Grand alliance

election as the administration. Election Commission, police and Rab are working against the Awami League-led grand alliance," AL Joint General Secretary Obaidul Quader told The Daily Star.

At yesterday's press conference, Jalil alleged that leaders and activists of the AL-led grand alliance have been killed, arrested, tortured and harassed by the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and police across the country ahead of the elections.

He also alleged that no action has been taken against the BNP-Jamaat cadres "who killed 26,000 people and resorted to a reign of terror across the country".

The AL high command had decided to participate in the election despite strong opposition from most party policymakers

"Taking part in the election will be suicidal for us as it is clear that all electoral organs--from the caretaker government to the field level administration including the Election Commission and police--are working to favour the BNP-Jamaat alliance," a top AL policymaker said.

He also pointed out that the package proposal of the caretaker government has not been implemented fully yet.

Another AL leader, who earlier supported the party decision on taking part in the election, said yesterday, "After the latest development, most of us are now in favour of boycotting the election."

Sources in the alliance, however, said the top leaders are now in a dilemma over taking the crucial

"The party high command has the faith that the party candidates will withdraw nomination papers if the party decides to boycott the election." the AL leader said.

"But, then we will have to mobilise people so that they also boycott the election and move to resist any conspiracy to hold a unilateral election to re-elect BNP and

Jamaat," he added. **AL BRIEFING** AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil at

a press briefing at the party's Dhanmondi office said the BNP-Jamaat coalition is worried to see mass awakening for the grand alliance after his alliance submitted nomination papers.

That is why the coalition has been trying to impede the process of creating a level playing field by using the President and Chief Adviser (CA) laiuddin Ahmed as their tool, explained Jalil

Jalil accused lajuddin of further politicising the administration to hold a blueprint election in favour of the BNP-Jamaat coalition.

He said the CA did not implement the package proposals even after he signed the proposals -- resulting in the resignation of four advisers. ...afterwards, we decided to take part in the election. But after filing of the nominations, the chief adviser. being controlled by the BNP-Jamaat remote control, is taking the situation in their favour. As such, the nation believes that a free and fair election under his command is not

possible. "He (CA) is trying to deprive the people of their voting rights by pushing the elections into unfathomable uncertainty. Under these circumstances, our stance is clear -we want a free and fair election. And for this, a congenial atmosphere will

have to be created." Jalil added. The AL second-in-command said if the president continues implementing the election engineering plot of BNP-Jamaat rather than

creating a congenial atmosphere for a free and fair election, he must have to guit the office of the CA and appoint a non-partisan person as

People do not want an election where votes will be stolen. They want a free and fair election through which their judgement would be reflected, the AL leader said adding that they would forge tougher agitations for fair polls

2 AL men hurt in bomb attacks in Chuadanga

UNB. Chuadanga

Two local Awami League (AL) leaders were injured in bomb attacks on Wednesday night

Unknown assailants threw a bomb on Moinul Islam when he was sitting in a tea stall at Hardi Bazar in Alamdanga upazila, leaving him seriously injured.

Another bomb attack was made on Advocate Malek in front of his house in Chuadanga town.

Both of them were admitted to the Sadar Hospital.

Awami League at protest rally in the town yesterday accused BNP cadres of the bomb attacks and demanded immediate arrest and punishment to the culprits

Head-banging snakes may predict China quakes

REUTERS, Beijing

China has come up with an earthquake prediction system which relies on the behaviour of snakes, state media said yesterday, two days after two quakes struck off neighbouring Taiwan.

The earthquake bureau in Nanning, capital of the Guangxi autonomous region in southern China, had developed its system using a combination of natural instinct and modern technology, the China Daily newspaper said.

Experts at the bureau monitor snakes at local snake farms via video cameras linked to a broadhand Internet connection. The video feed runs 24 hours per day.

"Of all the creatures on Earth, snakes are perhaps the most sensitive to earthquakes," bureau director Jiang Weisong was quoted as saying.

Jiang said snakes, a popular restaurant dish in the south in the winter, could sense an earthquake from 120 km (70 miles) away, three to five days before it happens. They respond by behaving strangely.

