

July 16, 2006

Dhaka condemns Israeli raid on Lebanon

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh has strongly condemned Israel's bombing and air attack on Lebanon, saying that Israel should immediately halt such aggressive action.

When asked, a spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said Israel's unwarranted bombing and air strike on Lebanon caused collective damage to the country's civilian infrastructures, including airport and loss of human lives.

The spokesman added that Israel should immediately bring a halt to this aggressive action.

MUMBAI BLASTS

Babar dismisses Indian media's claim on source of explosives

UNB, Dhaka

State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfozzaman Babar yesterday dismissed as fictitious the allegation in Indian newspapers that major portion of the explosives used in Mumbai serial bombings went from Bangladesh.

"It is nothing but ridiculous, it is impossible," he told newsmen at Rab headquarters after a meeting with the elite force on law and order.

He noted that explosives and detonators used by JMB in Bangladesh are believed to have come from across the border. And they (Indian press) might be bringing the allegation as a counter reaction.

The state minister asked the law enforcers to strengthen the intelligence network and remain alert following the blasts in India's business heartland.

Babar also instructed the Rab men to keep the law and order situation in good shape at the far end of this government and during the period of the caretaker government.

Referring to the allegation that Rab members are involved in crimes, the minister categorically said whoever involved in crimes will not be spared.

Chaired by the minister, the meeting reviewed the overall law and order situation in the country. Inspector General of Police (IGP) Anwarul Iqbal, Rab Director General Abdul Aziz Sarker and high officials concerned attended the meeting.

Meeting sources said Babar expressed his dissatisfaction over a poor progress in recovery of illegal firearms.

He also instructed the law enforcers to arrest the listed criminals and gear up their operations against drugs and narcotics.

2 killed in 'crossfire'

STAR REPORT

An alleged robber and an outlaw of Purbanga Communist Party (PBCP) ML faction was killed in two separate 'crossfire' incidents between their accomplices and members of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and police in Chittagong and Khulna yesterday.

Acting on a tip, a Rab-7 team raided Master Hat of North Shikabaha area Friday afternoon and arrested Mohammed Yusuf also known as Hathkata Yusuf, 48, our Chittagong University correspondent reports.

During interrogation at Rab headquarters at Patenga, Yusuf confessed to extortions and robberies with the help of his cohorts.

Following his information, Rab carried out another drive to capture his accomplices at their hideout on the Kamaphuli at Char Bakalia.

As the team reached the area around 1:45am yesterday, Yusuf's gang members ambushed the team who also retaliated in their defence.

During the gunfight, Yusuf was bullet hit when he tried to escape Rab custody. Rab personnel rushed him to Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH) where on-duty doctors declared him dead.

The elite force also recovered three single-barrel guns and eight live shells from the spot. His accomplices however managed to escape arrest. Yusuf was accused in 11 criminal cases, Rab sources said.

Meanwhile, an outlaw of PBCP ML faction was killed in 'encounter' between his accomplices and the police early yesterday at Ram Majhi of Terokheda upazila in

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HARBIN SET TO GET CHANDPUR POWER PROJECT

Legal flaws, hidden costs in PDB's draft deal

SHARIER KHAN

The draft contract for 150 megawatt Chandpur Power Project that Power Development Board (PDB) is set to sign next week with Chinese company Harbin contains hundreds of legal loopholes and hidden costs of \$15.56 million, sources said.

As in the case of Tongi power plant built by Harbin, the contract documents this time dropped 4,448 spare parts of 476 categories from Harbin's original offer.

The documents resemble those of Tk 360 crore 80 MW Tongi power plant, which tripped over 75 times in one year setting a record of bad performance. "In other words, PDB is all set to sign and procure a junk like Tongi power plant," said one

source.

Experts who have scrutinised the draft contract said the documents hid a cost of \$15.56 million in Harbin's bid. This means the company's original bid of \$41 million will actually impose a cost of over \$56 million on the PDB during the implementation period.

The PDB had selected Harbin's bid as the lowest through an arbitrary process, triggering another Chinese bidder - CMEC - to lodge formal complaints with the Implementation, Monitoring, Evaluation Department (IMED) of the government. The IMED dismissed Harbin's bid as it found gross violation of rules in it and asked the PDB to negotiate with the

CMEC.

But an influential lobby behind Harbin, which helped it bag the Tongi project and 90 MW Fenchuganj power project using political connections and sidekicks, succeeded in making the IMED verdict. The PDB justified its flawed selection on the pretext of Harbin being the drastically lowest bidder. Its offer appeared to be about \$11 million lower than that of CMEC.

But the contract documents give a true picture of Harbin's deal and explains how Harbin comes up as the so-called lowest bidder every time.

"The documents fail to provide essential information on equipment

to be supplied such as the names of manufacturers and country of origin," said an expert who has reviewed the contract document.

