Home ministry seeks

FROM PAGE 1

passport owners would be given machine readable passport and the project may be implemented under the revenue budget. The PM did not decide on setting up the NRD, neither did the ministry took any initiative to set it up.

Mohsin told The Daily Star, "It (NRD) was just a proposal. The government will implement it."

Sources however argued that all government projects have a clear-cut implementing authority and there is no room for vagueness about it.

Though implementing such a technology-oriented massive project demands appointment of an experienced consultant, preferably through the donors, the home ministry settled for appointing a senior information technology consultant. Two candidates were primarily selected. But they were disqualified during an interview with a committee headed by the ministry's additional secretary on May 7 last year. The committee observed that the candidates lacked technical expertise and failed to answer various technical questions.

But the ministry eventually appointed one Faiz Khan with a monthly salary of Tk 3 lakh. Under pressure from an influential minister's son, the National Board of Revenue (NBR) made his salary tax-free. Side by side, the additional secretary who opposed his appointment was removed from the ministry.

The senior IT consultant then set the criteria for potential bidders for the project in such a way that only certain companies could participate in the bid. Out of 34 companies in Europe, North America and Asia, which are involved in such projects, only four were pre-selected. These are Bundes Druckerie International Service (BDIS), Germany, Canadian Bank Note, Canada, G&D GmbH, Germany and De La Rue Identity Systems, UK. The ministry however did not verify whether any of these companies had the capability to implement such a project.

Sources pointed out that the senior IT consultant then designed such a tender document that would favour G&D GmbH only. Meanwhile, the ministry drafted an estimate for the project in September. On December 29, the four pre-qualified companies were given tender documents but the ministry then added various conditions time to time, making it difficult for the bidders to frame their bids. Except G&D, the three bidders at one point raised objections, which were ignored.

The ministry gave 111 days to the bidders to submit their proposal and it issued the last amendment to the bid three days before the bid closing. Sensing foul play, both the British and Canadian companies refrained from submitting their bids while the last minute bid amendment took German company BDIS off-guard and it failed to address the last minute change of the bid condition. The BDIS bid was shown as non-responsive and costly. On the other hand, the bid of G&D was shown responsive though it was full of flaws. The financial bid of G&D had gross anomalies, which the ministry okayed as mere "arithmetical error".

At this point, other bidders brought serious allegations against G&D. The home ministry then requested the Bangladesh embassy in Berlin to visit G&D and BDIS headquarters. The Bangladeshi commercial councillor in his report said that G&D has arrangements in Munich and Louisenthal to print the inner pages of machine readable passports with all security features. But the sewing of passport pages, embossing on the cover and binding is done at G&D Hellas premise owned by G&D in Athens. G&D manufactures and prints machine readable visas in Liepzig and machine readable ID cards in Lousenthal. But BDIS has a composite manufacturing plant for all these jobs in Berlin.

The commercial councillor added that G&D has shown inner passport pages it had manufactured for Bhutan, Latvia, Yemen, Haiti and Mongolia while BDIS showed complete passport of Germany.

Now, the home ministry is all set to award the contract to G&D. The terms and conditions for the contract do not include sub-contracting any part of the scheme. "But such a massive job will require sub-contracting. Otherwise, the contractor will fail to meet its deadline," noted one source. "Beside this programme is implemented under the Public Procurement Regulation, 2004, which demands the contractor give sub-contracts for such a project."

The source went on, "Bangladesh can save a lot of money if it goes for an open tender instead of a restricted one for such a project."

The home ministry's proposal to the cabinet purchase committee notes that the first year of the five-year programme will be considered as testing period. During this phase, the contractor will provide necessary hardware, software, local and foreign manpower and consumables to immigration and passport department. The offices to be covered by it are the head office in Dhaka, national issuance centre, six divisional headquarters and 12 district headquarters.

The home ministry adds the new passports and ID cards will increase acceptability of Bangladeshi passport internationally, which will eventually increase overseas employment, help implementation of the government's national security policy, boost direct revenue earning, resolve international pressure on Bangladesh on introduction of such passport etc.

