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## Quit politics, go abroad

### Bidisha tipped on remand; Ershad goes to Saudi Arabia today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bidisha Ershad, the arrested wife of Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad, has been tipped that she may be allowed a safe passage abroad in exchange for her stepping aside from politics.

Now on a three-day remand in a trivial case relating to theft of her husband's mobile and vandalism inside his residence, she has also been told that unless she accepts the offer, more cases may be filed against her. These cases may relate to money laundering and conspiracy against the state.

Sources said Bidisha may be asked to give statements on Ershad's

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Police drag Bidisha, wife of Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad, into the Court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate of Dhaka yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR



## Dr Kamal terms Bidisha's arrest illegal

UNB, Dhaka

Eminent lawyer and Jatiya Oikya Mancha President Dr Kamal Hossain blamed the government for using law for political gain and said it is impossible to think of such activities in a civilised society as are happening to Bidisha, wife of a former president.

"I have no language to criticise such heinous incident," he told journalists about the arrest of Bidisha Ershad, wife of former president and Jatiya Party President HM Ershad, at a press conference at the National Press Club yesterday. He termed her arrest "illegal and a violation of the Constitution".

About Bidisha's plea before her arrest that she would go with police if Dr Kamal went to her, he said, "She

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## Default loans mark rise again

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The default loan of the country's commercial banks has increased by .63 percentage point or Tk 511 crore in the first quarter of the current year.

As of December 2004, the total default loan stood at Tk 18,726 crore or 17 percent of the total outstanding loan, which in March 2005 rose to Tk 19,237 crore or 17.63 percent.

Explaining the rise, a commercial bank official said, though the banks typically try hard to recover classified loans ahead of the year-end, the drive somewhat eases off in the first few months of the new year, resulting in an inflated volume of default loans.

Of the four types of banks, only the Development Financial

Institutions (DFIs) could avoid this default loan increment. The remaining three -- Nationalised Commercial Banks (NCBs), Private Commercial Banks (PCBs) and Foreign Commercial Banks (FCBs) experienced this surge.

The amount of default loan in the four NCBs has risen by Tk 422 crore over the first quarter to stand at Tk 10,377 crore.

An official of Sonali Bank, the largest NCB, said, "No new loan has turned into default loan. Actually, the regular interest on the existing default loans has pushed the figure up."

Besides, in line with a government decision, recovery of agriculture loans has been suspended because of the last year's floods. But

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## CPD questions GDP estimate

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) has questioned the accuracy of the 6.27 percent record GDP growth in fiscal year 2003-04 reported by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) recently.

The question arises, as the gap is too wide to be credible between the bureau's provisional estimate of 5.52 percent and the final calculation of 6.27 percent growth in gross domestic product (GDP) in FY04.

"Without transparency in estimation methodology, reliability and usefulness of GDP data will be constantly questioned," observed the country's leading independent policy think-tank in an economic review report presented at a pre-budget press briefing last Saturday.

Referring to the recently formed Committee on National Income

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## Rain soothes capital

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

After heat waves persisting for more than a week, heavy rainfall in the afternoon yesterday brought a short relief to city life.

The rainfall that occurred throughout the country varied in amount while the meteorology department recorded the highest rainfall - 54mm - in the capital.

The sudden downpour, which continued for more than one hour, submerged low lying areas and created water logging in many roads, lanes and by-lanes in the city, as there is lack of a sufficient drainage system.

A nor'wester accompanied by gusty wind with a velocity of 57

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## Thriving sex trade at city hotels

### Unsafe sex poses STD threat

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and DAUD KHAN

A public health crisis of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV may be looming in Dhaka, as untold numbers of young prostitutes are forced to practice unsafe sex in hundreds of residential hotels throughout the city, doctors warn.

Their warning comes after learning about the dreadful experiences of Layla (not her real name), 17, who recently escaped from a residential hotel after 22 days of forced prostitu-

tion. The physicians at Dhaka Medical College and Hospital (DMCH) are now running tests to determine if she has contracted the HIV virus.

