

SHIPPING DEPT
Appointment of chief engineer stayed by HC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The appointment of the chief engineer and ship surveyor at the Department of Shipping has become complicated as the High Court stayed the appointment of a naval commander to the post.

The court issued an order on Sunday staying the appointment for one month and asked the government to explain why the appointment of AKM Alauddin, a naval commander, would not be declared 'illegal'.

Earlier, the government appointed Commander AKM Alauddin as the new chief engineer in late December as the tenure of chief engineer Monirul Islam was to end on January 16.

However, Monirul Islam got release from the department on Sunday but Alauddin could not join the post due to strong opposition by the shipping department.

AKM Alauddin reported to the Ministry of Shipping on December 28 but he was not given the chance

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Residents of Madhya Badda in the capital place a bamboo in the manhole without a lid on the busy Biswa Road to warn motorists. The lid has been missing for more than three months.

Israel unveils plan to expand settlement

AFP, Tel Aviv

Israel announced a settlement expansion in the West Bank yesterday, dealing a blow to US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice as she held talks with Israel's prime minister on jumpstarting the dormant Middle East peace process.

Rice departed for Egypt after talks with Prime Minister Ehud Olmert without speaking to the media, though Israeli radio reported that the two had agreed to hold a three-way summit with Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas soon. They did not set a date, however.

The news of the first tenders

announced this year by the housing ministry, which invited bids for construction of 44 new units in the largest Israeli settlement of Maale Adumim, came as Rice and Olmert were in the midst of a three-hour-long meeting at the prime minister's Jerusalem residence.

Palestinians and the Peace Now anti-settlement watchdog group warned the settlement bids jeopardized the international roadmap to Middle East peace -- a plan that Rice has been pushing on her regional tour.

"Israel must make a choice between peace and settlements. It cannot have both," Palestinian prime minister, today.

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Pakistan envoy meets Khaleda

UNB, Dhaka

Pakistan High Commissioner Alamgir Muhammad Babar yesterday met BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia at her Hawa Bhaban office and discussed the post-emergency situation in the country.

"The post-emergency situation came up for discussion," BNP Chairperson's Adviser Reaz Rahman told reporters after an hour-long meeting in the evening.

In reply to a question, he said it is too early to comment as the situation remains at the state of assessment.

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and former foreign minister M Morshed Khan were present.

New Indian High Commissioner Pinak Ranjan Chakraborty is likely to meet Khaleda, the immediate-past prime minister, today.

Rice to talk with Olmert, Abbas soon on ME

BBC ONLINE

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas are to meet soon for a three-way summit.

US officials said the meeting would take place in three to four weeks time.

News of the summit came as Rice left Israel for Egypt after talks with Olmert in Jerusalem.

Rice, who is on a week-long visit to the region, has said the US aims to revive the Middle East peace plan known as the roadmap.

US officials said the planned three-way summit would be held in the region.

Rice met Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas on Sunday, before talks with Jordan's King Abdullah in Amman.

She said she had heard "loud and clear" the call from Arab leaders for more US engagement in the long-running dispute.

The establishment of a Palestinian state should be pursued on its own merits, not because of anything else - not because of Iran, not because of Iraq, not because of anything.

But the top US diplomat has

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NEPAL CONSTITUTION OKAYED

Maoists join parliament after 10 years of war

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal yesterday approved a new temporary constitution to bring former rebel Maoists into an interim parliament and strip the king of his executive powers, bringing an end to a decade of civil war.

The new 303-seat parliament, with 83 former rebel members, was due to be sworn in and meet for the first time later Monday, nearly nine months after the Maoists and the government reached a ceasefire deal.

Parliament's unanimous vote in favour of the constitution was hailed by a minister in the alliance that has governed since King Gyanendra abandoned direct rule in April 2006.

"The interim constitution will be in favour of the people of Nepal and has mentioned that executive power ultimately rests with the

people," said Narendra Bikram Nemwang, the law minister, who spoke on behalf of elderly Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, who was not present at Monday's session.

Among the Maoist delegates slated to join the new parliament are members of marginalised groups, such as lower castes never before represented in Hindu-majority Nepal's parliament.