PM urged

FROM PAGE 16

consultation to find ways of solving any crisis, and in this regard, she mentioned that her government had taken an initiative for national dialogue to contain bomb terrorism in the country.

All parties, professional bodies and different organisations had responded to the call and taken part in the dialogue. "But a certain political party did not turn up for the dialogue," she regretted.

The prime minister also urged the business leaders to maintain proper environment at workplaces, ensuring just rights of the workers.

EC mulls changes

FROM PAGE 1

senior EC official told The Daily Star on condition of anonymity.

However, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Aziz on several occasions told reporters that the EC will send a set of proposals to the government in due time.

Although the CEC declared his intention of sending a proposal to the government seeking the EC Secretariat's independence from the control of the Prime Minister's Office, it is not clear yet whether the proposal will be incorporated in the draft or not, sources said.

The EC could not make the provision of registration of political parties mandatory before the last parliamentary election in 2001 in the face of severe opposition mainly from Awami League (AL) and BNP with an excuse of time constraint.

The major political parties during the dialogue arranged by the EC to discuss the reform proposals before the last election suggested not to introduce hurriedly the system of registration of political parties.

HM Ershad-led Jatiya Party and 34 other political parities, which exist only on papers, applied for registration with the EC, while AL, BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami did not show interest in registering.

The EC did not provide any political party with the certificate of registration as the major parties ignored the law which was optional anyway, the sources said.

None of the political parties that contested in the last parliamentary election had submitted their expenditure reports to the EC, ignoring the mandatory legal provision.

The EC however in the last five years has taken no step against the political parties for violating the law regarding submission of political parties' election expenditures but suddenly with the upcoming parliamentary election around the corner it is planning reforms. Officials of the EC Secretariat expressed their doubts about the success of the move due to time constraint.

"The Election Commission should have initiated the move long before as it is a very difficult process. To bring any reform in the electoral laws, the commission will have to seek opinion from major political parties," a senior EC official told The Daily Star wishing anonymity.

Some senior officials of the EC Secretariat however said the reforms might be brought during the regime of the caretaker government as it was done during the previous caretaker regime in 2001.

Since his appointment in May last year, CEC MA Aziz on several occasions declared that he would send a set of proposals regarding electoral reform to the government, but he has yet to keep his promise.

Now the officials at the EC Secretariat have been directed to prepare a set of draft proposals for electoral reform.

The EC wants to have the power again to cancel candidatures for gross irregularities. Before the last parliamentary election the EC had been provided with the power, but in the face of opposition from the major political parties it was later revoked.

About the punishment for irregularities during the election period, the existing laws have a provision of fine of Tk 20,000. The EC is now planning to introduce stiffer punishment including six months imprisonment and TK 50,000 fine for gross irregularities, sources said.

Shazneen case

FROM PAGE 16

tomorrow," said Deputy Attorney General ABM Waliur Rahman Khan who moved for the prosecution.

The Second Special Tribunal for Prevention of Women and Children Repression, Dhaka on September 2, 2003 convicted all the six accused and ordered for hanging them until death for raping and killing Shazneen Tasnim Rahman, youngest daughter of a leading businessman Latifur Rahman.

The convicted are Syed Sajjad Mainuddin Hasan, a contractor for repairing works at victim's house, his assistant Badal, Shahidul Islam Shahid, a house help, carpenter Shaniram Mondol and housemaids Estema Khatun Minu and Parvin.

As the convicts appealed against the verdict, the death reference bench began hearing on March 30 this year and fixed yesterday for delivering the verdict on completion of hearing on June 27.

Shazneen, also a IX student of Scholastica, was raped and murdered at her Gulshan house on April 23, 1998.

Germans

FROM PAGE 1

Mile behind the Brandenburg Gate.

The Fan Mile has been one of the abiding successes of this World Cup, creating a blueprint for future tournaments.

Even temperatures of 30 degrees Celsius were not putting off the fans, who began taking up positions hours before the kick-off in Dortmund.

The area has been extended ahead of the match to allow 900,000 people to crowd in and watch the action on giant screens.

