

Bush praises Iraqi leaders for resisting Qaeda threats

REUTERS, Washington

President Bush praised Iraqi politicians yesterday for standing firm against videotaped threats by al Qaeda's leader in Iraq as they work to forge a unity government. "The terrorists clearly recognize the threat that the new unity government poses to their dark plans for Iraq and the broader Middle East," Bush said in his weekly radio address, which was prerecorded. It was his first public comment on Abu Musab Zarqawi's message, posted on the Internet on Tuesday. The message from Zarqawi, who had been written off by some Iraqi leaders, came two days after an audio tape from al Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden. In a new video on Saturday, al Qaeda deputy leader Ayman al-Zawahiri said hundreds of suicide bombers had "broken America's back" in three years of war in Iraq.

Bush said "desperate acts of violence" in Iraq, including the assassination on Thursday of the sister of a newly appointed vice president, were meant to derail creation of a cabinet embracing the country's major ethnic and religious factions.

"The new leaders of Iraq are showing great courage in the face of terrorist threats," Bush said. "And I

have told them they can count on America."

Bush has struggled to defend his Iraq policy and pull up approval ratings that have hit new lows amid U.S. public disenchantment with the war. He again warned Americans: "There will more tough fighting ... and more days of sacrifice."

But he said a unity government would mark "the beginning of a new chapter in America's involvement" in Iraq three years after a U.S.-led invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein.

"As Iraqis continue to make progress toward a democracy that can govern itself, defend itself and sustain itself, more of our troops can come home with the honor they have earned," Bush said.

He has refused to set a timetable for withdrawing America's 133,000 troops.

SUPPORT FOR MALIKI
Bush spoke after U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice visited Baghdad to show support for new Prime Minister-designate Nuri al-Maliki.

Maliki, a Shi'ite leader, is forming a broad government Washington hopes will end sectarian strife that has raised the specter of civil war, and make it possible to draw down U.S. forces. He has said he hopes to

pick his cabinet by next week.

Citing the challenge posed by a Sunni-led insurgency, Bush said: "This week the terrorist Zarqawi, leader of al Qaeda in Iraq, released a video in which he denounced the new government and promised further acts of terrorism violence."

In his rare video appearance, the Jordanian-born Zarqawi called the United States the "crusader enemy," branded Baghdad authorities "apostates" and insisted America's military power would not prevail. Zarqawi, whose group has claimed responsibility for many major attacks in Iraq as well as beheadings of foreign hostages, has a \$25 million U.S. bounty on his head.

Democracy in Iraq would be a "double defeat" for insurgents, Bush said.

"It will deny the terrorists their immediate aim of turning Iraq into what Afghanistan was under the Taliban, a safe haven where they can plot ... more attacks," he said. He added it would also show the Middle East's future "belongs to freedom."

Bush said Iraqi leaders had agreed the new government must continue building up security forces and rein in militias.

Power tariff

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local and foreign—is a must to boost power generation.

The roundtable was jointly organised by the ADB and Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) at the latter's auditorium in the city.

ADB's senior economist Zahid Hossain presented the keynote paper at the discussion, highlighting various aspects of the reform programmes including establishment of 70 Palli Bidyut Samities, seven independent power projects, formation of power companies and reduction of systems losses.

ADB Country Director Hua Du said the current power tariffs are inadequate for the power sector to meet its operational expenses, debt service obligations and financing new investments.

The losses of Power Development Board (PDB) and Dhaka Electricity Supply Authority (Desa) and the implicit subsidy stem from operational expenses characterised by distribution losses and low collection-billing ratio, Hua Du said. The tariffs charged to consumers are also too low to recover the costs, she added.

She said, "The ability of PDB and Desa to meet their future debt service obligations will depend on the extent to which they can improve their operational performance and on future tariff levels."

Akhtar Hossain pointed out that the PDB sells electricity at Tk 2.5 per unit while neighbouring Nepal and India sell it at much higher rates.

Terminating tariff adjustment a major issue, he said it is not possible for the government to bear all the costs for power development. If power generation is done on private initiatives, the people will have to pay the

cost, he said.

