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Committee soon to co-ordinate armed forces

Headed by PM, chiefs of 3 services to be members; Armed Forces Division to become forces' HQ

SHAKHAWAT LITON

The government is going to form a high-powered 'defence committee' to better co-ordinate the activities of the armed forces, as the policymakers think the Armed Forces Division (AFD) is unable to do that due to certain structural shortcomings.

"The Armed Forces Division is facing difficulties in co-ordinating the forces, as the chiefs of the three services do not hold any position in the division. The division also lacks adequate power," a government high-up told The Daily Star wishing anonymity.

Sources said the prime minister will head the committee which will

have the chiefs of armed services as its members. After its formation, the AFD will be restructured to work as the joint headquarters of the armed services and the secretariat of the committee.

At present, the AFD works under the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and looks after the training and operational activities of the army, the airforce and the navy. The three chiefs are not officially involved in the AFD. But they have representation at the division.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, who is also in charge of the defence ministry, senior ministers and the chiefs of the armed services at a meeting on Monday discussed an AFD draft proposal on the defence

committee and decided in principle to go for it.

Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman, LGRD Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Health Minister Khandakar Mosharraf Hossain, Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan and Defence Adviser to the PM Lt Gen (ret'd) Mahbubur Rahman, among others, were present at the meeting held at the PMO.

According to the proposal, the prime minister will head the committee and the defence minister, if there is any, will be the deputy chief.

The AFD, after its restructuring, will be equipped with the logistical support and manpower necessary to play a due role as the secretariat of

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Saarc summit Feb 6-7

AGENCIES

The stalled 13th Saarc summit will now be held on February 6 and 7 and the heads of the government from the member countries are expected to arrive in Dhaka on February 5.

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan while briefing the newsmen on the latest development yesterday also said that the new schedule for the meeting has been set after consultation with all the seven member states of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc).

Current Saarc Chair, Pakistan, formally announced the new dates yesterday. Pakistani Foreign Ministry spokesman Masood Khan told a news agency that Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz had consulted all members and there was consensus on the new dates.

The summit had originally been slated to take place between January 9 and 11, but Prime Minister Khaleda Zia deferred it in the wake of December 26 tsunami disaster that cost over 1,60,000 lives along the Indian Ocean coastlines with some of the Saarc member states being worst-hit.

Though the fresh schedule suggests dropping of a day from what has been a three-day affair, foreign

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Plots in wetland on sale without Rajuk's nod



PHOTO: AKM MOHSIN

The signboard reads Hazaribagh Model Town that realtors have set up by filling up a wetland just outside the capital's flood protection embankment in violation of law and without permission of the city planners.

PINAKI ROY

A real estate company has filled up a vast area of wetland at the edge of Hazaribagh, and sold out at least 30 plots without permission of the Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha (Rajuk).

The company under the banner of Hazaribagh Model Town has been filling up the wetland just outside the flood protection embankment on the southern side of Shikder Medical College, a private institution.

The Wetland, Water Body and Open Space Protection Act, 2000 does not permit anyone to fill up any wetland without permission of the authorities.

Urbanisation experts have long been raising alarm that continuous filling up of the wetland on the suburbs of Dhaka will expose the city more to floods. They say flooding in the city would linger for longer periods, as rainwater would not find enough way out. Dhaka suffered acute waterlogging in the last monsoon and experts blamed it on the filling up of the wetlands.

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Tatenda Taibu, the Zimbabwe captain, square cuts on his way to 49 not out on Day One of the second Test against Bangladesh at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

SAFETY AT WORKPLACE Punish garment unit owners for defying court order: Dr Kamal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Gono Forum President Dr Kamal Hossain yesterday said ready-made garment manufacturers who do not provide safe working environment in their factories disobeying the order of the highest court, must be punished.

