

Anti-terrorism law sails thru' joint Indian parliament

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

The Indian Parliament has, at a rare joint sitting of its two Houses, given its seal of approval to the controversial new tough anti-terrorism law after a marathon debate marked by a bitter of words between the ruling BJP-led alliance and the Opposition.

That the Prevention of Terrorism Bill, 2002, was passed Tuesday night by 425 votes for and 296 against by members of Lok Sabha (Lower House) and Rajya Sabha (upper house) was more or less predictable as was the debate along expected partisan lines.

The joint sitting – only the third instance in Indian Parliamentary history after 1961 and 1978 – as necessitated after the bill was endorsed by Lok Sabha, where BJP-led alliance has majority, but rejected by Rajya Sabha where the opposition enjoys the edge in number game.

The day-long debate on the bill was enlivened by a spirited speech by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee towards the end when he made an intervention primarily because of his firm rebuttal of the charges made by Leader of the Opposition Sonia Gandhi who led the opposition charge against the

bill.

The new anti-terrorism law provides capital punishment for terrorist killings, empowers police to detain a person for 90 days without trial and special courts to handle terrorism cases.

BJP's ally Trinamool Congress led by Mamata Banerjee abstained from the joint sitting and AIADMK led by actress-turned-politician Jayalalitha and Nationalist Congress Party of Sharad Pawar were among the parties outside the ruling combine fold to support the bill.

Opposing the bill for its "anti-democratic" features, Sonia Gandhi said "time has come for Vajpayee to decide if his primary duty was to safeguard people's welfare or "succumb to internal pressures of his party and its sister organizations."

"Will he (Vajpayee) be submissive and weak in his leadership or will be uphold the prestige of the high office he holds. His moment of reckoning has come," she said in an equally spirited attack on the bill.

Stating that the bill was aimed at fulfilling "narrow political ends and subverting the very spirit of the Constitution," Gandhi said the measure was aimed at "suppressing" political rivals and religious

minorities and "overlooks the basic human rights of individuals." The measure, she added, posed "a larger threat" to the freedom of ordinary people "than to terrorists."

Vajpayee, in a brief intervention at the fag-end of the debate, launched a scathing counter-attack on Gandhi. His speech reflected a sense of hurt as well as anger, unusual of the veteran parliamentarian of more than four decades.

Referring to Sonia Gandhi's allegation that he was working under pressure from RSS and its affiliate bodies, Vajpayee said "This is wrong. I do not work under pressure from anyone. My parliamentary career is an ample testimony to this.

Vajpayee said he is not holding the office of Prime Minister courtesy Congress but despite its opposition. "People want me and I will remain Prime Minister till they want," he said questioning the words used by the Leader of the Opposition in her prepared speech.

Beside Gandhi, other opposition leaders including Somnath Chatterjee of CPI(M) and Samajwadi Party chief Mulayam Singh Yadav said the bill could be misused as was being done "selectively" in Gujarat state "evoking fear among minorities."

Gold worth Tk 58.80 lakh seized at ZIA

UNB, Dhaka

Customs officials seized 840 tolas of gold worth about Tk 58.80 lakh from a security guard at the Zia International Airport on Monday.

Police said the customs officials challenged Aminul Islam for his suspicious movement and recovered 84 gold bars, after searching his body at about 7 am.

Aminul was handed over to police. A case was filed.

Milk Vita dealer shot, robbed of Tk 5 lakh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Muggers shot and took away about Tk 5 lakh from a Milk Vita dealer in the city's Pallabi area yesterday, hospital sources said.

The victim, Mafizul Haq, was shot on his way to bank to deposit the money.

Critically injured Haq was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

When contacted last night, the duty officer at Pallabi police thana could not confirm the incident and said no case was filed in this regard.

Graft cases

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In yet another case, one incumbent and three former government officials were sued for inviting bids without estimating the cost of the theatre. The four misappropriated Tk 52,28,21,000, the case alleged.

