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## Bodos massacre 50 Muslim settlers

**GUWAHATI, July 24:** Suspected tribal militants shot dead 50 sleeping Muslims in a refugee camp in the Northeastern Indian state of Assam before dawn today, prompting demands for the government's resignation, reports AFP.

Some 15 gunmen from the outlawed Bodo Security Forces (BSF) surrounded a camp housing Muslims who had escaped a previous bout of ethnic strife and fired indiscriminately with automatic weapons, police said here.

At least 50 inmates, including women and children, were killed in the attack at a sleepy village in Barpeta District some 100 kilometers northwest of here, the United News of India (UNI) reported.

More than 100 others were injured as most policemen guarding the centre panicked and fled, officials said here. But a few security personnel fired back and killed two of the Bodo attackers.

**GUWAHATI, July 24:** The Indian government sent the army into parts of Assam today after tribal militants killed at least 50 Muslims at a relief camp, reports Reuter.

All the dead and injured were rushed to hospitals in two trucks. Sixty of those who were seriously injured were brought to a hospital in Guwahati, where doctors were frantically trying to save them.

Unofficial sources said the fatalities would go up. Police earlier said that the Bodo attack took place overnight Saturday.

It was not clear how the killers got near the camp despite an indefinite curfew imposed in the area after violence between Bodo tribals and Muslims last week left 23 people dead.

Today's massacre brought the toll in Barpeta to at least 75 since clashes erupted between the Bodo tribe and Muslim settlers in the region. The BSF is campaigning for a Bodo homeland in Assam.

It was the worst eruption of ethnic strife in Assam since 22 people were slain and hundreds injured in May when Bodos went on a violence spree in nearby Kokrajhar district.

The May massacre was linked to Bodo demands that non-tribal settlers leave Bodo-land.

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Members of six leftist factions of the Nepal Communist Party demonstrate yesterday in Kathmandu, demanding the removal of G P Koirala and the dissolution of the interim government.

## Saifur rules out expansion of VAT coverage, tariff cut soon

**By Staff Correspondent**

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday ruled out the possibility of expanding Value Added Tax (VAT) coverage and a further reduction of tariff in the immediate future.

He made the statement at a discussion meeting with Aid Group representatives on the problems and prospects of the country's economy, with particular reference to the current year's budget.

Held at a local hotel, representatives of the World Bank, IMF, ADB, UNDP and the envoys of the United States, Japan, Canada, Australia, Sweden, Norway, EEC and the Netherlands attended the two-hour meeting.

"We do not plan to increase VAT coverage in the immediate future as we need to achieve maximum output from the existing VAT net," the Finance Minister said in response to a proposal to expand VAT coverage by the IMF representative.

The IMF representative also sought further reduction of tariff slabs to 7.5-45 per cent from the current slab of 7.5-60 per cent. But the minister de-

arrested substantially and current account balance position is far better than that of the last year.

He said, last year's ADP implementation rate which is 10 per cent higher than that anticipated and that the inflation rate is at all time low. He said though the interest rate should have been much better, progress achieved in this sector is quite significant.

The Finance Minister, however, acknowledged that public sector utility management, performance of PDB and water sector are not that satisfactory, but still there have been some improvements. He said privatisation process has not been completed in this sector. The government is currently trying to gear up the privatisation process.

Dwelling on the micro sector, the Finance Minister said, achievements in some of the employment generating labour intensive micro industrial sectors are also excellent. He said, there have been phenomenal

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## Strike paralyses Kathmandu

**KATHMANDU, July 24:** Left-wing groups staged a largely peaceful dawn-to-dusk general strike here today to press King Birendra to sack Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala and restore dissolved parliament, reports AFP.

The Home Ministry said most shops in Kathmandu and surrounding areas were closed, and Communist organisers of the protest claimed 500 activists were arrested and 6,000 demonstrators took to the streets of the capital.

The ministry only confirmed 38 arrests of people caught throwing stones at public vehicles and buildings and no official estimate of the demonstration's size was available.

Four vehicles were damaged but there were no serious clashes reported.

Protesters carried anti-monarchy slogans that appeared in the past two weeks of protests demanding the removal of Koirala and the dissolution of his interim government.

King Birendra abolished the House of Representatives and named Koirala as caretaker.

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## 6 gas fields to be privatised

**By S Y Bakht and Inam Ahmed**

The government has approved a plan to offer six small gas fields for development by private investors.

The council committee of the cabinet at a recent meeting approved the plan, formulated by the Energy and Mineral Resources Ministry, in a major policy initiative seeking private sector participation.

According to official sources, the Bangladesh Oil, Gas and Mineral Corporation—Petrobangla—has been authorised to execute the plan and it is expected to float local and international tenders soon for the gas fields.

