

# India's training of Iranian military may dampen nuke deal: US lawmaker

AFF, Washington

India's alleged training of Iranian troops could dampen vital US Congress support for a bilateral landmark civilian nuclear deal, a ranking Democrat warned Thursday.

Tom Lantos, the top Democrat on the House of Representatives' powerful international relations committee scrutinizing the nuclear deal, expressed concern to visiting Indian Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran over New Delhi's training of the Iranian navy, the lawmaker's spokeswoman Lynne Weil told AFP.

"Congressman Lantos pointed out that episodes of conflict in relations between US and India, such as India's early wavering in its commitment to refer Iran to the UN Security Council and more recent concerns raised about Iranian troops receiving training from India will only undermine Congressional support for the deal," she said.

Reacting to the concerns, the Indian government said two Iranian naval ships with about 200 personnel were on a six-day "informal" visit to the southern Indian naval base in Kochi in March while on an annual sea training sortie in the Arabian Sea.

The port call was essentially "diplomatic-goodwill" and not part of any training package, said Venu Rajamony, spokesman for the Indian embassy in Washington.

He said the Iranian ships "interacted" with the Indian Navy as part of the visit, adding that activities included courtesy calls on Indian naval officers, navigational simula-

tion and recreational activities such as yachting.

Lantos and Saran discussed the US-Indian nuclear agreement in the larger context of bilateral relations "which they agreed are blossoming in many respects," Weil said.

But Lantos noted that "at a time when gestures from allies are significant — not symbolic gestures alone but substantive gestures — the Indian government should look for opportunities to make gestures that underscore the strength of the bilateral friendship," she said.

The India-US nuclear deal gives energy-starved India access to long-denied civilian nuclear technology in return for placing a majority of its nuclear reactors under international inspection.

For it to be effective, the US Congress has to amend the US Atomic Energy Act, which currently prohibits nuclear sales to countries that are not signatories of the Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

US lawmakers are reportedly sceptical about giving their mandatory approval to the deal as India has refused to sign the NPT and has developed nuclear weapons on its own.

Washington meanwhile is trying to rein in Iran's uranium enrichment activities amid suspicion that Tehran could be pursuing covert development of nuclear weapons.

On Wednesday, the UN Security Council in New York unanimously voted to give Iran 30 days to fall into line with long-running calls to abandon uranium enrichment.

India is treading a tightrope as it tries to firm up the civilian nuclear

deal with the United States and maintain its traditionally strong ties with neighbour Iran.

In February, India voted with 26 other nations to refer Iran to the UN Security Council amid charges by communists within the ruling Indian coalition that New Delhi's foreign policy was being dictated by Washington.

Saran warned Thursday of a setback in US-India ties if Congress refused to ratify the nuclear deal, clinched on March 2 by US President George W. Bush and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

"If this particular agreement does not go through, there is no doubt there will be, in terms of the expectation that has been created, in terms of the enthusiasm that has been created, there will be some falling back," Saran said when fielding questions on the deal at a Washington forum.

Saran, the top civil servant in the Indian foreign ministry, said inevitably the public focus of the envisioned strategic partnership between the two nations had been on the nuclear deal even though bilateral relations covered many key areas.

"If this does not go through, it does not mean that everything else will fall by the wayside but at the same time we should also recognise that for good reason or bad, there is intense focus on this particular agreement," he said.

"Therefore whether we like it or not, this has become very symbolic of what we want to do with India-US relations," he said.

## Cotton farming

**FROM PAGE 1**  
climate and soil in the country are not in favour of cotton cultivation.

CDB officials, however, said it is possible to increase cotton production greatly by introducing high-yielding and even genetically modified (GM) varieties as is being done in some affluent countries like the USA and Australia, and even in India.

If cotton is produced locally, its prices will be at least 15 to 20 percent less and will cut the RMG production cost significantly, BKMEA leaders said.

A pound of cotton on the global market costs on average about 70 cents and the textile industry has to spend over \$400 million a year to import more than 20 lakh bales of cotton, they added.

CDB Executive Director Abdul Baten said the ministry of establishment is considering a CDB proposal to appoint researchers to conduct researches on how to cut the production cost, duration and pestilence of cotton farming.

The government in 2001 had undertaken a project with financial support from the European Union and technical support from the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) that trained about 4,000 farmers, who later spread the knowledge and skills to others.

But, despite the fact that the project was completed in October 2004, there has not been any impact of it on the total cotton production.

