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Dhaka firm on protecting its maritime boundary

Says foreign secy

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh is determined to protect its rights within its economic zone and maritime boundary, Foreign Secretary Hemayetuddin yesterday said as newspapers reported that India and Myanmar are exploring hydrocarbon within country's deep-sea territory.

"We're determined to establish and protect our legitimate rights within our economic zone and maritime boundary," the foreign secretary told the news agency when asked to comment on the newspaper reports.

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HSC exams start today

BSS, Dhaka

The Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) and equivalent Alim and Business Management examinations under seven educational boards, Madrasa Education Board and Technical Education Board begin today.

A total of 4,18,728 examinees will sit for the HSC examinations at 1,017 centres under Dhaka, Rajshahi, Comilla, Jessore, Chittagong, Barisal and Sylhet education boards.

Of them, 133,526 will appear at the examinations under Dhaka Education Board, 98,942 under Rajshahi Education Board, 43,261 under Comilla Education Board, 66,649 under Jessore Education Board, 31,809 under Chittagong Education Board, 25, 674 under Barisal Education Board and 18,867

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DEEPENING WATER CRISIS Army deployed at supply points as city seethes with rage

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The army were deployed at different pumps and water treatment plants in the city to assist the civil administration in water supply management as opposition workers demonstrated yesterday at Mirpur and Ramna demanding uninterrupted water and power supplies.

The Demra-Shyampur Sangram Parishad yesterday held meetings in different areas to mobilise people in its campaign for water and power.

Meantime, the 14-party opposition combine has announced sit-in programmes in front of the offices of Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) and Dhaka Electricity Supply Authority (Desa) today.

"Members of the army have been set out at the city water pumps at Fakirpur, Lalbagh, Mohakhali, Lalmatia and Mirpur, water treatment plants at Sayedabad and Godnail of Narayanganj, and Wasa control room at Kakrail to assist the Wasa in lifting and distributing water," said a press release of the Inter Services Public Relations.

The army will also distribute water at different parts of the capital from its own vehicles and Wasa water tankers, the release said.

Activists of the main opposition Awami League (AL) and its front organisations from five wards under the Ramna Police Station area brought out a procession

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Army personnel fill a tanker with water at Fakirpur to supply it to the water-starved areas of the capital yesterday.

ASHRAYAN PROJECT Not a single soul lives, yet 2,200 on voter list

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

The abandoned Ashrayan Project of Char Motukpur in Gangachara upazila in Rangpur shows 2200 voters on the draft voter list even though nobody lives there anymore.

The building was destroyed in the flood of 2003 and has been abandoned ever since.

The Election Commission officials in different upazilas in the district were embarrassed after the draft voter list with massive anomalies was published.

The draft lists for Gangachara and Kounia upazila abound with fake voters while a large number of voters from the minority community dropped from the list.

Kolkond Union Council Chairman Mostafa Kamal of

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Over 6,000 new polling stations this time

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Over 6,000 new polling stations will be set up to enable the 1.65 crore voters to exercise their voting rights in the next parliamentary election.

"So far it is understood that 6,542 new polling stations will have to be set up for the new voters," a senior EC official told The Daily Star.

Consequently, the number of polling stations in the next parliamentary elections is likely to stand at over 36,000 for 9.13 crore voters.

A polling centre usually has the capacity to serve 2,000 to 25,000 voters.

The vital task of setting up these new polling centres will begin immediately after the election schedule is declared, officials at the Election Commission (EC)

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Slim talk chance stokes up street agitation options

SHAKHAWAT LITON and RAKIB HASNET SUMAN

With the possibility of holding dialogues on electoral reforms receding, the country's politics is set to generate much heat in coming days as both ruling and opposition alliances are considering agitation in the street.

The Awami League (AL) and its 14-party opposition alliance partners have decided to intensify street agitation programmes to realise their demands for reforms in the caretaker government and electoral systems.

The BNP-led ruling alliance has also started countering the opposition's street agitation besides its preparation for the upcoming general elections in January 2007.

"We will be on the street with the people to protest any anarchy in the name of anti-government movement," BNP Standing Committee member Khandakar Mosharraf Hossain told The Daily Star yesterday.

The 14-party opposition will start massive preparations to make its Dhaka-siege programme on June 5 a success and eight teams comprising senior leaders have been formed to launch mass contacts across the country for this.

It plans to enforce more agitation activities after the programme, sources in the alliance said. The opposition has been agitating since last year to realise its reforms demands.

"To expedite our agitation for reforms, we are also considering to

resign from parliament at a time when there will be no way to hold by-elections to the vacant seats," said a senior AL leader.

AL General Secretary and opposition combine Coordinator Abdul Jalil, however, avoided any comment on this issue yesterday and said, "You will see when the plan is implemented." The alliance will force the government to realise its reform demands through agitation, he added.

Sources in the AL said party leaders at the grassroots level are being asked to attend the party's extended meeting on May 24 and 25 where the party high command will give directives to gear up public protest.

Meanwhile, the ruling BNP

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CLASHES, POLICE FIRING IN SYLHET SUST, private medical college closed sine die

Students demand punishment of cops, resignation of VC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Shahjalal University of Science & Technology (SUST) and Jalalabad Ragib-Rabeya Medical College (JRRMC) in Sylhet were declared closed sine die yesterday following a series of clashes between the students of the private medical college and the university on Friday night.

The SUST authorities announced the decision to close the university for an indefinite period at 8:00pm yesterday and

asked the students to vacate their dormitories by last night.

Earlier, the students of SUST staged demonstration on the campus demanding probe into Friday night's incidents and resignation of the vice chancellor. They also demanded punishment of the policemen who opened fire on the students during the clashes.