He noted that it is not possible for the government to get concession loans in the next five years for power generation. "It is also not possible to take commercial loans...So, there is no alternative to tariff increase," he said.

The FBCCI leaders opposed any increase of tariff as the present situation of power characterised by load shedding and voltage fluctuation is seriously hampering industrial production and destroying machinery.

"We don't have objection to increasing tariffs, but the service must be standard and productive first," said Dewan Sultan Ahmed, FBCCI first vice president.

FBCCI Director Aftab Ul Islam noted that the cost of investment went 23 per cent higher for using captive power generators, which is very pricey now and is used by 64 per cent industrial units.

FBCCI President Mir Nasir Hossain said setting up small power plants in private sector through foreign investment and assistance will alleviate the existing power crisis.

He urged the ADB to finance the private bodies like the FBCCI and said, "We shall be able to solve the problems in the sector in three years."

FBCCI Vice President Mohammad Ali, Adviser Manzur Ahmed, Dhaka Chambers of Commerce and Industry President MA Momen, Director Shahidul Haque also spoke at the roundtable.

Dash for fuel as petrol pumps

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On whether the government has reduced the supplies, he said, "The last four months were the boro season, when there was adequate supply. Now that the season is over, we are assessing the fuel oil demand and supplying accordingly. The demand now is mainly for transportation and power generation. We have cut distribution so that oil is not smuggled out [to India]."

Bangladesh Petrol Pump Owners Association (BPPOA) meanwhile has threatened to go on a strike from May 7 to press home a 7-point charter of demand.

Commenting on the BPPOA move Mahmud said, "This is illegal, as the law regarding essential goods bars such strikes."

"BPC has been asked to take appropriate legal measures against them," he added.

CHITTAGONG SCENARIO
Our Chittagong correspondent reports: Most of the petrol pumps in the port city were deserted, with transport owners seen going away from them in utter frustration.

"Acoaxet Lady, a ship with 20 thousand metric tons of fuel, is scheduled to call at Chittagong Port tomorrow [Sunday]. Another ship, MT Mount Rainer, from Kuwait would hopefully arrive on May 02 with 30 thousand

tons of diesel and octane," a BPC source said.

Another BPC source pointed out that lack of cash arrangement for importing fuel oil from Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) might hinder the BPC from placing import order for a few more days. The BPC is yet to arrange the money to import fuel for May and the KPC may be unwilling to supply oil without cash in advance.

The BPC imports some 2 lakh to 2.5 lakh tonne fuel every month during the high-irrigation season and about 1.5 lakh tonne during rest of the year.

RAJSHAHI

Our Rajshahi correspondent adds: Almost all filling stations in greater Rajshahi region have stopped selling fuel for the last three days causing immense sufferings to farmers and other consumers.

"Notices like 'No Petrol and Octane' were seen hanging at many petrol pumps."

Gul Gafur Filling Station, one of the largest filling stations in the city, was also empty of petrol and octane. Manager of the station said there has been scanty supply of oils from Baghabari depot in the last one week. "Our oil tankers rushed to the Jamuna depot at Khulna but could not get any fuel until Friday morning," he told The Daily Star.

There was a long queue of vehicles

yesterday in front of a filling station in the city, as it sold fuel on ration under supervision of the local administration. However, a very few of the vehicles could get more than one or two litres of fuel.

Taking advantage of the situation, a section of the retailers are selling fuel oil at exorbitant prices. Petrol is selling at Tk 60 a litre against the normal price of Tk 42.35, while octane is selling at Tk 65 a litre against the normal Tk 45.35.

Some of the customers said they had to pay as high as Tk 80 a litre to buy petrol from retailers.

RANGPUR

Rafique Sarkar from Rangpur reports: All filling stations in Rangpur and the adjoining districts have run out of stock of petrol and octane, causing serious trouble for the consumers.

Atiqur Rahman, proprietor of Abdullah Filling Station of the city, said he did not send his lorry to Parbatipur depot yesterday, as the BPC supplied him only 1,500 litres of oil against his demand for 9,000 litres.

