a result of economic recession," the FBCCI president said.

"Already the ministries concerned have been directed to identify the problems that might be created following the world economic recession. After identifying the problems, government will chalk out plans and offer package programmes for the business sectors," the PM said, adds UNB.

Under the package programmes, the prime minister said, the business sectors will be given various facilities and incentives to keep the country's economy vibrant increasing the flow of export and import.

About the recent cancellation of Malaysian visas for Bangladeshi workers, she said the labour and foreign ministers would go to Kuala Lumpur to find out a solution to the prob-

If necessary, Hasina said, she ful manner herself would go to Malaysia and other countries to resolve the issues.

Assuring all of taking every possible measure in this regard, she said the government, at the same time, is focusing on creating new labour markets in the foreign countries.

The PM also informed the business leaders about some of her government's plans for the country's development.

She said the government is planning to activate Bhola power plant and special economic zone in the country's comparatively "poor and neglected" districts to expedite trade and business to create more employment opportuni-

Hasina further informed that the government has a plan to set up hydropower plants in areas abound with rivers and

To popularize the solar energy system, taxes on the solar system equipment have already been withdrawn, she added.

The prime minister suggested the industrialists to set up small power stations at their own factories saying that it will help to reduce the scarcity of electricity in the industries and even in the adjacent localities.

To increase navigability of the country's waterways, rivers will be dredged gradually, she said adding that the govern-

Bashundhara City FROM PAGE 1

remain opened to public today, two days after the top six floors of the largest mall-cum-office turned into wreckage.

"At present it is not possible to assess the actual amount of loss but it might be around Tk 200 crore" General manager Maj (retd) Kamrul Mehedi said. Joint Secretary (Police)

Iqbal Khan Chowdhury told The Daily Star, "We have asked complex authorities to provide a list of materials available on the floors that caught fire so that we can verify whether there was anything inflamma-

We are also investigating the causes why the fire lift did not work as it was supposed to work even without electricity", he said.

The lift was not for ordinary uses but they had been using it for the VIPs and other purposes, he added.

EU ambassadors FROM PAGE 16

opposition in parliament, like the ruling party, is considered "vitally important" in parliamentary democracy.

He said a delegation of the European Union will come to Dhaka on March 24 to release the final report of the EU election observation mission.

Former foreign secretary Shamser Mobin Chowdhury told reporters that Bangladesh has multi-faceted relations with the EU, particularly in economic cooperation. "BNP will extend all cooperation to strengthen the relationship."

BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain, Former Adviser for Foreign Affairs Reaz Rahman and EU Councillor Charles Whitley were present during the meet-

Ex-MP Gias

FROM PAGE 16'

Giasuddin had surrendered before a Narayanganj court on February 25, 2007 and was sent to jail on the same day.

On April 10, 2007, General Secretary of Bangladesh Lime extortion case with Siddhirganj Police Station in Narayanganj against treatment in Thailand, is Giasuddin.

Giasuddin in connivance with and concealing assets inforsome others had threatened the officials of the association and realised the money through vouchers and tokens on different dates.

charge sheet to the court in the ment residence. He was later

case, sources said. in a number of criminal cases on charges of corruption and money laundering, was shown arrested in this extortion case April 11, 2007.

most of the cases.

port to fully reactivate it. She also asked the business leaders to invest in the proposed economic zones of the

capture huge market abroad for organic foods and vegetables. "Try to exploit the potentials." She thanked the businessmen for reducing the price of edible oil and requested them, it

The government attaches equal importance to both public and private sectors for overall development of the

Hasina also thanked the business leaders for their role in holding the December 29 polls in free and fair manner and for standing beside the government to resolve the February 25-26 Pilkhana carnage in a peace-

The FBCCI leaders highly praised the PM's "wise and farsighted" steps to resolve the BDR carnage quickly and

The leaders observed that the prime minister's February 26 speech to the nation had played an outstanding role to disarm the "killers" which saved lives of many army officers and their family members.

Hasina mourned the death of "well educated and talented" army officers and civilians in the BDR carnage.

The prime minister categorically said she does not want to see any more conflicting situation, which is immensely harmful to the country's image as well as trade and investment.

Recognising the achievements of armed forces and police department's in the UN peacekeeping missions, she said that if any more conflicting situation takes place in the country, the fame earned by the armed forces and police will be

PM's Secretary Mollah Mahbubul Hoque Shakil were present at the meeting.