The government, however, also has initiated a programme of increasing the production of major crops including cotton, by 25 per cent. Under this programme, extending cotton cultivation to the char lands in Pabna, Natore, Manikganj and Sirajganj and the high vast lands in Dinajpur, Thakurgaon, Panchagarh and

Lalmonirhat could see some success, CDB sources hoped.

The US and the EU countries continuously conduct researches and develop high-yielding varieties of cotton to reduce costs of pesticide and production, a CDB official said, adding control of pestilence reduces the production cost by at least 40 percent. "If we can do it successfully, we could also profit from more production," he said.

The government also provides no subsidy for cotton cultivation, though most of the cotton-exporting countries subsidise the crop highly. "Subsidy could also encourage the farmers to grow more cotton," he noted.

The USA provided \$12.47 billion subsidy to farmers between August 1999 and July 2003, while its share in world cotton exports increased from 17 percent in 1998-99 to 42 percent in 2002-03.

The EU countries also pay cotton farmers \$1.07 billion a year in subsidy, says a Wall Street Journal report.

Last year GM cotton accounted for 28 percent of all cotton lands globally and one-ninth of the world's total area of GM crops, according to the World Bank.

BTMA President MA Awal however expressed a different view on local cotton production, saying growing food grains is more important here and producing various types of high-quality cotton might not be possible in the country.

He said the cotton-producing countries like India and China are also not so competitive, though they provide huge incentives in different forms at different stages from production to their end use.

## Ainjibi Parishad

**FROM PAGE 16**  
Barrister M Amir-ul Islam was elected president while advocate AM Aminuddin general secretary.

Barrister Amirul Islam received 840 votes while his nearest rival Advocate Habibul Islam Bhuiyan of Jatiyatabadi Ainjibi Oikya Panel received 500 votes.

Advocate AM Aminuddin bagged 737 votes and his nearest rival Barrister Abdullah Al Mamun of Jatiyatabadi Ainjibi Oikya Panel got 601 votes.

The other elected candidates are: Vice-presidents Advocate Abdul Mannan Khan and Advocate ATM Mizanur Rahman, Treasurer Mohammad Akram Hossain Manju, Assistant Secretaries Md Abdul Mannan Mohan and Md Moteher Hossain Saju and seven Executive Members Arabindul Kumar Roy (Ananda), Farid Ahmed, Jannatul Ferdousi (Rupa), Md Mojammel Haque Rana, Purabi Rani Sharma, Sheikh Akhterul Islam and SM Fazlul Haque.

Some 1,465 out of 1,622 voters cast their votes in the two-day election.

## JMB chief

**FROM PAGE 1**  
branch, Sylhet, for allowing money transactions with JMB.

Sub-inspector Waliullah of Sylhet Kotwali Police Station filed two cases — one under the explosives act and the other under the arms act — after the surrender of Abdur Rahman.

Our Mymensingh correspondent adds: A Mymensingh court yesterday granted a five-day remand for Fahima Akhter, wife of JMB's second in command Siddiqul Islam alias Bangla Bhai, for interrogation in an arms case.

First Class Magistrate Rokshana Tarannun granted the remand as Detective Branch of Police produced Fahima before the court with a five-day remand prayer.

Rapid Action Battalion lodged the case with Mukttagachha Police Station just after Bangla Bhai's arrest on March 6.

## Credible polls

**FROM PAGE 1**  
Bhuiyan and the prime minister over the reforms.

"Our demand for reforms will have to be realised under this government, and not under a caretaker one. They are planning to control the caretaker government after handover of power, it's their deep-rooted ploy," Saber said.

Regarding militancy, Saber told the US deputy assistant secretary of state that they think mere arrests of Bangla Bhai and Shaekh Abdur Rahman are not enough to curb militancy.

"If the government investigates all the bomb attacks including the August 21 grenade attack on an opposition rally, and the killings of former finance minister Shah AMS Kibria and the judges, then we would think that they are sincere about curbing militancy," Saber said.

Gastright was accompanied by the US Charge d'Affaires in Dhaka Judith A Chammas and senior US embassy officials.

Al General Secretary Abdul Jalil, and former ambassador Ziauddin were also present at the meeting.

## Quake in Iran

**FROM PAGE 1**  
faults in the earth's crust, and is prone to frequent earthquakes, many of them devastating.

Media reported that the weather was now sunny, but that inhabitants of Dorud and Borujer, terrified by the successive tremors, spent much of the night in parks in cool temperatures.

Some local reporters said that people in the area were not fully satisfied with the rescue operations.