The Maoists were to join the cabinet within a couple of weeks, after negotiations on which posts they will hold.

The rebels launched a deadly "people's war" in 1996 to install a communist republic in the impoverished Himalayan nation. The conflict claimed at least 12,500 lives and laid waste to Nepal's already fragile economy.

The new temporary constitution

Saddam's brother, aide hanged

REUTERS, Baghdad

Two of Saddam Hussein's aides were hanged before dawn yesterday, the Iraqi government said, admitting that the head of his half-brother Barzan Ibrahim al-Tikriti was also ripped from his body during the execution.

On the defensive after international uproar over sectarian taunts during the illicitly filmed hanging of the ousted president two weeks ago, government spokesman Ali al-Dabbagh insisted there was "no violation of procedure" during the executions of Barzan and former judge Awad Hamed al-Bander.

But defence lawyers and politicians from Saddam's once dominant Sunni Arab minority expressed fury at the fate of Barzan, Saddam's once feared intelligence chief, and there was also scepticism and condemnation of Iraq's Shi'ite-dominated government across the mostly Sunni-ruled

Arab world.

"The convicts were not subjected to any mistreatment," Dabbagh said, describing the beheading by the rope as a rare mishap. "Their rights were not violated. There was no chanting."

Government adviser Bassam al-Husseini said the damage to the body was "an act of God". During his trial for crimes against humanity over the killings of 148 Shi'ites from Dujail, a witness said Barzan's agents put people in a meat grinder.

The treatment of corpses is a particularly sensitive issue in Muslim culture. Video footage of Saddam's body lying on a trolley showed what appeared to be a wound on his throat.

Hangmen gauge the length of rope needed to snap the neck of the condemned but not to create enough force to sever the head.

Saleem al-Jibouri, a senior Sunni Arab member of parliament,

told Reuters Barzan's body may have been weakened by the cancer he was suffering: "But we have doubts and we want to ask experts and doctors if it's possible the head can come off," he said.

Barzan's son-in-law hurled a sectarian insult at the government on pan-Arab Al Jazeera television: "As for ripping off his head, this is the grudge of the Safavids," he said -- a historical term referring to Shi'ite tribes to non-Arab Iran.

"They have only come to Iraq for revenge," Azzam Salih Abdulla said from Yemen. "May God curse this democracy."

The hangings took place at 3 a.m. (12:00 a.m. British time) at the same former secret police base where Saddam was hanged on December 30, an adviser to Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki said. Officials tried to impose a media blackout for some hours but word leaked out.

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Fishing cat released to eco park

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

The fishing cat, caught alive at a village in Baralekha upazila on Saturday, was released at Madhabkunda Eco Park by forest officials yesterday.

The fishing cat that came to Maizagon village under Bahadurpur union of Baralekha upazila on Friday started catching and killing domestic animals and poultry, forest officials said. The villagers managed to catch the cat alive with the help of a trap the next day.

Forest officials of Baralekha went to the village and rescued the animal. They released it at Madhabkunda Eco Park yesterday noon.

The fishing cat came to the human habitation in search of food, said Forest Officer Sabir Jahangir.

Iran working with Iraq over US arrests

REUTERS, Tehran

Iran said yesterday it was working with Iraqi officials on securing the release of five Iranians arrested by US forces in Iraq last week and accused of running arms and money to Iraqi militants.

Tehran has said the five Iranians, who were seized from an Iranian government office in the Iraqi Kurdish city of Arbil on Thursday, were diplomats and had demanded their release.

"We are trying to release the diplomats and sorting out the issue with the Iraqi government. This was an attack on the Iraqi government as well," government spokesman Gholamhosseini Elham told a weekly news conference.

Iranian Intelligence Minister Gholamhosseini Mohseni-Ejei held talks with Shirwan al-Waili, Iraq's state secretary for national security, on Sunday evening. Waili said afterwards he hoped the issue would be resolved soon.

"This is against all the international immunity laws and political

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Villagers fishing in a festive mood at Biswanath Doulatdia Beel in Sylhet with the water receding in the winter, a common sight in rural Bangladesh.

PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA

