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US for free, fair, fully participatory election

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The US wants to see a free, fair and a full participatory parliamentary election in Bangladesh by the end of this year, as promised by the present caretaker government.

US Chargé d'Affaires Geeta Pasi yesterday in separate meetings with leaders of Awami League (AL) and Saifur Rahman-led faction of BNP, cleared her government's position on the upcoming national election, saying that her government wants to see complete implementation of the electoral roadmap.

"As we supported the Election Commission announced electoral roadmap, the US hopes that the next election will be held no later than December 2008," Geeta Pasi told journalists after a meeting with key leaders of AL.

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SUHRAWARDY UDYAN HC gives 7 days to explain land allocation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A High Court division bench issued a rule nisi upon respondents to explain within seven days as to why the allocation order of 25 acres of land of Suhrawardy Udyan for use as a golf course by Dhaka Club should not be declared illegal.

The respondents to the rule are secretary and director general of the housing and public works ministry, secretary and director general of the environment ministry, mayor of Dhaka City Corporation and president of Dhaka Club.

The bench comprised of Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain and Justice Farid Ahmad.

The ad interim relief prayed for by the petitioners will be considered after seven days. Bangladesh Environment Lawyers Association (BELA) and Ain O Shalish Kendra (ASK) jointly filed the petition and advocate Enayetur Rahim moved for it.

The petitioners prayed for a direction upon the respondents to prevent them from any contrary use of the park other than a public open space as envisaged in the master plan.

Rajshahi poultry farm owner, family safe from bird flu danger

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

The poultry farm owner and his wife and son, who were quarantined on suspicion of avian influenza infection, were released from Rajshahi Medical College Hospital (RMCH) yesterday after pathological tests in the capital produced negative results.

The tests of throat and nasal swabs of Ashraf Hossain, 42, and his wife and 14-year-old son were carried out at the virology departments of Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) and the ICDDR,B.

"We recommended releasing the three after extensive tests. We first performed a rapid test for influenza at the virology department of IEDCR and the results were negative for all three," said Prof Mahmudur Rahman, director of IEDCR.

"Usually, we do not proceed for further tests after the rapid test. But

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Badawi rejects calls to quit after polls debacle

Born-again politician Anwar taunts about ruling coalition loss

AP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia's prime minister said yesterday he does not intend to quit despite unprecedented electoral losses that gave the opposition control of five states and one-third of the Parliament.

Former longtime leader Mahathir Mohamad called for Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's resignation, saying he had "apparently made the wrong choice" when he hand-picked Abdullah to succeed him in 2003.

"My view is that he has destroyed" the National Front

coalition, Mahathir told reporters Sunday. "It's shocking. ... We have now a very weak government, and a weak government in a multiracial country will find great difficulty in running the country."

The National Front coalition has governed Malaysia since its independence from Britain in 1957. Scores of senior coalition officials lost their seats in the federal and state legislatures in Saturday's general elections, the National Front's worst performance ever.

The result reflected a huge protest vote sparked by disillusionment among minority ethnic

Chinese and Indians who have long complained about discrimination particularly an affirmative action system that gives the majority Muslim Malays preference in jobs, business and education. People also were upset over rising prices and crime.

National news agency Bernama quoted the prime minister as saying he does not need to step down because he still has strong support, especially from ruling party leaders.

"I will not resign because there is no pressure," he was quoted as

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SA sail on Smith ton

AL MUSABBIR SADI from Cig

Graeme Smith led from the front with his seventh one-day century as South Africa erased memories of their World Cup defeat to Bangladesh with a crushing nine-wicket win against the hosts in the opener of the three-match series yesterday.

Despite losing a crucial toss on a slow and turning wicket at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium, the Proteas rattled to 180 for one after booking Bangladesh for 178 to take one step forward to dethrone Australia as world's number one ODI team with man-of-the-match Smith and Herschelle Gibbs (57 off 84 balls) putting on 143 runs for the opening partnership.

If South Africa win both the remaining matches in Dhaka, they will overtake the world champions in the ICC world rankings.

Fresh from his Test double hundred at the same venue,

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NGO victims seek justice

Submit memo to Natore DC for CA, army chief

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

NGO victims yesterday marched towards Natore district headquarters defying police interception and demanded justice in what they said was a swindle committed in cooperation with local administration.

A procession of around 500 swindled people submitted a memorandum to the Natore

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Emon admits involvement in 7 murders

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Top criminal Sanjivul Islam Emon yesterday confessed to his involvement in seven murders committed between 1994 and 2002.

On the first day of his eight-day remand, the hardened criminal also told the interrogators that the first murder he committed was of his friend-turned-enemy Pang Babul's, CID sources said.

