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### INSIDE TODAY

#### COMMENT

President Bill Clinton's visit didn't bring about any strong US commitment excepting assurances for some assistance, writes **Mansoor Mamoon**

It is essential to ensure that examinations are an honest method of ascertaining merit, because when merit is compromised for convenience it creates the ultimate scope of corruption, writes **Mohammad Badrul Ahsan**

#### SOUTH ASIA

The leaders in Nepal need to understand that they have to put aside their individual differences for the sake of the masses, writes **Ekram Kabir**

#### ALTERNATIVE

It is astounding to note how the notion of human lives and their stake get lost when the leadership of India and Pakistan talk of militarisation and nuclearisation of South Asia, writes **Dilara Choudhury** in *Strategizing South Asia in Global Context*

## Musharraf takes polls path

### Pak military regime unveils local election plans

ISLAMABAD, Mar 23: Pakistan's military ruler on Thursday announced nationwide local elections — considered a first step toward a return to democracy, reports AP.

General Pervez Musharraf's promise came two days before US President Bill Clinton is scheduled to visit Pakistan, where he is expected to press the military ruler for a timeframe for general elections.

Musharraf has rebuffed international pressure to return Pakistan to democracy quickly, saying the task ahead is onerous. But Thursday, he said the first round of local elections will be held between December and May 2001. A second round of local elections — at the district level — will be held in July 2001, effectively putting municipal governments back in power.

"We want to empower the impoverished, the people at the

grass root level," Musharraf told a news conference in the federal capital.

"Democracy starts here at the district and local governments," he said. "From here we will move up step by step to provincial and federal (elections) in due course of time."

The army chief toppled Pakistan's elected government in a bloodless coup last October, accusing officials of corruption and power mongering that crippled institutions and alienated smaller provinces.

Musharraf's scheme for staggered local elections also involves a complete restructuring to give a greater voice to the village level, where councils are referred to as union councils.

His scheme also allocates seats for women, for minorities in Pakistan and for the first time, for the poorest whom he referred to as 'workers and

peasants."

In Pakistan's rough and tumble politics, the wealthiest generally dominate politics and dictate who the poorest should vote for.

Union councils, to be elected between December and May 2001, will have 25 seats — 10 reserved for women, four for peasants and workers and one for minority religious groups.

At the district level, the 66-seat councils will include 50 general seats, which can be contested by men and women, as well as 10 seats reserved for women, three for workers and peasants and three for minorities.

But before holding the local elections, the army-led government says it wants to revise a 20-year-old electoral list and make new identity cards that can't easily be forged.

"We have to create a new electoral role. They are all bogus.

They have been manipulated and distorted," Musharraf told reporters. "No one has any faith in them."

Musharraf previously referred to ousted Premier Nawaz Sharif's government as a "sham democracy" and vowed that the next time an elected government takes power in Pakistan it will be through a "real democracy."

The army's anti-corruption bureau, established by Musharraf, says it has recovered dhs 1 billion in unpaid bank loans and money stolen by corrupt politicians and bureaucrats.

The anti-corruption bureau was given sweeping powers to arrest, detain and charge those suspected of corruption.

Sharif is in jail in southern Karachi on charges of hijacking, attempted murder, kidnapping and terrorism. If convicted, he could be sentenced to death.

## India undermines SAPTA spirit

### Unilateral increase in duty on Bangladeshi garment product

By Staff Correspondent

India has unilaterally increased the duty on import of garment from Bangladesh against the spirit of Saarc Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA), exporters said.

According to sources, during the third round of negotiation under SAPTA in the middle of last year, Delhi agreed to provide some duty concessions on import of goods from Bangladesh and other Saarc countries.

Following the negotiation, Delhi informed Dhaka through a notification in last August that Indian importers would get 10 to 90 per cent duty concession on 77 items while buying those from Bangladesh. And

garments, particularly men's shirt was given 50 per cent concession.

Availing the concession, some garment manufacturers immediately started exporting apparel, particularly men's shirt to India. Some renowned international buyers who had chain shops in India also placed orders for garments item from Bangladesh.

But the Indian government suddenly changed the duty structure on garment import from Bangladesh. Earlier, Delhi would charge only 20 per cent duty on invoice value of garments imported from Bangladesh.

But in the month of February

this year it changed the duty on invoice value and imposed a duty of Rupees 135 per shirt, which is around 60 per cent higher than the previous duty, sources said.

When contacted, an official at the ministry of commerce who deals with export related matters said he did not know about the matter but he heard about duty increase by India on import of jute from Bangladesh.

However, he observed that a country cannot unilaterally increase duty after agreeing in the negotiation.

