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CEC's claim untrue
Adviser Mashhud spills the beans
 STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The denial of chief election commissioner (CEC) about an adviser's visit to his residence apparently proved false as caretaker government Adviser Lt Gen (ret'd) Hasan Mashhud Chowdhury yesterday emphatically said he visited the CEC's residence.

On behalf of the council of advisers, Hasan Mashhud and the military secretary to the president met with the CEC on Thursday night, seeking his opinion whether he will resign if requested by the caretaker government to pave the way for reconstituting the Election Commission (EC).

The adviser did not make the visit public. He, however, informed a meeting of the

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CA believes armed forces to cooperate in election

STAR REPORT

President, also Chief Adviser to the Caretaker Government, Iajuddin Ahmed yesterday said he firmly believes that the armed forces will provide all out cooperation, on demand, to his government and the Election Commission (EC) in holding the upcoming general election maintaining the same level of professional skill, devotion and neutrality demonstrated by them in past elections.

"As members of law enforcing agencies, neutral role of the armed forces is very important in the national election," Iajuddin said while addressing senior military officers at Senakunja in Dhaka Cantonment.

He said the devotion, professional skill and neutrality of the members of the armed forces in providing all out cooperation to the EC in holding successful, fair and neutral elections in the past, have earned confidence of the people as well as of different foreign agencies.

"The armed forces must be ready for the sake of the state and the people... I hope you'll jointly demonstrate your professionalism for maintaining democratic process and discharge your responsibilities by rising above all controversies," he said, according to a UNB report.

About the unrest on the eve of transfer of power late last month, the president, who is also the commander-in-chief, said the armed forces were kept on alert for a while during the period to control the evolving situation if the necessity would arise and to prevent any kind of unwarranted chaos in the country.

He said the armed forces proved their neutrality by exhibiting their professionalism, patience and tolerance in such an unexpected situation.

"The way the members of the armed forces played a strong role in maintaining peace and discipline in the past earning the confidence of the people, I do hope they will maintain the trend in the future," he said.

Professor Ahmed said, "If peace

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Advisers yet to find way to make EC effective

Discuss hajj, law and order at length
 STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With the chief election commissioner (CEC) having refused to step down, the caretaker government advisers sat last night for the first time after distribution of portfolios but failed to thrash out a conclusive plan to make the Election Commission (EC) effective.

The meeting of the advisers' council with President and Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed in the chair at Bangabhaban rather focused on other issues.

A major part of the meeting passed with the home secretary briefing on the current law and order situation and preparation for the coming hajj management, a meeting source said.

The meeting also discussed Adviser Hasan Mashhud Chowdhury's visit to CEC MA

Tk 6,000 crore looted from power sector in 4-party's 5-yr rule

Says LDP white paper
 STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The white paper on power sector corruption published yesterday by the recently formed Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) said Tk 6,000 crore was looted during the five-year tenure of the immediate past BNP-led four-party alliance government.

"Former prime minister, an alternative powerhouse of the then government, and secretary to the power ministry formed a syndicate to plunder in the power sector," former state minister for power and energy Anwarul Kabir Talukder told a press conference at LDP's Baridhara office, where the white paper was published.

During the last five years, around Tk 6,000 crore was looted out of over Tk 15,000 crore spent for different projects under the power sector, he said.

Talukder, who was in charge of the Power Division for nearly four months at the fag end of the BNP-led government, resigned from the post amid allegation of the government's corrupt practices and later joined the LDP.

During the installation of the Tongi power plant, substandard equipment was supplied at high price in which ministers and bureaucrats were involved, Talukder said, adding that that is why it could not generate even one megawatt of power.

Every year, an expenditure of Tk 1,000 crore was shown for overhauling of the power plants but power generation declined in those plants, he said.

The BNP government had decided to install some small

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14-PARTY ULTIMATUM

Butenis urges Hasina to give CG more time
 STAFF CORRESPONDENT

US Ambassador to Bangladesh Patricia A Butenis yesterday urged Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina to allow the caretaker government more time for implementing the 11-point task placed by her AL-led 14-party alliance.

The AL chief told Butenis that the alliance has shown maximum tolerance and given the president-cum-chief adviser "enough" time to give his neutrality but he has failed.

In a meeting at Sudha Sadan in the capital, Butenis talked to the AL chief about the country's current political situation, AL's demands and ultimatum to the caretaker government, and reconstitution of the Election Commission (EC).

Briefing newsmen after the meeting, the US envoy said, "The advisers are trying to move the country towards a free and fair election in which everyone could participate without violence, and involvement of candidates of people's choice."

