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A steel merchants' association hangs a banner in Old Dhaka as most shops kept their shutters down yesterday to press the government into stopping collection of VAT at import level and introducing package system in VAT payment by retailers.

## Oikya Mancha calls for nat'l unity to save flood-hit people

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leaders of Jatiya Oikya Mancha (National Platform for Unity) yesterday called for a national unity among political party leaders, professionals and NGO workers to save millions of people marooned by flood that has submerged vast areas of 36 districts.

"Let us sink political differences and conflicts and work unitedly for millions of our countrymen who are passing their days in utter misery having lost their homes to flooding," said Dr. Kamal Hossain, chairman of the platform, at a press conference at National Press Club yesterday.

"The state should make no further delay to declare the submerged districts as disaster-hit areas and seek foreign aids for the increasing number of victims," said leader of the platform formed on March 14 to head off 'criminalised politics' and

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## Manmohan, Khaleda's Bangkok meet set to boost bilateral ties

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA,  
from New Delhi

India and Bangladesh are set to carry forward their bilateral interaction with a series of high-level meetings in the coming weeks beginning with a summit-level meeting between prime ministers Manmohan Singh and Khaleda Zia later this month.

The proposed meeting between Singh and Khaleda on the sidelines of the BIMST-EC meet in the Thai capital would be the first top-level interface since the Congress-led coalition took office in India.

This was noted at a meeting between Indian External Affairs Minister Natwar Singh and his Bangladeshi counterpart M. Morshed Khan on the sidelines of Sarsc Foreign Ministers' meeting in

Islamabad on Tuesday.

The process of high-level interaction between the two countries was set in motion when Morshed Khan visited India in June. The Islamabad meeting between the two prime ministers was the first since the margin of the BIMST-EC summit in Bangkok last year and him was their second in less than two months.

According to official sources who briefed the press about the outcome of yesterday's meeting between the two foreign ministers, the bilateral contact between the two neighbours would push ahead when their foreign secretaries meet in New Delhi soon. A meeting of home secretaries will follow this.

While the foreign secretary-level talks will be held in New Delhi, Indian home secretary will travel to Dhaka, he said.

The sources said Natwar, during

his meeting with Morshed Khan, voiced concern over the massive arms haul in Chittagong sometime back and wanted to know about their origin and whom they were meant for.

Morshed is understood to have told Singh that this information would be shared with India as soon as Bangladesh finds it out.

The Indian external affairs minister underlined the need for India and Bangladesh to sign a bilateral free trade agreement (FTA), pointing out that this would go down as a landmark in their trade ties, said the sources.

Morshed welcomed Singh's proposal made at the Sarsc ministerial meeting Tuesday for a regional high economic council to boost economic cooperation in the region.

## UP chairmen demand more funds

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Union Parishad (UP) chairmen yesterday demanded of the government direct and enhanced allocation of funds for the UPs for what they said is strengthening the local government for the sake of a strong and stable democratic order.

The allocation for every UP must be raised to Tk 25 lakh a year from Tk 3.5 lakh, they further demanded.

The made the demands at a press conference of the National Union Parishad Forum (NUPF) in the capital.

President of the NUPF Golam Sarwar said about 40 percent of the development budget should be allocated to local government sector, instead of two percent now.

"We (each UP) get only Tk 3.5 lakh a year in three phases through upazila for development work. A portion of the money is misappropriated at upazila level," he said.

Mustaqur Rahman, general secretary of the NUPF, stressed direct allocation of funds for the UPs.

The UPs cannot work independently and this greatly hinders national development, he said.

On the current budget, he said it is not a budget for rural development.

Mustaqur said they have formulated a 12-point demand to resolve the problems facing the UPs across the country. The demands include

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## JS body to discuss court-martialling of 17 navy men

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A parliamentary body will discuss the reported court-martialling of 17 navy officials who are accused of irregularities in the purchase of a 'low quality' frigate, later decommissioned by the coalition government.

The parliamentary standing committee on defence ministry made the decision as the ministry could not inform yesterday's meeting at the Sangsad Bhaban about the issue, meeting sources said.