"When an earthquake is about to occur, snakes will move out of their nests, even in the cold of winter, Jiang was quoted as saying.

"If the earthquake is a big one. the snakes will even smash into walls while trying to escape."

China is struck by frequent earthquakes, with most hitting remote rural areas.

Two people were killed and 42 injured on Tuesday when three buildings collapsed in earthquakes that shook southern Taiwan.

While a tsunami warning came to nothing, the quake damaged undersea telecommunication cables,

Politics rule

The HC ordered the EC earlier this year to update the voter list as per the 2000 roll. Though the court asked for execution of the ruling urgently, the order did not reach the EC in the next few weeks. It usually takes about 15 days for a court order to reach its destination, if not intervened by the AGO.

The Appellate Division last week rejected an appeal of Ershad against the December 14 verdict by High Court in which he was asked to surrender to the lower court for

The legal developments involving Ershad took the reverse course in the last few months when he was dilly-dallying the decision to join the alliance led by the BNP.

Ershad was acquitted in five decade-old graft cases in August and September amid outcry from all and sundry. At that time, the BNPled alliance was in power and Ershad was all set to join the 4-party

But as soon as Ershad decided to join the Awami League-led 14party alliance, the flow of legal system suddenly started to go against him. On December 14, the high court upheld a decade-old lower court verdict in which the

former dictator was convicted. The EC came into play after Ershad submitted his nomination papers in five constituencies. The Returning Officers (ROs) were supposed to scrutinise his nomination Wednesday. And they had no reason to reject Ershad's nomination unless they had a specific court

order or any other criterion in hand that disqualifies his candidature. EC experts say. The court order was

rushing the process. In this case, the enthusiastic AGO faxed the Tuesday's Appellate Division order to some of the ROs by

Sources said, the AGO called up accept or reject Ershad's nominacancel the nomination after receiv-

But the returning officer in Dhaka remained confused till the afternoon about what to do. "I sent the matter (Ershad's paper) to the Election Commission," Mahfuzur Rahman, RO at the Dhaka-5 constituency,

matter, as an RO cannot send a nomination paper to the EC for a decision. However, the confused RO then announced to cancel Ershad's paper later in the evening. Legal experts criticised his way of handling this matter, saying that

what he did was unacceptable. Earlier on Tuesday, the EC officials met Attorney General AJ Mohammad Ali to get a clear idea about Ershad's fate.

HC orders

FROM PAGE 1

The supporters encircled Shamim's home. Heeramahal. and barricaded all roads leading to the leader's home to prevent his arrest.

They had set up barricades on roads in Chashara, Fatulla and Siddhirganj areas in Narayanganj town since Tuesday night following an announcement from a local mosque that law enforcers were trying to arrest Shamim.

Talking to journalists, Shamim said the attempts to arrest him were part of a conspiracy against him but it failed in the face of public protest.

However, Officer-in-charge of Narayanganj Police Station Moin Uddin denied police went to arrest Shamim

He said, "Police went to the area at night to ask the demonstrators to dismantle the road barricades."

Ending a five-year self-exile, Shamim returned to Narayanganj and submitted his nomination papers on Tuesday. But his return was overshadowed by reports of police attempting to arrest him.

Meanwhile, Narayanganj BNP condemned Shamim Osman and his cadres' activities.

In a statement, district BNP Office Secretary Zannatul Ferdous said Shamim's cadres humiliated the freedom fighters by vandalising a Liberation War memorial -- Bijoy Stambha -- in Chashara as BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan had inaugurated it.

Shooting

FROM PAGE 20

at Aziz Cooperative Super Market at Shahbagh from Shvampur.

Three youths riding a motorbike stopped by the microbus while it was caught in a traffic jam near Dhupkhola playground in Sutrapur and "...two of them started shooting at the vehicle indiscriminately at around 10:30am," the duty officer of Sutrapur Police Station said quoting witnesses. Window glasses of the vehicle were shattered in the shooting.

