



## Launch dialogue on electoral reforms

### EU troika asks country's 2 major political parties, stresses credible polls for sustaining democracy

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The European Union yesterday urged the country's two major political parties to initiate an active dialogue on electoral reform issues to establish a cross-party confidence in the caretaker government and the Election Commission.

"It is essential to the stability and prospects of Bangladesh that the election takes place on schedule and with full participation," said a visiting EU troika in a press statement yesterday, the wrap-up day of its 3-day visit to Dhaka.

The troika led by Nikolaus Scherk, Austrian foreign ministry director for Asia and the Pacific, came with a mandate to speak on behalf of all the 25 member states of the EU. The statement, which followed a wide range of dialogues



Leader of a European Union delegation Nikolaus Scherk, right, talks to journalists at a city hotel yesterday.

with important government and opposition leaders, high officials, civil society representatives and foreign diplomats in Dhaka, said a successful and credible election would need support from all political parties.

"The EU therefore urges the government and the opposition to find a way to allow all-party participation," so that people can make their choice democratically, Scherk told a press briefing.

According to the troika statement, the EU recognises the next general election as a milestone for Bangladesh's democracy, and peaceful, free and fair elections in 2007 would also send an important signal to the international community that a durable democracy is being cultivated here.

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## EU troika meets Hasina, stresses need for free EC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The visiting European Union (EU) troika yesterday met Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina and once again stressed the need for an independent Election Commission (EC) to ensure free, fair and credible elections in Bangladesh.

"We are not here to advise, but we felt that the Election Commission needs to be independent, its funding be clear and it needs to be freed from the [authority of] Prime Minister's Office," delegation leader Nikolaus Scherk told newsmen after the meeting.

The EU troika, however, regretted not getting an opportunity to talk directly to the chief election commissioner (CEC) and the prime minister. Scherk said they wished to meet the PM but "apparently she seems to be very busy."

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## FIRST-EVER MONETARY POLICY STATEMENT

# BB plans to cut credit to private sector

### Businesses fear loss of production, competitiveness

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bangladesh Bank (BB) in its first-ever Monetary Policy Statement (MPS) yesterday set a goal to contract private sector credit growth by 3.3 percentage points by June to fight inflation.

From 17.2 percent growth in private credit in September 2005, the BB aims to reduce it 13.9 percent.

But business chambers fear this loan-shrinking policy will increase the cost of fund, affecting production and competitiveness of local

goods. However, the central bank argued, "The 14 percent growth of credit to the private sector programmed for FY06 would be sufficient to support seven percent real GDP growth if inflation is seven percent."

The central bank maintained that the tight monetary stance it is pursuing is not intended to slow down the output growth but to curb the excess demand arising from inflationary expectations.

"In view of the good post flood recovery of agricultural output and

the better than expected holding up of apparels export demand after MFA expiry," the BB has set its real GDP growth target at 6.8 percent for the current fiscal year, FY2005-06, and at 7 percent for FY2006-07.

According to a BB press release, the MPS is the first issue of its newly introduced half-yearly release. The MPS, the release said, is intended to present for general information on BB's outlook on real sector and monetary developments over the immediate future and the monetary policy stance it will pursue.

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## 2 'Bangladeshis' caught in Delhi with explosives

### India claims they planned to attack Republic Day programme

STAR REPORT

Delhi Police on Tuesday arrested two Bangladeshi nationals at an East Delhi locality with explosives and detonators, which they were reportedly planning to use for disrupting India's Republic Day celebrations today.

Acting on a tip off, commandos of elite Delhi police picked up the duo -- Saiful and Shuabul, alleged members of Harkat-ul Jihad-e-Islami -- at Shastri Park in the

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## 6pc GDP growth achievable: MCCI

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Despite some weaknesses, the country's economy in the first half of the current fiscal year showed some positive features and achieving six per cent GDP growth would not be much difficult, observed Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI).

The leading business platform in its quarterly economic review (October-December 2005) attributed growth in manufacturing and other industrial sub sectors to the positive sign of economy.

Termining increasing inflationary pressure and the government's borrowing from the banks as the

economy's disconcerting aspects, the review suggested that the government takes effective measures for controlling inflation, solving problems of the infrastructure, particularly electricity and ports, and overcoming other weak points like tight monetary policy and increasing interest rate.