The accused are former chief engineer of the PWD AKM Mukitir Rahman, former chief engineer of the PWD Iskandar Hayet, additional chief engineer (Reserve) of the PWD and project director of Building Construction Project AFM Monjurul Islam and incumbent executive engineer of the PWD Azizul Haq Khan.

BAC filed the cases with the Tejaigon police station after getting approval from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

Apart from Hasina and Alamgir, four former ministers were sued in graft cases for the first time.

With these three cases, the number of graft cases filed against Hasina stands at five.

On December 11, BAC filed a dozen cases with different police stations of the city against former prime minister Sheikh Hasina and six former AL ministers along with around 40 former and serving bureaucrats and businessmen. Never in the country's history have so many bureaucrats been implicated together in graft cases.

On January 8, BAC filed six cases against three former AL ministers and some bureaucrats. Again on March 2, it filed two cases against an adviser to Sheikh Hasina, and 12 bureaucrats and businessmen.

Intelligence outfits

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tee noted that so far 124 decisions were taken for improving law and order.

Of these, some 55 have been implemented while 69 are being implemented.

In many cases, people are not aware of steps taken about law and order, so the meeting decided that one or two programmes on law and order would be telecast each week.

Discussing the "easy bail granting process," the committee also decided to gather information about it from officers in-charge (OCs) and police officials working in courts as well as the PPPs.

An action plan will then be framed to protect victims and witnesses while curbing terrorism.

The meeting was attended by ministers Moudud Ahmed, Mirza Abbas, Altaf Hossain Chowdhury and Dr Osman Farrok, state minister Lutfuzzaman Babor, cabinet secretary, law secretary and the IGP.

DCC polls

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BNP sources said there are more than one BNP candidate in almost all the wards, which has made it all the more difficult to extend party blessing to aspirants.

They said Jamaat has already been allowed to field its candidates in five wards – 4, 13, 36, 59 and 87. But it has demanded 15 more.

Talking to The Daily Star, city BNP President and mayor candidate Sadeque Hossain Khoka said the party has already finalised nominations for about 75 wards and expects to finalise the remaining ones before March 30, the last date for withdrawal.

Replying to a question, he said the BNP has prepared a list of 23 identified terrorists, who have submitted nomination papers. "It is out of question to nominate any of the 23. We will not give nomination to any terrorist," he added.

Khoka however said the Awami League government had implicated a number of candidates in various 'politically motivated' cases.

As a case in point, he said the previous government filed over 100 cases against Mohammad Mohon of Old Dhaka and claimed 'all these cases were politically motivated'.

"I was also implicated in 146 cases, including seven for murder, during the Awami League regime. But am I a terrorist?" he asked.

Shahriar

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Procedure Code (CrPC). Police failed to file any specific case against Shahriar till December 7 last year.

But Mohammad Shahadat Hossain, officer-in-charge (OC) of Airport Police Station, filed a sedition case against Shahriar Kabir with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka on December 8 last year.

He was granted ad-interim bail for six months by the High Court on January 20.

Hasina, UK envoy

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ment-opposition parley before the bill was passed and other contemporary domestic political developments also came up for discussion, sources said.

The AL said despite repeated urge the government neither withdrew the bill nor did it adjourn the session on March 21, the day the parliament passed the controversial bill.

AL lawmaker Kazi Zafrullah, who was a key person in the March 21 government-opposition parley, was also present during the meeting between Hasina and Carter.

These issues apart, during the hour-long meeting Hasina and Carter also discussed matters of mutual interests such as economic cooperation between the two countries and the interests of Bangladeshi expatriates in the UK.

British envoy appreciated Bangladesh's economic development during the five-year rule of former prime minister Sheikh Hasina and her commitment towards democracy.

Political Secretary to the AL president Sabir Hossain Chowdhury and her Press Advisor Jawadul Karim were also present.

Murder cases

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He said the designated courts would also be asked not to take up any fresh case before completing the trial of those cases.