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Saudi Crown Prince Sultan gifts Ershad Mercedes car

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Saudi Crown Prince and Deputy Prime Minister Sultan Bin Abdul Aziz recently presented a Mercedes-Benz 350 car to former president Hussain Muhammad Ershad.

Expressing his gratitude for the present, Ershad said the gift is a token of love of the prince and the Saudi government as well for the people of Bangladesh and for a political leader who is dedicated to serving his people, according to a Jatiya Party release.

It said Ershad came to know about the gift through a letter sent by Mohammad bin Selim-Al Mari, personal secretary to the crown prince.

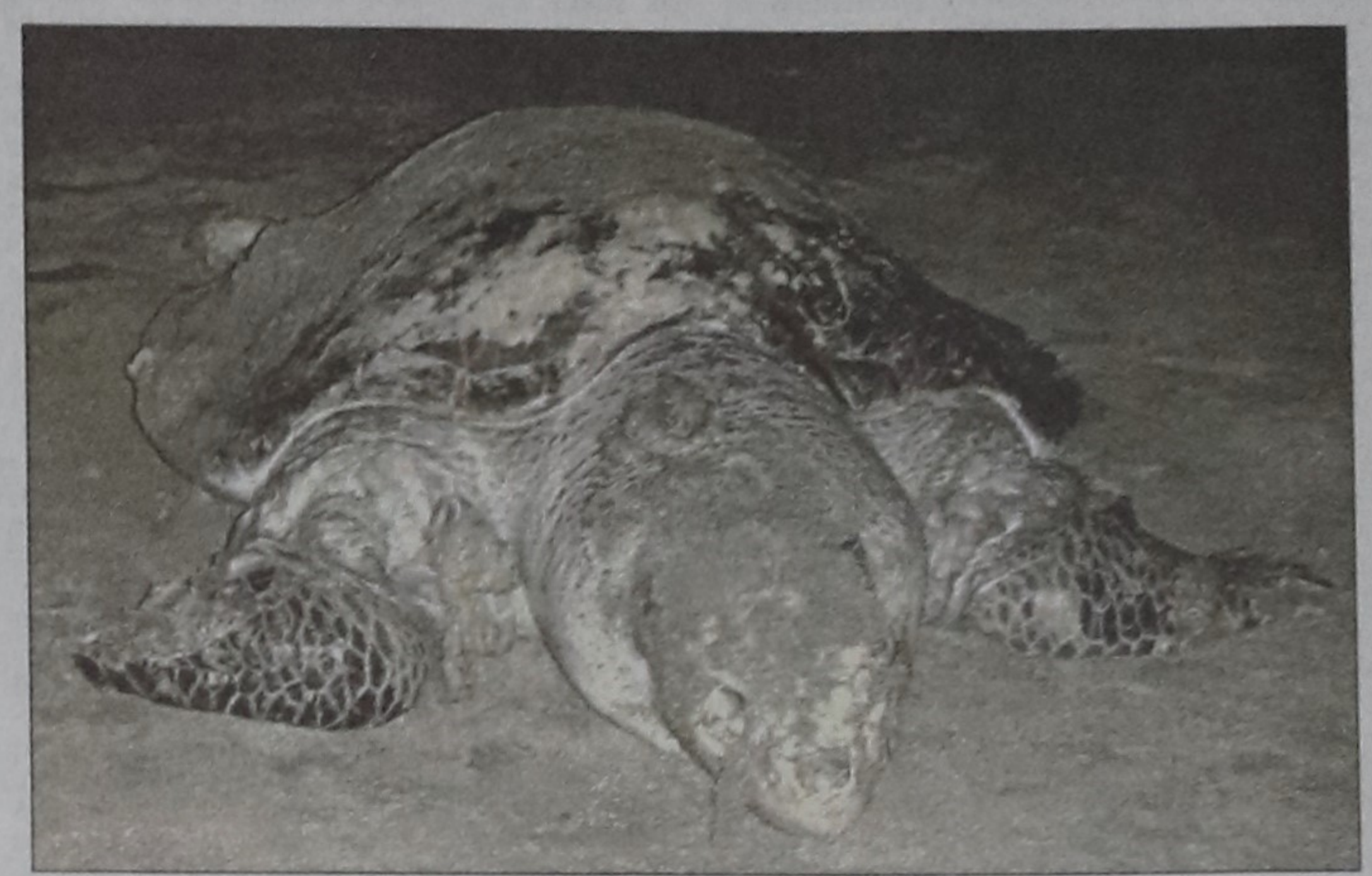


PHOTO: STAR

An Olive Ridely turtle, an endangered species, lies dead on the beach of St Martin's Island. Fishermen often kill turtles when they get entangled in their nets.

No govt move to conserve St Martin's Island

PINAKI ROY and HASIBUR RAHMAN BILU

Although St Martin's Island has been announced an ecologically critical area no government agencies are active to conserve endangered resources in and around the country's only coral island.

