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US request Advisors apprise President of govt's stand

UNB, Dhaka

President Shahabuddin Ahmed has again made it clear that the election will be held within the prescribed time provided in the Constitution.

Nobody should have doubt or apprehension about it, the president said at a meeting with Chief Advisor Latifur Rahman and the members of his council of advisors at Bangabhaban yesterday.

The council of advisors discussed with the president the law and order situation of the country.

They said the deployment of armed forces in some sensitive areas has been highly appreciated by the people and it has created confidence in their minds. They also expressed eagerness for such deployment in all the districts and upazilas, said a Bangabhaban release.

The council apprised the president of the government stand relating to the election.

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No Taliban network in Bangladesh

BSS, Dhaka

The government yesterday denied and knowledge of the presence of any cell of Afghan-based Taliban organisation or any fundamental groups in Bangladesh.

When asked to comment on an AP report that the disciplines of Osama bin Laden have been working in 34 countries including Bangladesh, a government spokesman said that the government had no such information.

The Principal Information Secretary said.

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Personnel assigned to the "Pukin' Dogs" of Fighter Squadron One Four Three (VF-143) perform maintenance on two F-14 "Tomcats" aboard aircraft carrier USS John F. Kennedy (CV67) in an undisclosed location at sea on Monday as destroyer USS Spruance (DD 963) steams in the background.

US battleships on the move

AFP, Washington

At least three US aircraft carriers were heading to undisclosed destinations yesterday as Washington assembled an international military coalition expected to go into Afghanistan.

US President George W. Bush has vowed to get bin Laden "dead or alive" and wage a crusade against terrorism. White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said Tuesday that the message to Afghanistan "remains loud and it remains clear: Those nations that harbour terrorists will not be spared."

In Norfolk, Virginia, the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt was to slip out of port along with an escort of 11 warships and a unit of Marines capable of conducting special operations, according to the US navy.

President Bush on Tuesday signed a congressional resolution authorising military action against those behind the attacks on New York and Washington, saying he was determined to bring Osama bin Laden to justice.

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Islamic alliance warns Musharraf of 'civil war'

Protest across Pakistan continues

REUTERS, AP, Islamabad

The head of a grouping of 35 Pakistani Islamic organisations said yesterday they would have to obey any Taliban order for a religious war if the United States attacked Afghanistan.

Maulana Sami-ul Haq, chairman of the Afghan Defence Council that includes 35 pro-Taliban Islamic groups, warned Pakistan's military leader General Pervez Musharraf against backing the US campaign against the Taliban and their "guest" Osama bin Laden.

Haq's statements at a news conference in Rawalpindi, beside the capital Islamabad, coincided with a gathering of clerics in the Afghan capital Kabul that could issue a call for jihad, or a religious war, against the United States and its supporters.

"If the ulema give an edict of jihad against American aggression and they also use Pakistan for it, then the entire ulema of the Islamic world and Pakistan will have to support that edict of jihad," Haq said.

He warned Pakistan's president that cooperation with the United States in its hunt for Laden could plunge the country into civil war.

"Pakistan army will be the target of public wrath and hatred if the military-led government allows American troops in the country to attack our Islamic neighbour," said Haq.

The alliance also called a nationwide strike and rallies on Friday, the Islamic sabbath.

"We will continue our protests until the government changes its decision," Haq told reporters. "And if

our Afghan brethren announces jihad (holy war) against America, we would also be forced to announce jihad," he said.

President Pervez Musharraf faces a difficult task when he takes his case before ordinary Pakistanis.

In a televised speech planned last night, Gen Pervez Musharraf was to try to reassure the nation that his military government acted in Pakistan's best interests when it agreed to help US forces capture or kill suspected terrorist Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan, said senior government officials familiar with the contents of the address. They spoke on condition of anonymity.

Musharraf's decision to provide US forces with access to its country's air space and land in the process of the operation was a

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Mullah Omar offers talks but Bush wants action

Edict on fate of Laden likely today

REUTERS, Kabul

The Taliban's spiritual leader yesterday told a council of hundreds of Islamic religious leaders deliberating the fate of the world's most wanted man, Osama bin Laden, that he was ready for talks with the United States.

The council, or shura, is expected to make a final decision by today on bin Laden, prime suspect in the September 11 destruction of the World Trade Center and the attack on the Pentagon in which nearly 6,000 were killed, Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) said.

"We have not tried to create problems with America," AIP quoted the reclusive Mullah Mohammad Omar as saying in a speech read out

to the shura of more than 1,000 religious leaders that he had convened to discuss the fate of bin Laden and the possibility of US air strikes.

"We have had several talks with the present and the past American governments and we are ready for more talks."

Taliban's Education Minister Mullah Amir Khan Muttaqi, who is attending the meeting, told the Pakistan-based AIP the council's final decision was expected by tomorrow.

"It is expected that the session will continue tomorrow (Thursday) and the final discussion and fatwa (edict) can be expected," said Mullah Muttaqi, adding that any decision would be in accordance

with Islamic Sharia law.

Mullah Omar earlier appeared to rule out any swift hand over of bin Laden, the Saudi-born multimillionaire wanted as the suspected mastermind of the US suicide attacks.

Any evidence linking bin Laden to the attacks should be handed over to the Afghan Supreme Court or to religious leaders of three Islamic countries, he said in the speech read out to the ulema, gathered in the presidential palace in the capital, Kabul.

