

EU envoys for CG

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EC secretary on how to continue our support to Bangladesh, Helen Campbell, head of the South Asian Department at the EU Headquarters in Brussels, told the press emerging from the meeting.

"The reconstitution of the Election Commission must be the first step and we're confident that this caretaker government can do what needs to be done for free and fair elections," he said.

Asked about the necessity of voter ID card for fair elections, he said it will be the experts who will examine whether the ID cards are not really 100 percent needed or needed after reviewing the overall situation.

He said the European Union wants free, fair and credible elections "as soon as possible". It means the conditions must be right and there must be a level playing field in the eyes of the people of Bangladesh and, if necessary, the Election Observation Mission—the voice of the European Union.

Mayke said they are very much impressed by some steps taken by the present caretaker government to improve the governance, action against corruption and move for separation of the judiciary in the last few days.

Asked about the reported deaths in army custody and large-scale arrest of political workers, the German ambassador said in the interest of the caretaker government, it "must ensure that human rights are respected and emergency powers are used with sensitivity".

He said the European Union and the international community are closely monitoring the situation, and the Advisors of the caretaker government will take care of it.

Briefing the reporters on his meeting with the foreign diplomats, the foreign affairs adviser said the International community appreciated the steps so far taken as positive and extended full support to holding the election within the shortest possible time to hand over power to an elected government.

Asked if the western diplomats asked to know a precise timetable for the election, Chowdhury said he has been able to present the complexity of the situation that is prevailing and they also perceived it. "These issues will have to be solved by us," he said.

The adviser once again reiterated that the caretaker government would do whatever necessary to hold a fair and credible election and hand over power to elected government as per mandate.

In reply to a question, he said the diplomats mentioned the issue of custodial deaths and he assured them that this would be examined.

MEETING WITH AL

Our staff correspondent reported that the EU delegation yesterday met the Awami League (AL) leaders and said they will continue their focus on Bangladesh in order to ensure the holding of a free and fair election.

During the meeting at the residence of AL President Sheikh Hasina's Political Secretary Sayer Hossain Chowdhury at Paribagh in the city, the AL leaders urged the EU delegation to resume their election-observing mission in the country.

Talking to The Daily Star after the meeting, Saber said, "We have emphasised which matters should be addressed first for a free and fair poll."

"We also stressed the need for reconstituting the Election Commission in this regard," he said.

The AL leaders included Faruk Chowdhury, HT Imam and Dr Hasan Mahmud.

MEETING WITH EC SECY

The delegation also called on the Election Commission Secretary Abdur Rashid Sarkar at his office and discussed the present situation of Bangladesh after cancellation of the January 22 election and how to continue its support to Bangladesh.

"We exchanged views with the

Ex-energy adviser

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commands any reputation of being financially capable or highly professional," noted a source.

A few days before Iajuddin Ahmed's caretaker government stepped down, the energy adviser had formed a committee to award Hosaf the Khalaspir coal zone where the same company was secretly awarded an exploration licence three years back.

Based on drilling just three test holes (Hosaf claimed the number to be 14) in the region, and conducting seismic survey, Hosaf and its Chinese partners came to the conclusion that the zone has recoverable 143 million tonnes of high quality bituminous coal in eight underground layers in 2.5 sqkm area of Khalaspir in Pirganj upazila. The GSB, which discovered the zone in 1962 and confirmed it in 1988, says there should be 685 million tonnes of recoverable coal in 25 sqkm area.

Despite its poorly done work and previous negative records involving the Barapukuria mine, Hosaf's proposal to award it the coal zone was being considered by the previous Khaleda Zia government merely on the basis of political proximity.

"The then energy adviser Chowdhury was trying to finish what the previous government could not," one source pointed out.

Talking to The Daily Star,

Hawa Bhaban

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during the period, said a home ministry news release.

DHAKA

The army-led joint forces picked up Jahangir Sattar Tinku from his Maghbazar triplex residence yesterday at 1:45am.

An hour later, the forces arrested Abdur Razzak, who was an elected member of Dhaka University Central Students Union (DUCSU) in 1989, from his residence at Dhanmondi Road No 5.

But they were yet to be handed over to police until filing of this report at 9:00pm yesterday.

Sources said Tinku, a non-practising doctor, is close to Hawa Bhaban and made an enormous amount of money during the last BNP regime.

A builder by profession, Tinku made the money by manipulating tender process of several departments of different ministries including Wapda, Roads and Highways and LGED using political influence.

Tinku, who once used to live in a rented house in the 1990s, now owns more than 10 apartments in the capital including a triplex on a 5-katha land, a pharmaceutical company and a local agency of a foreign medicine company, said the sources.

