

## Carter's Mideast book polarises opinion

REUTERS, Atlanta

A new book by Jimmy Carter in which he compares Israel's treatment of Palestinians to South Africa's Apartheid system has sparked a bitter debate over the former US president's reputation as a peacemaker.

Jewish groups have expressed outrage at the book "Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid," arguing its comparison of Israel to the racist South African regime could undermine the perception of Israel's legitimacy.

Carter, 82, has been dogged by protests during a promotional tour and Ken Stein, a long-time advisor on Middle East issues who was also the first executive director at the Carter Center in Atlanta, resigned over the book's content.

In an interview with Reuters, Stein cited a passage from the book that said it was imperative for Arabs and Palestinians to "make it clear that they will end the suicide bombings and other acts of terrorism when international laws and the ultimate goals of the Roadmap for peace are accepted by Israel."

Stein said: "Does that mean killing Jews is legitimate? Did I misread this? I don't think so. If he wrote it, he is endorsing violence, which is not the original purpose of the Carter Center."

But Douglas Brinkley, who published a biography of Carter focusing on his post-presidential years, said the book could enhance Carter's reputation in the Middle East and beyond among those who see him as an independent voice.

"This flap only enhances his reputation globally. It makes him seem somebody who doesn't just speak an American government line but who is an international peacemaker and a candid analyst," Brinkley told Reuters.

"The damage he has done is in the U.S. and Israel and in those

countries his reputation has taken a hit," he said.

In the book, Carter, who won the Nobel peace prize in 2002 for conflict resolution, traces the history of the Middle East from the 19th century to the present through the Camp David Accords in 1978, a year into his presidency.

"Anyone that goes there can't deny that a system of apartheid is going on," Carter said in a speech in Atlanta after the book was published in November.

He said he was "completely at ease" with the book, and that its title was deliberately provocative.

### WEDGE ISSUE

Carter's assertion that U.S. debate on the Middle East has been stifled by a pro-Jewish lobby is aimed at causing people within America's evangelical community to question support for Israel, according to Michael Jacobs, managing editor of the Atlanta Jewish Times.

He said the assertion would likely backfire.

"It's damaged the way he is seen in the Jewish community of Atlanta and ... a large portion of the evangelical Christian community. But people who aren't friends of Israel see this as an example of him being courageous," Jacobs told Reuters.

Carter is a native of Georgia, where he served as governor before launching his bid for the White House, and is widely seen as the state's leading citizen.

Judy Marx, executive director of the Atlanta chapter of the American Jewish Committee, said the book would undermine Carter's reputation for conflict resolution "because he is not offering balanced opinions and being an honest broker."

But she said the controversy had in the short term opened doors for dialogue with African American, Latino and other groups in Atlanta who had invited her group to address them over the book.

## Potato farmers

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Munshiganj district who cultivates potatoes on a three-acre plot said.

Notwithstanding a scarcity in seeds, potato production has increased in the Munshiganj district in 2006. "Potatoes are normally cultivated on 30,530 hectares of land in the Munshiganj district, however this year at least another 1,000 acres of land came under potato cultivation," said Jatindra Chandra Modak, deputy director of Munshiganj district department of agriculture extension. Government officials in the department of agriculture extension told journalists that all the low lands in the districts came under potato cultivation this year. As a result, hardly any low arable land remains after this year's sowing season, Jatindra observed.

Munshiganj produces around 40 per cent of the Bangladesh's total potato production and the average potato yield in the district is well over double the national average per hectare. The average potato production in the district is 27.70 metric tons per hectare against national average of 11-12 tons, they said. More than 50 per cent of arable land in the district goes under potato cultivation, agriculture extension sources said.

There are also concerns that farmers are overusing fertilizers, pesticides and fungicides to maximize production. Government officials claim that farmers cultivating potatoes on a commercial basis are paying little heed to suggestions for a reduction in chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

The DAE deputy director said that they have promoted a wide-spread information programme among farmers, advocating a reduction in the use of fertilizers to ensure maintaining soil quality. This year 2,000 farmers were given special training about the danger in using chemical fertilizer in potato farming, he said.

The main advantages of the district in potato farming is low land, heavy silt during monsoon and suitable weather condition, Modak said.

