

India fears attack on nuclear plant

REUTERS, New Delhi

Terrorist threats to India's nuclear plants have increased after a landmark civilian nuclear cooperation agreement with the United States, the home minister said on Wednesday.

Security at India's nuclear facilities has been stepped up over the last year after officials said they had information that the sites were on the hit-list of militants.

Several high-profile attacks on other targets across the country, blamed on Pakistan-based militant groups fighting against Indian rule in Kashmir, have also led to increased vigil at government facilities.

But Home Minister Shivraj Patil's comments were the first to link the vulnerability of the nuclear plants to the civilian nuclear pact with Washington, which is in the final stages of approval by the US Congress.

"Our critical infrastructure faces a serious threat from terrorists," Patil told a conference of state police chiefs.

"In view of the recent Indo-US agreement on civil nuclear energy cooperation, our atomic power plants have become highly vulnerable," he said.

Patil did not elaborate but a home ministry official said security agencies feared the nuclear plants

could be targeted by Islamist militants opposed to American policies and US presence in South Asia.

India has 15 nuclear power plants in operation, with an installed generating capacity of 3,310 megawatts (MW). Seven more plants with a capacity of 3,420 MW are under construction and scheduled for completion by 2009.

Fourteen of the 22 plants categorised as civilian facilities would be allowed to access fuel and equipment from the United States under the deal which overturns a three-decade ban on nuclear trade.

The deal was approved by the US Senate last week and needs approval jointly by the House of Representatives and the Senate, besides the 45-nation Nuclear Suppliers Group and the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Patil said installations in the oil and natural gas sector, defence, communications and the IT sector were also vulnerable, adding "the enemy" was always looking for new targets.

"The challenge of terrorism must be faced resolutely and the police and security agencies cannot afford to lower their guard," he said.

Irked advisers

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case once again infuriated his advisers.

The advisers were further irritated by the follow-up actions of Iajuddin after he had formed an advisers' committee to talk a way out of the crisis arising out of Aziz's steadfastness to cling on to his post. For three days, the advisers held whirlwind meetings with all the major political parties and prepared their report. Although the situation called for immediate actions, the chief adviser, for reasons beyond anyone's guess, scheduled to hear the report four days later while the political crisis intensified. Surprised and disappointed, the advisers forced Iajuddin to advance the meeting by two days, which ultimately paved the way for the CEC's stepping aside. But the actions of the chief adviser left the advisers with a heavy mind.

The advisers, frustrated with such actions of the chief adviser, met separately on November 6 at a state guesthouse to discuss what they could do to improve the situation. However, their action was again equated with 'conspiracy' by the 4-party alliance. This past week, they had been almost regularly meeting separately during lunch.

Home Secretary Jahurul Hoque wrote to the district administrations across the country on the decision of the government to deploy army to maintain law and order. The Chief Adviser kept this decision taken in the afternoon hidden from the advisers. The same evening, Iajuddin had a more than two and a half hours meeting with the advisers, but he never mentioned about the army deployment decision. Only at the end of the meeting, he called in the home secretary to brief the council on the law and order situation on the backdrop of the ongoing blockade.

The home secretary just cursorily mentioned at the end of his briefing that the stalemate at the Chittagong Port may necessitate deployment of the army, a proposition that was vehemently opposed by all advisers. Only after the meeting did the advisers come to know from journalists that orders had already been sent for army deployment.

The advisers now allege that Iajuddin is running the show with no written records of decisions made in council's meetings, which are also rare to take place.

"We don't have any written minutes of the meetings, which is a dangerous matter," an adviser said. "Therefore, we often find that decisions made at the meetings are often reversed or even denied."

More to add to the advisers' feeling of 'redundancy' is the way the chief adviser keeps them away from meetings with political leaders and foreign diplomats and from running the affairs of the important ministries.

"In the past, the chief advisers kept one or two of the advisers with him whenever meeting with political leaders or diplomats," pointed out one adviser. "This helped them feel the political air. But this time, we are left groping in the dark."

The overwhelming concentration

Iajuddin asks

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over the charge of the chief adviser to the caretaker government and extended support of the Canadian government to him.

The envoy also lauded the steps that have been taken to resolve the political impasse over the electoral issues.

President's Adviser Mokhesur Rahman Chowdhury, military secretary to the president and other high officials were present.

Dr Kamal

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focus on six areas including misappropriation of state wealth through misuse of power, corruption in various tenders, allocation of money against false projects, purchase of government land and launching of television channels with black money.