Germans have shown in this World Cup that waving their flag is no longer taboo.

Fans had gathered at the team's hotel on the outskirts of Berlin on Tuesday to wave off the team coach as it left for the airport.

Teenage girls waiting at the hotel's gates had scrawled "I Love Klinsi" across their faces, an affectionate tribute to Juergen Klinsmann, the California-based coach who has married US-style motivational techniques with Germany's traditional footballing strength.

The country's top-selling newspaper Bild meanwhile got into the spirit by portraying the Italy team as pieces of pizza.

"Arriverderci Italia," screamed the front page.

Germany was still reeling from the suspension of key midfielder Torsten Frings, who was ruled out after TV pictures came to light of him hitting an Argentinian player in the face after the quarterfinal win on penalties.

Bild was not alone in the German media in accusing the Italian media of dirty tricks in uncovering the incriminating pictures and forcing FIFA to suspend Frings, although he will be eligible to play in the final on Sunday, should Germany qualify.

The now reunited Germany is seeking to emulate the West Germany team of 1974, which reached and then won the final in Munich against the Netherlands.

Garment workers

FROM PAGE 1

indifference of the authorities.

As the demonstrators began to march towards Dhaka-Ashulia-Baipail highway at around 8:30am, police charged baton to disperse them. But the procession kept going.

Shortly after the incident, a huge number of police and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) men were deployed around the factory and at every important points across Zirabo and Zamgora area.

Fearing more violence, the authorities soon shut around 50 factories. Later, workers of those factories too joined the procession heading towards the highway.

As the procession reached Zamgora, the demonstrators pelted stones at some of the factories. Police baton-charged the procession, triggering chase and counter chase.

During the clashes, the workers vandalised at least 10 buses.

Workers of IFL alleged that the factory authorities called a meeting on Sunday to discuss their seven-point demand including salary as per the exchange rate of US dollar and better wage for per piece product.

As three representatives of the workers went to join the meeting, goons hired by the factory authorities dragged them inside a room on the first floor. Led by Chan Mian, a local broker, they beat the three mercilessly, they added.

As the news spread, the workers flew into a rage and went on the rampage inside the factory. Police charged baton at around 8:00pm, leaving at least 20 injured.

Earlier in the day, the workers who were on a three-hour work abstention resumed work at 11:30am after the authorities had promised to settle the issue through discussion at night.

"We never get full monthly salary. I get only Tk 3,000 instead of Tk 5,000. And although they had pledged to pay us Tk 5 for a piece of finished product, we have been getting only Tk 3," said Samedul, a worker of IFL.

Edn to suffer

FROM PAGE 1

teachers' jobs and 19 crore to incorporate the Ebtedayee madrasa teachers into the national pay scale.

Government sources, however, said it is very difficult to provide additional TK 750 crore at the eleventh hour of the BNP-led four-party alliance government.

GOVERNMENT PRIMARY TEACHERS

Two organisations of government primary teachers who started hunger strike until death at separate places in the capital demanding elimination of 'wage discrimination' and introduction of school-based examination system withdrew their hunger strike on July 26 following government's assurance of meeting their demands by July 31.

Opposition Awami League-backed Bangladesh Primary Teachers Association, who also observed strike at schools from June 17 to 26, warned of going for indefinite strike from August 1 if their demands are not met by July 31.

Around 1,80,000 government primary school teachers teaching more than one crore children at 37,000 schools across the country receive a monthly salary of only Tk 2600.

NON-GOVERNMENT PRIMARY TEACHERS

Two organisations of non-government primary school teachers who had observed hunger strike on May 31 and June 1 at Muktangon and the Central Shaheed Minar are continuing agitation demanding nationalisation of their job.

About 76,000 teachers in 19,420 non-government primary schools now receive Tk 2,000 each per month. They will receive Tk 3,800 per month if their demand is met.

COMMUNITY PRIMARY TEACHERS

Community primary school teachers have vowed to resume tough agitation for realising their demand for nationalisation of their jobs.

The community primary teachers earlier postponed their action programmes including self-immolation on June 27 following request from the AL-led 14-party alliance and representatives of different professional bodies and human rights organisations.

