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83 including 4 listed criminals nabbed on 2nd day of drive

UNB, Khulna

Some 83 people including four listed criminals were arrested in the last 24 hours ending 4:00pm yesterday during the joint drive in the south-western districts.

The joint drive by police, BDR, coast guard and ansars to flush out outlaws and criminals began in the region Saturday night in the wake of rising incidents of secret killings.

A police press release said an airgun and a pipe gun with ammunition were recovered during the operation yesterday.

UNB Khulna correspondent reports: Officials are maintaining utmost secrecy about the drive to make it a success.

Bagerhat correspondent reports: Several hundred people picked up by the joint forces from different areas of Mollahat and Fakirhat were being interrogated.

Check posts have been set at important junctures and raids continued in remote areas.

Indian team arrives to finalise Dhaka-Agartala bus service

BSS, Dhaka

A five-member delegation from Indian State of Tripura arrived in Dhaka yesterday to finalise route fare and other issues relating to Dhaka-Agartala bus service.

As per decision of the recently held Bangladesh-India Joint Economic Commission (JEC) meeting the bus service is scheduled to start on August 9 this year.

However, before formal launch of the bus service, delegations from Bangladesh and India are supposed to visit each other's country.

Bangladesh delegation led by BRTC Chairman Advocate Taimur Alam Khandkar is expected to visit Tripura on August 1.

The Indian delegation led by commissioner of Tripura, Dr Sriker, is expected to hold a meeting with the communication minister and other officials concerned today.

It was learnt that both sides have already agreed to select one of the two proposed routes for the bus service. The routes under consideration are Dhaka-Bhairab-Akhaura-Agartala and Dhaka-Comilla-Akhaura-Agartala.

NETROKONA POLLS
Seven files nomination

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Netrokona

Seven nomination papers were filed yesterday for parliamentary by-election in Netrokona-3 constituency scheduled for August 21.

The ruling coalition nominated Khadiza Amin, widow of Nurul Amin Talukder who died in June this year.

Main opposition Awami League (AL) has nominated a candidate as well. This is the first time since the general elections in October 1, 2001 that the AL is participating in any parliamentary by-polls.

The seven candidates are Khadiza Amin (Four-party alliance), Zubed Ali (AL), Ali Osman (JP-Ershad), Abdul Ali (JP-Monju), Abu Jaber Sarker (Krishak Sramik Janata League), Krishak Mohammad Sadeq (Krishak Sramik Mukti Andolon) and Abdul Wahab (Independent).

Correction

The caption of the front-page photograph of our yesterday's issue was garbled due to some technical errors. The caption should read: "To encourage daytime travel on river routes to avoid launch disasters overnight, the BIWTC launched the MV Seha at Sadarghat yesterday. The first four trips between Dhaka and Barisal via Chandpur will be free." We regret the inconvenience.

WB nudges govt to downsize NCB staff

Identify possible troublemakers to oppose step

NAZMUL AHSAN

The World Bank (WB) has asked the government to initiate steps for rightsizing the employees of four nationalised commercial banks (NCBs), saying the state-owned banks are overstaffed by 30 to 50 per cent.

The NCBs Sonali Bank, Agrani Bank, Janata Bank and Rupali Bank currently have 61,000 staff.

The WB also recommended listing Rupali Bank with the Privatisation Commission by July 31 for its divestment.

But before starting the manpower cut, the WB has asked the government to identify possible troublemakers within the banks, who might oppose the move.

"Identify clear troublemakers and those who are negative influences on the banks, who should be especially targeted for separation," the WB said in its draft aide memoire, submitted to the government recently.

The aide memoire followed a visit by an eight-member WB mis-

sion under a proposed state-owned enterprise and NCB reform project between June 29 and July 4.

The WB suggested finalising the package for those employees to be offered voluntary retirement scheme and incentive package for those to be retained.