President of the Supreme Court Bar Association Barrister Amir Ul Islam, Vice-chairman of Bangladesh Bar Council Rokonuddin Mahmud, General Secretary of Bangladesh Economic Association Abul Barakat and Badul Alam Mojumder of civil society body Sujana also spoke on the occasion.

Amir Ul Islam hailed formation of the commission as a timely step. Such a commission was formed earlier for investigating corruption by former president H M Ershad, and a number of cases were framed against him on the basis of his findings, he recalled.

Rokonuddin noted that the influence of black money and musclemen are the main barriers to holding a peaceful election.

He said identity of black money holders should be made public before the next election so that none can dare to misuse state power in future. The newly formed commission's probe would set an example for the Anti-Corruption Commission, he thought.

He alleged the president has curtailed the powers of the advisory council by keeping so many ministries under him. Iajuddin is using state power by-passing the council, he added.

Abul Barakat said massive corruption, misappropriation of public money, resources and lands in the 34 years since independence have crippling effects on the country. In the last five years, corruption, terrorism and communalism have been institutionalised, he observed.

Government-backed trade syndicates have grabbed around Tk 2.86 lakh crore in the last five years through price hike, he alleged.

Badul Alam called for probing corruption not only in the last five years but also during the tenure of previous governments.

Defamation case

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tary of AL Brahmanbaria unit, filed the case with First Class Magistrate's Court.

After hearing, the court ordered judicial inquiry into the case and asked the magistrate concerned to submit a report by December 31.

In his complaint, Mamun Sarker mentioned that Tarique Zia in his remarks against the AL chief at Hawa Baban on November 14 said, "Had Sheikh Hasina bought the suit for me and been my gambling partner?"

He said Tarique Zia has tarnished the image of Sheikh Hasina through his "indecent remarks"

About 50 lawyers stood for the case while a group of lawyers, led by former MP Advocate Harun-al-Rashid, for the BNP joint secretary general.

BNP men

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cameraman Majnu Hossain, witnesses said. Cameraman of Rtv Sajedur Rahman also came under attack from them. Mentionable, the owner of the channel is BNP leader Mosaddek Ali Falu.

The BNP men also attempted to vandalise a microbus of the ATN Bangla, parked on the party office premises.

Some top city BNP leaders provoked the activists to assault the journalists, sources alleged.

BNP leaders, however, regretted the unexpected incident that occurred between the journalists and "a few people in front of the BNP office."

Terminating a separate and depressing incident, BNP in a press release claimed that the party had no relation with it. "As soon as the party leaders were apprised of the incident, they rushed to the spot and apologised," the press release reads.

People concerned have been already directed to investigate into the incident and asked to bring the culprits to book if they were from BNP or any of its affiliates, it adds.

Bhuiyan slates

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current blockade programme.

The BNP secretary general urged the chief adviser to the caretaker government to take a tough stance against the 14-party alliance's blockade.

Bhuiyan also urged his party activists to prepare for the upcoming general elections and make BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia the prime minister again.

He said, "The 14-party alliance locked the people of the country inside their homes and held their victory rally."

"They [14-party] locked people inside because they fear people," Bhuiyan observed. Termining the four-party alliance the people's alliance, the BNP secretary general said people would always stay beside four-party alliance.

He said the four-party would go on with its present political programmes until the 14-party alliance end their programmes.

BNP leaders Moudud Ahmed, Khandaker Mosharrif Hossain, Sadeque Hossain Khoka, Mirza Abbas and Jamaat-e-Islami Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mujahid also addressed the rally.

Acting CEC

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about the number of political parties and dialogue with them before announcement of the schedule for the next general election.

"It is not my cup of tea who will accept me or not as acting CEC. I will keep on doing my duties for holding a free and fair election," he said responding to a query whether the Awami League (AL)-led 14-party combine will accept him.

On July 26 last year, during the dialogue between the Election Commission (EC) and political parties on preparation of voter list, CEC MA Aziz made a remark on the AL League that triggered severe criticism. "How many seats do they [AL] have in parliament?" Aziz asked while replying to a question on the outcome of the dialogue without participation of the AL.

Justice Mahfuz, who will lead the EC to conduct the next election scheduled for January, rejected outright any possibility of dialogue with political parties seeking their views on the polls schedule.

The acting CEC said election schedule will be announced this month, meaning next week. "We have all preparations for holding the

Ctg mayor

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financial loss, he further said.

"The company charges Tk 470 for handling per container while earlier the same job was done only at Tk five," the mayor said adding that on behalf of the commoners, he had asked for the termination of the agreement.