Civil society

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In corruption. The government should ensure an atmosphere where an honest man remains honest even after being elected.

The speakers also opined in favour of curtailing the executive power of the parliament members. The lawmakers should not be involved in distributing relief and development projects, they said.

The electoral process should be reformed so that the black money holders cannot participate in the polls. Besides, someone who has been elected to parliament for two straight terms and one who had failed last time should not be allowed to run for office, observed some of the discussants.

The participants said a free press and vibrant civil society are prerequisite for a true and practising democracy.

Executive Director of CPD Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya was moderator of the daylong discussion presided over by noted intellectual Jatin Sarker. Former member of caretaker government Syed Manzur Elahi, Mymensingh District Nagorik Andolon President Advocate Anisur Rahman Khan and Principle Shamsul Islam spoke as the special guests.

Participated by political leaders, lawyers, teachers, social workers, development and cultural activists, the dialogue seemed to have generated much enthusiasm among the locals. Many of the participants could not

speak due to time constraint.

Suggestions were made on issues ranging from electoral reforms to transparency in the government to accountability of the public representatives.

Advocate Anisur Rahman Khan said the main problem is that people do not have confidence in the political parties while some of the civil society members seem biased towards certain political parties, he observed.

Syed Manzur Elahi suggested the political parties practise democracy within their organisation. Democracy will not flourish if party activities centre around one particular leader, he pointed out.

Shamsul Islam said the candidates failing to keep their electoral pledges should be considered ineligible for the next election.

Jatin Sarker said religion-based politics should be banned as per the constitution of 1972. He said the lawmakers should not be involved in activities other than legislating.

Advocate Sultana Kamal of Ain O Shalish Kendra, Shaikh Siraj of Channel i, Abdul Quayyum of Prothom Alo, Captain Mujibur Rahman MP, Delwar Hossain Khan Dulu MP, Abdul Matin Sarker were among the other speakers.

State Department

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assets of individuals and organisations designated as terrorists or terrorist supporters, the report said, adding that Bangladesh banned JMB, Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh and Harkatul Jihad al Islami.

"Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia regularly condemned terrorism at domestic and international forums," it read.

The report also said Bangladesh asserts there are no international terrorist groups in the country, and denies allegations that northeast Indian insurgent groups operate from Bangladesh with the connivance of the government.

In 2005, there was a significant shift in terrorism's targets, style, and tempo in Bangladesh, the report observed, adding that previously attacks on isolated individuals largely went unclaimed and were not seen as part of a broader public campaign.

"In 2005, JMB emerged as an organisation capable of launching coordinated nationwide attacks on 'un-Islamic' persons and facilities in pursuit of its goal of a fundamentalist Islamic society," read the report.

Leaflets found at blast sites during the August 17 attack last year threatened judges, government officials, politicians, and other 'enemies of Islam' including the US and the UK, the report went on adding that JMB breached a major psychological barrier by launching deadly suicide attacks in November, a first in Bangladesh.

Despite arrests and seizure of explosive materials, JMB attacks continued, it said.

Bangladesh has subsequently succeeded in capturing JMB leaders Abdur Rahman and Bangla Bhai, acknowledged the report.

"There have been no attacks against US citizens or interests in Bangladesh," it said.

There are no formal US-Bangladesh agreements on the investigation or prosecution of acts of international terrorism against US citizens or interests.

"In 2005, there was good cooperation between law enforcement agencies on several cases relating to domestic terrorism," it went on, "With US technical assistance, Bangladesh in 2005 drafted a new, comprehensive anti-money laundering law. It is also working with the US to strengthen controls at land, sea, and air ports of entry."

On South Asia, the report said, "Although terrorism remained a major problem in the region, with increases in activity in 2005 by terrorist groups in Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh, there were encouraging signs."

Jamaat leader

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exploding several bombs. He died on the spot.

Jamaat district Ameer Maulana Abudur Rahim and General Secretary Abu Taleb Mondal condemned the killing and demanded immediate arrest of the killers.

Tata team

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bid to bridge the gaps.

According to sources in Tata, the revised offer in a package form will be very comprehensive

"Changes may come in regard to gas price, power tariff and coal mining," said an official of the Indian Industrial conglomerate now operating in 40 countries of the world.

"We're trying our level best to bridge the gaps... everything is subject to making the projects economically viable. We're still hopeful of making the things happen," he added.

Kibria killing

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and former finance minister Kibria was killed in a grenade attack as he was coming out after addressing an Awami League (AL) rally in Baidderbazar of Habiganj. Habiganj AL's organising secretary filed two cases, one murder case and another under Explosive Substance Act. Charge sheets on both the cases were submitted the same year. But the complainant demanded re-investigation of the murder which was rejected by the court.

Asma Kibria said when the trial of the killing case resumes in Sylhet's Speedy Trial Tribunal they will once again appeal for re-investigation. Responding to a question Reza said the government, if it is sincere, can re-investigate the whole affair even if it is a matter related to the court now.

Referring to the murders of Kibria and Ahsanullah Master, an AL MP from Gazipur, as well as the grenade attack on Sheikh Hasina's rally on August 21 that killed 22 and maimed dozens, Reza said, a powerful quarter positioned at the top level of the government is involved with these incidents.

"These attacks are very much part of the terrorism campaign that we have recently witnessed in the form of Islamist extremists," Reza said.

Mentioning Finance and Planning Minister Saifur Rahman's comment immediately after Kibria's murder that Kibria killing was a regional incident Reza said his comment implies he knows who were behind the murder. "As he knows it is a regional incident,

neither national or political, he should be quizzed to find out the criminals behind the curtain," he added.

Reza also hinted that the murders of Kibria and Ahsanullah Master as well as the August 21 attack on Hasina's rally are linked with the coming national elections. "When an MP is killed and the culprits get away, how can one expect a credible election? These are all part of BNP's intimidation campaign aimed at election engineering," he observed.

Asma Kibria said her movement Blue for Peace would continue until they get justice and they will soon form an 11-member committee with Prof AAMS Arefin Siddiqui, former president of Dhaka University Teachers' Association.

In the briefing Kibria's family declared programmes on May 1, Kibria's 75th birth anniversary, which includes placing wreaths at Kibria's grave at Banani, a photograph exhibition on the life and work of Kibria at their Dhanmondi residence, and a seminar at BILLA auditorium where Dr Syed Abdus Samad will present a key note paper on Kibria's thoughts regarding the reform of caretaker government system and election commission at 3:30pm.

Reza Kibria said his father was supposed to present his paper on the reform issue on January 30, 2005 in a programme but his murder delayed the ongoing movement for reform for about a year.

US raid rumours

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"However, we don't conduct random sweeps," he said. "All our arrests are the result of investigations, evidence and intelligence."

ICE officials acknowledged they have stepped up arrests under their "Operation Phoenix," an existing programme to find and deport fugitive illegal immigrants with criminal backgrounds.

Many wondered whether the rumours would deter people from national immigration protests planned for Monday.

The National Immigration Law Centre called on organisations nationwide to sign a petition urging ICE to assure the public it won't make any immigration arrests during the protests.

The agency said its policy is not to discuss potential operations. "ICE will continue to operate as it does every day of the year," Boyd said.

The rumours affected a wide variety of businesses. In New Jersey and New York, day-labourer gathering sites drew only a trickle of workers.

"It's the ugliest of rumours because it has intimidated people who are already afraid. They are living in the shadows of society, wondering who is going to knock on the door," said the Rev. Allan Ramirez, pastor of the Brookville Dutch Reform Church in Long Island, N.Y.

Elias Bermudez, an activist and talk show host for a Spanish-language radio station in Phoenix, said many believe they are being punished for participating in recent protests in favour of legalising the status of many illegal immigrants.

