

## EU to send big mission to monitor elections

UNB, Dhaka

European Union is sending a big mission to Bangladesh shortly to monitor the entire process of upcoming general elections, likely in June, right from the announcement of the poll schedule.

European Commission Head of Delegation in Dhaka Antonio De Souza Menezes disclosed that a high-power contingent of 66 election observers drawn from all the 15 member states would monitor the polls.

The Election Observation Mission (EUEOM) members will start arriving as soon as the countdown begins with the announcement.

Ambassador Menezes said EU is sending the big army of election observers at the request of the Bangladesh Election Commission, the government and the opposition

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## Govt teachers to boycott classes March 19-21

BSS, Dhaka

Teachers of all the government colleges, teacher's training colleges and government madrasahs will boycott classes from March 19 to March 21 to press home their four-point demand including due promotions.

A press release of the BCS Sadharan Sikha Samity yesterday said they would take tougher action programme after the boycott if their demands were not met.

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	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Mar 18		6.09pm
Mar 19	6-05am	

## Prayer Timings

March 18		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fazr	5-20	5-50
Zohr	12-45	1-30
Asr	4-30	4-45
Maghrib	6-13	6-18
Esha	7-30	8-00

Source: Islamic Foundation

# Hostages freed unharmed



Danes Nils Hulgaard (R), Torben Mikkelsen (L) and Briton Tim Selby (C) wave to photographers as security men and officials look on at the Bangladesh Air Force helipad at Tejgaon in the city yesterday. Army troops freed the three Europeans, held hostage since February 16, early yesterday after a brief gunbattle with the tribal kidnappers.

## Abductors escape after brief gunbattle with troops

SHEHAB AHMED and ABDULLAH AL MAHMUD from Rangamati

Army troops rescued the three Europeans in a lightning raid at the kidnappers' hideout at Daijyapara, 38 km north-west of Rangamati, in the early hours of yesterday after a brief exchange of fire.

"We are fine," said Danish engineer Torben Mikkelsen, 38, at Kashkhali army camp where he, fellow Danish Nils Hulgaard, 63, and Briton Tim Selby were taken by troops for a check-up and rest before being flown to Dhaka by helicopter.

Those were the only words for newsmen from the three freed after 29 days. They appeared cheerful

and in fine health during a brief photo session at the entrance of the hilltop army camp.

Newsmen were not allowed to further talk with the Europeans.

They were abducted at gunpoint by a band of tribals at Betchhari, 30 km north of Rangamati, on

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February 16 while visiting construction site of a Danish-aided road project for linking Rangamati with Dhaka via Khagrachhari.

The rescue operation started at 12-30 am after the

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## Chronology of kidnap crisis

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chittagong

**February 16:** Six to seven tribal gunmen kidnap Torben Mikkelsen and Nils Hulgaard of Denmark, and Tim Selby, all working for CAMPSAX on a Denmark-aided road development project, from a place known as Satero Miler Matha at Gunjapara in Naniarchar Upazila at around 5:00pm. The three Europeans were on their way back from a survey in a pickup.

Dave Weston, a British consultant, and Mohammad Mustafa, the driver of the pickup, are allowed to go with a letter written in Bengali demanding a Tk nine crore ransom for the release of the hostages. Weston informs Rangamati police of the incident at around 8:00pm.

**February 17:** Police and army personnel cordon off the Kalapahar area, where the hostages are believed to have kept the hostages.

**February 18:** The authorities communicate with the abductors through local UP chairmen and leaders working as intermediaries. The abductors, in a note, demand withdrawal of army cordon as a

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## Freed hostages kept away from newsmen

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

The three Europeans freed from abductors were barred from talking to newsmen since they were flown to Dhaka at around noon yesterday.

They were kept at the Combined Military Hospital (CMH) till writing of the report at about 10 pm, eight hours after doctors certified that they were physically fit to move to some guesthouse or hotel for rest, sources said.

They were surrounded by officers of Bangladesh army and diplomats of the two countries, joined by foreign ministry officials at 7 pm.

Only press photographers were given a chance to take quick snaps of the freed Europeans nearly half an hour after a military chopper carrying them landed at the Tejgaon airport.

The British High Commissioner and the Danish Charge d'affaires talked to them for nearly half an hour inside the helicopter after it landed. Three other military choppers accompanied the helicopter carrying the freed Europeans.

Newsmen waiting at the airport for long were at first told that they could talk briefly with them. However, it was denied later and they were whisked to the CMH in a microbus under a military escort. The microbus reached the CMH at 1:05pm.

The freed hostages - Danes Torben Mikkelsen and Nils Hulgaard and Briton Tim Selby -- were immediately lodged in VIP cabins on the third floor of the CMH where they underwent a thorough check-up by army doctors, sources said.

The check-up was completed within an hour of their arrival there. CMH doctors under Brigadier General Salam, Commandant of the

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## Stevedores, dockers call off strike at Ctg Port

UNB, Ctg

Bangladesh Master Stevedores Association (BMSA) and four dock labourers associations have called off their strike at Chittagong Port after a fruitful discussion with the port authority.

Dock-workers went on a wildcat strike Friday night protesting filing of a case under the Public Safety Act against BMSA chairman and others by MH Chowdhury & Co on Thursday.

The port chairman held separate meetings with BMSA, four striking labourers' associations and MH Chowdhury & Co and reached a settlement last night, meeting sources said.

The case was filed as the workers refused to attend the delivery work of stevedoring organisation MH Chowdhury & Co.