Local people and fishermen frequently kill endangered sea turtles and catch crabs as several restaurants serve dishes of crab and shark to unaware tourists. Besides, the locals also extract corals and stones to sell those as souvenirs.

During a recent visit to the St Martin's a carcass of Olive Ridely turtle was found lying on the sand. Olive Ridely is treated as a critically endangered species.

"If we find the carcass of a turtle generally we bury it in the sand so that environment of the island remains unaffected," said a resident.

He said a good number of turtles are netted and eventually killed by the fishermen. "The fishermen just sever turtles' legs to save their net," he said, adding that besides people, dogs also kill many turtles.

"So the number of turtles coming to the island to lay eggs has decreased significantly."

Earlier, the government had issued a gazette notification ordering installation of Turtle Escape Device (TED) in fishing net but no-one is using

that, said a former official who worked with the St Martin's conservation project.

Most of the residents don't have knowledge about ecology conservation. One of them, Dulu Mia, said they sell crabs and sharks to some restaurants in addition to fish. Allahr Daan is one of such restaurants where crab dishes are always available.

Rony, a worker of the restaurant, said they sell crab at Tk 40 to Tk 50 per dish.

"Turtle dish is not always available, but we can manage it if anyone gives us prior notice," he said. Besides Allahr Daan, crab is available at Daruchini, St Martin's Tourist Park and Hazi Salam Restaurant, he added.

Abdul Hamid sells fried crab to the tourists on Chera Dwip (a small island south off St Martin's) at Tk 10 to Tk 15 per piece. While frying crab under the open sky, he said he cuts the small bush of the island for firewood.

According to the Environment Protection Act, 1997, no-one can conduct any activities harmful for ecology in an ecologically critical area (ECA).

Asked, Hamid said he has no idea about ecology and its conservation.

Considering the island's rich

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

Pak parties agree to form coalition govt

AFP, Murree

Pakistan's two main opposition leaders agreed Sunday to form a coalition government, and urged President Pervez Musharraf to convene parliament without delay.

Asif Ali Zardari, widower of assassinated ex-premier Benazir Bhutto, and Nawaz Sharif signed the agreement at a news conference here after a fresh round of coalition talks following last month's general election.

Zardari is the de facto leader of Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP), which won the most seats in the February 18 ballot and, along with Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N), trounced Musharraf's political allies.

The parties agreed to form a coalition government and to reinstate judges sacked by Musharraf during his emergency rule in November last year, Sharif said, reading from the joint declaration.

"The leadership was of the firm opinion that the coalition partners

are ready to form the government and the national and provincial assemblies should be convened immediately," Sharif said.

Zardari said they would stay on the road to democracy.

"We feel that the country is on the verge of making history. This was also the desire of Benazir Bhutto and we also intend to stick to road to democracy; we are aware of the problems that the country is facing," Zardari said.

Bhutto was killed in a suicide attack in the garrison city of Rawalpindi on December 27, causing the elections to be delayed.

Musharraf, who faces the prospect of a hostile parliament, Saturday urged the incoming government to leave politics aside and focus on good governance, economic management and peace and stability.

"We need a stable government and peace in society," he said, adding, "These are basic requirements to run the country's affairs."

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Extortion charges framed against Khulna mayor

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Charges were framed yesterday against detained Khulna City Corporation (KCC) mayor Sheikh Tayebur Rahman and seven others in the Tk 4.5 lakh extortion case.

Out of the eight accused, Tayebur, Jubo Dal leader Tarikul Islam Jahir, Saiful Islam Babu and Mohammad Anam were present at the court of Additional District and Sessions Judge Md Barekuzzaman during the charge framing.

The other four accused -- KCC Public Relations Officer Sarder Abu Taher, KCC engineer

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Prayer Timing

March 10		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-05	5-40
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-30	4-45
Maghrib	6-12	6-15
Esha	7-30	8-00

Source: Islamic Foundation

Make 'crossfire', torture in police custody punishable offence

Speakers tell consultative meeting

UNB, Cox's Bazar

Participants at a consultative meeting on the proposed police reform ordinance in Cox's Bazar yesterday said 'crossfire' and inhuman torture in police custody should be made punishable offence.

About a hundred people drawn from different sections of the society took part in the meeting, presided over by Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of Police at Chittagong Range AKM Shahidul Haq.

The meeting was part of similar meetings across the country which aim at assimilating popular views into the proposed reforms.

Scores of people have been killed in crossfire since March, 2004.

Most of the participants viewed that 'crossfire' is against the existing laws and religion also does not permit this.

They held that the political party in power would tend to take advantage of 'crossfire' if the practice is not made a punishable offence.

Similarly, torture of the accused on remand in a bid to extract confessional statement as desired by the police should also be made punishable offence.

The participants also suggested revoking Section 54 of Criminal

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