

Bagerhat blast  
Army Chief  
visits spot:  
Statements of  
12 witnesses  
recorded

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

The Chief of Army Staff General Haroon-ar-Rashid visited Mollahat yesterday. He went to the place where a powerful bomb blast on Sunday left nine people killed. Police have so far arrested five persons in connection with a case recorded with Mollahat thana at midnight on Monday night. The names of four arrested persons have been disclosed. They are Abul Kalam Gazi, 36, Sadek Molla, 45, S M Hannan, 38 and Nasir Munshi, 40. Nasir Munshi is an employee of Mollahat branch of Sonali Bank, while SM Hannan hails from Lokpur village under Matlab thana of Chandpur. He reportedly came to Mollahat two days before the blast, police said. He is being quizzed by CID. ASP of CID Mohammad Khashrul Huq of Khulna-Jessore Zone has been made IO of the case. Docket of the case was sent to Khulna office of CID on Tuesday night. Khashrul Huq who also investigated SMA Rob murder case was not available for further information as he is now staying at Mollahat for conducting operation to arrest the accused. Members of CID team are also searching for those who were found loitering around the venue of meeting. Meanwhile, statements of 12 witnesses were recorded by a home ministry team led by Additional

SEE PAGE 11 COL 8

BNP briefs envoys,  
diplomats about  
latest situation

UNB, Dhaka

BNP yesterday apprised diplomats of the western world and Japan of latest situation in the country heading for national elections in just four days, amid some unrest in the run-up. "We just kept them posted on the latest situation of the country and informed them of our position," Prof A Q M Badruddoza Chowdhury told newsmen after an hour-long session with the envoys of western countries and also of Japan at Hotel Sheraton in the evening. Some 16 ambassadors or their representatives attended the parley and made several queries on various issues, including political violence that claimed several lives in various places, the latest at Mollahat in Bagerhat district. Explaining BNP position the party vice chairman told the diplomats that BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia condemned the heinous attack and demanded a "judicial inquiry commission" to probe into the incident. BNP also made it clear that bomb-incidents like at Kotlilpara in Gopalganj, UDICHI, Ramna Batamul, Narayanganj are linked in a string and "we demanded judicial

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

Chief of EU  
Election  
Observation  
Mission in city

UNB, Dhaka

Head of the EU Election Observation Mission and Chief Observer Joaquim Miranda arrived in Dhaka yesterday. Miranda, a member of the European Parliament, was here earlier in late August for preliminary contacts with the caretaker government and to set up the core team of EU observers and deployment of the EU Long-term Observers (LTOs). The EU Chief Observer is expected to call on the Chief Adviser Latifur Rahman, the Chief Election Commissioner M A Syed and the leaders of the mainstream political parties before Election Day. He will also visit some of the constituencies to meet the EULTOs and Short Term Observers (STOs) deployed in those places. The EU has deployed 31 LTOs across the country about a month ago and has assigned a similar number of LTOs in the third week of September.

Steps to enable women who  
couldn't cast votes for years

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs in cooperation with the Election Commission (EC) has taken up a special programme to encourage women voters to cast their votes in the ensuing parliamentary election. There are many villages in the country where women could not cast vote for many years due to social, religious and other barriers. The EC has identified such localities in several districts. To deal with this issue effectively, a high level committee was formed recently comprising representatives from the religious affairs ministry and directorate of women's affairs and others, headed by a joint secretary of the women and children affairs ministry. Several sub-committees were also formed and

those are already working to implement various decisions in this regard. "The aim of this initiative is to encourage women, particularly in the areas where women voters face religious, social and other barriers. Our intention is to break the barriers and enable women to exercise their franchise," said Adviser of the caretaker government Rokia Rahman who holds charge of the women and children affairs ministry. Addressing a press conference at the ministry yesterday, Rokia Rahman who is also Adviser for Labour and Employment and Social Welfare said, "I have written to the chief adviser of the caretaker government and the chief election commissioner and also requested the law enforcing agencies concerned to ensure special security for women voters at the polling centres

during the election." Rokia said, "We have instructed all our field staff to go from door to door and persuade women to cast vote in the coming election. The Election Commission would deploy 1,20,000 women ansars especially for the security of women at the polling centres. In every centre, there would be four women ansars in addition to army and BDR personnel." The EC also instructed its district officials to encourage women voters to caste vote and take all possible steps in this regard. In some areas where distance is a big barrier to women voters, there would be polling centres at places nearby. Rokia added, "The idea is to empower women to vote and there is no reason why they should not

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6



Awami League President Sheikh Hasina (inset) smiles having received a bouquet minutes before addressing an election meeting in Srimangal yesterday.

