

Dhaka, Jakarta firm to stamp out terrorism

Khaleda, Megawati vow at banquet

UNB, Dhaka

Visiting Indonesian President Megawati Soekarnoputri and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday reiterated their strong stand against all kinds of extremism and terrorism.

Both leaders also expressed their firm belief in tolerance and understanding of diverse views, and stated that the two countries held similar views on regional and international issues of common concern.

The two leaders were addressing a dinner hosted in honour of the Indonesian president by the Bangladesh prime minister at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in the evening.

President Megawati arrived here yesterday afternoon on a three-day visit to Dhaka.

President Iajuddin Ahmed, accompanied by his wife Prof Anwara Begum, and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia received the Indonesian president at Zia International Airport (ZIA) at 1:10pm.

Megawati was driven to the National Memorial in Savar to pay tributes to the martyred freedom fighters. Megawati placed a wreath and stood in solemn silence, as bugles played the last post.

Chief Justice Mainur Reza Chowdhury, ministers, political leaders including Raushan Ershad,

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PHOTO: PID

President Iajuddin Ahmed receives Indonesian President Megawati Soekarnoputri on arrival at Zia International Airport yesterday on a three-day state visit, while Prime Minister Khaleda Zia looks on.

Gender ratio gap narrows

PINAKI ROY

Latest census figures indicate that the social and health conditions of women in Bangladesh have improved significantly in recent years.

The 2001 census report, yet to be published, show that men and women ratio is now 103.8:100. This gap, according to demographers, is the lowest in the past 100 years.

Population expert Professor A K M Nurunnabi says the improvement of women population signifies several aspects.

"Maybe it is because of lesser mortality rate of women and baby girls or it may be because the food habits of women have become more nutrition oriented," he said.

A report of the women and chil

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BCL's hartal today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) will observe a six-hour nation-wide hartal from 6:00am today protesting the killing of BCL leader Saiful Rasul Palash.

Palash was the general secretary of the city's north unit.

BCL leaders and activists held a rally in front of their party office at

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Hanif, Maya retain AL Dhaka city unit posts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Old guards prevailed over young aspirants yesterday for the top offices of Dhaka city Awami League, when Mohammad Hanif and Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya retained their posts of president and general secretary respectively.

ASHK Sadek, member of AL Advisory Committee, announced

the names at the triennial council of the city unit held at the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh in the city last night.

The announcement dashed the hopes of young leaders and enthusiastic workers who were expecting fresh blood in party ranks to perk it up. But party chief Sheikh Hasina gave her judgement for old faces, some leaders said, requesting

anonymity.

No election was held to choose new leaders as councilors of Dhaka City unit had empowered Hasina on June 13 to form the new committee.

Hanif and Maya have been serving as the unit's president and general secretary since the council of 1997.

After the poll debacle in 2001

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Hasina asks party men to fight back 'oppression'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina yesterday asked party workers to get ready to resist 'government oppression'.

"We don't want to see any more bodies of our men," she said, blaming the government for the killing of her party men.

Hasina inaugurated the triennial council of the AL Dhaka city unit at the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh as chief guest.

She blamed the high command of the government for the killing of Bangladesh Chhatra League leader Saiful Rasul Palash as he protested extortionists patronised by the

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Doles of relief for Dhaka jail inmates

ZAYADUL AHSAN

A touch of compassion awaits the inmates of the Dhaka Central Jail who live their prison days in squalid conditions.

For a starter, 800 ceiling fans will be provided to the 36 wards of the jail. This would lessen the prisoners' plight on hot summer days. When the wards are four times overcrowded, the body heat generated from the prisoners is enough to make the place a hell.

However, inmates living in cells are unlucky, as they will not get any fans in apprehension of prisoners committing suicide. They will later be provided with fans fitted to walls.

The good news does not end there. Fifty television sets will be installed in the wards.

But the biggest improvement the

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AL walks out twice over allegation of tarnishing country image

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League (AL) yesterday walked out of the Jatiya Sangsad twice over a statement of the education minister and a letter circulated by the chief whip.

Education Minister Dr Osman Farruk said the opposition party scheduled hartal for June 19 and 28 only to tarnish the country's image before the state guests from abroad -- US Secretary of State Colin Powell and Indonesian President Megawati Soekarnoputri.

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Forex reserves cross \$2b mark after 6 years

STAR REPORT

After long six years, foreign exchange reserves again crossed the \$2 billion-mark yesterday.

The reserves reached \$ 2,001 billion on a robust remittance growth at 24 per cent and lesser import demand, Bangladesh Bank sources said.

The last time the reserves crossed the level was in June 1996 when it reached \$2,039 billion. Since then, it kept on falling and at one point it dipped slightly above \$900 million after the alliance government came to power. Reduction of foreign aid also contributed to the dipping reserves.

The government then applied a

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Colin Powell

Powell arrives this afternoon

Dhaka to seek duty- and quota-free access, liberal visit and immigration visa policies, soft attitude to Bangladeshis in US

REZAUL KARIM

US Secretary of State Colin Powell arrives in the city this afternoon on a brief visit as part of his three-nation trip to Asia and the Middle East.

The visit, first by a top US leader since the tour of president Bill Clinton on March 20, 2000, is being billed as 'highly significant' in view of the regime change in Iraq and the peace process in the

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ROK to give 50pc duty rebate on 34 items

RAFIQ HASAN

South Korea has agreed to provide 50 per cent duty concession on 34 Bangladeshi items from under the Bangkok Agreement.

Seoul's decision on Dhaka's request for the duty-and quota-free access of 132 items is likely to be known in the next meeting of the agreement, sources at the commerce ministry said. Representatives from all the six member countries are going to gather in Bangkok for a four-day meet, starting on August 25.

Sources expect the duty concession would help Bangladesh reduce a huge trade gap with Korea.

Bangladesh imports goods worth about \$300 million from South Korea annually against the export sum of only \$20 million.

Though the agreement was signed in 1975, it gained significant momentum following the inclusion of China this year, sources observed.

China has already declared to allow duty-free access of 59 Bangladeshi items to its market. It has also offered duty concession, ranging from 10 to 85 per cent, on 150 items from Bangladesh.

Five countries -- Bangladesh, India, Laos, South Korea and Sri Lanka -- signed the agreement first to ensure preferential trade

arrangement among them.

"We are hoping to get duty-and quota-free access of more items from other member countries after the next meeting," said a commerce ministry high official, who attended a number of negotiation meetings under the agreement.

In return, Dhaka will also have to allow duty free access of some items from other nations. A final decision in this regard would be made in consultation with major chamber bodies, he told The Daily Star.

The official also said Pakistan was very interested to join the agree

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