He is also a member of Bangladesh Medical Association, and executive member of Chharagram Samity and a number of other organisations.

The former student leader was one of the negotiators for Hawa Bhaban for different business deals and even ran a syndicate with businessmen and most wanted criminals, the sources added.

Meanwhile, Rab arrested DCC Ward Commissioner of Ward No 46 Abu Sayeed Bepari from his East Jafrabad residence early yesterday and sent him to detention for a month.

He was accused in four cases including two for murders, and allegedly had involvement in an incident of arson in Mohammadpur on Monday night that left a person killed.

The joint forces also arrested Keraniganj Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) General Secretary Delawar Hossain Masum yesterday and handed him over to police.

CHITTAGONG

The joint forces arrested 13 persons yesterday from the district and three CHT (Chittagong Hill Tracts) districts, including a Jatiya Party (JP) leader, for their alleged involvement with criminal activities.

They also recovered two locally made guns, abandoned at a place close to the village home of former BNP lawmaker Mostafa Kamal Pasha in Sandwip.

The joint forces interrogated Pasha after recovering the guns. The former lawmaker however denied having any knowledge of how the guns got there.

Sitkakunda Municipality JP General Secretary Rafiqul Islam is also among the arrestees. Sources said he is a listed criminal.

An activist of Awami League (AL), Itak alias Nayan, was arrested in Sitakalanda.

EIGHT KHALI

PAUJ including a freedom fighter and three BNP men were arrested by the joint forces during raids in different upazilas in the district.

A team of Rab-8 arrested Afzal Hossain, a freedom fighter of Kalapara upazila, from his house.

Police said the army arrested JCD leaders Shahin alias Madhab Shahin, 22, and Mizanur Rahman, 20, from Gorostan Road area in the district town.

They also held AL leader Anisur Rahman, 38, and a businessman Babul, 20, from Boga Bazar area.

Rab arrested Mohabbat Ali, 30, a BNP leader of Char Montaz, a remote shoal under Galachipa upazila. Galachipa police arrested Shahjahan, 50, and Abdul Khaleq, 48, both of whom had been sentenced to six months in prison in connection with a case filed by the Forest Department in 1996.

KHAGRACHHARI

The army along with police arrested two activists of BNP yesterday from Beltali under Matiranga upazila in the hill district of Khagrachhari. The arrestees are Mohammad Abdus Salam and Idris Ali.

NETRAKONA

Police and the army arrested 14 persons including a JCD leader from different places of the district.

One of the arrestees is General Secretary of Madan Upazila JCD Ziaul Haque Tuton, 25, while the others are listed criminals.

Meanwhile, the army and Rab yesterday jointly carried out raids to arrest Giasuddin Al Mamun and Dipjol, two close associates of BNP leader Tarique Rahman, but they could not arrest any of them, reports UNB.

The joint team kept Marshal Distilleries at Dhakkamara in Panchagarh district town under siege for two hours from 5:00pm and thoroughly searched the factory compound and the area around it. The factory officials were interrogated but none could provide any clue regarding the whereabouts of the wanted men.

Reliable sources said a number of luxury cars came to the factory owned by Mamun on January 12 giving rise to a suspicion that he might have been hiding there.

Innings begins

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entirely new in Bangladesh. It was introduced for the first in 1982, but it never really took off due to a lack of initiatives," said Hamida Begum, assistant director of National Sports Council (NSC).

"It was very important for the women cricketers to get recognition from the BCB. We received this in May. Now we don't have to look back," she said.

"This is the right time to be serious in this field," said Alaya Ferdousi, vice chairman of BCB Women's Wing, adding that Bangladeshi women have yet to participate in the Women's World Cup or the Asia Cup due to the lack of a proper national team.

"Family and society need to give women the opportunity to play sports, otherwise they will be left as a weaker section in society," said Alaya.

One example of the unwavering determination of women players is Mahmuda, who practices at the Women's Sports Complex at Dhanmondi.

Due to financial problems Mahmuda could not sit for her Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examinations last year. But her determination to do something has taken her to the ground to compete for a place in the national team.

"I was the school sports champion, so I made up my mind that I will involve myself in sports. I have been trying my best to be a full-fledged cricketer," said Mahmuda, adding that she used to train in front her home ignoring incessant teasing from the neighbours.

Former national coach Syed Altaf Hossain said women are playing better cricket than before. "They are more agile in bowling, batting and fielding now and they proved it in an exhibition match," he said, stressing the need to organise more tournaments and matches in order for the women to make further strides.

