

RAT starts operation today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Rapid Action Team (RAT) begins its operation in the capital from today.

RAT has been formed as a follow-up measure to continue the anti-crime drive, after the withdrawal of the army, which was called out last October to tackle the growing incidence of crime across the country.

RAT will start operation after the members take oath at the Rajarbagh Police Line at 11:00am today.

Sources said the RAT members will hide their identity while operating.

The 133-member RAT includes a deputy commissioner, an additional deputy commissioner, 11 assistant commissioners, eight inspectors, eight sub-inspectors, 12 sergeants, two head constables, 22 naiks and 68 constables. The members of the

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

BGMEA election tomorrow

STAR REPORT

After a two-week uncertainty over schedule, garment manufacturers and exporters are now bracing for their election to be held tomorrow.

The election board of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) prepared for the election and contestants of both panels engaged in the last-minute campaign.

The uncertainty arose from the commerce ministry's order to defer the polls and the BGMEA executive committee's writ petition against the order.

On January 13, the ministry

SEE PAGE 11 COL 8

Staggered polls start amid fear and fanfare Voting in 327 union parishads today

NAZRUL ISLAM

The Union Parishad (UP) polls begin today amid a mixed sense of fear and fanfare.

The build-up to the polls was marked by a disagreement between the government and the Election Commission (EC) on army deployment for security.

Voting takes place from 8.00am to 4.00pm straight in 327 UPs on the first day of the two-month country-wide election running until March 16.

Voters will elect representatives on a five-year term. The previous UP polls were held in 1997.

The UP, the local body tier, is the custodian of rural development.

The EC has called upon all

concerned to work towards making the polls peaceful.

Contrasting arguments surfaced on law and order. The atmosphere is congenial thanks to the army-led Operation Clean Heart, said government leaders.

By contrast, field-level officials of the government came up with an argument that criminals broke cover after pullout of the army.

A total of 1,98,704 contenders, who need not have set qualifications to run the race, have entered the fray for 54,964 posts.

Of them, 21,376 vie for 4,228 chairman posts, 1,39,909 for 38,052 general member posts and 39,419 candidates for 12,684 member posts reserved for women.

The EC has taken security

measures with police, the paramilitary BDR and ansars for over 6.15 crore voters, as the government did not agree to deploy army.

Fifteen law enforcers, five of them with firearms, will stand guard at each polling station. The BDR will be deployed as striking force and mobile courts will deal with election-related offences on the spot.

The EC has banned motorised vehicles on the polling days and declared the voting day a public holiday in the area.

It has employed 1,868 returning officers, 39,372 presiding officers, 1,55,749 assistant presiding officers and 3,11,498 polling officers.

Besides, the EC has issued

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3



Officials at the Office of the Deputy Election Commissioner in Chittagong dispatch ballot boxes to different upazilas yesterday for the Union Parishad polls beginning today.

PHOTO: STAR

Union Parishad Polls 2003 (Jan 25-Mar 16)

Total posts --- 54,964	Total contenders --- 1,98,704
Chairman --- 4,228 posts	21,376 contenders
Member --- 38,052 posts	1,39,909 contenders
Female member --- 12,684 posts	39,419 contenders
Total voters	6,15,15,806
Polling stations	39,372
Ballot papers	18,45,47,418
Returning officers	1,868
Presiding officers	39,372
Astt. presiding officers	1,55,749
Polling officers	3,11,498
Polling agents	1,98,704
Voting hours	8 am to 4 pm

Euro-parliament rapporteur decries indemnity ordn

UNB, Dhaka

Bob van den Bos, rapporteur on human rights for the European Parliament, deplored the Joint Drive Indemnity Ordinance 2003 promulgated in Bangladesh.

"A law that legalises violence is an offence against fundamental rights," Bob Bos said, as the European Parliament thinks the restoration of law and order can never be justified and achieved through excessive use of force and violence.

In a statement, received here yesterday, the human rights rapporteur voiced concerns of various rights-groups as the indemnity ordinance is going to be placed before the Jatiya Sangsad on January 26 for approval.

Dr Kamal's call to unite against 'bank robbers'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eminent lawyer Dr. Kamal Hossain urged the people to unite against 'bank robbers' and black money holders, terming them responsible for criminal activities and corruption in the country.

"With the power of people we will overthrow all the evil forces by this year," he said firmly while addressing a prize giving ceremony at Jatiya Press Club in the city yesterday organised by Jatiya Chhatra Dhara.

The bank robbers have transferred thousands of crores of taka to other countries, he said.

He also questioned the sources of income of some politicians and businessmen of the country.

People should raise their voice against all types of criminal activities committed by the black money holders, the Gano Forum president said.

He said the present government lacks the ability, experience and rational thinking needed to run the

SEE PAGE 11 COL 8

Lawyers demand withdrawal of ordn, trial for custodial deaths

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leaders of different bar associations and senior lawyers of the Supreme Court yesterday demanded withdrawal of the indemnity ordinance.

They demanded trial and punishment of the persons responsible for the deaths during Operation Clean Heart.

They called upon the government not to place the ordinance at the Jatiya Sangsad and pass it as a bill, and said that the lawyers of the country would go for a two-hour work abstention on the day it is placed at the Sangsad.

"Due to lack of accountability and caution, nearly 50 people died and hundreds were injured in army custody. It was against the fundamental rights of citizens and the spirit of the Constitution of

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

BDR foils BSF bid to push in hundreds

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

BDR foiled BSF attempts to push in over 1000 people through Jayantapur border in Sharsha upazila and Dhopakhola border in Benapole early morning yesterday, BDR sources and local people said.

BDR resisted another BSF attempt to push in more than 600 people through Benapole border on Thursday.

On Wednesday, BSF pushed in about 200 people through different borders in Sharsha and Benapole. They are now held by Sharsha police.

BDR has been put on "high alert" and reinforced in Sharsha and Benapole borders as "tension is running high".

BDR has been ordered to "resist any more push in attempt at any cost".

People, particularly women and children, have moved to safer places fearing confrontation between the border security forces of both the countries.

Lt Col Mominul Alam, Commanding Officer, BDR Jessore Battalion, said a monitoring cell is working round-the-clock to assess the situation.

More than 5000 people have been assembled in different border areas in West Bengal to push them into Bangladesh, other sources said.

BSF is trying to push them into

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

Prices of essentials spiral

STAR REPORT

Cost of living in the city has increased significantly in less than a month due to price hike of essentials and fuel.

Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmood will sit with representatives of retailers and wholesalers in the city today to discuss the situation. At the meeting, prices of some essentials may be fixed, sources said.

Prices of rice and vegetables have increased by at least Tk 2 to 3 per kilogram in the city's kitchen markets in the last few days. Prices of soybean and eggs have marked sharp rise - by Tk 10 per litre and Tk 10 per dozen respectively.

Wholesalers and suppliers attribute this to the severe cold

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4