000 workers

PORIMOL PALMA

In the face of rising fatalities caused by spread of swine flu in the neighbouring India, the Bangladesh government has decided to vaccinate some 3,000 frontline health workers across the country.

As of March 10 this year, the deadly virus H1N1 killed as many as 1,537 people and left 27,234 infected in India.

What puts Bangladesh at risk is the influenza's spread in West Bengal that borders the western districts of the country. As of March 12, death toll in West Bengal stood at 18 and the number of infected at 274.

Four Bangladeshis who travelled to India in February and March were infected with the virus, but all of them were treated and are out of danger now, Dr Mahmudur Rahman, director at the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR), told The Daily Star yesterday.

Dr AKM Shamsuzzaman, director (communicable diseases) at the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) said, "Considering the spread of virus in India, we have started administering one shot of influenza vaccine to our frontline health workers because they are at higher risks."

The physicians, nurses or health assistants posted at the 27 international ports [air, land and sea], isolation wards of district hospitals and IEDCR

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"Democracy was buried when I relinquished power."

JATIYA PARTY CHAIRMAN
HM ERSHAD
TALKING TO NEWSMEN AT HIS RANGPUR RESIDENCE

Hartal becomes work-vibrant

People irked, defiant; non-stop programme loses its sting

STAR REPORT

The ongoing hartals and over two-month-long indefinite blockade seem to have fizzled out.

Tired of the prolonged agitation by the BNP-led alliance, people in big cities and district towns are coming out of their homes in large numbers to carry out their regular work.

Local and inter-district bus operators have increased their trips significantly over the last week. The night-time trips of long-haul buses resumed on Thursday night after over a month. Transportation of goods across the country has been largely normal.

All offices and businesses in and outside Dhaka are operating smoothly. Markets and roadside shops are open.

Almost all the schools and colleges in the districts are running their normal academic activities as more students are joining classes and taking exams.

But people still are apprehensive of attacks from alleged blockaders as there are reports of stray incidents of petrol or crude bomb blasts.

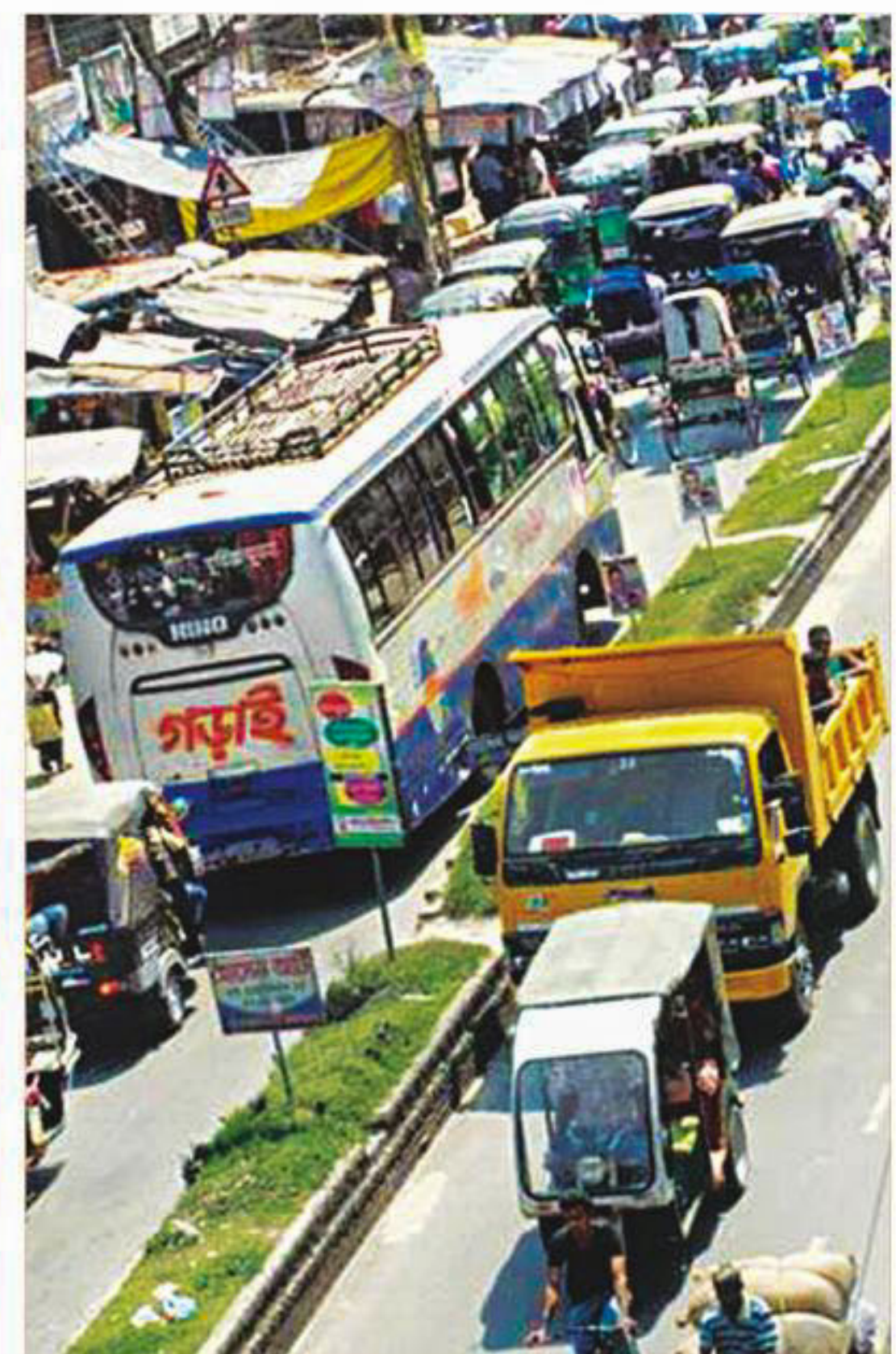
ECONOMY YET TO REGAIN PACE

Although incidents of violence are on the wane, the opposition's programmes are hitting the economy badly. Economic activities are yet to gain momentum.

SA Kader Kiron, president of Bangladesh Dokan Malik Samity, a platform of around 25 lakh shop owners, said almost all the shops and markets are open now but sales have been poor for lack of customers.

The number of customers at the markets has increased in the last three days, but most of them are buying essential products, he told The Daily Star. "Shop owners are counting losses as they have to pay salaries to their staff and utility bills to service providers."

Ekrumul Haque, president of Mymensingh Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said businesses suffered a setback



Roads in Dhaka, Khulna, Bogra and Chittagong are filled with vehicles just like a usual work day while academic activities continue at a school in the port city defying blockade and hartal enforced by the 20-party. The photos were taken at different times since the end of last month.

PHOTO: STAR