"Our girls have been playing well in the practice matches," said Parvin Putul, coach of Dhaka. "They have come a long way. They have overcome all the fears about cricket, barriers from their families and the

19 directors still

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who was given a contract service in Petrobangla and made director of both Bakhraabad Ltd and Bangladesh Gas Field Ltd. His contract was cancelled.

In Bangladesh Gas Fields Ltd, the alliance government appointed two directors—other than Nazrul Islam—out of seven under political consideration. Dr M Tamim, professor of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet), and Md Abdul Aziz Khan, director general of Petrobangla, Dhaka, are still working there.

In Rupantarita Praktitik Gas Co Ltd, the alliance government appointed four directors out of eight under political consideration: Dr Anawarul Azim, vice chancellor of Buet, Matiur Rahman Chowdhury, editor of Daily Manabzamin, Md Manirul Islam, personal secretary of prime minister, and Abdul Matlub Ahmed, chairman of Nitol Group. They are still serving.

In Bangladesh Petroleum Exploration and Productions Co Ltd, the BNP-led alliance government appointed Abu Ahmed, professor of economics at University of Dhaka.

Out of seven directors in Gas Transmission Co Ltd, four were appointed under political consider-

ation. Three of them—AYM Kamal, director of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Dr Ezaz Hossain, professor of Buet, and Md Manirul Islam, personal secretary-1 of prime minister—are still working there.

The caretaker government cancelled the contract of the other director, Md Emdadul Haq, director general of Bangladesh Petroleum Institute. Emdadul was also serving as a director of the Madhyapara Granite Mining Co Ltd (MGML).

Other than Emdadul, the MGML still has one politically appointed director in its six-member panel. He is MA Awal, chairman of Bangladesh Textiles Mills Association.

At Barapukuria Coal Mining Co Ltd, two directors out of six were appointed under political consideration. They are Emdadul Haq, member of Board of Investment, and Jalal Uddin Al Kaderi, director of Prime Minister's Office.

Reazul Islam, vice president of Institute of Engineers Bangladesh, was appointed in Western Gas Co Ltd under political consideration and is still continuing in the post.

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wireless terminals, 28 wireless local loop, 25 quantum gateway equipment, 88 FWT and one voice finder.

Rab sources said one Mohammad Selim alias Dodul used to run the unauthorised phone services business. He is absconding.

A case was lodged against him with Lalbagh Police Station in this connection.

FOUR CRIMINALS REMANDED

Yesterday's operation came about 26 hours after a similar seizure from an office at Purana Paltan where the Rab men confiscated VoIP equipment worth about Tk 10 lakh.

The seized items include computers, 228 SIM cards of different cellphone operators, 42 tellurer devices and loads of Internet cables' coils.

A Dhaka court yesterday placed four people, arrested in connection with the unauthorised business, on a three-day remand for interrogation.

Earlier the Rab men produced owner of the office Mainul Islam Khan and his staff -- Abdul Kuddus, Mosharrar Hossain, and Shohag Sikder -- before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court seeking a 10-day remand.

PREVIOUS SEIZURES

On December 26, Rab busted an illegal VoIP business centre at a fifth-floor office at Concord Tower in Dhaka and arrested five Faruquzzaman and Mokhlesur

Israeli president

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Lawmakers and Cabinet officials urged Katsav to give up his fight to stay in office, saying the scandal was tarnishing the presidency.

While Katsav is innocent until proven guilty, "he should not be waging the battle to prove his innocence from the president's office," Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, who also serves as justice minister, said in a statement.

Minister of Public Security Avi Dichter also urged Katsav to step down, saying he "must not cling to the post, not even for a few months."

Dozens of lawmakers, meanwhile, set an impeachment process in motion, mustering enough signatures for parliament to convene a debate on removing the president.

"If the president doesn't announce his resignation tonight, we will launch impeachment proceedings," lawmaker Zehava Galon said.

Stepping aside temporarily would not be enough to end the impeachment push, said Galon's spokeswoman Idit Shabtay-Sidis. Impeachment would require the support of 90 of parliament's 120 legislators.

No sitting Israeli president has ever been charged with a crime. But the Israeli public has grown accustomed to the spectacle of politicians being put on trial or tainted by corruption allegations. One former Cabinet minister is currently being tried in a separate sexual misconduct case, and corruption allegations have reached as high as Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, now under investigation for his involvement in the sale of a government-controlled bank.

The allegation that Katsav used his position as Israel's ceremonial head of state to force himself on female employees has left the nation reeling.

"It is a sad day for the state of Israel," said lawmaker Benny Elon, who called on Katsav to resign to spare the nation further trauma.

The office of president was once filled by Zionist legends and revered statesmen, but has lost esteem in recent years.

