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Dhaka closely monitoring Pak situation

The foreign ministry is closely watching the development in Pakistan where the Army was reported to have revolted against the government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

"We are closely watching the situation," state minister for foreign Abdul Hanis Chowdhury told UNB over telephone.

He refrained from making further comments when asked about the prospect of politics in the region in view of military action in Pakistan.

US watching, Vajpayee holds crisis meeting

WASHINGTON, Oct 12: The United States said today it was watching events in Pakistan closely following the news that Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's official residence had been surrounded by troops, reports Reuters.

"We've seen the reports, and we're watching it closely," said David Leavy, spokesman for the White House National Security Council.

Just three weeks ago, US officials expressed concern about a possible military coup because of political turmoil and opposition demands that Sharif quit.

"We hope there will be no return to the days of interrupted democracy in Pakistan," a US official said at the time. "We would strongly oppose any attempt to change the government through extra-constitutional means."

AP from New Delhi says, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee went into a crisis meeting with top advisers tonight as soon as reports arrived about the military takeover of public facilities in Pakistan.

The Indian government made no immediate comment on the events in Pakistan, and officials refused to confirm.

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Army forces Sharif out of office

ISLAMABAD, Oct 12: Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was ousted in a military coup today after he sacked the country's powerful army chief, reports AFP.

State-run television, in a statement issued several hours after troops surrounded the prime minister's official residence here, said Sharif's two-and-a-half-year-old government had been removed.

The government has been dismissed, the brief statement said.

The statement said that

army chief General Pervez Musharraf, who was sacked by Sharif earlier in the day, would make a televised address to the nation tonight.

Television broadcasts had been cut off for about three hours after Sharif made the shock announcement that he had fired Musharraf and replaced him with Lieutenant

General Khawaja Ziauddin.

A senior police official said troops had told Sharif not to leave his Islamabad residence and police at his home had been disarmed.

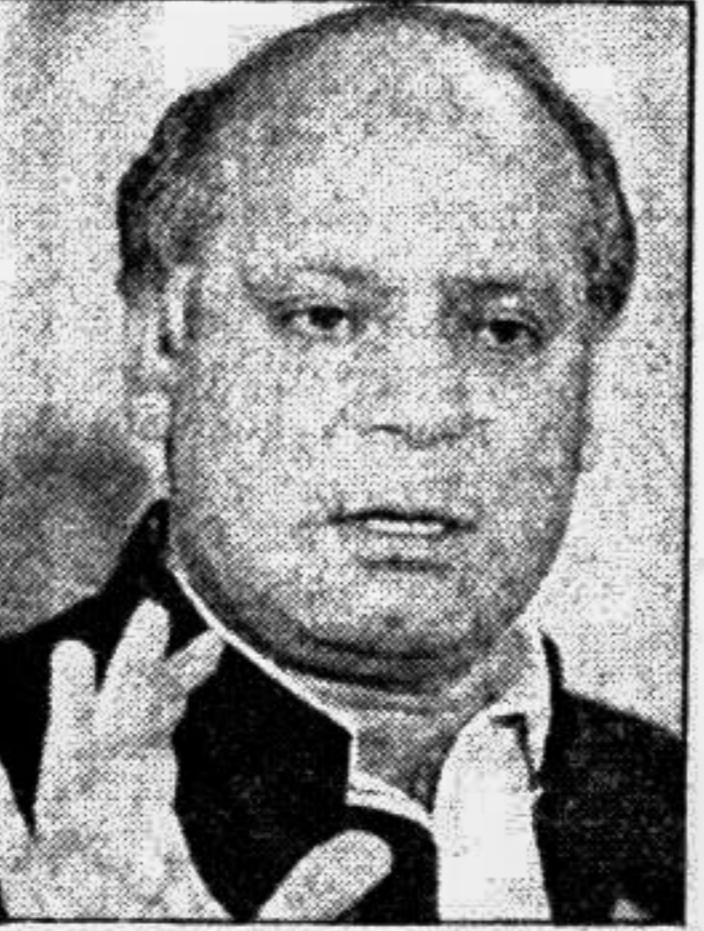
Sources said Sharif, his brother, Shahbaz Sharif, several ministers, the premier's military secretary and Ziauddin, the head of the military's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency, were inside the residence.

Earlier, Pakistani soldiers seized control of the national airport. Key government offices and shut down state-run television today in an apparent move against the government following the dismissal of the country's powerful army chief.

Sharif fired army chief Gen Musharraf while he was on a visit to Sri Lanka. Soon afterward, Pakistani television went off the air and army personnel moved rapidly through the capital, seizing administrative buildings and the homes of senior government officials.