The tremor registering 6.0 on the Richter scale struck at 4:47 am (0117 GMT) following two others measuring 4.7 and 5.1. Iranian television quoted the national seismological institute as saying.

The Strasbourg observatory in eastern France announced an earthquake measuring 5.5 on the Richter scale in western Iran at 0116 GMT. It situated the epicentre at 32.86 degrees north and 48.30 degrees east.

Iranian television said the quake caused an electricity blackout in Dorud where the inhabitants rushed out into the streets in panic.

The tremor was felt as far away as Hamedan in the province of the same name to the north.

The worst tremor in recent times hit Bam in the south of the country in December 2003, killing 31,000 people, about a quarter of the city's population, and destroying the city's ancient mud-built citadel.

The most recent quake measuring 6.0 on the Richter scale shook a sparsely-populated region of south Iran on March 25, killing one person in a landslide and damaging houses in the mountainous Kouhshab region.

In November last year, 10 people were killed in a 6.0 quake on the Gulf island of Qeshm that was felt across the water in the United Arab Emirates.

The deadliest and most powerful quake to hit the country was in June 1990 in the northwestern provinces of Ghilan and Zandjan when about 37,000 people were killed and more than 100,000 injured. The quake had a magnitude of 7.7 and devastated hundreds of towns and villages.

## Pay heed to UN call

**FROM PAGE 16**  
politicians and scientists.

Straw added that if Iran backed down and complied, "then all sorts of good things, not bad things, will follow."

Both Steinmeier and US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice dodged questions about sanctions.

"Now a 30-day period is running and it is Iran's move," the German foreign minister said.

A German official familiar with Thursday's talks said on condition of anonymity that Germany, one of the biggest exporters of goods to Iran, was ultimately prepared to support economic sanctions if Iran remained defiant.

Russia and China oppose any sanctions, let alone force, against Tehran and insisted on deleting portions of the UN statement that they feared could lead down that path.

Iran said its decision to pursue enrichment was irreversible and suggested the West was manipulating the Security Council.

"We will not, definitely, suspend again the enrichment," Iran's IAEA ambassador, Aliashgar Soltaniyeh, told Reuters.

Oil climbed further above \$66 a barrel toward its \$70 record after Iran rejected the UN admonition.

The UN statement came after three weeks of haggling among the council's five veto-wielding members — Britain, France, China, Russia and the United States.

Germany and the five big powers had agreed on January 31 to report Iran to the Security Council over its nuclear activities.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei

Lavrov said neither Moscow nor Beijing would tolerate force and any plans to resolve the row "by compulsion and force are extremely counter-productive."

After the Berlin talks, Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister Dai Bingguo said there had "been enough turmoil in the Middle East. We do not want to see new turmoil being introduced to the region."

A senior US State Department official told reporters en route to Paris that the question of military action did not come up at the Berlin meeting, but hinted it could be raised someday.

"We are on a diplomatic track but we have not taken any option off the table," the official said, declining to be named.

Rice said the world must keep up pressure on Iran to suspend enrichment and return to negotiations.

She urged the other permanent council members and Germany to take into account Iran's calls for Israel to be "wiped off the map," as well as its support for Syria and Hizbollah in Lebanon.

Iran's decision to resume enrichment in January led Britain, France and Germany to halt 2-1/2 years of talks with Tehran and to back referring it to the Security Council.

The EU trio has offered to resume talks with Iran on condition that it resuspend all enrichment-related activities.

## Senate panel

**FROM PAGE 16**  
international telephone calls and e-mails involving Americans when one party is suspected of links with terrorism, violates the law because it is conducted without court warrants.

Committee Chairman Arlen Specter, a Pennsylvania Republican, contends there are no grounds for censure, but has agreed to hold the hearing to debate the matter.

"I think that there's absolutely no merit in it, and that the hearing will expose it because of the president's broad (constitutional) authority," Specter said.

Feingold's censure resolution has rallied the support of a number of liberal groups, but it has also galvanized conservatives in support of the embattled war-time president.

Republicans have dismissed the resolution as a political stunt, while many Democrats have distanced themselves from it as they jockey for position for the November congressional elections.

So far, just two of Feingold's 43 fellow Senate Democrats, Tom

Harkin of Iowa and Barbara Boxer of California, have co-sponsored his resolution.

Nixon became the first president to resign from office in August 1974 after a congressional impeachment investigation aided by Dean, who had earlier been his White House counsel.

The Judiciary Committee will decide whether to send the censure resolution against Bush to the Republican-led Senate where it seems to have virtually no chance of being approved.

