

'Asean a long way from EU-style integration'

AFP, Singapore

It will take 50 years or more for Southeast Asian nations to more closely resemble the European Union including the easing of border controls, according to Singapore's founding father Lee Kuan Yew.

He said the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) was still a long way from being as closely integrated as the European Union, which in December admitted nine new countries into a no-passport zone.

"Well, I don't think they are comparable," Lee said late Monday on the day Singapore became the first Asean member to complete ratification of a landmark charter aimed at transforming the 10-member bloc.

"To expect us to make this leap into a European Union will be 50, maybe more, years," he told a

gathering on the 40th anniversary of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS).

Lee, who retains an influential position in the cabinet of his son Lee Hsien Loong, said Asean nations were "very disparate" with differing levels of economic and cultural development.

"I think we make progress slowly. As we rise and we converge towards a more common level there will still be differences but not so stark. Then we can make the moves to free up the borders," he said.

The EU move means people will now be able to travel in 24 countries across Europe, from the Baltic Sea nation of Estonia to Portugal, without passport controls.

Asean's charter aims to commit the region's disparate nations to promote human rights and democratic ideals, and sets out the principles and rules for members.

It also transforms Asean,

formed in 1967, into a legal entity, which will give the group greater clout in international negotiations.

But Tommy Koh, a Singaporean diplomat and chairman of the task force which drafted the charter, warned yesterday it was in some jeopardy because of threats not to ratify it.

He said Philippines President Gloria Arroyo warned her country's Congress might not approve the document if Myanmar did not honour the charter's provisions on democracy and human rights.

There is also a strong initiative in Indonesia to dissuade parliament there from ratifying the charter, Koh told the ISEAS Regional Outlook Forum. Koh said one of those opposing ratification is Jusuf Wanandi, a prominent Indonesian academic.

"I don't think that the charter is bold and visionary enough," Wanandi told the forum.

Koh countered that although the charter is not perfect, it is a good start and can be amended later.

He and Surin Pitsuwan, who began his term as Asean secretary general on Monday, said the charter will better position the bloc as it faces intense competition from China, India and elsewhere.

"The stakes facing Asean are very high," Koh said.

Among the charter's benefits, he said it will allow Asean to improve on its "very poor track record" of implementing decisions.

"Asean needs a truly new beginning," Pitsuwan said.

The Asean leaders are also fast-tracking integration of their economies with the goal of creating a single market of more than half a billion people by 2015 to help battle competition from giants China and India.



Students of Bangladesh International Tutorial pose for photograph with the teachers on the campus in the city yesterday on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the school.

EC to redraw outline of constituencies

FROM PAGE 1

the much talked about electoral roadmap, the CEC said the process will start this month with an aim to complete the job in June.

"Actually, the task of redrawing the constituencies can be completed in a month if we don't face any objection to it. But we guess many people will raise objections which we will have to resolve," CEC Huda said.

"The number of registered voters in each current constituency, for example, varies from as low as 1,04,049 in a constituency in Narayanganj, to more than six times that number in a couple of constituencies in Dhaka. This disparity in numbers of voters among the constituencies is not acceptable for the functioning of a truly democratic system," the CEC argued.

Asked whether the massive undertaking will hamper maintaining the EC's course on the electoral roadmap announced by itself, stipulating to hold the polls by December this year, the CEC said the plan for redrawing the constituencies is not a new one since the roadmap was drawn in last July incorporating the plan.

"I have no doubt in my mind about holding the parliamentary polls within the timeframe announced. But how can I read the minds of the people and know whether they have doubts," CEC Huda said replying to a query.

He said the government high ups always inquire about the progress

of the preparation for holding the stalled ninth parliamentary polls.

"The government high ups want to know how quickly the election can be held. We will proceed for holding the polls as soon as we are ready," Huda said.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The Constitution of Bangladesh assigns the responsibility to the EC for delimiting the boundaries of constituencies for the purpose of elections to the parliament. The Delimitation of Constituencies Ordinance 1976 requires redrawing of the boundaries of constituencies after each census.

The 2001 census report was published only recently, meaning the boundaries have not been redrawn in this decade. Earlier, the constituencies were redrawn in 1973, 1979, 1984 and in 1995 on limited scales.

"Because only minor changes were brought to the boundaries in the last 30 years, the existing constituencies vary dramatically in their densities of populations," the CEC said in the briefing in the EC Secretariat conference room.

The delimitation ordinance identified three criteria for redrawing the constituencies -- population, administrative convenience, and keeping the administrative units intact.

