

Israel to ease WB curfews

REUTERS, Jerusalem

Israel approved a plan on Wednesday to gradually lift daytime curfews that have locked hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in their homes in West Bank cities reoccupied by the Israeli army.

A senior Palestinian security chief denied he had been dismissed by President Yasser Arafat amid US demands for changes in the Palestinian Authority, while thousands took to the streets of Gaza City to demonstrate support for Arafat.

US Secretary of State Colin Powell, in an interview with Reuters, reasserted Washington's position that it would no longer deal with Arafat and made clear US officials had embarked on a diplomatic effort to bring reluctant Europeans on board.

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and his security cabinet backed a plan to end daytime curfews in seven Palestinian-ruled cities.

"We will lift the curfew during the day so that normal life can be gradually restored (to Palestinian areas)," Raanan Gissin, a Sharon adviser, told Reuters after the cabinet met.

US 'rogue state'

AFP, London

Prominent British-based journalist John Pilger took a front-page swipe at Washington yesterday, labelling the US a "rogue state" and charging that its bombs have claimed more Afghan civilian lives than those lost in the World Trade Center.

As Americans celebrated their Independence Day under huge security and in fear of fresh attacks, Britain's mass-selling left-of-centre Daily Mirror headlined Pilger's article "Mourn on the Fourth of July".

Pilger, an award-winning journalist and documentary filmmaker, accused US President George W. Bush of undermining international law by his policy of "shoot and bomb first, and find out later" in Afghanistan.

The United States "now qualifies it as the world's leading rogue state" given the "systematic murderous way the US military has operated in Afghanistan", he wrote.

Pilger quoted a study by the University of New Hampshire in the US saying that at least 3,767 civilians were killed by American bombs between October 7 and December 10, an average of 62 a day.

This was now estimated to have passed 5,000 civilian deaths, Pilger said, "almost double" the number who died on September 11.

Then, more than 2,800 people were killed when the World Trade Center's twin towers in New York collapsed after each was hit by separate hijacked passenger planes.

Pilger also questioned Washington's true motive behind its military interventions in Afghanistan.

"Potential vast energy resources in Central Asia have become critical for the deeply troubled US economy, and for the Bush administration, which is dominated by oil industry interests, notably the Bush family itself," he wrote.

"If there was a map of American military bases established in the region... what would be immediately striking is that it would follow almost exactly the route of a projected oil pipeline to the Indian Ocean."

Pilger also dismissed the role of Royal Marines from Britain, America's closest ally in its war on terrorism, as "a farcical operation as mercenaries of the United States".

"There is no evidence that a single leader of al-Qaeda (the organisation led by chief terror

Supernova fireworks

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other in January 2002. The colors "illuminate the heavens like Fourth of July fireworks," the statement said, noting that the light from the blast reached Earth "nearly a century before our United States celebrated its birth with a bang."

FRAGMENTS OF DEAD STAR Set against the blackness of space, the supernova stretches across 13 light-years. A light-year is about 6 trillion miles, the distance light travels in a year.

The photo shows the star's debris is arranged into thousands of small, cooling knots of gas that will be recycled into building new generations of stars and planets. Our own Sun and planets are constructed from the debris of supernovae that exploded billions of years ago.

Near the top of the image are dozens of tiny clumps of matter that used to be small fragments of the dead star. Each clump is tens of times larger than the diameter of our solar system.

Astronomers want to study these clumps for clues as to just how a

supernova explodes, according to Hubble scientist Keith Noll.

"What we don't know about them is the details," Noll said in a telephone interview. "We know that the star runs out of fuel at end of its life and it explodes but exactly how that happens -- is it like a sphere expanding or does it come out in jets, is it clumpy or is it smooth? -- are questions the scientists want to answer."

Cassiopeia A is a prime candidate for this kind of study, as one of the closest and youngest of supernova remnants, Noll said.

The star itself was 15 to 25 times more massive than the Sun, with a short lifespan typical of these big stars. They use up their nuclear fuel in tens of millions of years, much faster than the billions of years our Sun has been burning.

With their fuel exhausted, their cores collapse, releasing an enormous amount of gravitational energy that in turn flings most of the star's mass into space at speeds up to 45 million mph.