Judiciary

FROM PAGE 1

on February 25, as they were not ratified within the stipulated time limit.

tabled Code of Criminal Procedure (Amendment) Bill 2009 to enact laws necessary for continuation of the separa-

Last week, a High Court bench ordered the government to explain by March 19 (administration) of the mall under what legal authority the judicial magistrates are functioning now that the ordinances separating the judi-

> asked the government to explain why it did not have the ordinances ratified. OTHER EXTENSIONS

> The bill seeking revival of the Upazila Parishad Act 1998 will approved by the legislature.

> standing committee on the LGRD ministry to place report on the bill.

The upazila parishads

promulgated by the caretaker government lost effect on February 25 as parliament did

The House yesterday gave the standing committee on the law ministry two more weeks also for submitting reports on Human Rights Commission Bill, Money Loan Court (amendment) Bill and the Supreme Court's Judges (remuneration and privileges)

On proposal of Rashed Khan Menon, chief of the parliamentary standing committee on the education ministry, parliament stretched by two weeks the time to place reports on Bangladesh University of Professionals Bill and Begum Rokeya University

Koko's parole

Rukhsana Hasin.

Koko, now undergoing accused in three cases. One is It was stated in the case that for amassing illegal wealth

released on parole July 17, Giasuddin, who is accused 2008 since he fell ill while in custody.

He afterwards went to Bangkok for treatment and eral times.

Security

FROM PAGE 16

over the last couple of weeks with a cautionary message that the local people are likely to attack the power stations after experiencing loadshedding, officials said.

Government may cut gas supply from fertiliser factories for use in power generation while maintaining power supply for rural irrigation. The government may also fix 7:00 pm instead of existing 8:00 pm for shutting down shops.

Tuku said the government already has decided to ensure uninterrupted power supply from 11:00 pm to 7:00 am every day for irrigation.

Replying to a query, he gave assurance of developing the power sector within a year to deal with the power crisis.

"We can't make any major improvement overnight. But the government would make every efforts to improve the power sector at the earliest possible time," he said blaming the BNP-Jamaat alliance government for the situation.

HC directive

FROM PAGE 1

general of the fire service to prepare a list of equipment necessary to fight fires in such buildings and submit it to the

Three Supreme Court (SC) lawyers filed the petition as a public interest litigation (PIL) on behalf of the Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh (HRPB) organisation, following the massive fire at Bashundhara City Complex in the capital city on Friday.

They challenged the government's 'inaction' in arranging fire-fighting equipment necessary to save the lives of people as well as prop-

The petitioners are Asaduzzaman Siddique, Sarwar Ahad Chowdhury and Md Aklas Uddin Bhuiyan.

Home secretary, finance secretary, food and disaster management secretary and director general and director of the Fire Service have been made respondents in the petition.

The petitioners stated, quoting some news items published in the daily newspapers, that due to absence of such equipment to fight fires, authorities failed to control the fire at Bashundhara shopping complex's upper levels from the 14th floor to 20th

Consequently seven people died and property worth millions of taka was destroyed.

The petition also stated that a few years ago a fire at the Ntv Bahaban at Karwan Bazar caused huge damage and at that time also the fire service authority did not have sufficient equipment to reach the top storeys of the building.

The authorities concerned are not aware of the problem and have limitations in terms of manpower and fire fighting equipment, it said, adding that under these circumstances it is very important to arrange sufficient fire fighting equipment for the fire service.

After hearing a brief submission from the petitioners' counsel Manzill Murshid, the HC bench of Justice ABM Khairul Haque and Justice Md Abdul Hye fixed Sunday next for further hearing of the petition.

Malaysia

FROM PAGE 1

stringent vetting process by the authorities, a Home Ministry official told the Star newspaper.

"Those requesting for foreign labour have to prove that they have made the effort to employ locals," the ministry's senior deputy secretarygeneral Raja Azahar Raja Abdul Manap was quoted as saying.

"If they can prove it, then they will get the clearance," he

A ministry spokesman was not immediately available to confirm the report.

In January, Malaysia banned the hiring of new foreigners in the manufacturing and services sectors after a report forecast 45,000 Malaysians would lose their

jobs in the next few months. And last week, the government cancelled work visas issued to 55,000 Bangladeshi workers after unions said the situation for Malaysians was bleak enough without additional foreign manpower being brought in.

