

## Cut defence budget

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explaining why some of the government pledges could not be fulfilled."

The budget also should explain the results of the government steps taken earlier, he added.

Meeting sources said, a former finance minister raised the agenda of downsizing defence spending. He said, instead of purchasing Mig fighters, the government should spend to equip the police, increase their salary and enlarge the police force. His suggestion met with instant support from the other economists present.

In response, Saifur reasoned that "the army also earns a lot of foreign exchange. It's not true that spending for the army do not generate income."

"But, that is a very costly way of earning," quipped one of the consultants, adding, "If we invest more for the police, it will improve the law and order, and people will do better business. Ultimately, the whole nation will eat its fruits and the economy will prosper."

Meeting sources said, at this point, the finance minister agreed with the view. But, he said he had no power to change the present structure of defence spending, sources added. He also said, "I don't want to say anything in this regard."

The economists then discussed on how to put priority projects in the Annual Development Programme (ADP). They observed that a huge number of road-building and other construction projects were already there in the pipeline and, so, the government should not take up any

## EC to provide

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of education in the formal primary education sub-sector.

In addition to EC, Asian Development Bank, United Kingdom Department for International Development, the Netherlands government, Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, Sida, Cida, World Bank, Jaica, AusAID and Unicef are other development partners of PEDP-II, said a press release.

## 12 killed

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"A helicopter fired missiles at a group of armed militants in two separate incidents at the same spot," an Israeli military source said.

Israeli troops later shot dead a 19-year-old Palestinian during a push into Rafah, where 10 homes were demolished witnesses and medics said. Israel often raids the camp to uncover tunnels used to smuggle weapons from Egypt.

On Tuesday, six Israeli soldiers died when their armored vehicle hit a land mine during a raid in Gaza City's Zeitoun neighborhood, a militant stronghold.

Israeli forces pulled out of Zeitoun early yesterday in what Palestinian sources said was an Egyptian-mediated deal under which militants returned the remains of the servicemen.

Palestinian medics said 16 people, including militants and bystanders, were killed and 185 wounded in the two-day siege.

## Tk 11 lakh

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broke the window by the rifle but and then fired a blank shot signalling us to stop the car. Three others encircled the car and took away the money at gun point."

He said the muggers exploded a cracker before fleeing the scene in a CNG auto-rickshaw parked nearby. He described the muggers as smartly dressed and fair complexioned youths.

"A team of patrol police rushed in and chased the muggers but in vain," Nurul further added.

Despite raids in different places none could be arrested, said Mohammad Shahjahan, sub-inspector of Panchaish Police Station.

The same distributor was robbed of Tk 10 lakh some two years ago.

## Politicians hail

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Party of Bangladesh.

"This is a rejection of the communal ideals of BJP and its allied parties and their free-market policies," said Selim.

On the back-to-back win of left parties in the bordering states, Selim added, "I am very happy that on both sides of Bangladesh, in West Bengal and Tripura, the communist party and left parties have strengthened their hold."

"This is a victory for democracy in the region. Such a powerful reaction against communalism will also strengthen the movement against communalism in Bangladesh," said Rashed Khan Menon.

Md Kamaruzzaman assistant secretary general of Jamaat-e-Islami, a partner in the BNP-led coalition government, said, "India is a large democratic country, [the Indians] have established a long tradition of forming government through elections. We heartily congratulate those who are going to form the government after the latest elections."

He said they would continue to negotiate with the pilots to reach an agreement to work out the crisis.

Director Waluji Khandakar, Captain Kamal Mahmud and Captain Mahmud Rahman attended the press conference held at the head office of the Biman.

Up tobacco tax

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speakers said around 13 percent of the children working in bidi factories in Bangladesh are below nine. About 40 percent of child workers of the factories aged between 5 and 15, had never been to school.

The CAT president alleged low-grade bidders are being manufactured, posing a serious hazard.

He also said about two lakh hectares of land in Bangladesh is used for tobacco cultivation and other related purposes every year.

About the proposed tobacco law, he said it should aim at long-term benefits and not short-term gains.

National Professor and President of Adhunik Nurul Islam and Kamru Islam, secretary general of CAT, were present at the function.

## BCL leader

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The JCD men also beat up Saleh Ahmed, leaving him seriously injured. He was admitted to the upazila health complex.

Zakaria is the President of Bhopur Union BCL and his brother Osman Gani was a BCL activist and degree student of Faticchhara College.