"There are laws. Had those laws been implemented, we would not have seen so many workers die in fire," the eminent jurist said while addressing a rally in the city to protest the death of 22 workers in a devastating fire on January 6. The incident happened in a knitting

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TRADE CORRIDOR TO NEPAL, BHUTAN Delhi to look 'favourably' at Dhaka's request

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

New Delhi now appears to be agreeable to Dhaka's requests for trade corridor to Nepal and Bhutan through India and for power supply from the Himalayan kingdoms using India's electricity grid.

Talking to journalists here after India, Bangladesh and Myanmar had agreed last Thursday to a transnational pipeline project to ferry natural gas from Myanmar to India through Bangladesh, Indian Petroleum Minister Mani Shankar Aiyar said New Delhi "would favourably consider Dhaka's request for

trade transit to Nepal and Bhutan".

On Dhaka's overture to Delhi seeking access to hydro-electricity of Nepal and Bhutan through Indian power grid in return for the Myanmar-Bangladesh-India pipeline, Aiyar said, "India would examine positively any fresh proposal received from Dhaka with regard to the required facilities."

Officials here said the understanding arrived at between the three countries in Yangon took note of Bangladesh's concerns on trade and electricity transit issues, which is reflected significantly in the joint statement issued there on Thursday.

The statement said, "The Governments of Bangladesh, India and Myanmar agree to continue keeping contact with each other at the Ministerial level and to meet both bilaterally and bilaterally at regular intervals in order to update each other on the measures being taken relating to the development of activities in their respective countries in regard to natural gas and, more generally, the power and energy sector."

It said, "With respect to issues of bilateral cooperation which impinge on their trilateral

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Khatme Nabuwat 'deadline' to govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

International Khatme Nabuwat Movement, Bangladesh, yesterday set December 23 this year as the deadline for the government to enact a law declaring the Ahmadisyyas non-Muslims.

Giving the deadline at a rally of Islamic zealots in the capital, leaders of the movement said they will sacrifice their lives to save the 'dignity of Islam and Khatme Nabuwat Movement'.

The government alone will be responsible for the consequences if it fails to meet their demand by the deadline, said the movement's Bangladesh Ameer Mufti Noor Hossain.

He said although the parties in the coalition government claim themselves as nationalist and pro-Islam, they are just silent spectators

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Enamul keeps Tigers in

AL MUSABBIR SADI

Enamul Haque carried on from where he left off in Chittagong when the young left-spinner sparked an early collapse in Zimbabwe's first innings. But the visitors battled their way to reach 244-6 on Day One of the second and final Test at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Enamul, who bagged a career-best 6-45 in the port city to spearhead Bangladesh to their maiden

Test victory on January 10, took the first four wickets as Zimbabwe slumped to 111-4 midway through the post-lunch session.

But skipper Tatenda Taibu, who elected to bat first, was involved in two significant partnerships with Hamilton Masakadza (43) and Elton Chigumbura to guide the side out of troubled waters.

Taibu was one run away from his second half-century in the series while Tinashe Panyangara, who missed the Chittagong Test due to

injury, was batting on 14 when stumps were drawn.

The 18-year-old Enamul, who ended up with 4-74 from 27 overs after an exciting first spell of 19-3-67-4, made the all-important breakthrough in his very first over just before lunch when he bowled Barney Rogers ending a solid stand with Stuart Matsikenyeri.

The pair put on 65 runs for the first wicket.

The left-handed Rogers was on 29 when he mistimed a sweep off the bowler's last delivery of the 19th over and the ball hit the stumps off his pad.

From 87-1 at the interval, the Zimbabweans tumbled to 111-4 shortly after lunch as Enamul got rid of Matsikenyeri, who had just reached his fifty with his eighth boundary in 95 balls, playing a delivery onto the stumps.

Dion Ebrahim's return after serving a one-Test ban was brief.

The experienced Zimbabwe batsman, having settled for a characteristically slow 12 in 64 balls, decided to let a delivery go but it

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3 die in 'crossfire'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Three people -- a wanted criminal, a Juba Dal leader and a regional leader of an outlawed communist outfit -- died yesterday across the country in encounters with Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and police.