## Tarique

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workers of BNP and its front organisations of Gabtoli unit of Bogra district thronged Hawa Bhaban in the morning and chanted slogans in favour of Tarique's nomination for Gabtoli constituency.

They met Tarique and demanded his candidature for the constituency.

Khaleda called the party activists to her Hawa Bhaban office to listen to them during lunch break of interview of BNP nomination-seekers from five districts of Dhaka Division. She was apparently convinced by their request.

The BNP chairperson then called Tarique and told him that he would have to contest the election from Bogra-7 constituency, as the locals demand it.

The party activists burst into joy at the announcement.

Later, the party's standing committee members congratulated Tarique for his candidature.

## Khaleda

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BNP Office Secretary Nazrul Islam Khan conveyed Khaleda's call as he briefed newsmen on the interview of BNP nomination seekers yesterday.

A total of 174 aspirants for 23 parliamentary constituencies of Kishoreganj, Manikganj, Munshiganj, Gazipur and Narsingdi districts appeared for interview at BNP chairperson's Hawa Bhaban office at Banani.

BNP Parliamentary Board conducted the interview with Khaleda Zia in the chair.

## Iajuddin

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Commissioner to Bangladesh Anwar Choudhury during a meeting at Bangabhaban.

Choudhury informed the president that London wanted to see an election participated by all political parties in Bangladesh.

A Bangabhaban spokesman told UNB that the British envoy informed the president that they [diplomats] already urged parties involved in movements to take part in the election shunning the path of street violence.

The British High Commissioner said, "It's not our concern which party comes to power, but we expect the election to be participated by all."

Referring to the signing of the "general understanding" between the European Union (EU) and other countries, including Sri Lanka, Choudhury suggested signing of a similar agreement on monitoring the polls by the EU.

The envoy also informed the president the EU signed a memorandum of understanding with the Election Commission regarding the attendances of the European poll observers recently.

The president termed Dhaka-London ties as unique and appreciated the British assistances for the development of Bangladesh, the spokesman said.

Earlier, outgoing Afghan Ambassador to Bangladesh Akmal Ghani made a farewell call on President Iajuddin Ahmed. During the meeting, the president recalled the historic and traditional ties between Dhaka and Kabul.

Iajuddin also recalled his meeting with Afghan President Hamid Karzai at the funeral of Saudi King Fahad Bin AbdulAziz.

He expected Afghanistan, a new Saarc member, would play an important role for development of the region.

The ambassador recalled with appreciation the role of late president Ziaur Rahman regarding the Saarc launching.

## Bangladeshi

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Police sources said the Pakistani intelligence forces picked up Mubarak while coming out of a mosque in Jalalabad, Afghanistan as he was asking for directions to Karachi.

The Pakistan police took him to Karachi and detained him there for two weeks before handing him over to the US special agents. The US special agents then flew him to the Guantanamo prison, said police sources.

Abul Hashem told the reporters that he went to the Airport Police to receive his son after he came to know of his son's return on TV.

"After becoming a Hafez from a madrasa at Lalmaia in Dhaka, he (Mubarak) went to a madrasa in Karachi (Pakistan) at the end of 1998 to obtain the Mufti degree," Hashem said.

"Mubarak studied there for two years and afterwards began teaching at a madrasa before he went missing," he continued.

Mubarak's uncle Giasuddin was also in Karachi during his study there, said Hashem. "All of a sudden, my brother (Giasuddin) one day informed me over phone that Mubarak went missing."

Giasuddin returned to Bangladesh in 2002 after failing to find Mubarak, he added.

Hashem said all his six sons and

two daughters are educated in madrasas.

He found out about his missing son's whereabouts from Red Crescent in 2004. "The Red Crescent first informed me that my son is being detained at Guantanamo, but I did not believe them," he told the reporters.

But later, almost all detective agencies in the country started inquiring about Mubarak, which made the father believe the authenticity of the Red Crescent's information.

"Following the lead, I applied through the Red Crescent in June this year for my son's release," Hashem said.

Red Crescent made his son's return possible by assisting Hashem submit the documents required by the home and foreign ministry.

## Polls expenditure

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He said the Ministry of Finance will extend any cooperation in this regard, if required.

Replying to another question on political unrest over the coming elections, he said the advisers were communicating with the political parties and expected that the government would be able to inform about a positive development within a day or two.