The law minister said the delay in trial of those cases was frustrating people who have started questioning function of the Judiciary.

"Our government is committed to ensuring speedy trial," he said, adding that the law ministry is screening the list it received from the home ministry.

Moudud said the coordination and monitoring cell would also look into why the witnesses did not appear in the cases, which, he said, is also a cause of the delay.

In the first phase, the cases of Dhaka would be dealt with and then the cell would look into other cases outside the capital.

2-stroke vehicles

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BELA also prayed for ensuring that the exemption of motor cycles from the requirement of certificate of fitness under the Motor Vehicles Ordinance, 1983 be withdrawn immediately.

The BLAST petition also prayed for directives to check vehicular pollution.

On behalf of the government, BRTA, Dhaka Metropolitan Police, environment ministry, Department of Environment, commerce ministry and ministry of energy and mineral resources submitted testimony (affidavit) in opposition before the court.

The government already has five computerised vehicle inspection centres. Although they were completed in May 2000, none of them have been put into operation, sources said.

Advocate Rezwana Hasan, director programmes, and Advocate Iqbal kabir of BELA, moved the petition while advocates M I Farooqui, Shadheen Malik and Md Mannan Khan presented the case.

PM's portrait

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portrait in offices of the heads of government organisations and Bangladesh missions abroad.

The Council of Ministers also approved the drafts of amendments to the Bangladesh Environment Preservation Act, 1995 and the Environment Court Act, 2000.

The cabinet also endorsed the draft of Bangladesh-Turkey Military Training, Strategy and Science Cooperation Agreement.

Fatullah Thana

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The other arrested people are Nannu Mia, Khokon, Abul Hossain, Shamsul Huq, Giasuddin, Rahmatullah, Jamal, Jalaluddin and Sattar.

Soon after the arrests, the supporters of Farid attacked the police station, which led the police to open fire.

AL to agitate

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leaders and workers that day as they were staging hunger strike at different venues.

The passage of a bill in the parliament on March 21 repealing the law on display of Bangabandhu's portrait antagonised the opposition.

Canadian minister

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official talks with State Minister for Foreign Affairs Reaz Rahman and meet ministers of the government.

"On this visit I will focus on enhancing trade relations and investment, promoting studies in Canada, exchanging views with government officials and non-governmental organisations on issues relating to human rights, good governance and security, and seeing first hand the development work being undertaken by Canadians in Bangladesh," Kilgour said.

David Kilgour, MP, and the accompanying business delegation will also talk with senior government officials and business people to further boost bilateral trade ties and explore business opportunities in the power, oil, gas and information technology sectors.

In addition, the Canadian minister will launch the Canada-Bangladesh Business Council, participate in a groundbreaking ceremony for the new Canadian chancery complex in Dhaka, and visit CIDA-sponsored NGO projects that promote education, women's empowerment and micro-credit.



PHOTO: STAR

Awami League Chief Sheikh Hasina along with top ranking party leaders placing wreath at Savar memorial on the Independence Day on March 26.

Independence Day

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Chowdhury, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina laid wreaths at the National Memorial at Savar and paid respect to the martyrs of the Liberation War.

National leaders and people from all walks of life also placed wreaths at the memorial, paying homage to the martyrs of the Liberation War.

The day was a public holiday. National flag was hoisted atop government and private buildings while important installations were illuminated in the evening.

Different road islands were tastefully decorated with red-green miniature national flags and colourful festoons.

Main attraction of the day was a combined march past at the National Parade Square. The President took salute and inspected the march.

Various political and socio-cultural organisations celebrated the day, holding rallies, cultural functions and discussions.

The President, the Prime

Minister and the Leader of the Opposition in Parliament gave separate messages on the eve of the Independence and National Day.

Newspapers published special supplements while radio and television channels aired special programmes highlighting the significance of the day in national life.

Different cultural organisations and government's Department of Mass Communication arranged mobile cultural functions on trucks.