Musharraf returned to Pakistan late today and was

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Nawaz Sharif



Gen Musharraf



Soldiers enter the Pakistan state television building by jumping over the gate in Islamabad following the dismissal of Army Chief General Pervez Musharraf yesterday. — AFP photo

A false claim

By Staff Correspondent

The Daily Star categorically states that Salahuddin Shoab Choudhury is neither a writer of The Daily Star nor a contributor to the newspaper. He has no link with the newspaper.

There is no record that The Daily Star published anything written by Shoab.

According to a report in a Bangla daily yesterday, Shoab had claimed himself to be a "writer of The Daily Star".

Shoab was arrested recently in connection with a case alleging a conspiracy to assassinate the Prime Minister, her close relatives and some Cabinet members.

JIC interrogating Shoab Chy

By Staff Correspondent

A joint interrogation cell constituted with personnel from the Special Branch of Police, National Security Intelligence and Defence Forces Intelligence continued interrogating Salahuddin Shoab Choudhury, official sources said last night.

A Bangla newspaper reported yesterday that Shoab Choudhury had claimed himself to be a "regular contributor to The Daily Star". The claim is totally false and baseless. He had never been associated with The Daily Star.

Shoab Choudhury, managing director of now defunct ATV was arrested by Special Branch of police Sunday night from his Uttara residence in connection with a case filed with Motijheel thana alleging a conspiracy to kill the Prime Minister, her close relatives and some members of the Cabinet.

The case against Shoab Choudhury was filed on July 11.

Police earlier claimed that they recovered an e-mail message offering millions of dollars for the assassinations. Police claimed that the message was sent from Shoab's e-mail address. This led to his arrest.

The said e-mail message was also sent to some newspaper offices on May 4.

The CMM court placed him on eight days' police remand on Monday.

EC to sit with political parties to discuss UZ, city corp polls

By Staff Correspondent

The Election Commission has decided to discuss with political parties holding of elections to Upazila Parishads (thana level local bodies) and City Corporations 'very soon'.

"The Commission would send invitations to both the ruling and the opposition political parties in a couple of days," a top official of the EC secretariat told The Daily Star yesterday.

"The Commission would discuss various aspects of Upazila and City Corporation elections, including possible dates, with the parties," he said.

The three-man Election Commission headed by Mohammad Abu Hena reached the decision at a meeting for holding polls to four City Corporations is December 27. However, as things appear, the Commission would be able to hold elections to three corporations, save Dhaka, where a case is still pending with the High Court on the delimitation of certain wards of the Dhaka City Corporation.

The deadline for Upazila polls is December 28.

There is, however, a legal flexibility in matters of holding elections to the 463 upazila bodies. The latest amendment to the law governing the Upazila bodies says that the EC would

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Now fake bomb!

By Staff Correspondent

A "fake bomb" drove panicky residents of a twelve-storey apartment building at the heart of the city out of their homes yesterday afternoon.

Police removed the "bomb", found in an elevator of the building at Lake Circus, Kalabagan, and took it to an open space nearby. Military experts later discovered that it was not a bomb.

"It could be a false alarm," said an explosives expert of Bangladesh Army to a Daily Star correspondent as he examined the "bomb" wrapped in hard paper on the Kalabagan Kiraz Chakra ground adjacent to Mirpur Road at about 9:00pm last night.

Senior Dhaka Metropolitan Police officials confirmed late last night that "it was a hoax".

Residents started running out of the 36-flat building soon after they learnt there was a "bomb" in the elevator. The "bomb" in the building (1/C

North Dhanmondi) also panicked the neighbourhood residents.

Most residents did not return to their homes till 10pm, one of their neighbours said.

Residents and police said Mamun, owner of a flat on the seventh floor, along with residents of two other apartments first saw the "bomb" inside the lift at about 5:15 pm. Blue and white electrical wires were exposed when they spotted the packet-length 8 inches, width 6 inches and height 3 inches) made of hard paper, which made them think it could be a bomb.

The lift had no operator and two security men at the entrance of the apartment had no idea about who left the packet.

Asked to comment by The Daily Star about the series of incidents involving bombs, real or fake, the city police chief said he was at a loss.

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Policemen take a look at the "bomb" they removed from a 12-storey residential building in the city yesterday. — Star photo

Bomb planting: 3 more held

By Court Correspondent

Three more persons have been arrested in connection with the recent bomb blast in a mosque in Khulna and planting of two bombs in two mosques and an anti-tank mine in a newspaper office in the city.

