

# Biggest global water meet kicks off

**AFP, Kyoto**

The largest international conference yet on water issues started yesterday with an expected 10,000 participants calling on governments to take concrete action to help some 1.4 billion people without access to safe drinking water.

The Third World Water Forum, to be attended by about 150 government ministers and several heads of state, will also discuss ways to raise awareness on the increasingly scarce resource.

The event, however, would only ask for voluntary pledges from governments and companies to help pay for water projects. International bodies have agreed that the world urgently needs to

double the amount of money that goes towards water projects from the current 80 billion dollars.

"Here we must look into public-private partnership," said Mahmoud Abu-Zeid, president of forum organiser the World Water Council and minister of water resources and irrigation from Egypt.

"I think we can look for a balance between private companies' need (to make profits) ... and governments' need to support the poor," he said.

Water experts around the world already have set goals for their nations, and forum participants must pressure governments to consider water issues as their priority, Ryutaro Hashimoto,

former Japanese prime minister, said in the forum's opening remarks.

"Already a goal has been set to reduce by half the number of people with no access to safe water and basic sanitation facilities by 2015," Hashimoto, the chairman of the forum's National Steering Committee, said, referring to a goal set by the United Nations.

"It is now time to follow up and to ensure those goals are achieved. That's what the Third World Water Forum is for," Hashimoto said.

Representatives of non-government organisations are expected to join the week-long event held in Kyoto, Osaka and Shiga.

Delegates will take part in some 350 sessions during the week to discuss efficient water use in agriculture, climate change, management of distribution systems and ways to pay for infrastructure in poor areas.

International bodies such as the World Bank and UNESCO are pressing for the forum to move beyond discussion and announce action plans with a schedule for implementation and funding.

At the end of the forum, the ministers will meet on March 22 and 23 to issue a final declaration.

Messages from the forum will be delivered to the G8 forum of the world's top industrialised nations to be held in June in Evian, France.

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## ADP to be downsized

**UNB, Dhaka**

The current Annual Development Programme (ADP) is being downsized to Tk 17,500 crore with substantial cutbacks in the original budgetary allocation of Tk 19,200 crore, sources said.

A Planning Commission meeting yesterday finalised a decision to this effect in view of the limited resources in the government coffers.

"The reduced ADP is to be approved by the ECNEC," Finance and Planning Minister Saifur Rahman told newsmen following the meeting with Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in the NEC conference room.

He said the commission suspended 82 projects to match the development plan with the revised allocation. Now, the new allocation would be utilised in priority projects in agriculture, health and nutrition, education, integrated communications and poverty alleviation.

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Prime Minister Khaleda Zia presides over a meeting of the Bangladesh Planning Commission in the National Economic Council conference room yesterday.

## Iraq crisis Chances of a peaceful solution fading, says US envoy

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

Chances of any peaceful solution to the Iraq crisis are disappearing fast and an effort to disarm Iraq will be an expensive exercise, said US Ambassador Mary Ann Peters yesterday.

"The possibility of peaceful resolution is shrinking," Peters told a press briefing, held at the American Center in Dhaka under tight security.

"I am not in a position to say specifically the amount to be involved with the exercise (disarm Iraq by any means). But it would be quite expensive."

The US envoy to Dhaka, however, said there is debate and disagreement even in the US administration over the financial cost in the event of a war.

The impact of a war on poor and small countries depends on what will happen in Iraq, she said.

The US troops are well prepared to make the war shorter to avoid any major human casualty, especially of civilians, she said.

"I am not privy to all military plans. But our troops are well trained to get hold of the weapons of mass destruction that Iraq has before anybody gets the chance to use them," she said.

A US-led war on Iraq without UN approval would not put the world body in any existence crisis, she thinks. "This a serious time for UN...I hope it (UN) would go on."

Avoiding any direct reply to a query about Dhaka's support in any form for a war, Peters said the US embassy is always discussing the development with the Bangladesh government.

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# Wen elected new Chinese premier



**AFP, Beijing**

Political survivor and skilled technocrat Wen Jiabao yesterday took the helm of China's government as Hu Jintao spent his first day as the new president and basked in the overwhelming support of parliament.

