

Dhaka offers up to 2,000 peacekeepers for Lebanon

UNB, Dhaka
Bangladesh is willing to contribute up to 2,000 troops to the United Nations (UN) peacekeeping force in Lebanon.

The offer was made at a meeting of nearly 50 troops contributing countries at the UN headquarters in New York on Thursday.

Quoting UN diplomats, AP said Bangladesh pledged two mechanised infantry battalions, Indonesia one mechanised battalion and an engineering company, Malaysia one mechanised battalion and Nepal pledged one mechanised battalion.

Yahya Mahmassani, the Arab League's envoy to the United Nations, said he has been officially informed that Bangladesh will contribute two battalions, totalling between 1,600 and 2,000 troops.

When contacted Foreign Secretary Hemayetuddin told the news agency yesterday that Dhaka is willing to participate in the peacekeeping in Lebanon, but the size of contingent will be determined after receiving the details of the terms of reference for deployment of troops.

"We're prepared to participate in the peacekeeping, but the size of

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PMO intervenes to revive rejected MRP deal

SHARIF KHAN

In an unusual instance, the home ministry is set to seek again the approval of the cabinet purchase committee next week for the Tk 1,561-crore programme on machine-readable passport (MRP), visa and national identity card (NID).

Sources said the massive deal was revived through an intervention of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) which recently sent a letter to the finance minister asking him to approve the scheme. The PMO also wrote to the cabinet division to send the proposal again to the purchase committee.

Sources said the finance minister wants to discuss the matter with the prime minister before it is tabled at the upcoming purchase committee meeting on August 21. The August 21 meeting agenda does not include this programme, but sources said that if the prime minister clears her position on this

matter to the finance minister before the meeting, the proposal will be tabled that day.

On July 17, the purchase committee rejected the same deal categorically asking the home ministry to re-tender the MRP and visa component and shelve the costly NID component.

Accordingly, after that meeting the home ministry seemed to be preparing itself for the re-tender. However, behind this preparation a top political force was lobbying with the prime minister all along for the last biggest deal of the present government.

The programme components will remain unchanged. The home ministry will however add a few explanations with its proposal that the purchase committee rejected on July 17.

"If this programme goes to re-tendering, the cost (of the procurement) will go at least 1.5 times higher than the offer we now have," State Minister for Home

Lutfuzzaman Babar told The Daily Star at his office Tuesday.

According to Babar, the Cabinet Division has asked the home ministry to re-send to the purchase committee the Tk 1,561 crore (173.54 million Euro) programme, to be awarded to German company Giesecke and Devrient (G&D) GmbH.

"It's not going back as it was before. We are making a fresh summary in which we will explain some issues raised in the previous purchase committee meeting," he added.

Spearheading the project since the prime minister gave her consent for MRP, visa and NID on October 16, 2004, the state minister for home ministry claims absolute transparency in the deal. "We have responded to each and every complaints we have received on the tender for the programme," he said.

He added that the July 17 purchase committee meeting raised

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PHOTO: STAR

In wreaths people pay homage to their late lamented poet at the Central Shaheed Minar yesterday.

The poet would not believe his eyes

RAFIQ HASAN

Shamsur Rahman once wrote that people do not bring out processions after a poet dies and usually there is hardly any reflection of the loss on the streets.

The poet probably would not believe his own eyes if he were to see the thousands of people including women and children who joined a long procession on the road from the Central Shaheed Minar to the University Central Mosque in the capital yesterday to pay their last respects to their beloved bard during his funeral wake.

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The bard will remain alive in hearts of admirers

Thousands pay tribute to Shamsur Rahman at Shaheed Minar

HASAN JAHD TUSER

"Distinguished poet Shamsur Rahman, a legend of contemporary Bangla poetry and literature, who once used to inspire the nation by reciting his poems at the foot of this Shaheed Minar will never speak again, but his writings left behind, will continue to inspire the nation forever."

"Today the great poet has not

come here but his lifeless quite body has come among his admirers. The poet has passed away but he has left behind everything he had for the nation. The poet will remain alive in the hearts of the people of the country as long as the nation and its language exist."