Malaysia is one of Asia's largest importers of labour and has an estimated 2.2 million foreign workers, who are the mainstay of the plantation and manufacturing sec-

However, the government has become concerned about the ramifications of having such a large migrant workforce and periodically tries to reduce it.

Manpower sector

Bangladeshi workers. These bans had no link with current financial downtrend," says a recruiting agent.

Saudi Arabia, which is home to around 20 lakh Bangladeshis, significantly reduced recruitment from Bangladesh in March. It used to recruit 5,000 to 7,000 workers a month in the previous years, but the number has come down to 1,000-1,500

lakh Bangladeshis in Kuwait, which used to recruit monthly around 3,000 workers, but hired only 319 Bangladeshis throughout last year. On the other hand, by

while the number was around 1,300 earlier. Businesses say when international racketeers dominate the recruitment process workers get exploited and engaged

Recruitment bans by the three Gulf countries were surely linked to such reasons and negligence of our foreign missions," a recruiting agent

in crime that annoys the host

"As buy-and-sale of job approvals brings huge profit, agents [unlicensed brokers] buy more job approvals or visas for more profit," says a manpower broker in Malaysia.

visas by Malaysia is not only for economic reason, he adds. Many Bangladeshis were left Morshed, a migration expert.

unemployed and they stayed in the open, while many others were kept in 'go-downs' in Malaysia. These annoyed the

Malaysian government, he About unemployment of Bangladeshis in Singapore, a Singaporean rights activist said, "It is not for recession, but because they were brought as extra workers."

When Malaysia froze intake of Bangladeshis on October 3 in 2007, the country's then home minister Datuk Seri Mohd Radzi Sheikh Ahmad commented, "The presence of too many agents from Bangladesh in Malaysia, who used Malaysians as subagents, and the huge amount of money involved, is not a healthy sign, it is not good for the country."

Kuwait's Labour Minister Sabah Khaled AL-Hamd Al Sabah in an occasion in 2007 expressed annoyance over unscrupulous agencies and said they were facing problems in recruiting labour from Bangladesh.

Nasser al-Abdali, head of the Kuwaiti Society for the Development of Democracy, said visa trading in Kuwait was worth about three billion dollars annually and charged that officials facilitated the illegal trade, reported the Arab Times on August 24 last year.

"We are concerned over recruiting workers, but not making sure that they get good salaries and are not exploited," says Sakiul Millat

Govt plans

returned home from Malaysia yesterday as they were not employed and paid, said an official at Zia International Airport.

Meanwhile, labour wings of both Awami League and BNP yesterday requested Malaysia Trade Union Congress to take immediate steps to protect the rights and interest of Bangladeshi workers in that country

Replying to a query, Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain said the allegations against high commission officials concerned in Kuala Lumpur will be investigated and actions would be taken accordingly.

He said the government is also considering compensation to unemployed workers who have returned home.

Foreign Minister Dr Dipu Moni and Mosharraf are likely to visit Malaysia on March 29-30 to thrash out the current labour problems there. "If need be, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will also go to

Malaysia...We are hopeful that Malaysia will review its decision of cancelling visas," he Mosharraf does not see anything unusual in the return of 300-400 workers a day as

there are 62 lakh Bangladeshi

workers in various countries of

the world. "Nothing has happened that can cause panic, he said. In a joint letter to Malaysia Trade Union Congress President G Rajasekaran, Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Sramik Dal and Jatiya Sramik League said, "We would request you and your esteemed organisation, which is wellknown for protecting human

ing people, to look into the Sramik League General Secretary Roy Ramesh Chandra and Sramik Dal President Nazrul Islam Khan

and trade union rights of work-

signed the letter. In the letter, the two leaders expressed concerns over the facts that hundreds of

Sangsad talks FROM PAGE 1 suffers from lax security, then

where is our security?" the BNP lawmaker asked. Participating in the discussion, Awami league (AL) lawmaker Tofail Ahmed said different attempts have been

made on Sheikh Hasina's life in the past. "Against this background, she said grenades and bullets still haunt her," the veteran politician said.

Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, deputy leader of the House said the life of the prime minister has come under threat as her government is taking steps for the trial of war criminals of 1971. "We must hold the trial of

war criminals," the deputy leader of the House said. BNP lawmaker MK Anwar, meanwhile, protested the demolition of murals of late president Ziaur Rahman at

Chittagong airport.

times in the past.