Wen, considered a quiet conciliator and consensus builder, was endorsed with 99.3 percent of the vote as premier to replace retiring economic czar Zhu Rongji, cementing the transition to a younger leadership following the election Saturday of Hu.

Lawmakers in Beijing's cavernous Great Hall of the People

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## Smith handed SA captaincy

**AFP, Cape Town**

South African cricket made a clean break from the Hansie Cronje era on Sunday when Graeme Smith was appointed as the country's cricket captain.

"I never met Hansie Cronje," the 22-year-old said of the disgraced former captain who was sacked in 2000 for taking money from a bookmaker.

"I never played with him or against him. He was a good leader but in the end he tarnished the game."

"We are starting afresh, there are no issues involved."

Smith was appointed captain in place of Shaun Pollock who was sacked on Saturday following South Africa's first round exit from the World Cup.

The Western Province opener will lead a new-look 14-man squad to two limited-overs tri-series in Sharjah and Bangladesh next month.

Six of the World Cup squad were left out, including Gary Kirsten, 35, who announced his retirement from one-day international cricket although he remained available for Test matches.

Also retired is fast bowler Allan Donald. Dropped were all-rounder Lance Klusener, left-arm spin bowler Nicky Boje and pace bowlers Charl Langeveldt and Monde Zondeki.

**SQUAD:** Graeme Smith (captain), Paul Adams, Mark Boucher, Alan Dawson, Beeta Dippenaar, Herschelle Gibbs, Andrew Hall, Jacques Kallis, Neil McKenzie, Mahaya Ntini, Robin Peterson, Shaun Pollock, Jacques Rudolph, Charl Willoughby.

# Wheat procurement Buy from farmers, silos briefed

**REAZ AHMAD**

Food officials have been instructed not to buy wheat from non-farmers and old stocks.

The instruction is part of a new policy for this year's official wheat procurement drive that started on Saturday.

"Wheat will be procured from homegrown fresh stock (grown in 2003) and real farmers," says the new policy.

The government has laid out the strict, cautious policy as a safeguard against irregularities found in last year's wheat purchase.

"Farmers will benefit from the new policy and the government will be able to build a good reserve," a high food official told The Daily Star yesterday.

The previous policy did not have any clear prohibition on purchase of wheat from non-farmers and old stocks.

Traders with strong political backing sold substandard Indian wheat to the government silos last year and regulatory loopholes were blamed for the scam. A group of food officials was also accused of conniving with the traders.

Eight government officials, including the then secretary of the food ministry and the director general of the food directorate,

were made officers on special duty (OSDs) as part of disciplinary action.

Three of them were forced into retirement for irregularities in the Tk 90 crore purchases.

The prime minister admonished a lawmaker of the ruling BNP for alleged involvement in the irregularities.

Two probe bodies, formed on instructions of the prime minister and the food minister amid criticism, submitted their reports over six months ago. But the government is yet to reveal the findings.

The strict measures of the new policy

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# Another al-Qaeda top gun nabbed

## Pak agents, FBI grill new catch

**REUTERS, Islamabad**

Pakistani and FBI agents yesterday interrogated a top al-Qaeda lieutenant and logistics expert snared overnight in what US officials called a significant arrest.

US-educated Moroccan Yasir al-Jaziri was moved to the capital, Islamabad, for questioning after his capture in a raid on Saturday night in the eastern city of Lahore, intelligence sources told Reuters.

Al-Jaziri is believed to be involved in communications, logistics and al-Qaeda's business operations, but not as an operational planner or plotter of attacks.

"He is significant. He is a key al-Qaeda lieutenant," a US official told Reuters in Washington.

His arrest follows the capture two weeks ago in the northern city of Rawalpindi of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, often portrayed as number three in al-Qaeda and suspected of being a leading figure behind the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States.

It also came a day after Washington waived sanctions imposed after General Pervez Musharraf's 1999 coup, clearing the way for the release of more than \$250 million in economic aid.

## Sabbir murder 4 more held in N'ganj

**OUR CORRESPONDENT, N'ganj**

Four more people including two JCD (Jatiyatbadi Chhatra Dal) leaders were arrested in town Saturday night in connection with the murder of business leader Sabbir Alam Khondoker.

District JCD organising secretary Monirul Islam Sajal and executive committee member Ohidul Islam Chhakku, and Saidur Rahman and Sayeed Hossain Ripon were returning from Dhaka in a taxicab when they were arrested in the town's Chashara area, police said.

