

# Rally permitted

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create anarchy," he added.  
Asked about the reason to permit the BNP rally, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal said, "We are for democracy and we want functional politics. We want the BNP to observe programmes lawfully. We want the BNP to return to democratic ways, leaving destructive politics."

Last year, the government did not allow the BNP-led alliance to hold a rally to observe January 5, the first anniversary of last parliamentary polls, as "democracy killing day."

The opposition could not even get on the streets to protest the government's denial because of tough police action.

Instead, AL workers took over the streets to observe "victory day for democracy."

In protest, the BNP started a country-wide non-stop blockade for nearly three months from January 6. Street violence killed at least 95 people and hurt about 1,500 others, mostly in firebombing of transports.

This time tension rose as the AL also wanted to hold rally at Suhrawardy Udyan, where the BNP had already planned its rally and asked for permission.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police then said neither party would be allowed to use the location. Both parties then asked police permission for rallies in front of their offices.

The situation remained uncertain as last year police had not permitted the BNP to hold a planned rally in front of its office. Police had also banned rallies in the capital on January 5.

The BNP was desperate for the rally last year defying police ban. But this year, the party made it clear it would not go for confrontation.

BNP's acting secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday morning again confirmed his party's view at a press conference.

Around noon, Dhaka South City Corporation Mayor Sayeed Khokon announced the DSCC gave permission to the AL and the BNP to hold rallies in front of their offices today.

Later in the afternoon, DMP announced its conditional permission to the parties. DMP also warned of actions if there were untoward incidents during the rallies.

"We gave permission to both parties by assessing security threats and recommendations of local police," DMP Commissioner Asaduzzaman Mia said in a media conference.

The AL would now hold two rallies, one in front of its party central office on Bangabandhu Avenue and the other at Russell Square to mark the day as "Victory Day for Democracy".

It thus changed its earlier decision to occupy 18 strategic points in the capital to resist the BNP.

"We've changed our decision after request from the Dhaka Metropolitan Police," AL Joint General Secretary Mahbul Alam Hanif told reporters after meeting city unit leaders at the party's central office.

The BNP would be holding its rally in front of its central office at Nayapalton, marking the day as "Democracy Killing Day" and it will be addressed by its chief Khaleda Zia.

The party is observing the day alone this time. It has decided to distance itself from anti-liberation Jamaat-e-Islami, its key ally, to avoid criticism, said BNP insiders.

The BNP and Jamaat boycotted the 2014 election because their demand for election under a nonparty caretaker administration was not agreed to by Sheikh Hasina.

The party is making "all-out efforts" to ensure a big show in the rally today. Khaleda Zia will be the chief guest.

"We are going to organise a rally in front of the central office after four years. That's why we want a record gathering," Fazlul Haque Milon, an organising secretary of the BNP, told The Daily Star last night.

The BNP chairperson last night also met senior party leaders at her office. An assistant office secretary of the party said Khaleda is likely to come to the rally after 2:00pm.

Visiting the AL and BNP central offices around 11:00pm, The Daily Star correspondents found that the ruling party was yet to start the work of setting up stage in front of its office, while the BNP had taken almost half of the road to set up stage in front of its office.

**CHITTAGONG**  
The AL rally in the port city will be held at the Central Shaheed Minar, said Badiul Alam, vice president of Chittagong city unit AL. "Our programme will start at 3:00pm."

BNP Chittagong city unit president Ameer Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury said their rally would be held in front of the party office. It will start at 2:00pm.

Contacted, CMP Commissioner Abdul Jalil Mondol said they permitted the two parties to rally on condition that traffic was not obstructed.

