

## Border confce ends with vow to combat crime

UNB, Dhaka

A six-day border conference between Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and Indian Border Security Force (BSF) concluded in New Delhi yesterday with both sides agreeing to combat cross-border crimes and cooperate in reducing border tension.

BDR Director General Major General Shakil Ahmed and BSF Director General

AK Mitra signed joint records of discussion after the conference.

Killing or injuring by BSF, "unprovoked" firing by the Indian border guards, trafficking in illegal arms and ammunition, and smuggling of explosive and narcotic substances, including phensidyl, heroin and hemp from India, were discussed at the conference, a release of BDR said.

Push-in bids and border violation by BSF and Indian citizens, Bangladeshi "criminals acting from inside India", intrusion, obstruction by BSF to the development activities of Bangladesh, keeping Tin Bigha corridor open for 24 hours, electrification of Dohogram-Angurpota area, and other security issues were also discussed at the conference.

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## Date-expired spices, milk powder seized

UNB, N'ganj

The joint forces yesterday seized date-expired spices and powdered milk from the town.

Led by magistrate Hasna Jahan Khanam, the team raided Jamir Super Market and seized the spices and powder milk.

The law enforcers arrested four people-- Hossain, Saber Ahmed, Monir Hossain and Tara Mia--from the spot.

## US war-wounded scandal grows

Army secy resigns as Bush vows review

AFP, BBC, Washington

US Defence Secretary Robert Gates sacked the civilian chief of the US Army Friday, saying he was "disappointed" with the service's response to a scandal over the care of wounded troops at a top military hospital.

Already under fire for surging more troops to Iraq, the White House announced it was forming a bipartisan presidential commission to review the care given wounded servicemembers.

President George W Bush has intervened in the scandal over the way wounded American soldiers were treated after they returned home from Iraq or Afghanistan.

Bush, in comments prepared for a weekly Saturday radio address, said he was "deeply troubled by recent reports of substandard conditions at Walter Reed Army Medical Centre."

He is forming a cross-party commission to oversee how they have been handled.

Refusing to take questions, Gates made a brief statement to reporters announcing the resignation of Army Secretary Francis Harvey.

"I have accepted his resignation," Gates said.

It came a day after Major General George Weightman was relieved of command of Walter Reed, which came 11 days after revelations in The Washington Post newspaper about poor outpatient care of wounded soldiers at the renowned hospital.

In the stories, the Post exposed how convalescing soldiers were housed in rooms with mould-covered walls, holes in the ceiling and infestations of rodents and cockroaches.

Once released as outpatients, they often became lost in a bewildering labyrinth of bureaucracy in a bid to get benefits to which they were due.

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Prayer Timing		
March 4		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-10	5-45
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-30	4-45
Maghrib	6-07	6-11
Esha	7-30	8-00
Source: Islamic Foundation		

### FERTILISER CRISIS

# Farmers block roads, besiege agri offices

#### STAR REPORT

Failing to get fertiliser in this peak season for IRRi-Boro cultivation, aggrieved farmers barricaded highways and laid siege to upazila agricultural offices in Dinajpur, Pabna and Barisal in the last two days.

In Dinajpur, several thousand farmers of Parbatipur and Chirirbandar upazilas put barricades at two points on Dinajpur-Bogra highway for hours yesterday leaving hundreds of vehicles stranded on both sides, reports our correspondent there.

At around 9:00am, the agitating farmers blockaded the highway at

Ambari point that lasted for nearly two hours.

Informed, officer-in-charge (OC) of Parbatipur Police Station and Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) officials of 15 Battalion rushed to the spot. Later, Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Dinajpur AM Saiful Hasan visited the spot and gave assurance to distribute at least 600 sacks of fertiliser among the agitating farmers.

BDR officials had been overseeing the distribution until late in the evening.

Meanwhile, the angry farmers of Chirirbandar upazila barricaded Dinajpur-Rangpur Highway at around 11:00am when the local

fertiliser dealer at Ranibandar Mor refused to sell fertiliser that day.

The two hours long blockade caused a five km-long traffic on both sides of the highway.

Later, the DC and OC of the Chirirbandar Police Station held talks with the farmers and brought the situation under control at around 1:30pm. They also supervised the fertiliser sale among the farmers.

Talking to The Daily Star, the agitating farmers alleged that an unscrupulous cartel of dealers have long been depriving them of fertiliser by claiming high prices for it and selling it on the black market.

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## Govt focused on poll reforms, economy

Says Mainul

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The caretaker government is emphasising mostly on reforming the election system and reviving the economic activities, said Law Adviser barrister Mainul Hossain yesterday.

Speaking as the chief guest at the concluding session of the National Consultation Process on the Thematic Issues of the UN Commission on Legal Empowerment of the Poor (CLEP), Mainul said the election could not be meaningful "if the corrupt can easily get elected and the politics is then perverted into unhindered corruption through abuse of people's trust."

The government has set its principal objective to swiftly carry out necessary reforms in the

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PHOTO: STAR

LEFT TO BE RUINED: A large number of seized unlicensed rickshaws kept in the open at Osmani Udyan in the capital.

## Ecneec sends back 7 projects for review

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecneec) yesterday sent back seven projects including three power schemes.

At a meeting chaired by Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed, it asked the ministries concerned to review the projects that involve Tk 1,483 crore in total and place fresh proposals within a month.

Especially the planning ministry officials were instructed to examine the projects closely before forwarding those to the Ecneec. "The chief adviser has asked them to weigh up the potential economic and environ-

mental impact and necessity of the projects," said a meeting source.

Finance and Planning Adviser Mirza Azizul Islam said, "The project proposals were returned for further examination to find irregularity, if there is any."

Asked about the power projects, he said, "We have asked to examine particularly one project [of power] to see whether it was processed meeting all the requirements."

At its first meeting under the present caretaker government, the Ecneec, the highest government

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## Essentials' prices on the rise

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The prices of essentials have been on the rise for the past two weeks causing much suffering to the people of low and middle income groups.

Rice, fish, meat, vegetables, milk powder, edible oil etc, which got very pricey on the eve of the last Eid ul Azha, have become even costlier during this period, the consumers and shopkeepers at different markets in the city said.

Vegetable market saw the sharpest rise in price in the past two weeks. Green chilli was earlier

selling at Tk 40-45 per kg, which now costs Tk 60. The price of per kg bean went up to Tk 20, which was been selling at Tk 12-14 last week. The price of aubergine almost doubled compared with last week, with per kg now selling at Tk 36-40.

Although prices of vegetables were supposed to be comparatively low during the end of winter, the opposite is being observed in the markets of the capital, retailer Amin of Kathalbagan market told The Daily Star yesterday.

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## 40 people killed in Indonesia landslide

AFP, Kupang

At least 40 people have been killed in landslides triggered by heavy rains on the eastern Indonesian island of Flores, and dozens more are still missing, officials said yesterday.

Entire houses were washed away by flash floods, and authorities said rescue teams had still not been able to reach some of the affected areas.

Around 80 people were reported missing and presumed dead buried by landslides and washed away by

flash floods. However, only 40 bodies were recovered as of Saturday evening.

"Of 73 people reported (missing), we have recovered 40 bodies. Four people were found alive and we are still searching for 29 more people," district police chief Santoso Ginting said on MetroTV.

The injured were being treated in the local subdistrict health centre. No further details were available on their condition.

"As of 6:45 pm (1045 GMT) evacuation efforts are still underway," Johnny Erasmus from the

disaster management coordination office here told AFP.

He said search and rescue efforts will continue for the next seven days.

East Manggarai district head Christian Rotok earlier told AFP that local residents were themselves organising relief efforts since access to affected areas was limited.

"The Ruteng-Cibal road will be totally impassable for the next one or two days, this means the district capital will be paralysed," Rotok

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PHOTO: STAR

Hanging on a ladder made of bamboo and ropes, workers fix window-panes in a high-rise building at Mohakhali in the capital, risking their lives.

## Speed up process for polls by June

Hasina asks CG, EC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina yesterday urged the caretaker government and the Election Commission (EC) to speed up initiatives for holding the next parliamentary elections by June.

"Seven weeks have already passed since the present caretaker government assumed office. The Election Commission has also been reconstituted. So, I hope the caretaker government and the Election Commission will take proper steps to hold the election by June," Hasina

said.

Hasina was speaking at a meeting of the AL Central Working Committee at her Dhanmondi office in the city. The meeting discussed the latest political situation and mulled reforms within the party, among other things.

Hasina said the central council of the party will be held when the state of emergency is lifted.

On reforms in the party, the AL chief said reformation has been an ongoing process in her party as

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## Rejoinder, our reply

Former water resources and commerce minister Major (retd) Hafizuddin Ahmed sent a rejoinder to the news item under the headline "Former minister Hafizuddin sued for killing" published in The Daily Star on March 03.

The rejoinder signed by Hafizuddin claimed that during the 2001 national election armed supporters of his contestant Awami League candidate Tofail Ahmed had captured the polling centre at Dr Azhar Uddin Primary School and got engaged in vote rigging.

He said he went to the centre at around 3:00pm on the day and complained about the irregularities to the presiding officer

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