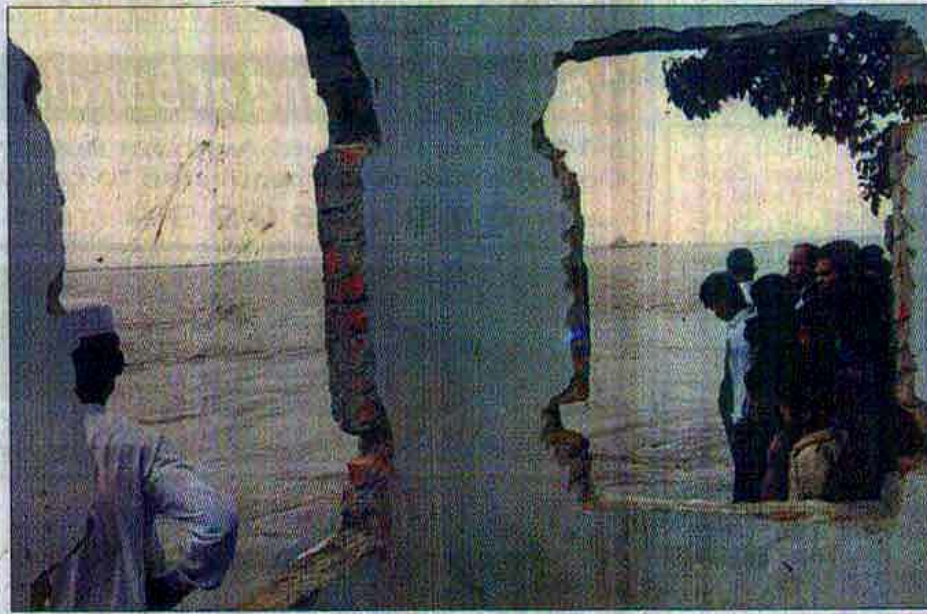
It said a similar package can be offered to the employees of the Bangladesh Bank (BB) for their retrenchment.

Those BB staff above 45 years or those who have completed more than 10 years in service will be eligible for voluntary retirement. They will be given three months' basic salary. Their housing loans will be adjusted against voluntary compensation scheme and the balance will be written off.

The BB employees will also get pension or gratuity. In addition, they will enjoy medical facilities even after retirement.

The WB has recommended setting up of a signoff committee with each NCB to identify the staff to be retained.

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RAVAGES OF RIVER: The floodwater-swollen, fierce-flowing Padma devours its bank at Louhojag with a vengeance as flooding keeps a tight grip on central districts including Munshiganj. The remnants of the Public Library, top, are on the verge of collapse and the helpless family of Bazlu Munshi, bottom, picks the last things in the rubble of their home, the most part of which at Baro Nawpara has slipped into oblivion along with the village.

Swelling Padma devours buildings at Munshiganj

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The monsoon-swollen Padma with turbulent currents has washed away the public health complex and unspecified numbers of houses, shops and mosques in the Louhojag upazila in Munshiganj, one of the flood-hit districts, over the past few days.

The police station building and the official residence of Louhojag upazila nirbahi officer are under the threat of collapse from a relentless rise in river waters.

The riverbank is steadily eroding just 100 yards off 15 government buildings, including the post office, UNO office and TNT office, and bank branches, sending a wave of panic among locals.

The erosion has also received a sharp edge in Dharai Kalma, Gaudia, Ghidripura, Samurbari and Basudia areas in the upazila.

In Sirajganj, at least 350 shops and houses at Randhuni Bari Bazaar in Belkuchi upazila were devoured by the raging Jamuna, official sources said.

Waterborne diseases like diarrhoea and dysentery are spreading

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

Caretaker issue sent to chief justice for full bench hearing

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday observed that the 13th amendment to the constitution, making provisions for caretaker government, had gone against the basic structure of the constitution and a referendum was needed before the president assented to it.

A High Court Division bench comprising Justice Shah Abu Nayeem Mominur Rahman and Justice Abdul Awal referred the matter to the chief justice for formation of a full bench of the High Court to decide whether the 13th amendment had actually amended the constitution or not.

The ruling came after a writ petition was filed by Advocate M Salimullah challenging the legitimacy of the 13th amendment. The court pointed out that the High Court Division bench of Justice MM Huq and Abdul Matin on July 25, 1996 rejected a similar writ petition, observing that certain articles of the

constitution were not amended to make referendum mandatory.

By contrast, the court yesterday observed that the 13th amendment had actually altered the constitution. Articles 58 A, B, C, D and E of the constitution dealing with the caretaker government are an addition. "Addition of any new provision amounts to an amendment, according to article 142 of the constitution," said the court.

Article 48(3) requires the president to act in advice with the prime minister in all cases but appointments of the prime minister and the chief justice.

But the 13th amendment provides that the president will appoint the chief advisor to the caretaker government independently. The amendment also provides that article 48(3) will remain ineffective during the tenure of the caretaker government, which amounts to an amendment of article 48(3), the court observed.