The Bangabandhu, a much-talked-about frigate built by

Daewoo of South Korea, was commissioned into the Bangladesh Navy in June 2001 after it was purchased during the Awami League (AL) rule.

But the frigate was decommissioned during the rule of the four-party coalition and the Bureau of Anti-Corruption filed a case on August 7, 2003 against some officials and AL leaders, including former prime minister Sheikh Hasina, for involvement in the controversial frigate purchase.

Hasina, also leader of the opposition, at a recent meeting accused the government of court-martialling the innocent navy officials and the issue

raised at the budget session of parliament grabbed the media spotlight.

"News reports worried people and we are concerned about the issue as people's representatives. We will discuss it at the next meeting," former army chief Mahbubur Rahman, also chairman of the committee, told The Daily Star.

The chairman said committee members wanted to know about the issue from Defence Secretary KM Ehsanul Haque, but he could not inform them as he said he did not receive any information from the

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## Student strike today to protest history distortion

DU CORRESPONDENT

Three opposition-backed student organisations yesterday called a nationwide student strike for today to denounce what they said were the distortion of history in the reprint of the Liberation War documents and death threats to teachers, free thinkers and journalists.

Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), student wing of main opposition Awami League, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal-backed BCL and Workers' Party's student wing Bangladesh Chhatra Maitree (BCM) called the strike.

The three organisations yesterday took out processions on the Dhaka University campus in support of today's strike. The strike will be relaxed at the educational institutions in the flood-affected regions.

The Dhaka University authorities have postponed all the examinations scheduled for today.

## HOLDING TAX House-owners block Khoka's motorcade

UNB, Dhaka

Police lobbed teargas canisters and charged baton to disperse angry people who tried to block the motorcade of Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka in the capital yesterday.

Witnesses said Khoka's motorcade came in front of a procession of angry house-owners protesting the new budgetary provision of self-assessed holding tax on his way to a meeting in old part of the city at about 4:00pm.

He later attended the meeting

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## HOLDING TAX ASSESSMENT

## Submission deadline extended to Aug 14

AL gives one-week ultimatum to cancel self-assessment system

STAR REPORT

Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) yesterday extended the deadline for submitting self-assessment of holding tax from July 31 to August 14, while Awami League issued a one-week ultimatum to the corporation to withdraw the newly intro-

duced tax assessment system. The DCC took the decision to shift the submission deadline considering the current flood situation in different areas of the city.

Announcing the decision to a group of reporters at his office yesterday, DCC Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka said the reassess-

ment of holding tax is taking place after long 14 years as the city corporation has not been receiving the due holding taxes from new houses.

The DCC authorities introduced the new system from July 1 with a view to increase its revenue earning. According to the system, owner of

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## Rab's midnight raid terrorises ex-army man's family

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) team stormed into the house of a retired army officer at New Defence Officers' Housing Society (DOHS) at Mohakhali late Tuesday night on a tip off that criminals were hiding

there but the whole exercise proved futile.

The commando style midnight operation at the residence of retired Lt. colonel Sirajul Islam left the inmates of the house traumatised.

Three of the sixteen-member

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## Natwar, Kasuri talk borderline terrorism

AFP, PTI, Islamabad

Indian External Affairs Minister K. Natwar Singh and his Pakistani counterpart Khurshid Mehmood Kasuri yesterday discussed the Kashmir problem, the issue of cross border terrorism while reviewing the various confidence building measures (CBMs) and decided to meet again on September 5 and 6 in New Delhi.

During their 75-minute breakfast meeting, the two leaders also discussed the proposed bus service between Srinagar and Muzaffarabad in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK).

Emerging from the talks, both the leaders told reporters that they have decided to meet again on September 5 and 6 to carry forward the dialogue process.

Singh said the issue of cross border terrorism also came up during their parleys.

This was their third bilateral meeting in two months. They had met in the Chinese city of Qingdao in June and earlier this month in Jakarta.

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## Westmont to add 250-MW power to national grid by December

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Westmont Power (Bangladesh) Ltd has launched a \$150 million expansion drive with a target to add 250-megawatt electricity to the national grid by December.