In the rural town of Homestead,

US army col charged in Abu Ghraib scandal

REUTERS, Washington

The US Army on Friday charged Lt Col Steven Jordan, who headed the interrogation center at Iraq's Abu Ghraib jail, with maltreatment of detainees, interfering with investigators and other counts, making him the highest-ranking person charged in the scandal.

The Army Military District of Washington said Jordan faced 12 criminal counts relating to seven different charges. Prosecutors said he subjected detainees to forced nudity and intimidation by military working dogs and later lied about it to investigators.

Ten low-ranking soldiers have been convicted in military courts in connection with the physical abuse and sexual humiliation of detainees at Abu Ghraib. Two officers senior to Jordan at Abu Ghraib have been disciplined by the Army, but neither faced criminal charges.

BNP letter

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of the ruling four-party coalition in the talks.

Jail said, "Sitting with them means sitting with Bangla Bhai and Shaekh Abdur Rahman and inspire militancy." Rejecting Bhuiyan's letter, he said it proves that the government is not sincere about implementing the reform agenda.

Asked if the possibility of the dialogue has been finished, Jail said it depends on the government. Chaired by AL President Member Abdur Razzak, the meeting was attended by Tofail Ahmed, Suranjit Sengupta, Sheikh Fazul Karim Selim, Motia Chowdhury, Obaidul Quader, Rashed Khan Menon, Hasanul Haque Inu, Dilip Barua, Bimal Biswas, MA Gani, Mainuddin Khan Badal and Enamul Haque, among others.

Earlier at a discussion yesterday with the senior party leaders, Leader of the Opposition and AL President Sheikh Hasina severely criticised the government for such nomination.

The opposition had suggested holding the dialogue only between the AL and BNP to avoid "controversy".

Lawyer killed

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found tied around his throat and bore wounds in his forehead and chest, they added.

"They left the place hurriedly without giving any information about the victim or the incident as soon as the doctors declared him dead," said a nurse, on condition of anonymity.

People at the hospital later phoned Tejaon police who later contacted Harun.

Contacted, Tejaon police said they found one missing sandal of Emdad in a taxicab left at Manik Mia Avenue in the night and suspected that he was killed somewhere else and later dumped there.

The victim's relatives suspect that muggers might have killed Emdad.

Harun filed a case with Tejaon Police Station yesterday but police could not arrest anyone as of 8:00pm.

Cyclone Mala

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boats to remain alert until this morning.

Met officials said Cyclone Mala started moving towards the Akyab coast at 12:00 noon yesterday and completed the crossing in the evening.

According to AFP, Cyclone Mala, a category-4 storm, lost intensity after it made landfall and moved inland through Rakhine state of Myanmar.

A depression originated from a depression over the southeast Bay on April 25, Cyclone Mala was spotted yesterday about 810km south-southwest of Chittagong, 720km south-southwest of Cox's Bazar and 830km south-southeast of Mongla port.

Sadequee denied bail

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Haris Ahmed, 21, the other US citizen of Pakistani descent, also traveled to the mountains of Georgia to conduct military-style training exercises. Much of the information supporting the accusations against Sadequee came from Ahmed.

A third individual accompanied them to the mountains, the prosecutor said, but she did not give that person's name, said Jeremy Redmon, a journalist from Atlanta who covered the incident. Kavanagh said the third man, whom she described as an associate of Sadequee, had corroborated an account of the exercises provided by Ahmed.

Kavanagh also told the judge that Sadequee gave Ahmed information on how to arrange for receiving military-style training in Pakistan. Ahmed later traveled to Pakistan in an attempt to receive such training, FBI said in an affidavit in support of a warrant to arrest Sadequee.

Sadequee is charged with lying to FBI agents who questioned him about a trip that prosecutors say he and Ahmed made to Canada in March 2005 to meet with "like-minded Islamic extremists". Kavanagh said Georgia prosecutors are considering more serious charges against Sadequee.

Five months after the interrogation, Sadequee flew to Bangladesh and had been living there since then. Bangladesh authorities took him into custody on April 17, and he was later turned over to FBI agents, who flew him to the United States on April 21.

