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## 16-TOWN POWER DISTRIBUTION PROJECT PDB spends Tk 271cr without approval

REJAU KARIM BYRON

Power Development Board (PDB) spent an excess of Tk 271 crore in a power distribution project without approval of the authorities while a severe power crisis persists in the country.

An investigation report by the Planning Ministry's Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation Department (IMED) cited pressure from lawmakers and high officials in the past for the 'excess spending' on the 16-town power distribution project (second phase).

The amount originally approved for the project was Tk 225 crore but the PDB spent Tk 496 crore on it. Of the Tk 271 crore excess spending, the PDB is yet to pay Tk 169 crore outstanding bills to contractors, the report said.

In May 2005, the PDB placed a revised project at a meeting of the Executive Committee of National Economic Council (Ecneec) seeking approval of the Tk 271 crore additional expenditure.

But the Ecneec did not approve it and formed a committee under the IMED to investigate the unusually high additional costs for the project.

ject.

The committee visited seven of the 16 towns and submitted its report at last week's National Economic Council meeting.

Under the project, the PDB was to build 749 km of new power lines but ended up building 2,371 km.

While the PDB was to repair 742 km of old power lines with the approved funds, it repaired 2,911 km, according to the report.

There were other irregularities also in implementing the project. The inquiry team found that additional Tk 2.8 crore was spent to

## HIGHWAY ROBBERY UNDP official stabbed to death, mob kill three bandits

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

An official of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and three robbers were killed during a highway robbery in a bus on Tangail-Jamuna bridge road at Alenga in Kalihati upazila Friday night.

The robbers stabbed UNDP Programme Officer Soumitra Kumar Dev, 35, and three others including the driver and supervisor of the bus. Soumitra later died in hospital.

The three robbers died of mob beating and four of their cohorts were arrested as they were

## India clinch ODI series

MOHAMMAD ISAM

Gautam Gambhir and debutant Piyush Chawla starred as India clinched the three-match one-day series against Bangladesh 2-0 with a convincing 46-run victory in the second ODI at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Stylish left-hander Gambhir struck his second one-day international century after captain Rahul Dravid won the all-important toss and elected to bat. India posted a healthy 284 for eight in 49 overs after the game was delayed by 30 minutes due to rain in the morning. Bangladesh, in reply, could only muster 238 for nine as they gave away the series with one more game to go.

Aftab Ahmed ensured that Bangladesh were in the hunt from the start having scored 40 off 41 balls. Typically, Aftab took the game by the scruff of the neck as, for about 45 minutes, he looked to take the game away from the visitors but after he fell while trying to heave off-spinner Ramesh Powar, the run-rate started to climb due to the fall of regular wickets out in the middle.

19-year-old leg-spinner Chawla, making his one-day debut, bowled effectively as he used the lack of pace in the wicket with good variation of flight and spin. He was the best of the Indian bowlers as he took the wickets of Mohammad Ashraful, Habibul Bashar and Mohammad Rafique and only gave away 37 runs in his 10 overs.

"After the last match we thought the extra spinner would be useful. Sreesanth wasn't available for selection because of a sore calf. It

was natural to give him (Chawla) a chance," admitted Dravid in the post-match press conference.

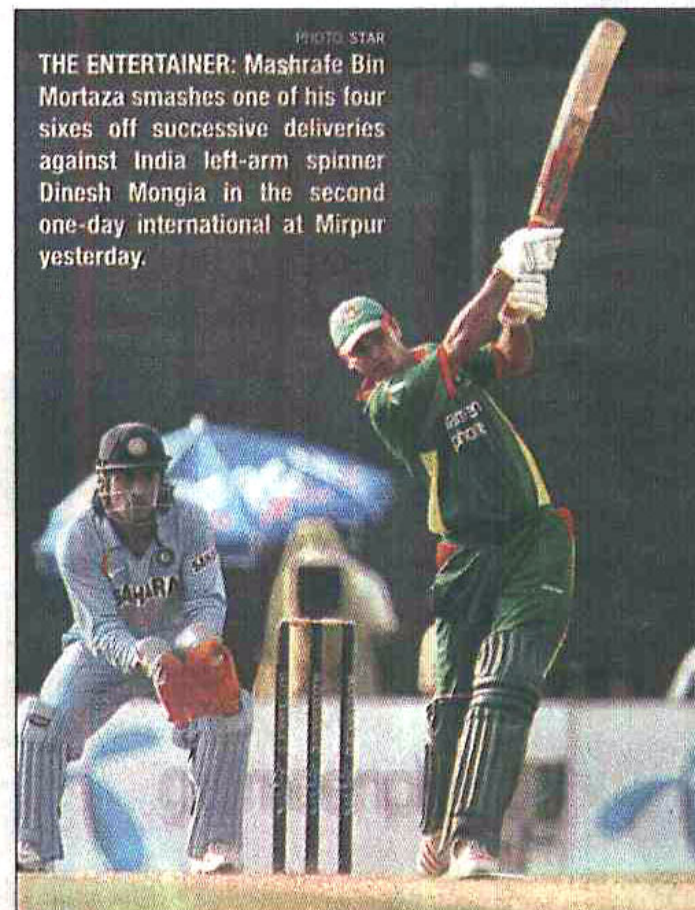
"I was confident with the score as I knew that Bangladesh had to bat really well to win but our bowlers kept it tight almost till the end," said Dravid.