"Our Islamic state is the true Islamic system in the world and for this reason... the enemies of our country look on us as a thorn in their eye and seek different excuses to finish it off," he was quoted as say-

ing.

"Osama bin Laden is one of these (excuses)," he said of the man whom US President George W. Bush said is wanted "dead or alive."

Can they decide?

It was unclear if the ulema really have the authority to decide to surrender bin Laden given the reverence that surrounds Omar, who may have convened the meeting more to endorse his own views than to seek consensus.

Omar's remarks came just two days after Pakistani intelligence chief General Mahmood Ahmed flew to meet him in his southern stronghold, Kandahar, to try to convince him that if the Taliban do not hand over bin Laden their turn will come.

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Attacks in US Indo-Pak envoys brief CA on their countries' positions

UNB, BSS, Dhaka

The High Commissioners of India and Pakistan called on Chief Adviser Justice Latifur Rahman at his office yesterday.

They discussed with the Chief Adviser their countries' positions following terrorist attacks on America.

Latif apprised the Indian High Commissioner ML Tripathi of the decision of the Council of Advisors in response to a US request for assistance following terrorist attacks on New York and Washington.

"This decision was based on a consensual approach involving consultation with the major political parties and a broad spectrum of foreign policy experts," he said.

Justifying Dhaka's position on the issue, the head of caretaker

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EC warns Khaleda, 64 others for violating code of conduct

UNB, Dhaka

Election Commission has so far warned 65 candidates, including Khaleda Zia and some other prominent leaders, for violating election code of conduct.

The EC issued warning letters to them on the basis of reports from the district electoral inquiry committees.

The candidates violated the code of conduct by publishing coloured posters and posters larger than permissible size, putting up election symbols larger than allowable size and using loud speakers during restricted time.

Eighteen such warning letters were issued yesterday asking the candidates concerned to strictly abide by the code of conduct, said a spokesman of the EC Secretariat during regular briefing.

They included Anwar Hossain Manju (Barguna-3), the secretary

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Prisoners forced to sleep in shifts!

Tale of jails in 3 districts

ROVING CORRESPONDENT, from Feni

Prisons in Feni, Noakhali and Laxmipur have become so crowded that inmates are forced to sleep or rest in shifts.

Prison officials and the district administration said such overcrowding is a regular phenomenon. The number of prisoners rose by only a fraction during the on-going police drive.

A doctor at Laxmipur jail said that due to overcrowding, scabies and various fungal infections are on the rise among the prisoners.

"The menace of skin diseases are always there and most of the prisoners have scabies," said Dr. Mohammad Selim.

There are 743 prisoners at Laxmipur prison now against its capacity of 121.

At Feni prison, the overcrowding problem is so acute that the authori-

ties shifted more than 550 prisoners to different jails recently.

Local officials said that if the courts did not grant bails, it would have been impossible for the authorities to accommodate so many prisoners in country's jails.

"The same problem exists in almost all the prisons in the country. It worsened during the on-going drive to nab criminals," said an official at Laxmipur prison.

At Feni, an official said that about 70 per cent of the inmates were under-trial prisoners. At one stage, most of them would go out on bails.

"There are thousands outside on bail. With our existing facilities in prisons, we do not want them back," said an official at Feni.

Prison officials also said they are facing acute shortage of prison guards. The Laxmipur jail requires 80 guards but it has 38 now. The same problem exists everywhere.



Part of the BIWTA terminal at Chandpur crumbled due to river erosion (left) and the onrush of water of the Meghna and the Dakatia brought hotels and shops in the terminal area on the verge of collapse (right).

Meghna devours portion of Chandpur launch terminal

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chandpur

A large portion of Chandpur BIWTA launch terminal building and about 200 metres of the terminal were washed away yesterday morning by turbulent waters of rain-fed Meghna and Dakatia rivers.

According to BIWTA sources, the erosion started at about 5 am as the rivers swelled following two days' downpour.

The entire BIWTA terminal is now threatened as six of its foundation pillars have collapsed and the protection embankment has been washed away.

The terminal building has been closed and launches are berthing at a nearby place.

The Chandpur steamer ghat and the fish ghat are also threatened, officials said.

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Musharraf tries to allay fear

AP, Islamabad

Dressed in his military uniform, Pakistan's President Gen. Pervez Musharraf said in a nationally televised speech yesterday that the US decision to go after suspected terrorist Osama bin Laden does not target Islam or the people of Afghanistan.

"Nowhere have the words Islam or the Afghan nation been mentioned," in discussions between Pakistan and the United States during discussions about cooperating in their efforts to battle terrorism, he said.

He warned that the terrorist attacks against the United States and Pakistan's decision to help the United States find and prosecute the perpetrators has put the country in its worst crisis since its last war with neighboring India in 1971.

"Pakistan is passing through a very serious time," he said. "Our decision today will impact on our future."

US promises rewards for Pakistan

AFP, Islamabad

The United States yesterday assured Pakistan it would be rewarded for its decision to back possible US military action against Afghanistan.

"Let me just assure you that the United States stands by its friends," Washington's ambassador in Islamabad, Wendy Chamberlain, told reporters after meeting with Pakistan's minister for refugees.

"We are quite aware of a number of needs that Pakistan has really to accomplish the objectives of this government."

"You will find that we will stand by our friends who stand by us."

"We are currently talking about any number of ways to be responsive to Pakistan as they have been responsive to us."

Pakistan has made it clear that it expects its decision to back the United States in the current crisis to result in more financial aid and an easing of international sanctions imposed over its nuclear program.

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