

## UN commends peacekeeping role of Dhaka

UNB, Dhaka

United Nations (UN) Assistant Secretary General Jane Holl Lute yesterday appreciated the contribution of Bangladesh in UN peace-keeping mission.

Lute, officer-in-charge of the Department of Field Support created recently at the UN, made the appreciation at a meeting with Foreign Adviser Dr Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury at his office.

She also thanked the adviser for the support the UN has been receiving consistently from Bangladesh.

Lute conveyed deep sympathy to the foreign adviser on behalf of the UN for the heavy losses due to Cyclone 'Sidr'.

She praised "the resilience" of the Bangladeshi people in facing calamity of such magnitude and yet moving forward.

She also reported on her visit to the affected areas, said a foreign ministry press release.

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## Transparent ballot box likely for next polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) is likely to introduce transparent ballot boxes in the next parliamentary election responding to a demand of most political parties it sat in electoral reform dialogues with.

The EC however will take a formal decision on the matter this month since it will require seven to eight months to receive the boxes from abroad if it decides to introduce them, sources in the EC Secretariat said.

"We don't want to give any scope to any losing party to denounce the election with the excuse of not having transparent ballot boxes in the polls. So, we are thinking of introducing transparent ballot boxes," Chief Election

Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda said yesterday during the commission's electoral reform dialogue with Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh (BDB).

"We will do it despite waste of 4 million US dollars since most of the political parties want transparent ballot boxes," the CEC said referring to the approximate cost of purchasing the boxes.

The EC was against introduction of transparent ballot boxes due to complexities of using them, instead it was in favour of using the traditional steel ballot boxes made of steel, which the commission already have in its hands.

Referring to the round of electoral reform talks, the CEC said most of the political parties including Awami League, the Communist

## ILLEGAL APPOINTMENT 431 staffs of Sylhet City Corp sacked

UNB, Dhaka

The caretaker government has ordered that 431 officials and employees of Sylhet City Corporation (SCC) be sacked on grounds that they were appointed "illegally".

"The decision to terminate them was taken as allegations of irregularities in their appointment were proved following an investigation conducted by Sylhet divisional commissioner," an official announcement said yesterday.

In the big band of SCC staffers who got their marching orders there is one first-class officer, 15 second-class employees, 222 third-class and 193 fourth-class employees.

In a notification, the Local Government Division of the LGRD ministry has instructed the SCC chief executive officer to submit a report after cancelling the appointments as well as taking "legal actions" against those involved in the appointment process.

## CA pledges all-out support to legitimate commerce

UNB, Dhaka

Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed reiterated yesterday his government's all-out support and priority-based cooperation in expanding competitive and legitimate commercial activities in the country.

"The trend of international market is now oriented towards globalisation. Foreign trade is now more competitive and is based on knowledge and policy guidelines than any other time in the past. We'll have to turn this challenge into opportunity through pragmatic strategy and combined efforts," he said.

Fakhruddin was addressing the inaugural function of the three-day Third Bangladesh Knitwear Exhibition 2007 at Hotel Dhaka Sheraton, organised by Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers' and

Exporters' Association (BKMEA).

The chief adviser said partnership and combined efforts of the government and private sector would have to be further strengthened in the future for the sake of the country's march toward development.

He said the government has been implementing various measures in line with the guidelines in the country's export policy for exploring new export market.

For diversification of products by reducing dependence on limited number of goods, the government in its export policy has given highest priority to IT, software, agriculture and agro products, light engineering, leather products, pharmaceutical industry and higher value-added readymade garments, Fakhruddin said.

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## EXTORTION CASE

## Trial of Hasina starts today

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The trial of an extortion case against detained Awami League (AL) chief Sheikh Hasina and two others begins today at a Special Court in the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban complex.

Judge Mohammad Azizul Haque of Dhaka Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court will begin the hearing on charge-framing against Sheikh Hasina, her sister Sheikh Rehana and cousin Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim at 9:30am, court sources said.

Earlier on November 28, the court directed the jail authorities to produce Sheikh Hasina and Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim before the court today.

The trial against Sheikh Rehana will be held in her absence, as she has still not surrendered before the court.

The government on November

25 decided to hold the trial of the Tk 2.99 crore extortion case at the Jatiya Sangsad complex instead of Dhaka Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court on grounds of security.

The law ministry issued a gazette notification under section 9(2) of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) on November 26 about the pending case. Acting Law Secretary Kazi Habibul Awal sent the notification to the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court appointing five public prosecutors to move on behalf of the state.

Azam J Chowdhury, managing director of Eastcoast Trading Pvt Ltd, filed the case against Hasina and Selim with Gulshan Police Station on June 13 last, accusing them of extorting Tk 2.99 crore from him.