Special prayers were offered at mosques and other places of worship seeking divine blessings of the Almighty and continued peace, progress and prosperity of the nation.

Special diets were served in jails, hospitals, orphanages and vagrant homes.

In the afternoon, President Prof A Q M Badrudduja Chowdhury and Begum Chowdhury hosted a reception at Bangabhaban on the occasion.

IU clash

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campus and chased the Saiful group out of the campus. Supporters of the Momin group also assaulted the JCD president, sources said. Both groups entered the campus again at about 4.00pm.

Tension was prevailing on the campus although security was tightened ahead of the convocation.

The critically injured are Joint Secretary Jahangir Hossain, Joint Secretary Sohrab Hossain, Zia Hall Secretary Abdul Majid and Sohel – who were rushed to the IU Medical Centre and a local clinic.

Some other injured are Razzak, Ohidul and Sajjad of the Saiful group and Sujon, Ripu, Jhontu, Momin, Majid, Ranju and Rabiul of the Momin group. Also injured was Abdur Rashid, an employee.

At a press conference yesterday, the IU unit of the JCD expelled two activists for their anti-party activities. They are Abdul Majid, the Zia Hall secretary and Sabir Ahmed Jhontu, the member of the executive body, both belonging to the Momin group.

When contacted, Proctor Dr Mizanur Rahman said, "It is their internal conflict."

Hasina: Garment exempted

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Hasina said the alliance government won the election through massive rigging and resorted to torture and repression on the people to perpetuate their power.

"We have been compelled to announce programmes like hartal as murder and rape have become too common in the country these days," she said adding that her party realises the sufferings of the people and it does want to put the people in trouble, but it has no option.

The former prime minister mentioned the steps taken for the development of the garment sector and said the growth of this sector during Awami League rule was remarkable. Even the massive flood in 1998 could not hamper production and export of this growing sector.

Referring to the decision of the government to stop fabric import to check smuggling, she ridiculed that this was like cutting off the head for headache.

"Smuggling had come down to a large extent during the Awami League rule but it has taken an upturn soon after assumption of power by the BNP-Jamaat government," Hasina told the function.

Referring to the appointment of a

lobbyist firm in USA to solve the problems created following US pressure to allow unionism in EPZs, she said, "Now I'm accused of corruption as I protected the interests of the garment and industrial sectors".

She also referred to the steps undertaken by her government for the development of industrial and social sectors and said her government had worked for the people and put the economy back on track.

"We had left behind a strong economy but they ruined it in five months," she said alleging that the ruling party was working only to make a fortune for itself, and not for the people.

Former finance minister Shah AMS Kibria said the government has utterly failed in economic management and pushed the economy to a dangerous situation for lack of its farsightedness.

Giving a description of declining export and foreign investment, he said it's not possible to increase investment without improving the law and order situation and demanded effective steps for restoring law and order.

Former industries minister Tofail Ahmed said the country had

plunged into a total anarchy and one couldn't expect investment in such an unstable situation.

Awami League general secretary Zillur Rahman MP, former commerce minister Abdul Jalil MP, BGMEA president Kutubuddin Ahmed, BGMEA vice president Ershad Ullah and Quazi Moniruzzaman also addressed the function.

BGMEA president Kutubuddin said former Awami League government had taken a number of important steps for the growth of the garment sector and mentioned that garment exports rose to 5 billion dollars in 2001 from 2.5 billion in 1996.

He said due to sincerity and support of the government of Sheikh Hasina the number of garment factories in the country had risen to 3,500 creating employment opportunities for 18 lakh people of whom 80 per cent were women. "About 76 per cent of the country's export earnings come from this vital sector," he said demanding that the sector be kept free from all political programmes.

Two 'embarrassed' judges

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expressed his embarrassment. The remaining two judges could not take up the case as it required a bench of minimum three members.