Katsav's predecessor, the outspoken war hero turned peacemaker Ezer Weizman, resigned in 2000 after the attorney general ruled he had improperly accepted more than \$300,000 in gifts from a French millionaire. Weizman was never indicted.

Katsav had a far less lofty resume than his predecessors. He had been a low-level Cabinet minister and a Likud Party stalwart when the parliament chose him to be president in 2000 in a shocking upset over Nobel Peace Prize winner Shimon Peres, after a revered rabbi swung votes by saying a "vision" showed him the heavens favored Katsav.

But Katsav's relatively quiet presidency was rocked last summer when one of his female employees accused him of forcing her to have sex in his office. Other women came forward with similar accusations, painting the picture of a politician who had abused his power for years.

In the face of the growing scandal, Katsav disappeared from public life, hunkering down in the president's compound in Jerusalem. He even briefly removed himself from office in September instead of presiding over the inauguration of a new chief justice for the Supreme Court.

On Tuesday, Mazuz said he had collected enough evidence to indict Katsav on charges of rape, harassment, abusing his power for sex, obstructing justice and illegally distributing gifts while president and Cabinet minister.

Oriental Bank

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lawyers about the matter.

The BB investigations found that Obaidul Karim misappropriated around Tk 488.50 crore through unauthorised issuance of 371 Inter-Branch Debit Advice (IBD). Another Tk 106.47 crore was embezzled by providing loans against fake bank accounts.

Slum eviction

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During their meeting with Mainul, the representatives asked about the special scheme regarding rehabilitation of slum dwellers that was adopted in 1997.

Terming the matter very important, Barrister Mainul Hosein said they were considering the matter and gave assurance to the representatives that he would examine his duties regarding the implementation of the special scheme.

Seven left-leaning parties including Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal, Workers' Party, Samrajibi Mukti Andolan, Samyabadi Dal and Bangladesh Gonotrantrik Andolan expressed their concerns and protested against the eviction drive.

Bangladesh Grameen O Nagar Darida Federation and Bangladesh Samrajibi Nari Maitree also expressed their concerns over the issue.

4 Americans in Iraq crash shot in head

AP, Baghdad

Four of the five Americans killed when a US security company's helicopter crashed in a dangerous Sunni neighborhood in central Baghdad were shot execution style in the back the head, Iraqi and US officials said yesterday.

A senior Iraqi military official said a machine gunner downed the helicopter, but a US military official in Washington said there were no indications that the aircraft, owned by Blackwater USA, had been shot out of the sky.

In Washington, a US defense official said four of the five killed were shot in the back of the head but did not know whether they were still alive when they were shot. The US official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak on the record.

The Iraqi official, who also declined to be identified because details had not been made public, said the four were shot in the back of the head while they were on the ground.

It also was not clear whether gunfire actually brought the small helicopter down or caused the craft to drop toward the ground, where it became entangled in electrical wires, the US official said. The helicopter was virtually destroyed and after investigating the site, US forces had been planning to blow up it up to keep people from scavenging the parts, the official said.

Blackwater USA confirmed that five Americans employed by the North Carolina-based company as security professionals were killed, but provided no identities or any details.

O n Wednesday, US Ambassador Zalmay Khalizad offered condolences for the five Americans killed.

"We had a very bad day yesterday," Khalizad told reporters during a round-table discussion at the embassy in the heavily fortified Green Zone in Baghdad. "We lost five fine men."

He said he had traveled with the men who were killed and had gone to the morgue to view the bodies.

Khalizad did not give more details, saying the crash was still under investigation and it was difficult to know exactly what happened because of "the fog of war."

Another American official in Baghdad, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said three Blackwater helicopters were involved. One had landed for an unknown reason and one of the Blackwater employees was shot at that point, he said. That helicopter apparently was able to take off but a second one then crashed in the same area, he added without explaining the involvement of the third helicopter.

The New York Times, citing unnamed American officials, reported that the helicopter's four-man crew was killed along with a gunner on a second Blackwater helicopter.

The Qatar-based Al-Jazeera television said the 1920 Revolution Brigades insurgent group claimed responsibility for shooting down the helicopter and showed a video taken by a cell phone of a mass of still-smoldering twisted metal that it was said was the wreckage of the chopper.

Another Sunni insurgent group, the Ansar al-Sunnah Army, also claimed responsibility and posted identity cards of men who were on the helicopter on a Web site, including at least two that bore the name of Arthur Laguna, who was later identified by his mother as among those killed.

2 outlaws

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the police on their arrival at Katchubari.