## One held with toy pistol at ZIA

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The authorities of Civil Aviation held a Bangladeshi settled in America for carrying a toy pistol inside the Zia International Airport and handed him over to the cantonment police yesterday.

Sources said Mamun-or-Rashid Masum who hailed from Barisal in Barisal went to the airport yesterday morning to see off his younger brother.

The authorities asked him to show his luggage, when he entered the departure lounge along with his brother. But he refused to do so and behaved arrogantly with them, sources said.

Police seized a toy pistol, a laptop and an ISD cellular phone from him.

Cantonment police said they interrogated Mamun to find out whether he is involved in any crime

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## Expatriate voter issue still unresolved

NAZRUL ISLAM

The government and the Election Commission (EC) are now in a face to face position over the "complicated" issue of enrolment of nearly 2.5 million expatriate Bangladeshis in the fresh voter list ahead of the next general election.

The government wants amendment to the existing law to enrol expatriates in the voter list, but the EC discourages such move as it may jeopardise the entire election process.

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) M A Syed identified many impediments and said the EC would be over burdened if expatriates are included in the list.

The CEC and a section of EC officials termed the issue a complicated one. Inclusion of expatriates in the list may multiply risks in holding a free and fair election while many voters in the country are often deprived of their franchise, they said.

"We would go by the cross section of opinions on the issue," Law Minister Abdul Matin Khasru told The Daily Star. The ministries and constitutional

bodies concerned are giving opinions on legal matters to avoid complication and a decision will be taken considering the reality, he said.

Earlier, the government asked the ministries of foreign affairs, labour and manpower, home affairs, the Election Commission and the Law Commission to submit reports with their suggestions on the issue.

Only the Law Commission submitted its report with a positive note, the law minister said. "The government considers the issue positively and is hopeful of creating a scope for their enrolment in the voters' list," Khasru added.

On the other hand, the CEC said the EC, with 74 million voters in the country, has to work under pressure. "It will be very difficult to handle the additional voters if expatriates, scattered across the globe, are included in the list."

He said the neighboring countries like India, Sri Lanka and others have no such provision. "With the existing practice, we should not go for such a provision," he added.

Earlier, the government constituted a high-powered Cabinet Committee headed by the law minister to examine the prospect of inclusion of expatriates in the voter list.

Soon after the EC launched a project on May 15 last year to prepare a fresh voter list, expatriate Bangladeshis, specially those in European countries, raised the demand for their enrolment in the voters list. They submitted memoranda to the Prime Minister and the CEC.

In several statements home and abroad, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina assured overseas Bangladeshis that they would be enrolled in the fresh voter list.

The law minister also expressed his optimism in this regard in parliament. Official sources said the law ministry is working on a draft amendment to the existing law in this regard.

Existing laws permit an eligible Bangladeshi residing within the geographical boundary during election to cast his or her vote. Government

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## Road accidents in Gazipur, Comilla kill 19

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 19 people were killed and 39 others injured in separate road accidents in Gazipur and Comilla districts yesterday.

Of them, 11 were killed in Gazipur while the rest in Comilla, police and witnesses said.

In Gazipur, 11 people were killed and 36 injured when Dhaka-bound bus from Panchagarh skidded off the road and fell into a roadside ditch at Sutrapur in Kaliakoir Upazila at around 6 in the morning, killing 10 passengers on the spot and injuring 36 others. Another died on way to hospital.

Of the dead, seven were identified as Golam Quddus, 50, Kanchan, 36, Wahed Ali, 35, Jahangir, 30, Chittaranjan 30, Jasimuddin, 25, and Kader, 22. The identity of four others could not be known till filing of this report last night.

The injured were admitted to different hospitals and clinics in Gazipur, Kaliakoir and Dhaka. Our Correspondent from Comilla reports: Eight people including two children were killed and three injured when a microbus collided with a truck on Dhaka-Chittagong highway at Baro Gobindapur in Chandina Upazila yesterday morning.

Police and witnesses said, the accident took place at around 5 am when a

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## Manzur says he is 'hiding'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jatiya Party (Ershad) Secretary General Nazir Rahman Manzur went into hiding since his younger brother Mofizur Rahman Mustafa was arrested from his Banani residence in the city in the small hours of Friday.

"I came to know that police might also arrest me because the government finds me a big hurdle to its design to split the opposition alliance," Manzur told The Daily Star on mobile phone yesterday evening.

The JP leader said he was hiding "somewhere in the city".

Police said they arrested Mustafa at around 1 am on Friday under Section 54 of the CrPC. He

might be implicated in the case in connection with the murder of industrialist Obaidul Haq Babul five years ago, police said.

Another charge for "trying to bring armed goons" from Bhola for the opposition alliance's March 21 rally in the city may also be brought against him, police said.

Mustafa was produced in court yesterday. Police sought a five-day remand to interrogate him but the court granted two days' remand.

Manzur said he also talked with BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan on the issue.

BNP chief Khaleda Zia in a statement last night condemned Mustafa's arrest without any warrant and demanded his immediate release.

The BNP Chairperson also said the government will not be able to harm the opposition unity through repression.

Meanwhile, the JP Presidium meets this morning to discuss some crucial issues including the party lawmakers' joining the next parliament session. Top JP leaders are divided on joining the session.

The JP Parliamentary Party is expected to decide the issue at its meeting on March 20.

GM Quader, younger brother of JP chief and former president Ershad, told The Daily Star that the party would leave no stone unturned to secure release of the party chief before the next caretaker government takes over.