## THE OTHER CONDITIONS

- Set up stage in a limited space without blocking road
- Use limited number of loudspeakers
- Video projection can't be used beyond police-assigned area
- Restrict entry of unwanted people to the rally venue
- Deploy adequate volunteers with ID cards
- Install high-end CCTV cameras under own management in and outside the rally venue upon police's instruction
- Ensure adequate lighting in and around the rally venue
- Ensure fire extinguishing system at the rally venue under own management
- Loudspeakers can't be used during Aazan and Namaj
- Stop engaging in activities that go against public interest or violate law and order
- DMP will cancel its permission immediately if it receives any complaint centring the programme
- Legal actions will be taken if the conditions are violated
- The authorities keep the rights to cancel permission without any reasons



Activists of two rival factions of Bangladesh Chhatra League clash over establishing supremacy at the organisation's office in Thakurgaon town yesterday. The clash left at least 10 injured. Right, activists of the pro-AL student body wielding sharp weapons.

PHOTO:

STAR



# They all care about democracy

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From two-and-a-half-year-old Safir to octogenarian Abu Taher, from school-teacher Altaf Hossain to priest Alok Chakrobarty, from housewife Rahima Begum to truck helper Sohag -- none was spared.

Businessmen kept losing several hundred crores every day, helpless farmers watched their crops rot in the fields and parents remained worried about children's future seeing exam schedules collapse and no safety on roads to exam halls.

But the battling sides -- the Awami League and the BNP -- made no move to bring an end to this situation through talks. The government tried to contain the situation using law-enforcing agencies, while the blockaders kept throwing petrol bombs at public transports, leaving people in a state of panic.

Because of the rigidity of the two camps, the country experienced the longest ever nonstop political agitation -- blockade -- in its history.

At least 95 people died in violence since January 5. More than 1,500 suffered injuries. Another 45 people got killed in "shootouts" with law enforcement agencies. Half the shootout victims were allegedly involved in

arson attacks.

Although the victims received financial assistance from the government and some private organisations, many are still struggling to get back to normal life.

The families that lost the lone bread-earners are living in uncertainty while those who suffered injuries have recovered but could not yet resume their work.

Take, for example, the case of Liton, a truck driver from Shailakupa of Jhenidah.

He will never be able to drive truck anymore as a bomb blew away his one eye and damaged the other on January 14.

"I want to live," he told this newspaper last month.

Rita Begum of Faridpur lost her trucker husband and father in a petrol bomb attack on February 7. Now, she shudders to think what would happen to her two minor daughters.

"I panic thinking of my children's future," said the widow.

Law enforcers arrested hundreds of pro-blockade activists for their alleged involvement in the mindless attacks and dozens of cases were filed against named and unnamed persons.

However, the trial in any of such cases is yet to begin. Many of the victim families are sceptical about getting justice.

The nationwide blockade coupled with frequent shutdowns affected every aspect of public life.

Economy was hit hard.

The blockade paralysed supply chain, hit farm incomes, snapped inter-district road and rail communications and cornered local businesses, particularly the small ones.

Farmers were not being able to take their produce to the market. According to the shop owners, their sales had dropped by 70 percent.

But the major damage was the serious transport disruption between Dhaka and other districts due to the deadly arson and petrol bomb attacks.

According to a World Bank report released in April last year, Bangladesh lost \$2.2 billion (approximately Tk 17,150 crore) or 1 percent point of gross domestic product (GDP) due to the prolonged political turmoil.

The amount is more than two-thirds of the estimated cost of constructing the 6.15km Padma bridge, it said in its "Bangladesh Development Update Report 2015".

The Washington-based multilateral lender said the unrest caused greater damage to the country's economy than that in 2013 when the two main political parties fought over general elections.

Education is another sector that was badly affected.

The blockade had upset academic activities at the very beginning of the year, frustrating about five crore students from schools to universities.

Around 14 lakh SSC examinees, in particular, were the worst victims of the situation as none of their exams were held as per schedule. All the tests were deferred and held on weekends due to hartals. Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid had said it took 23 additional days to complete the tests.

Most of the educational institutions could not hold classes for a few months, except on the weekends, affecting the academic calendar.

The blockade also put a negative impact on the results of SSC exams as the pass rate and the number of GPA-5 scorers came down. Chairmen of almost all education boards, teachers and guardians cited the political turmoil as one of the main reasons for the fall.