## Butenis observes

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American Studies (BAAS) organised the seminar in cooperation with the American Centre in Dhaka. Held at the Cirdap auditorium in the capital, it was chaired by BAAS President Dr AKM Nurun Nabi.

She lauded the major political parties for what she said was flexibility on issues they once insisted had no room for compromise.

Describing all parties' participation in the election as crucial, she said, "The people of Bangladesh deserve to have choices that reflect the diversity of opinion, philosophy, and even style that exists in this country's politics."

Issues relating to the election are fundamentally political and thus require political solutions, she observed.

The responsibility rests primarily on the political parties to do away with the remaining obstacles to full participation in a fair election, she added.

Mentioning public concern over the voter roll, she said it is crucial that the Election Commission continue to address the issue.

She said the US will keep urging flexibility and dialogue on all sides.

She said it is vitally important that the political parties stop trying to manipulate the caretaker government and that the caretaker government actively resist such interference, "whether the pressure comes from the streets or from behind the scenes."

"The essence of caretaker government is impartiality. Whether it is the army, the state-run media, or the police, the credibility of the caretaker government depends on its acting in a visibly neutral and effective manner," said Butenis.

Referring to the sufferings that the people had to experience due to the caretaker government's not acting neutrally, she said, "We hope that is behind us now."

Reiterating US stance against hartals and nation-wide blockades, she called on all parties to pursue their political objectives through democratic practices, not on the streets.

"Students, business people, and ordinary people have all suffered because the political parties of this great country could not agree on the basic rules of the game," she added. "I am an optimist by nature and my observations reflect that optimism but my outlook on life is often severely challenged by your politics," she said.

The US ambassador underlined the importance of "creating political parties that are genuinely democratic in practice and outlook, parties that focus on issues and national interest instead of personalities and perceptions of face, and parties that make decisions transparently and are accountable to their supporters and the people at large, not just as election time but between elections as well".

She said the political parties now should commit themselves to work together in the next parliament, whether as the treasury bench or the loyal opposition, to advance the country's economic, political, and social interests.

On growing controversy over the interim government system, she said, "The caretaker government remains the constitutionally provided mechanism for preparing Bangladesh elections."

"Any extra-constitutional arrangement imposed on the people of Bangladesh, such as military intervention, would not address the basic weaknesses afflicting the current political process, would likely lead to great turmoil and disappointment, and should be stoutly resisted," Butenis said.

"The caretaker government

## 50 vessels

FROM PAGE 16

Baghabari ghat from Chittagong and Narayanganj six days ago but failed to reach there as the water levels at Nakalia, Majkhani and Koitola in the Jamuna river came down to 4/6 feet from 9/10 feet, port authorities said.

The Padma, one of the country's main rivers, has split into many narrow streams with the emergence of innumerable sandbars due to scanty water flow down the Ganges.

Rivers such as Baronai, Fakiri and Atrai as well as canals are also fast drying up.

The fertilisers, fuel and clinkers are now being unloaded from the stranded vessels and carried to Baghabari by boat. "It is pushing up the transport cost abnormally," said one port official.

Taking the advantage of disruption in supply, some dishonest fuel dealers have increased prices of fuels in the northern region.

Chairman of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) Mridul Kanti Ghosh visited the area on Friday and directed the officials concerned to carry out dredging on an urgent basis.

## UAE to spend

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The UAE now plans to use robots to race camels rather than children.

In September, a civil lawsuit was filed in a US court in Florida alleging the ruler of Dubai, a member of the UAE federation, and his brother enslaved some 30,000 children over the past three decades for use as camel jockeys.

The suit named Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum and his brother, Sheikh Hamdan bin Rashid al-Maktoum, as well as others.

They were charged with "the alleged abduction and human trafficking of thousands of young boys" from places like Bangladesh, Sudan and southern Asia, according to a US law firm.

## Nizami blames

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He said the eminent citizens in many meetings said the election time could be deferred if the situation demanded. "There is no scope to defer the election beyond the tenure of the caretaker government according to the constitution and it would be harmful for the nation if the elections were not held in due time," Nizami added.

He said it would be a suicidal decision not to hold the elections within the stipulated time.

The Awami League will participate in the upcoming elections as they had in all the elections of the past including elections under the regimes of HM Ershad, Ayub Khan and Yahya Khan, he observed.