The Senate has censured a president, which amounts to a formal rebuke, only once before and that was Andrew Jackson in 1834 in a banking dispute.

Dean was one of five witnesses called to testify before the Judiciary Committee — two by Democrats, three by Republicans.

## 15 hurt as JCD

**FROM PAGE 1**  
At one stage, the Chhatra Dal and Shibir activists locked in a clash, leaving 15 injured from both sides.

Of the injured, Mahibul Akhter, Saiful Islam, Mashriur Rahman, Abdul Momen and JCD leader Abdul Matin were admitted to Chittagong Medical College and Hospital (CMCH) while others given first aid.

Sources said 15 rooms of the hostel were ransacked and a motorbike belonging to a Shibir leader was set ablaze during the clash that continued for an hour.

On information, Panchlaish police rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control at about 2:30am.

The CMC authorities formed a four-member committee, headed by Professor Badrul Alam of the Paediatric Department, to probe the incident.

## Bahrain cruise boat

**FROM PAGE 16**  
and hospital workers hurried them to waiting ambulances. Scores of officials and relatives waited on the dock watching small rescue boats with flashing blue lights bring more bodies and survivors.

Television stations showed what they called a file photo of the al-Dana, which appeared to be 60 to 70 feet long with two decks.

There was no indication of what caused the vessel to overturn in what appeared to be ideal weather conditions. The government dismissed terrorism as a cause, and the news agency quoted Interior Ministry spokesman Maj. Mohammed Ben Dayna calling it an accident.

"It's too early to say what caused the accident," Ben Dayna said.

Al-Hassan said an investigation was under way. The boat's owners said overloading could have caused the boat to capsize, according to Bahrain television.

The passengers were thought to be a mix of Bahrainis, nationals of other Gulf Arab nations and Westerners. Health Minister Nada Haffadh told al-Arabiya television that survivors who arrived at hospitals included nationals of India, South Africa, Singapore and Britain.

Information Minister Mohammed Abul-Ghafar, interviewed on al-Arabiya television, said the passengers included 25 Britons, 20 Filipinos, 10 South Africans and 10 Egyptians.

Haffadh said 24 people were hospitalised and that other survivors had been released upon arrival on shore. Television footage showed survivors, appearing to be in shock and their hair still wet, squatting on the floor of a hospital. Many of them covered themselves with blankets. One male survivor was shown being

treated for cuts to the head.

Survivors, some with blood streaming down their faces, hugged each other. Several went uncontrollably as friends and relatives tried to calm them. Some survivors needed assistance as they disembarked from a rescue boat that brought them to shore.

Interior Minister Sheik Al Khalifa said most of the passengers were employees of a Bahrain-based company.

Coast guard chief Youssef al-Katem said there were 150 guests at a dinner party aboard. The guests, he said, ate dinner while the vessel was still docked and that up to 20 of them disembarked before it sailed.

Cmdr. Jeff Breslau, a spokesman for the US Navy, told The Associated Press that the US military aided the rescue effort. The Navy has had a presence in Bahrain for more than 50 years.

"We're sending divers, small boats and a helicopter," Breslau said.

A pair of helicopters could be seen from the shore flying low over the site of the incident. Rescue teams on small boats could also be seen using flashlights to help them search for survivors.

The capsizing of the ship came about two months after an Egyptian ferry sank in the Red Sea, killing about 1,000 people. The vessel was en route from the Saudi port of Dubai to the Egyptian port of Safage when it went down before dawn about 60 miles off the Egyptian coast.

Bahrain is an oil-exporting and refining archipelago of 688,000 off the coast of Saudi Arabia.

## Remittances exceed

**FROM PAGE 16**  
imposing taxes will discourage workers from sending funds through the banking system, it added.

It noted that levies charged by remittance service providers "are very high", with fees for small transfers reaching as high as 10-15 percent.

"There is no doubt that more can be done to increase the volume of home remittances and to enable the recipients to use them more effectively," UN-ESCAP said.

"Additional measures should be taken to increase the access of poor migrant workers and their families to formal financial institutions."

UN-ESCAP urged banks in the worker's home countries to establish branches in host nations and allow micro credit institutions and credit unions to transfer funds to rural households.

The agency said governments should give the right information about job opportunities to prevent situations in which families borrow huge sums to send a worker abroad, only to discover that the earnings are not enough to recover the cost.

In the Asia Pacific region, Australia, Hong Kong, China, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea and Singapore are major sources of remittances for developing countries.

For Laos and Myanmar, neighbouring Thailand is a key source of workers' remittances, UN-ESCAP

said. Outside the region, Canada, the United States, Britain, France, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States are the main source of foreign workers' remittances.