Habibul Ahsan Bablu, president of the Bangladesh Community Primary Teachers Association, said they would go for indefinite strike at their schools from August 6 if their five-point demand including nationalisation of jobs is not met by July 31.

With a meagre salary of Tk 750 monthly, 10,565 teachers of 3,778 community primary schools remain stuck in miserable conditions.

The community primary teachers teach around 10 lakh underprivileged rural children across the country.

NON-GOVERNMENT HIGH SCHOOLS, COLLEGES AND MADRASAS

Five lakh teachers and employees of more than 30,000 non-government schools, colleges and madrasas, who now receive 90 per cent of their basic pay from the government exchequer, demand 100 per cent of it.

Jatiya Shikkhak Karmachari Front, a platform of 11 AL-backed organisations of the teachers and employees of non-government schools, colleges and madrasas led by Prof Kazi Faruque Ahmed, will go for indefinite strike from July 8 for realising their eight-point demand including 10 per cent increase of salary.

Jatiya Shikkhak Karmachari Oikya Parishad, another platform of eight AL-backed organisations of teachers and employees of non-government schools and colleges, will go for indefinite strike at the educational institutions from the same day demanding 10 per cent salary increase.

Ruling BNP-backed Shikkhak Karmachari Oikya Jote led by Selim Bhuiyan will go for indefinite strike from July 6 while a faction of it led by Prof M Shariful Shariful Islam will go for indefinite strike from July 9 for realising their demand for salary increase.

Besides, non-government primary madrasa teachers under the banner of Bangladesh Swatantra Ebtedayee Madrasa Teachers Association, a section of government primary teachers under Graduate Primary Teachers Association, government college teachers under BCS (General Education) Teachers Association, and technical college teachers under the banner of Bangladesh Karigari College Shikkhak Samity will also go for programmes including rallies, processions and strikes demanding better pay.

New EC secy

FROM PAGE 1

Referring to his experiences, Abdur Rashid said fifty percent of the eligible people in Dhaka city might remain out of the voter list due to the complex procedure currently being followed by the EC.

"I personally believe, the voter list should be prepared following the previous procedure and it should be prepared by going from door to door if all including major political parties demand so."

All the political parties including Awami League and BNP and also legal experts have been demanding to update the voter list by going from door to door. But the EC has been ignoring the demand so far.

Amid lukewarm response from the people, the EC on July 1 started the task of updating the voter list asking people to come to the offices of the EC officials for amendments, deletions and inclusions of names on the voter list.

About the ongoing task of updating the voter list, the newly appointed secretary said a fair voter list through updating the existing one is only possible when all the political parties and the people cooperate with the task.

He said this is the first time the voter list is being updated in a major scale. "As a layman I believe, people of our country are not so conscious that they will go to the election offices to be enlisted on the voter list," he said.

Govt, opposition

FROM PAGE 16

"It's solely the Election Commission's jurisdiction to prepare the voter list. We hope they will prepare an accurate voter list in accordance with the Supreme Court's verdict," Moudud said.

Abdur Razzak said, "People will never accept a voter list prepared by the present Commission as they have already lost confidence in it."

Taking floor on a point of order, AL lawmaker Faruk Khan described as false the statement of the state minister for home affairs regarding the deaths of a policeman and an opposition activist during the Sunday's blockade.

"Both the opposition activist and the policeman were killed by the government, whereas the state minister claimed that the opposition activist died of cardiac arrest and the policeman was killed by the opposition activists," he added.

In reply, the law minister said, " You (AL) are looking for dead bodies for political gains, but such politicking will never be tolerated."

The post of the secretary to the EC Secretarial remained vacant since January last. A joint secretary to the EC Secretariat was in charge of the posts of the additional secretary and secretary since the erstwhile secretary, SM Zakaria, had been appointed as an election commissioner on January 16.

The government however in last February appointed a secretary to the commission's secretariat, but the official declined to join the post.

Abdur Rashid yesterday however said he had not yet received any circular issued by the establishment ministry regarding his new appointment.