Jamaat Secretary General Ali Ahsan Muhammad Mujahid and a number of its central leaders also spoke in the meeting.

## JP enforces hartal

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A huge number of JP activists took position at important points in the town for picketing in favour of the hartal.

A few pickets damaged two motorbikes in Lalbagh and Dhap areas in the morning.

The JP activists also damaged window glasses of a Parbotipur-bound train about to leave the Rangpur Station at about 9:00am.

The JP district unit held a rally at the Jahaj Company intersection in the afternoon. JP district unit Secretary Moshir Rahman Ranga, Vice-President Abdur Rouf Manik, JP sadar upazila unit President Mostafizur Rahman and Jubo Sanghati President Yeasir Ahmed spoke at the rally.

### LALMONIRHAT

The JP activists and supporters set fire on a truck at Hatibandha at noon.

Rail communication remained suspended on all routes from 6:00am to 6:00pm as pickets took position on rail lines in four upazilas in the district.

The pickets damaged seven motorbikes near Alorupa cinema hall and two more at Saptitbari.

A huge procession was brought out from the party office at 11:00am parading the major streets of Lalmonirhat town.

### KURIGRAM

The hartal was observed peacefully in the district although life came to a standstill as all commercial centres, government and non-government offices, banks and educational institutions remained closed during the hartal hours.

## 3 die

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primary investigation detected that consumption of toxic liquor might have caused the deaths.

Shubol Paharia has been running his homemade liquor business in the area for a long time, locals said.

Abdur Rashid, father of another victim Hannan, alleged that at least 15 illegal liquor factories are being operated in the area with connivance of the police.

## EC's men yet to visit

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the earlier list or have not been registered yet.

A number of prospective voters residing in the city's Panthapath, Magbazar, Rajabazar, Begunbari, Azimpur, Goran, Khilgaon, Maniknagar, Kazipara and Mirpur-10 areas said no field level EC staff visited their houses.

"No EC staff visited our apartment till today," Mosharraf Hossain, manager of Tulip Tower on Road No 11 (New) in Dhanmondi said yesterday.

Amzad Hossain, security guard of House no 251/L on Road 13/A, and Dipu Chowdhury, security guard of House no 79 on Road No 12/A in Dhanmondi, and Sadequzzaman Khan, owner of a four-storey residential building in Jigatola also said no EC staff has yet made a visit to those addresses.

Wahiduzzaman, a security guard of Shwamalata Apartments at 6/1, Block F in Lalmaia said no one came to that address to correct the updated voter list.

During a visit to Basila and nearby Wazpur in Mohammadpur and Hazaribagh yesterday The Daily Star talked to many residents of the areas, all of whom said no EC staff visited their houses till yesterday.

"I have been hearing for the last 10 to 12 days that people will come to correct the voter list, but no one has come yet," said Rahim Bibi of Basila who just turned 100 this year.

Abdul Mannan of Wazpur, just on the other side of Buriganga River also said, "No EC staff visited our house or our neighbours."

Local residents of Syed Nazrul Islam Road in Mohammadpur said most of the prospective voters in 36 houses on the road were not registered. They alleged that the EC staff came to the houses and went back without registering most of their names.

"There are 20 residents in my building who are eligible to be voters and the EC staff registered their names a few months ago. But now we see that only mine and my husband's name are on the updated list," said Rehana Siddique adding that she is not even sure whether she herself will be able to cast her vote as the address mentioned on the voter lists is incorrect.

"I requested the EC staff to list the names of those who were left out although they have been residing in my house for the last four years, but the EC staff left the place without registering their names," Rehana said.

Delwar Hossain, a security guard of a six-storey building just opposite Rehana's building, said two EC staff went to the address, but did not go upstairs. He said the EC staff went away after making sure that two voters whose names are on the list are still residing in the building.

"There are about 25 prospective voters in the building, but only the names of the landlord and his wife are on the list," Delwar said.

## Air pollution

FROM PAGE 16

of deaths in polluted cities by as much as 15 per cent every year, the WHO said, calling for lower limits of other pollutants such as ozone and sulphur dioxide.

"Asia's growth in population, urbanization, motorisation and energy consumption remain key challenges in efforts to counter air pollution. For example, lower emissions from vehicles are counter-balanced by a higher volume of vehicles," the ADB said.