While the memories of the mayhem are still fresh in people's minds, a renewed tension in the political arena has created public anxieties, especially after both the parties -- the AL and the BNP -- have once again announced plans to observe "Democracy Killing Day" and "Day of Victory for Democracy".

# Robber killed in 'gunfight'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Leader of an inter-district robbers' gang was killed in a "gunfight" with Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) in Tangail Sadar upazila early yesterday. The dead is Mostofa Miah, 35, of Sholakuri village in Madhupur upazila.

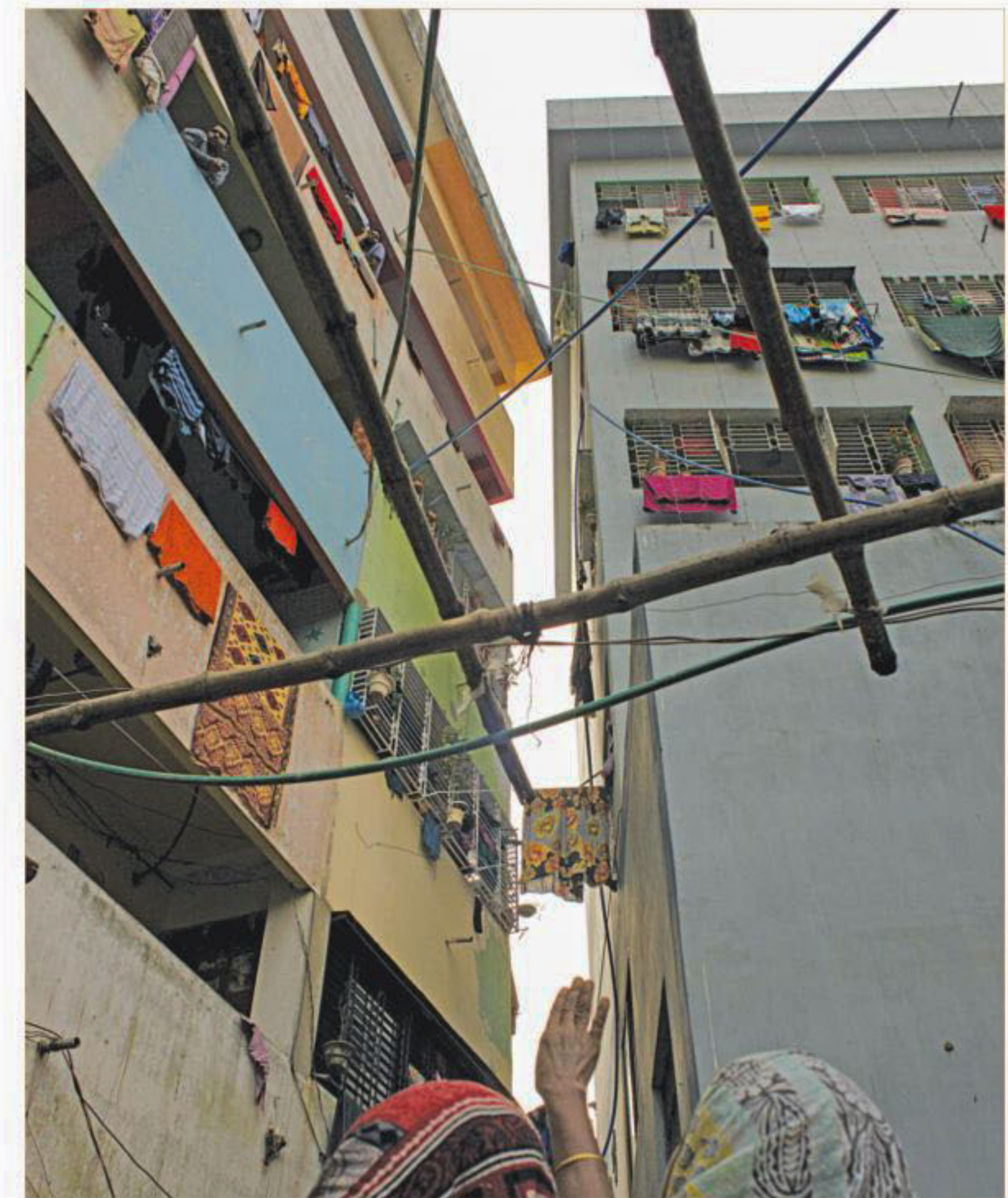
Mostofa was the ringleader of the gang, according to Rab.