Conjoined twins

FROM PAGE 16

brains, hearts and urinal tracts in a normal condition.

The twins, weighing four kilograms, have four hands and three legs with problems in one leg.

"We are now consulting the specialists of home and abroad and will probably decide next week on surgery if the twins could be separated or not," Prof Kabirul said.

Mother of the newborns Salma said they would accept any decision taken by the specialists for the betterment of the babies.

Coming to know of the birth of the rare conjoined twins, doctors of many countries have now been communicating with the DMCH, sources said.

Most of prisons

FROM PAGE 16

Of the 67 prisons, Dhaka Central Jail accommodates highest 8,111 prisoners against the capacity of 2, 682.

Answering to ruling BNP lawmaker Shamsuddin Ahmed's query, the state minister said after the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) was launched on March 26, 2004, 231 members of the force have been punished for various crimes till June 26 this year.

The state minister said 42 members of the Rab have been awarded with Bangladesh Police Medal and Prime Minister's Police Medal, 21 members with Testimonials and 14 with Inspector General of Police's exemplary good service badges.

Tax ombudsman

FROM PAGE 1

and take preventive measures against bribery and tax evasion.

Meanwhile, Commerce Secretary Abdul Karim was appointed the new chairman of NBR yesterday.

Karim is supposed to join office today.

F-16 package

FROM PAGE 1

Congress of the plan on June 28, said Snow, according to whom the proposed package is valued at approximately five billion dollars.

Pakistan agreed in April to purchase a scaled-down package of US F-16 fighters after foregoing a larger purchase to finance relief efforts after last year's devastating earthquake, which killed more than 73,000 people.

Washington had blocked the sale of F-16s to Pakistan for 15 years to protest its nuclear weapons programme, but gave the green light in March 2005 to reward the South Asian ally for its help in the "war on terror".

Pakistan said it expected the current deal to materialise.

"We do not think that there would be any revocation of the deal and we have no such fears. We know that the US administration is committed to providing aircraft to Pakistan," foreign ministry spokeswoman Tasnim Aslam told AFP.

"We do not entertain any suspicion that the US would not honour the deal," Aslam said.

Pakistan already has more than 30 multi-role F-16s made by US aerospace giant Lockheed Martin Corp.

In New Delhi, a spokesman for the Indian foreign ministry said the move would not help improve ties between the South Asian nuclear-armed rivals.

"This has been the subject of discussion with the US government in the past. In fact, the prime minister himself has expressed disappointment at the US approach to President Bush," spokesman Navtej Sarna told reporters.

"We can reiterate our position that this step is not conducive to improving ties between India and Pakistan," Sarna said.

India and Pakistan both claim Kashmir in full and have fought two of their three wars over the scenic Himalayan region.

Since January 2004 they have been engaged in a peace process to resolve all their pending disputes, including the one over Kashmir.

PM distributes

FROM PAGE 16

The prime minister handed over cheques for Tk 60,000, equivalent to one year's honorarium for the fiscal 2005-06, to each of the families at a function arranged by the Ministry of Cultural Affairs at the International Conference Centre (ICC).

Speaking on the occasion, the prime minister called upon to work from their respective positions for welfare of the country and the nation.

Shaheed Barkat's nephew Ainuddin Barkat, Shaheed Jabbar's son Nurul Islam Badal, Shaheed Salam's younger brother Abdul Karim, Shaheed Rafiquddin's younger brother Md Khorshed Alam and Shaheed Shafiur's wife Begum Akila Khatun received the cheques.

Paying tribute to the language martyrs, the prime minister advised all to follow the bright example of patriotism set by the martyrs through their sacrifice.

She said the spirit of nationalism had developed in the minds of the people through the great Language Movement, which subsequently culminated in the country's independence.

Ministers, MPs, distinguished personalities of different professions and members of the language martyrs' families attended the function.

Iajuddin

FROM PAGE 1

light paper work and short meetings (preferably lasting no more than 15-30 minutes once or twice a day) at home," said the Bangabhaban, quoting the recommendations of Dr Morris.