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Saddam

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To Miami. "He was coming here for flight engineer training," Orihuela said. But he lacked the student visa required for foreign citizens to attend flight training schools in the United States, she said.

Saffi, born in 1966, was to be moved to an immigration detention center south of Miami pending deportation proceedings, Orihuela said.

The FBI declined to say how investigators learned of his connection with Hussein and his whereabouts.

Jim Goldman, an assistant director with the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, told a Miami television station that, "We find the circumstance to be somewhat disturbing."

The United States has toughened visa requirements for foreign citizens attending flight schools after the Sept. 11 hijacked plane attacks on New York and Washington. Some of the hijackers implicated in the attacks, which killed some 3,000 people, had trained at Florida flight schools and received training on flight simulators in Miami.

Orihuela could not confirm reports that the seminar Saffi planned to attend was hosted by one of the same flight schools one of the hijackers attended.

According to a December 12 report in the New Zealand Herald, Saffi worked for Air New Zealand, lived in Auckland with his family and had been in the country at least since 1997.

The newspaper said New Zealand authorities investigated his background last year after the Sept. 11 attacks and after learning of his connection with the Iraqi president but took no action.

The newspaper quoted Saffi as saying that he did not want any publicity and that he did not object to the questioning by New Zealand authorities.

Lawyer

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saying he already took it outside, he went straight to sleep. The following day Mosharraf got up early and after offering the fair prayers he went back to sleep. His wife later called him for breakfast but he said that he would rather drink poison.

Thinking it to be a joke, his wife again, called him for breakfast, but then Mosharraf showed her an empty bottle, which had contained the poison. The victim's wife immediately let out a cry for help, alerting the neighbors.

Mosharraf's sister, Hosne Ara, told newsmen that her brother had been suffering from mental disorder for the last few years and was also being treated by a doctor at Banani. His wife however, refuted this allegation saying he was perfectly sound and was adequately conducting his legal affairs.

Several lawyer of the Dhaka Bar Association went to the DMCH after hearing their colleague's death. Mosharraf, the elder of three brothers and four sisters, left behind an eight-year-old daughter.

Plane crash

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living in the area. The crash is the latest in a string of air disasters on the continent -- the least safe to fly in last year according to figures from the Dutch-based Aviation Safety Network.

A Nigerian airliner smashed into the northern city of Kano in May killing at least 148 people, including Nigerian Sports Minister Ishaya Mark Aku. Of 75 people on board, four survived. The rest of the dead were killed on the ground.

Central African Republic is one of the world's poorest countries, despite rich diamond mines. The former French colony's population of 3.5 million struggle by on an average \$290 a year.

The country, located almost at the exact center of Africa, is slightly smaller than Texas, stretching from rainforest in the southwest to savannah in the north.

It is bounded by Chad to the north, Sudan to the east, Cameroon to the west, and the Democratic Republic of Congo to the south.

SP's 'suicide'

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Khairul Bashar, 45, SP of Faridpur, shot himself dead with his service revolver in his apartment at Ramna Tower during the early hours of Wednesday. The SP was on a three-day leave for the treatment of his son.

It is believed that a family squabble led to the victim's suicide. Bashar's wife, Moni, lived in the city with her youngest daughter while two other daughters and the only son stayed with their father at Faridpur.

Natore daily

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persons responsible for the error. Despite all that, the decision for cancellation of the declaration was taken which shows that there is an ulterior motive behind it.

"We have come to know that deputy minister Ruhul Kuddus Dulu from Natore is going to bring out a newspaper and so our voice has been suppressed in order to root out any competition.



The Awami League leaders and activists line up in a human chain on the Bangabandhu Avenue during the half-day hartal yesterday.

Book bungling

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No experts were consulted before preparing and finalising the list of books. The list was reportedly made taking certain suppliers' suggestions into account to award the job to certain firms.

The authorities allowed only three days to submit the bid for the three separate packages. The participants would have to submit an earnest money of Tk 8 lakh for each package.

The tender termed the package three for supply of books as 'training materials' allegedly to keep away genuine book suppliers so that only the firms they favour could participate in the bid.