Mohammad Selim, 30, died in the capital, Rajab Ali, 30, in Natore and Ajmat Ali, 35, in Pabna.

DHAKA Selim, accused in several cases including two for murders, was killed and a police sub-inspector (SI) received bullet injuries in a shootout between police and a gang of alleged robbers in the city's Dhanmondi area early yesterday.

Selim, son of Montajuddin Sarker of Baulal, Patuakhali, used to live at 34/1 Rayer Bazar in Dhanmondi. His wife termed the incident a cold-blooded murder.

Tipped off, a police team led by the officer-in-charge (OC) of Dhanmondi Police Station (PS) received bullet injuries in a shootout between police and a gang of alleged robbers in the city's Dhanmondi area early yesterday.

According to police, catching

sight of the police team, the gang of about six armed men opened fire. Police fired back.

Hit by bullets in the head, Selim died on the spot, while SI Atiqur Rahman received a bullet in his left arm, said the duty officer at Dhanmondi PS.

The rest of the gang managed to escape. Police recovered a sawed-off rifle and five bullets from the spot.

SI Rahman was admitted to Razarbagh Police Lines Hospital.

Police sent Selim's body to Dhaka Medical College and Hospital (DMCH) for autopsy.

Selim's wife Hashi Begum said, "Police picked him (Selim) up from our house Wednesday night and since then we had no information about him until this (Friday) morning."

NATORE

Rajab Ali, son of Sekandar Ali and general secretary of ruling BNP's youth front Juba Dal's Bahadurpur Ward unit, was killed in alleged crossfire between police and his associates at Gopalpur village under Lalpur upazila in the district at about 2:00pm yesterday.

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US 'erodes' global human rights

BBC ONLINE

A leading human rights group has criticised the US over the Abu Ghraib prison abuse scandal and the treatment of prisoners at Guantanamo Bay.

In its annual report, Human Rights Watch says that when a country as dominant as the US openly defies the law, it invites others to do the same.

It says an independent US commission should look into prisoner abuse at Iraq's US-run Abu Ghraib jail.

The report also calls for more military protection in Sudan's Darfur region.

According to the New-York based group, abuses committed by the US have significantly weakened the world's ability to protect human rights.

"The US government is less and less able to push for justice abroad, because it's unwilling to see justice done at home," said Kenneth Roth, executive director of HRW.

Washington says it has condemned the abuse and is investigating allegations in Iraq and Guantanamo Bay.

HRW accuses the Bush administration of failing to take responsibility for the treatment of prisoners in its war on terror, saying they "sought

to blame the scandal on the young soldiers they sent to fight in Iraq and Afghanistan."

It also highlights the coercive interrogation techniques used by prisoners at Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib jail.

"Governments facing human rights pressure from the United States now find it easy to turn the tables," said Roth. "Washington can't very well uphold principles that it violates itself."

The group calls for the Bush administration to set up a fully independent investigative commission, similar to the 9/11 Commission, to look into the Abu

Ghraib allegations.

US State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said eight investigations had already been completed and junior soldiers were being prosecuted.

"We do not condone torture or abuse of prisoners," he said.

"The actions of the administration have been quite clear in prosecuting this and investigating it and bringing it to light."

HRW also accuses the world of showing "callous disregard" for the 70,000 people killed and up to two million made homeless in the Darfur conflict.

"Darfur is making a mockery of

our vows of 'never again'," said Roth.

HRW singles out China and Russia - UN Security Council veto members - in particular for being more concerned about protecting oil contracts and arms sales to Khartoum than saving lives.

The report says a large UN-authorized military force is needed to protect citizens, and criticises Western powers for handing the situation to the relatively inexperienced African Union.

It also calls for an international criminal court to ensure crimes committed in Darfur do not go unpunished.

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