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Ban on indoor politics to go soon, polls to be held by '08
CA tells VOA

UNB, Dhaka

Chief Adviser (CA) Fakhruddin Ahmed yesterday said the ban on indoor politics will be lifted at an appropriate time in near future and parliamentary elections will be held before the end of 2008.

"Already political parties spontaneously came up with reforms... there is no difference of opinion on the lifting of the ban. It will be withdrawn at an appropriate time in near future..." he said in an interview with Voice of America (VOA) Bangla Service chief Iqbal Bahar Chowdhury.

The CA reiterated that the stalled parliamentary elections will be held before the end of 2008 on

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Sweeping changes in AL reform proposal

HASAN JAHID TUSHER

Reformists of Awami League (AL) have brought some amendments to their 25-point party reform proposal, making it a much more sweeping proposal for overall political reform instead of a mere party reform.

The amended proposal seeks not only to reform the party constitution but also the national constitution as well as the legislative, judicial, and executive branches of the state.

The sweeping new proposal, which the AL reformists claim, as well, also suggests reforms in the Election Commission, Public Service Commission, and Anti-

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Commandos join Thanchi operation

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

Commandos of the army were deployed yesterday in the remote Thanchi upazila of Bandarban to strengthen the search and rescue efforts for kidnapped Danish International Development Agency (Danida) staff Shahid Suman.

At least 40 commandos reinforced more than 400 men, comprising army personnel, Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) personnel, and policemen, who are trying to rescue Suman.

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Following information gleaned from people arrested earlier in this connection, the law enforcers have been conducting their operations in the hilly forest of the region to pinpoint the location of the kidnappers, sources said.

Danida driver Md Hanif, who was also kidnapped with Suman, was rescued in an unconscious state Thursday 40km from the spot from which they were taken. He

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Rail links cut as goods train derails in Lalmonirhat

STAR REPORT

A freight train derailed near Tushbander Railway Station in Lalmonirhat early Friday snapping rail communication between Pathagram, Tushbander, Hatibandha and the rest of the country while two engines of Akhaura Railway Junction were suspended for negligence of duty in another freight train derailment incident on Monday.

Railway sources said nine wagons of freight train-452 derailed around 3:00am allegedly due to bad railway lines. A relief train from Lalmonirhat is still trying to put the train back on track as of last evening, our Rangpur correspondent reports.

Imported goods could not be transported from Burimari land port to other parts of the country yesterday as rail communications

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Next two projected budgets likely to be more pragmatic

Mid-term budgetary framework shows

REJAIL KARIM BYRON

The projected budgets for the two fiscal years starting from 2008-09 seem more pragmatic than that for the year beginning tomorrow.

The size of the budget for the 2007-08, the first by the caretaker government, has been increased by 30.37 percent to Tk 87,137 crore from the revised budget of the current year, according to the

Medium Term Budgetary Framework (MTBF) for the next three fiscal years.

The volume of the budget for fiscal 2008-09 will increase only by 2.07 percent to Tk 88,950 crore and by 13.31 percent to Tk 100,079 crore in the last fiscal (2009-10) of the government's three-year framework.

The MTBF and other budgetary documents to help get an overview

of the future policies were released yesterday.

Earlier on Thursday, the president approved the budget for fiscal 2007-08 without imposing the customs duties that had been proposed on different items. Most of the changes in the approved budget relate to duty, VAT and income tax rates.

Finance Adviser AB Mirza Azizul

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2 young politicians for polls without symbols

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Young politicians Mahi B Chowdhury and Sayeed Khokan yesterday proposed holding of the next election without using electoral symbols as people are emotional about the existing party symbols and do not judge candidates while casting votes.

The two political leaders placed some reform proposals at a roundtable styled "Electoral Thoughts of New Generation" organised by National Youth Forum of Bangladesh at the Latya Press Club.

Mahi B Chowdhury resigned as the organising secretary of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)

and Sayeed Khokan resigned from Awami League (AL) recently.

"The ballot papers should be designed without the electoral symbols. Only the candidate's name, the party's name and the candidate's photo should be there on the ballot paper," said Mahi, son of LDP President AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury.

People cannot judge the candidates when they notice the AL symbol 'boat' or the BNP symbol 'sheaf of paddy' on the ballot paper," he explained.