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## Regulatory reforms body to place recommendations today to CA

UNB, Dhaka

The Regulatory Reforms Commission (BRRRC) will submit two recommendations to Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed today as part of its efforts to guide the government to update the old regulations.

One of the recommendations is to disseminate information to elicit public opinion on any regulation before its formulation and another is to post any government decision on website, RRC Chairman Dr Akbar Ali Khan told reporters yesterday.

"Delegated legislation affects the rights of the people... hurts business confidence," he said explaining the importance of the recommendations.

The recommendations would be the first after the government formed the 17-member commission on October 30.

Dr Akbar was talking to reporters at the Planning Ministry after a meeting with Finance and Planning Adviser Mirza Azizul Islam in his office.

Dr Akbar accompanied Dr Ehsanur Rahman, former president of Bangladesh Medical Association of North America, who

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Muhammad Aleem says prayers on a stretch of bare land where his house once stood before Sidr destroyed the locality near the Baleshwar river at Dakkhin Southkhali, Bagerhat. Living in a nearby cyclone shelter now, the elderly man returns to this place at prayer times every day.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## VGF did not reach most Patuakhali Sidr victims

SHAMIM ASHRAF and SOHRAB HOSSAIN, from Patuakhali

Cyclone victims in the whole district, excepting two unions, did not get any food grain under the vulnerable group feeding (VGF) programme in the last two days due to lack of sufficient supply.

Chairmen of all the 68 union parishads (UP) and four municipalities said as per a government order they submitted lists of persons eligible for the special VGF programme within November 28.

"The upazila administration had also issued distribution orders, but the district food controller's office informed us that it does not have sufficient food grains," Abdul Mannan, chairman of Patuakhali district unit of UP Chairman Association, told The Daily Star yesterday.

"The chairmen were asked to receive food grains in turns considering the shortage of supply, but they have refused it," said Mannan, also chairman of Joyenakathi UP under Patuakhali sadar upazila.

About 5,000 people from Bashbaria union under Dashedina upazila and Golachipa sadar union

each received 15kg of rice this Saturday.

"Each upazila parishad is supposed to receive 75 tonnes of rice as the monthly VGF programme grant. But the district administration does not have enough rice for distribution among all the unions," Golam Sarwar, chairman of Badarpur UP under Patuakhali sadar, told The Daily Star.

The district administration selected a few UP chairmen for the grant but they refused the offer saying they want all the UPs to get the grants together, otherwise the people of the deprived unions might think that their chairmen have misappropriated the grant, said Monir Rahman, chairman of Kamalapur UP.

District Food Controller Shikder Mahbubur Rahman told The Daily Star last night that the administration now has a stock of 23,000 tonnes of rice against the monthly demand of 28,000 tonnes.

"I requested the UP chairmen to share the stock but they did not agree," he said.

Victims of cyclone Sidr, however, want an immediate solution

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## 12 relief seekers held for bringing out procession

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Police yesterday arrested 12 relief seekers on charges of violating emergency rules as around 500 of them brought out a procession demanding relief materials in a cyclone-affected outlying village of Barguna.

Legal steps would be taken against the arrestees upon completion of primary interrogation, said Sohrab Ali, officer in charge of Barguna sadar police station.

Speaking with The Daily Star, he added, "No one has the right to bring out any procession breaching the state of emergency -- regardless of his or her demand."

The arrestees -- Zakir Hossain, 28, Harunor Rashid Master, 40, Abdur Rahman, 36, Sushanta, 38, Tuhin, 32, Humayun Kabir, 35, Rubel, 26, Manik Roy, 42, Zakir, 26, Abul Kalam Azad, 37, Monjurul Haq and Jasim Uddin -- are from different villages of Gourichanna union under sadar upazila. They were in custody at sadar police station at the time of filing this report at 6:00pm.

Police and locals said over 500 people affected by Cyclone Sidr brought out the procession as they did not receive any aid since the

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## MAKING EC INDEPENDENT Advisers want more scrutiny of law

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The council of advisers to the caretaker government yesterday sent back the Independent Election Commission (EC) Secretariat Ordinance-2007 to the law ministry for further scrutiny for ensuring full independence of the commission.

"The law ministry will place the ordinance to the council as soon as possible after review," Syed Fahim Munaim, press secretary to the chief adviser (CA), told reporters at a news briefing in the CA's office following a meeting of the council.

He also said it is yet to be finalized with which government

authority the commission will be affiliated.

The council of advisers approved the EC's proposal to free the commission from the Prime Minister's Office in principle on June 23, and asked the law ministry to draft an ordinance for setting up an independent secretariat for the commission.

The law ministry yesterday placed the ordinance before the council but the council sent it back for further scrutiny, as the government wants the Election Commission to be completely independent.

The council yesterday also

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## Naser Rahman's wife sent to jail

Graft charges pressed against ex-state minister Salahuddin, wife

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Detained former BNP lawmaker M Naser Rahman's wife Rezina Naser was sent to jail yesterday in a case filed against her for amassing wealth through illegal means.