The criminals fled the scene moments later firing blank shots. Police suspect dispute over

financial transactions or business rivalries might be the cause of the attack

Police could not arrest anyone till filing of this report at 8:00pm.

Kaikobad

FROM PAGE 20

before Kaikobad went to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's (CMM) Court to file a defamation case against the editor and publisher of Manabzamin and its Daudkandi correspondent for

running a defamatory news item. The prosecution lawvers also demanded cancellation of time

petition by the defence lawyers. Hearing both sides, the magistrate rejected the time petition, cancelled previous bails and issued arrest warrants against the three accused.

Following the order, three notices of arrest warrants were sent to the officer-in-charge of Motijheel police station for taking actions to arrest them.

On September 6, 2001, Mohammad Ayub Khan, proprietor of the M/s Ayub Khan & Sons, filed the cheating case against the three-- Kaikobad. chairman of The Arab Contractor (BD) Limited, managing director Kazi Mojibul Hag and project manager Sirajul Islam-- with the CMM's Court, Dhaka.

In his complaint, Ayub said the accused did not pay Tk 779,545 as per an agreement signed between him and the Arab Contractor (BD) Limited on June 11, 2000 for a construction work at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel even after serving of a legal notice upon them.

Birdwatchers

FROM PAGE 20

Prof Ainun Nishat, country director of International Union for Conservation of Nature, was present at the conference as the chief guest while Sadat Selim, convenor of Waterfowl Census National Committee, presided over the conference.

At the press conference, the experts urged the government to take programmes to raise awareness to protect waterfowls and their habitats. They also urged to prevent the trapping, killing and selling of the waterfowls. They asked community-based conservation activities to save the waterfowls in the country.

They said Winter Waterfowl Census 2007 will start from January 1 next year and an eight-member team will conduct the census. They also held a bird-welcoming programme at Lalmohan in Bhola vesterday.

100 hurt as hartal

Eyewitnesses, on the other hand, said the clash erupted at about 11:00am when police from the District Collector Building lobbed tear gas shells on a big procession of the grand alliance that was heading towards the DC office.

As police entered the houses of New Engineer Para, Kerani Para, and Kotkipara chasing the activists of the grand alliance, the law enforcers got locked into clashes with the

At one stage police entered the Rangpur office of The Daily Prathom Alo at the court square. When The Daily Prothom Alo staff correspondent Ariful Hague Ruiu, and photographer Litu Anam tried to resist them, police beat them up.

From early in the morning the activists of the grand alliance started picketing at different points of Rangpur town. Agitating people dismantled

upazila and Shvampur under Baderganj upazila. Picketers kept halted Teesta Intercity Express at Badergani station and two local trains at

railway line at Lalbagh under sadar

Rangpur station. There was little vehicular movement while banks, commercial centres, educational institutions and government and non-government offices remained closed in Rangour town and seven upazilas during the hartal hours.

At a rally at the Jahaj Company intersection in the afternoon, the grand alliance leaders urged the returning officers of five districts concerned to accept the nomination papers of Ershad.

LALMONIRHAT At least 12 people were injured in a clash between JP and BNP workers at 11:30am vesterday in Mazar area and Khuniya Gachh under Lalmonirhat sadar upazila, reports our Lalmonirhat correspondent.

Seriously injured JP workers

Azizar Rahman, 36, Nur Jamal, 40, and BNP workers Khalil. 32. Gamad, 42, and Jobed Ali, 26, were admitted to the hospital. Hartal supporters vandalised three motorcycles on Dak Bangla road in the town, at Chaparhat

Barokhata under Hatibandha upazila. Vehicular movement in the district remained completely

under Kaliganj upazila and at

Traders' strike

FROM PAGE 20 About 700 tucks remained stranded in Indian part of the land port due to

the strike. A tripartite meeting involving importers and exporters, the private operator and Bangladesh Land Port Authority was held in Dhaka on Tuesday, but it failed to resolve the problems.

Ashraful Alam Rashid, director of the private operator, said they informed the National Board of

Revenue about the demands Clearing and Forwarding Agents' Association of the port also

extended its support to the strike. The land port sources said the government has been incurring a loss of about Tk 50 lakh in revenue per day due to the strike.

