

## SAARC still has future, Kumaratunga says

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) can still be a strong forum for development, provided its member states and secretariat play proactive roles, said Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga.

"There are political problems between two member states (of SAARC)," Kumaratunga said alluding to India and Pakistan.

Despite all odds, the forum must move forward, she told the press at the Sonargaon Hotel yesterday afternoon prior to leaving Bangladesh after completion of a two-day visit.

Kumaratunga also spoke on the ongoing peace process in her country to put an end to decades of an ethnic strife.

The sixth attempt to have a negotiated settlement of the separatist movement of LTTE is now going on, with talks and a ceasefire for the longest time ever, she said.

Asked about the difference of opinion between her and Sri Lankan Prime Minister's Office yesterday.

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Visiting Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga, right, is at talks with Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at the Prime Minister's Office yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

## Jockeying for appointment of HC judges on

STAR REPORT

A fresh bid to appoint about 10 additional judges to the High Court has hit a snag due to intense lobbying by ministers and leaders of the ruling four-party alliance to get their closer ones selected.

A law ministry source said the ministry was preparing a list of judges for appointment, but desperate lobbying was delaying the process.

However, the ministry has decided to finalise the list anyway -- whether some of the lobbyists are happy or not, he added.

For the 10 posts, three would be selected from judicial officials and the rest from government law officials and practicing lawyers.

The ministry is facing difficulties to finalise seven from the latter category.

Four-party alliance partner Jamaat is pushing for the appointment of one of its men while coalition leader BNP is pursuing the case of one of its closer one, a ministry source said.

In addition, some ministers from the legal profession as well as some senior lawyers are jockeying for their persons, a Bar member said.

"Now the law minister has decided to finalise the list by directly discussing the issue with the prime

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## US blocks relief in northern Iraq

### UN arms inspectors must return to verify any WMD, says EU external affairs commissioner

STAR DESK

The United Nations and international aid agencies accused the US military of deliberately hindering the relief programme by stopping relief flights from coming into northern Iraq.

The UN has 30 workers stuck in Larnaca, Cyprus, after failing to get security clearance from US military authorities for their own planned flight.

Veronique Taveua, spokeswoman for the UN Office of the Humanitarian Coordinator in Iraq, said the delay meant the organisation could not oversee food, water, health care and demining programmes in the region.

She added: "This is slowing down the delivery of humanitarian aid. It's too long a process to return to an area where direct conflict did not occur."

Meanwhile, the first emergency

shipment of food reached Baghdad yesterday, as the UN significantly increases the scale of its aid to Iraq in an effort to avert an impending humanitarian disaster.

Rob MacGillivray, emergency programme manager of Save The Children, said: "The doctors we are trying to help in Mosul have been

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PHOTO: STAR

THIS IS NOT A SWIMMING POOL! Two ground staff wade through the deluge at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday after rain swept the venue. The final of the TVS Cup tri-series had to be abandoned without a ball being bowled. Weather-permitting, the final will be played today.

## Budget session to see independent anti-graft body bill

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A bill for setting up of an independent anti-corruption commission is likely to be placed in the next budget session.

The government promised to the donors in the Paris Consortium meeting last year for setting up of an independent anti-corruption commission to ensure good governance and reforms in nationalised commercial banks.

The donors recently reminded the government of fulfilling its pledges by September this year to ensure smooth aid flow in Bangladesh.

The two-day development forum meet starts in Dhaka on May 18.

A high level meeting, chaired by Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman, reviewed the progress in establishing the commission. The meeting assessed the structure of such commissions in different developing nations but could not come to any conclusive decision.

"The structure is yet to be finalised," the finance minister told reporters after the meeting. He however said that the commission would include a chairman and three members, who will work free from government's influence.

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## Consultations on nat'l policy review from April 26

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Fresh grassroots consultations will start on April 26, 2003 under the Citizen's Initiative to review the recommendations made by the 16 task forces formed prior to election 2001.

The recommendations of the task forces were prepared through six regional consultations and later

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## Cabinet decides on flag rule today

### Local ship owners resent move

STAR REPORT

The cabinet would decide the fate of the Bangladesh Flag (protection) Ordinance (1982) today amidst continued protests by the local ship owners, according to sources.

The proposal contains claims, which the local ship owners dismiss as "misrepresentation of facts".

The proposal made for the cabinet meeting claimed that the ordinance ensuring at least 40 per cent of cargoes to national flag carrier vessels was outdated and not consistent with the present day world economic situation.

The ordinance should be cancelled as the nature of shipping business has

changed significantly over the last 20 years, the shipping ministry proposal said.

It also suggested formation of a committee comprising local ocean-going ship owners to prepare a policy guideline for the local shipping sector.

It claimed that the existing temporary rule of sharing cargoes with 60 per cent going to the foreign vessels and 40 per cent to locals is very difficult to implement.

An inter-ministerial meeting on April 13 chaired by Principal Secretary to the prime minister Dr Kamaluddin Siddiqui discussed the issue and favoured cancellation of the rule.

The proposal mentions that the

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## Dhaka, Colombo sign protocol

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh and Sri Lanka yesterday signed a protocol agreeing to hold annual consultation at the foreign secretary level to further strengthen cooperation between the two countries.

The protocol was signed after official talks between visiting Sri

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