

Israel rejects Palestinian offer to halt rocket fire

AFP, Jerusalem

A proposal from Palestinian factions to stop rocket attacks in exchange for an end to Israeli offensives in Gaza and the West Bank was rejected as inadequate by Israel yesterday.

A Palestinian child and Hamas militant were killed by Israeli fire in the Gaza Strip just hours after a spokesman for the ultra-radical Islamic Jihad extended the offer, following an overnight meeting between rival factions.

Four Palestinian rockets also exploded inside Israel in ongoing attacks on Friday, causing damage to a commercial centre in the southern town of Sderot.

Palestinian Prime Minister Ismail Haniya, head of the internationally boycotted Hamas government, reiterated on Friday that Israeli offensives should end "in order to allow factions to stop" rocket fire.

"There is a responsible Palestinian position and now the ball is in the Israeli court. They must stop aggressions and the escalation against the Palestinian people," he told reporters after prayers in Gaza City.

But Israel was not playing ball, with government spokeswoman Miri Eisin describing it as a "partial ceasefire" impossible to take seriously.

"The suggestion concerns a partial ceasefire, limited to rocket fire from the Gaza Strip in exchange for a total halt to Israeli operations on all fronts. This is not serious," she told AFP.

"Israel has always aspired to an end to violence and we count on a change of attitude from the Palestinians and primarily Hamas in order to give development a priority in the Gaza Strip instead of continued attacks," she added.

Two Israelis have been killed in Palestinian rocket attacks on the Jewish state in the last 10 days. The army says more than a 1,000 such projectiles have landed in the country since Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip in 2005.

Israel has been operating inside the volatile Palestinian territory

since late June, when militants captured a soldier in a daring cross-border raid, in a bid to retrieve the conscript and end the constant rocket menace.

"Our people are victim of a barbaric Israeli offensive that has left more than 400 dead and 1,500 wounded while thousands of homes have been destroyed," Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas declared in Gaza City late Thursday.

"All that on the pretext of home-made rocket fire and unfortunately we are giving them such pretext," he added at talks with his Fatah party.

After separate inter-faction talks, the Jihad spokesmen said there was an agreement to stop rocket fire in exchange for a "halt to Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza".

He said Abbas would transmit the idea to the Israelis, but a spokesman for Hamas and an independent MP both said there could be no way forward if Israel remained intransigent.

"There is no chance of a truce as long as the enemy aggression continues," said Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhum.

Independent MP Mustapha Barghuthi lashed out, branding the Israeli reaction "very discouraging".

"Israel is responsible for the cycle of violence. Each time Palestinians want an end of violence, Israel refuses. Israel is the one that does not want to stop the cycle of violence," he told AFP in Gaza City.

Israeli troops have stepped up an air and ground offensive in the northern Gaza Strip in a bid to counter near daily Palestinian rocket attacks.

In addition to the two Palestinians killed in the territory on Friday, three Israeli soldiers were slightly wounded by an anti-tank missile during clashes in the northern Gaza Strip.

Nizami slates

FROM PAGE 16 supporting Awami League in its illogical demands," Nizami told a roundtable discussion with Jamaat-minded professionals.

He observed that the representatives of the EU have expressed concern over the next election and asked the caretaker government to remove CEC Aziz without even observing the situation on the field.

Describing the EU as a propaganda mill, he said the AL led 14-party has created such an atmosphere that now foreign countries or organisations like the EU could comfortably interfere in the internal affairs. "And whenever a foreigner comes and speaks about our country, the journalists rush headlong to highlight the statements," Nizami added.

He also came down heavily on the business community and said a group of businessmen had went as far as to issue a deadline for President and Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed to remove the CEC, whereas they should have protested the "irrational demands" of AL.

Jamaat-e-Islami organised the roundtable at Al-Falah Auditorium at Daily Sangram office in the capital.

"Information terrorism by the media and the so-called intellectuals has gripped the country," said ATM Azharul Islam, assistant secretary general of Jamaat.