The MCCI review, referring to an internal survey, said leading entrepreneurs expressed deep concern over political tensions in the country and criticised the government for its failure in taking necessary moves to defuse the tensions.

The entrepreneurs, however, appreciated the government for

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## Rocca due today

REZAUL KARIM

Christina Rocca, assistant secretary for South Asian Affairs of the US State Department, flies to Dhaka today on a three-day official visit to discuss issues of common interest with the government and representatives of civil society.

She will carry a letter of US

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## Hartal observed in Chapainawabganj

### Protests go on at Kansat; MP denies his role in police action

ANWAR ALI

A dawn-to-dusk hartal was observed peacefully at Chapainawabganj yesterday amid continued public protests at Kansat where eight people were killed in police firing on Monday during the rural power users' demonstration.

The 14-party opposition combine enforced the shutdown to protest the police atrocities but no political activists or policemen were seen on the streets during the hartal hours.

Angry villagers cut down two large mango trees from the mango orchard of local lawmaker

Shahjahan Mia blaming him for the police atrocities and chanted slogans against him, the police and local administration.

They also declared the BNP lawmaker persona non grata in Kansat. But Shahjahan Mia denied his role in the arrest of three leaders of local rural electricity subscribers' association and subsequent police action that sparked Monday's violence.

Villagers staged demonstration yesterday setting tyres on fire at several points of the Chapainawabganj-Sonamasjid Road. They put fresh barricades on

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## 'Sick' CEC stays home at night, returns to hospital in morning

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Election Commissioner MA Aziz, who took admission to a hospital on Tuesday after cancelling a meeting with the visiting European Union's (EU) troika, stayed at home that night but returned to the hospital early morning yesterday.

The sudden cancellation of the meeting for the CEC's sickness has raised question as the whole matter seems to be shady and two of the four election commissioners expressed their ignorance about the meeting and the CEC's illness.

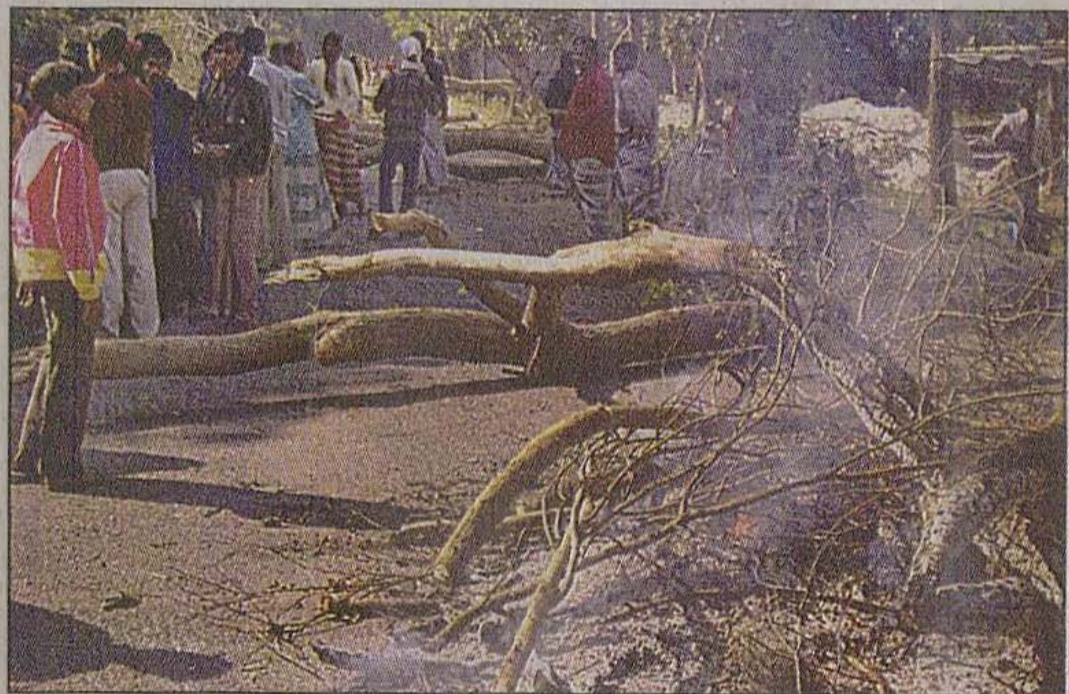
"We are not officially informed about the scheduled meeting with the EU team and we didn't know

about his (CEC) sickness," Election Commissioner AK Mohammad Ali told reporters yesterday. He said he came to know about these from newspaper reports.