Police suspect that Sajal and Chhakku were directly involved in the killing of Sabbir Alam.

All the arrested were sent to jail.

## War to harm ME people severely, says Russia

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

Russia thinks any attack on Iraq would have a severe effect on the entire population in the Middle East and grave environmental consequences.

"The forthcoming military action against Iraq will be of much bigger scale than previous American operations: Desert Storm (1991) and Desert Fox (1995)," said a statement by the Embassy of Russian Federation in Dhaka yesterday.

The attack will affect not only Iraqis but people of other countries of the Gulf region as well, the statement added.

If Iraq strikes back, it will target Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Israel; and the result will be dangerous, said the Russian embassy.

"Climatic changes in the Gulf region will be caused by significant outbursts of smoke and carbon in the atmosphere as a result of use of weapons on the Iraqi oil refineries and storage facilities," the statement said.

The destruction of chemical production facilities in Iraq would lead to broad-based pollution causing human sufferings, it added.



Workers repair a Chittagong University shuttle train that derailed because of worn-out railroad tracks yesterday. Ten people were injured.

## 10 hurt as CU shuttle train derails

**CU CORRESPONDENT**

At least 10 people including Chittagong University (CU) students and admission seekers were injured when a CU shuttle train derailed yesterday.

Admission test for BBA was delayed by one and a half hours as thousands of examinees couldn't reach the campus in time due to the derailment that occurred at around 8:00am in the cantonment area.

The university's rail communication remained cut off till 2:30pm when a salvage train finished removing the three derailed bogies of the shuttle train.

"The rail track has been worn out for a long time. The rail lines have no stones and even the sleepers are outdated and damaged. For this reason, derailment occurs often but authorities pay no heed," said a CU official.

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# UP polls conclude, CEC tight-lipped

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

The Union Parishad (UP) election staggered over two months ended yesterday amid a discord between the chief election commissioner (CEC) and the government over deployment of troops during the polls and his reported comments on the voting.

The Election Commission (EC) conducted elections to 4,223 Union Parishad, the lowest tier of the government, although rigging, violence, killing and intimidation marred the polls.

Some 80 people were killed and over 7,500 injured in polls-related violence, according to sources.

The EC has planned re-election in 53 out of 140 polling stations where voting was suspended due to violence.

CEC MA Syed, who came under fire from the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) men for his reported comments on the Union Parishad election, was tight-lipped yesterday about the polls.

But, an EC official expressed satisfaction over the UP polls, saying it was the finest UP election ever.

"We are happy that we could conduct a free and fair election," Election Commissioner AK Mohammad Ali told reporters.

Earlier, Syed, who had demanded troops deployment in aid to civil administration to maintain law and order during the polls, which the government turned down repeatedly, told reporters that the election was more or less a futile exercise.

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## Wahed murder PBCP leaflet claiming responsibility

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi**

The outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) in a leaflet circulated in different areas of Natore and Rajshahi on Thursday claimed responsibility for the murder of BNP leader Abdul Wahed Mondol.

The leaflet, which began with a quotation of the renowned Charu Majumdar, was headlined 'Murder of Wahed, a heinous and tyrant class enemy and enemy of Party ideals'.

"Guerrillas of the party reached safer grounds after murdering Wahed. Outwardly, Wahed was a Naxalite leader under the guidance of Ohidur Rahman but people accused him of tyranny, corruption and even rape," the leaflet said.

The leaflet was reportedly circulated in different areas of Naldanga in Natore and Bagmara in Rajshahi from the inter-city train Titumir Express on Thursday morning.

The leaflet further said the police department is the 'class enemy' and the PBCP's future target. It also cautioned five people of Bagmara saying their activities ran counter to the party's operation and interests in the region.

The five are Abdul Gafur, a ward commissioner of Taherpur Pourashava, his brother Abdus Samad Mondol, and three others -- Abdus Sattar Moulavi, Forgar and Ansar -- whose occupations were

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	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Mar 17		6-08 pm
Mar 18	6-05 am	
Prayer Timings		
Mar 17		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-15	5-45
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-32	5-00
Maghrib	6-13	6-20
Esha	7-35	8-00
Source: Islamic Foundation		