The discussion was addressed among others by Jamaat leaders Makbul Ahmed, Rafiqul Islam and Habibur Rahman Azad.

Oikya Front

FROM PAGE 16 If the Chief Adviser to the Caretaker Government Prof Iajuddin Ahmed does not resign within November 27, we will go for an indefinite sit-in in front of the Bangabhaban, said JOF leaders at a press conference held at the LDP's presidium office at Baridhara in the city.

"We won't let any election be held in the country until the chief adviser resigns," said LDP leaders Major (ret'd) Abdul Mannan and Mahi B Chowdhury.

The JOF leaders alleged that President/Chief Adviser Prof Iajuddin Ahmed has failed to prove his neutrality as the chief adviser to the caretaker government.

They urged all political parties including the 14-party alliance, Jatiya Party, Jukta Front and Jaker Party to move together in this regard.

"If the chief adviser does not resign, we will go for tougher movements," Mannan said. He said it is impossible that an election will be held in a free and fair manner under the present chief adviser.

The president and chief adviser has failed to create an environment for a free and fair election to be held, JOF leaders said.

"The four-party alliance has a blueprint to foil the upcoming elections and the chief adviser is helping them to accomplish their intention," Mannan claimed.

The JOF leaders declared to go on with their movement until Chief Adviser Prof Iajuddin Ahmed resigns.

Commander (ret'd) Abdur Rouf of Jatiya Oikya Mancha, Rezaul Haq and MA Awal of Bangladesh Tarikat Federation were present in the briefing.

RMG owners

FROM PAGE 1 The hour-long protest programme from 12:30pm to 1:30pm also aims at drumming up the demand of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) for keeping the country's main exports-earning industry out of all political programmes.

"We are unable to bear the burden any more. There should be a permanent way so that the export-oriented industry does not fall victim to confrontational politics," said BGMEA President SM Fazlul Hoque.

The garment industry is moving the country's economic growth forward, but the politicians have been imposing barriers to that growth, he said.

BGMEA leaders will meet with the leaders of both the four-party and 14-party alliances to convince them to include the issue of keeping the garment industry out of political programmes into their manifesto.

The BGMEA leaders said the garment owners are forced to ship a portion of their consignments through airfreight, which ultimately affects the industry's profit.

Fazlul Hoque said the association will launch fresh agitation after the sit-in to help rescue the sick industries.

More than dozens of garment factories are feared to become sick because of the political chaos and strike.

The BGMEA leaders announced its programme at a press conference on Thursday.

14-party, allies

FROM PAGE 1 nirbahi officers have been made from one district to another keeping them in the same positions through unilateral decisions of the chief adviser while the other advisers remained in the dark."

A 14-party delegation led by Abdul Jalil is likely to meet the chief adviser today to remind him of their demands.

"The chief adviser is playing highly controversial and partisan roles and we can hardly believe he will take any steps to create a congenial atmosphere for a free and fair election or make neutral the field and top levels of civil and police administration," said another 14-party leader.

"And for this we are thinking of going for one-point movement to force the chief adviser to resign," he added.

The coalition held a series of meetings with different political parties including the Jatiya Oikyo Front (JOF) led by Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), HM Ershad-led Jatiya Party, and several Islamic political parties during the last couple of days to bring them under a platform for movement for a free and fair election.

These political parties have expressed solidarity with the 14-party combine and staged simultaneous demonstrations in the streets demanding immediate reconstitution of the EC, correction of voter lists, neutralisation of the administration along with several other demands for a free and fair election.

Before taking the final decision to wage a combined movement to oust the CA, the 14-party and the 'like-minded' ones will continue their pressure on the CA for a few more days to see what steps he takes to make the administration neutral, sources said.

Talking to The Daily Star, several leaders of different political parties said they cannot accept the chief adviser's blind partisan activities in

favour of the BNP-Jamaat alliance.

"If the chief adviser continues partisan activities we will have no alternative but to go for a one-point movement," said Workers' Party President Rashed Khan Menon, a key leader in the 14-party combine.

Keeping in mind the matter of waging a one-point movement to force the CA to resign, the 14-party began negotiating with other political parties and finalised a common programme to stage sit-in demonstrations in front of the Bangabhaban and EC Secretariat on November 27 and 28 as a starter.

During the last couple of days, the 14-party also held meetings with several foreign diplomats and will continue briefing them of the CA's 'controversial' activities.

The 14-party and the JOF sat at Abdul Jalil's Gulshan residence on Thursday night to devise a strategy to force the caretaker government head out of the office.

Emerging from the meeting, LDP Secretary General Abdul Mannan told journalists that they will wage a one-point movement to force resignation of the chief adviser.

"That's why we'll stage a sit-in in front of the Bangabhaban on November 27," he added.

The same night, Zaker Party, an Islamic political party, also held meeting with the 14-party to express solidarity with the movements.

The combine will also talk to some other political parties to bring them in the streets with them.

After a three-hour long meeting of the 14-party leaders at Jalil's residence yesterday with AL Presidium Member Abdur Razzak in the chair, Jalil demanded immediate resignation of the CA who he termed 'the root of all misdeeds'.

14-party to reject

FROM PAGE 16 core 'ghost voters'. This incorrect voter list would hinder holding of a free and fair election, the AL general secretary added.

On Mahfuzur Rahman's taking charge as acting CEC, Jalil said rules have not been followed properly. His takeover before the appointment of two more election commissioners, as assured by the president, is illegal, the coalition leaders said.

Mahfuzur Rahman has 'illegally' captured the office of CEC just as President Iajuddin Ahmed took over as chief adviser (CA), Jalil alleged.

Appointment of two more election commissioners should be finalised in consultation with them (14-party) and the advisers to the caretaker government, Jalil said. But the president is planning to appoint them as 'dictated' by Hawa Bhaban (BNP's Banani office), he alleged.

Criticising the acting CEC's comment on the voter list and on the 14-party combine, the AL leader said his statement is against the people.

Jalil said the CA is 'implementing' the agenda of BNP-Jamaat as per their election engineering. "That is why we have no option but to wage a movement against him."

They would stage sit-in demonstrations in front of the Bangabhaban and the Election Commission to press home the demands for resignation of Iajuddin from the post of CA, and protesting the 'conspiracy' to announce election schedule without correcting the voter list.

Jalil also asked the CA to refrain from taking decisions unilaterally keeping the advisers in the dark for creating a congenial atmosphere for free and fair polls.

Life returns

FROM PAGE 1 "We had to face a huge loss as we could not run our vehicles during the blockade," said a bus driver of Mirpur route.

Businesses at Motijheel and other commercial areas went on in full swing with people thronging the commercial hub of the capital.

Most low-income group people, especially the day labourers who could not find any work during the blockade, were also seen back in business.

Anisul Haq, a green coconut vendor at Karwan Bazar, said his business in the last few days was not good due to the blockade.

Meanwhile, despite increased supply of vegetables and other food items, the kitchen markets in the capital showed no sign of decreasing the prices of essentials.

Vendors at Karwan Bazar said the prices will decrease after the supply of commodities continues normally for a week.

The AL-led 14-party alliance enforced the blockade programme for the third time, demanding reconstitution of Election Commission.

Brac brings internet

FROM PAGE 16 PhD person to carry out the mission. What we need is an educated person, who would establish an e-Hut to empower himself and bring the community to the global information network."

It requires two to three lakh taka to start a business, which people interested to launch the business can get from small and medium enterprises (SME) services from banks. Officials concerned said Brac Bank has rendered help to people in this respect.

At first, an entrepreneur will have to purchase a few computers and other logistics. The entrepreneurs will get the radio modem after paying the small security deposit. Even though radio modems cost Tk 80,000 the entrepreneurs will only have to deposit Tk 30,000.

BracNET has already established three e-Huts in Dhaka division, one in Badda in the capital and the other two in Gazipur. Babu, owner of Linda Land Business and Telecom Centre, said every morning his shop becomes crowded with people. A number of the customers are interested in politics and they come to read different national dailies' online editions. He said he charges his customers Tk 20 per hour.

Babu said only from internet surfing he earns around Tk 800 a day. He offers basic computer courses as well where each trainee is paying Tk 1500 for the course. The basic computer literacy course offers students and professionals to come and learn how to operate computers.

He said a few industries and residents of the area wanted to be internet-connected via the e-Hut.

"Since I can provide WIMAX

Two outlaws held with explosives

UNB, Kushtia

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested two outlaws with explosives at Noadapara and Choudia villages under Mirpur upazila of the district on Thursday night.

Acting on a tip-off, Rab arrested Ziaur Rahman Zia, a cadre of Purbo Banglar Communist Party (ML-Janajuddho), at Noadapara village at around 7:00pm.

On Zia's statement, the members of the elite force raided the house of Ijar Ali at Choudia village and arrested his son Anwarul, another cadre of the underground outfit.

They also seized 350 grams explosives, marble stones, bomb-making materials and some bullets from the house.

Iajuddin, Shafi

FROM PAGE 1 complete the tasks to prepare the ground for general elections.

Besides, the president sought his suggestions on different issues, the official said.

"Sometimes an adviser cannot his mind in a formal meeting. It's like a confidence building measure," he said, adding that the president will hold similar one-to-one meeting with other advisers apart from formal and informal meetings of the council of advisers.

Asked about the appointment of two election commissioners, the official, who asked not to be named, said the president will soon appoint neutral and non-controversial persons to the posts.

Rejoinder

FROM PAGE 1 as mentioned in the article."

"Bangladesh Navy also raises the concern that such an article involving the image of a highly esteemed service of the country, has been published without any verification from the Service Headquarters."

"However considering the greater interest of upholding Bangladesh Navy out of any controversy, fresh procurement process has been initiated cancelling the previous ones," the ISPR rejoinder said.

OUR REPLY

The rejoinder does not factually contradict with any part of the story. Furthermore, just one day after the story was published the Navy has cancelled the tender -- this action alone explains the truthfulness of the story.

4-party

FROM PAGE 16 failed to decide whether they will participate in the elections."

Mentioning reshuffles in the administration and police, Bhuiyan said, "The 14-party suspects that all in the administration and police are people of the four-party alliance."

"If you do not keep faith in anybody then how will you run for the election? Will you hire people from outside the country?" he posed the question.

People do not support the AL-led 14-party as they do not trust anyone, Bhuiyan said, adding that no one can change the result of national elections even if anyone favours a particular party.

Presided over by Dhaka City BNP President and city Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka, the rally was addressed, among others, by BNP presidium member Moudud Ahmed, Jamaat Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammed Mujahid and Islami Oikya Jete leader Moulana Mohammad Shafiq Uddin.

Wadud's removal

FROM PAGE 16 Khagrachhari district, sweets were distributed among the people while activities of Awami League and Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghaty Samity (PCJSS), a popular organisation of the indigenous people, expressed jubilation after hearing the news.

On November 2, PCJSS gave a memorandum to the President and Chief Adviser of caretaker government Iajuddin Ahmed through Deputy Commissioner Golum Mowla demanding Wadud's removal from the board.

In the second week of this month, PCJSS President Jyotirindra Bodhipriya Larma alias Shantu Larma met the chief adviser and urged him to take steps for Wadud's removal.

PCJSS Secretary Sudhakar Tripara said BNP-led 4-party alliance government appointed Wadud Bhuiyan as CHT Development Board chairman in 2001 to defy the terms and condition of the CHT peace accord.

During the last five years, Wadud and his followers were involved in violence, tender manipulation, misappropriation of government fund for the board, bribery and anti-social activities, said Khagrachhari AL Secretary Zahidul Alam.

He demanded judicial inquiry in this regard.

President's speech

FROM PAGE 16 have any indication of the package solution the CG advisers had assured of earlier for holding a fair, impartial, peaceful and acceptable election against the backdrop of a long agitation for this, they said.

The speech had no other substance except that Chief Election Commissioner MAAziz is going on a 3-month leave, and the president would appoint two more election commissioners, they said.

Mentioning that the people's demand was not for the CEC's leave, they said he (CEC) can join his duty anytime before the expiry of his leave.

Iajuddin's speech did not contain any solution to the demands of the political parties and civil society for reconstitution of the Election Commission and resignation of the CEC, preparing a voter list excluding fake voters and making the administration neutral.

When the president also became the CA without following all provisions of article 58 (C) of the constitution, it raised questions, the joint statement recalled. "And now after 25 days of the CG, it has been proved that the concept of non-party CG has been negated as the president was selected by a party, and he now took charge as CA," it said.

The CA could not perform his duties in unison with the other advisers while article 58 B (2) and (3) of the constitution requires him to do so. The

CA has kept too many offices under him that has resulted in a concentration of power in his hands.

As a consequence, issues like handover of the charge of CA to an acceptable person are now coming up for decentralisation of power, said the prominent citizens.

They appreciated the advisers' move to publish a white paper on energy sector, and asked for more initiatives to reveal corrupt practices.

They urged the CG to take steps to reconstitute the EC by appointing 'acceptable' commissioners and removing the controversial ones, correcting the voter list by excluding 1.3 crore 'fake voters', ensure neutrality of the administration, nab terrorists and recover illegal arms for holding a peaceful election.

Signatories to the joint statement included Dr Khan Sarwar Murshid, Dr Ajoy Roy, Mujibul Huq, Tobarak Hossain, Ajoy Roy, Ibrahim Khaled, Dr Hamida Hossain, Dr Shirin Sharmin Chowdhury, Selina Hossain, SM Sabur, M Saidduzzaman, Dr Hayat Mamud, Shahabuddin Ahmad, Kamal Lohani, Hashem Khan, M Shafiqur Rahman Khan, Dr Quazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad, Aysha Khanam, Abul Hossain Khokon, Dr AMM Shawkat Ali, Khushi Kabir, Tarek Ali and Saleh Ahmed.

Another bloody day

FROM PAGE 16 Close to the Syrian border and mostly populated by ethnic Turkish speakers, Tal Afar was once a bastion for al-Qaeda-linked Sunni guerrillas but has been held up for the past year by the US military as an example of successful counter-insurgency operations.

Local Sunnis complain, however, of discrimination against them by US-backed Iraqi security forces dominated by Shias.

Barring security forces, the only movement in the streets of the capital was thousands of mourners streaming on foot behind cars laden with coffins as they began their journey south to the holy city of Najaf, traditional burial site for pious Shias.

At Najaf, bodies packed premises set aside near its ancient cemetery for the ritual washing of the dead before interment.

Moqtada al-Sadr, youthful cleric and leader of the Mehdi Army militia which dominates Sadr City, also appealed for Iraqis to unite in peace and many in the district, home to over 2 million people, said they hoped all would control their anger.

"At the end of the day we are all losers," one local man, Hassan, said as the funeral processions passed by. "This is our home, our country, Sunnis and Shias must come together to rebuild our country so we can breathe the air."

Daylight also brought new visions of the mangled metal wrought by six car bombs and a series of mortar blasts that in its turn transformed streets and a market into a bloodbath.

Already, after months of mounting sectarian violence since the destruction of a Shia shrine at Samarra in February, the capital is under curfew for several hours during Friday prayers.

Now the curfew is absolute and indefinite, with Baghdad airport also closed and the key oil port of Basra in the south, controlled by Shia parties, also shutting down in sympathy.

The US-backed national unity government issued urgent calls for peace in earnest televised statements on Thursday.

Meanwhile, US forces killed four insurgents and detained six others in a raid north of Baghdad on a suspected car bomb manufacturing cell in the early hours Friday, the US military announced.

As US forces approached the building in the restive village of Tarmiyah, just north of the capital, they came under fire from a nearby mosque, a military statement said. In the ensuing firefight, four Iraqis were killed.

IAEA investigation

FROM PAGE 16 Natanz in the centre of the country.

Uranium is enriched by centrifuges to refine out the U-235 isotope to produce what can be fuel for civilian nuclear reactors or -- at highly refined levels -- the explosive core of atom bombs.

A second diplomat said the IAEA had reported that Iran was not allowing the agency inspectors access to "the tail products" -- the depleted uranium produced at the same time as the main product.

"If the IAEA does not receive the tail results it lacks critical data for calculating the uranium and isotope balances," the diplomat said, referring to the method of verifying the level of enrichment.

Iran says it has not enriched over five percent, a level consistent with fuel needs. Uranium for weapons use is usually enriched to more than 90 percent.

David Albright, a former nuclear inspector who now heads the Washington-based Institute for Science and International Security think tank, said the new Iranian steps were "a big deal because the Iranians have been so uncooperative."

But, said Albright, that concession alone is "not going to solve the IAEA's problems."

The new information is "not going to provide confidence that the Iranians are not going to suddenly accelerate work at Natanz" or that they are "not building an undeclared

"At the targeted building, the ground forces detained two suspected terrorists," said the statement. "After they left the building, they returned to the vicinity of the mosque and six individuals, including two wounded men, exited the building," four of whom were detained.

The military described the suspects as being members of an al-Qaeda linked cell involved in the manufacture of car bombs.

"Considering the amount of human suffering and damage inflicted by VBIEDs (car bombs), it is always significant when coalition forces are able to eliminate and detain terrorists involved in organising these attacks," added the military.

Hu promises

FROM PAGE 16 "We appreciate and support the efforts by Pakistan and India to resolve their existing disputes peacefully through dialogue," he said, referring to a tentative peace process between the nuclear-armed South Asian rivals.

Analysts believe China has supported Pakistan's missile and nuclear weapons programme for decades. It is Pakistan's main supplier of conventional arms and provides hundreds of millions of dollars of development finance.

The warmth of Pakistan's ties with China contrasts sharply with the on-off relationship Pakistan has had with the United States.

Pakistan has been a major US ally in a global war on terrorism for the past five years, and has been supplied with long-coveted US weapons and generous aid, but many Pakistanis see the United States as a fickle friend.

The United States reached a nuclear cooperation deal with India this year but declined to offer Pakistan similar help. Pakistan remains under a cloud because of the role played by its former top scientist in a nuclear proliferation scandal.

Hu was due to address the Pakistani nation on television later on Friday and travel to the city of Lahore on Saturday. He is due to leave Pakistan on Sunday.

centrifuge enrichment plant," Albright said.

Another analyst who follows Iran closely, Mark Fitzgerald of London's International Institute for Strategic Studies, said Natanz and Lavizan were "two of many areas in which the IAEA has asked additional questions."

He called the Iranian moves "a small show of cooperation, but I don't think it gets Iran off the hook in terms of meeting the Security Council mandate for full cooperation."

EI Baradei told his board that limited cooperation by Iran had blocked the IAEA from making "further progress" on clearing up questions about Tehran's nuclear program, including the scope of its enrichment work.

The IAEA chief said the access to Natanz and the Lavizan equipment were "steps in the right direction" but that they should be followed in the immediate future by "additional measures."

The IAEA on Thursday had shelved indefinitely Iran's request for technical help in building a nuclear reactor that the United States fears could provide plutonium for weapons.

Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki said Iran would still press on with its heavy-water reactor in Arak, which Tehran says is to produce medical isotopes.