His counterpart Bashar stayed at the crease for long for his 43 off 88 balls that included two sixes. But

it was a late-order cameo from comeback man Mashrafe Bin Mortaza that stole the show.

He took 26 runs off left-arm spinner Dinesh Mongia, that included four sixes off successive deliveries. Mashrafe carted three of those sixes over long-on and one over mid-wicket, the biggest of the lot, as Bangladesh took their score

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THE ENTERTAINER: Mashrafe Bin Mortaza smashes one of his four sixes off successive deliveries against India left-arm spinner Dinesh Mongia in the second one-day international at Mirpur yesterday.

## CG's reform move good but delay will harm democracy

Speakers tell BBC Bangla Sanglap

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a discussion yesterday said the country's democracy will suffer if the military backed caretaker government stays in power for a 'long period of time', but they endorsed its reform initiatives.

Saying that democracy cannot be sustained or advanced without an elected government, they also called upon the caretaker government to hold a free, fair and credible election after bringing necessary electoral reforms.

The speakers made the remarks on BBC Bangladesh Sanglap held in Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference centre in the capital.

"If the present caretaker government stays in power for a long period of time, democracy will be hampered. But we will have to give them time to carry out necessary reforms for holding a free and fair election," said Awami League (AL) leader Advocate Abdul Hamid, who was also a deputy leader of the opposition in the last parliament.

BNP leader and former whip Ashraf Hossain termed the present caretaker government 'undemocratic'. "As the present government is not elected, it is of course undemocratic," said the BNP leader. He also observed that the present government is a hindrance to flourishing of democracy.

The AL leader however said the

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## Bangladesh to sign deal with UAE on export of manpower

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh will sign an agreement with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on exporting manpower to promote and regulate recruitment of Bangladeshi workers to the UAE, the second largest destination for Bangladeshi labour.

The council of advisers approved the decision in principle

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## PROTEST OVER TOP JUDGE SACKING

## 34 killed in violence ahead of rally in Pakistan

AFP, Karachi

Fierce gun battles between rival political activists left 34 people dead and 100 wounded yesterday in the worst violence since President Pervez Musharraf suspended Pakistan's top judge two months ago.

Most of the victims were opposi-

tion party workers headed for a rally in the volatile southern city of Karachi by Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, who was trapped at the airport by roadblocks set up by Musharraf supporters.

Chaudhry, increasingly a symbol of defiance for those opposed to Musharraf's eight-year military

rule, later abandoned his plans to give a speech and flew back to the capital Islamabad.

Musharraf, who was due to address his own rival rally in Islamabad in the evening, ruled out declaring a state of emergency but deployed extra paramilitary troops in armoured cars in Karachi.

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## US SECURITY TEAM TO BUSH Give Bangladesh high priority as US strategic partner

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A US security delegation comprising a congressman and military veterans has asked President George W Bush to give Bangladesh "high priority" as a strategic partner in US foreign and national security policies against the backdrop of its

exposure to Islamist extremism.

"Bangladesh is potentially a crucial player in the struggle against Islamic extremism, and this is a crucial period for that country. The US has rare opportunity now to help shape the future of an important nation," the delegation said in

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## Amnesty concerned at death, torture in custody

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Amnesty International has expressed grave concern over the alleged "tortures and deaths in custody" since the declaration of the state of emergency in January 11 in Bangladesh, it said in a statement.

The human rights watchdog called for prompt, impartial and effective investigations into all reports of torture and death in custody and urged the caretaker government to ensure that any

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## UN offers help in holding fair polls

Govt to welcome UN support in recovery of siphoned out money, says Farook Sobhan

UNB, Dhaka

The United Nations (UN) will provide technical and financial assistance for holding a free and fair election in Bangladesh.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon gave the assurance when Farooq Sobhan, special envoy of the chief adviser, called on him at

UN headquarters on Friday.

Sobhan apprised the secretary general of various reform measures adopted by the caretaker government to hold the election before the end of 2008.

He also met a number of UN high officials including Lynn Pascoe, under secretary general,

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## Khaleda still under pressure

Says Hannan Shah

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's adviser Brig (retd) ASM Hannan Shah yesterday said Khaleda is still under pressure to leave the country, a charge that the government denied shortly afterwards.

"She [Khaleda] did not get the Saudi [Arabian] visa and she did not want to go too. There is still some pressure on her to leave for any other country. But she will not leave," Hannan told reporters at his

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## Saifur for end to 'dynastic' politics

Acknowledges 4-party govt's 'mistakes'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Senior BNP leader M Saifur Rahman yesterday called for an end to 'dynastic' politics and said a number of mistakes committed by the last BNP-led four-party government brought on the present situation.

During an interview on private television channel ntv, the former

finance and planning minister said the extension of the judges' retirement age and the appointment of the caretaker government were the reasons which brought on the present situation.

"There should be an immediate end to family-centric politics," Saifur said.

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## thankyou memento on World Mothers' Day

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