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Iraq challenges 'no-fly' zones, to down western planes

BAGHDAD, Dec 29: Iraq is challenging the 'no-fly' zones patrolled by the United States and Britain by flying its warplanes there, Vice President Taha Yassin Ramadan said today.

The move came a day after US aircraft fired on an anti-aircraft battery in the northern no-fly zone, Iraq says four soldiers were killed.

Asked if Iraq was flying its own aircraft in the no-fly zones, Ramadan said: "We are doing it right now."

"Iraqi planes in effect are flying in a normal manner in Iraqi air space," he told Associated Press Television News.

Ramadan said today that Iraqi armed forces confirmed shooting down a western plane during a US strike on an anti-aircraft position in northern Iraq on Monday.

US officials in Washington and at the air base in Turkey from which the attack was launched have stated that all aircraft returned safely.

Ramadan vowed that Iraq would continue to open fire at

western planes guarding two no-fly zones in southern and northern Iraq.

Iraq does not recognise these no-fly zones ... and we will continue to resist such violations," he said.

In response, the Pentagon said US and British warplanes won't be intimidated by the latest Iraqi threats.

As the president said yesterday, we will continue to enforce the 'no-fly' zones, Lt Col Stephen Campbell said today. "Nothing has changed."

American flyers are prepared to act against any Iraqi aggression, said Col Richard Bridges. "I'm sure that pilots will be much more alert. There'll be more adrenaline running. But the mechanisms to respond appropriately are already in place."

Ramadan issued a direct challenge: "Our resistance will continue against any penetration," he told Associated Press Television News. "The war is still on."

Iraq has always questioned

the legitimacy of the no-fly zones, but has rarely engaged US and British warplanes — the last time was in September of 1996. Now, however, Iraq is trying to provoke the United States as part of a calculated strategy to get out from under strict UN economic sanctions and other controls, foreign policy experts say.

The Iraqi defiance is likely to escalate its confrontation with the United States and Britain, which bombed Iraq for four nights from Dec 16 and Dec 19.

The state aim of the airstrikes was to diminish Iraq's ability to build weapons of mass destruction, which UN weapons inspectors were trying to dismantle until they withdrew Dec 16, complaining of Iraqi obstruction.

Iraq says 62 soldiers and more than 40 civilians were killed in the strikes. Iraq alleges that many civilian targets were hit, and not just defense sites as the United States maintains.

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Hasina slates Ershad

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for allowing the opposition to speak in Parliament, the Prime Minister said the opposition leader doesn't go to parliament, nor takes part in the debates.

"But when she speaks in the House she gets enough time, sometime she takes more time than the Leader of the House."

Brushing aside the allegation of the opposition leader that the ruling party is jeopardizing sovereignty and independence of the country, Hasina, also the President of Awami League, said: "The party which gave blood for the independence could never betray."

Rather, those who don't believe in the independence, nor have faith in the spirit of Liberation War may betray with the nation at the cost of sovereignty," she said.

The Prime Minister said that while in power, Khaleda Zia had harmed the country's interest by signing a joint communiqué with India that gave rise to the "push in" controversy.

The previous BNP government also turned the local market into a market of Indian goods by unilaterally withdrawing the tariff and non-tariff barriers, she alleged and said that government has stopped the process and taken measures for export of more Bangladeshi goods to India.

"We've taken steps for protecting the market, for the growth of local industry and creating market for Bangladeshi goods abroad to uphold the country's interest."

About measures to keep prices of essentials within the reach of the commonman, she said the government has begun the Open Market Sale of rice at fair price.

Regarding the Upazila election, Hasina said the parliament has passed a bill allowing election of the local government body. Upazila and Pourasava elections will be held soon in the country, she added.

Referring to the Pabna-2 by-election, she said all the elections under this government were held in a totally free and fair atmosphere. "The coming elections under this government will also be free and fair," she assured.

Responding to local de-

mands, Hasina said a polytechnic institute will be set up in Sirajganj and the district hospital will be developed. A children's park will be set up in Sirajganj town and measures will be taken to develop the educational institution, she added.

She said the government is also planning an "industrial park" near the Bangabandhu Bridge for industrial growth of the region.

"We're fulfilling our commitments to the people one by one," she said.

