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## Russian school siege toll soars to 322

Dead include 155 children; Putin ordered crackdown to end hostage ordeal

AGENCIES, *Beslan*

Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday paid his respects to the 322 dead and hundreds of wounded from a horrific battle between security forces and heavily-armed militants holding 1,000 hostages at a school.

The three-day siege ended in scenes of horror that the press described as the "worst possible scenario", with half-naked, bloodied children fleeing from the school and the mutilated bodies of the dead rushed out on stretchers.

Dozens of unexploded bombs remained in the building, hampering efforts to bring out burned corpses still in the school gymnasium where the hostages were held, an interior ministry official told the Interfax agency.

"All of Russia suffers for you and prays together with the people of the republic," said Putin during his unannounced pre-dawn visit to Beslan, in the Caucasian republic of North Ossetia, where he visited some of the 700 wounded in the storm of the school building by crack troops.

Some 322 people, including 155 children, were killed in the hostage siege in a southern Russian school.

Black, who arrives in Dhaka today on two-day trip, made the remarks in an exclusive interview titled "We are looking closely at Bangladesh," with Indian weekly The Outlook in its advance issue till September 13.

"I got some good insights from the Indian team on what is going on in Bangladesh," said Black in the interview conducted in Delhi during his visit there last week to hold

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A woman cries in uncontrollable pain for her dear one in front of stone-faced Russian soldiers cordoning off the school at the end of a three-day hostage crisis.

## COUNTER-TERRORISM US top expert due today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Joseph Cofer Black, US State Department's coordinator for counter-terrorism, arrives in Dhaka on a two-day trip today.

Foreign Secretary Shamsheer Mobin Chowdhury told reporters yesterday that Black's visit had been in the pipeline for two months and is not related to the presence of Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) officials in the country to assist in probing the August 21 grenade attacks.

"He is a policymaker not an investigator," said Chowdhury to reporters not disclosing any possible agenda on the discussion to be held between Morshed and Black.

As President Bush's special envoy to Bangladesh, Black will call

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## Forex reserves hit all time high at \$3.23b

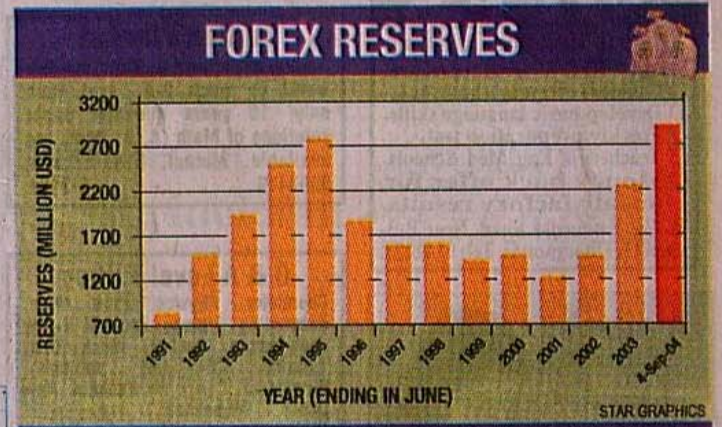
REJAUL KARIM BYRON

Foreign exchange reserves hit all time high of \$3.23 billion yesterday, thanks to the robust growths in export and remittance coupled with disbursement of loans and grants by the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF).

This is for the second time the country's foreign currency reserve crossed \$3 billion-mark, after 1995 when the amount was \$3,077 billion.

The reserve witnessed a continued surge over the last few months, Bangladesh Bank (BB) officials said. The amount was \$2.7 billion at the

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## Black talks to Indian media on Bangladesh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The United States is keeping a close watch on use of Bangladesh as a potential "platform to project terror elsewhere," said Joseph Cofer Black, State Department's coordinator for counter-terrorism.

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## GRENADATE ATTACK Interpol looking for common suspects

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Interpol is digging into available information about all suspects in the major grenade and bomb blasts in the country during the last six years and trying to detect whether there is any one common in the incidents.

Sources said the three Interpol staffs probing the August 21 grenade attack on an Awami League rally are scrutinising police and media records on the suspects and gathering information about their present status and movement.