The arrested persons have been identified as Shahidul Islam, founder president Al-Markazi-Islam, Mohammad Markatul-Islam, Mohammad Ruhul Amin, its Chairman and professor at Haraganga College at Munshiganj and Mohammad Sayeed Al-Meshah, Director of its publication wing, police said.

Shahidul Islam was arrested from Mohammadpur and Meshah from Kamrangchhar in the city on Monday. Ruhul Amin was arrested from Kalyanpur yesterday, police said.

Arrested under Section 54 of CrPC, the three were produced before the CMM court yesterday. The court placed them on five day's remand for interrogation, police said.

Another person, Mohammad Afsar Ali, stated by police to be a BNP activist, was arrested under Section 54 of CrPC on Monday in connection with planting of the explosives in the city. He was produced before the CMM Court the same day. The court placed him under two days' remand.

No specific case has yet been filed in connection with the recovery of explosives.

DMP Commissioner AKM Shamsuddin said last night that DB has been asked to investigate the incidents.

Metal detectors may be installed at important public places

By Staff Correspondent

The government plans to install metal detectors at important public places to ensure public safety and beef up security, home ministry officials said.

The move comes in the wake of bomb blast in a Khulna mosque on Friday that left seven people dead and subsequent recovery of grenades and land mines in the city.

Police have been asked to keep extra vigilance on shopping centres, bus and ferry terminals, rail stations, courts and places of worship.

"Police are planning to buy metal detectors for important public places such as rail, ferry and bus terminals," said Abdur Rahim Khan, Additional

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BNP considering legal action against Alauddin, Swapan

By Staff Correspondent

BNP is considering legal action against two of its former MPs whose seats were declared vacant by the Election Commission for crossing the floor.

Talking to newsmen at the official residence of the Leader of the Opposition in Parliament yesterday evening, BNP Standing Committee member Barrister Moudud said that the party was looking into three key issues based on which legal action could be taken.

Dr Mohammad Alauddin and Hasibur Rahman Swapan, both elected on BNP tickets, joined the Awami League government and were made junior ministers.

The issues under examination are: (1) whether the orders given by the two ministers during their tenure can be proved illegal, (2) whether they should

return their salaries, allowances, expenditure on house, cars, furniture and other facilities enjoyed by them since they have been ministers and (3) whether the Prime Minister and the Speaker have violated the Constitution by their acts.

"We are now examining the matter and yet to decide for legal action," Moudud said and added "Do you think that we will allow them to go scot free?"

He said the two ministers must resign immediately after the verdict given by the EC "if they have minimum respect" for the Constitution. "It would be wise on part of the Prime Minister to call and ask them to resign as soon as she heard the verdict."

"Both the Prime Minister and the Speaker have violated the Constitution and failed to

Fate of Swapan, Alauddin yet to be decided

By Staff Correspondent

The confusion over composition of the Cabinet after two ministers lost their parliamentary seats prevailed yesterday as there was no move to settle the matter.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who was on a trip to Tangail yesterday, was not learnt to have taken any concrete step in this regard till last night, which left the fate of state minister Dr. Mohammad Alauddin and deputy minister Hasibur Rahman Swapan hung in the balance.

The Election Commission on Monday ruled that the two ministers would lose their parliamentary seats immediately for crossing the floor in the House. They joined the government 20 months ago against the decision of their party, BNP.

The EC action has raised questions whether the two will retain their places on the Cabinet.

Both Alauddin and Swapan have now become technocratic ministers by definition. The law does not permit more than one tenth of the Cabinet to be from among non-MPs. Accordingly, the present 38-strong Cabinet can accommodate three ministers from the tech-

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PM orders combing operation Recover arms, nab all terrorists in Tangail

By Staff Correspondent

TANGAIL, Oct 12: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina today asked the officials to launch a combing operation in Tangail, like the one in the southwestern region of the country, within seven days to nab the terrorists and recover arms, reports UNB.

"Start a special drive within seven days to arrest the terrorists and recover all illegal arms," she told officials addressing a law and order review meeting at the local DC's office.

The Prime Minister told the officials to take stern action against the terrorists irrespective of political affiliation. Hasina suggested creating public awareness and involving people in the anti-terrorist campaign.

"People are the main force... if the people power is with us the terrorists, no matter how powerful they are, will not be able to survive," she said.

The meeting, attended by government officials, members of the law enforcing agencies, local political leaders and professionals, apprised the prime minister of the law and order situation in the district.

They said the terrorists backed by some vested quarters

have been disturbing peace in the area. They also told her that tender for different works is the root cause of terrorism and corruption.