Another ADB study said emerging Asia currently has rather low levels of personal motorized transport, in many cases comprising mainly motorcycles, but these levels are likely to increase drastically as incomes in these countries grow and the urban populations expands.

The Manila-based bank cited China, already the world's fourth-largest economy, where the number of cars and sport utility vehicles could rise by as much as 15 times over the next 30 years to more than 190 million vehicles.

In India, the growth could be as much as 13-fold, it said.

Correspondingly, carbon dioxide emissions could be expected to rise by 3.4 times for China and 5.8 times for India over the same period, the ADB study said.

To help address these problems, the Indonesia conference, attended by representatives of 20 Asian countries, issued a call for a review of air quality standards and air pollution indices all over the region to make them more effective and more comparable to each other.

The conference summary also called for a new "roadmap" for improved fuel quality and emission standards for new vehicles as well as more strategies to control emissions from vehicles that are already on the roads.

Other recommended measures included promoting clean, alternative, renewable energy, encouraging the use of mass public transport systems and even promoting urban housing that lowers energy consumption and emissions.

Both Rehana and Delwar said the scenario is the same in other residential buildings on the road.

### THE EC

EC Secretary Abdur Rashid Sarker yesterday said people are more interested in including their names in the voter list than correcting duplications.

About the outcome of the process of correcting the updated voter list, the EC secretary said, "We have yet to get the report. I do not see any possibility of a decrease in the number of voters rather it might increase."

He was talking to reporters in his office following an EC meeting.

About rescheduling the upcoming election the EC secretary said, "The Election Commission will take a decision regarding that tomorrow."

### CHITTAGONG

Our correspondent from Chittagong reported that many prospective voters including some people of religious minority communities of Nazirbari Lane, Chariapara, Mistripura, and Moulvopara of ward No 24 in the port city said yesterday that they are yet to be registered as voters.

Lucky Sen Gupta, a resident of Mohammad Colony in Nazirbari, told The Daily Star yesterday that she and six other Hindu families in the colony did not see any EC staff.

Saleha Begum, owner of the adjoining Saleha Colony, also made the same allegation saying twenty of her tenants are yet to be registered as voters.

Meanwhile, a local leader of Jatiyatabadi Chattrra Dal (JCD) Towhidul Alam Nishat of Kazir Dewry in Kazipara area submitted some 40 photocopies of filled up inclusion forms to EC Staff Sadhan Kumar Das on Friday for including the names in the voter list.

Two EC staff who visited the area to check the authenticity of the 40 applications yesterday afternoon said the forms are full of wrong information. They said they found no existence of a Marjina Colony in entire Kazipara, although the name of this colony appears in some of the forms.

Our Patuakhali Correspondent reported that EC staff in seven upazilas of the district are continuously facing the ire of the local people demanding inclusion of their names in the voter list.

Our Gaibandha Correspondent reported that field level EC staff have yet to visit the residents of 50 percent prospective voters in the district.

Local people said the EC staff have not yet visited residents of 70 percent of prospective voters in 14 remote unions along the Brahmaputra basin as the communication system is bad and costly for the staff to visit the areas.

## Vegetables traders

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fishes from them. However, the fish wholesalers have agreed to meet all the demands and the fish retailers' strike was withdrawn, said Abdul Karim Babul, general secretary of the association.

The leaders of Karwan Bazar Kanchamal Arot Baboshai Malik Bohumukhi Shamabai Samity threatened to go for legal actions against the on-strike retailers if they prevented other retailers from buying goods from them.

"We will take legal actions against any wholesaler, if the allegations brought against him are proved," said Abdul Latif Mia, president of the Samity.

Dismissing the allegations, he said the 61 members of the wholesalers' association are not involved with any of those things. He claimed there have not been any weight or price manipulations inside Karwan Bazar kitchen market in the last 10 years.

## LDP plans

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participating in it.

During a view exchange meeting with LDP grass roots level leaders at a city hotel, he also laid out the party strategy for the upcoming polls.

Terming the current situation as "uncongenial" for holding a neutral election, the LDP president said that the election can take place only after the reconstitution of the election commission, arrest of criminals, seizure of illegal arms and above all after providing equal election service to all parties.

LDP Executive President Col (Retd) Oli Ahmed, meanwhile, urged the party nomination seekers to form an election functioning committee and a voting centre committee with veteran and young leaders and activists to monitor the casting of votes.