Opposition Chief Whip Zainul Abdin Farroque demanded a discussion on suspension of the Independence Day parade, terming it unprecedented. Deputy Speaker Shawkat Ali, who was presiding over the sitting, however pointed out

the Independence Day parade

had been suspended several

handed.

They said hundreds of Bangladeshi workers who arrived in Kuala Lumpur with valid legal documents were not allowed to go to their workplaces and were detained by the immigration authority. Some of them managed to return to Dhaka and described their immense sufferings under custody.

20 stolen

FROM PAGE 16

during the mutiny inside the neadquarters. During an investigation by The Daily Star, Biplob gave

dubious information, while his parents also tried to conceal their identity. According to eyewitness Fahad, Biplob, who was also a former BDR cook, was in uniform while handing him the

Biplob claims to have received the mobile and camera from a mutineer when he was standing outside the gate along with hundreds of locals at

took the cellphone and camera to his place. As soon as his mother Minu Ara opened the phone, it began ringing and she realised it belonged to an army officer currently under attack.

'My brother is a mutineer and can shoot you dead any moment. I give you two minutes to surrender the cellphone and the camera," Minu quoted Kamal as shouting to her.

We are considering sending him to Task Force for Interrogation this time as we have found an eyewitness to Biplob's involvement with the mutineers," says a Rab official involved with recovery of the

rogation Biplob identified some mutineers seeing video footages and later Rab released him on condition that he would help them trap at least 15 muti-The investigators were tight-

lipped about the other three

tracked down in connection with the cellphones. Once we trap the current users of the killed army officers' cellphones we'll have impor tant information leading to identification of the muti-

pened to the rest of the cellphones. We didn't find those. The cellphones might be lost when the officers were killed or the two rejected candidates taken away by the mutineers or could file appeal to the EC by destroyed," he adds.

BDR MUTINY

2 more jawans held in Ctg

The Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested two more BDR members yesterday at Satkania Bangladesh Rifles Training School (RTS) in Chittagong on suspicion of their involvement in the mutiny and massacre at the RTS on February 26.

Meanwhile, on the information from the intelligence department, Indian Border Security Force (BSF) launched combing operations and imposed curfew along the border areas. They suspect that BDR mutineers had been escaping to India for hideouts. Our correspondent from

Bandarban reports: The arrested BDR members, sepoy Samedul and sepoy Yunus, were taken for interrogation to Rab-7 headquarters in Chittagong. Rab sources said in the

primary interrogation, they found involvement of the suspects in the mutiny and massacre at RTS. A total of 11 BDR members were arrested at RTS on March

11. The sepoys arrested include Dulal, Ferdous, Saiful, Sarwar, Ata Ullah, Atiquzzaman, Ziaur Rahman and Abu Ferdous. A correspondent from Benapole reports: The BSF members are executing search

operations in their territory

and imposed curfew in the

bordering areas from 6:00pm to 5:00am. Sources said after the arrest of the two mutineers from Satkhira, the BSF at 24-Parganas (north) intensified their vigilance. Moreover, the security and intelligence activities have also been beefed up

RU violence

along the border areas.

FROM PAGE 16

dwellers seemed to have come to a standstill while many small businesses started sliding following closure of all higher educational institu-

Earlier on Friday, sporadic clashes between BCL and ICS men on RU campus left ICS leader Nomani killed and 100 people injured. All higher educational

institutions in the city, including RU, have been closed for an indefinite period one after another following the RU

Eden College

assured us of it but the admis-

sion committee chairman

FROM PAGE 16 "We demanded 300 seats as ruling political party quota. A source of the college principal

refused our demand," said Tania Sultana Happy, organising secretary of BCL Eden college unit. A number of BCL leaders went up to the college office

and threatened the admission

committee not to continue the

admission process until their

demand is met, sources said. However, College Vice-Principal Prof Saiyada Khairunnesa said that they would resume the admission

process in couple of days. Budget

FROM PAGE 16 session in consultation with

the Leader of the House. "We, however, discussed two proposals. One is to run the current session until March 23 or 24 and then it will be prorogued. If the current session is adjourned on March 23, the House will have to be convened by May 22," the

deputy speaker said. On another proposal, Shawkat said the current session would be adjourned on March 23 or 24 and it will resume after a week again and continue until first week of April. "If it is so, the next session will begin in the first week of June," Shawkat said referring to the constitutional obligation that says time gap between one session to another will not exceed 60 days.