In the first phase, the private-sector power producer will install its second power generation unit, an 80-MW combined cycle power plant, by September.

With this second unit in operation, the production capacity of Bijoer Aalo, Westmont's barge-mounted power generation complex at Baghabari, Sirajganj, will rise to 170-MW. Westmont Group Chairman Kazi Tajul Islam Faruque told a news conference in the city yesterday.

Westmont has already purchased and is importing an Indonesia-assembled giant 300 feet long by 90

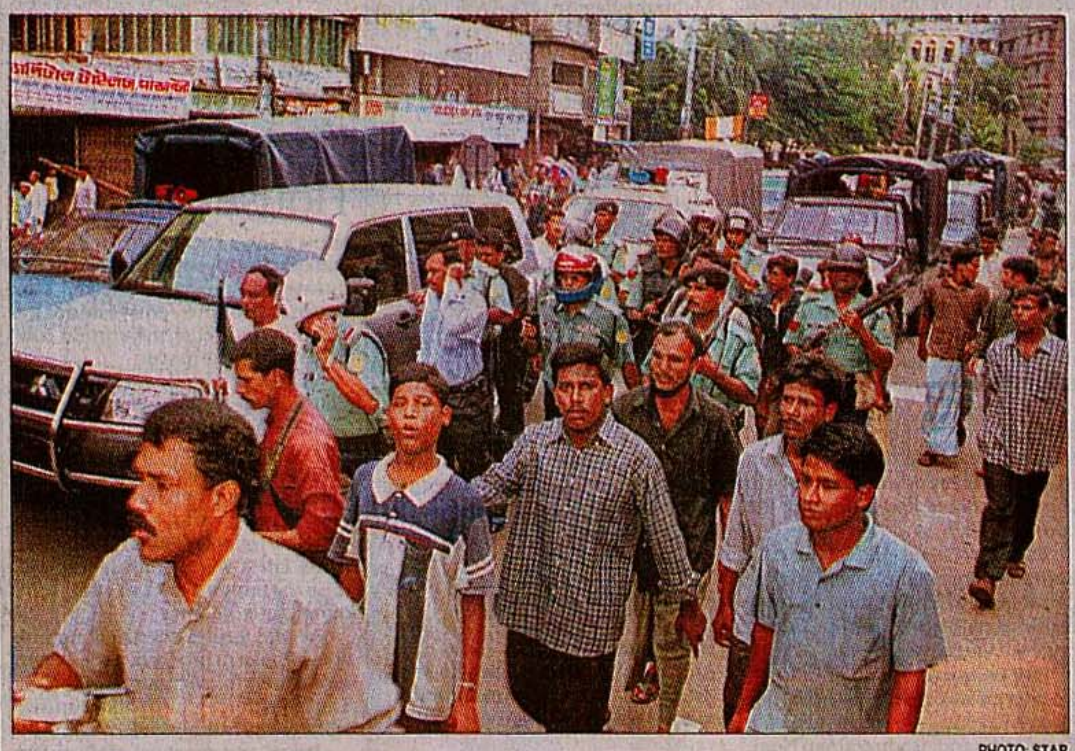
feet wide by 110 feet high floating powerplant.

Faruque said the plant, which had left Indonesia's Batam Port on

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**OBITUARY**

**Shahpar Ali Khan (Molly)**, Daughter of Mr. M. Sahjad Ali and Mrs. Tahmina Ali, died in the morning of July 20, 2004, at Charing Cross Hospital, London. (Inna Lillah, wa inna elaihe rejiun!) Molly was born on April 16, 1966. Among those who grieve for her loss, are Molly parents, only brother, husband, son, daughter, cousins, nephew's nieces, and all the friends and relatives whose lives were touched by Molly in the short span of her life. Her Namaze Janaza will be held on Thursday July 22nd, after Zohr prayers, at Gulshan Central Mosque. May her soul rest in peace.



Police escort a car carrying Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka on the North South Road in Dhaka yesterday after angry demonstrators tried to block his motorcade in protest at the new budgetary provision of self-assessed holding tax.

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