Electric Supply Authority (Desa),

Power Development Board (PDB),

Rural Electrification Board (REB),

and Dhaka Electric Supply

Company (Desco), sources con-

ers when performance of a trans-

former declines. Then we sell it in

auctions for recycling purposes or

for other uses." a high official of

disposal facilities. So we prefer

further use of it and sometimes

people misuse the used oil as it has

The study also reveals that there

are 2,481 power transformers,

3,74,132 distribution transformers

and 77 circuit breakers in the coun-

try which contain no less than

1,07,473 metric tons of PCB mixed

oil containing at least 56.1 metric

on board of old ships as it works as

flame retardant also, sources from

Besides. PCB is also available

Sources working with Desa said

a small 10 kilo volt-ampere (kVA)

transformer can contain as much as

30 litres of oil. A big one can contain

is really low. May be only six to

seven taka per litre," said an engi-

neer working with Desa, requesting

recycling used transformer oil in a

limited quantity and selling it to

private transformer owners, the

However, besides being mixed

with edible oil, PCB is also being

used as surface coating for

carbonless copy paper, and as

plasticizer in sealants, rubber, paint,

of used oil. Everywhere you will find

dishonest people," another engi-

neer said who also requested

"It is very hard to control misuse

There are some plants in Savar

"The price of used transformer oil

around 200 barrels of oil.

no colour or smell," he said.

"We don't dump it due to lack of

Desa said requesting anonymity.

"We change the oil of transform-

cerned said.

tons of PCB.

DoE said.

anonymity.

Desa official said.

wax and asphalt.

anonymity.

Toxic transformer oil

JP activists stopped an intercity train at Bamondanga railway station in the morning. They also stopped five trains at Lalmonirhat railway station, one at Bawra station and one at Kaunia station.

KURIGRAM The hartal called by the grand alliance was observed peacefully in the nine upazilas of the district, reports our Kurigram correspon-With stoppage of public transport

and closure of most of the shops and commercial organisations, life came to a standstill. GAIBANDHA AL-led alliance activists paraded the

main road of the town and held a

protest procession during the hartal

yesterday, our Gaibandha correspondent reports. The hartal was also observed in Nilphamari district.

SYLHET Pickets yesterday damaged 14 vehicles at Dakshin Surma during the half-day hartal that was called to raise protest against the cancellation of the nomination paper filed by the JP chief HM Ershad for Sylhet-3 constituency (Dakshin Surma and Fenchuganj), reports our staff correspondent from Sylhet.

The vehicles include, bus, truck, CNG run auto rickshaw and private car. No inter district or upazila linked bus departed or came to the central bus terminal during the hartal hours.

However, the half-day hartal passed off almost peacefully at Habiganj-3 constituency (Habiganj Sadar and Lakhai).

3 murdered

filing of the case, the gang had been pressurising Aslam to withdraw the case, they added.

"The gang members might have killed Aslam as he did not pay heed to their demand," Sub-Inspector Nazrul Islam of Shyampur Police Station told The Daily Star.

In another incident at Sattola Basti (slum) in Mohakhali area, an eight-year-old girl was found dead at a shanty with serious wounds in her throat.

The victim, Safia, went to sleep with her mother as usual after midnight

"In the morning, I found her

unconscious with several marks of injury in her throat," Safia's mother Nazma Begum told reporters at the DMCH where doctors declared her dead on arrival at 7:00am. Neither Nazma nor Gulshan

police could say how Safia suffered

the wounds. However, sources at

Dhaka Medical College morgue said stab injuries were found in her Meanwhile, Jatrabari police recovered the body of an unidenti-

fied man from Matuail Canal yester-On information, police rushed to the scene and found the body with his hands and legs tied with electric

Police said the criminals strangled him and then dumped the body into the canal. They could not arrest any of the criminals as of 7:00pm yesterday.