In the tender, the project sought two types of encyclopaedia, namely a 22-volume 'World Book Encyclopaedia' and a 13-volume Students Discovery Encyclopaedia, 60 sets each, meaning 10 sets for each language laboratory, which would teach 25 students a shift. There will be two shifts a day.

Experts also wonder how much the encyclopaedias would help students to learn the languages since these are usually used for reference. Besides, even the country's premier universities do not have more than one set of encyclopaedia.

A 22-volume 'World Book Encyclopaedia' costs over Tk 68,000 while The Encyclopaedia of Britannica, synonymous with encyclopaedia, costs less than Tk 40,000.

Encyclopaedia is updated every year, so there is no reason to buy ten sets of encyclopaedia at a time, one teacher of the department of English of Dhaka University said.

Children's books titled Early World & Learning (Arabic), and Child Craft (Arabic), each 18 volumes and a 22-volume World Book (Arabic) have been sought for the training of pre- and post-intermediate learners.

According to a market study, only 12 categories of books, 10 sets per laboratory including World Book Multimedia, Science Power, Study Power, Word Power, World Book Dictionary, Wonderful World of English, Early World & Learning would eat up over Tk 2 crore, while the other 446 books were included as a cover-up.

The government initiated project after managing a surplus fund of Tk 8.90 crore from nine education boards of the country to discourage secondary level dropouts. The language laboratories would be equipped to teach English and Arabic to develop human resources for overseas market.

"The project was initiated to train up job seekers and secondary level dropouts for overseas job," a key official of the project told The Daily Star.

He said Tk 3 crore have been allocated each for six divisional headquarters for procurement of computers and audio-visual equip-

ment, office equipment and training materials including books, video and audio cassettes.

The list also quoted six journals without showing the volumes and issue numbers. The journals are updated periodically, so it is baffling why six sets of journals should be procured at a time.

When contacted, a key official of the project claimed that there was no dubious reason behind the preparation of the book list. Rather, the list was produced by taking into consideration reference lists of different educational and research institutions.

Clarifying why the experts were not consulted, the official said they were under 'tremendous pressure' to complete the procedures within a short time before a scheduled visit of the prime minister to the Ministry of Education.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the tender committee reserves the right to amend the list. So, the committee could still update the list despite the fact that the tender was floated and bidding opened on June 29.

Teachers for the language laboratories at the divisional headquarters of Dhaka, Chittagong, Sylhet, Rajshahi, Barisal and Khulna will undergo a 24-day training at the British Council and other Arabic institutions.

Unocal refuses compensation

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The claim was filed on the basis of a report by a probe committee consisting government officials and experts and an expert from Occidental, the US company responsible for the blowout.

Petrobangla could not make the claim earlier because of an unwritten government policy to remain silent over the blast.

Before the claim was sent, Unocal's Bangladesh chief had claimed to the press that the compensation issue was settled through the supplementary agreement. In 2000, the oil company in a document also made a similar claim and even said over Tk 350 crore has been 'paid' to Petrobangla.

The matter ended after Petrobangla issued a warning to Unocal, asking it to refrain from giving out any such fictitious figures.

The Production Sharing Contract (PSC) of Occidental for blocks 13 and 14 was terminated on January 11, 1998 for failing to fulfil minimum work obligation drilling of at least one exploratory well.

Not only did Occidental fail to fulfil its work obligation, it also did not apply for the extension of the PSC at least 60 days prior to the contract termination as per the PSC.

After the PSC was terminated, Occidental lobbied hard and the

process for a supplementary agreement began. During this process, Petrobangla proposed several clauses like compensation for the burnt-out gas at Magurchara or inclusion of BAPEX, the state-owned exploration company, as a partner of Occidental. But Occidental rejected the demands and a deadlock followed.

Finally, Occidental's high officials 'verbally' promised to the political high-ups to pay the compensation for the blowout. Accordingly, Petrobangla had to be happy with a five per cent additional share of gas in the supplementary agreement.

"Nowhere in the supplementary agreement has it been mentioned about the compensation for the Magurchara blowout," said a source involved in the drafting of the agreement.

Petrobangla was about to submit the compensation claim in mid-May when the State Minister for Energy Mosharraf Hossain called the Petrobangla chairman over telephone and asked him to stop the process. The claim was earlier approved by the energy ministry and the Petrobangla Board and vetted by legal experts.