Protesting the killing, BCL activists put up a barricade on Bhopur road, disrupting traffic.

BCL Chittagong district unit blamed JCD for the murder and attack and demanded arrest of the JCD cadres involved.

A case was filed with Faticchhara Police Station.

## Congress triumphs

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India's historic rival Pakistan expressed hope that the new government will proceed with a dialogue between the two countries initiated last year by Vajpayee, who declared he was on his last bid to make peace in South Asia.

Congress spokesman Anand Sharma told AFP the party "is committed to working towards creating lasting peace in the region."

But Islamic militants in Pakistan rejoiced, calling the election payback for bloody anti-Muslim riots two years ago in the BJP-ruled western state of Gujarat - where the Hindu nationalists lost seats yesterday.

Hindu hardliners also reacted sharply, saying the BJP lost by shunning its right-wing past in favour of a more moderate image stressing tolerance towards India's 140 million Muslims.

The United States, which had a warm relationship with Vajpayee, offered India congratulations on the election and pledged to work with the next prime minister, a US official said.

At the headquarters of Congress, a huge balloon shaped as an open palm, the 119-year-old party's symbol, dropped to the ground as supporters lit firecrackers.

"Long live Congress! Down with the BJP!" they shouted.

Sonia and Rajiv's son, Rahul Gandhi, became the fourth-generation MP from the dynasty.

The 33-year-old former financial consultant, who spent much of his 20s in Britain and the United States, won from the family's stronghold Amethi in Uttar Pradesh.

More than 370 million people voted in the national election, held on five dates from April 20 to allow poll workers, police and soldiers to fan out to the nearly 687,500 voting stations.

## ALLIANCE

Leftist parties, which have promised to support a Congress-led government, also appeared to be doing well and they could give the opposition the edge it would need to take power.

## Tigers start with win

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ened to change the complexion of the game. However, Rajshahi mates Khaled Mashud and Mushfiqur Rahman kept their heads and put on decisive 50 runs for the seventh wicket to see the Tigers home in the last ball of the 40th over.

All-rounder Mashfiq, who hit the winning runs with a square cut off left arm paceman Pedro Collins, remained not out on 25. Mashud was taken by his Board XI counterpart Carlton Baugh Jr off a Jermaine Lawson delivery just four runs shy of victory.

Fast bowler Lawson made a solid if not spectacular return to competitive cricket after a year out with injuries and controversy regarding his bowling action which was reported by match-referee Mike Proctor following the Test match against Australia in Antigua in May, 2003. The 24-year-old, who has remodelled his action a little, returned with figures of two for 23 off eight overs.

New ball partner Collins had made the early inroads by dismissing both openers. Shahriar Hossain (0) missed an in-swinger and was adjudged lbw in the very first over while Manjari (7) fell to a spectacular diving catch at mid-wicket by Wilkinson after he had featured in a 44-run partnership with skipper Habibul Bashar. The score was soon 53 for three as Ryan Hinds plucked Rajin Saleh (1) at square leg with a two-handed dive. Wavell Hinds was the bowler.

Earlier, Manjari baffled the Board XI batting with a dream spell of 9.3-4-9-4 as the home team failed to come to terms with the combination of seam and spin of the Tigers.

Khaled Mahmud (3/3) and Mohammad Rafique (2/27) gave Manjari perfect support on a wicket that did not particularly suit strokeplay.

At 82 for six, Bangladesh were in a spot of bother before Mashud and Mashfiq steadied the ship.

The garbage with which the low-lying areas of the city are being filled up is yet another source of spreading disease germs, he added.

Akther's revelation that the water and sewerage authority he runs at present is able to meet only 10 percent of the city's current sewerage needs shocked everyone attending the session.

According to the Wasa chief executive, the sewerage system of the city has almost broken down and in urgent need of overhauling, upgrading and expansion to cope up with the rapidly rising population.

"If anybody thinks that I'm in (Iraq) to throw water on a fire, they're wrong," Rumsfeld told reporters on board. "We care about the detainees being treated right. We care about soldiers behaving right. We care about command systems working."

Other US defence officials said the sudden trip by Rumsfeld and Myers was triggered by the photo-graphs.

In the holy cities of Najaf and Kerbala, gunfire echoed from narrow streets just a few hundred metres (yards) from the revered Imam Hussein mosque in early afternoon. Smoke rose nearby, witnesses said.