Acting on information that the robbers' gang was committing a robbery at the house of one Arjun in

Magurata village, a patrol team of the elite force went there around 3:30am, said Additional Superintendent of police Mohiuddin Faruki, commander of crime prevention company-3 of Rab-12.

Sensing presence of the Rab members, the criminals, while fleeing the scene, opened fire on the elite force and threw cocktails at them, forcing the Rab members to return fire, killing Mostofa on the spot, he added.

The elite crime-buster arrested 10 members of the gang from the spot.



A six-storey residential building, left, tilts towards another building at Bangshal in Old Dhaka after an earthquake jolted the capital and other parts of the country at dawn yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

# Middle East tensions

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on the embassy as an "excuse" to sever ties and further increase sectarian tensions, after Shias across the world denounced Saudi Arabia's execution of Shia cleric Nimr al-Nimr.

A man was shot dead in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province late on Sunday, and two Sunni mosques in Iraq's Shia-majority Hilla province were bombed in the fallout from the dispute between the Middle East's top Sunni and Shia powers.

Oil prices rose more than two percent, overcoming economic weakness in Asia, as the two big petroleum exporters traded insults and tensions spilled into other crude producers such as Iraq.

Crude importer China declared itself "highly concerned" with the developments, in a rare foray into Middle East diplomacy.

"Like the international community, China is highly concerned about the developments and expresses concern that the relevant event may intensify conflict in the region," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying told a regular news briefing, referring to the escalation in tension.

The United States and Germany called for restraint, while Russia offered to mediate an end to the dispute.

The row threatened to derail efforts to end Syria's five-year-old civil war, where Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Arab powers support rebel groups against Iran-backed President Bashar al-Assad.

In neighbouring Lebanon, newspapers said the spat had clouded the hopes of filling the vacant presidency that had been raised last month after Iran and Saudi Arabia both voiced support for a power-sharing deal.

**DIVINE REVENGE**

After a furious response in Shia communities worldwide to the Sunni kingdom's execution of Shia Muslim cleric Nimr al-Nimr, Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir said Iran was creating "terrorist cells" among the kingdom's Shia minority.

Saudi Arabia executed Nimr and three other Shias on terrorism charges on Saturday, alongside dozens of Sunni jihadists. Shia Iran hailed him as a "martyr" and warned Saudi Arabia's ruling Al Saud family of "divine revenge".

Shia groups united in condemnation of Saudi Arabia while Sunni powers rallied behind the kingdom, hardening a sectarian split that has torn apart communities across the Middle East and nourished the jihadist ideology of Islamic State.

# 5 die in panic

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cardiac arrest when he was rushing out of his home, said Humayun Kabir, OC of Motihar Police Station.

In Lalmonirhat's Patgram, Kadu Miah, 60, died of a heart attack in his bathroom during the tremor, our correspondent there reported quoting Rezaul Karim, OC of Patgram Police Station.

In Sirajganj, Abul Kashem, 45, died of a heart attack while five others were injured trying to run to safety, reports our Pabna correspondent.

In Jamalpur, tailor Sonu Miah, 38, at Jangalia of Melandah upazila died of cardiac arrest within five minutes of the earthquake. Family sources said Sonu was asleep. He woke up suddenly and started to panic. He died at 5.12am.