An increasing number of remittance-senders are women, it noted.

## Bomb hurled at NGO office in Khulna

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Unidentified criminals yesterday hurled a bomb, targeting the office of ADAMS, a non-governmental organisation (NGO), at Maheshwar Pasha under Daulatpur Police Station of Khulna city.

The bomb exploded with a big bang on the compound of the NGO office at about 7:30pm. No one was injured and no damage done.

Sources said six officials of the NGO were inside the office when the bomb attack was launched.

On information, police and Rab rushed to the spot and cordoned off the area.

## India renews transit treaty with Nepal

AFP, New Delhi

India has renewed a transit treaty with landlocked neighbour Nepal which will allow the Himalayan country to export its goods through Indian ports, the Indian foreign ministry said yesterday.

"Following the completion of the review process... the Treaty of Transit between India and Nepal which was in force up to January 5, 2006 has been renewed... for a further period of seven years," the ministry said in a statement.

According to the ministry, the transit treaty provides Nepal with port facilities at the eastern Indian city of Kolkata.

It also specifies 15 transit routes for the transport of Nepalese goods between the India-Nepal border and Kolkata.

"In addition, Nepalese trade traffic to Bangladesh also transits through India," the ministry's website says.

India accounts for nearly two-thirds of Nepal's foreign trade, according to Indian figures.

## Cellphones

**FROM PAGE 1**  
a customs official. Some workers of the loading section and security men were assisting him, he added.

As members of the police and Armed Police Battalion noticed the incident and rushed to the spot the workers and security men ran away.

The law enforcers captured Habibur and later handed him over to Airport police.

In another customs recovery on March 26, officials seized cellphones along with battery packs worth around Tk 1.66 crore at ZIA.

Declaring it sewing machines, the smugglers attempted to make of with 4,000 cellphones, packed in 12 cartons inside a wooden box.

## JCD leader

**FROM PAGE 16**  
He said, "They forcibly took me to a room of Shaheed Dr Milan Hostel of the medical college and beat up me there.

"At one stage of the torture, I agreed to give them the amount and asked them to come to my under construction house on Thursday."

He along with his wife on March 29 informed the Rab, who in the guise of day labourers took position around the house and arrested the four.

Rab and police sources said there are several allegations of crime against Maruf and his men.

Kotwali police sources said Maruf and his accomplices on March 28 abducted Zafar Iqbal alias Simu and snatched his motorcycle, cellphone and Tk 1,500. He was confined in the same hostel, from where he managed to flee with the help of other students.

"I expect the opposition would soon send the nominations. We'll also announce the names of our leaders who will be on the committee. The discussion on reforms will kick-start as soon as the committee is set up," Bhuiyan told the press at his residence last afternoon.

Asked whether the committee would also draw from the leaders of the BNP's coalition partners, he said yes.

On what took his party so long to reply, Bhuiyan said it was because when he received Jalil's letter the prime minister was away in India and then again she was preoccupied with some important programmes for a few days after returning home.

While Jalil remarked that it would look better had the BNP sent the letter before Thursday's sit-in programme around the Secretariat, Mannan Bhuiyan reasoned, "As she [Khaleda Zia] was very busy, there were some delays in holding our own discussions on the issue, which put off replying to your letter."

Now that the BNP has agreed to widen the committee's representation by allowing opposition leaders outside parliament to be part of it, a positive response from the opposition should let the committee be formed and function, political agenda remarked.

## REFORMAGENDA ON CARETAKER GOVT

The opposition's five-point proposal to reform the caretaker government system included the following:

The president in consultation with all political parties will appoint acceptable and trusted persons as the chief adviser and advisers of the caretaker government.

During the tenure of the caretaker government, the president will act on all matters relating to state on advice of the chief adviser, taking the parliamentary democracy into consideration.

During its term, the caretaker government will run the defence ministry.

And, jurisdiction of the caretaker government will be confined to conducting the day-to-day work and assisting the Election Commission (EC) in holding the general elections.

**EC REFORMS**  
The reform proposals regarding the EC include the appointment of the chief election commissioner (CEC) and other election commissioners in consultation with political parties. The number of election commissioners will also be determined through consultation. In case of any difference in opinion, the decision on the EC will follow the majority view.

Being a permanent constitutional body, the EC has to have the ability and status to conduct elections neutrally. It will have an independent secretariat free of control of the executive. The EC will also expand its organisational framework down to upazila level and appoint and control

## BNP proposes