EC'S PLAN

The EC said the constituencies will be redrawn using computerised Geographic Information System (GIS). Assistance will be

sought from the Centre for Environmental and Geographic Information System, and from Local Government Engineering Department in exchange for payment, and the hired experts will also train the EC staff to develop the commission's capacity for running the system in the future, the written work plan of the commission says.

After the preparation will be complete, the EC will redraw the boundaries of the constituencies between March and April. In May, it will undertake a public consultation to solicit comments on the provisional new boundaries, and in June it will finalise the new boundaries and prepare a final report on it.

The CEC said the EC will disclose the tentative numbers of constituencies for specific districts next week.

STATE OF EMERGENCY

Asked whether the EC will hold the election amid the state of emergency, the CEC said the commission has yet to decide on the matter, and it does not know either what the government's plan is.

"I am now studying the state of emergency to know about it in detail, whether and how it affects political processions or meetings for election purposes. I also suggested the two other election commissioners to study it," the CEC added.

"Don't worry...we will do whatever is better for the nation," CEC Huda said replying to another query.

Man admits planning terrorist acts in Pakistan

AFP, London

A young man admitted in court here yesterday planning to travel to Pakistan to carry out unspecified acts of terrorism, aiming to "kill many."

Sohail Qureshi, 29, was detained at London Heathrow Airport in October 2006, and was found to be carrying thousands of pounds in cash, as well as a night sight, medical supplies and computer material for alleged terrorist purposes.

Prosecutor Jonathan Sharp told the Old Bailey central criminal court that Qureshi intended to fly to Islamabad for a "two- to three-week operation" either in Afghanistan, Pakistan, or its Waziristan region, on the border between the two countries.

"Pray that I kill many, brother. Revenge, revenge, revenge," wrote Qureshi, according to Internet traffic intercepted by police and released at the court hearing.

"Sohail Qureshi is a dedicated supporter of Islamist extremism," said Sharp, after Qureshi pleaded guilty to preparing for terrorism under Section 5 of the Terrorism Act 2006, the first conviction under this legal section.

He also admitted possessing an article for a terrorist purpose and possessing a record likely to be useful in terrorism, although the details were not immediately clear.

Sarkozy hints at marriage with Bruni

AFP, Paris

French President Nicolas Sarkozy yesterday said his romance with Carla Bruni was "serious" and hinted that he was ready to marry the Italian former supermodel.

"There is a strong chance that you will learn about it once it's already been done," Sarkozy told a packed New Year's press conference when asked about reports that a wedding is planned next month.

"It is serious," he said of the romance, which has unleashed a media blitz since the couple were first photographed in December visiting the Disneyland theme park near Paris.

The 52-year-old president and Bruni -- an heiress whose past conquests include rock stars Mick Jagger and Eric Clapton -- have since been trailed by a swarm of paparazzi.

"Carla and I have decided not to lie," said the president, addressing some 600 French and foreign journalists at his first major news conference since his election last May.

Three months after divorcing his second wife Cecilia, Sarkozy has been under pressure to comment publicly on the romance amid signs that the celebrity spotlight could be hurting his approval ratings.

Several polls since the New Year have shown Sarkozy slip three to four points, while one showed a seven-point plunge in his confidence rating to 48 percent -- the lowest point since his election.

Dubbed "the Bling-Bling president" by left-wing critics, Sarkozy has been accused of parading his romance in the media while neglecting the public's day-to-day concerns.

Elected on pledge to enact sweeping reforms, Sarkozy faces criticism that he has been unable to kick-start the economy into higher gear.



Democratic Leftist Alliance Coordinator Saiful Haque speaks at a roundtable on 'Spirit of liberation war and trial of war criminals' at the National Press Club in the city yesterday.

Leave Pak border district

Wazir tribe chief asks Qaeda-linked militants

AFP, Wana

A powerful tribal chief yesterday warned Al-Qaeda-linked militants to leave a Pakistani border district after the death of eight members of his clan supporting peace efforts in the troubled region.

Maulavi Nazir who drove out hundreds of Uzbek fighters in a bloody battle last year said his armed followers would attack those loyal to an Al-Qaeda linchpin in South Waziristan.

Health camp at Shialbari slum

A volunteer health research team launched a medical and dental camp at Shialbari slum at Mirpur-2 in the city on Monday.

They also collected data on 'Influence of poor socio-economic status on overall health and dental condition of children in slum areas in Dhaka city' from the 300 patients who visited the camp.

