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CEC reiterates army watch

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Syed yesterday said there is no alternative to deployment of army personnel at every polling centre for the Dhaka-10 by-polls to be free and fair.

"The government should deploy army personnel in line with the Election Commission's decision. We've made the decision considering demands of the voters and contesting candidates," the CEC told private TV channel ATN Bangla yesterday at Zia International Airport prior to his departure from Dhaka to Washington.

The CEC will return home on August 16. Election Commissioner Sajidul Rahman will work as acting CEC until Syed returns.

The CEC on June 15 sent a letter to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia asking to deploy army personnel at each of the 103 polling centres.

The EC is yet to receive any response from the government. The CEC, however, said he is optimistic that the government will respond positively.

The CEC said it is his scheduled family visit and has no link to the by-polls of Dhaka-10 on July 1 and Gazipur-2 on August 1.

Correction

The Daily Star news-story headlined "Thai Airways to manage Ctg airport" carried two inadvertent mistakes yesterday. It said the Chittagong airport incurred an annual loss of Tk 45 crore in stead of Tk 4 crore. Another part of the story read the cabinet purchase committee rejected a proposal to carry out a 450 megawatt Sirajganj power plant project. Actually, the proposal for the power plant was dropped from the committee meeting.

Dhaka to erase West's Islam misconception

Agrees to join 8-country nucleus; Singapore pledges more manpower import, investment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka yesterday accepted an offer from Singapore to join an eight-country Nucleus Steering Committee (NSC) to remove misconceptions of Islam in the West and agreed to take steps to cooperate in the war on terror in the region.

Visiting Singaporean Prime

Minister Goh Chok Tong made the offer to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia during official talks at the Prime Minister's Office on the second day of his three-day tour. Khaleda welcomed the Singaporean initiative and accepted the offer.

The city state also assured Bangladesh of an increase in manpower import, greater promotion of investment and its support to

Bangladesh's bid to join ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) during the talks.

The two countries signed an agreement to protect and promote investment and a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on regular consultation between the two foreign ministries on bilateral concern. Foreign Secretary Shamsher Mobin

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Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong called on Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at her office in Dhaka yesterday. Goh arrived in Dhaka on a three-day visit on Wednesday.

75 killed in wave of Iraqi attacks

3 US soldiers among dead

REUTERS, Baghdad

Rebels bent on disrupting a handover to Iraqi rule bloodied five cities yesterday with coordinated assaults on local security forces in which about 75 people, including three U.S. soldiers, were killed.

The violence in Baquba, Falluja, Ramadi, Mosul and Baghdad intensified a sustained campaign by Iraqi insurgents and foreign militants to sabotage Iraq's formal transition from U.S.-led occupation to an interim government in six days' time.

More than 200 people were wounded.

In Mosul, 240 miles north of Baghdad, multiple car bombings on police buildings rocked the city, killing at least 44 people and wounding

216, the Health Ministry said.

Fighting in Anbar province, which includes Falluja and Ramadi, killed at least nine people and wounded 27. Clashes around Baquba killed 13 and wounded 15, the ministry said.

At least seven large explosions shook Mosul and local television ordered residents to stay at home. Police blocked off all major roads and announced a dusk-to-dawn curfew.

Apart from the Iraqi casualties, the U.S. military said an American soldier had been killed and three wounded in the blasts. It said a security guard was also killed.

Gunfire rattled across Mosul as insurgents fought running battles with U.S. troops and Iraqi police.

At least four members of Iraq's

national guard were killed and two civilians wounded by a car bomb blast in southern Baghdad, an officer in the paramilitary force said. Hospital sources said five people were killed in the blast.

ZARQAWI'S FINGERPRINTS

Scores of black-clad gunmen, some claiming loyalty to Jordanian militant Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, attacked a police station and other government buildings in Baquba, 60 km (40 miles) northwest of Baghdad, in a dawn assault.

A U.S. military spokesman said two American soldiers had been killed in an ambush. U.S. forces had responded with air strikes after gunmen captured the civic center and attacked another government building. Two insurgents were killed.

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Charges on judiciary traded in Sangsad

Govt interferes in judges work: AL; AL robbed judicial independence: BNP

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Key ruling party BNP and the main opposition Awami League (AL) swapped allegations about interference in the judiciary in parliament yesterday.

Speaking on points of order, AL lawmakers accused the government of interfering in judges' work and pegged as untrue Law Minister Moudud Ahmed's statement in the Jatiya Sangsad on Wednesday on the writ petition file by a district and sessions judge.

The treasury bench members counter-charged the previous AL government with robbing the independence of the judiciary and excoriated a stick procession led by former home minister Mohammad Nasim against judges.

He said opposition deputies submitted several notices demanding discussion in parliament on important issues, including the

Incentives offered to perk up poultry

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday decided to provide a range of incentives including loan facilities to reinvigorate the country's poultry sector that was hard hit by last year's public panic over bird flu.

A meeting participated by Finance Minister M. Saifur Rahman, Fisheries and Livestock Minister Abdullah Al Noman, bankers concerned and poultry industry representatives yesterday decided that public sector banks will reschedule default loans as well as hand out fresh loans to defaulter poultry farms.

According to the decision, a defaulter poultry farm borrower will now be able to reschedule the defaulted loan by making a down payment of 10-20 percent of the principal loan amount. In this case, the lending bank will hold one year's interest on the rescheduled loan as a 'block account'.

The decision also makes loan defaulter poultry farms eligible to get fresh bank loans.