However, as per a government decision on January 17 to restructure the Appellate Division, the number of judges was raised to seven from five earlier this month, creating the scope for the revival of the case.

The chief justice formed two benches; one with three judges, while the other comprising four. But the problem remained. The four-member bench could not take up the case since two members had heard the case at the High Court. And, the three-member bench could not hear it as one of its members had earlier felt embarrassed.

Against the backdrop, the chief justice formed a bench consisting of judges who do not have any problem hearing the Bangabandhu Murder Case.

The Awami League (AL) has been maintaining for months that the government is deliberately delaying the process by shifting the schedule of the hearing. Law Minister Moudud Ahmed, on the other hand, claimed that the government was very sincere about the case and it would be complete.

However, after yesterday's development, the AL leaders and those legally involved with the case expressed their frustrations.

Expressing his deep frustration, Awami League presidium member Abdur Razzak said he does not find any reason for the judges to feel

embarrassed. "Judges should play a brave role. Otherwise, people's confidence would erode."

Talking to the BBC, former chief justice Mostafa Kamal observed that the case had repeatedly been halted because of the embarrassment of the judges. "This is an important case. It has political implications and no judge wants to be involved in its politics," he said. "But ultimately, the judges will have to be bold enough to handle the issue," the former chief justice observed.

A Supreme Court source noted that there was a relationship between the case and the issue of restructuring the Appellate Division. The notion of restructuring the division was floated by a group of BNP-leaning lawyers at the Supreme Court during a movement early last year. The lawyers went for agitation protesting appointments of two junior judges superseding senior ones.

A former government legal officer said the court could easily complete the case if it wanted to. "There are still scopes, but the signs are not encouraging regarding the continuation of the case," he said, requesting anonymity.

As regards the options to revive the case, one could be appointment of a judge on an ad-hoc basis. Article 98 of the constitution says,

"If the President is satisfied that the number of the Judges of a division of the Supreme Court should be for the time being increased, the President may appoint one or more duly qualified persons to be Additional

Judges of the division for such period not exceeding two years as he may specify, or, if he thinks fit, may require a Judge of the High Court Division to sit in the Appellate Division for any temporary period as an ad hoc Judge..."

The chief justice in last October, when the case remained deadlocked, exercised this constitutional provision and requested the president to appoint a judge on an ad-hoc basis. But the request was not entertained.

Filed on October 2, 1996, the trial court gave the verdict of the Bangabandhu Murder Case on November 8, 1998. Fifteen persons were convicted to death sentence in the case. Afterwards, the High Court upheld death penalty for 12 of the 15. Of these 12, only four are in jail.

These four appealed before the Appellate Division against the High Court verdict. However, the hearing on the Leave to Appeal petition has not taken place till date.

Mockbul's son

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with the murder.

Later, some 50 BNP supporters went to the Mohammadpur Police Station and asked the officer-in-charge to release the 14 arrested persons within 24 hours.

The group then went to the kitchen market adjacent to the Krishi Market and ransacked and looted some shops. They also damaged a number of vehicles there in the evening.

A tense situation was prevailing in the Mohammadpur area.

BAFWA handicraft show opens Steps taken to make womenfolk worthy citizens: PM

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday said real development of the country is not possible keeping women, who constitute half of the population, neglected and mentioned various steps being taken for them by her government.

"Our government has taken various programmes to make the womenfolk educated, self-reliant and worthy citizens," she said inaugurating a week-long handicraft exhibition at Bijoy Sarani yesterday afternoon.

Some 144 stalls have been set up by different organisations of the Army, Air Force, Navy, BDR, Police, Ansars and VDP. BNCC, Bangladesh Machine Tools Factory and Sena Kalyan Sangsha at the exhibition organised by the Bangladesh Army Family Welfare Association (BAFWA).

Khaleda appreciated the programmes the BAFWA has taken for raising living standard of the family members of defence personnel. She said it was not only improving the condition of the families of armymen but also making significant contribution to socioeconomic uplift of the country.