Meanwhile, although the Chittagong Port resumed operations yesterday after suspension of the blockade programme by the 14-party, the gantry cranes did not operate due to the controversy over the agreement.

According to sources, a total of 350 TEUs containers have been released yesterday from the port yard while the cargo handling at the general yard resumed with gang-bookings (booking dockers for a job) for the night shift.

The operation in the general yard starts in full swing this morning, but resumption of operation at vital container yard remained suspended.

"The port is saying nothing about resumption of container yard operations," a shipping agent told The Daily Star last night, adding that two large ships have been anchored at the terminal for several days and another seven ships in the outer anchorage.

The government installed four sophisticated gantry cranes in January this year spending Tk 150 crore. At first, the port operators were to operate the cranes, but later the private company was awarded the job for increasing the speed of crane handling.

Saif Powertec Ltd started operation in August this year and handled 25-30 containers per hour instead of 10-12 by the port operators.

Hasina sees

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10:00am to 2:00pm on November 27 and 28 respectively to press home their 11-point demand and said their movements for a free and fair election will continue.

Those who fear people are conspiring against a free and fair election, Hasina said, adding that the next election is to protest all grenade and bomb attacks and killings of people including political leaders and establish rule of law in the country.

The fresh programmes came at a meeting of the 14-party held at Sheikh Hasina's Sudha Sadan residence after CEC MA Aziz went on a three months' leave on Wednesday night that eased the political deadlock centring the CEC.

In the new political event, the 14-party leaders also talked to other like-minded political parties including the HM Ershad-led Jatiya Party, Liberal Democratic Party and different Islamic political parties before chalking out fresh programmes.

The 14-party had enforced the third phase of their non-stop countrywide blockade from November 20 to press home the popular demands for reconstitution in the EC after removal of 'controversial' CEC MA Aziz and three other election commissioners, neutralisation of the administration and correction of voter list.

Addressing the press briefing, Hasina thanked people of all walks of life for making the blockade programme a success and urged the people to make the sit-in demonstrations complete success.

The AL chief said although she (Khaleda) expressed her firm determination that the election would be held under Justice KM Hasan as the chief adviser to the caretaker government and Justice MA Aziz as the CEC, people's movement foiled the plans.

She termed Aziz's going on leave as 'victory of the people's movement'.

Saying that the existing EC has lost its credibility and trust at home as well as abroad, Hasina demanded immediate reconstitution of the EC with 'non-controversial and acceptable' persons to bring back confidence of all.

After MA Aziz's going on leave, a person has been given the charge of acting CEC from whose residence

election in time."

In reply to a question, he said, "I don't see any obstacle to holding the next election."

He sought cooperation from all and said all measures will be taken to ensure free and fair polls.

In past, the EC used to hold meetings with caretaker government and political parties before announcing polls schedule. And this time also the EC had planned to hold a meeting with the interim government but the acting CEC yesterday rejected any possibility of such a meeting.

"We will conduct the election, the caretaker government will not. The caretaker government is constitutionally obliged to cooperate with us in conducting the election. But some advisers to it are now speaking in such a way as if they will conduct the election," Justice Mahfuz said.

Pre-poll admin

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assess the situation. If they find any loophole or leakage in the administration and suggest more reshuffle, that will be executed as per their guideline," the secretary told reporters.

About the allegation that the ministry only changes the officers from one place to another at the upazila, district and divisional levels, the secretary said the government has withdrawn six divisional commissioners, 34 deputy commissioners and more than a hundred upazila nirbahi officers - which is the highest ever withdrawal compared to other caretaker governments' tenure.

Asked about the officers posted at different sensitive places including the Election Commission secretariat, Cabinet Division and the Ministry of Establishment since the period of the immediate past BNP-led alliance government, the secretary said the allegations should be specific.

"If anyone complains to me about any officer's inefficiency or moral character we must take action against him. But if someone talks generally the ministry cannot take action," he said.

About the promotion and posting, Solaiman Chowdhury said the Superior Selection Board (SSB) held meeting during the last two days and will continue it for a few more days to bring all the officials under assessment.

"We want to assess every officer personally so that no one is excluded from the promotion process. The SSB are seriously examining whether anyone has been deprived," he said.

Chowdhury said there are problems in the annual confidential report and necessary documents of many officers for which it takes long time to complete the board meeting.

About the problem of officers on special duty he said the ministry will bear the 'burden' for a long time as officers were previously promoted to more posts than the vacant ones.

SC Bar

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a result, the president himself has been creating crisis one after another," it said.

The meeting urged the president to appoint two more election commissioners through discussion among all parties concerned instead of deciding the appointments on individual capacity.