"By withholding information and deferring such critical issues using terms like 'later' in the contract documents, Harbin is making the PDB fall prey to its trap of signing an agreement with serious legal and contractual loopholes. A term like 'later' would be exploited by Harbin in supplying equipment of its own choice and of poor standard," he added.

The statements in the documents reflect the connivance between Harbin and a section of unscrupulous PDB officials to

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18 Lebanese burned alive in Israeli air blitz

Hezbollah HQ destroyed, first attack near Syrian border

AFP, Beirut

Eighteen people were burnt alive yesterday when a helicopter gunship hit a convoy of families fleeing Israel's blistering offensive on Lebanon, as concerns mounted that the conflict was spiralling dangerously out of control.

Israel also destroyed the headquarters of Hezbollah guerrilla chief Hassan Nasrallah in Beirut's southern suburbs after he declared open war on the Jewish state.

Israeli warplanes for the first time struck the no-man's land between Lebanon and Syria at the Lebanese main crossing point of Masnaa, police said.

A fighter bomber fired four missiles at about 200 meters (yards) beyond Masnaa, they said.

The Israeli army said it was carrying out a series of raids in the Lebanese-Syrian border area.

"The air force is bombing roads and bridges on the border between Lebanon and Syria to prevent Hezbollah from taking our captured soldiers out of the country," an army spokeswoman said.

She did not say whether the raids had been aimed at Syrian targets.

She said the strikes were also intended to prevent militants from the Syrian-backed Hezbollah from fleeing across the border, and to stop weapons from being smuggled

into Lebanon.

Lebanon failed at an emergency UN Security Council debate Friday to secure a ceasefire to halt Israel's fiercest assault on its neighbour in a decade, underscoring rifts among world powers over how to contain the conflict.

US President George W. Bush, in Russia for the Group of Eight summit, said he was "troubled" by the loss of innocent lives but that it was up to the Shia Muslim militia Hezbollah to stop its attacks.

Some Council members, including Russia and France, have described Israel's actions in the

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A man surveys the damage to shops in the Beirut suburb of Dahyieh Junubiya yesterday on the second day of Israeli bombings on the militant stronghold in Lebanon. Israel kept on its blistering offensive against Lebanon yesterday after Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah defiantly declared open war against Israel.

ENERGY SUBSIDY

Tk 9,000cr a year benefits the rich

Govt study shows

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

A government study shows that about Tk 9,000 crore subsidy against power, natural gas and petroleum products per year has benefited only the rich, putting a pressure on the fiscal management.

Finance ministry sources said upon suggestions from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the government conducted the study on financial loss for underpricing of natural gas, power and petroleum products.

The study reveals that 55 per cent of the total subsidy against petroleum products benefited the rich while the figure is 65 per cent in case of subsidy against gas.

"The government incurs a Tk 1,030 fiscal cost for every Tk 100 of subsidies reaching the poorest income group," a finance ministry source said quoting from a recent IMF report.

He said two-thirds of the total

subsidy went to two petroleum products, namely diesel and kerosene.

Referring to the increasing oil prices in international market, he said the finance ministry is concerned about the oil price hike.

The price of oil was \$78 per barrel yesterday, the official said, apprehending that the price may climb to \$100.

On government plan to adjust fuel prices, a high official of the energy ministry said the government will not go for fresh price hike of fuels considering the upcoming national election.

"To face the crisis of fuel price hike, the government should ask the World Bank and ADB for special assistance," he suggested.

According to Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation, diesel and kerosene consumption is around 75 per cent of the total need for

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Bring home Birsreshtha Hamidur's remains

Relatives demand

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Citizens and relatives of the country's Liberation War heroes demanded to bring back the remains of Birsreshtha Hamidur Rahman from Ambasa village of Indian state Tripura and bury on the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban premises.

They also demanded for burial of the remains of Birsreshtha Ruhul Amin—whose grave is situated at the Rupsha ferry ghat in Khulna—on the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban premises.

The Citizens Rights Movement (CRM) and the relatives of six of the seven war heroes awarded "Birsreshtha" made the demands at a press conference at the Jatiya Press Club yesterday.

Referring to the retrieval of Birsreshtha Matiur Rahman's remains from Pakistan recently after 35 years of the country's independence, CRM General Secretary Tushar Rehman said Birsreshtha Hamidur Rahman was also buried in a foreign land when he died during the Liberation War.

In a written statement, he said the grave of Birsreshtha Ruhul

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Call for movement to encourage voters

Regional dialogue at Rangpur

RAFIQUE HASSAN and RAFIQUE SARKER, from Rangpur

Speakers at the regional dialogue on "National Dialogue 2007: Civil Society Initiative for Accountable Development" held in Rangpur yesterday called upon the people to launch a united national campaign for ensuring enrolment in the voter list and people's right to vote.

They urged the people to form citizens' committee at every locality for the purpose.

Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) organised the dialogue with the



collaboration of The Daily Star, the Prothom Alo and Channel I as part of a civil society initiative for fair elections and accountable development.

The local level leaders should create pressure on their party high-ups for nominating honest, dedicated and competent candidates in

the upcoming elections, the speakers said, adding that those who have been in the politics for long, sacrificing and have contribution for the area should get nomination.

The participants in the dialogue also stressed the need for continuation of the civil society initiative beyond the next general election.

They also demanded resignation of the chief election commissioner and members of the commission, preparing proper voter lists and bringing massive reforms in the Election Commission and

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BR to procure 130 passenger carriages

BSS, Dhaka

Bangladesh Railway (BR) will procure 130 passenger carriages worth about Tk 400 crore from China and Indonesia by December this year.

A high official of the BR told the state-run news agency yesterday that out of the 130 coaches, 30 air-conditioned coaches will be imported from Chang Chun Rolling Stock Manufacturing Company of China at a cost of Tk 94.64 crore while the rest will be imported from PT Inca of Indonesia at a cost of Tk 304.84 crore.

After arrival of the coaches, BR will introduce air-conditioned rail services on Dhaka-Chittagong and

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Rab man among 7 held for looting covered van

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Demra police on Friday night arrested a Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) corporal, a retired army man and five others on charge of hijacking a covered van and looting electronic appliances and apparels worth around Tk 73 lakh.

Rab corporal Bazul Rashid, retired army sergeant Shaheen and the other arrestees confessed to have committed the crime, police said.

In a joint drive, police and Rab have recovered the hijacked van and most of the looted goods and

continued their hunt for the rest.

Five people including Bazul posing as Rab members hijacked the covered van laden with 26 air-conditioners (ACs) worth about Tk 39 lakh and fabrics worth around Tk 34 lakh at Rayerbagh in Demra at about 6:00am on Wednesday. Bazul was wearing a Rab jacket at the time.

As part of the pre-planned crime, a member of the gang got into the covered van of a transport agency -- Mrs Jockey -- in Chittagong and supplied information to them over mobile phone.

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Robbers loot another bank in Bogra

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

Robbers looted Tk 43 thousand and a gun from Agrani Bank Gakul Branch in Bogra Sadar upazila of the district sometime between Thursday and Friday night.

The robbers broke open the strong room when there was no guard in the bank on the weekly holiday, said Bogra police.

A case has been filed with Bogra Sadar Police Station yesterday, police said.

A few days ago, robbers looted a gun, bullets, and money from another branch of the bank in Shahjahanpur upazila in absence of the guard.

JS probe body on TIB report fails to start work after 9 months

Communications ministry did not provide documents

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A parliamentary body tasked with probing the Transparency International Bangladesh's (TIB) report that labelled the communications sector as the most corrupt could not start working even after nine months of its formation as the communications ministry did not provide information.

The communications ministry had assured the committee to provide information challenging the report to take legal action against the TIB, said Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Ministry of Communications Syed Manjur Hossain, who is also convenor of the sub-committee for looking into the basis of the TIB report.

"But we have not received any

information from the communications ministry yet. So we could not start probing the TIB report," he added.

The sub-committee, formed on October 2 last year, was tasked with reporting back within a month, but it has not held any meeting so far.

Even the parliamentary body on communications ministry has not held meeting in last few months ignoring the rules of procedure of the Jatiya Sangsad that say every parliamentary body will sit at least once in a month.

The convenor of the committee, however, said they will start discussing the TIB report soon. "I will convene a meeting of the committee after my recovery from illness," Manjur said.

The TIB, Bangladesh chapter of Transparency International in a

corruption database released on September 15 last year revealed that the country had incurred a loss of about Tk 415 crore in 2004 due to corruption.

The communications sector came out as the most corrupt sector in the TIB report, which was based on the corruption reports published in 25 national and regional dailies in 2004.

Communications Minister Nazmul Huda on October 2 at a meeting of the parliamentary standing committee on his ministry blasted the TIB for labelling the communications sector as the most corrupt and sought intervention of the parliamentary body in taking legal action against the organisation for smearing the government.

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Several teachers were wounded as police swooped on a procession of Bangladesh Shikhhak Karmachari Oikya Parishad in support of their 17-point demand at Paltan intersection in the capital yesterday.

Cops club teachers' procession

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police yesterday charged batons on a procession of Bangladesh Shikhhak Karmachari Oikya Parishad, a platform of pro-Awami League non-government school, college and madrasa teachers and staffs, leaving several teachers injured.

The injured teachers are Shikhhak Karmachari Oikya Parishad Convener Shahjahan Alam Sahju, its Information Secretary Mani Haldar, and Alauddin Bhuiyan, Ranjit Kumar Saha, Shafiqul Islam Bablu, Habibur Rahman and Sharfuddin Shuvra.

Pressing home their 17-point demand, which include 100 per cent basic salary and respectable amount of other allowances from the national coffers, the teachers

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