At yesterday's meeting, the finance minister approved a proposal to bestow 20 percent rebate on power tariff for agro-based industries, including the poultry farms. He also agreed to withdraw a budget proposal of 7.5 percent import duty on poultry medicine.

Poultry sector representatives said, following a press report on presence of toxicity in poultry feed, many small farms had to shut down. The industry was further dealt with a severe blow last year when bird flu scare gripped the world, including Bangladesh's poultry consumers.



People gather to get a glimpse of Rajib and Sabbir whom police rescued from captors in Joypurhat yesterday, 72 hours after they were kidnapped from Uttara in Dhaka.

BIMST-EC Dhaka signs protocol today

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh signs a protocol with other BIMST-EC countries today as the prelude to striking a deal for free trade among the Bay of Bengal communities.

Thai commerce ministry will host the protocol-signing ceremony for the Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand Economic Cooperation (BIMST-EC) Agreement, according to reports.

India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand, as well as new members of the sub-regional grouping - Bhutan and Nepal - signed the FTA at a meeting in February in Phuket. Bangladesh did not sign the deal at the time.

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Cops raid DU hall, pick 20 but Tanjil

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police and detectives early yesterday raided Jahanul Haq Hall of Dhaka University but failed to net Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) leader Tanjilur Rahman Tanjil, an accused in Sunday's cops killing.

Police, however, picked up 20 people for illegal stay in the dormitory.

Outsiders including fish traders, employees of different stores in Nilkhel and New Market and students of different colleges were among the arrested.

Employees of the hall said the arrested have regularly been staying

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Brothers freed from captors

Police find them at Joypurhat

STAR REPORT

Police yesterday rescued abducted schoolboys Sajib and Sabbir from the house of a BNP activist in Joypurhat, 72 hours after their kidnapping from Uttara and a day after freeing a trader abducted by activists of BNP's student and youth fronts in the capital.

Police arrested one of the kidnappers, Imdadul Haq.

MASS ARRESTS

Govt mum a month after HC deadline

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Main opposition Awami League (AL) yesterday proposed the key ruling party BNP for a two-shift parliament session from Sunday to enable more lawmakers to debate the proposed budget for the fiscal 2004-05 slated for passage on June 30.

In an out-of-the-House party in the presence of Speaker Jamil Uddin Sircar at the Sangsad Bhaban, Opposition Chief Whip Abdus Shahid demanded allocation of 50 percent of the debate time to the AL deputies.

Sircar told the negotiators that parliament dedicated 13 hours to discussing the proposed budget until Wednesday, of which opposition deputies got four hours and 17 minutes.

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Announcement

The 96-page 8th Anniversary Issue of Star Weekend Magazine comes out today.

But the counsels for petitioners say the issue has nothing to do with being listed and the government should have submitted the court requirement to the Supreme Court Registrar's Office by the deadline.

Barrister Tanjil Ul Alam, one of the counsels for the petitioners, told The Daily Star that the government did not comply with the court order, adding: "We will inform the court about it on Saturday."

A coalition government lawmaker said the rule lost its effect with the mass arrests coming to an end and arrestees released. "Still, we will reply to the order as the court directed it," he said.

"We will provide documents on a plot designed to overthrow the government, creating anarchy, which led the government to take administrative measures, including arrest of some people to protect national interest," he added.

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US FACT-FINDING MISSION Cops bar locals to talk freely

ANWAR ALI, Rajshahi

Police controlled the visit of three US embassy officials to the northwest to gather information about militant activities of an Islamist outfit, the officials alleged yesterday, hours before they left Rajshahi for Dhaka.

Law enforcers, who apparently supported the Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMB), closely guarded the officials scaring villagers into hiding information about the group's vigilante operatives blamed for a series of killings in northwestern districts since April 1.

Villagers in the JMB bastion with close ties to its dreaded operations commander Bangla Bhai told the officials that nobody existed as Bangla Bhai nor there was evidence of killing by his men.

Talking exclusively to The Daily Star Wednesday night, the US embassy's Political Officer Paul S. Ague said: "We have so far learnt visiting the villages that JMB came

into being to get rid of outlaws and it was successful."

"Police were always with us ... they took us to the families victimised at the hands of outlaws and they resisted the people and local journalists who were willing to talk," he said over coffee with this correspondent in the Parjatan Motel in Rajshahi city.

"They (police) told us about security problems in the villages when we wanted to talk to people freely," said Ague, who was accompanied by Regional Security Officer David Modley and Bangladeshi Press Officer Muhammad Ali.

The team arrived in Rajshahi on Tuesday to gather first-hand information about the JMB atrocities that grabbed sharp media spotlight and visited Bagmara upazila in Rajshahi and Raninagar and Atrai in Naogaon until Wednesday evening.

Modley said most people the team met during the visit suffered at the hands of outlaws, popularly

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Vehicle requisition spree goes high

Owners left to buy release of their transports

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police under cover of so-called requisition use about 300 private vehicles of businesspeople a day by force to carry out anticrime sweeps in Dhaka, flouting a home ministry directive, officials said.

"Most of the vehicles the police use are private minibuses. The vehicles are more than needed. They could run anticrime operations with fewer vehicles," a home ministry official said, asking not to be named.

State Minister for Home Lutfuzzaman Babar ordered the police headquarters to use vehicles of government offices in times of emergency, not private vehicles.

But a senior police officer alleged: "We did not use the vehicles only for us all the time. The home ministry also asked us to do so for its own purpose and we have just carried out its order."

Police took to coercion appar-



Police patrol the Sangsad Bhaban area in Dhaka in a pick-up van taken from a businessman despite a home ministry order for a stop to so-called requisition of private vehicles for anticrime operations.