

LDP favours national ID card for next polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) President Badruddoza Chowdhury yesterday told a four-member European Commission (EC) delegation that his party favours introduction of national identity cards in the next parliamentary election to stop fake voting.

During the hour-long meeting at the LDP's Baridhara office, Badruddoza apprised the EC delegation of his party's recommendations regarding the next poll that include neutralising the administration, arrest of criminals and recovery of illegal arms.

"We consulted introduction of national ID cards with the experts, who viewed that it will take only three months," Mahi B Chowdhury told newsmen after the meeting.

The delegation leader and also the EC Ambassador in Dhaka Spesan Frowein said they met the LDP leaders as part of their programmes to monitor the next parliamentary elections.

Other delegation members include Charles Whiteley, first secretary of the EC, Helen Campdell, chief of the South Asian unit, and Johannes Sphachinger, desk officer on Bangladesh affairs.

Judicial probe adjourned in defamation case against Jalil

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday adjourned judicial inquiry into a defamation suit filed against Awami League (AL) General Secretary Abdul Jalil until March 15 as the complainant BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Tarique Rahman could not appear before it.

Metropolitan Magistrate Abdur Rouf Khan passed the order following a time petition by the prosecution lawyers on behalf of the complainant saying he (Tarique) was busy in his business.

Earlier, on January 15 and 18, two metropolitan magistrates adjourned judicial inquiries into two defamation cases filed by Tarique against AL Chief Sheikh Hasina and Joint General Secretary Obaidul Quader.

Tarique on November 19 filed the three cases with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's (CMM) Court for conducting 'malicious campaign' against him.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 5

Israel indicts president Katsav on rape charges

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel's attorney general Menachem Mazuz has decided to indict President Moshe Katsav on charges of raping four women, a justice ministry official said yesterday.

The indictment will include charges of rape, indecent acts, obstruction of justice and threatening a witness, he said. They are the most serious charges ever levelled against an Israeli leader.

A final decision on the indictment will be made only after a hearing at which Katsav will be able to present his case.

On October 15 last year, police said they had uncovered enough evidence to charge Katsav with sexual harassment and

SEE PAGE 15 COL 8

Top Republicans move against Bush's Iraq troop hike plan

AFP, Washington

Top Republican senators Monday assailed President George W Bush's plan to increase US troops in Iraq, adding critical strength to the movement in Congress against his new war plan.

In a rising revolt in Bush's own party, senior Republican Senator John Warner and colleagues proposed a resolution calling on Bush to find alternatives to his plan, announced January 10, to send 21,500 more US troops to Iraq in a last-ditch effort to restore security.

In a press conference together with Republican Senators Susan Collins and Norm Coleman, Warner

said the resolution aimed at registering "genuine concerns" in the Congress about Bush's plan.

"It is clear that the United States' strategy and operations in Iraq can only be sustained and achieved with support from the American people and with a level of bipartisanship in Congress," Warner, an influential member of the powerful Senate Armed Services Committee, said.

"The purpose of this resolution is not to cut our forces at the current level or to set any timetables for withdrawal but, rather, to express the genuine, and I repeat, the genuine concerns of a number of senators from both parties about the president's plan," he said.

The non-binding resolution, one of several proposed challenging Bush's war plan but the first offered by such senior Republicans, reads: "The Senate disagrees with the plan to augment our forces by 21,500 and urges the president instead to consider all options and alternatives for achieving the strategic goals set forth below with reduced force levels than proposed."

Warner's announcement came a day before Bush is to defend the highly unpopular strategy in his annual State of the Union speech to Congress.

In also comes as Democrats in the Senate -- with the support of

SEE PAGE 15 COL 8

Security alert for UN staff in Bangladesh withdrawn

UNB, Dhaka

UN security alert imposed on its staff members in Bangladesh has been withdrawn following significant improvement of law and order in the country.

A source in the UN mission here said with the declaration of a state of emergency and assumption of power by the new caretaker government, the law and order situation in the country has significantly improved. Political unrest has diminished and a relatively peaceful situation is prevailing in the country.

Consequently, the restrictions imposed on internal and external missions were lifted.