For different reasons effective and strict measures could not be taken here, said the Superintendent of police.

Home Minister Mohammad Nasim asked the officials to arrest the terrorists without showing any excuses and said "The Prime Minister has ordered us to check terrorism at any cost."

"If you can't control terrorism, there is no need to continue in your job. Take action, we will protect you," he said.

The Home Minister also asked the officials not to give any concession to the terrorists. "If we can take action against our MPs, why will you not be able to take action against the terrorists?" he asked.

Prime Minister Hasina said usually it is difficult to get witness against the terrorists, and suggested the officials give protection to the witnesses. Confidence in the government has increased and people are

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'Export of food items to help cut trade gap with S'pore'

By Rafiq Hasan

The visiting deputy leader of a high-powered trade and investment mission from Singapore, Tham Hock Chee, has said Bangladesh can reduce trade gap with his country through exporting more food items and agricultural goods.

"You produce a lot of food items and agricultural goods which can well be exported to Singapore. It would help reduce the trade gap between the two countries," he pointed out.

According to available data, balance of trade between the two countries so far remained in favour of Singapore. During the last three fiscal years, the trade balance in favour of Singapore stood at US\$ 882.26 million.

During financial years from 1995-96 to 1997-98, Bangladesh exported goods worth only US\$ 78.94 million to Singapore and import goods worth 882.26 million dollars.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday after talks with members of Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) at its conference room, Tham observed that Bangladesh had great potential to increase the volume of export to Singapore.

"The cultivable land in Singapore is very meagre and it hardly produces any agricultural commodity." So Bangladesh can take the advantage through exporting agricultural goods and agro-based products there," Tham Hock said.

"We buy agricultural goods from as far as America, Australia, New Zealand, China, India and Pakistan. Why not from Bangladesh?"

The reason is, "You do not have proper processing system including freezing facilities", Tham noted. "To minimise the trade gap, Bangladesh should take initiatives to send goods to the Singapore market which also happens to be a transit point for the whole world."

The 15-member trade delegation arrives Dhaka Saturday night and held talks with the

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Punish culprits, demands Ahmadiya community

By Staff Correspondent

Leaders of the Ahmadiya community yesterday demanded exemplary punishment to those responsible for the Friday's bomb blast inside a mosque in Khulna on Friday and placing of another bomb in their Bakshibazar mosque in the city on Sunday.

At a press conference, held at the Bakshibazar Ahmadiya mosque, they alleged that members of an organised group, who had been threatening them from the podiums of public meetings, were responsible for the attacks.

The press conference, addressed by Mir Mohammad Ali, national ameer of the sect, was attended, among others, by

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Shikdar names his patrons in police

From Quazi Amanullah

SHULNA, Oct 12: Ershad Khulna has named seven former police commissioners and a retired DIG of Khulna range as his patrons and beneficiaries.

Of the seven, four have gone into retirement while three served as police commissioners here during the last eight years.

The three former police commissioners belong to the 1973 batch of BCS entrants and are still serving in the police department.

He also named some officials of the Khulna Metropolitan Police (KMP) saying he used to bribe them till August 11, the day he was arrested, police commissioner M Anwarul Iqbal told newsmen this afternoon. DC (south) Mazharul Huq

was also present there.

The four retired police commissioners are M K I Chowdhury, Osman Ali Khan, Abdul Hakim Khan and Mir Hashmatullah. The retired DIG is Mirza Raqibul Huda who also served as police super, Khulna, for more than two years.

All these five officials were tipped from the Army by late president Ziaur Rahman.

The police officials took huge amount of bribe at different times during their tenure to conceal criminal acts of Ershad Shikdar and his accomplices, Iqbal added.

But the police commissioner declined to disclose names of former police commissioners

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Student strike at all varsities today

By DU Correspondent

Ganatantrik Chhatra Oikya (GCO) will enforce a strike at all the universities of the country today to protest police action on the agitating students of Jahangirnagar University (JU) and realise their various demands.

The demands are immediate resumption of JU classes, cancellation of enhanced admission fees at JU, resumption of bus service at Chittagong University, making the residential halls of Rajshahi University free from Shibir activists, arrest of 60 listed terrorists from DU, setting up of a complaint cell at DU to resist harassment of female students and more government allocation for the universities.

Five other left-leaning student bodies also called a strike at DU today to press home their six-point demand, including withdrawal of the decision by the government to raise admission fees and immediate reopening of JU.

The student organisations are Jatiya Chhatra Dal, Bangladesh Chhatra Federation, Biplobi Chhatra Moitri, Biplobi Chhatra Sangstha and Chhatra Oikya Forum.