Iqbal Kabir, a student of Dhaka University residing in Shaheedullah Hall, was admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital with critical injuries after he allegedly jumped from the third floor, one of his friends told The Daily Star.

students, took fast aid at the emergency section of the DMCH, Mozammel Haque, in-charge of the hospital's police camp, told The Daily Star.

Khandakar Sohan, a constable who was in the barrack beside police headquarters, fractured both his legs after he had jumped from the first floor. He was admitted to the DMCH as well.

Gas connections snapped in some areas of the capital while some other areas suffered power outages following the earthquake.

The Met office in Dhaka claimed that the earthquake was of 6.6 magnitude and was at a depth of 40 kilometres.

However, experts said the earthquake released energy of 6.7 magnitude at its epicentre but it was felt between 4 and 5 in Dhaka, based on the soil quality of certain places.

Most people thought it was the strongest earthquake they had ever felt and that was because they had not experienced such a strong earthquake from so close to the epicentre, said professor of geology department and

earthquake specialist Syed Akhter Humayun.

The professor said on the soft soil of Dhaka city, the intensity was around 5 while in areas with harder soil it was 4. The people of Sylhet felt it more than the people of Dhaka since Sylhet is closer to Manipur.

According to him, Dhaka city dwellers experienced the Nepal quake of last year between 3 and 4 on the modified Mercalli Intensity Scale.

"Even people living away from the epicentre might feel a stronger jolt if they live on soft soil," he said.

Mehedi Ahmed Ansari of the civil engineering department of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology said had the quake intensity been 8, the damage to Dhaka would have been severe.

Historically, Manipur is earthquake-prone, he said.

Two residential buildings listed in Dhaka.

A six-storey building in Shanir Akhra was leaning on the larger building next door, said Brig Gen Ali Ahmed Khan, chief of Bangladesh Fire Service

and Civil Defence.

"Fire fighters are working there. The adjacent building has several cracks too."

Another building in Bangshal was leaning.

At least 20 people were injured in Sylhet city whilst trying to run to safety, our Moulvibazar correspondent reports quoting Sohail Ahmed, OC of Kotwali Police Station.

Several injured were admitted to Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital.

A number of homes and buildings were damaged, including Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital.

Two constables of Chittagong Metropolitan Police received minor injuries while they were jostling down the staircase of their quarters, our Chittagong correspondent reports.

Our Barisal correspondent reported that the lone seismograph of the southern region in Patuakhali Science and Technology University has been out of order for the last three years.

Relief and Disaster Management Minister Mofazzal Hossain

Chowdhury Maya at a press briefing in the capital said the people of Bangladesh has the special blessings of Allah and that was the reason for the insignificant damage the earthquake had caused.

He said, "The people of Bangladesh are pious. Allah has blessed this country. That is why the damage was insignificant compared to the magnitude of the quake."

"Researchers had said Dhaka would be demolished if it suffered a 6.5 magnitude earthquake. We had one with 6.6."

"It is my belief that Dhaka would not be damaged even if it was hit by a 7.0 magnitude earthquake," he went on to say.

Secretary to the ministry Shah Kamal at he briefing said, "at least 72,000 buildings of Dhaka have been marked risky."

Our reporters in Jamalpur, Chandpur, Chittagong, Pabna, Sherpur, Rajshahi, Moulvibazar, Barisal, Satkhira, and Lalmonirhat contributed to this report.

# Avalanche kills four Indian soldiers

AFP, Srinagar

Four Indian soldiers have been killed by an avalanche in the remote Himalayan region of Ladakh near the de facto border with Pakistan, a defence spokesman said yesterday.

The four were hit as they patrolled a glacier at an altitude of 18,000 feet (5,500 metres) on Sunday morning, Colonel SD Goswami said.

"Their bodies were retrieved today," Goswami told AFP.

The area serves as the base camp for the Siachen Glacier, dubbed the world's highest battlefield, in the Kashmir region which is disputed between India and Pakistan.

Avalanches and landslides are common in the area during the winter.

Last year four soldiers died when their vehicle was buried under an avalanche near Leh, the main city of the high-altitude desert area.