Seven SUST students, including five who sustained bullet wounds during the police firing, were admitted to Sylhet MAG Osmani

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Children form human chain for power, water

CU CORRESPONDENT

Hundreds of children formed a human chain in front of the Chittagong Press Club yesterday demanding smooth power and water supply in the city.

The Consumers Rights Protection Committee organised the hour-long human chain from 4:00pm to 5:00pm.

The speakers during the human chain said power cuts were disrupting the normal operation of all industries, business centres, hospitals and the studies of the examinees of Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) examination.

The committee leaders threatened to lock the Agrabad Power Development Board (PDB) Office

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Political parties should create honest candidates

Demands Nagorik committee dialogue

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A regional dialogue in Jessore yesterday demanded elimination of anomalies in the electoral system, declaration of educational qualifications of candidates, transparency and democratic practices within political parties, separation of the judiciary, empowerment of the Anti-Corruption Commission and

an end to all sorts of outside pressure and influence of black money to ensure a free and fair election.

The farmers, labourers and women have to be involved in mainstream politics. And political parties must create honest and competent candidates as they would not come from outside the country, speakers at the dialogue demanded.

The dialogue on "National Election 2007: Civil Society Initiative for Accountable

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Development" was part of a series of programmes jointly organised by the policy think-tank Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), The Daily Star, the Prothom Alo and Channeli.

The speakers pointed out that the people want to see an effective parliament but its members often boycott it when they sit in the opposition bench.

Politicians often change parties for getting better position. There should be a rule that one who changes a party cannot contest polls in next five years, they said.

They regretted that the candidates often forget their election pledges and become corrupt after being elected.

The government should give a clarification on the controversial draft voter list, the speakers thought.

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PVT VARSITY ANOMALIES Stamford, Darul Ihsan face students' anger

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Students of Stamford University yesterday went on rampage on two of its six campuses in the city during a daylong demonstration to drive a six-point demand home, prompting a three-day closure of the university.

The day also saw students of another private university, Darul Ihsan University, demonstrating on its Shyamoli campus and blocking Mirpur Road, protesting the university's closure for over a week now.

On Stamford University Siddheshwary campus, a few hundred students of the pharmacy department brought out a scheduled procession at around 8:00am to press for the fulfilment of a number of demands, witnesses said.

The demands include setting up a laboratory and a library at the pharmacy department, and accreditation of the course by Bangladesh Pharmacy Council, required much to get a pharmacist's job.

"At one stage, the students went

unruly and started ransacking computers, a library, a laboratory, and the door- and window-panes of the registrar's office on the ground floors of three campus buildings," said a pharmacy student on condition of anonymity.

By that time, many other students joined the demonstrators and together they marched in a procession towards Maghbazar. But, police intercepted them in front of Ramna Police Station.

At about noon, the demonstrators went to Stamford University Dhanmondi campus in Satmasjid Road. There their fellow students came out of the academic buildings and joined them. They started pelting brickbats at the buildings, breaking a few more door- and window-panes.

The agitating students then blocked Satmasjid Road, halting vehicular traffic on the city thoroughfare from noon until late in the evening.

The vice chancellor of the university, Hannan Firoz, arrived on the Dhanmondi campus with a

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Latifur yet to vacate govt house after 4 1/2 years

RAKIB HASNET SUMAN

Former chief adviser to a caretaker government, Justice Latifur Rahman, is still living in a government residence with 'special considerations' from the prime minister after four and a half years of his term's end in the interim government.

Latifur Rahman, also a former chief justice, has yet to leave the government allotted residence although his three-month tenure expired on October 10, 2001, after the takeover of the country's

administration by the new government of BNP-Jamaat-led alliance.

Housing and Works Secretary Iqbal Uddin Chowdhury told The Daily Star on Monday night over the phone that the prime minister has the authority to allot official residences for a maximum of five years. Justice Latifur Rahman was allotted the house on special consideration, he added.

Sources said Prime Minister Khaleda Zia gave permission to Latifur Rahman to stay in the government residence considering

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Justice Latifur Rahman is yet to leave this Minto Road house allotted to him as the chief adviser of the caretaker government in 2001. He has obtained 'special permission' from the prime minister.

Caretaker govt to land in tough fiscal time

Zaid Bakht of BIDS tells The Daily Star

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The next caretaker government is likely to face fiscal strains resulting from excessive release of funds in the first quarter of FY07 against an over-ambitious budget, feared economist Zaid Bakht.

"This being an election year fiscal restraint can be least expected, which will worsen the budget deficit and government borrowing situation," observed the research director of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) in a recent interview with The Daily Star.

These coupled with "the inflationary fallout of election-oriented activities, possible capital flight and resulting pressure on the exchange rate may threaten mac-



Zaid Bakht

roeconomic stability," he said. Such a situation, Zaid predicted, will render the caretaker government more vulnerable to the dictates of the IMF particularly as the disbursement of the \$80 million sixth tranche of its Poverty Reduction Growth Facility (PRGF) loan is slated for that time.

On fuel oil pricing, the BIDS research director said kerosene and diesel prices are critically linked with the state of the economy. "Further rise in the domestic price of these two items will threaten macroeconomic stability in this election year by worsening both inflationary and exchange rate situation."

He recommended waiving the import tariffs on kerosene and

diesel and dropping the large number of low-quality road projects taken up on political considerations from the ADP and reallocating their budgetary resources to cover the gap between international and domestic prices of kerosene and diesel.

In his opinion, "While price of petrol and octane can be readily adjusted upward, such upward adjustment in the prices of kerosene and diesel should be done gradually and only after inflationary trend has been contained effectively."

THE INTERVIEW The Daily Star (DS): What are the most pressing challenges the economy is facing at the moment?

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