According to the recommendations, visitors should be limited in order to avoid physical strain and exposure to cross-infections, and such social commitments should be restricted to no more than 30-60 minutes daily.

"Prior to his return to light office work about 8 weeks post-bypass, he should undergo a complete physical reassessment so that the timing, duration and intensity of such work may be better prescribed," according to the recommendation.

The release also said it is anticipated that the president may be able to return to work for 6-8 hours in office by about 3-4 months post-bypass.

During this period, it is recommended that he should avoid presiding over official functions where mental and emotional strain may be detrimental.

"It may be beneficial to have a physical examination prior to engagements that are expected to be strenuous, and to have medical cover provided at close call during such engagements to anticipate any medical problems that may arise, as well as to provide reassurance to the president," says the physician's recommendation.

Dr Morris Chu, the consultant physician of Mount Elizabeth Hospital where Iajuddin had a successful bypass surgery, was quoted as saying to private satellite television channel ATN Bangla that the president's condition was okay to get back to work after he returned to Bangladesh. Some newspapers also carried similar reports.

Iraq demands justice in rape-slay case

AP, *Baghdad*

The justice minister demanded yesterday that the U.N. Security Council ensure that a group of U.S. troops are punished in the alleged rape and murder of a young Iraqi and the killing of her family, calling the attack "monstrous and inhuman."

Two female legislators also called for Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to be summoned to parliament to give assurances that justice would be done.

The March 12 attack on the family in Mahmoudiya, south of Baghdad, was among the worst in a series of cases of U.S. troops accused of killing and abusing Iraqi civilians. Iraq's largest newspaper, Azzaman, said in an editorial Tuesday the rape "summarizes what has been going in Iraq for the past years not only by the American occupation army, but also by some Iraqi groups."

Former Pfc. Steven D. Green appeared in federal court in Charlotte, N.C., on Monday to face murder and rape charges. At least four other U.S. soldiers still in Iraq are under investigation, and the military has stressed it is taking the allegations seriously.

"If this act actually happened, it constitutes an ugly and unethical crime, monstrous and inhuman," said Justice Minister Hashim Abdul-Rahman al-Shebli, a Sunni Arab. "The Iraqi judiciary should be informed about this investigation which should be conducted under supervision of international and human organizations. Those involved should face justice."

"The ugliness of this crime demands a swift intervention of the U.N. Security Council to stop these violations of human rights and to condemn them so that they will not happen again," he added.

The two lawmakers, Safiya al-Suhail and Ayda al-Sharif, said condemnation was not enough.

"We demand severe punishment for the five soldiers involved," al-Sharif said. "Denouncements are not enough. If this act has taken place in another country, the world would have turned upside down."

Al-Suhail said al-Maliki should appear before parliament "to make sure investigations are taking place."

Mahmoudiya Mayor Mouayad Fadhil said Iraqi authorities have started their own investigation and that he had asked the hospital where the victims were taken for more details.

Green is accused of raping the woman and killing her and three relatives an adult male and female and a girl estimated to be 5 years old. An official familiar with the investigation said he set fire to the rape victim's body in an apparent cover-up attempt.

Iraqi authorities identified the rape victim as Abeer Qassim Hamza. The other victims were her father, Qassim Hamza, her mother, Fikhriya Taha, and her sister, Hadeel Qassim Hamza.

CIA reportedly disbands Laden unit

AP, *New York*

A CIA unit that had hunted for Osama bin Laden and his top deputies for a decade has been disbanded, according to a published report.

Citing unnamed intelligence officials, The New York Times reported Tuesday that the unit, known as "Alec Station," was shut down late last year. The decision to close the unit, which predated the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, was first reported Monday by National Public Radio.

The officials told the Times that the change reflects a view that al-Qaida's hierarchy has changed, and terrorist attacks inspired by the group are now being carried out independently of bin Laden and his second-in-command, Ayman al-Zawahiri.

The CIA said hunting bin Laden remains a priority, but resources needed to be directed toward other people and groups likely to initiate new attacks.

"The efforts to find Osama bin Laden are as strong as ever," said CIA spokeswoman Jennifer Millerwise Dyck. "This is an agile agency, and the decision was made to ensure greater reach and focus."