"I am calling all the parties to give the caretaker government support, not pressure. I think the advisers seem very decent people of their integrity and have interests for the country. I think every Bangladeshi should support them," she added.

Butenis told journalists that she informed Hasina of the US position on the current situation in Bangladesh and that the US appreciated the AL and its allies as they restrained from street violence.

"I have urged Sheikh Hasina to continue exercising their tolerance as difficult as it may be. I think it is crucial to the success of election here, not the violence," Butenis said.

Briefing the journalists from AL side, its Presidium Member Kazi Zafarullah said the discussion between the AL chief and US envoy

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BNP, Jamaat rally round CEC

3-man team goes to EC, assures help to hold polls under existing set-up
 STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In an apparent move to resist the mounting demand for reconstitution of the Election Commission (EC), a delegation of the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami yesterday met the EC chief and other election commissioners, and assured them of all cooperation in holding the next general election under the existing EC.

The three-member delegation at its over one-hour meeting with Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Justice MA Aziz and election commissioners Justice Mahfuzur Rahman, SM Zakaria and Hasan Mahmud Mansur also discussed preparations and tentative time for announcement of schedule for the election due to be held in January next year.

"The next parliamentary election must be held under the present Election Commission, if you follow the constitution," BNP Vice-chairman MK Anwar, who led the team, told reporters emerging from the meeting held in the afternoon.

"If you (want to) enforce the constitution using 'sticks', then it is something different," Anwar said replying to query.

"It is immaterial whether any party contests the election or not," the former agriculture minister said when asked about the Awami League (AL)-led 14-party's stance that it would not contest any polls under the present EC.

Asked whether the polls will be credible if the 14-party combine does not contest, Anwar said, "The election will be held as per the constitution."

Jamaat leader "Abdur Razzaq said, "We will keep on cooperating with the Election Commission as

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46 top officials transferred

STAR REPORT

As part of the ongoing reshuffle in the administration, the caretaker government yesterday transferred five secretaries, six additional secretaries and 35 joint secretaries.

According to a circular issued by the establishment ministry, AKM Samsuddin, secretary of the women and children affairs ministry, has been transferred to the primary and mass education ministry, while Mohammad Abdul Haque, secretary of the primary and mass education ministry, to the women and children affairs ministry.

Md Azizul Islam, member, Privatisation Commission, has been transferred as member of the planning ministry, Sayed Ataur Rahman, director general, BCS Administration Academy, as member of Privatisation Commission and Bhupendra Chandra Debnath, member, Planning Commission, as director general of BCS

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Football superstar Zinedine Zidane signs a stone plaque at the inaugural ceremony of Grameen Danone Food Ltd at Sonargaon Hotel in the capital yesterday. Nobel Peace Prize winner Prof Muhammad Yunus is also seen.

Zidane opens food plant

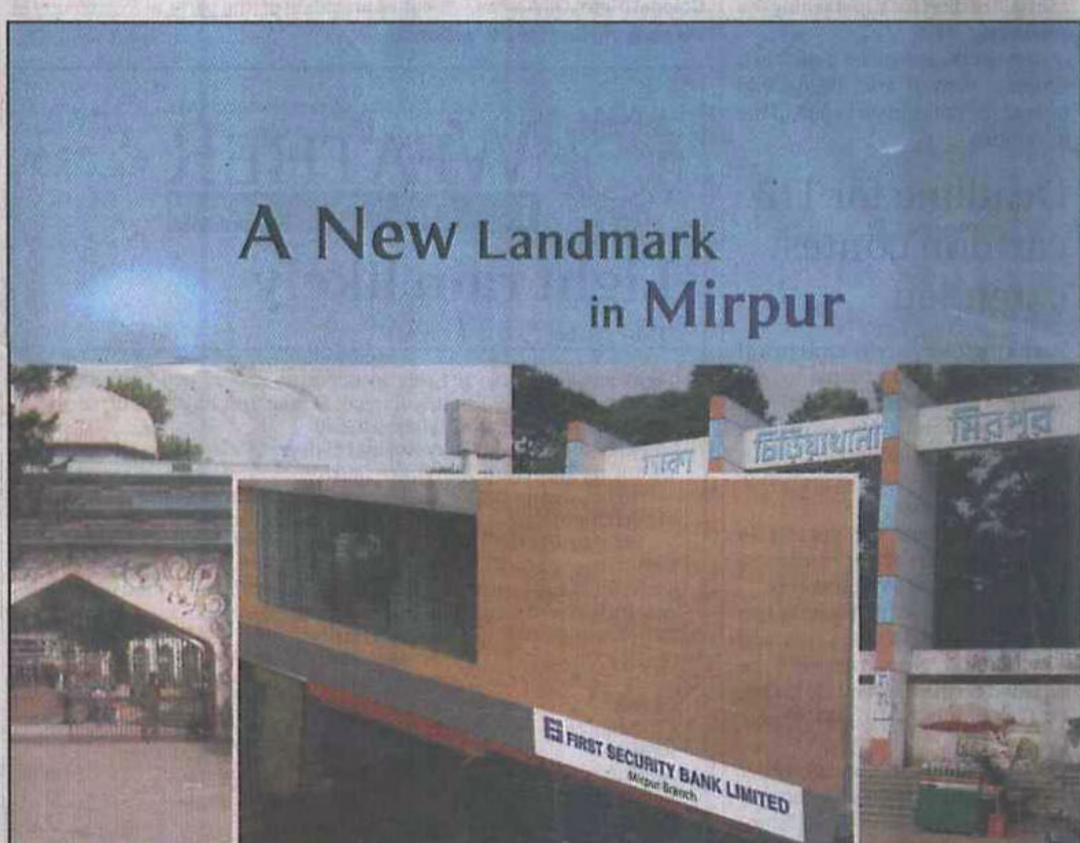
Heads home
 STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Grameen Group and international dairy food giant Groupe Danone yesterday jointly launched a venture to produce nutritious yoghurts for children of Bangladesh's least well-off families who often suffer from nutritional deficiencies.