The gas fields, termed by officials as marginal and containing less than 200 billion cubic feet (bcf) of reserves each, are Chhatak, Kamta, Belabo, Begumganj, Meghna and Bianbazar.

It is estimated that around Tk 1,500 crore would be required to develop these gas fields.

Petrobangla would be offering "development and profit-sharing contracts" to the private investors. The development work would include drilling and connecting the output to the existing transmission lines.

The total development costs would be borne by the investors while the profit would be split with the government. "A logical and reasonable profit will be allowed for the investors after a detailed profitability analysis, under known conditions, is completed for each of the gas fields," one source pointed out.

Preference would be given to local investors and to foreign companies entering into separate exploration contracts with the government, sources added.

The contract would last till the depletion of the gas reserves. The government decision seeking private investments to develop the gas fields comes in the backdrop of severe fund crisis of Petrobangla, which was unable to bear the development costs of the

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## Rabin-Hussein summit today

**WASHINGTON, July 24:** Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin arrived in Washington today, one day ahead of his historic White House meeting with Jordan's King Hussein, reports Reuter.

Rabin made no statement upon his arrival at Andrews air force base just outside Washington at about 8:30 am (12:30 GMT).

King Hussein arrived in Washington late Friday.

The two nations have been in a state of war for 46 years and Monday's summit will represent the first public meeting between the two leaders.

Although the meeting is not expected to produce a peace treaty, it will provide the most forceful image yet of a new era in their relations. Both men will also address a joint session of Congress on Tuesday.

## Abu Hena held, released on bail

**By Staff Correspondent**

M A Hena, secretary general of the Prokrichi-BES Central Action Council, was arrested and later released on bail on Sunday.

Earlier in the morning, a team of police gheraoed the residence and arrested Hena on charges of corruption.

He was released from the district court as he had obtained from the High Court an anticipatory bail on February 9.

Relatives said, an official of the Anti-Corruption Bureau phoned the Prokrichi leader at about 11 in the morning and sought an appointment with him.

At about 12 noon, Hena found his house surrounded by police.

After the arrest, police sent him first to Dhanmondi thana and later to the court where he was set free on bail.

However, he had to submit his passport.

Leaders of the Prokrichi Central Action Council

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## ALCWC meets today

The Awami League Central Working Committee (ALCWC) meets today to review the country's latest political situation and finalise its future programme, reports UNB.

The opposition parties led by the Awami League boycotted the last two sessions of Parliament to press for some general elections under a neutral caretaker government. The demand was repeatedly rejected by the ruling party.

The Awami League sources indicated that the party's next action programme would be directed to mount pressure on the government to accept the demand for a caretaker administration.

Today's meeting at the Awami League central office scheduled to begin at 11:00 am will be chaired by party chief Sheikh Hasina.

Apart from anti-government

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## Currency Smuggling Businessman held in city

**By Staff Correspondent**

The Detective Branch (DB) of police yesterday arrested a businessman, Mohammad Hayatullah, 40, for his alleged attempt to smuggle out of the country foreign currency worth Tk 1.5 crore.

A DB team led by its senior

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## NEWS BRIEFS

### PM releases postal stamp on JMB

The Bangladesh Postal Department yesterday issued a commemorative postal stamp and a first day cover on the Jamuna Multi Purpose Bridge. Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia formally released the postal stamp of Taka four denomination and the first day cover valued Taka five at her office, reports BSS.

### Mostafiz hospitalised

**By Staff Correspondent**

Foreign Minister A S M Mostafizur Rahman is indisposed and has been admitted to the BIRDEM hospital, according to sources.

### Bangladeshi worker killed in Singapore

**SINGAPORE, July 24:** A Bangladeshi worker was killed Saturday when a crane gantry boom fell on him, Singapore Broadcasting Corporation (SBC) reported today, says AFP.

SBC said Abdul Kalam, 28, was working on the ground floor of a building when the crane fell. A South Korean, who was not named, was injured.

### Bank money looted in Ctg

**From Staff Correspondent**

**CHITTAGONG, July 24:** A group of terrorists today looted Taka 9,524 and a gun from a place near Tiger Pass here in the city, police said. The terrorists looted the money and the gun by intercepting an auto tempoo which was carrying the money from Agrani Bank, Laldighi branch to Pahartali branch at 12 noon.

### Mubarak, Assad start talks

**DAMASCUS, July 24:** Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak opened talks with Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad today to try to break a deadlock in peace negotiations between Syria and Israel, reports Reuter.

## CHT settlers face hardship, have no regular means of livelihood

**By Asiuzzaman, back from Khagrachhari**

Some 2,50,000 Bengali-speaking settlers in Khagrachhari district have been facing hardship for the past several years because they do not have any regular means of livelihood, a number of settlers alleged.