Dressmen Limited, a local garment manufacturer, received an export order of 3.60 lakh pieces of men's shirts val-

ued at 1.26 million dollars from Madura Garments of Bangalore.

It shipped the first consignment of garment comprising 30,000 shirts in January. But the buyer informed them that due to sudden change in the duty structure they are cancelling the future shipment.

"Such a huge increase is actually difficult for us to work with and we are making strong presentations to the government to reduce the duty. We also request you to make a presentation to your government to provide a favourable duty terms for import from Bangladesh," said R. Krishnakumar, purchase manager of Madura Gar-

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## Some city areas to suffer short supply of gas

By Staff Correspondent

Supply of gas will be disrupted today in some areas of the city and at Joydevpur, Tongi, Savar, Dhamrai, Maikaganj and Aricha for replacement of an old pipeline at Joydevpur.

In the city, Mirpur, Pallabi, Kallyanpur, Shyamoli, Mohammadpur, Hajeribagh, Rayerbazar, and parts of Dhanmandi will be affected.

Pressure of gas will be very low from 11:00 am today to 6:00 am tomorrow for laying of a new 400 metre 14 inch pipeline. Sikander Hayat Khan, Managing Director of Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company told The daily Star last night

## Truant teachers

### DU crackdown on consultancy pays no dividend

By Abul Kalam Azad

Some Dhaka University teachers are still accepting work as consultants rather than teaching students, despite efforts to crackdown on the practice.

University authorities issued warnings and drafted 10 recommendations to make teachers more accountable. The academic council's recommendations included a requirement that teachers get permission from the university before they accepted consultancy work.

The council also suggested better monitoring of the teachers' activities, teacher-student discussions at least three times a week, a stronger role for stu-

dent advisors and the publication of results within a month of an exam.

Sources said a few teachers became serious about their jobs after repeated warnings, but most ignored the authorities and continued to accept jobs.

When teachers didn't respond to the recommendations, the authorities held a discussion with faculty to create pressure on the truant staff. They also held several orientation programmes for new lecturers to create awareness about their academic duties and responsibilities to students.

However, the efforts failed to

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## 'Dhaka satisfied with security'

By Diplomatic Correspondent

Foreign Secretary C M Shafi Sami said yesterday Dhaka was fully satisfied with the security situation in the country during US President Bill Clinton's visit to Bangladesh.

"We felt that the security situation was under control so far as we are concerned. And it was safe for him (Clinton)."

Responding to a barrage of questions on the cancellation of Clinton's visit to Savar, and related information in the international media about perceived terrorist threat to the US president and whether Dhaka was aware of the threat posed by Osama Bin Laden or any other terrorist group, the foreign secretary reiterated, "I have nothing to add to what I said."

## A new era of partnership

### Foreign secy briefs newsmen on Clinton's visit

By Diplomatic Correspondent

The dimensions of political, economic and commercial cooperation with the US have widened following President Bill Clinton's visit to Bangladesh.

"Clinton's trip marks the beginning of a new chapter of engagement and partnership," Foreign Secretary Shafi Sami said while briefing newsmen on the visit at the foreign office yesterday.

The two governments will now be engaged in building 'a new partnership', he said.

The US President was impressed by the overall performance of Bangladesh. This was reflected in his comments terming the country 'an island

of peace and stability in contrast to the prevailing situation in the region."

The President also appreciated the role of the government in empowerment of women, poverty alleviation and development of the social sector.

The Foreign Secretary was flanked by Bangladesh Ambassador to the US K M Shehabuddin and DG (America and Pacific) Sarjit Hasan at the press briefing. Senior officials of the foreign ministry were also present.

He said the US President announced a number of programmes and packages during his visit. These include food assistance worth 97 million dol-

lars, 50 million dollars for an overall energy survey covering other South Asian countries.

The US President also indicated that several million dollars would be available to help 30,000 Bangladeshi children go to safer working conditions from hazardous conditions in industries they are working now.

Clinton also promised involvement and assistance to combat arsenic contamination of ground water in the country.

Another important aspect that touched Clinton was disaster management. The President also assured substantial assistance for further capacity build-

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## Uncertainty deepens over women's JS seats

By Nazmul Ashraf

While women's organisations are demanding increase in the reserved seats for women in parliament, the fate of existing 30 such seats has become uncertain because of the major political parties' indifference to the issue and the present political impasse.

Tenure of the 30 seats will expire on April 4 next year if not extended by the present parliament through constitutional amendment or a new parliament is elected before the expiry.

Extension of the tenure needs approval by a two-thirds majority in the 330-member House, which is uncertain as the ruling party lacks the

strength and there is no sign of BNP's joining the session.

On the demand for increasing the number of seats, neither the ruling party nor those in opposition have yet spoken out their mind in clear terms.