Mosharraf had asked the Petrobangla chairman to hold off the letter for further review by 'foreign' PSC experts.

But even after a month, the state minister did not take any initiative to hire foreign PSC experts. And finally, the ministry surprised Petrobangla by sending a letter disowning the verbal instruction to refrain from submitting the claim, which encouraged Petrobangla to file the damage claim.

In the past, Unocal and Occidental always got a soft treatment from political leadership when it came to the Magurchara issue.

The official probe report on the Magurchara blowout that faulted Occidental for the disaster was kept secret as a classified document.

Occidental was allowed to work without any penalty, given extension of the terminated PSC and finally allowed it to sell of its Bangladesh concern to Unocal in 1999. When Unocal took over Occidental's operation, it auto-matically inherited the latter's liabilities.

AL notices

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tation of the opposition to parliamentary standing committees on ministries, which are yet to be formed.

The total strengths of the opposition, including independents, are around 80 in the 300-member parliament.

Reshuffle rumour

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because of strong speculations that either the ministers concerned would be dropped or their portfolios would be changed.

Activities in the post and telecommunications ministry are also going slow as its officials and employees have come to know that their minister Aminul Haque have been offered the post of Speaker of the Jatiya Sangsad.

Similarly, there is a strong rumor at the Secretariat that Information Minister Tariqul Islam would be made post and telecommunications minister. Officials said he held the portfolio during the previous tenure of the BNP and proved his efficiency.

A cabinet source, on condition of anonymity, told this correspondent it has been 'almost finalised' that Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar would be elected President and Aminul Haq has been offered the post of Speaker.

Industries Minister MK Anwar has been offered to take up as home minister, but he agreed to accept the offer on some conditions, sources said.

The conditions are there should be no state or deputy minister under him, he should be given 'a free hand' for a certain period, he would look into all matters including transfers and postings under the ministry and there should be no interference from any quarter.

The sources further said Anwar clearly informed the high command that if he takes charge of the home ministry, he would take it as 'an assignment' and try his best to accomplish the tasks to be given by the prime minister and that he would not accept any tadbir.

"The conditions have made the BNP policymakers think deeply, but finally they might agree those in the greater interest of improving the law and order in the country," one source said.

Meanwhile, some sources said the prime minister is firm to downsize the council of ministers to 40-45 from 60 now. More than five cabinet ministers and about 15 state and deputy ministers might be dropped because of poor performance, inefficiency and corruption.

The sources also said except technocrat cabinet minister Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed (Social Welfare Minister) and state minister Reaz Rahman (Foreign Affairs), four state ministers under the technocrat quota are in great tension because two of them might be axed soon. But they would be given other important positions.

Peaceful hartal

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AL leaders and activists formed a human chain at Bangabandhu Avenue protesting this and chanted slogans for down-fall of the 'repressive' government.

A bomb was exploded by an unidentified person at Siddiq Bazar, injuring a passer by at the bag end of the hartal hours. The victim, Ramzan, aged about 40, was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Pro-hartal picket set fire to a minibus plying in Mohakhali area in the morning. Police said the fire was brought under control after two seats of the minibus were burnt.

No major incident of violence was reported from any other part of the city. Classes were not held at educational institutions, business houses and shopping malls remained closed during the hartal hours. But government offices remained open with the office-goers attending those ignoring the hartal and also rains.

Rickshaws plied as usual. But all other types of vehicles, except a small number of city service minibuses, stayed off the streets in the morning hours. However, the number of vehicles on the streets increased after 11 am.

No central leader of the AL, other than Matia Chowdhury, turned up at the party office at Bangabandhu Avenue during hartal hours yesterday apparently due to police raids at the residences of some AL leaders and party offices in last few days.

City AL President Mohammad Hanif and General Secretary Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya also did not come the party office, leaving a demoralising effect on party workers, sources pointed out.

AL lawmaker Mirza Azam, former lawmakers Shagufa Yasmin Emily, Tahura Ali and Meher Afroz Chumki, some leaders of AL's front organisations and a good number of women activists joined Matia at the party office despite obstruction from police.