Referring to relationship between advertisement and flourishing of business, she stressed the need for using modern technology for the publicity of high-quality handicrafts made in Bangladesh.

"Such exhibitions will also help create new markets for the country's handicrafts and earn valuable foreign exchange," she told the function.

Khaleda Zia, who was involved with the floating of BAFWA, recalled her relationship with the association that had a modest start 27 years ago.

ETV's licence

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Mahmud was valid. The transfer of the licence to the ETV as well as the signature by the then prime minister were also found valid. However, the court was not convinced as to how the then prime minister reached the decision that the ETV was number one (in the licence tender procedure)."

Further explaining, he said that despite repeated request the government did not provide the court with the documents on the procedures for the selection of the ETV, and thus the court suspected lack of transparency in it. "That is why it acted suo moto."

But the petitioners (against the ETV) had prayed that both the issuance of the licence as well as its transfer were illegal, he added.

About the fate of the ETV in the event the channel lost the legal battle, Barrister Huq said operations of the channel would have to be shut down.

One of the petitioners Gias Kamal Chowdhury gave his reaction at the court premises to The Daily Star. "Alhamdulillah, a nation of courageous people could never be defeated," he said.

Barrister Abdur Razzak, the chief lawyer of petitioners, in his reaction said, "Through the judgement, it is proved that the rule of law will be established in the country."

The ETV, whose licence was awarded during the past Awami League, was frequently accused by the then opposition party BNP of bias towards the then ruling Awami League. The ETV had always denied the charges and claimed neutrality.

In a statement following the verdict, ETV Chairman and Chief Executive Officer AS Mahmud said, "On the advice of its lawyers, who believe there are sufficient grounds to contest the judgement, Ekushey Television Limited is planning to file an appeal."

The ETV commenced its operation both as terrestrial and satellite channel in the private sector on the Bangla New Year's day in 1999. It gained huge popularity mainly for attractive broadcasting, setting a trend in country's electronic news media. The popular TV channel currently has over 250 employees.

Earlier, the High Court on September 26, 2000 issued a rule nisi upon the respondents. It wanted to know why the licence agreement dated 09.03.1999 signed by and between the Ministry of Information,

the respondent no 1; and AS Mahmud, the respondent no 7; and the subsequent approval to transfer the licence to the ETV Limited, should not be declared to have been entered into and granted without any lawful authority and with no legitimate effect.

Prof. Chowdhury Mohammad Hossain of the Pharmacy Department and Prof. Abdur Rob of the Geography Department of Dhaka University, and Gias Kamal Chowdhury, president of a faction of the Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ), jointly filed the writ petition on September 19, 2000.

In their writ petition, the petitioners said international bids were invited for setting up a private television channel in the country in 1998. ETV was one of the parties that participated in the bid. But after scrutiny, the tender evaluation committee on July 9, 1998 sent a list to the Ministry of Information where ETV was disqualified. But mysteriously, another list showing ETV at the top of the list was sent to the ministry later that day.

They further alleged that the licensing agreement was executed with AS Mahmud despite the fact that he did not at all participate in the bid offers but subsequently transferred the license to ETV Ltd.

The petitioners also alleged that ETV did not obtain any clearance certificate as per the Telegraph Act for functioning as a TV channel and set up key-point installations (KPI) at BTV infrastructure without permission from the National Security Intelligence (NSI).

BDR-BSF meet

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along the border between the two countries in the last one year – 50 Indians and 41 Bangladeshis.

The meeting also took up the issues of trafficking of women and children, smuggling of arms and drugs and extradition of accused citizens of the two countries.

According to some BDR sources, the other issues which figured prominently at the conference included killing of civilians by border forces, cross border intrusion and kidnapping of innocent civilians, setting up of tea gardens close to the zero line and construction of groins on the common rivers and cultivation of illegally occupied lands.

Leadership change

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Now the AL intends regenerating party fronts before it scales up a movement against the BNP and