However, all the UN staff members are advised to remain vigilant to avoid any untoward situation. Similarly, contact should be kept with wardens and agency security focal points in order to update themselves on any further security instructions from the designated official.



PHOTO: PID

Chief Adviser to the caretaker government Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed meets the secretaries at Bangladesh Secretariat yesterday.

2,500 more held
Firearms seized as anti-crime drive continues

STAR REPORT

Around 2,500 people were arrested on various charges in the ongoing countrywide anti-crime drive during the last 24 hours ending at 10:00pm yesterday.

A press release of the home ministry said that police and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) detained 2,001 people that include 31 fugitive convicts, 1,015 facing arrest warrants and 955 for other charges.

The army held 239 people in the last 24 hours ending at 6:00am yesterday, said the release.

Police and Rab members also recovered 14 firearms, 17 other weapons and 155 rounds of ammunition.

In Netrakona, the joint forces of police and army arrested seven people including four BNP men from Monday night till yesterday evening, reports our correspondent.

They are -- Purbadhala upazila Juba Dal president Deluar Ahmed Darpan, 35, upazila Tanti (weaver) Dal president Enamul Haque Halud, 40, upazila JCD president Shamimul Islam Shamim, 25 and former assistant secretary of the upazila BNP Anwarul Islam Anwar,

40.

The joint forces also arrested Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) activist Jahid Hasan Kanchon, 35 and listed criminals Mir Hossen Miru, 25 and Abdul Jabbar, 27 of Goalakanda village under the same upazila.

In Tangail, four, including two BNP men and an outlaw, were held by the joint forces during raids in different upazilas in the last 24 hours, sources said.

The army personnel on Monday night held Abul Kashem Kachhed, president of Mirzapur upazila unit Sramik Dal and also of Mirzapur municipal unit of BNP, and his son Rashed Miah, organising secretary of Mirzapur Rickshaw Sramik Union, sources said.

Rab personnel yesterday arrested Dulal, a member of the outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP-Red Flag), from Chinakhali village in Sadar upazila, and Joinal from Biswas Betka area in Tangail town, Rab sources said.

In Bogra, five people were held by Rab yesterday noon, including former joint secretary of Bogra District BNP Noor Mohammed and

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

5 detained in Britain under anti-terror laws

AFP, London

Five men were arrested in dawn raids in Britain yesterday under anti-terrorism laws, including two British Pakistanis, police and reports said.

Two men, aged 25 and 29, were detained in Halifax, West Yorkshire, in northern England, "on suspicion of the commission, preparation or instigation of acts of terrorism," London's Metropolitan Police said.

The BBC reported that they were thought to be British Pakistanis, being held on suspicion of involvement in facilitating terrorist activities overseas, although police declined to comment.

A further three suspects, two aged 24 and one 32-year-old, were arrested by anti-terror officers who raided four addresses in the city of Manchester, north-west England.

Police from the Met worked with colleagues from West Yorkshire to carry out the Halifax raids at around 6:00 a.m. (0600 GMT).

A Metropolitan Police spokeswoman said the arrests came as part of an "intelligence-led operation" and stressed that the operation was not carried out by armed officers.

The men were arrested at separate houses in Halifax which are now being searched along with two other houses there and a London flat, she added.

BGMEA for steps against corrupt officials

UNB, Dhaka

Garment industry owners have demanded stern actions against the corrupt government officials.

They particularly mentioned the officials of Chittagong seaport, customs and NBR, as the officials demand bribe at every stage for moving files forward.

The demand was made when a delegation of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters' Association (BGMEA), led by its President SM Fazlul Haque, met Finance and Commerce Adviser Mirza Azizul Islam at his finance ministry office.

The BGMEA leaders also placed five-point demand, including soft bank loans as a contingency measure, to save their businesses that

were hit hard during the last 7-8 months' political standoff.

After the meeting, the finance adviser told reporters that he would take some decisions to resolve the garment sector's problems after holding talks with other relevant departments, including finance and commerce, NBR, customs and Chittagong Port Authority.

"We'll meet them (BGMEA) again and inform them about the government's decisions within a week. The decisions will be made to protect the interests of all concerned," he told journalists.