BNP-Jamaat out to subvert  
polls fearing defeat: Hasina  
AL chief ends cross-country tour

NAZMUL ASHRAF, from Sylhet

Sheikh Hasina yesterday rounded off her cross-country election tour in Sylhet by offering *fateha* at the mazar of Hazrat Shahjalal (RA) just as she did to touch off campaigning exactly a month ago. With the October 1 just three days away, the Awami League president, who returned to Dhaka last night, is highly unlikely to go outside the capital on electioneering. During her whirlwind country-wide tour, the immediate-past prime minister covered all the 64 districts and more than 200 of the 300 constituencies. On the campaign trail, Hasina highlighted her party's electoral pledges besides harping on her government's success stories. She was also critical of Khaleda Zia, the BNP and its allies in the four-party

combine. In some cases, she castigated the caretaker government for, what she termed, its bias to her opponents. Hasina also accused the alliance of triggering the recent spate of violence with a view to foiling the upcoming election. She alleged that the BNP-Jamaat nexus, having anticipated defeat, was attacking her party activists in different parts of the country to subvert the polls. On the last day of her two-day tour of six northeastern districts yesterday, the AL chief demanded that the authorities take immediate actions against the terrorists and create an atmosphere conducive to a free, fair and peaceful election. She addressed 11 huge election rallies in Brahmanbaria, Habiganj, Moulvibazar and Sylhet. While seeking vote for boat, her party's election symbol, Hasina said she would work for a poverty-free,

prosperous Bangladesh, if re-elected. The AL president addressed her first meeting at Sorail playground in Brahmanbaria-2 constituency where her party nominee, Abdul Halim, is expected to face a stiff challenge from the Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ) leader Fazlul Haq Aminin, an Islamic extremist. Hasina highlighted her government's efforts for the cause of Islam. Referring to Aminin, who is sharing the BNP election symbol, sheaf of paddy, she accused her opponents of abusing Islam for their political ends. Reminding that Aminin once opposed women leadership, she said the IOJ leader was now found sitting beside the BNP chairperson's legs. She also criticised Aminin for

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

6494 licensed  
pistols and  
revolvers  
deposited so far

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

As many as 6,494 licensed pistols and revolvers were deposited until Tuesday, which the government fixed as the deadline for deposition of small firearms. The government in a statement asked the firearm holders to deposit their arms prior to the October 1 general election. The deposition began on September 17. Sources said the number of revolvers deposited was 2,718 and pistols 2,340. The rest was other guns. Of the total, 2,186 were deposited at different police stations of the capital. Of about two lakh licensed firearms, only six thousand were deposited in the last seven days, said another source. Those who did not surrender their firearms would face dire consequences, the sources said. Earlier, the government fixed September 25 as the deadline for deposition and imposed restriction on movement along with firearms from September 23 to October 7.

Unprecedented insect & fungal attack

Thousands of sissoo trees dead  
or dying in Kushtia region

MORSHED ALI KHAN, from Kushtia

Hundreds of thousands of Dalbergia sissoo trees are dead or dying in the region due to an "unprecedented insect and fungal attack" on these popular trees. Thousands of farmers and planters, who opted for this fast growing tropical timber tree for over 30 years, are suffering losses worth crores of taka due to the "colossal" attack, first of its kind in the country, Forest Department officials in Jessore said. In Kumarkhali under Kushtia district, hundreds of sissoo trees of all sizes were seen dead or dying. Many villagers said as soon as the trees showed symptoms of the attack, they sold those at 'just token' prices. In many cases, villagers just waited in vain for help from the Forest Department and saw the trees dead within days. "We always knew that sissoo is a very profitable timber tree and there has been a rush for planting those, but now I am ruined because I lost twenty full grown trees in the last six months," said Azhar Mollah of Shilaidaha village.

Villagers said the first symptoms of the fungal attack appear on tree trunks, which change to a black colour. Then the trunks start discharging black saps and die. Manoj Kanti Roy, Conservator of Forest in Jessore, told The Daily Star that the killer disease is rampant in Rajshahi, Jessore, Kushtia and Faridpur. He said the department started receiving reports of the disease about four years ago. The Bangladesh Forest Research Institute (BFRI) was alerted, but 'no clue' was found. The disease is attacking only the sissoo trees. "We know it is a soil borne fungus attacking roots of this particular tree. The tree is then attacked by small insects. But we are yet to find a cure for it," Roy said. He said that people who planted thousands of sissoo trees over the years due to its profitability has become victims of the ongoing "epidemic". Sissoo has several advantages for villagers. It is fast growing and is not devoured by cattle. Throughout the country villagers and farmers were once inspired to plant sissoo samplings, Roy said.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6



BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia (inset) addresses an election rally at Sutrapur in the city in the early hours of yesterday.

Use 'ballot bombs' on Oct 1  
to end AL misrule  
Khaleda tells rally at Bhola

REZAUL KARIM, from Bhola

Khaleda Zia yesterday called upon people to use 'ballot bombs' in the October 1 general election as their answer to the Awami League misrule, terrorism and corruption. "We do not believe in (the use of) firearms and bombs... we believe in ballot. The Awami League has illegal arms, but the people have their ballot which is much powerful than any sort of bomb is," the BNP chairperson said. Addressing a mammoth election meeting at Bhola Government High School playground, she said the AL activists and terrorists are currently possessing thousands of sophisticated illegal weapons, including the AK-47 assault rifle. But all these may prove useless as people are ready to give a befitting reply to the AL. The meeting in Bhola town was

organised to woo votes for four-party alliance nominee Mosharraf Hossain Shahjahan for the Bhola-1 seat. She also introduced alliance candidates in Bhola constituencies, namely Hafiz Ibrahim, Major (ret'd.) M Hafizuddin Ahmed and Nazimuddin Alam. Jatiya Party (N-F) Chairman Nazirur Rahman Manjur and Secretary General Kazi Firoz Rashid, Jamaat-e-Islami Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mujahid and BNP Joint-Secretary General Selima Rahman accompanied her and addressed the meetings in Barisal and Bhola. At the function, Bhola Pourashabha Chairman and prominent AL leader Shafiuur Rahman Kiron along with a good number of his supporters formally joined the BNP. The BNP chief also addressed a series of election meetings in different parts of greater Barisal on the

first day of her two-day electioneering. Tens of thousands of people from far and wide converged on the meetings to listen to the former prime minister. Khaleda, who arrived at Bhola Kheyaghat at 12:45pm, was given a rousing welcome by thousands of party workers and local people. Many more lined up on the entire five-kilometre stretch of road from Kheyaghat to the meeting venue and chanted slogans with sheaf of paddy in their hands. "The boat and the Awami terrorists will sink in the October 1, they will have to pay for the sins they committed during the five years in power. They have been cursed by the mothers and sisters across the country who they violated," she said. The BNP chief said the people faced untold sufferings in last five

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

EC warns  
40 more  
candidates

UNB, Dhaka

Election Commission yesterday warned 40 more candidates, including from Awami League, BNP and JP (Ershad), for violating the election code of conduct. The EC in separate orders also cautioned them to take corrective measures saying failure will result in imposition of fine in cash. The latest warnings raised the total number of candidates warned by the EC to 157. Earlier, 117 contestants, including Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina, were warned. As earlier, the warnings went to the candidates following recommendations of the district electoral inquiry committees. The warnings were issued for writing graffiti, putting up coloured posters, using loudspeakers during prohibited hours, displaying portraits and symbols larger than permissible size, using jeeps and motorbikes in processions and offering food and drinks to voters. Following is the list of candidates warned yesterday:

BNP and four-party: Advocate Ruhul Quddus Talukder (Natore-2), M Ilias Ali (Sylhet-2), Saifur Rahman (Moulvibazar-3), Khurshid Jahan Haq (Dinajpur-3), SA Sultan Tito (Chandpur-4), Delwar Hossain Khan (Mymensingh-4), Barrister Nazmul Huda (Dhaka-1), Abdul Mannan (Dhaka-2), Mufti Abdul Sattar (Bagerhat-3), Shahjahan Mia (Nawabganj-1), Syed Manzur Hossain (Nawabganj-2), Lt Gen (ret'd) Mahbubur Rahman (Dinajpur-2), Habibul Islam Habib (Satkhira-1), MM Jasimuddin (Jessore-4) and Mahmudul Haq Rubel (Sherpur-3). Awami League: Salman F Rahman (Dhaka-1), Yusuf Gazi (Chandpur-4), M Mostafizur Rahman (Dinajpur-6), Mirza Abdul Jalil (Pabna-2), Maulana Nurul Islam (Dhaka-1).

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

Chief Advisor  
inaugurates  
central jail  
at Kashimpur

UNB, Gazipur

Chief Advisor Latifur Rahman yesterday sought cooperation from all in discharging the responsibility of holding a free, fair and impartial election. "As head of the caretaker government I am carrying out the important responsibility staying totally impartial in accordance with the Constitution and law," he said while inaugurating the newly built central jail at Kashimpur, about 30 kilometres from the capital. The chief advisor said that immediately after taking over the responsibility, the caretaker government launched operations to nab terrorists and criminals to create a congenial atmosphere for elections. He informed that more than one hundred thousand people accused in various cases including terrorism had been arrested. Considering the accommodation problem of those arrested, he said, emphasis was given on the construction of jail-1 despite financial constraints. Presided over by Home Secretary Dr Sadaat Hossain, the function was also addressed by inspector general of prison M Liakat Ali Khan. On arrival at the newly constructed jail, the chief advisor was given a guard of honour by the jail guards. He then unveiled the plaque of the jail built as part of the plan to shift the Dhaka Central Jail from the capital. Some 200 prisoners from the Dhaka Central Jail were shifted on September 24 to the new prison with the capacity of 300 inmates. The new building constructed at a cost of nearly Tk 200 million is part of a Tk 1,260 million project that started in the late 80s. More buildings will be built on 110 acres of land acquired for the purpose to house some 2,000 male and 200 female prisoners.

News Analysis

India looks into Afghanistan  
in post-Taliban era

Diplomatic efforts on to cobble alternative government

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

As the United States prepares for a military strike on Afghanistan in its campaign against terrorism, India has joined the diplomatic efforts to put together an alternative government to the ruling Taliban in that country. The need for a post-Taliban structure in Afghanistan which truly reflects the country's multiethnic character was one of the subjects that came up for discussion during a telephonic conversation between Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and his British counterpart Tony Blair Tuesday night, official sources in New Delhi said. Vajpayee, according to the sources, told Blair that it was time for the international community to look at an arrangement after the Taliban regime. He also spoke of recon-

struction work in strife-ravaged Afghanistan, indicating India's keenness to revive economic relations with that country which is the gateway to energy-rich Central Asian countries with reserves of oil and natural gas. Sources in New Delhi said India, Russia and Iran, with a convergence of interests in seeing an alternative to the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, have already begun consultations to back the Northern Alliance which is opposed to the Taliban. India, Iran and Russia are of the view that sources of terrorism in Afghanistan could be eliminated only if a stable alternative is formed to replace the Taliban. In fact, the post-Taliban arrangement is understood to have come for discussion recently during Indian External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh's separate telephonic talks with his Iranian and Russian coun-

terparts Kamal Kharazmi and Igor Ivanov respectively. India's National Security Advisor Brajesh Mishra also took up the issue with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Rushaila in Moscow last week, the sources said. The topic

SEE PAGE 11 COL 8