Yesterday, they spent the morning in their hotel rooms and went to

the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) headquarters in the afternoon, where they had long discussion sessions with local investigators.

Meanwhile, the lone Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agent who had come to probe the attack left Bangladesh Friday.

The Interpol investigators are collecting photographs and evidences on the suspects and checking from the video footages and photos whether there is any one common in the incidents.

They are also collecting detailed profiles of the organisations,

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## India won't link rivers without bilateral talks

Says minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Water Resources Minister Hafiz Uddin Ahmad, Bir Bikram, yesterday said India has assured Bangladesh of not implementing its river-linking project without bilateral discussion.

We have also received an assurance from India that it will not implementing any other projects which may appear to be harmful to Bangladesh without talks, the minister said.

Bangladesh has invited Indian water resources minister to the 36th meeting of Bangladesh-India Joint River Commission scheduled for

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## BOMB THREAT Nothing found in DU building search

DU CORRESPONDENT

A bomb threat on Friday prompted a thorough search of the Arts Building of Dhaka University (DU) that found no explosives.

DU Proctor AK Firoz Ahmed said yesterday security men checked the Arts Building area but found nothing suspicious.

An anonymous letter to mass communication and journalism department on Friday threatened to blow up the Arts Building in five days.

Police and security staff of the university searched the room where the letter was found and the adjacent area but traced no explosives.

Two sub-inspectors of Ramna Police Station told Chairperson of the department Prof Shaikh Abdus Salam high officials are now looking into the bomb threat.

Meanwhile, poor attendance of teachers, students, officials and employees at the Arts Building marked the day yesterday.

Classes at most of the departments were held partially. But no classes were held at journalism department though the department chairperson did not make any announcement suspending classes.

Most of the teachers' rooms and seminar library of the department remained closed due to the panic. Some teachers even sought leave for a few days.

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## Govt destroying rally bombing evidence: AL

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The main opposition Awami League (AL) yesterday accused the government of destroying vital evidence of deadly grenade attacks on its rally to bungle investigation and save the criminals linked to the government.

Rejecting the government-initiated probes, frontline AL leaders at a press conference at the party's Dhanmondi office also

alleged the Khaleda Zia administration was trying to shift the blame onto the AL to cover up its hand in the crime.

"Neutral investigation into the deadly attacks will not be possible keeping this government in power as it is involved in the crime," said AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil. "Only the government's resignation can ensure proper probes into the August 21 carnage and all other

crimes under the coalition regime."

He wondered the government did not take any disciplinary action against the state minister for home, home secretary, inspector general of police and chiefs of different intelligence agencies even after such mayhem. "Absolute failures of these persons led to the August 21 attacks," he said.

Referring to previous bomb

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## JS body to okay bill to cap cabinet size at 35

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A parliamentary standing committee yesterday decided to clear a constitution amendment for introduction in the House aimed at fixing the size of the cabinet at not more than 35.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Private Members Bills and Resolutions yesterday

discussed the bill submitted to it by Jatiya Party lawmaker GM Quader.

The amendment bill proposes that the size of the cabinet should not exceed one-tenth of the seats in the Jatiya Sangsad.

Both ruling and opposition lawmakers agreed at the meeting to recommend to the House for the

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## Bangladeshis not communal

Asserts PM

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia has alleged that a vested quarter is out to damage the country's image at home and abroad through false propaganda.

They are trying to use the religious sentiment for political gains, she said, asserting that "people of Bangladesh are not communal".

The prime minister made the observations while exchanging views with the members of Bangladesh Hindu Bouddha Christian Kalyan Front yesterday.

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## Twenty injured as garment workers go on rampage over dues

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 20 people were injured yesterday at Maghbazar in the city as enraged workers of a garment factory went on rampage in retaliation to the factory manager's frequent physical assaults on them.

The workers roughed up manager of Impressive Apparels Limited Mustafizur Rahman alias Jakir Hossain and then staged a demonstration in front of the factory building blocking the busy Outer Circular Road at 3:20pm.

Ramna police baton-charged and dispersed them after about two hours injuring around 10.

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Policemen carry out a search at classrooms of Dhaka University yesterday after an anonymous letter on Friday threatened to blow up the Arts Building in five days.

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