This was one of many eulogies made on the nation's greatest poet at the Central Shaheed Minar in the capital when several thousand

mourners comprising colleagues of the poet, literateurs, artists, cultural activists, academics, journalists, politicians and people from all walks of life and ages yesterday thronged the Shaheed Minar premises to pay their last respects to the nation's greatest poet Shamsur Rahman.

After the funeral wake, the poet's body was taken to the Dhaka

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Voters can enlist their names at concerned offices after Aug 20

UNB, Dhaka

An eligible voter will be able to enlist his or her name in the voter list by contacting the registration or assistant registration offices of the area concerned after August 20, when door-to-door updating ends.

An Election Commission (EC) press release yesterday said if any voter failed to enlist his or her name during the door-to-door updating, he or she can incorporate the name at the registration or the assistant registration office.

The release said inclusion of names in the voter list and amendment or exclusion is an ongoing process. An eligible voter can include his or her name in the list even a day before the elections by applying in a specific form.

The EC gave telephones numbers of Dhaka Metropolitan City's District Election Officer (Registration Officer) and Thana Election Officer (Asst Registration Officer)

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Huge arms, ammo seized in Bandarban

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Army personnel recovered a huge cache of firearms, including 13 machine guns and rifles, six rocket launchers, 16 rocket shells and 10,750 rounds of ammunition, from the deep forest in Ali Kadam upazila of Bandarban district on Thursday.

On an army intelligence report, around 50 army personnel started an intensive search in the forest at Menchengpara near Myanmar border on Wednesday night and finally dug out the cache around 8:30pm on Thursday, said Captain Saif, general staff officer-3 in Bandarban.

"The team led by Lt Col Azimullah Bahar is still searching the area 31km off the Ali Kadam headquarters," Capt Saif told The Daily Star last night over phone.

None was arrested in connection with the arms haul.

The seized arms and ammunition include three AK47 assault

rifles, two M16 assault rifles, two light machine guns (LMG), six sub-machine guns (SMG), one 40mm rocket launcher, 11 40mm shells, five US-made rocket launchers and five shells, 6,750 bullets, and 2,000 bullets of LMG and SMG each.

"The army also recovered 21 magazines of various kinds of firearms and 20 link belts.

Capt Saif said they are investigating to find out the people who kept the arms and ammunition hidden. He suspected that foreign miscreants may be behind it.

Local sources said rebels from Myanmar wandering inside the Bangladesh territory could possess the arms and ammunition.

Earlier on March 4, a joint team of army and Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) seized five AK47 rifles, two M16 rifles, one M1-A1 heavy machine gun, one 21-A1 machine gun, one German-made G3 LMG, one G3 rifle, one 7.62 bore rifle, one heavy SBBL gun, two SBBL guns and one Russian-made sub-machine

carbine from Naikkhongchhari upazila in Bandarban.

In the biggest haul in last three years, they also recovered 19 rocket shells, 12 grenades, 47 anti-personnel mines including 27 US-made Clamour mines, 31 explosives-charged rocket launchers, one 40mm rocket launcher, 19 SMG magazines, eight M16 rifle magazines, three G3 LMG magazines and 7,000 bullets.

On February 25, the security forces seized another huge cache of arms, explosives and military equipment, including global positioning system (GPS) and range finders, from the area.

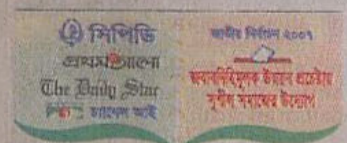
The BDR arrested three Arakan rebels and seized a big cache of arms and ammunition, including LMGs, AK47 and M16 rifles, from the remote forest of Naikkhongchhari on January 3.

In December last year, the BDR seized four Russian-made AK47 rifles and .79mm German-made pistols from Naikkhongchhari.



PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA

AK47 rifles, left, and rocket propelled grenades seized deep in Bandarban forest yesterday.



Regional dialogue in Pabna today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The 12th regional dialogue on "National Election 2007: Civil Society Initiative for Accountable Development" will be held in Pabna today.

It is being held as part of a series of programmes jointly organised by Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Prothom Alo, The Daily Star and Channel I.

Eminent academics and professionals, development and cultural activists, public representatives and political leaders and civil society representatives of the district will speak at the dialogue.