Mahi said the Election Commission and the caretaker government should introduce rules to ban political programmes

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KCCI president arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

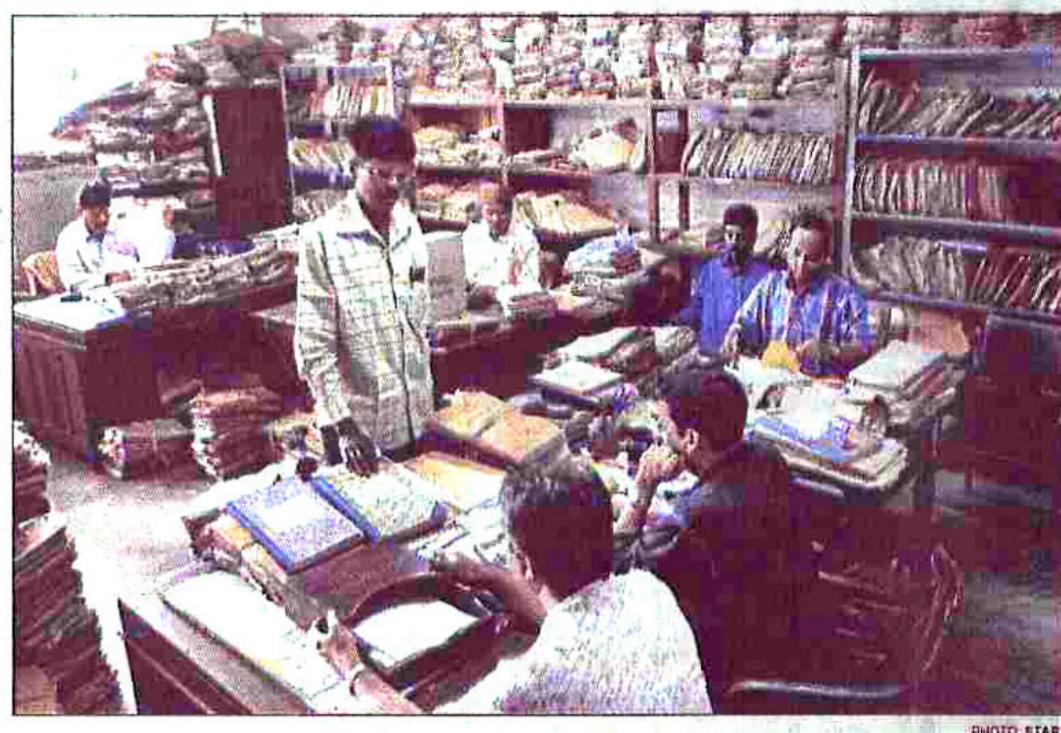
Police yesterday arrested Khulna Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) President Shaharuzzaman Martuza at his residence at Bhairob Strand road under Khulna Sadar Police Station on charges of holding two international passports.

The law enforcers raided the house of the KCC president at 7:15pm and arrested him. They also seized an international passport from his possession.

Officer-in-Charge (OC) Asaduzzaman of Khulna Sadar Police Station said the KCCI president was arrested under section 11(A) of the Passport Act, 1973

for keeping two international passports.

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Segunbagicha revenue office in the capital at work yesterday following arrangement to keep the revenue offices and banks open on weekly holidays Friday and Saturday to facilitate revenue transactions on the concluding days of the fiscal year 2006-07.

PHOTO: STAR

Councils being planned in a way to drop 2 party chiefs

SHAKHAWAT LITON

The pro-reform leaders of the BNP and Awami League (AL) reportedly plan to hold national councils in a way that won't allow the party chiefs--Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina--to participate in those.

The two top leaders maintain that they too want reforms but those should be determined by the national councils and must not be imposed from outside.

Talking to The Daily Star, a number of senior leaders of both the AL and BNP have said they want to keep their party heads out of the council sessions as they think the supremos might influence the proposed changes and the

way they want those to take place.

Alongside preparations for councils on reforms, the pro-reform camps are now trying to convince the councillors that exclusion of Hasina and Khaleda is an absolute imperative for meaningful reforms.

Because of corruption charges against them it seems uncertain if the ladies who ruled the country's political landscape for decades will be able to take part in the councils.

Three extortion cases have already been filed against AL President Hasina while preparation is on to file more, a source in the intelligence agency said.

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Officials of district administration, Bangladesh Rifles and police visiting the Bandarban spot from where Danida Programme Coordinator Hossain Shahid Suman was kidnapped on Sunday.

PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA

Canals being turned into box culverts ignoring impact

PINAKI ROY

Despite negative impacts of box culverts, the Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA) has been continuing to convert canals into box culverts in the capital ignoring recommendations of several experts.

In the last 17 years, the Wasa authorities spent more than Tk 300 crore in the name of development of canals and the drainage system of the city. Under two development projects the authorities turned several natural canals into box culverts to 'develop' the city's storm sewerage system. Currently the WASA authorities are implementing a project titled 'The Project for Ending Waterlogging in the Capital'.