But people can also buy used

Dr Md Igbal Rauf Mamun, a

teacher of the chemistry department

of Dhaka University, who conducted

the PCB test, however said the level

of PCB traces in human blood

human blood samples was from

only 7 to 52.2 nanograms (ng) per

gram of blood. But the safety level of

PCB in human blood is yet to be

12 EU election

observers will meet election offi-

cials, candidates and representa-

tives of civil society, and will report

their observations back to the core

"The work of the long-term

observers will allow the EU EOM to

conduct a comprehensive analysis

of the electoral process over a

period of several weeks--before,

during and after election day," said

Graham Elson, deputy chief

observers will arrive in Dhaka on

January 6. After extensive briefing

by the core team, they will join their

ers (STOs) from Europe, locally-

recruited short-term observers from

the embassies of EU member states

in Bangladesh and a delegation of

members of the European

Parliament will also join the mission

to observe voting, counting, and the

After election, the EU election

observation mission will issue a

statement on preliminary findings

and conclusions. A final report will

tabulation of results.

be issued at a later stage.

One hundred short-term observ-

colleagues across the country.

A second group of 30 long-term

observer of the EU EOM.

"The range of PCB traces in

samples was very low.

fixed." Dr Igbal said.

FROM PAGE 1

team in Dhaka.

transformer oil from the employees

of the Tongi store of Desa and PDB,

sources said.

SAYEDABAD

ANM Mujibullah Naser, general secretary of Sayedabad Terminal Bus Owners' Association, told The Daily Star that they have decided to ply extra city-service buses on different routes considering the need of the homebound passen-

Thousands head

Khulna, said Ashok Kumar Dey,

station manager of Kamalapur

Extra compartments will be

added to almost every train to meet

the increased demand of the pas-

sengers, said the Bangladesh

Besides, a special train with a

capacity of 500 passengers will also

ply between Dhaka and Dewanganj,

FROM PAGE 20

railway station.

Railway sources

the sources added.

"We also decided to deploy 100 volunteers at different spots from Sayedabad to Jatrabari to reduce traffic iam." Naser added.

Defending the exorbitant fares, he said they are bound to do so to overcome losses as the buses return empty from the other side of

Hartal

reinstatement of retrenched workers and employees and allocation of fund for purchasing raw Jute.

Khulna District Auto-rickshaw Sramik Union has also expressed its solidarity with the movement of Jute mill workers and employees.

Advisory council

FROM PAGE 20

The power ministry placed the proposal for transforming the BPDB into a holding company as part of reform of the problemridden power sector

The meeting decided to form a high-level committee to identify the problems with the nonprofitable jute mills in the public sector and make recommendation for bailing those out.

Advisers to the caretaker government attended the meeting. Cabinet Secretary Ali Imam Majumder and other secretaries concerned were present.

Brother files case

FROM PAGE 1 Battalion started to club the dem-

onstrators mercilessly on orders from Kohinoor. Following the incident, a subinspector of Ramna police station filed a criminal case accusing an

unknown truck driver the same After the hearing, Metropolitan Magistrate AJM Abdullahel Bagui recorded the complainant's statement, took the complaint into cognisance and directed the officer-in-charge of Ramna police to merge the complaint with previous case filed by the police

and investigate the matter jointly. The other accused in the yesterday's case are deputy commissioners (DCs) of police Kohinoor Miah and Aurangazeb Mahbub, additional deputy commissioners (ADCs) Ishrail and Abul Khair and assistant commissioners (ACs) Taherul Chowhan and Giaus Uddin and more than 100 unknown policemen.

Iragi civilians

FROM PAGE 20

insurgency, on Wednesday, the military said. Two soldiers died and another was wounded southwest of

Baghdad on Wednesday during a security patrol on a well-travelled route, the military said Another soldier was killed and two more were wounded in an eastern section of Baghdad on

Wednesday when a similar bomb exploded, said a separate state-With 99 American troops dead so far this month, December is the second-deadliest month of 2006 for

US military personnel, A total of 105

troops died in October "This has been a difficult month for coalition forces," Maj Gen William Caldwell, a spokesman for US forces in Iraq, said Wednesday.