Members of the 'Nagorik Committee 2006, who are preparing a Vision Paper for Bangladesh, will also be present at the meeting to receive public feedback.

Khulna BNP to demand Whip Ashraf's expulsion

Expels two senior members of city unit

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

The convening committee of Khulna City BNP yesterday decided to place the demand before the party high command for expelling Whip Ashraf Hossain from the party for making remarks against the prime minister's family and branding Jamaat as harbourer of JMB.

The decision was taken at an emergency meeting at the party office with Ali Asgar Lobi MP in the chair.

The committee also expelled two senior members of the city unit from primary membership. They are Nazrul Islam Manju and Nuruzzaman Khokon.

Nazrul Islam Manju, former general secretary of Khulna City

BNP, and Whip Ashraf Hossain belong to lawmaker M Nurul Islam faction of Khulna BNP, which opposes the faction being headed by Ali Asgar Lobi.

Both the factions are now at loggerheads and involved in slandering their leaders openly at different meetings on party programmes.

Lawmaker M Nurul Islam, former founding president of Khulna City BNP, told this correspondent yesterday that Ali Asgar Lobi has no right to expel anyone as he heads a convening committee not approved by the central high command.

One the other hand, Lobi accused Manju and Khokon of their involvement in anti-party activities.

Manju in a press statement in the afternoon branded Lobi as an agent saboteur in the BNP. He said Lobi is serving purpose of self-interest under the cover of BNP.

Meanwhile, security forces have been deployed in front of the City BNP office, fearing violence between supporters of both factions.

Supporters of Nurul Islam Manju faction have declared to occupy party office, challenging the authority of Lobi to issue expulsion order.

On the other hand, supporters of Lobi-Mayor faction have declared to prevent the supporters of Nurul Islam, Whip Ashraf Hossain and Manju from entering party office.

US official to visit Dhaka to examine refugee issues

AFP, Washington

The US official in charge of refugee affairs will travel to Malaysia, Bangladesh and Thailand next week to examine refugee issues, the State Department said Thursday.

Ellen Sauerbrey, assistant secretary of state for population, refugees and migration affairs, will be accompanied by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Antonio Guterres, on the Thai portion of the trip.

The objective of the trip to the three Asian nations, from August 21 to September 2, was to "examine refugee programs and policy, including a number of high-profile refugee issues," a State Department statement said, without giving details.

It will be Sauerbrey's first trip to the region since her appointment in January, US officials said.

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Grand opening of SA Games

AL MUSABBIR SADI from Colombo

There are only two seasons in Sri Lanka: rain and sunshine. And nature showed both of its variety as the Sri Lankan capital -- decorated like a young, shy bride -- unveiled the 10th South Asian Games amidst sunshine, rain and foolproof security here Friday with hopes that the 'Olympics' of the region will help shift focus from terror to sports.

Festoons, banners and spectacular paper lanterns of eight colours had already given a festive mood to this teardrop-shaped island of the Indian Ocean which -- despite Monday's terrorist bomb attack in the heart of Colombo that killed eight people -- showed signs of returning to normalcy with singing cuckoos announcing the arrival of clear weather after the monsoon.

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'Her Pakistani roots caused airport alarm'

AP, Ceredo, West Virginia

A Pakistani woman whose daughter's carry-on luggage caused an airport to shut down for 9 1/2 hours says it was her ethnic background, not a few bottles of suspicious liquids that set off security officials.

Initial laboratory testing by the FBI turned up no evidence of explosive materials in the bottles carried at Tri-State Airport in West Virginia by Rima Qayyum, a 28-year-old Pakistani woman dressed in the traditional Islamic headcover.

No charges were filed against the woman, who was never detained and was cooperative when interviewed by the FBI.

Qayyum's mother, Mian Qayyum of Jackson, Michigan, said that her daughter is four months pregnant, lives in Barboursville and is innocent.

"It was not only a false alarm, it was racial discrimination because there was nothing," Mian Qayyum said. "They should clear her name

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PHOTO: BPA

Swimmer Rubel Rena carries the Bangladesh flag in the march past of the athletes during the colourful opening ceremony of the 10th South Asian Games at the Sugathadasa Stadium in Colombo on Friday.