A former CIA official who once led the unit, Michael Scheuer, told the Times that its shutdown was a mistake.

"This will clearly denigrate our operations against al-Qaida," he said. "These days at the agency, bin Laden and al-Qaida appear to be treated merely as first among equals."

Nepal polls

FROM PAGE 16

and cold over inviting an international agency to monitor arms.

While the rebels initially resisted the move, rebel chief Prachanda in an interview to Reuters last month said both forces should be confined to their respective barracks or camps and be under international supervision.

However, last week he said there was no need for foreign involvement.

There was no immediate reaction from the rebels to the government decision.

Meanwhile, a parliamentary address by Nepali Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala outlining his government's policies and vision for the next year has been delayed because he is ill.

Koirala, appointed in April after King Gyanendra gave in to weeks of pro-democracy protests, will make his speech on Sunday, said House of Representatives speaker Subas Nemwang after meeting Koirala in a hospital.

The 84-year-old politician was admitted on Monday night and is in the intensive care unit of the Gangalal Heart Centre in Kathmandu after complaining of chest problems. Doctors said his condition was stable but he needs to be in hospital for two days.

"We think he will be able to attend the parliament on Sunday and make the historic address," Nemwang told Reuters.

The address is to be the first by a prime minister after the parliament curtailed King Gyanendra's legislative role and stripped him of his control over the 90,000-strong army.

Earlier, the king used to read the statement outlining the government's annual policies and programmes.

Koirala's family says he has problems in the right lung, a chest infection and needs rest.

Koirala underwent prostate surgery in Bangkok last month.

Since his appointment, Koirala has avoided most public events due to his poor health. The swearing in of Koirala, the consensus choice of the seven political parties that organised the pro-democracy protests in April, was delayed a few days because of bronchitis.

Koirala, serving his fifth term as premier, met Maoist rebel chief Prachanda last month and the two sides agreed to include the guerrillas in the interim administration.

That move is seen as a first step toward ending a decade-old Maoist insurgency in which more than 13,000 people have been killed, but prompted a warning of a possible aid freeze from the United States, which lists the Maoists as a terrorist group.

Iraqi minister

FROM PAGE 16

northern district bordering Sadr City.

Sunni lawmakers have boycotted the last two sessions of parliament, refusing to return until she is released. Some Sunni leaders have blamed the kidnapping on Shia militias.

Meanwhile, the US military said yesterday it had killed an al-Qaeda operative suspected of orchestrating a massive truck bombing in a bustling Shiite market in Baghdad last week that left 66 people dead.

US forces carried out a raid Sunday near a village in the western province of Al-Anbar, the stronghold of the insurgency, in which a member of an al-Qaeda cell was killed and seven others arrested, it said.

"Coalition forces were targeting the al-Qaeda cell and we believe these people were from that cell who are responsible for the bombing on Saturday," US military spokesman Major William Wilhoite told AFP.

A huge truck bomb went off in a market in the Baghdad district of Sadr City on Saturday, killing 66 and wounding another 98 people. The area, a bastion of Shiite militiamen loyal to radical cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, is known for its anti-US fervour.

It was the second deadliest attack in the war-torn country this year, coming less than a month after the killing of al-Qaeda in Iraq chief Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in a US air strike on June 7.

The capital is hit almost daily by bomb attacks despite a massive security operation with tens of thousands of Iraqi and US troops patrolling the streets of Baghdad.

And on Tuesday, two police commandos were killed and three others wounded when a roadside bomb went off against their patrol in eastern Baghdad, while in the former rebel bastion of Fallujah gunmen stormed a mosque and shot dead Sunni cleric Sheikh Mohammed al-Jumaili.

The US military said it led a raid Sunday on the village of Mudaysis in Al-Anbar province against an al-Qaeda cell it said was known to "facilitate suicide bombing operations throughout the Euphrates River Valley."

"Intelligence led the troops to the known location of a terrorist who has been tied to senior leaders of a Syrian-based foreign terrorist network," a statement from the military said.