Reserved seats

FROM PAGE 16 as the EC found her "telephone bill defaulter."

Besides, Jatiya Party candidate Marina Rahman's nomination was declared invalid as the commission "did not find her proposer's signature authentic," she also said.

The EC declared valid the

nominations of all of the five

BNP-nominated candidates.

After the two rejections, the number of valid candidates stood at 44, one short of the 45 seats reserved for the women members of parliament. The returning officer said

Sharif defies 'arrest'

FROM PAGE 1 Sharif denounced the order as illegal and later left the house in a convoy of vehicles packed with chanting, flagwaving supporters, headed for a downtown rally that had

Mobs accompanying the swelling convoy smashed the windows of buses parked along the route. Others torched tires, sending plumes of black smoke into the blue sky over a usually bustling boulevard littered with stones and empty tear gas shells.

moments," Sharif told supporters before he climbed into his car. "I tell every Pakistani youth that this is not the time to stay home; come and save me."

Rao Iftikhar, a senior government official, said authorities reconsidered the restrictions on Sharif to allow him to address the rally capital. and return home afterward.

Earlier Punjab Police also placed under house arrest Jamat-e-Islami (JI) chief Qazi Hussain Ahmed and the leader of Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaaf Imran Khan, Geo News reported.

According to informed sources, overnight orders included names of other political leaders like Shahbaz Sharif, Hamza Shahbaz, Zulfigar Khosa, Qazi Hussain which Lahore is the capital. Ahmed and Liaquat Baloch.

prevent it from being an bring the government to a effective ally in the fight standstill and present a against insurgents in target to terrorists.

vehicles, police said. party supporters had demandforashake-up of the planned to gather near judiciary. Lahore's main court complex before heading toward state a group of independsit-in front of Parliament, in Musharraf.

major roads on the edge of the city, and riot police took corruption charges against up positions outside the him and his wife, slain forrailway station and govern-

Supreme Court disqualified the Sharif brothers from elected office, over convictions dating back to an earlier chapter in Pakistan's turbulent political history. Zardari compounded the

Protesters pelted some of

the hundreds of riot police

ringing the area with rocks,

triggering running clashes.

An Associated Press reporter

saw one officer led away with

tear gas, scattering the

crowd, and beat several

stragglers with batons, only

for the demonstrators to

return with fresh supplies of

of other protest leaders went

underground to dodge their

own detention orders.

Iftikhar said they had been

issued for the head of

Pakistan's main Islamist

party and cricketer star-

turned-politician Imran

police commandos wearing

flak jackets and armed with

assault rifles apparently

searching for Shahbaz in

Rawalpindi, just south of the

Television images showed

Shahbaz Sharif and a host

Police repeatedly fired

a head wound.

sticks and stones.

crisis by dismissing the Sharifs' administration in Punjab, Pakistan's biggest and richest province, of

nite sit-in in Islamabad a move officials say would On Saturday, after US Suspected militants Secretary of State Hillary Clinton spoke to both

Lawyers and opposition the move but stuck by its

Zardari refuses to rein-

ent-minded judges fired by

mer leader Benazir Bhutto. Sceptics suspect Sharif of tions, from which he and Islamist parties would likely

FROM PAGE 16 and international observers

from entering the conflict However the UN human rights chief Navi Pillay on adding that both sides may be

guilty of war crimes. Sri Lankan leaders rejected the charges as "un-

substantiated.' expects to soon end the guer-

Tamil homeland.

have stopped at a makeshift hospital in Sri Lanka's war zone because of a lack of basic supplies such as anes-

Meanwhile, all surgeries

sticks were being used to brace fractured limbs. "We don't have bandages or gauze, we tear up bed sheets to bind the wounds and use palm sticks to sup-

Varatharajah said. Four civilians died in the hospital Saturday from injuries, while 48 others were

pleading for supplies.

awaiting treatment, he said.

sands of civilians caught in have committed war crimes. the war zone has become a matter of international consioner for human rights said Friday that she believed 2,800 is unsubstantiated and based on figures given by the Tamil

separate state in the north and east of the island, are using the civilians as human

was not possible to verify the reports independently because reporters are barred from the coastal war zone. UN human rights chief Navi Pillay warned Friday that civilian casualties could reach "catastrophic" proportions if the two sides do not

miles (35 square kilometres) on Sri Lanka's northeast But the government has rejected the calls for a ceasefire in its drive to capture the

civil war. Human Rights Minister Mahinda Samarasinghe said Pillay's report failed to tell the used for bandages, while rebels to let civilians in the

area leave. "If the high commissioner for human rights is concerned about these civilians, then the high commissioner must call on the LTTE to let them go," he

not comment on charges by The fate of tens of thou- Pillay that the rebels may

> The government has said repeatedly that it does not target civilians. The rebels have fought

marginalisation at the hands of governments dominated by the Sinhalese majority.

