

US seeks Pak permission to raid for Laden: Time

AFP, Washington

The United States believes Osama bin Laden is hiding in the mountains of Pakistan along its border with Afghanistan and is seeking Islamabad's permission to stage a raid there, the US newsweekly *Time* reported.

In the Sunday's issue, the magazine said Christina Rocca, assistant secretary of state for South Asian affairs, visited Islamabad last month seeking permission for the raid from Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf.

Musharraf is hesitant to approve the operation, the magazine quoted sources as saying, because the fierce tribes in the region are well-armed and sympathetic to Afghanistan's former Taliban regime.

Bin Laden -- chief suspect in the deadly September 11 suicide attacks in the United States -- has so far eluded US attempts to capture him. President George W Bush said earlier this month he did not know if bin Laden was dead or alive.

But *Time* said US officials now

seem convinced bin Laden is hiding somewhere along the rugged and untamed border between the two countries, possibly due to intelligence gleaned from captured documents and militants belonging to bin Laden's al-Qaeda group.

Among those captured recently was Zayn al-Abidin Muhammad Husayn, or Abu Zubaydah, Abu Zubaydah, believed to be a key lieutenant of bin Laden with particular knowledge of operations outside of Afghanistan, was among 29 people captured late last month in Pakistan in raids on suspected al-Qaeda hideouts.

Interior Afghan foreign minister Abdullah Abdullah said Sunday during a visit to Abu Dhabi he also believed bin Laden was alive and living somewhere on the borders of Afghanistan.

Foreign office spokesman Aziz Ahmed Khan said no such request had been received and Washington had repeatedly expressed its satisfaction with the cooperation it had been receiving from Islamabad.

He said "terrorists" from Afghanistan may be trying to cross

the border but avoided referring directly to al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, blamed for the September 11 attacks on the United States.

"There is no need for any outside forces in this regard ... Our record in apprehending terrorists who have crossed into Pakistan from Afghanistan has been impeccable and has been very successful," he told reporters.

"We hope to continue to chase those terrorists who might try to seek refuge here."

He said Pakistan had been sharing intelligence with the United States but there were no discussions on possible joint military operations on Pakistani territory.

Pak Defence Secretary Hamid Nawazkhan, on a visit to Azerbaijan, said he did not believe Laden was hiding out on Pakistani territory.

"I do not have information about bin Laden's whereabouts but as far as I know it is impossible for him to be in Pakistan right now," Nawazkhan told reporters in the Azerbaijani capital, Baku.

Graft controversy

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minister, strongly suggests an attempt to conduct economic irregularities in the process of concluding the contract," the letter went on.

However, a reply from the shipping secretary dated February 20 said the minister had proposed the meeting "with the Danish JV (joint venture) representatives if and when they visit Dhaka to negotiate a better deal for the BIWTC".

Meanwhile, the Danish claim of "serious intention of corruption" aired by Under-secretary of the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Peter Lyskolt Hansen has touched off a diplomatic storm and caused embarrassment to the government.

The options are a negotiated contract with Danish JV, rehabilitation to be carried by Bangladeshi shipyards under a project management model and floating of an international tender to two bids from pre-qualified shipyards in South East Asian region.

It was agreed that to avoid any delay it would be suitable to negotiate a contact with the Danish JV, according to the shipping secretary's letter to the Danish envoy. However, the shipping secretary in the letter said, "The alternate options would be considered in case negotiations are not successful."

The proposed negotiation with the Danish JV was done in Copenhagen from January 9-15 this year and two representative of the BIWTC attended the negotiation process. Prior to the departure of the BIWTC officials, the shipping secretary, the BIWTC and the Danish embassy held a meeting.

At the meeting, said the Danish ambassador in his letter to the finance minister, they (the Danes) handed over a copy of a confidential note on the issue to the secretary and "all details as to how the negotiations would take place were explained and discussed".

The Danish embassy at the meeting stressed that the representatives of the BIWTC should have a mandate for approval of a contract amount in line with the confidential note.

