

Criminals clash with cops

4 gangsters killed, 19 including 5 border guards injured in hour-long fight

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia Police recovered a sizeable number of arms and ammunition from the spot. Tipped off about two rival bands of criminals making preparations to fight out the control of the area, the joint force contingent led by the officer-in-charge of Kushtia Sadar Police Station reached Chheuria at dead of night, around 2am, police sources said. Hamidul is the chief of the band. **SEE PAGE 11 COL 1**

6 JS bodies inactive for key vacant posts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT At least six parliamentary standing committees on different ministries are facing difficulty in holding meetings as key posts remain vacant following death or resignation of committee chairmen or due to change of portfolio of some ministers. "A recasting has become inevitable, but it could not be done in the last session due to time constraints and other pressing matters," a ruling party whip told The Daily Star yesterday wishing anonymity. The posts of chairmen of parliamentary standing committees on home and labour and employment **SEE PAGE 11 COL 6**

Saifur agrees to give direct farm subsidy

Asks NGOs to formulate modality

STAFF CORRESPONDENT The finance minister at a pre-budget meeting yesterday agreed in principle to a proposal of the NGOs to give direct subsidy to farmers to help keep agricultural production cost down at a reasonable level. The meeting between Finance Minister Saifur Rahman and representatives of some two dozen non-government organisations (NGOs) however could not decide on the mode of subsidy distribution. The suggestion strongly pursued by the NGO leaders was for introducing a direct farm subsidy system in which the farmers would obtain benefits using subsidy coupons. Agreeing with the concept the finance minister noted that although a coupon system might prove useful, no one could ensure that it would not be misused. "It can just happen that the person in **SEE PAGE 11 COL 3**



US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs Christina Rocca calls on Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina at Sudha Sadan in Dhaka yesterday. **PHOTO: STAR**

Maj Mannan stops campaigning

Says BNP cadres tried to kill him yesterday, seeks EC's protection

STAFF CORRESPONDENT Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh (BDB) candidate for Dhaka-10 parliamentary by-polls retired army major MA Mannan has alleged that ruling BNP cadres attempted to kill him during an election campaign at Tejgaon Railway Colony yesterday. Mannan decided to stop campaigning until the Election Commission (EC) guarantees his safety. "I will resume campaigning when the EC ensures my security," said the BDB general secretary at a press conference at the National Press Club yesterday. Mahi B Chowdhury, BDB central committee member and the party's candidate for Munshiganj-1 **SEE PAGE 11 COL 6**



Trucks containing two Indian elephants stand at Benapole, the India-Bangladesh border, some 75km northeast of Kolkata yesterday after being repatriated from Bangladesh. The elephants wandered across the border. **PHOTO: AFP**

Ershad cases stalk JP

Leaders divided over how to face 'coercion'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT Jatiya Party (Ershad) is in tight corners with ruling parties using the dozen-plus pending cases against its Chairman HM Ershad as weapons to curtail its freedom of independent political stance as an opposition, some of its frontline leaders has alleged. Central leaders of the party are divided into two factions on the issue. While one group of JP lawmakers led by Rawshan Ershad wants to keep good relations with the government, the other section of leaders and lawmakers led by JP presidium member and lawmaker Golam Mohammad Kader professes to play an independent role. The crisis dogging the party has further deepened and the rift between the two factions widened following the Monday's warning notice served by Ershad on Kader for violating the party decision about the 14th amendment bill to the constitution. The JP initially stood against the government on the bill. But, it was later forced to change its mind allegedly by a threat of the ruling coalition to activate the cases against Ershad, arrest and put him behind bars. The last minute decision reversing the party attitude to the bill was taken at its parliamentary party meeting on Saturday night, reportedly under government coercion. The next day, 12 JP lawmakers surprised the country's political quarters by voting in the House in favour of the bill, which also triggered considerable grievances among the many of the party leaders. TIM Fazle Rabbi Chowdhury and Kader, two of the party's most influential lawmakers, skipped parliament proceedings that day to register their protest against the party's shift of stance. Kader also accused **SEE PAGE 11 COL 8**

MP murder, Bangla Bhai rule Rocca-Hasina talks

STAFF CORRESPONDENT US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Christina Rocca yesterday met Leader of the Opposition President Sheikh Hasina and discussed recent assassination of AL lawmaker Ahsanullah Master, emergence of religious extremists in the north and Chittagong arms seizure. "The US envoy expressed concern over the emergence of a religious extremist group in the northern districts reportedly under government patronisation," said Kazi Zafar Ullah, presidium member of the AL which Hasina heads, quoting the meeting discussion. The meeting that lasted for more than an hour at the AL chief's Dhanmondi residence also discussed AL's stance on return to parliament, recent mass arrests of common people, persecution of religious minorities and political opponents, corruption, slide in law and order and recently-held municipal polls. "They (US) are well informed about Bangla Bhai's emergence with **SEE PAGE 11 COL 8**

30 hurt as JCD factions clash at BAU

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh At least 30 activists of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) were injured in a clash between two factions of the pro-BNP student body at Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU) in the early hours of yesterday. Activists of one faction later ransacked 35 rooms at Shaheed Nazmul Ahsan Hall and set fire to beds and other things in some rooms. Four of the injured were admitted to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital in a critical condition. Police and BAU sources said trouble started as leaders and workers of the JCD faction led by Khandaker Quamruzzaman Munna drove away a worker of the rival **SEE PAGE 11 COL 8**

13 Palestinians die in Israel raid

REUTERS, Rafah Israeli forces killed 13 Palestinians in Gaza's Rafah refugee camp early yesterday as tanks and infantry thrust into the militant stronghold despite an international outcry. The raid, one of the biggest since the start of a Palestinian uprising in 2000, drew international condemnation because of Israeli threats to destroy hundreds of Palestinian houses in the occupied territory. But the army said there were no plans for any systematic demolition during what it called an open-ended operation to stop the smuggling of weapons through tunnels from Egypt. "When the fighting is over, most of the residents will almost certainly return to their homes," said Colonel Pinky Zuretz, a field commander. Under cover of darkness, troops fanned out into Rafah's Tel al-Sultan neighborhood, taking vantage points in bullet-pocked buildings as soldiers searched house-to-house for militants and fought Palestinian gunmen. Israel had amassed more forces in Gaza than since capturing it in the 1967 Middle East war, commentators said, for a raid launched after militants killed 13 soldiers there last week and dealt the army its biggest blow for two years. Helicopter gunships killed seven Palestinians, at least three of them gunmen. The identities of the others were unclear. **SEE PAGE 11 COL 7**

OC dies in truck chase

UNB, Dhaka AKM Muhiuddin, officer-in-charge (OC) of city's Motijheel Police Station, died of cardiac arrest after a chase against an errant truck in the early hours of yesterday. Police said Muhiuddin and his team chased a truck from Motijheel area up to Banani rail crossing where he seized the vehicle with the help of Tejgaon and Gulshan police at about 3:00am. "Shortly afterwards, he felt sick **SEE PAGE 11 COL 5**

| Prayer Timing | | |
|---------------|-------|--------|
| May 19 | | |
| | Azan | Jamaat |
| Fajr | 4-10 | 4-45 |
| Zohr | 12-45 | 1-15 |
| Asr | 5-00 | 5-15 |
| Maghrib | 6-36 | 6-40 |
| Esha | 8-00 | 8-30 |

Source: Islamic Foundation