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## Son of ex-Bangladesh PM arrested in corruption crackdown

**DHAKA** — The influential son of Bangladesh's outgoing Prime Minister was detained early yesterday as the military-backed interim government intensified its anti-graft crackdown, officials said.

Security forces swooped on the residence of Mr Tareque Rahman, son of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) leader Khaleda Zia and slain former President Ziaur Rahman, in the early hours, police said.

Mr Rahman has been widely accused of graft in the country's media and was described by one critic as "the epicentre of crime and corruption".

His arrest was one of a string of detentions in overnight raids which also saw the home of Mr Sheikh Hasina Wajed, leader of the main opposition Awami League, searched.

Mr Rahman had been tipped as a successor to his mother, whose party led a coal-

ition government until last October when it handed power to an interim government tasked with holding elections.

He holds the post of senior joint secretary of the BNP and analysts have said he was being groomed for the leadership.

Four other politicians and a national newspaper editor were also arrested. They were the latest in a series of about 40 arrests in the anti-corruption crackdown. — **AFP**



HEIR: Mr Rahman was being groomed to lead the ruling party. — **AFP**



## GLOBAL ROUNDUP

### BUSINESS CARD WITH THE MIDAS TOUCH

A Japanese firm has come up with something that would impress at a first meeting — a name card made of gold.

Mitsubishi Materials is selling gold business cards of 99.99 per cent purity, *Reuters* reported. Each card costs 10,000 yen (\$131). "There is very little difference between this and the usual business card, they both feel about the same," said a spokeswoman for the precious and base metals firm. "The main difference is that the colour of this one is gold."

The card is aimed at the gift market, such as for people who have been promoted or are retiring, *Reuters* reported.

### US ARRESTS FORMER NAVY MAN FOR SPYING FOR AL QAEDA

A former United States Navy sailor has been arrested for supplying a pro-Al Qaeda website with information on US ship movements and vulnerabilities.

Hassan Abujihad, formerly known as Paul R Hall, was arrested in Arizona on charges that he had supplied information on a US Navy battle group involved in missions against Al Qaeda and the Taliban to London-based *Azzam Publications* and the *Azzam.com* website, justice authorities said. Abujihad will be transferred to Connecticut where he will be prosecuted. — **AFP**

### DAUGHTER OF RAJIV GANDHI'S KILLERS TO BE ALLOWED INTO INDIA

A court in India has ruled that the daughter of a couple jailed over the killing of former Premier Rajiv Gandhi should be allowed into the country to visit them, the *BBC* said. The Tamil Nadu state government has four weeks to issue an entry permit to the 15-year-old.

Megara was allowed to leave India as a child. She has seen her parents once, last year. Her father, Murugan, is on death row for helping plot the 1991 assassination. Her mother, Nalini, is serving a life term for the same crime. Mr Gandhi was opposition leader when he died. He was killed while campaign-

ing in Tamil Nadu for a general election.

### PANDA SEEKS LIMB, LOVE LIFE

An animal research centre in China has appealed to world experts for help to fashion an artificial leg for a panda that has lost a limb — along with its sex life, *Reuters* reported.

In December, a female panda was injured in a fight among pandas in Shaanxi province. Its life was saved at an animal rescue centre but it lost two-thirds of its front left leg. It now needs a fake limb because "without her left paw, her loss of balance has directly affected her love life," the *Beijing News* reported, citing the centre's staff.

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## Allowing parents to sue their kids

Why law in India won't benefit elderly who need support

TOM SULLIVAN IN NEW DELHI  
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IN AN effort to combat the rising abuse and neglect of senior citizens, the Indian government has proposed radical plans to force children to support their parents or face fines and imprisonment.

More than 90 per cent of the elderly in India are not covered by a pension scheme. Older family members are traditionally cared for in "joint" families, with three generations living under one roof; elderly parents commonly sign over the family home to their children.

However, economic growth, increased migration and the breakdown of traditional family units has led to increasing numbers of senior citizens being forced from their homes or left in villages and towns to fend for themselves.

"There's been a growing acceptance in India over the last 10 years that old people are a burden," said Ms Nidhi Raj Kapoor of Help Age India, adding that nearly 80 million elderly Indians have no means of support beyond their families.

While activists welcome the proposed new law announced last month, which will give par-

ents the power to take their children to court, most argue that it will be difficult to enforce.

Fines of 5,000 rupees (\$172) and three months' jail could be imposed on children who fail to support their parents financially. But overloaded local courts lack the resources to handle cases and the stigma attached to publicising family conflicts is expected to make the law a paper tiger.

"We have spoken to many senior citizens about this and very few said they would go against their children," Ms Raj Kapoor said. "As it stands the law will not work but at least it gives the elderly some rights."

The Dignity Foundation in Mumbai runs a helpline and outreach programmes for the elderly and receives almost a hundred calls each week from distressed senior citizens who are being hounded by their children to sign over their property.

Last month the group rescued a 78-year-old abandoned by his daughter and son-in-law after they coaxed him into selling his home and moving in with them.

"They duped him out of his flat and 1.2 million rupees and then left him at a hotel," said Dr Sheilu Sreenivasan, director of the group. "Now he's in one of our homes without a penny to his name."

State support for the eld-



AT RISK: There are about 40 million vulnerable elderly people in India. — **AFP**

erly is virtually non-existent in India. Last year the state pension (which is only for the totally destitute) was doubled — to 200 rupees per month. According to Help Age India, there are fewer than 5,000 nursing homes, most of them privately run or charities, to cater for about 40 million vulnerable elderly people.

At a home for the destitute in the outskirts of Delhi, 75-year-old J P Jain is sceptical about the new law.

"How do you expect an old person in a home to find the money or energy to take their children to court?" he said, looking wistfully around his spartan surroundings.

While the new law may be unpopular among the elderly, experts believe it marks a seismic shift in Indian society and illustrates the government's increasing tendency to intervene in family affairs.

"It's recognition that the institution of the family is no longer sacred and protected in India, that things are changing," said Dr Renu Adlakha, a sociologist researching family and gender issues.

"Of course it would be an enormous step for parents to take their child to court," she added. "But the elderly will be forced to do it as there are huge tensions within families over money and property."

With 9-per-cent economic growth attracting more and more young people to leave home in search of jobs and accelerating the break up of traditional extended families, Dr Adlakha believes the Indian government's move is pre-emptive.

"It's an attempt to create a sort of social security for senior citizens," she said. "But it's also about the state washing its hands of the elderly."

## China takes swipe at US rights

**BEIJING** — China yesterday assailed the human cost of the United States' overseas wars in its annual riposte to Washington's criticism of Beijing's own record on human rights.

"The United States has lorded it over other countries by condemning their human rights practices while ignoring its own problems, which exposes its double standard ... on the human rights issue," said a report released by the State Council, China's Cabinet.

The alleged rights abuses cited in the report, titled *The Human Rights Record of the United States in 2006*, included massive civilian casualties in the Iraq conflict, violations of Geneva Conventions such as abuse of Iraqi prisoners and terror suspects,

## abuses around the globe

and the killings of unarmed civilians by US troops in Iraq.

China also pointed out nagging US problems with crime, gun control and poverty. It also cited the Bush administration's surveillance of private communications in the name of the war on terror.

China began issuing its report several years ago in retaliation for the annual US assessment of global human rights, which routinely singles out China as one of the world's worst violators.

The State Department's 2007 report, issued on Tuesday, accused China of stepping up the harassment and detention of journalists, writers, activists and defence lawyers, and tightening restrictions on freedom of speech, especially on the Internet. — **AFP**



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