The meeting also demanded withdrawal of upazila election officers, appointed earlier on political consideration, and replace them by fresh non-partisan officers.

Chaired by SCBA President Barrister M Amir Ul Islam, the meeting was addressed, among others, by Dr Kamal Hossain, Abdul Basat Majumder, Ozair Farooq, Barrister Rokonuddin Mahmud, Mahbubey Alam, Khandaker Mahbub Hossain, Abdul Mannan Khan, AM Amin Uddin, M Enayetur Rahim, Mahbub Ali, Bashir Ahmed and AHM Shamsuddin Ashraf Manik.

Meanwhile, the BNP-backed Jatiyatlabadi Ainjubi Forum (JAF) hailed the Wednesday's address to the nation by President/Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed.

Termining the president's speech a guideline for resolving the political deadlock over the reforms of the Election Commission, the forum demanded immediate announcement of the election schedule.

Adviser criticises

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He reiterated the government's efforts to make the hajj more comfortable for the pilgrims.

Adviser M Azizul Islam also spoke at the programme.

This year 2,551 ballottee pilgrims will perform hajj under direct government supervision while 48,014 non-ballottee pilgrims are expected to perform hajj under the supervision of different hajj agencies.

The Biman Bangladesh Airlines will carry around 29,000 pilgrims while Saudia Airlines will carry 12,000.

The first hajj flight will leave for Saudi Arabia on November 26 at 9:00am with ballottee pilgrims.

Aziz

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Jamaat leader said Justice KM Hasan had declined to assume the office of the caretaker government chief because of tremendous pressure from the 14-party.

"The continuity of democracy will be seriously hampered if the constitution is violated and institutions are made subject to debate," he added.

Welcoming the president's address to the nation and thanking Justice Aziz for taking the leave, Nizami expressed hope that all political parties, including AL, will now turn back to the election.

Jamaat-e-Islami does not subscribe to the idea of wholesale cancellation of appointments or transfers of the public servants, he said and alleged that [contractual] appointments that did not bear any links to politics are also being cancelled.

The immediate past industries minister said the 14-party's allegation of 1.30 crore fake voters in the voter list is without foundation. "They are creating unnecessary troubles in this regard, whereas the Election Commission rules say that there is always a provision of correcting the list."

Nizami claimed that there were 1.81 crore more names in the voter list prepared during the tenure of the AL government. The increase in the number of voters was 32 percent then when it is only 23 percent now, he noted.

It is not the job of the caretaker government to resolve the political crises, he said adding that it is quite irrational to press it [interim government] for resolution of the disputes that could not be settled even through a series of dialogues between the secretaries general of the two major political parties.

Jamaat Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mujahid, Assistant Secretaries General Kamaruzzaman and Abdul Kader Molla and Publicity Secretary Tasnim Alam were present at the conference.

Shujan

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Criticising the role of the chief adviser (CA), who is also the president, Dr Kamal said that the CA has no right of exercising power without the consent of other advisers. Some vested quarters are directing him from behind the scene, he alleged.

Shujan Secretary Dr Badul Alam Majumdar observed that democracy of the country is at stake, which will not bring any good result. The citizens of the country should come forward to voice for holding a free and fair election, he said and urged the political parties to act according to democratic behaviour, which is the precondition for a free election.

While asking for accountability of the EC, film director Kazi Hayat also demanded enactment of a law that bars the smugglers from contesting in the election.

Dr Hamida Hossain, acting executive director of Ain O Shalish Kendra (ASK), SM Shahjahan, adviser to former caretaker government, Dr Mehedi Huda, Shujan central committee member, Ajoy Roy, president of Sammilita Samajik Andolon, Mohidul Haque Khan, general secretary of BAPA and Brig Gen (ret'd) Shakhawat Hossain, defence expert also spoke on the occasion among others.

India, China can dominate next century, says Hu

AFP, Mumbai

Asia will dominate the next century if China and India can strengthen their trade and business links, China's President Hu Jintao said yesterday at the end of a visit to the fellow Asian giant.

"We need to move towards a free-trade agreement and boost bilateral trade further, particularly along the borders," said Hu, whose four-day visit to India was the first by a Chinese president in a decade.

"If India and China take the necessary steps to strengthen trade and business, the 21st century will be Asia's," he told business and government leaders from both nations in India's financial hub Mumbai before heading to Pakistan on the final leg of his South Asian tour.

India's Commerce and Industries Minister Kamal Nath echoed Hu's call for greater economic ties, saying: "We must add 'mass' and 'items' to the trade basket."

