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## AL hems in Hawa Bhaban today

High security alert; JCD cancels Sudha Sadan siege

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The last 10 days in the countdown to an opposition-set deadline for the government's fall begins today with Awami League's front organisations laying siege to Hawa Bhaban and Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) marching towards the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) in the city amid heavy security arrangements

by the government.

Though the tension, brewed over the last one week centring siege and counter-siege programmes by the opposition and the ruling BNP, subdued to a large extent at the last-minute cancellation of programmes by the BNP and its student wing, police continued its arrest-sprees ahead of today's opposition showdown.

Since Monday night, police has picked up nearly 2,000 people from different entry points to the city, mostly from bus, launch and train stations, suspecting that the opposition might have been assembling people with arms and explosives from outside the capital for subversive activities today. Several staff including a deputy director of Proshika, an NGO, were also picked

up yesterday on suspicion of their possible involvement with the Awami League's (AL's) siege programme, the officer-in-charge of Pallabi Police Station said. In line with the AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil's much-talked-about April-30 deadline for the government's fall, the main opposition party would announce the last

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**SIEGE PROGRAMME**  
Hawa Bhaban men nonchalant, will play cricket today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Men at Hawa Bhaban seemed unperturbed by today's opposition programme to besiege the much-talked-about 'alternate power centre of the government', and will play cricket at a nearby field today. BNP (Bangladesh Nationalist Party) Senior Joint Secretary General Tarique Rahman, eldest son of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and a Hawa Bhaban frequenter, is expected to participate in the friendship match, sources said. "We are not anxious about the opposition's plan to lay siege to Hawa Bhaban. It is the political office of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and the BNP high-ups will think

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## BAIL FIX Judge Shahidur axed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

High Court Additional Judge Syed Shahidur Rahman was removed from office yesterday in the first ever verdict of the Supreme Judicial Council on a judge's gross misconduct.

President Iajuddin Ahmed signed the removal of Shahidur, charged with taking Tk 50,000 in bribe to fix bail for an accused in a women's repression case.

The law ministry published a gazette notification on a presidential note that says the order will take immediate effect.

"The president acted in line with the council's report to uphold the dignity of the Supreme Court," Law Minister Moudud Ahmed told

newspersons. Some may argue the council's report is self-contradictory as it once says the allegation against

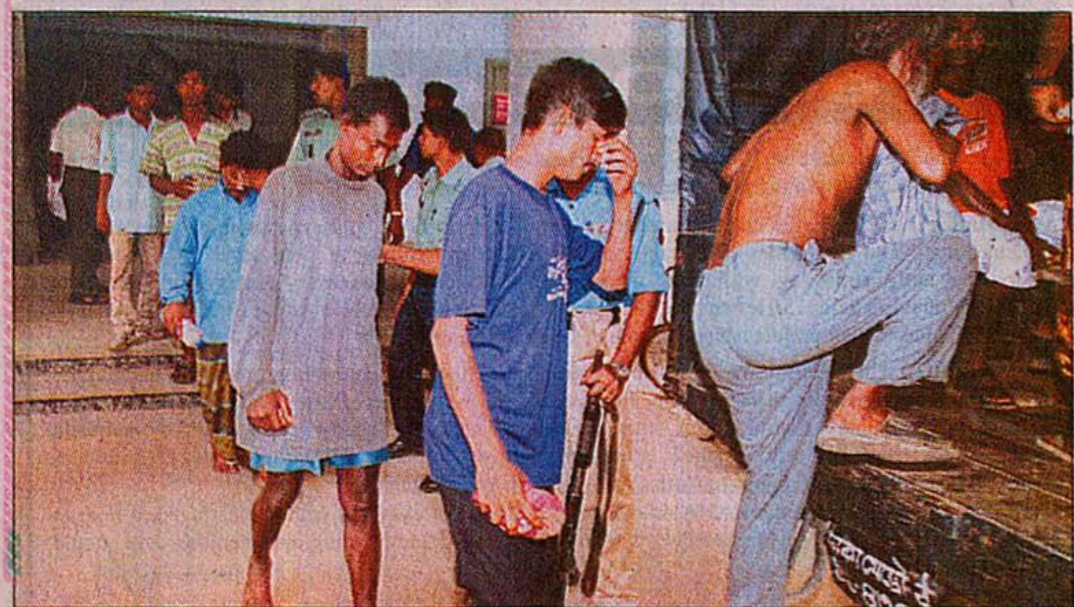
Shahidur could not be proved beyond doubt but observes the allegation cannot be said to be baseless either, the minister pointed out.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia on April 18 approved the presidential note on the council's January 26 verdict report with an opinion that Shahidur should stand down as additional judge.

Former chief justice KM Hasan, who headed the three-member council, handed over the verdict report to the president on his last day in office for action against the judge.

The removal of Shahidur brings back memories of Justice Latifur Rahman of the High Court Division

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The arrestees, held in Monday night's police crackdown ahead of today's Hawa Bhaban siege programme by Awami League, board a cop van en route to court yesterday. The picture was taken at Motijheel Police Station.

## DEVELOPMENT FORUM MEET Saifur visits WB, IMF HQs for positive report

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman is now in the USA on a one-week mission, mainly to persuade the World Bank (WB) into not making a negative report on Bangladesh in the upcoming Bangladesh Development Forum (BDF) meeting.

Saifur feels 'sentational' and 'untrue' press reports have created a 'baseless' negative image of the country which may influence the WB's report on Bangladesh at the BDF meeting. He left Dhaka Monday and will be back on April 26.