"And the month is not over yet," Caldwell said. "Our deepest condolences to those families and friends who've lost someone near and dear to them."

At least 2,986 members of the US military have died since the beginning of the Iraq war in March 2003, according to an Associated Press count. The figure includes seven military civilians. At least 2,391 died as a result of hostile action, according to the military's Iraqi forces backed by US troops

captured an al-Qaeda in Iraq terror cell leader south of Baghdad, the US military said. The suspect, who was detained Tuesday, is believed responsible for kidnapping two American soldiers from a checkpoint in June, the military said. The soldiers were later found tortured

Ershad files appeal

before the High Court if the EC rejects his or her appeal. Officials of different banks appealed with the EC for cancelling the nomination papers

of the candidates who are default-

ers in the bank records. "After the end of the process of submitting appeal, the full commission of the EC will sit for hearing," acting Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Justice Mahfuzur Rahman said while talking to the newsmen at his office.

On the rejection of Ershad's nomination papers, the acting CEC said. "He [Ershad] will have to appeal as per the law and then we will work on the matter."

"All who are appealing are equal in our eyes," Justice Mahfuz said, adding, "At least as a former judge, everybody is equal to me and the law will take its own course."

"I was never engaged in conspiracy and I don't know what the conspiracy is," Justice Mahfuz said replying to a question papers were rejected as 'part of conspiracy' to prevent him from

contesting the upcoming polls. Asked about sending Ershad's nomination paper by RO of Dhaka Division Mahfuzur Rahman to the EC for scrutiny, the acting CEC

said, "We did not get any such papers.' "He [RO Mahfuzur Rahman] could not say that," Justice Mahfuz said. When the reporters drew his notice on the remark of the RO who told the newsmen that he had sent the matter to the EC. Justice Mahfuz said. "He

[RO] has said this to save his life." Nine aspirants who submitted appeal yesterday are Prof Abdus Salam (Sherpur-2), Mohammad Ali (Narayanganj-4), Munshi Mohammad Toberez Ullah (Bhola-2), Md Ahad Mia (Moulvibazar-4), Abdul Halim (Bhrahmanbaria-2), Aby Sayed Chand (Rajshahi-5), Anwarul Islam Jummah (Rajshahi-4), Mujibur Rahman (Cox's Bazar-3) and Manjurul Alam Tipu (Dhaka-

Nomination valid

papers of seven constituencies in the district as the candidates were listed as loan defaulters in a report published by Credit Information Bureau (CIB) of the However, the CIB report also

listed Jamal, AKM Faizul Hug. former minister and a rebel candidate of Awami League (AL) and Shahed Akon Samrat, local leader of BNP's youth front, as loan defaulters. A fax copy of the CIB report

was sent to the Barisal Returning Officer's Office from the BB late Wednesday afternoon. Sources said Omar Faruk

additional divisional commissioner of Barisal and returning officer in charge of the Banaripara-Swarupkathi constituency, scrutinised the nomination papers. Omar Faruk was the personal secretary to Shahidul Huq Jamal during the immediate past BNP-Jamaat alliance government.

Asked about the matter, Omar

Faruk said he declared their

nomination papers valid since he

did not get the CIB report on time and none of the candidates raised any question about them. He said, "The Bangladesh Bank did not send the list to us before the end of the scrutiny time saying the three candidates are

loan defaulters. We can't accept anything after 5:00pm.' Meanwhile, Education Affairs Secretary of AL's Gazipur district unit Amanat Hossain Khan and

upazila unit Ruhul Amin yesterday sent a letter to the chief election commissioner asking him to cancel the candidature of fourparty candidate of Gazipur-4 constituency Brigadier (retd) ASM Hannan Shah. In the letter, the AL leaders said the district returning officer

General Secretary of Kapasia

declared Hannan's nomination paper valid even though BB in a circular listed him as a loan defaulter. Sources said Hannan's son Reza Shah took a loan from

Agrani Bank, Gazipur branch, and

became a defaulter. Hannan was

the quarantor of the loan. The BB declared Hannan a loan defaulter and sent a letter to the returning officer on November

On Wednesday the district

returning officer Syed Mizanur Rahman disqualified Hannan's nomination papers. But Hannan appeared before the returning officer with the manager of the branch Mosharraf Hossain within half an hour and

rescheduled his loan on December 24. Following the NOC, the returning officer declared him valid to

submitted a no objection certifi-

cate (NOC), that said Hannan had

contest in the election. AL in the letter said without the clearance of BB, no bank has any

jurisdiction to clear off anyone.