Doctors fear her risk level is high, since she rarely used condoms. "The girl came in touch with many different people, including foreigners. She might have contracted the HIV virus since she slept with these people, especially the foreigners," Dr Bilkis Begum, a gynaecology consultant at DMCH's One Stop

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## Cut tax, save newspapers

### Noab, BSP demand

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Newspaper Owners' Association of Bangladesh (Noab), Bangladesh Sangbadpatra Parishad (BSP) and journalist union leaders yesterday demanded that the government exempt or reduce the tax on imported newsprint to a maximum five percent and increase the rate of government advertisements.

Full text of proposal on page 15

As the price of newsprint on the international market is consistently increasing, the existing 25 percent tax on imported newsprint will hit the country's newspaper industry, said the Noab, BSP and journalist union leaders at a meeting held at the National Press Club.

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## From Jordan with broken hearts

### 28 more return

BISHAWJIT DAS

They went abroad for a favour of fortune but they returned home empty-handed, with their dream for a better life shattered by six months' ordeal.

The 28 Bangladeshi youths who went to Jordan late last year came back home Saturday evening, having gleaned the nightmarish experience.

"I still cannot believe we are free... and everything seems here heavenly," an overwhelming gush

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Twenty-eight Bangladeshi workers return home penniless Saturday evening after working six months at a Jordanian garment factory.

PHOTO: STAR

## BDR seizes 3 mortars, 8 rocket launchers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

Paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) seized eight rocket launchers and three mortars in Jaruliachhari in Naikhangchhari upazila in the early hours yesterday.

On information, a team of BDR raided the Jaruliachhari area and seized the rocket launchers and mortars at 5:00am. BDR sources said. They however could not say who are linked to the arms.

Earlier on Thursday, the BDR in another raid seized 300 SMC (sub machine carbine) bullets from the same place.

## DU VIOLENCE Probe body gets 15 more days

DU CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka University authorities yesterday granted the six-member committee 15 more days to investigate the incidents of violence on the campus between May 28 and 29, said Vice-chancellor Prof SMA Faiz.

The deadline for submission of a report was extended after the committee asked for more time. It also wrote to the legal advisor of the university to let it know whether

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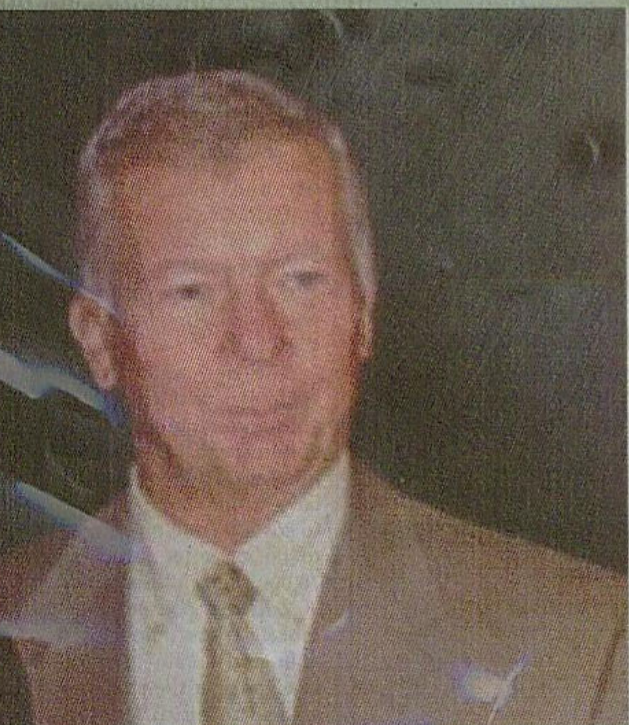
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to Bangladesh.  
Alongwith the TSS/AMC Team and Ms. Menon,  
we take pleasure in wishing you a pleasant and  
prosperous stay in this country.



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