The camp aims to shed light on the health issues facing children living on the margins of urban society.

The children received free medicine and dental supplies along with an overall health evaluation.

The group plans to continue their health camp with research till Thursday.

The team was led by Prof Abul Sayeed of Department of Community Medicine, Ibrahim Medical College, Dr Mahfuzul Haq Khan, an assistant professor at the Department of Dentistry, Birdem and Richard Hubbard of the University of the South, Sewanee, Tennessee, USA.

Nazir, who represents the influential Wazir tribe, blamed Baitullah Mehsud for the killing on Sunday night of eight peace committee members, which has stirred fears of intra-clan clashes in the unstable region bordering Afghanistan.

The area is a known hub of Al-Qaeda and Taliban militants and thousands of Pakistani troops have been deployed in the region to hunt them down.

Mehsud is accused by the government of masterminding a spate of suicide attacks in the country, including the December 27 assassination of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto in a gun and suicide bomb attack in Rawalpindi.

Suspected Islamic militants

stormed the offices of provincial government tribal elder Nazir in the Wana and Shakai towns of South Waziristan late Sunday and killed eight people, according to security officials.

Residents said announcements made on a public address system Tuesday asked Mehsud tribesmen to "leave Wana to avoid losses."

Security officials earlier suspected the assailants were Uzbek militants who were engaged in bloody clashes with Nazir's loyalists in March last year.

Nazir who commands considerable influence in Wana has summoned a meeting of elders of his clan on Wednesday to discuss the situation after the killings, his aides said.



A volunteer health research team opened a medical and dental camp at Shialbari Slum at Mirpur-2 in the city on Monday.

Cold snap kills eight in Iran

AFP, Tehran

At least eight people froze to death in the heaviest snowfalls to have hit Iran in years, with several areas brought to a virtual standstill and 20 towns suffering cuts in gas supplies, officials said yesterday.

The snowfalls, said to be the worst in some 40 years, have forced all schools and government offices to close in Tehran and other regions in northern Iran over the last two days. They will remain shut on Wednesday.

The eight fatalities "were stuck on the roads and died of cold and freezing," the head of Iran's natural disasters control centre, Hossein Bagheri, told the ISNA news agency.

He added that 20 more people were killed in road accidents attributed to the bad weather, with 290 people injured and 40,000 stranded on the first night of heavy snow on Saturday.

CA asks cops not to harass

FROM PAGE 16

Bangladesh police UN Mission contingent, railway and highway police, horse-mounted police and police band party. He took salute from a decorated podium.

Flanked by the IGP, the chief adviser on board an open jeep reviewed the parade.

He distributed Bangladesh Police Gallantry Padak (Bangladesh Police Medal), Rastrapratir Police Padak (President's Police Medal), Bangladesh Police Padak-Service and Rastrapratir Police Padak-service for the year 2007 among the recipients for their courageous and heroic role in curbing crime and rendering extraordinary services for maintaining law and order.

On his arrival at the venue, the CA was received by Inspector General of Police Noor Mohammad and additional IGP Nabu Bikram Kishore Tripura.

Advisers to the caretaker government, chiefs of the three services, diplomats, distinguished personalities and senior civil and military officials were

present at the function.

Informing the police members that the government is aware about their profession-related problems and constraints, he assured that the government would take effective steps gradually in resolving their problems.

In this regard, he mentioned some steps, including allocation of funds for providing allowance at the rate of 30 percent of salary to all members working in traffic division. Besides, providing 25 percent risk allowance of basic salary to all police members and raising the number of family ration consumers from 60 percent to 80 percent, are under active consideration of the government.

He said the decision has been taken to provide Tk 1,000 to Tk 3,000 on the nature of cases for maintaining investigation expenses of cases. The CA lauded the role of police members in different UN peacekeeping missions

Arab League chief takes political crisis plan to Beirut

AFP, Beirut

Arab League chief Amr Moussa arrives in Beirut today on a delicate mission to try to push Lebanon's rival political leaders to accept a plan aimed at ending the country's constitutional crisis.

Armed with international support for his initiative, Moussa will seek the approval of all sides for the three-stage Arab League proposal to hold a vote in order to fill the Lebanese presidency, vacant since November 24.

Over the weekend, Arab foreign ministers agreed in Cairo on a plan that would see Lebanese army chief General Michel Sleiman elected as president, a national unity government formed and a new electoral law adopted.

Lebanon has been without a president since the mandate of pro-Syrian Emile Lahoud expired on November 23, amid sharp divisions between the Western-backed ruling majority and the opposition, which is backed by Syria and Iran.

A vote in the Lebanese parliament to elect a new head of state has been postponed 11 times, and the legislature is now due to meet again on January 12 for a fresh attempt.

MP Mohammad Haidar, from the militant group Hezbollah which is spearheading the opposition, said his party was awaiting for Moussa's arrival to guarantee that there would be "no winner and no loser" as part of the settlement plan.

"We want to make sure that under the proposed formula, no party will be able to impose its decisions in the next government," he said.

"So, if this is the case, then we could have an elected president on Saturday," he said.

While the opposition's position regarding the plan remained unclear, the ruling majority has already declared its approval of the plan.

Hasina wants timely polls even if she's banned

FROM PAGE 1

last words before she was taken to the sub-jail.

Earlier, at 9:38am an ailing Hasina in ash-coloured shawl and brownish saree appeared before the court. Selim in a white shirt and black suit arrived at 9:25am.

"When justice is influenced and even delivered as ordered, undergoing medical check-up means nothing here," she said in reply to a question of nearby journalists over her health condition.

She also mentioned that she is suffering from multiple sickness including high blood pressure, vertigo, eye and ear problems.

"But it's meaningless mentioning the diseases I am suffering from."

Mentioning examples of floods and economic recession in Asia

during the tenure of AL government, Hasina said: "At that time only we were successful to control the inflation. We couldn't have been were not able to provide the poor rice at about Tk 10 per kg if we were involved in theft."

"How could we reduce power crisis by generating 4,000 MW if we were thieves?" she asked.

Mentioning the deal stroke between the Russian state-owned power generation company Techno Prom Export (TPE) and Power Development Board for the first phase of erecting and commissioning of Siddhirganj power plant in Narayanganj in 2000, Hasina said: "My deal was fair."

"Foreign investment in our country is being stopped gradually. And this is happening only because of

false and baseless cases being filed involving foreign companies," she observed.

Azam J Chowdhury, managing director of Eastcoast Trading Private Ltd, filed the Tk 3 crore extortion case with Gulshan Police Station against Hasina and AL leader Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim.

Regarding the case Hasina said: "Is there any record where the extorted money had existed? Selim went Ganabhaban to give me share of the extorted money but how?"

"Did Selim enter Ganabhaban carrying the extorted money on bare head?" Hasina questioned. She added that there are cameras set surrounding Ganabhaban and the incident must have been videoed if were real.

"Where are those documents if there is any such incident and where is the money," Hasina questioned repeatedly during her meeting with the defence lawyers.

THE EXTORTION CASE

In the FIR, Azam J Chowdhury mentioned that Hasina's cousin former lawmaker Sheikh Selim tried to be the local agent of Russian company TPE and on different occasions tried to influence the TPE chief to serve his purpose.

Selim continued to put pressure on Azam, prompting the complainant to strike a deal of paying Tk 2.99 crore to Selim besides making the proposal of making him a consultant during the second phase of the work, the FIR says.

Azam also said Selim also threatened that the complainant would not be able to withdraw any bill from PDB if he did not pay a commission from the work. The threats were issued between June and July 2000, the complainant added.

The name of Hasina's sister Sheikh Rehana was included in the charge sheet submitted on July 24 by the investigation officer.

A court accepted the charge sheet, issued a warrant of arrest against Rehana and ordered confiscation of her property.

Law enforcement agencies arrested Hasina on July 16 and produced her before a magistrate's court, which sent her to the sub-jail on parliament premises.



IFIC Bank Chairman Mohammad Lutfar Rahman hands over a cheque for Tk 25 lakh on behalf of the bank to Chief Adviser Fakhrudin Ahmed for the cyclone victims at the latter's office on Monday. Lutfar Rahman also handed over another cheque for Tk 25 lakh to the Chief of Army Staff General Moeen U Ahmed as donation for the cyclone victims last month.



RAK Ceramics (Bangladesh) Director SAK Ekramuzzaman hands over a cheque for Tk 20 lakh to Chief Adviser Fakhrudin Ahmed at the latter's office on behalf of the company for the Sidr-affected people on Monday. Mahbubur Rahman, personnel manager of RAK Ceramics, was present on the occasion.

Teachers Required

A Well Established English Medium School at Dhanmondi Urgently Required Experienced Teachers for 'O' Level Physics/Chemistry and English (Mid/Junior Section). Attractive Salary Awaits the Right Candidates.

Apply with Full C.V. by the 17th Jan'08 to Box No. A-07, C/o, The Daily Star