Businesses ask

FROM PAGE 1

ment will dredge the Mongla country. Hasina said Bangladesh can

possible, to reduce the prices of other daily essentials as well.

country, the PM said.

peacefully.

harmed. Wahiduzzaman, Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad and Deputy Press Secretary

Later, the government

ciary are not in force. In a suo moto rule, it also

take two more weeks to be The House yesterday extended by two weeks the time for the parliamentary

constituted through January 22 polls have yet to begin functioning due to absence of the laws required. The upazila ordinance

not ratify it by that day.

FROM PAGE 16 Manufacturers' Association announcement signed by Abu Taleb filed a Tk 4.15 crore Senior Assistance Secretary

mation from ACC, one for extortion and another for graft in Gatco deal. On September 3, 2007, Koko and Khaleda were Police have submitted arrested from their canton-

has been there since. The government had earlier He got bail from the HC in extended Koko's parole sev-

FROM PAGE 1

There are now around 2

partial ban, Bahrain also recruited not more than 1,100 workers monthly last year,

countries. observes.

The cancellation of 55,000

Bangladeshi workers were either arrested in Malaysia or sent back to Bangladesh while a huge number of workers were thrown out of employment without notice and are being forced to return home empty-

cellphone and a camera from inside the gate 5 of the headquarters at 4:00pm on February

11:00am the same day. He claims he handed the cellphone and camera to Fahad for taking it to his (Biplob's) house soon after receiving those. Instead, Fahad "mistakenly

She said Biplob's elde brother Kamal showed up and demanded the devices, but she denied handing those over to

At this stage, Biplob appeared and claimed that he purchased those, she added. Rab picked up Biplob for the second time for interrogation suspecting his involvement with the mutiny on Wednesday.

cellphone. During the first phase inter-

neers," says a top-level Rab investigator. "We don't know what hap-

STAR REPORT

already turned violent.

"These are the decisive

Pakistan is calling you to

the crisis will further destabilize the shaky the year-old government and

Afghanistan. attacked a transport terminal in northwestern Pakistan Zardari and Nawaz Sharif by used to supply Nato troops in telephone, the government Afghanistan before dawn on announced it would appeal Sunday and torched dozens the Supreme Court ruling in of containers and military the coming days.

Islamabad to stage a mass defiance of a government To thwart them, authorities parked trucks across

ment buildings. Still, several thousands hoping to force early elecflag-waving demonstrators pushed past police barri-

Lankan troops kill

Friday said some 2,800 civilians had been killed in the fighting since January 20,

The military says it has surrounded the Tiger rebels in a narrow strip of land and rillas' decades-long armed struggle for an independent

thetic and blood bags, the top government health official there said Sunday. Dr. Thurairaja Varatharajah said the situation was so bad that bed sheets were being

port fractures. We are in need of a quick supply,"

cern. The UN high commishave died since Jan. 20, a ent state for the Tamil minor-

rebels, who are fighting for a been killed in the fighting.

The political turmoil began last month when the

The brothers then threw Washington worries that their support behind plans by lawyers to stage an indefi-

Sharif's party welcomed

Many observers suspect Zardari fears the judges could challenge a pact signed by Musharraf that quashed long-standing

cades to reach the courts. profit.

shields in a desperate attempt to avoid defeat. The rebels could not be reached for comment, and it

> suspend fighting. She said 150,000 to 180,000 people remain trapped in the rebel area estimated at 13.5 square

shrinking rebel enclave and end the island's 25-year-old

told reporters Saturday. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam countered Sunday with a statement that called on the United Nations to investigate the military's treatment of civilians. The Varatharajah said he sent a statement, posted on the proreport to the government rebel Web site TamilNet, did

since 1983 for an independ-

number the government says ity, which suffered decades of The government says the More than 70,000 people have