



PHOTO: STAR

Winners of Oitijhya-Etcetera-New Age Story Writing Contest 2006 pose for photograph with the guests at STM Hall in the city yesterday. Sitting from left are Arifur Rahman Naim, playwright Anisul Haq, litterateur Kaiser Chowdhury, Editor of the New Age Nurul Kabir and Managing Director of Etcetera Bangladesh Private Limited Maher Murshed.

# Thais protest against military rule

AFP, Bangkok

At least 5,000 Thais rallied under tight security in Bangkok yesterday to demand an end to the country's army-backed government amid fears of a repeat of last Sunday's violence.

More than 300 police officers and some troops stood guard as the crowd, mostly middle-aged men and women, gathered in Sanam Luang plaza in central Bangkok.

The military has become increasingly nervous about opposition movements since more than 100 anti-coup protesters were injured in clashes with police last Sunday.

The clashes, the first violence since the bloodless coup in September 2006, came as campaigning got underway for an August 19 referendum to approve an army-backed constitution.

"We are calling for democracy, which is a duty of every Thai," said Maethaphan Phothiteeraroj, a leader of an alliance of democracy advocates and supporters of deposed premier Thaksin Shinawatra.

Police said 5,000 protesters turned out to yesterday's demonstration, while organisers put the figure at 10,000.

Although the military said earlier it was boosting security with thousands of troops, only a handful of soldiers were seen around the plaza, a venue of daily rallies demanding the ouster of the junta.

Thailand's junta chief, General

Sonthi Boonyaratglin, on Friday ordered the troop deployment to ensure security, while police arrested nine protest leaders over the weekend clashes. One was released late Friday on bail.

Authorities have repeatedly warned that the government could impose a state of emergency in Bangkok if more violence breaks out at anti-coup protests.

Police have allowed protesters to rally only inside Sanam Luang and warned people would be arrested if they marched outside

the plaza.

But protest organisers said they would continue to stage the rallies to voice opposition to military rule.

"We will not stop protesting until we get our democracy back," said Surachai Sae-dan, another protest leader.

Some protesters wore T-shirts saying "No Vote" as the kingdom heads toward the charter referendum next month.

"We are urging people to vote against this constitution, which was drafted in a non-democratic man-

ner," said Maethaphan.

The military says the new charter will clear the way for elections by the end of the year, but opponents fear it will provide ways for the army to maintain an influence over government through powerful appointees.

Campaigning is tilted heavily in the government's favour, with half the country under martial law since the coup and a new law threatening prison for anyone convicted of obstructing the referendum.

# Asean urged to push Myanmar democracy

AFP, Bangkok

Southeast Asian nations must press Myanmar's military rulers to lay out a credible transition to democracy as the junta wraps up work on a long-stalled constitution, a rights organisation said yesterday.

The military last week opened what it says will be the final session of its constitutional talks, which have dragged on since 1993.

The junta bills the talks as the first step on its "road map" to democracy, but Human Rights Watch warned that the constitution under discussion would not end widespread rights violations in the country, formerly known as Burma.

"The new constitution, if it is

completed in its present form, will not necessarily make things any better," Brad Adams, head of the group's Asia division, wrote in the Nation newspaper in Bangkok.

The charter would cement the military's role in politics, reserve one quarter of seats in parliament for soldiers, and bar democracy leader and Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi from running in elections, he said.

Adams said the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean), which includes Myanmar, should not be intimidated by the growing influence of China and India on the regime.

"Thailand and the other members of Asean must press the Burmese government to end its

widespread human rights violations and create a credible process of handing power to a credible civilian government through free and fair elections," he wrote.

"While some in Asean have spoken out against the slow pace of reform, Asean as a whole must also speak clearly and publicly about the situation in Burma," he added.

The military has ruled Myanmar since 1962, even though Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy won elections in 1990 in a landslide victory.

The 61-year-old has been detained for most of the past 17 years under house arrest in Yangon.

# Brown due for first talks with Bush

AFP, London

Gordon Brown makes his first official trip to the United States as British prime minister today, at a time many this side of the North Atlantic Ocean want clearer water between London and Washington.

The three-day trip, announced by the White House on Thursday and later confirmed by Downing Street, sees Brown hold talks with US President George W Bush at his Camp David retreat.

The White House and Downing Street said there would be a broad agenda, ranging from the situation in Iraq and Iran's disputed nuclear programme to the crisis in Darfur, Europe, Kosovo independence and United Nations reform.

Brown then heads to New York for a meeting with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and to address the assembly.

It was at the US head of state's Maryland bolthole in 2001 that Brown's predecessor Tony Blair first met Bush, amid doubts about how a centre-left Labour prime minister would get on with a right-wing Republican president.

# Road accidents kill 5

UNB, Dhaka

At least five people were killed and 16 others injured in separate road accidents in Bogra and Benapole yesterday.

Bogra correspondent reports: Three people were killed and six others injured in a road accident at Chandmuha in Sadar upazila yesterday.

Two of the dead were identified as Abdus Samad Sarder, 60, of Akail village of Kahalu upazila, Azizul Islam, 45, of Nilphamari. Identity of the other could not be known immediately.

Police said the accident occurred when a bus hit a tempo coming from opposite direction at about

11:00am, leaving three the people dead on the spot.

The injured were rushed to Mohammd Ali Hospital and Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College Hospital.

Another report from Benapole adds: Two people were killed and 10 others injured when a fish-laden truck hit a lorry at Kagajpukur in Benapole yesterday.

Local sources said the fish-land truck hit another truck standing on the roadside for loading jute as the driver lost his control over the steering, leaving one dead on the spot.

Another succumbed to his injuries on the way to hospital.

The deceased identified as Nazrul, 30, and Nabi, 25, were

loading jute on the parked truck.

Of the injured, Bijoy, 30, Hossain, 32, Harun, 45, Mahtab, 40, and Mansur Ali, 52, were rushed to Navaron Hospital in critical condition.

# 8 die in Indian protests

AFP, Hyderabad

Eight people were killed in southern India yesterday after police started firing on protesters demanding land for the poor, police said.

Communist parties called the protest in southern Andhra Pradesh state to demand land and houses for the impoverished in the area.

# Motorcycle stolen in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A motorcycle of a staff member of The Daily Star has been stolen from Gulshan area in the city yesterday.

Mohammad Jahangir Hossain, a business executive of The Daily Star, said he parked his black TVS Victor motorcycle (Dhaka Metro-HA-17-6893) in front of the TB Hospital Gate at Mohakhali and went inside the hospital to consult a doctor after putting it under lock and key at about 10:00am.

But he found that his motorcycle was missing once he came out of the hospital after about 45 minutes.

Neither the people roaming around the parking spot nor the security guards could give him any information about his motorcycle, he added.

1X2

5X2

6X2

5X3

4X4

10X4