## Change of power

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usually there is not much change in its foreign policy--and there is no possibility of any adverse impact on Bangladesh's foreign policy.

Asked if the bilateral relations would see any improvement with a new government in India, Khan said peoples of the two neighbouring countries want to make their economic advancement through mutual cooperation.

Referring to the World Health Organisation's statistics, the prime minister said there are 1.4 crore disabled people in the country and nearly 10 percent of the world population are disabled in a way or the other.

She said many people in the country become physically challenged for various reasons like acid attacks, accidents and burn injuries.

Terming the physically challenged an integral part of the society, the prime minister said the overall development is not possible ignoring them. "They have equal rights like all other citizens of the country," she said.

Khaleda said a taskforce has been formed comprising 14 ministries for the development of the disabled and it will soon formulate a national plan.

Asked if there be any impact on India-Pakistan peace talks with a new regime in New Delhi, the foreign minister said it's the compulsion for both the governments in Pakistan and India to continue the peace process as peace is precondition to any economic development.

The prime minister said a special programme has been taken up to rehabilitate the acid-burnt women alongside steps to strictly enforce the law against the acid throwers.

A case was filed with Faticchhara Police Station.

## Student abducted in Kushtia

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

A gang abducted a college student from Thanapara in Kushtia town on Wednesday.

A gang of seven picked up Kumar Kundu Shah, 18, son of Dr Sukumar Kundu Shah, from near their Thanapara house at about 9:00pm when he was returning home, relatives said.

Members of the victim's family alleged that the gang men are their neighbours, Amitav is a second year student of Kushtia Government College.

The gang has demanded Tk 20 lakh for his release.

"None filed any case with us, so we don't know anything about it," said Sub-Inspector Ayub Sharif of Sadar Police Station late evening.

Police, meanwhile, failed to recover schoolboy Nayan Rahman, kidnapped from Monchorpur in Kumarkhali on Monday, till 6:00 yesterday evening.

## US asst secy Rocca arrives May 18

STAR REPORT

US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Christina Rocca will visit Bangladesh May 18 on a three-day visit to discuss trade, investment, human rights and minority rights.

She will also bring a group of 50 Peace Corps volunteers with her to help Bangladesh in various development fields.

"We are excited about her visit," US Ambassador Harry K. Thomas told The Daily Star yesterday. "It is a good news that Peace Corps operation will be increased here."

Next year, another group of 35 volunteers will come to teach English in rural schools.

## City breeding

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monly known as E. coli, is a rod-shaped bacterium which inhabits and attacks the large intestine of both humans and animals causing severe diarrhoea. "If we don't go for immediate corrective measures, an alarming rise of water-borne diseases may soon beset the city dwellers. The situation may even explode into raging epidemics," Akther Hossain warned.

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## JS probe

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Khan, Hanif Sheikh, Mahsin Mia, Mozaffar Hossain, Moktar Hossain, Sheikh Motaleb, Ibrahim Khalil, Kamruzzaman, Abu Al Hossain and Ishaq Mia.

The committee pointed out that the country's extractable gas reserve currently stood at 15.032 trillion cu ft after the use of 294,859 billion cu ft up to February this year.

Committee chairman Shihidul Islam presided over the meeting at the Jatiya Sangsab Bhaban, also attended by committee members and officials concerned.

## Fertiliser traders

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domination and saving importers and vessel owners from their exploitation," said AZ Feroz Kabir Chowdhury, chairman of Coastal Ship Owners Association.

He claimed the new charges were fixed following discussions with Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCC).

Kabir said the association wrote to the ministries of shipping and agriculture, seeking their initiatives for a dialogue with the vessel owners to fix rates acceptable to both parties.

BFA chairman, however, ruled out the possibility of a fertiliser crisis and said there was no shortage of urea fertiliser during the last peak season and the prices in the retail markets were also stable.

"We did not get any report of urea fertiliser prices going beyond Tk 300 a bag during the peak season from anywhere in the country."

The prices however may go up beyond Tk 300 next season due to increased transportation cost, he warned.

The appreciation came when leaders of Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry met Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at her office.

## Spectacular win

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particularly the DMK, has announced its support from outside to the party.

If this was a battle between Vaipavee and Sonia, she has won hands down. Her foreign origin did not matter with the electorate although this was a poll issue raised by the BJP. Even the Bofors scandal did not evoke any attention. Even otherwise, corruption is not the topic which raise hackles because people have come to live with it. The number of scams during the BJP government