The BGMEA leaders said the garment sector has been facing serious financial constraints due to the political stalemate that the country experienced in the last 7-8 months.

Many garment factory owners had to shut down their production units while many have failed to disburse salaries of their workers, they said.

"We need banking support to get out of the financial constraints, or else, it will be very difficult to survive," said BGMEA President Fazlul Haque.

Welcoming the present caretaker government and the state of emergency, he said the garment factory owners now feel very comfortable in doing their businesses.

"We don't want to see any political movement in the country in the name of democracy... we want a free and fair election with participation of all," the BGMEA president said.

Eight hurt as chemical drum explodes at factory

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eight workers of an electric fan factory in the city's Jatrabari area were severely injured when a drum full of chemical substances exploded last night.

The injured--Alamgir, Solaiman, Titu, Ershad, Akash, Russell, Sagar and Sajib--were admitted to the burn unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital in a critical condition.

Of them, Sajib is eight years old while the rest are aged between 17 to 21 years.

Witnesses said when a fluorescent light inside the factory at Mir Hajirbagh burst, sparks fell into the drum that in the blink of an eye blew up with a bang.

"Out of nowhere, splashes of

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7

Rab seizes equipment from VoIP trader

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) members arrested three people and seized a huge quantity of equipment used to run unauthorised voice over internet protocol (VoIP) business from an office at Purana Paltan in the capital on Monday.

Members of Rab 2 arrested the owner of the office Mainul Islam Khan and two of its staff, Abdul Kuddus and Shohag, during an eight-hour long raid that ended at 10:00pm that night.

The seized equipment includes computers, 228 SIM (subscriber identity module) cards of different cellular phone service operators, 42 teller devices and many coils of internet cables. Rab officials said the estimated price of the seized equipment could be over Tk 10 lakh.

The criminals had been using the seized equipment to generate or terminate overseas calls by first

turning voice calls to data, routing it over the internet and then turning the data into voice again. This method, also known as Internet Telephony, bypasses BTB (Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board) -- the sole carrier for overseas calls in Bangladesh.

Assistant Police Super of Rab, Kazi Ashraful Azim, who led the raid, said the gang had been running the illegal business for the last three years, although the government is yet to provide any licence to run VoIP business in Bangladesh.

"The gang deprived the government of around Tk 14 to 15 crore in taxes," he estimated.

He said the owner of the illegal business Mainul lives in Kuwait and his telephony service connected many countries all over the world. "We're lucky to have arrested him as he hardly visits Bangladesh."

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1



PHOTO: STAR

Dwellers of Banshbari slum in Mohammadpur look for things in the debris after a devastating fire gutted 250 shanties Monday night. Story on page-3.

Thailand confirms 2nd bird flu outbreak

AFP, Bangkok

Thai livestock officials yesterday confirmed the country's second outbreak of bird flu this year, saying they had detected the deadly H5N1 virus among chickens in the country's northeast.

"The results of laboratory tests confirmed that it's the H5N1 virus, found in 2,000 chickens raised for their eggs," a livestock department official said.

"Those chickens were culled on January 20," she added.

Thailand reported its first outbreak of the year on January 15,

SEE PAGE 15 COL 2

Zawahri taunts Bush over Iraq troops plan

REUTERS, Dubai

al-Qaeda deputy leader Ayman al-Zawahri mocked US President George W Bush's plan to send more troops to Iraq, saying militants could wipe out the entire US army, according to an Internet video posted on Monday.

Zawahri's comments were published on the Web site of the US-based SITE institute, www.siteinstitute.org, which searches and analyses militant networks. It said the video was broadcast on al-Qaeda's multimedia arm as-Sahab, which it moni-

tors.

"Why send 20,000 only? Why not send 50 or 100,000? Aren't you aware that the dogs of Iraq are pining for your troops' dead bodies?" he said.

Bush plans to send a further 21,500 US soldiers to Iraq to help the government improve security, particularly in Baghdad.

It was al-Qaeda's first reaction to the US plan.

Zawahri taunted Bush further by inviting him to send the whole US army to Iraq, and said the "Mujahideen" were capable of

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7