According to article 56, the head of

Blair suffers as probe into Kelly's death begins

REUTERS, Beijing

Prime Minister Tony Blair pledged to cooperate fully with an inquiry launched on Monday into the suicide of a scientist sucked into a vicious row over Britain's reasons for waging war on Iraq.

Blair called for a period of calm and respect for the dead man's family, but his waning popularity has taken a further hit and jitters about a fight between the government and the BBC -- which claimed London hyped intelligence on Iraqi weapons to justify war -- spread to financial markets.

The premier said he would testify to judge Lord Hutton, who has been asked to determine what pushed

weapons expert David Kelly to slush his wrist last week.

"I will do what the judge in charge of the inquiry wants me to. I shall cooperate fully," Blair told reporters in Beijing, the latest leg of a Far East tour.

In a statement asserting his independence, Hutton signalled he may range beyond the death to wider aspects of the Iraq war.

Blair justified the war by saying Saddam Hussein had to be disarmed of banned weapons, but months after military action finished none has been found.

"It will be for me to decide...the matters which will be the subject of my investigation," the judge said.

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Newsweek finds Saudi 'link' in Sept 11 attacks

AFP, Washington

A congressional inquiry points to suspicion over a potential role played by Saudi Arabia in the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks that killed more than 3,000 people, Newsweek writes in its Monday edition.

The conclusions of a congressional joint intelligence inquiry, to be

released Thursday, claim the Federal Bureau of Investigation failed to follow through on important evidence relating to the al-Qaeda network's presence in the United States, the weekly magazine said.

The report to be released contains evidence suggesting that Omar al-Bayoumi, a key associate of hijackers Khaled al-Mihdar and

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No love lost between Samad, Suranjit

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Long-lasting discord between two senior leaders of the Awami League (AL), Abdus Samad Azad and Suranjit Sengupta, reached its peak over a decision taken by the Sunamganj district unit.

AL sources said the discord is mainly about gaining supremacy in party politics in the district.

Suranjit Sengupta was announced persona non grata in Sunamganj on July 15 by a section of the district unit. Suranjit blamed Abdus Samad Azad for instigating the local leaders to take such a decision.

A noisy argument ran between the two AL leaders on this issue at the AL Central Working Committee (ALCWC) meeting held on Friday.

"I raised the matter before the ALCWC meeting demanding disciplinary action against the persons for taking such a decision against a senior central leader," Suranjit told The Daily Star.

"All my colleagues supported me, but the acting president disagreed with the motion of the meet-

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Judge receives showcase notice for 'not respecting' another judge

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Second Assistant Judge, Dhaka, Yusuf Ali received a showcase notice when he failed to show due respect to the District and Session Judge's Court.

On July 17, Judge ATM Fazle Kabir issued the order as to why a proceeding of contempt of court should not be taken against the second assistant judge for violating his (district judge) order by not sending a civil suit file to the District and Session Judge's Court though he (district judge) directed the assistant judge to send it for several dates.

The district judge issued the order following a petition submitted by the Government Pleader (GP)

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Sundarbans safe haven for poachers, criminals

A forest guard, with a run-down rifle slung over his shoulder, walks through a stump-ridden clearing of the Sundarbans.

The guards are too ill-equipped to fight the gangs of poachers, illegal loggers and other criminals who pillage the world's largest mangrove forest.

PHOTO: AKM MOHSIN

SHARIEF KHAN

Forest guards fail to protect the world's largest mangrove forest, the Sundarbans, from gangs of marauding poachers, illegal loggers and other criminals, as they are easily outgunned.

Poaching of deer and tigers and illegal logging apart, incidents of robbery have sharply increased in the world heritage site over the years, said forest officials.

Over 30,000 fishermen working in the forest with permission from the forest department are prime targets for the robbers, who are backed by 15 influential fish traders and bailed out in underhand dealings after their arrest.

As a temporary measure, the Bangladesh Coast Guard more than a week

ago launched a combing operation with backups from navy, BDR, police and VDP (Village Defence Party). About 600 personnel deployed in the anticrime operation code-named Operation Golden Tiger roam the waterways crisscrossing the forest in 10 ships and a number of speedboats.

"Criminals have retreated to their hideouts for fear of the coast guards," said a forest official. He believes such an operation is not a permanent deterrent to criminals and said the operatives will creep back in after the coast guards pull out.

"Unless they give us modern arms and ammunition, the criminals will always dominate the forest," he said.

As the custodian of the 5,770 square kilometres forest laced with 1,700 square

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