World famous football star Zinedine Zidane yesterday inaugurated the first plant of the Tk 25 crore joint venture, Grameen Danone Foods Limited, at Pan Pacific Sonargaon through a function to promote the product, Shoktidol.

Groupe Danone, a Paris-based international food products company which is especially famous for its yoghurt, shares with the Grameen group -- comprising Grameen Dyabosa Bikash, Grameen Kalyan, Grameen Shakti and Grameen Telecom -- in investing initially Tk 7.5 crore in the plant.

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First Security Bank Limited announces the opening of its new branch at 793 Kazipara, Begum Rokeya Sarani, Mirpur, Dhaka-1216 from today. Conveniently located and equipped with modern banking facilities the new branch will satisfy all your banking needs.

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Graft changes colour

Alliance govt inaugurated 2 fertiliser projects after it suspended them for corruption in 2001
 SHARIER KHAN

When it came to power in 2001, the BNP-led alliance government suspended two DAP-Ammonium Phosphate (Dap) fertiliser projects on grounds of corruption by the previous Awami League (AL) government. But five years later, immediate past prime minister Khaleda Zia inaugurated both these overpriced plants, imposing perennial losses on the nation.

The two Dap factories are producing natural gas-based fertiliser at a cost of Tk 24,500 per tonne and selling that at Tk 18,000, swallowing Tk 6,500 loss per tonne. The two plants will produce more than half a million tonnes annually.

According to experts, the factories inaugurated by Khaleda in September will not be able to bear such losses for long, and it was a wrong decision to install them. The country was better off importing this fertiliser, they pointed out.

Import price of Dap from US and China is \$315 per tonne and \$330 from Australia, delivered at Chittagongport.

Interestingly, the PMO's (Prime Minister's Office) website (<http://www.pmo.gov.bd/wpceng/bcic.htm>) still identifies the Dap schemes as loss making. "It is evident that the decision of establishing two plants was not based on economic and commercial considerations. These projects would constitute a permanent drain on the nation's resources," it said.

The PMO's website even accuses the then AL government's industries minister Tofael Ahmed of favouring a certain Chinese company -- COMPLANT-- for the Dap-1 project and initiating the "buyer's credit", which is basically a hard loan incognito.

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Suicide bomb kills 42 at Pak troops

AFP, Peshawar

A suicide bomber killed 42 soldiers at an army base in northwest Pakistan Wednesday in an attack officials said was likely revenge for a missile strike against an al-Qaeda training camp.

Witnesses said the huge explosion at Dargai in Northwest Frontier Province sowed panic, and left body parts and shredded clothing scattered across a parade ground where trainee soldiers had gathered for morning assembly.

Military spokesman Major General Shaukat Sultan condemned the bombing, which targeted a training centre run by the Punjab Regiment, as a terrorist attack and warned the death toll could rise.

"Some 42 trainees died in the attack and 20 others are wounded. Some are in a critical condition," Sultan told AFP.

An interior ministry official said the bomber targeted recruits on a parade ground next to the regiment's main training centre.

"The bomber was clad in a shawl and he blew himself up in the middle of the assembly causing largescale casualties," the official told AFP.

Hidayatullah Khan, who saw the explosion from his newspaper stall

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