The website of The New York Times yesterday reported that a law enforcement official, who was granted anonymity because the investigation is continuing, said the case is linked to the arrests of three other men in November in Britain, where the police seized images Sadequee had made on his trip to Washington along with computer images containing instructions for making car bombs and suicide bombing vests.

THE HEARING

Sadequee was denied bond by Judge Sandra Townes, overturning a ruling earlier in the day by a federal magistrate judge. The government, which had previously been tight-lipped about its case against Sadequee, was

forced to reveal more details in the appeal hearing.

Sadequee's lawyer, Douglas M Morris argued that his client should be released on bond because of his close ties to his family in Georgia. But the judge, noting that he also has strong family ties in Bangladesh, said the flight risk is too great, reports The New York Times.

Morris also suggested to the judge that his client might have been kidnapped in Bangladesh. But he provided no details, and it was unclear whether he was referring to Bangladeshi authorities or FBI. After the hearing he declined to discuss the case.

Sadequee, who was born in Fairfax, Va., was clad in a wrinkled white T-shirt, rolled-up blue prison pants and slip-on shoes. He wiped away tears as he looked at his family in the courtroom. About 20 relatives, friends and other observers were in attendance.

Judge Townes heard the case after the government appealed a decision by a federal magistrate, Steven M Gold, who held a bail hearing earlier in the day and ordered Sadequee released on a \$250,000 bond. But during that proceeding, Kavanagh did not mention the accusations of videotaping and training.

BBC Bangla Service yesterday reported that Sadequee's lawyer Morris said they will appeal for another bail hearing within a week.

FATHER CLAIMS SADEQUEE INNOCENT

Sadequee's father, Sardar Mohammed Sharif, said he has yet to get any information about Friday's court hearing.

He, however, said his son is not guilty and all charges against him are false and he is victim of a conspiracy. "My son is innocent," Sharif told The Daily Star yesterday from a hospital bed in the capital over a mobile phone.

"Those who visit mosques in the US fall victim to such harassment," said Sharif who is recovering from a recent heart attack, a kidney infection and complications from diabetes.

He said his son also suffers from chronic ailments: hepatitis, jaundice and asthma.

Western powers

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legally obliging Iran to meet IAEA and Council demands.

If Iran still refuses, such a resolution could pave the way to economic sanctions and even military action, although Tehran's major trading partners Russia and China -- which have a veto on the Council -- oppose any such move.

Foreign ministers of the five permanent Council members and Germany plan to gather in New York on May 9 to discuss the crisis, while political directors of the so-called "P-5 plus one" are due to meet in Paris Tuesday ahead of the talks.

US President George W. Bush has branded Iran's nuclear ambitions as "dangerous" but insisted that Washington wanted to resolve the dispute "diplomatically and peacefully".

But Ahmadinejad called on Western powers to "respect Iran's rights" and allow the IAEA -- and not the UN Security Council -- to deal with the case.

He also said that "as a nuclear country, the Islamic republic is ready to discuss, alongside other nuclear powers and with all countries, how to assure world peace."

The vice president of Iran's Atomic Energy Organisation Mohammad Saidi said Iran was working on extremely advanced centrifuge designs for enrichment. "But when it comes to which type

we will use, we are still examining this. It isn't the P-2 (centrifuge) -- there are other devices that are more advanced and that are a part of our work," he told state television.

Centrifuges work in cascades of hundreds, or thousands, spinning at high speed to refine out the uranium U-235 isotope. The technology is seen as a "breakout capacity" which, once mastered, makes manufacturing nuclear weapons possible.

Iran announced earlier this month that it had successfully enriched uranium to reactor-grade levels using less advanced P-1 centrifuges. But the more advanced P-2 centrifuge can enrich at a much faster rate and is considered far more effective than the P-1 in the production of weapons-grade material.

Saidi also reiterated Iran's pledge to cooperate more on condition that its case is dealt with by the IAEA and not the Security Council.

"We would accept to remove the worries of certain countries through negotiations," he said, adding that Iran would even be prepared to allow tougher UN inspections that were stopped after the case went to New York.