But the idea of making box culverts proved to be wrong as the city continued to be inundated every year during monsoons even after conversion of open natural

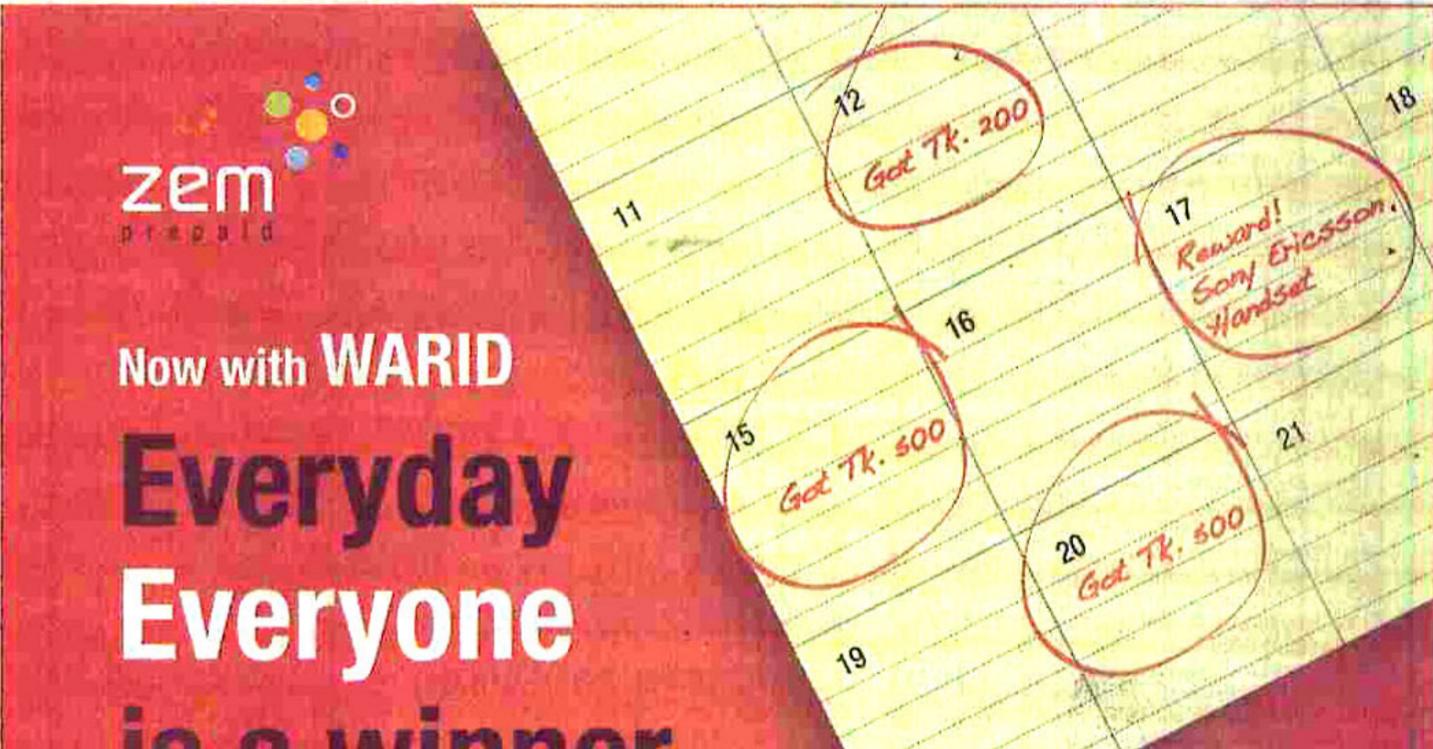
canals into box culverts.

"Natural open canals are better than box culverts, maintenance of those is easier. On the outskirts of the city we keep the canals open but in the city it is not possible for us to protect open canals from encroachers," said Md Zahurul Alam, superintendent engineer of Wasa and project director of The Project for Ending Waterlogging in the Capital.

Following the massive inundation of the city during the floods of 1988, the authorities realised for the first time the importance of the city canals. Soon the government formed a committee and undertook projects to rehabilitate the canals of the city to ensure proper drainage of storm water. Ironically however instead of increasing the depths of the canals and protecting them from encroachers, the Wasa authorities turned several canals into box culverts spending Tk 250 crore, funded by Asian

Development Bank (ADB). But the situation did not improve. The city continued to be inundated during monsoons.

In 2004, heavy rainfall of two consecutive days marooned the city for quite a long time and the government again formed a steering committee to find out the state of the city's canals and to recover and rehabilitate them.



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