Khaleda

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nobody can sleep in peace as murder, hijacking and kidnapping have become everyday incident," she alleged.

"There is no alternative to movement to topple this anti-people government."

Referring to various problems in the city she said, how the government which can not manage traffic and keep the city clean can hope to manage the economy, maintain law and order and run the state affairs. "In fact the ruling party has no experience and competence to run the country," Begum Zia said.

She said her party has launched movement against the "incompetent, corrupt and anti-people" government. She claimed that people including students have started protesting government's "misdeeds". Students of Dhaka University and Jahangirnagar University have started anti-government agitation, she added.

"Fall of this government must be expedited further through a united movement aimed at a single objective," she added and called upon all to join the current movement for establishing "people's rule and re-establishing democracy in the country".

Presided over by city BNP's Joint Convenor Ekashuddin Mollah, it was addressed by among others, Sadeq Hossain Khoka MP, Amanullah Aman MP, Jainul Abedin Faruq MP, Ehsanul Kabir, Hasan Uddin Sarker, Abdus Salam, Kazi Abdul Bashar, MA Malek, Nasiruddin Ahmed Pinto, Tobarak Hossain Parag and Ahsanullah Hasan.

All my money is gone, says Gorbatchev

MUNICH, Dec 29: Former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbatchev says in an interview published today that he lost his savings — about 80,000 dollar — in Russia's financial crisis last summer, reports AP.

"All my money is gone," he told Bunte magazine.

The financial turmoil in August sent the Moscow bank where he had his account into bankruptcy, he said. Because of the loss, he said he hasn't been able to pay the employees at his personally financed foundation for months either.

You know, I'm not really as rich as many in the West think," he said. "The 'new rich' here in Moscow often spend more in one night than I earn in a whole year."

The speakers at the rally also expressed solidarity with the six-point demand of the SPSH. They urged the people of the country, especially students to launch a concerted movement against all forms of sexual harassment.

The SPSH would announce further programmes at a press conference tomorrow.

The SPSH held the 'solidarity rally' on the Central Library premises under police protection. Earlier, it brought out a procession from Rokeya Hall.

A section of students of the Jahangirnagar University (JU) joined the rally to express solidarity with the SPSH.

The organisations that expressed solidarity are Bangladesh Chhatra Federation, Jatiya Chhatra Dal, Chhatra Oikya Forum, Biplobi Chhatra Moity, Nari Pragati, Tatty Parjalochara O Samanay Kendra, Suchana Adhayan Chakra, Bibartan Sangskriti, Bitarka Patrika Goshti, Samaj Chetana and Samilita Nari Samaj.

A number of DU teachers also expressed solidarity with the SPSH and addressed the rally. They include Prof Mozaffar Ahmed of IBA, HK Arefin of Anthropology, Golam Hossain and MM Akash of Economics, Mofazzelul Haq of Public Administration, Mesbah Kamal of History and Rubaiat Ferdous of Mass Communication and Journalism.

The rally was addressed by

DU: Protest mounting

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campus yesterday to protest the attacks on students.

The SPSH members came under attack from their rival group "Conscious Students" on Sunday and Monday. The rival group that claims they stand for saving the image of DU teachers did not observe any programme yesterday.

The JCD leaders, at a rally in front of the DUCSU building, held the Vice-chancellor responsible for the untoward incidents on the campus over the last few days and asked him to resign.

The unrest was created by the Awami League-backed BCL and so the AL-backed VC should step down taking all the responsibility," JCD president for the DU unit Monir Hossain said.

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eminent writer Ahmed Sofi, lawyer Rawson Jahan Parveen, nutritionist Dilwar Akhtar Jahan, JU teacher Anu Muhammad, BUET teacher Abdul Hasib Chowdhury, Notre Dame College teacher A.N. Rasheda, general secretary of Sangjukta Sramik Federation Sharif Ullah, president of Bahumukhi Hacker Samity Bacchu, Mirza Taslima of March 18 Parishad, president of Hill Woman's Federation Kabita Chakma, president of Pahari Chhatra Parishad Dipayan Khisa, Faizul Hakim Lal of Anti-Fascism Democratic Committee and Manash Chowdhury of 'Asuchi'.

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