An hour-long gun battle took place between the police and the cadres when the law enforcers started firing in retaliation.

Ikru! got caught in 'crossfire' when he tried to escape from police van during the shootout and died on the spot.

Police recovered one shutter-gun and two bullets from the spot.

According to police, Ikru! was accused in ten different cases including three for murder filed with Mirpur police station.

Meanwhile UNB reported a leader of an outlawed party was killed in a shootout between his cohorts and Rab on the premises of Lundi Sheikh Russell College in Rajoir upazila of Madaripur Tuesday night.

The deceased was identified as Mohsin, 35, second-in-command of outlawed 'Aziz Group.'

Acting on a tip-off, Rab members raided the college where a group of extremists were holding a meeting at about 4:00 am.

Sensing their presence, the extremists fired on the Rab members.

In reply, the elite force also shot fires on them triggering a gunfight. "Mohsin was struck by a bullet and died on the spot," said a spot account.

Rab also recovered a revolver and two rounds of bullet from the scene.

Mohsin was one of the main accused in two police officer murder cases in the district, Rab sources said.

Laguna was a 52-year-old pilot for Blackwater who previously served in the Army and the California National Guard, his mother, Lydia Laguna, of Rio Linda, Calif., told the AP. She said she received a call from her other son, also a Blackwater pilot in Baghdad, notifying her of Arthur's death.

Witnesses in the Fadhil neighborhood told the AP that they saw the helicopter go down after gunmen on the ground opened fire. Accounts varied, but all were consistent that at least one person operating the aircraft had been shot and badly hurt before the crash.

The helicopter was believed to have been escorting a VIP ground convoy as it headed away from the heavily fortified Green Zone.

A report in the Washington Post, also citing unnamed U.S. officials, said one of the Blackwater victims was killed as he traveled with the convoy on the ground.

Blackwater USA provides security for State Department officials in Iraq, trains military units from around the world, and works for corporate clients.

"These untimely deaths are a reminder of the extraordinary circumstances under which our professionals voluntarily serve to bring freedom and democracy to the Iraqi people," the Blackwater statement said.

Katy Helvenston, mother of Scott Helvenston, a Blackwater employee who died in March 2004, said Tuesday's crash "just breaks my heart."

"I'm so sick of these kids dying," she said.

US envoy

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holding a free, fair and credible election.

About the pre-election agenda of the caretaker government, the US Ambassador said the programme is a 'legitimate one and it is ambitious'. 'Some of the problems that this country is facing really require a long-term solution,' she added.

She said there are programmes they would like to work with, like eradicating corruption. The US government already worked with the previous government to promote measures against corruption, she said adding, "I do think that the agenda requires a long time to address."

When asked about the timeframe for the stalled parliamentary elections, the US ambassador said it is not her job to establish the timeframe. "It is for the Bangladeshis to work that out."

Japan calls Bush

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Japan should do the same. It's not so simple," he said.

"What can Japan do to reconstruct Iraq? Is it impossible without Japan's (Air) Self-Defense Forces? We must look at the overall assessment to give a final decision," he told a news conference.

"If it is necessary, we can extend deployment," he said. "If we think we can entrust responsibility to the private sector, that is also possible."

The government quickly played down the latest attack on US policy from Kyuma, who took office in late September when Prime Minister Shinzo Abe replaced Koizumi.

"Minister Kyuma spoke as a politician," chief government spokesman Yasuhisa Shiozaki said at a press conference.

"US authorities have already said that weapons of mass destruction didn't exist (in Iraq), so such a statement is nothing new," he added.

The Iraq deployment marked the first time Japan sent troops overseas since defeat in World War II, when the United States stripped it of its right to maintain a military.

Kyuma rejected Bush's comparisons of Iraq to post-war Japan.

The US president has repeatedly pointed to the alliance with Japan as proof that former adversaries can become allies.

"Just because it worked in Japan does not mean it would work in Iraq," Kyuma said. "It worked in Japan because the US left the emperor system."

US occupation authorities allowed Japan to keep Emperor Hirohito, although he was forced to renounce his divine status.

Kyuma this month became Japan's first defense minister since World War II after Abe's government pushed through a bill to give him cabinet status.

Previously, Japan had a "Defense Agency" with lesser rank than full-fledged ministries.

Kyuma reiterated that Japan was not going back down the militarist path. "By upgrading to a defense ministry, everyone seems to have the illusion that ... Japan is becoming a military power," Kyuma said. "However, it is performing under the government's limited budget" under which military funding is decreasing, he said.

"Also, if we maintain the current constitution, there should be no such worry," he said.

Abe is also seeking to revise the US-imposed 1947 pacifist constitution.