"We are deprived of the basic necessities. We are fully dependent on meagre ration," said Rezaul Karim Helal, President of Bangalee Krishak Sramik Kalyan Parisad (BKSKP). "We are leading a confined camp life in cluster villages and are not allowed to shift to our own houses in different hill areas," he said.

Helal said the Bangalees were concentrated in 78 cluster villages in 1986 following mass killing by tribal rebels. A large number of settlers left their ancestral land in 1979 and migrated to the hill districts where they were given five acres of, two cows, two bundle of CI sheets and Tk 10,000 as loan to cultivate the lands, he said.

Helal alleged that some 10,000 certificate cases for recovery of loans have been issued against the settlers but ironically they had to leave their farmland for the cultivation of which they were given loans.

"I had five acres of land where I cultivated vegetable and fruits but I was forced to leave my house at Thalbari because of the rebel attack," the Imam of Pathanchara Jama'at Mosque, Abul Washeh told The Daily Star.

He said some 350 Bengali-speaking families were shifted under security escort from Thalbari to Pathanchara under Ramgar thana in 1986 following an incident in which several settlers were killed.

Sixty five-year old Sadul Huq recalled how his two-year old child was roasted alive by tribal rebels.

A group of men, women and children 'belonging' to BKSKP blocked the Dhaka-Khagrachhari road near Pathanchara bridge on July 22 to narrate their harrowing tale to the visiting newsmen.

Sayed Ali and Haris Miah, both suffering from malaria, said that the cluster villages had no medical facilities and no supply of pure drinking water.

Shamsuddin Kamal, a member of Pathanchara Union Parishad, said that on July 20 when he went to his old house premises, the rebels might have kidnapped him, Kamal added.

Haris Miah of the same village said "we would no longer like to live on charity. We want our land and houses back to become self reliant."

Abul Khair and Abul Hashem also described their painful life which, they said, began in 1986.

One of them started weep-

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## Ctg Jamaat, APSU head for showdown tomorrow

**From Staff Correspondent**

**Chittagong, July 24:** Tension is mounting in the Chittagong city as both Jamaat and the All-Party Students Unity (APSU) continue their preparation to hold a public meeting at Laldighi maidan at the same time on July 26.

The two sides are organising rallies and processions to make their July 26 meeting a success.

APSU supporters held way-side rallies at different places of the city today demanding trial of Jamaat chief Golam Azam and other war criminals. They also paraded in the city streets calling for resisting the activities of fundamentalists.

APSU leaders at a press conference this evening expressed their determination to organise a meeting on July 26 at Laldighi maidan by resisting the Jamaat.

APSU leaders also threatened that they would attack the buses and trucks which would carry the Jamaat supporters on July 26.

The Jamaat leaders blamed APSU for calling a meeting at the same time at the same

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## Implementation of SAPTA demanded

**By Staff Correspondent**

The South Asian Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA) can and should become an efficiently functioning entity to help boost trade among the SAARC countries.

This was said at a press briefing following a seminar on the SAPTA at a local hotel yesterday.

President of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) Mahbubur Rahman said at the press briefing "the private sector now feels that there should not be any delay in implementing SAPTA."

The economic cooperation must continue despite political differences prevailing in the region, he said. "By such cooperation, we can expand and develop our production base and add new products to the trade basket."

The GATT records are likely to increase global trade by about 300 billion dollars and through SAPTA the South Asian countries could achieve the bargaining power to gain from this boom, the press briefing was told.

S M Inam, President of SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry, who was also present at the briefing, said "Through economic integra-

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## Armedmen storm N'ganj market

**From Our Correspondent**

**NARAYANGANJ, July 24:** An armed gang stormed into a busy market place at Chashara here, ransacked 11 shops and left four people wounded tonight.

The damaged shops included a confectionery, nine video cassette shops and a photo studio.

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## BSF men kill one near Jaintapur

**From Our Correspondent**

**SYLHET, July 24:** A Bangladeshi was reportedly killed by the Indian border security force (BSF) near the Jaintapur border yesterday.

Abdul Latif, 38, of Goabari village under Nijpat union of Jaintapur thana went to collect fire-wood near the Mohadev Tilla where the BSF men shot him dead.

The BSF informed the BDR of the incident at 10 am today. The body of the victim was handed over to the BDR after a flag meeting with the BSF this noon.

Last Wednesday, three Bangladeshis were killed by Indian nationals near Protappur border out post in Gowainghat thana.



A group of Bengali-speaking settlers who met the visiting journalists to tell their problems at Patanchara village under Ramgar thana in Khagrachhari. — Star photo