



Chief Adviser to Caretaker Government Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed presides over the meeting of the Council of Advisers at his office in the city yesterday.

# World determined to stop Iran having N-arms

## Merkel tells Munich Conference

AFP, Munich

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said here yesterday the international community was resolved to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons.

"We are all determined to prevent the threat of an Iran with a military nuclear programme," Merkel said in a speech to the Munich Conference on Security Policy.

Merkel said the Islamic republic must conform with international demands to stop enriching uranium "without ifs and buts and without tricks".

"What we are talking about here is a very, very sensitive technology and so we need a high degree of transparency, which Iran has failed to provide, and if Iran does not do this it risks falling deeper into isolation," Merkel said.

Iran's top nuclear negotiator Ali Larijani is attending the annual high-level gathering and will give a speech on Sunday.

Larijani has said he will also meet European officials in Munich, who, it is believed, will try to get Iran to re-engage in talks over its nuclear programme.

He will have his first meeting in five months with EU foreign policy

chief Javier Solana, but Solana's spokeswoman Cristina Gallach dampened hopes of a major step forward.

"There will be no breakthrough. It will be an opportunity for an exchange of views," she told AFP.

Larijani struck a defiant tone as he arrived in Germany, saying Iran's nuclear activities were "under the supervision" of the International Atomic Energy Agency and that the country was committed to its engagements under the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

"Iran is following a clear path in its nuclear activities and this not hidden to anyone," he told the Iranian state agency IRNA.

Iran rejects a UN Security Council resolution of December 23 which imposed limited sanctions to force it to stop enriching uranium.

Uranium enrichment uses centrifuges to make fuel for civilian nuclear reactors but can also be used to make material for bombs, although Iran denies it is developing nuclear weapons.

In Iran itself, hundreds of thousands of people were to rally on Sunday in an annual show of support for the Islamic revolution, with the country's leaders promising a major announcement which was

expected to focus on the achievement of a new stage in uranium enrichment.

In a sign of the continuing divisions between the international community over how to handle Iran, President Vladimir Putin defended Russia's friendship with Iran which includes the ongoing construction of a nuclear power station at Bushehr.

"We don't want Iran to feel cornered in a hostile environment. They

should understand that they have some friends," Putin said in response to questions from US politicians after his speech to the Munich conference.

"We must all be patient and offer Iran incentives and show their leaders that it is best to avoid confrontation with the international community."

## Islamists boycott talks over Pak mosque row

AFP, Islamabad

A radical Islamic cleric yesterday pulled out of negotiations with Pakistani authorities to resolve a simmering row over illegally built mosques, as 200 female students continue to occupy a library.

Maulana Abdul Rashid Ghazi announced the boycott of talks at a news conference here, accusing the government of planning to use force to evict the women protesters occupying a government library for children.

The baton-armed and veiled students occupied the library next to the city's Lal Masjid (red mosque) last month after municipal authorities raised two mosques in the capital they say were built on grabbed land.

The authorities also said they would demolish parts of the mosque's affiliated seminary, Jamia Hasfa, sparking a bitter row.

Witnesses said hundreds of Islamists gathered outside the mosque on Saturday and pelted stones at passing vehicles.

The students have refused to leave until the mosques were rebuilt, and the demolition notice against the seminary was withdrawn.

Ghazi is a fierce critic of President Pervez Musharraf for the military ruler's support of the US-led "War on Terror". Security agencies suspect Ghazi has maintained links in past with Taliban and Al-Qaeda.



Baroness Pola Uddin of Bethnal Green and Lord Nazir Ahmed of Rotherham visit Brac programmes at Korail slum in the city yesterday. Fazle Hasan Abed, founder and chairperson of Brac, is also seen.

## Brac programmes lauded

### Baroness Pola, Lord Nazir visit Korail slum

Two members of the House of Lords, Britain's upper house of the parliament, Baroness Pola Uddin of Bethnal Green and Lord Nazir Ahmed of Rotherham, visited Brac programmes in Korail slum in Dhaka yesterday, says a press release.

In Korail, they first visited a Brac micro-finance group meeting in progress and saw some of the income generating activities of the borrowers such as a grocery store run by a member and her son. They also visited a Brac health forum where the topic of discussion was the care of pregnant women.

Afterwards, Baroness Pola and Lord Nazir were taken to a Brac birthing centre, which provides a safe and clean environment for assisted births with a trained midwife. They also visited a Brac primary school located in

the slum where they enjoyed musical performances by the children.

From Korail, the Baroness and Lord paid a short visit to the Stranded Pakistani Camp in Pallabi where they spoke to some Brac borrowers residing there.

During the visit, Fazle Hasan Abed, founder and chairperson of Brac, Shabbir Ahmed Chowdhury, director, Microfinance and Kaosar Afsana, Health Programme Coordinator, accompanied the guests.

Baroness Pola and Lord Nazir appreciated the development interventions of Brac in Bangladesh.

Baroness Pola is the first and only person of Bangladeshi origin to become a member of the House of Lords.

## China coal mine deaths rise to 24

AFP, Beijing

The death toll in a colliery fire in central China rose to 24 yesterday after a cover-up of 17 fatalities was unveiled, state media said.

"The number of deaths is 24, not seven, as announced previously by the local authorities," said Li Jiucheng, director of the Coal Mine Safety Bureau of Henan Province.

"The deaths of 17 miners were deliberately concealed," Li was quoted as saying by Xinhua news agency.

Colliery managers and local officials originally said that seven miners had been killed and four

others injured in a fire which broke out on February 2 in Xing'an Colliery, located in Henan's Tianchi town.

When reporters visited villages to investigate the accident, they heard stories of a possible cover-up.

"Five people, including the owner and manager of the mine, have been taken into custody, and four government officials have been sacked," Li told Xinhua.

He said they included a deputy head of Mianchi county, the director of the county coal bureau, the head of Tianchi town and the town's Communist Party chief.