Mohammad Ali yesterday afternoon talked to Election Commissioner Munsef Ali over telephone whether he knew anything, but Munsef expressed his ignorance.

The newly appointed two election commissioners, Mahfuzur Rahman and SM Zakaria, visited the CEC at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) hospital but declined to talk to the press when they came out of the cabin after a 20-minute stay.

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Agitators put up barricades with felled trees on the road in Kansat in Chapainawabganj during hartal yesterday to protest the death of eight people in police firing on January 23.

## 1 killed, 20 hurt in blasts at Kirtan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two bombs were thrown at a congregation of Kirtan -- Hindu devotional songs -- killing one and injuring at least 20 in Gangni upazila of Meherpur last night following an alleged argument between some local Muslims and kirtan-goers.

The home-made bombs were thrown at around 10:25pm when the Kirtan was at its peak on the

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## Hili land port closed after BDR-BSF gunfight

STAR REPORT

Import and export activities through the Hili land port in Dinajpur were closed last evening in the wake of a shootout between the border guards of Bangladesh and India.

The gunfight ensued as a member of Indian Border Security Force (BSF) chased an alleged drug peddler into Bangladesh around

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## Supreme Judicial Council on cards to probe alleged misconduct by EC Mohammad Ali

UNB, Dhaka

A three-member Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) headed by the chief justice awaits orders of the president to probe the allegations of 'gross misconduct' of Election Commissioner AK Mohammad Ali.

A competent source in the government told the news agency

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## CONDOLENCE



Mr Kihak Sung, Chairman Youngone Corporation

Officials of Youngone Group of Companies in Bangladesh express their deep and profound condolences on the sad demise of Mr A N M Eusuf, Chairman KEPZ Corporation (BD) Ltd in the early morning of Jan 24, 2006.

Previous to his joining Youngone Group, he had a distinguished career in the Civil Service of Bangladesh, his last assignment being Principal Secretary, Prime Minister's Office, Government of Bangladesh.

We all pray for the salvation of the departed soul. We also pray to God to give enough patience and strength to the bereaved family to bear the loss with fortitude.

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- 1998 Donation to Asiatic Society of Dhaka.
- 2003 Donation of Passenger Lift worth Tk. 2.6 Million to BIRDEM Hospital.
- 2004 Donation of Tk. 4 Million to the Prime Minister's Relief Fund for flood affected people. Donation of two Haemodialysis Machines worth Tk. 1.8 Million to BIRDEM Hospital. Sponsored 10 bed ward of Ahsania Mission Cancer & General Hospital by donating Tk. 3 Million. Installation of Donation Boxes for Ahsania Mission Cancer & General Hospital. Relief operation for flood victims at the cost of Tk. 5 Million.
- 2004-05 Sponsor of Jubo Mela organized by Jubo Unnayan Adhivaptar.
- 2005 Assistance to Society for the Welfare of Autistic Children (SWAC). Renovation of Dhaka Bank Fountain. Donation of Tk. 5 Million for Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Shishu Hospital, Bogra. Donation of Tk. 0.6 Million to renovate the Auditorium of Dhaka Reporters' Unity. Sponsored Uttara Sporting Club in Premier Division Cricket League and Inter Club Tennis Tournament in Gulshan Club. Sponsor of 6th Borsai Exhibition & Competition. Donation of Tk. 10 Million to Centre for Women and Child Health Hospital. Donation of USD 10,000 for Tsunami victims in Sri Lanka.
- 2006 Financial Assistance for Chaayanaut Cultural Complex. Sponsor of 20th Bangladesh International Junior Tennis Championships. Sponsor of Bangladesh Under 19 Cricket Team. Sponsor of Anti Drug Debate. Distribution of Winter Clothes by the employees.

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