



Warm welcome awaits Kumaratunga

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga arrives in Dhaka this morning on a two-day visit to Bangladesh, being viewed as a big step forward in further expanding and strengthening the existing friendly ties between the two countries.

President Iajuddin Ahmed will receive her at the Zia International Airport at 11:00 am.

This will be the first visit to Bangladesh by a Sri Lankan president since 1995.

After a warm welcome at the airport, Kumaratunga will go to the National Memorial at Savar to pay tribute to the martyrs of the Liberation War.

She will call on President Iajuddin in the evening and attend a banquet in her honour at the Bangabhaban.

The Sri Lankan president and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia will hold talks tomorrow.

Bilateral relations, particularly in the fields of trade, commerce and investment, are likely to figure

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

US to send 1000-man team to look for WMD

Iraq's neighbouring states reject US threats against Syria; Baghdad shakes with protest against American presence

STAR DESK

Washington is going to deploy a 1,000-strong force to hunt for Saddam Hussein's alleged banned arms to justify the US-led invasion of Iraq.

US defence officials, quoted by

CNN, said the "Iraq Survey Group" would probably be led by a general and consist of military personnel, government intelligence analysts, civilian scientists and private contractors.

Initial elements of the weapons of mass destruction (WMD) team are

already on the ground in Iraq and the full contingent should be operational within two weeks, CNN quoted a Pentagon official as saying Thursday.

The survey team will focus on putting a larger number of personnel into Iraq to conduct a more organised

search for WMDs based on intelligence leads, the network said.

This latest effort to locate the elusive WMDs, said CNN, underscores the growing Pentagon view that Washington no longer expects

SEE PAGE 11 DOL 3

New tender for grains import recommended

REAZ AHMAD

The inter-ministerial purchase committee has recommended floating fresh international tender for import of two lakh tonnes of food grains, following a poor response to a tender earlier this month.

The cabinet at its meeting on Monday would review the purchase committee's recommendation before taking a final decision on import of rice and wheat, one lakh tonnes each.

The government's food stock has now come down to 2.5 lakh tonnes.

Official sources told The Daily Star yesterday that in response to the international tender floated earlier, only four bidders offered to supply wheat and 12 to supply rice. The authorities found only one of the proposals for wheat supply and three for rice 'responsive,' meaning these four bidders could fulfil the

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

30 Iraqi fighters captured after firefight

AFP, As-Saliyah

US troops captured more than 30 paramilitary fighters and destroyed eight military vehicles after coming under attack north of Baghdad, the US Central Command announced yesterday.

"The Fourth Infantry Division encountered paramilitary resistance as they continued their move north between Taji and Samarra along that route," Brigadier General Vincent Brooks said at Centcom's war headquarters in Qatar.

"In the engagement the coalition

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6



PHOTO: INTERNET

Iraqis take to Baghdad streets to demonstrate against the American presence in Iraq after Friday prayers. The anti-US resentment is surging high all across Iraq.

35 more CNG filling stations by June

SOHEL ISLAM

Compressed natural gas (CNG) crisis in the city would ease with the installation of 35 more filling stations for CNG-run vehicles by the end of June this year.

State Minister for Energy and Mineral Resources A K M Mosharraf Hossain gave this assurance while talking to The Daily Star.

"I know drivers of CNG vehicles and commuters are now facing problems due to a small number of filling stations. Their suffering will end with the setting

up of new filling stations," he said.

Miseries of the drivers of four-stroke three-wheelers multiplied as three major CNG filling stations out of the 15 were closed recently.

Two of the stations -- one at Shewrapara and the other at Bijoy Sarani -- were 'closed temporarily,' sources said.

Shewrapara station is now undergoing repair and it might take a month to complete the work. With the expiry of

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4