A huge consignment of police in riot gear cordoned off the AL central office from early hours and prevented party activists from gathering there.

Scores of female party workers also stood for hours in the rain as they were not allowed to enter the party office. Police officers on duty could not give any reason for such prohibition, but said they were doing this under orders from the high-ups.

At around 11 am, Matia Chowdhury led a procession of some 50 people only to be stopped by policemen and policewomen a few yards from the party office.

Party leaders and workers then

However, the portfolio of Jamaat Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed is likely to be changed. State minister for home Lutfozzaman Babar may be shifted to information ministry if Tariqul Islam is made T&T minister and MK Anwar takes up as home minister.

Some new faces like KM Obaidur Rahman and Zahiruddin Swapan are likely to be taken in the council of ministers.

Besides, Bangladesh Jatiya Party Chairman Nazir Rahman Manjur and Islami Oikya Jote Chairman Azizul Haq may be appointed advisors to the prime minister with the rank and status of cabinet ministers. This is apparently aimed at fulfilling the commitment to accommodate the four-party alliance partners in the government, sources noted.

PSI lifted

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The decision took effect from yesterday the clarification said. It was said categorically in the clarification that in the current national budget no import duty was imposed on newspapers and periodicals, rather both provisions of PSI and three per cent advance income tax were withdrawn.

The clarification said that in the 2001-2002 fiscal five per cent regulatory duty was imposed on import of newspapers and periodicals. In the present budget, this regulatory duty has been amalgamated with the import duty.

As a result, the minimum slab of import duty on newspapers and periodicals has been fixed at 7.5 per cent instead of earlier five per cent.

Sramik Dal

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sequel to intra-party rivalry, but Bagerhat BNP leaders have blamed Awami League armed cadres for the murder. Local AL leaders refuted the allegation, saying that the murder was due to a rift within BNP.

The slain Sramik Dal activist was himself an armed cadre of BNP and loyal to Selim MP, Bagerhat district president of BNP, said the officer-in-charge of Sadar thana.

Three others including secretary general of Gourambha union unit of BNP, Asaduzzaman, were killed earlier on Wednesday noon in a gun battle between activists of the BNP and the AL over possession of shrimp enclosures.

Tension remained high in the area at the time of writing this report. Police have been put on high alert both in Bagerhat town and the Gourambha union area.

formed a human chain in protest and held a brief rally chaired by city AL vice president Monir Hossain Khan. It was addressed by Matia Chowdhury, Mirza Azam MP, Sramik League President Abdus Salam Khan, Krishak League General Secretary Ruhul Amin Howladar, Tahura Ali, ex-MP; city AL leaders advocate Quamril Islam and some other leaders of different front organisations.

Matia came down heavily on the present 'repressive' government and alleged that her party leaders and workers were being implicated in false cases and tortured.

The former agriculture minister asked the party rank and file to be prepared for a greater movement against the BNP-Jamaat alliance government.

Missing link

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evolutionary change among early tetrapods," Robert Carroll, of McGill University in Montreal, Canada said in the journal. While discoveries of fossils of dinosaurs and other mammals are quite frequent, Carroll said finding the remains of transitional animals does not happen as often.

"The number of truly intermediate forms linking the major groups of vertebrates remains small," he added.

Shazneen Case

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on the day. So they prayed for adjournment of the hearing.

Shazneen Tasnim Rahman, 15, the youngest daughter of Latifur Rahman, Chairman of Transcom, was raped and murdered at their Gulshan residence on April 23, 1998.

Latifur Rahman filed a murder case with Gulshan Police Station accusing Shahidul Islam alias Shahid, a domestic help at his residence, on April 24, 1998.

Mojibur Rahman, additional superintendent of police of CID, Dhaka, filed a rape case with the same police station against seven people including Shahid, after six months of investigation into the Shazneen murder case.

Special public prosecutor ABM Sharfuddin Khan Mukul and Mahbub Ahmed appeared in the court yesterday on behalf of the complainant.

The Shazneen murder case, pending with the First Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court, Dhaka, was earlier stayed by the High Court. The stay order will remain valid till disposal of the rape case.

Trial of the rape case began at the special court on July 9, 2000.