During his speech, Hu, accompanied by a nearly 120-member business delegation, also called for more energy co-operation, saying "it will help us bid for third country contracts better."

India and China have increasingly been competitors as they scramble globally for energy and mineral resources to feed their fast-growing economies.

Earlier in the visit, the world's two most populous nations agreed to double trade to 40 billion dollars by 2010 and speed efforts to settle a long-festering border row that brought them to war in 1962.

Hu declared Wednesday in New Delhi he had visited India to enhance "mutual trust" and "chart a new course" for strategic relations.

Ties between India and China have long been clouded by the legacy of the brief but bloody border war and Beijing's economic and military sup-

Rejoinder

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who allegedly used to bribe Tk 5 lakh monthly to former state minister for expatriates' welfare and overseas employment Major (Retd) Quamrul Islam and Wahid-uz Zaman when they were in their respective offices.

Wahid, who was the DG of BMET from April 25, 2004 to October 23, 2006 and is now serving as the executive director of Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge Authority, in his rejoinder said the charges against him in the report were absolutely malicious and aimed at tarnishing his image.

He said during his more than 28-year career as a civil servant, he had never been charged with conduct. "My strict compliance with rules and regulations, my unbending character and my inherent obedience to conscience had been the root cause of my belated promotion as secretary to the government."

Wahid said he never faced even a show cause notice by the higher authorities for any kind of misconduct.

OUR REPLY
Through further investigation, we have found that our sources could not substantiate the information they had given us earlier. We now have reasons to believe that they could be wrong.

We, therefore, extend our apology to former DG of BMET Wahid-uz-Zaman, former state minister Major (Retd) Quamrul Islam and BMET Director (Immigration) Manzur Rahman and regret any damage done to their reputation.

Car bombings

FROM PAGE 1
raided a scientific research institute of the ministry of higher education and kidnapped around 150 people.

About 80 people, many of them employees of the ministry, are believed still to be hostages.

Sadr City, the impoverished district of followers loyal to radical Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, was also the site of an early morning incident involving US troops.

"US troops fired on a minibus carrying workers and killed a number of them in Al-Falah street at 6 am," Imam Abdel Zahra al-Suwaidi from the Sadr movement told AFP.

"I condemn this shooting that targeted the workers and accuse US forces of repeating such acts which leave many victims every day," Suwaidi said.

A medic at the Sadr City hospital said four people were killed and eight wounded, including two women.

An Iraqi security source also confirmed the incident.

"US forces fired on the minibus as the vehicle was seen on the streets before the dusk-to-dawn curfew was lifted," the source said.

But the US military said that Iraqi forces fired on the vehicle during a raid to detain the leader of a kidnapping cell.

"A vehicle displaying hostile intent was identified as an immediate threat to Iraqi forces. Iraqi forces fired on the vehicle to neutralise the threat," the military said without mentioning civilian casualties.

The security source said the workers were headed to a market in the Jamila neighborhood near Sadr City at the time.

A daily curfew is imposed on Baghdad from 9:00 pm to 6:00 am (1800 GMT to 0300 GMT).

US forces have regularly raided Sadr City to hunt for leaders of kidnapping cells who the military alleges are militia men loyal to Sadr.

port for Pakistan, India's long-time rival.

New Delhi claims a large chunk of Chinese-administered territory in disputed Kashmir while Beijing lays stake to Indian-administered Arunachal Pradesh.

Hu called his talks Tuesday with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in the Indian capital "fruitful."

"China does not seek any selfish gains in South Asia and is ready to play a constructive role in promoting peace and development in the subcontinent," Hu said, as he welcomed improved relations between India and Pakistan which have fought three wars since independence in 1947.

The Chinese president was dogged throughout his visit by Tibetan protesters demonstrating against what they called China's illegal occupation of Tibet. Dozens were arrested.

One Tibetan man in his late 20s set himself ablaze outside Hu's hotel Thursday but police quickly doused the flames, witnesses said.

China reiterated its claim to Tibet Thursday following the protests organised by the Tibetan Youth Congress in which hundreds of demonstrators took part.

"The Tibet autonomous region has been an integral part of China since ancient times and Tibetan affairs are the internal affairs of China," foreign ministry spokeswoman Jiang Yu said in Beijing.

Partial victory

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The city unit of 14-party set up the Mancha on two trucks in the afternoon, and speeches, cheers and musical performances continued there till midnight.

General Secretary of city Awami League Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya chaired the victory rally and leaders of the combine spoke thanking people for participating in the movement.

Echoing the 14-party central leaders