Asia backs to online

according to the US Geological

Survey, severed the cables. At least five maintenance ships based in the region are heading for the waters near southern Taiwan to repair the undersea cables. Hong Kong's telecoms regulator said.

"In general, it requires about five to seven days to repair the cables,' the regulator said in a statement "However, due to the earthquake, the seabed may have been dam aged and there may be further earthquakes that will affect the maintenance work."

The main quake struck off Taiwan's southern coast at 1226 GMT on Tuesday, killing two people and leading to aftershocks that sparked chaos on Wednesday. Businesses across the region ground to a halt, although many said it was fortunate that the breakdown happened in the middle of the quiet holiday period. "Voice services to the United

States, Japan, Canada, China and Singapore have been restored as of pm (0500 GMT)," an official at Chunghwa said. However, services to Hong Kong remain seriously disrupted, with only 27.6 percent functioning, while those to Southeast Asia were about 50 Regional operators scrambled to

divert traffic through other lines or via satellite. But the switch to alternative cables put additional pressure on Asia's networks, causing slow Internet access and problems dialing abroad. KDDI Corp., Japan's secondlargest telecoms firm, said that while

its international phone services had switched to alternative routes, about 177 of its corporate network lines remained affected, compared with 290 lines on Wednesday. NTT Communications, a unit of Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Corp., said in a statement that 87 percent of its 243 corporate data

transmission lines had recovered by mid-morning while some of its Internet services continued to be KT Corp., South Korea's top fixed-line and broadband operator, had restored most of the telephone services but broadband services for some clients, including banks and the country's foreign ministry,

remained unavailable. Local media reported that 36 foreign bank branches in South

Sofyan Djalil, Indonesia's infor-

Korea had been affected.

mation and communications minister, told a press conference the government would ease its restrictions on the use of foreign satellite links after serious disruption to the nation's Internet service "A lot of fibre-optic cables are still

broken. This affects the entire area

including Indonesia. The effects are

mainly seen in the banking sector. by users of international ATMs and the internet," he said. Hong Kong's dominant fixed-line and broadband provider PCCW Ltd. said it would take days to recover

lost capacity but did not provide further details By Thursday afternoon, business across the tech-savvy region appeared to be suffering from fewer disruptions. Regional stock markets continued their strong year-end run

after a record close on Wall Street.

Singapore, Southeast Asia's finan-

Several Fortune 500 firms in

cial centre, had been hit by the disruption on Wednesday, with Internet access completely down or slowing to a crawl. "It's getting better because more traffic is being diverted to other

at StarHub, Singapore's secondlargest telecoms firm. Singapore Telecommunications, Southeast Asia's top phone company, also said services were progressively being restored, and that it was working closely with the sub-

cables right now," said a spokesman

CAT Telecom, Thailand's Internet regulator and sole controller of the international gateway, said four of its eight optical networks had been affected, causing its speed to drop by 70 percent. The problem was expected to continue for seven to 10 days, a spokeswoman said.

marine cable consortium members.

Telekom Malavsia said international call services to countries including Taiwan, Japan, China, Hong Kong, South Korea and the United States had been affected but that it was working closely with other Asian telecoms firms on the repairs.

bombed to death by the JMB

corruption in purchase of the Japanese boat.

coalition.

used against him by dubiously

the Wednesday noon. The ROs cancelled his nomination upon verbal instructions from a political quarter, sources alleged. At least one of the five ROs did not even receive the faxed court order, they confided.

these five ROs on the morning of Wednesday, asking them not to tion until they receive the court order. Four of the officers went on to ing the order by noon.

told the media in the afternoon. The EC however denied the