Meanwhile, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) pressed charges against detained former state minister for communications Salahuddin Ahmed and his wife Hasina Ahmed in connection with a corruption case.

Also a Dhaka court yesterday directed authorities concerned to publish an advertisement in two

national dailies asking former Awami League (AL) lawmaker Dr HBM Iqbal and four of his family members to appear before the court within the next three days.

REZINA NASER Judge Mohammad Azizul Haque of the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court sent Rezina to jail when she appeared before the court seeking bail in the case filed against her.

Earlier, the same court issued an arrest warrant against her and ordered attachment of her property. Rezina had been a fugitive since the

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## An open market for drugs

SHARIFUL ISLAM and SHAHEEN MOLLAH

It is virtually an open market for drugs. Several hundred people, most of them drug users, every day visit the market, an open filed surrounded by shanties in Agargaon in the capital.

Every day around three kilograms of heroin worth about Tk 3 crore is sold out from a single spot at BNP slum in West Agargaon, say sources in the detective branch of Department of Narcotics Control (DNC).

The illegal trade is on so boldly that during a visit to the spot as customers of heroin and phensidyle, a number of drug traders were found ready to sell those without any hesitation. They did not even bother to check identities of The Daily Star correspondents.

A youth aged around 22 came forward and said, "Mama, what do you want?" Asked about the price, he stared at the potential customers for a while and offered Tk 50 for each puria of heroin, Tk 1,000 for a bottle of intact phensidyle and Tk 6,000 for a loose one.

Locals say a chunk of the everyday profit goes to the pockets of law enforcers and DNC officials whose job is to check illegal drug sales.

The drug den, which locals believe can be demolished in just one hour if authorities concerned want, is in operation over the years.

As the drug traders hand-somely pay high-ups in the DNC and law enforcement agencies, they never dare to flex their muscles and even attack filed

level DNC staff and law enforcers launching any drive there.

A team of plainclothes Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) on November 7 came under attack by the drug peddlers when they raided a house to recover heroin.

Two Rab members -- Captain Shariful Alam and Sub-inspector Shahjahan -- suffered injuries as around 150 drug peddlers armed with stones, sticks and iron rods attacked the elite force.

A DNC official said they do not dare to raid the place despite knowing that it is a drug den, as none of their colleagues were

attacked in the last one year.

Just three days into the attack on the Rab members, The Daily Star team found peddlers selling drugs openly.

HOW THE GANG OPERATES The gang deploys 52 teams in as many points, including all entrances, who round the clock watch whether anyone is approaching the place.

If they sense any upcoming danger, the teams on watch soon inform their other colleagues and the godfathers, sources in the DNC say.

The gang also harbours a

group of musclemen whose duty is to face any criminal stand on the way of their lucrative trade.

These musclemen are also responsible to find out if anyone inside is going to betray. If any would-be betrayer is detected the gang hands them over to law enforcers with some heroin.

The drug syndicate also has its paid-up sources in the DNC and law enforcement agencies who inform the godfather if any drive is planned, the sources say.

Besides, the syndicate has employed 25 more teams to sell

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## Tarique granted HC bail in 2 extortion cases

STAR REPORT

The High Court (HC) yesterday granted ad interim bail to Tarique Rahman, senior joint secretary general of the BNP, in two extortion cases while another division bench issued a ruling on the government

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## BIDS INT'L SEMINAR

## Growth gains should reach marginalised people

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Economists yesterday underscored the need for taking the benefits of economic growth to the marginalised section of population to offset the increased level income inequality.

They suggested creation of a central agency for economic affairs for the government's macro-, micro- and sector-based policies to address future development challenges.

They also recommended autonomy for Bangladesh Bureau of

Statistics (BBS) and more operational independence for Bangladesh Bank and the think tanks for economic advancement.

The recommendations came at the inaugural session of a two-day international conference styled "Development Prospects of Bangladesh: Emerging Challenges" presided over by Centre for Policy Dialogue Chairman Prof Rehman Sobhan.

Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) organised the seminar in associa-

tion with The Daily Star as media partner at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel on the occasion of the institute's golden jubilee.

"The sectoral ministries can seldom take effectively the wider view and examine the interconnectedness of the policies in different sectors," said International Food Policy Research Institute Emeritus Fellow Prof Nurul Islam at the programme.

Referring to the examples of

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MORE STORIES ON BUSINESS PAGE



Narcotic substances are sold at these thriving makeshift stalls at the so-called Agargaon BNP slum in the capital.

PHOTO: SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

### Notice

Today's issue of The Daily Star contains a two-page supplement on the proceedings of Bangladesh-Singapore Dialogue organised by the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy Singapore, on November 2, 2007.