The negotiation with the Danish JV was concluded in mid-January with a negotiated draft.

As the BIWTC representatives were not given any mandate to approve the contract, the Danish embassy asked the shipping ministry to inform it by January 29 this year whether the deal was agreeable.

On their return from Copenhagen, the two BIWTC representatives reported the negotiation result to the shipping ministry and the ministry found the results "not up to its expectations".

Later on at a meeting between the ministry and Danish embassy it became clear that the shipping ministry could not accept the negotiated contract without knowing the details of the JV's subcontract with a Bangladeshi shipyard, and the Danish envoy's letter.

However, the shipping secretary in his letter denied this allegation saying, "The observation that MOS has no sense of ownership towards the planned rehabilitation of Ro-Ro ferries is not real."

"The exclusion of Embassy officials in the proposed meeting never thought of, though norms and practices, in our view, does not preclude direct contact between a buyer and a supplier. It appears that your Excellency has misunderstood the spirit of the discussions and communications Hon'ble Minister for Shipping had with the esteemed Embassy officials. The only objective Hon'ble Minister was pursuing was to obtain a better bargain and overall minimisation of the cost to the BIWTC," the shipping secretary wrote.

Regarding the complaints of using a businessman by the shipping minister, the shipping secretary said, "Desirability or appropriateness of the visit of a private individual to the esteemed Embassy has been, in our view, unguardedly misplaced. I understand the gentleman had nothing to do with the rehabilitation contract of Ro-Ro ferries. He visited the Embassy for a courtesy call and Hon'ble Minister introduced him so he was well received in the Embassy."

"In this connection I would like to draw your attention to the fact that one Col. Mujib contacted and met Hon'ble Minister for Shipping and other officials on your behalf to discuss issues relating to rehabilitation of Ro-Ro ferries. We found nothing unusual about it."

"We believe that visits of private individuals would deter neither the Royal Danish Embassy nor the Ministry of Shipping in upholding their respective national interests," the letter added.

How all this brewed up
Denmark and Bangladesh concluded an agreement in October 2000 for rehabilitation of 10 ferries and nine landing stations on the Aricha route on the basis of a sector programme document prepared by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in May 2000.

An amount of DKK 113.80 million was earmarked for ferry and landing rehabilitation, according to the shipping ministry officials.

Danish ambassador Niels Severin Munk in his letter said the commencement of the rehabilitation of the ferries at the Aricha crossing under the Transport Sector Programme Support (TSPS) has been in the process for more than two years.

"During the Annual Sector Review (ASR) in November 2001 extensive meetings were held between Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC) and the ASR team with a special focus on agreeing on which basis the contract negotiations with the potential Danish shipyard Joint Venture (JV) could commence."

Munk also mentioned that an agreement on the strategy for the negotiations was achieved on November 13 last year.

In November 2000, a tender was floated inviting bids from pre-qualified Danish shipyards for rehabilitation work of 10 Ro-Ro ferries and nine landing stations. But the tender was cancelled, as the bids received did not live up to the expectations.

Later, bids were invited for rehabilitation of four ferries out of the planned 10 from three pre-qualified Danish shipyards in

August last year. One of the bidders later withdrew, while the rest two formed a joint venture (JV).

"This again led to the cancellation of the tender as no competition could be obtained," says the shipping secretary's letter.

In this context, during Annual Sector Review in November 2001 three possible options were agreed upon for rehabilitation of the four Ro-Ro ferries.

The options are a negotiated contract with Danish JV, rehabilitation to be carried by Bangladeshi shipyards under a project management model and floating of an international tender to two bids from pre-qualified shipyards in South East Asian region.

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Lightning kills 3 in Mymensingh

UNB, Mymensingh

Three people were killed and two others injured when a thunderbolt struck them at their house in Fulbaria upazila here yesterday morning.

Police and witnesses said Jalaluddin, 45, his son Ibrahim, 15, and close relative Ripon, 15, were killed as the lightning hit them at about 8 am.

Jalal's wife Maleka and another person suffered critical burn injuries in the tragic incident.

They were admitted to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital.

Two rescued

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On information from the victim's family on Saturday, a DB team led by AC Abdul Aziz was formed for his rescue. When the family went to hand over rest of the ransom money at about 1pm on Sunday at a place near a supermarket at Gulshan, the DB team arrested five alleged kidnappers -- Mukbul, Suman, Siraj, Shahidul and Minad. Acting on their professional statement, the team rescued Rokon.

The abductors had kept Rokon confined at various places in Banani, Mirpu and Kalachandpur areas and tortured him. A case was filed with Badda police in this connection.

"The way it happened indicates that something is being cooked up and it is a plot. They have started with me and will carry on", the minister stopped short of completing the sentence.

He said the Danes are trying to interfere in domestic affairs and making unwanted comments on law and order.

When asked whether he sent any businessman to the Danish embassy for any sort of business deals, the minister refused the allegation. "I have never sent anybody to any embassy for any sort of business deal. Yes, sometimes I send people to help them get visas, but not for any other purpose."

He also said there are many local businessmen who visit different embassies and even foreign businessmen drop by different ministries. "What's the harm in it? This is a practice done by all business people."

Narrating his version, the minister said he came to know about the repair of the ferries on January 7, 2002 when two representatives of the BIWTC went to Denmark for negotiation.

The minister said Tk 71.50 crore was earmarked as cost of rehabilitation of the four ferries.

As per the proposal of the Danish joint venture, the minister said the repair cost of the engines of the four ferries would cost Tk 14 crore at Tk 3.5 crore each.

"And the rest of the amount was earmarked for rehabilitation of hulls and other works. But we thought it was too high an amount for the job. That's why we wanted an open tender be floated for this purpose. In our view, the repair work of the hulls of the four ferries can be done at a cost of Tk 14 to 15 crore," he went on.

"Our efforts to minimise the cost might have irked the Danish officials," he added.

"If we could have saved money from the work we could have used it on other purposes and requested the government for interest waiver on the rest amount," Akbar said.

The High Court instructed the jail authorities to give Mahiuddin 'division' in jail. But he has not yet been given the status, the sources said.

But the jailer claimed that Mahiuddin has been given all the facilities provided in a Division Cell.

Hasina

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around the Ramna Park, the gathering was initially than before but gradually swelled to a huge crowd creating a huge traffic jam in the nearby roads.

Reports from other cities and different districts said the Pahela Baishakh was celebrated across the country through various arrangements made by government and different organisations.

The Near Year greetings and gifts sent by Khaleda Zia to Sheikh Hasina in an unusual friendly gesture was the much-talked-about topic among the early morning cassettes.

The sedition case against Shahriar Kabir was filed with the CMM's Court, Dhaka on December 8, last year.

Earlier, the CMM's Court and the Judge's Court had rejected the petition seeking return of Shahriar's passport seized by Special Branch (SB) of police.

NICVD lacks devices

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last year for a valve and a oxygenator, both of which were approved by the PMO two months later. Like the rest of the 460 patients in waiting, they are yet to be operated upon because of device dearth.

"Most of the patients on the waiting list needed emergency valve replacements. But fear many of them might have died by now, or their condition deteriorated beyond the stage of operation," said one cardiac surgeon at the hospital who has examined many of the patients on the waiting list.

"We are in the process of purchasing the items and hope to get the shipment of fresh stock shortly," said a CMMSD official.

When contacted, Director of the CMMSD Brigadier General Abdul Kalam Azad refused to give any details.

He was phoned several times last week for his comments. This correspondent also went to meet him at his office twice, but on both occasions he was not available. He was also requested to give his comments to The Daily Star by fax.

According to sources, it would take at least another two months before fresh stocks of valves and oxygenators would be available.

Danish charges

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