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Dr Kamal vows to resist any move against poll roadmap

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Gono Forum President Dr Kamal Hossain yesterday said they would resist any attempts to hinder the present caretaker government announced electoral roadmap.

"A derailed train has been put on the line again. We will have to work together so that the train does not derail again and can reach its destination on time. We will be united so that none can derail the train from the lines," said Kamal after a bilateral meeting with Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS) held at his Bailey Road home in the capital.

Briefing newsmen, the Gono Forum president said, "If anyone wants to obstruct the train, we will resist it."

Kamal hoped that the government would hold a really free and

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Sloan not allowed to hold press confce as he came as tourist

UNB, Dhaka

The government did not allow international human rights lawyer William Sloan to hold press conference in Dhaka on February 22 as he came to Bangladesh on a tourist visa, a home ministry release yesterday said.

It said Sloan had told immigration officials on arrival at Zia International Airport on February 16 that he was very interested in seeing different paintings. As a tourist, it was only logical for him to see different paintings according to the country's law.

"But without doing that, Sloan, also president of Canada chapter of American Association of Jurists,

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Kazi Zafarullah indicted for extortion

UNB, Dhaka

A special tribunal yesterday indicted former Awami League lawmaker Kazi Zafarullah for extorting Tk 50 lakh from a businessman.

Zafarullah pleaded not guilty when Judge Shafiqul Alam read out the charge against him.

Businessman Gazi Golam Dastagir filed the case, complaining that the ex-MP had forced him into paying the money.

In another case, the same court indicted BNP leader and ward commissioner of Dhaka City Corporation, Chowdhury Alam, and his accomplice Rahmat Ali for extorting about Tk 23.94 crore from Bangabazar shopkeepers.

Sheikh Shahjahan, president of shopkeepers' association, filed the case, alleging that Chowdhury Alam and his accomplice extorted the money as toll from 2001 through 2005.

The accused pleaded not guilty when the charge was read out to them.

Both the cases will go to trial on February 28.

HIDING WEALTH Arrest warrant against Shahjahan Omar, family

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday issued arrest warrants against former state minister for law barrister Shahjahan Omar, his wife Mehjabin Farzana Omar and their son Adnan Omar in a case filed for concealing information in their wealth statements.

After scrutinising the case docket and other relevant documents, Judge Mohammad Azizul Haque of the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court took the charges against the three into cognisance and passed the order.

The court also directed the authorities concerned to send the copies of the arrest warrants to respective addresses of the accused. The court fixed March 2 for the next hearing of the case.

On February 20, Deputy

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4 MONTHS LEFT TO COP RECRUITMENT

Job remains half-done for red tape

SHARIFUL ISLAM

Although the government decided to recruit 13,202 police personnel in 2006-08 fiscal years, only half the target joined the force due to bureaucratic red tape with the deadline expiring in four months.

The cabinet committee on law and order in 2006 approved an organogram to create posts and recruit 30,459 police personnel between the ranks of additional inspector general to constable in phases in five fiscal years.

According to the new organogram, 6,497 police personnel were supposed to be recruited in 2006-07FY and 6,705 others in

2007-08FY. The government in two phases has already recruited 6,968 personnel but recruitment of 6,234 remains stalled.

Police Headquarters insiders said the government made the decision considering serious manpower crisis in the force and aiming at providing more services to the people.

"The objectives of the recruitment could not be fulfilled due to unusual delay by the ministries concerned in approving the recruitment," said a top police official asking not to be named.

Though the police HQ gave prompt and necessary reply to all queries from the establishment

and finance ministries, some files for recruitment in different units remain stalled.

Even the finance division of the finance ministry expressed its "inability" to create 157 posts for the proposed Traffic, Driving and Peacekeeping School.

"We have reminded the ministry officials concerned of the necessity of creating 157 posts for the proposed school. But it seems they have turned a deaf ear to it," said an HQ source.

The source added that files for recruiting 803 police personnel in different units as part of recruitment of 6,497 in 2006-07FY are still

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Mahbub Jamil appointed head of reconstituted Biman board

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday reconstituted the Biman board of directors and appointed Special Assistant to the Chief Adviser Mahbub Jamil as its head to bring efficiency and dynamism in the activities of the national flag carrier.

The other members of the 10-member board are: civil aviation and tourism secretary, secretary of the finance division, director of Dhaka University Institute of Business Administration, Editor of The Bangladesh Monitor Kazi Wahidul Alam, President of International Chamber of Commerce and Industry Bangladesh Mahbubur Rahman, assistant chief of air force (operation and training), engineer-in-chief of Bangladesh Army, and

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The coastguard along with the army recovers land on the Shitalakhya near Kanchpur Bridge in Dhaka yesterday. Sand traders had encroached on the river, filling a section of it with sand.

Pak Taliban ready for talks with new govt

3 troops, 2 militants killed in fresh violence

AFP, Peshawar

Taliban militants are ready for peace talks with Pakistan's new government, a rebel spokesman said Sunday, after opposition parties trounced President Pervez Musharraf's allies in elections.

But the spokesman quoted Taliban warlord Baitullah Mehsud - who is accused by Pakistani officials of masterminding the slaying of ex-PM Benazir Bhutto - as warning the incoming administration not to take them on.

The statement comes amid concerns in Washington about what the victory of Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the party of former premier Nawaz Sharif in Monday's vote means for the "war on terror".

"The Taliban movement welcomes the victory of anti-Musharraf political parties in the election and announces its willingness to enter into negotiations with them for bringing peace in the restive tribal area," Taliban spokesman Maulvi Omar said, quoting a

statement by Mehsud.

"Taliban are ready for negotiations with the political parties as long as they do not re-impose war on them. If they do so, then Taliban will continue their activities against them," Omar told journalists in Peshawar by telephone.