The ruling party finds non-cooperation in the Opposition but hasn't yet proved its sincerity to the demand.

The BNP-led opposition parties are still reluctant to go back to Parliament, not to speak of their support to the issue.

A bill seeking retention of the existing 30 reserved seats for another 10 years got Cabinet clearance on February 14.

Law Minister Abdul Matin

Khasru confirmed that the bill would be placed in the parliament's coming session, due to commence on March 28. But placing the bill in the House may prove to be a futile exercise without confirming BNP's support.

"It's not a matter of political sentiment. It involves dignity and rights of the entire women community. It's not an issue of any party but of the entire nation," the law minister said while talking to this correspondent on Wednesday. He hoped that the opposition MPs would support the crucial bill

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## Cabinet okays Paris memo

Cabinet approved yesterday draft country memorandum to be submitted at the Bangladesh Development Forum meeting in Paris on April 13-14, reports UNB.

The document summarizes the country's economic performance in the current fiscal, provides projections for the next and estimates the foreign aid requirement for 2000-2001.

The aid requirement is estimated to be about \$ 2.03 billion US.

Foreign aid disbursement at the end of the current fiscal is estimated to be \$ 1.69 billion US against Bangladesh's requirement of \$ 2.64 billion US.

The memo pegged economic growth for the current fiscal at 5.5 per cent.

The cabinet also endorsed a proposal to follow a UN-certified System of National Account-1993 to determine GDP and GNP. The determination

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## AL has turned people into beggars: Khaleda

By Staff Correspondent

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia said yesterday the ruling party that always claim Bangladesh "as its own property" has failed to give the nation anything after the liberation.

Instead, it has made the country a "basket case" and turned the people into beggars.

Back to power, the party has ruined the economy looting state wealth, she said. They (Awami League) want to make the nation beggar.

Addressing a discussion meeting organised on the occasion of 12<sup>th</sup> founding anniversary of Zia Parishad at her 29 Minto Road official residence, Khaleda said the government since its assumption to power is busy erasing the name of Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman and destroying the BNP.

"You (the government) can erase the name of Zia from signboard... but you cannot erase the name of the great hero from the mind of the people of this country."

Khaleda, also Leader of the Opposition in parliament, said the conspirators thought that the BNP and the ideals of Zia would be vanished after his death but the party has emerged as the largest and most popular organisation in the country.

She asked leaders and members of Zia Parishad to spread the ideals and works of Zia among the masses.

### Our new numbers

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Fishing fiesta

Children in Madaripur with receding waterline take to the river and fish have no place to hide.

—Star photo: A. K. M. Mohsin

## Education system needs overhaul

### The Daily Star roundtable told

Star Report

The country must change its education system to create enterprising and creative people rather than job-seeking robots if it wants to accelerate economic growth.

This was the conclusion of a roundtable sponsored by The Daily Star on "Entrepreneurship Education and Training in Bangladesh: Prospects and Challenges as an Alternative HRD Strategy".

It was organised by Young Entrepreneurs and Professionals (YEP) Forum in collaboration with the British Council and Professional Development Programme (PDP) of North South University and was held at the British Council auditorium.

The roundtable aimed to inspire the young graduates to take risk of becoming entrepreneurs by using their acquired knowledge and creativity.

Attended by academics, aspiring entrepreneurs, fresh graduates as well as university students, the roundtable also emphasised introducing entrepreneurship development education from school level.

"Education should be designed in a way so as to enable people to think intelligently and make them creative and

courageous to take risk. But unfortunately that is what is lacking in our education system," said Mahfuz Anam, Editor of The Daily Star.

The major impediment to development, he said, was the national mindset where everybody tends to think that this nation is poor and incapable of doing anything.

He urged the young people to take the responsibility to change the attitude.

While pointing out that it would not be possible for any government to provide job for everybody, Anam said young people have to think of setting up their own organisation, make the best of their creative thinking and add value to the society.

As young people do not have any voice in the country due to politicisation of student organisations, Mahfuz Anam maintained that young people should have a say through forums like this.

Vice-chancellor of North South University Hafiz G. A. Siddiqui said Bengalis by nature is shy. "But the young people have to get out of this shyness and show the nation the light through their enterprising enthusiasm."

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## Announcement

The Daily Star in cooperation with the Bangladesh Scouts will hold a

SEMINAR on

The Building Construction Act of 1952.

Time : 10 AM to 4 PM.

Venue : Scouts Bhaban, Kakrail, Dhaka.

Purpose : To examine how to make Dhaka a better metropolis.

Participants : DCC, RAJUK, WASA, DESA and experts from BUET and other relevant bodies.

Interested citizens are invited to attend.