The three-day BDF meeting that

begins on May 8 will have seven sessions. There, the WB will present progress reports on various commitments made by Bangladesh in last year's meeting. Apparently, corruption, law and order, and conflicting politics are going to dominate this year's BDF agenda.

During the tour, the finance minister will also try to convince the International Monetary Fund (IMF) of the difficulties the government is facing in implementing various conditions the fund has tagged with the third instalment of its loan to Bangladesh under the Poverty Reduction Growth Facilities (PRGF)

programme. A finance ministry source said the government is now not in a position to implement those conditions within the stipulated timeframe, which makes it uncertain for the country to qualify for the \$70-million tranche in June this year.

"We will inform them of our works and our economic success," Saifur said on his USA visit following a meeting of the Executive Committee of National Economic Council (EGNEC) Sunday. "There has also been some reshuffling of IMF and World Bank staff and the

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## US funds drying up for graft

USAID director says at AmCham meet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

US aid to Bangladesh is drying up due to corruption and the absence of transparency in project implementation, a high US government official said yesterday.

"Transparency is below acceptable level in Bangladesh," Gene George, director of United States Agency for International Development Bangladesh (USAID) said at the monthly luncheon meeting of American Chamber of Commerce in Bangladesh (AmCham).

The Bush administration has set

up the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) which focuses on growth-based approach to US foreign development assistance. Transparency is a key to getting aid through MCC, he said.

MCC will only support poor countries committed to growth-promoting governance, health, education and economic policies. The Bush administration has allocated \$5 billion to MCC to support poor countries in addition to its \$11 billion foreign aid budget.

MCC reflects a new international consensus that development aid

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## 50-bed burn unit opens at DMCH

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) finally opened its full-fledged burn unit yesterday, marking a turning point in the management of plastic surgery and burn injuries.

The first patients to be admitted to the newly built 50-bed burn unit yesterday included a child who mistakenly swallowed acid, a bomb blast victim from Kishoreganj and a woman with severe burn injuries.

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## Mob lynches 2 muggers at Wari

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A mob beat dead two muggers at Wari in Sutrapur yesterday after catching them in the act of mugging a woman.

Mizan, 28, and his 32-year-old still-unnamed accomplice were reportedly members of an organised mugging gang based in Dhalpur, Demra.

Witnesses said six muggers halted a woman at 8:30am when she

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## 16 killed as militants target Indian polls

First phase of election begins

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Militants set off mines and fired at polling stations killing 16 people and injuring 44 others, as an estimated 45 percent of 175 million voters yesterday exercised their franchise in the first phase of Indian parliamentary elections.

Muslim rebels in disputed Kashmir, Maoists in the lawless east and tribal separatists in the north-east hills attacked poll stations, staged landmine blasts and fought gunbattles, AFP says. Six security personnel were among the dead. In Kashmir, a woman journalist and human rights activist, Asiya Jeelani, 30, was killed with her taxi driver when their car hit a landmine, police said.

The first of the five-phased elections, for which 675 million voters are eligible, spread over three weeks covering 140 constituencies in 13 states and three federally administered territories.

Voting in 186,000 booths through electronic voting machines began at 7:00am on a dull note but picked up as the day wore on, reports reaching here said.

Yesterday's voting sealed the

electoral fates of several frontline leaders including Deputy Prime Minister LK Advani contesting from Gandhinagar in Gujarat, External Affairs Minister Yashwant Sinha in fray from Hazaribagh in the eastern state of Jharkhand, former prime minister HD Deve Gowda in the southern state of Karnataka and some cabinet members of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's government.

The polls will be held up to May 10. Election staff will count votes on May 13 and the results are expected to be announced the same day.

Backed by security personnel to ensure security, thousands of election officials conducted the polls across the country.

**VIOLENCE FLARES UP**  
Violence erupted in Jammu and Kashmir, where two of the six constituencies went to polls with an election boycott call from militants and naxalites.

National Conference President and former minister of state for external affairs Omar Abdullah escaped unhurt when militants triggered a powerful landmine blast shortly after his cavalcade passed by

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## Dhaka slams Israel's killing of Rantisi

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh has strongly condemned and denounced the cowardly killing of Sheikh Abdel Aziz Al Rantisi by Israel in Gaza.

"Bangladesh strongly opposes any extra-judicial assassination of civilians," the foreign ministry said in press release yesterday.

"Bangladesh also rejects and condemns Israel's heinous policy of military escalation and killing of innocent Palestinians," it added.

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## Taiwan Trade Centre opening cancelled

STAR REPORT

The management of Taiwan Trade Centre in Dhaka yesterday called off the centre's formal inauguration amid an aggravating row between Dhaka and Beijing over the issue.

"We don't have any programme for holding a formal opening," Taiwan Trade Centre Director James Kuo told The Daily Star from his Navana Tower office, without spelling out the reasons for the cancellation.

On Sunday, Chinese Ambassador

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## Govt won't allow anarchy in the name of political programmes

Says press note

BSS, Dhaka

The home ministry in a press note yesterday urged all concerned to refrain from any kind of activities which would deteriorate law and order situation and disrupt normal life.

It said there has been concern among the people over programmes and counter programmes by two student organisations to lay siege to two important houses in the capital today. The programme includes, a political party office known as 'Hawa Bhaban' and the leader of the opposition's residence 'Shaudha Sadar.'

"Both the programmes are relating to the law and order and the

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