The PPP and Sharif's party agreed on Thursday to form a coalition but are still hammering out their policies on the future of Musharraf, a key US ally, and on how they will deal with mounting Islamic extremism.

Hundreds of people have died in months of clashes with Taliban militants in Pakistan's tribal regions near the Afghan border, while the country has been hit by a wave of suicide attacks over the past year.

The most high-profile bombing killed Bhutto at a political rally on December 27. The Pakistani government said Mehsud orchestrated the killing and accused him of links to al-Qaeda, but he has denied all involvement.

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JP (Manju) demands polls under nat'l govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jatiya Party (JP-Manju) yesterday demanded holding the polls under the supervision of a 'national government' comprising of all political parties, except the anti-liberation war elements, to make the election acceptable to all.

The present caretaker government will not be able to conduct a free and fair election, the JP leaders said.

"The next election would be acceptable to all if it is held under a national government, consisting of all patriotic political parties and

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Aman transferred punitively to N'Ganj Jail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Convict Aman Ullah Aman, also a former state minister, was shifted to Narayanganj Jail punitively yesterday from Dhaka Central Jail for violating the jail code.

Deputy Inspector General (DIG-Prisons) Maj Shamsul Haider Siddique told The Daily Star last night, "We have sent Aman Ullah Aman to Narayanganj Jail this evening punitively and suspended jail guard Aminul Islam for negligence in duty."

He added that the jail

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Hannan Shah ready to sit with reformists

UNB, Dhaka

BNP chairperson's adviser Brig Gen (ret'd) Hannan Shah said he is ready to sit with the reformist group without any pre-condition and hoped for forging unity in BNP.

"I am positive about unity. I've taken the initiative not alone, I've taken all with me for this effort," he told news agency UNB yesterday night over the phone.

But he would not say when they are meeting with the reformist group headed by Saifur Rahman.

"There will be no pre-condition. We are hopeful of sorting out differences when we meet. They will

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PRICE CONTROL

Commerce adviser admits govt failure, pledges steps

UNB, Dhaka

Commerce Adviser Dr Hossain Zillur Rahman yesterday admitted the government's failure in controlling prices of essentials and pledged to check the unsteady rise in prices, which is not consistent with the international market.

"We admit our failure, but we won't remain silent. We'll continue efforts to control the unsteady rise of prices," he told reporters after a meeting at the commerce ministry on review of prices.

He considered the situation as a cause for concern amid difficult price situation in the international market.

The adviser considered the day's meeting as informal and preparatory ahead of a scheduled meeting today to discuss the issue with the stakeholders, including importers of essential items.

He said the prices of essentials would rise in the local market consistent with the prices in international market, but the prices should not go up irrationally.

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Some EC rules to help black money holders

Say LDF leaders

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Left Democratic Front (LDF) leaders yesterday said many people have raised questions about the neutrality of the Election Commission (EC) as it is trying to impose some undemocratic rules in the name of registering political parties.

The EC has been proposing some rules which would actually help black money holders and criminals to play a part in the parliamentary elections, the LDF leaders said at a meeting at

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Suicide bomber kills 40 pilgrims in Iraq

AFP, Hilla

A suicide bomber blew himself up amid a crowd of Shia pilgrims south of Baghdad yesterday, killing at least 40 people, police and medical officials told AFP.

At least 60 people were also wounded in the blast in the town of Iskandariyah, said Karim Al-Tamimi, a police lieutenant from the province of Babil.

"At around 3:00 pm, when pilgrims were eating their lunch inside the tent, a bomber blew himself up amid the crowd," said Tamimi.

Mohammed Al-Zaidi, of Babil province state health office, gave

the same toll and said that at least 25 of those wounded were seriously injured.

A US military official confirmed the attack, but put the initial death toll at 25.

"The suicide bomber was wearing an explosives vest who detonated his explosives outside the Hateen Apartments, which is outside of Iskandariyah," the official added.

The apartments are located on the route between the towns of Iskandariyah and Musayyib in the region known as the "triangle of death."

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Iran vows reprisals against any new UN sanctions

AFP, Tehran

Iran vowed on Saturday to retaliate if the UN Security Council imposes new sanctions after the latest UN atomic agency report on its nuclear activities spoke of progress.

And ahead of a meeting of major powers on Monday to discuss a new draft package of sanctions, Iranian leaders insisted that more UN resolutions would be pointless and without legal basis.

"They could spend 100 years passing resolutions but it wouldn't change anything," Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said in an interview with state television.

"We have prepared plans if they continue. Any country that leads

the way, European or non-European, must know that we will take firm reprisals," Ahmadinejad said.

He insisted it was "in the interest" of the world's major powers to change their attitude towards Iran, adding that Iran was "not joking."

He dubbed the report by the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) as a "historic victory of Iran in its greatest confrontation with the oppressive powers since the Islamic revolution" of 1979.

Javad Vaidi, deputy head of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, said that "if the Security Council wants to issue a resolution it will be legally and technically

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Hillary turns up heat to rescue White House bid

AFP, Washington

The US presidential race turned more aggressive yesterday after Hillary Clinton launched a scathing attack on Democratic rival Barack Obama in a bid to restore her front-runner status.

After a day of denying that a series of 11 straight losses to Obama left her campaign teetering on the edge of defeat, Clinton changed to a sharper tone and went on the offensive, accusing him of borrowing Republican tactics to criticise her health care and trade positions.

"Shame on you, Barack Obama," Hillary Clinton said Saturday during a campaign rally in Ohio, which along with the southern state of Texas holds key Democratic nominating contests on March 4.

"It is time you ran a campaign consistent with your messages in

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Garbage is littered all over Hatirjheel near Sonargaon Hotel in the capital, polluting the water and spreading stench in the area. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR