

US derails drive at UN for global ban on cloning

REUTERS, United Nations

The United States has derailed for at least a year a Franco-German proposal for a global ban on human cloning that the US anti-abortion movement rejects as too narrow, UN diplomats said on Tuesday.

A US official called the delay a major victory for Washington at the United Nations, saying, "We very strongly feel that no decision is better than a bad decision."

But French and German diplomats portrayed the latest manoeuvring as only a temporary setback in their campaign for international approval of an agreement outlawing the cloning of human beings.

At issue is whether the treaty should ban solely the cloning of humans, as called for by Paris and Berlin, or whether it should also ban so-called "therapeutic" or "experimental" cloning, in which human embryos are cloned for medical research.

Scientists have strongly opposed such restrictions on their activities as a matter of principle, arguing that research like stem-cell studies could save human lives.

France and Germany initially claimed support for their approach from the vast majority of the United Nations' 191 member-states.

But at the urging of the US anti-

abortion movement, Washington began pushing hard earlier this year for a treaty that would ban both types of cloning.

US officials recently claimed support for their rival initiative from more than 30 other countries, led by heavily Catholic Spain and the Philippines.

The two opposing factions then put forward rival draft resolutions, intended to provide guidance to the treaty drafters on how to proceed.

The General Assembly's Legal Committee, the panel in charge of the drafting process, had been expected to vote by Thursday, at the latest, on the duelling approaches.

But at the last minute, envoys from France, Germany, the United States, Spain and the Philippines agreed to end their dispute and to instead put off the drafting for a year.

A US official said Paris and Berlin had agreed to the yearlong delay after concluding their plan would be defeated in the Legal Committee.

But German envoy Christian Much dismissed that statement as "psychological warfare."

"We would win the vote but the divisions within the committee would not provide a sound basis for going forward," Much told Reuters.

"This does not mean the United

Nations is condoning cloning or closing its eyes on the matter," he said. "We will spend the time looking for ways to move forward."

Diplomats backing the Franco-German approach have argued the US stance could doom the project before it even got off the ground. They said their own approach could have produced a draft treaty, ready for ratification by early 2004.

But US anti-abortion activists said delays did not bother them. To go forward with the Franco-German plan would mean allowing the destruction of human embryos, which they saw as murder.

"We are concerned about research that deliberately and knowingly ends up killing a human being," said Wendy Wright of Concerned Women for America, a non-profit public policy group that favours the US approach.

The General Assembly first voted to draft a treaty last year, after Italian fertility specialist Severino Antinori announced his intention to become the first scientist to clone a human being.

Numerous researchers have since claimed progress in research into the mechanics of cloning a variety of animals as well as humans, their organs and cells. But none so far has boasted of fashioning human clones in a laboratory.



Suspects arrested with arms and ammunition by the army in an anticrime drive are lined up for photographs at the Basundhara army camp in the city yesterday.

Killing of al-Qaida leader US to shut Yemen embassy fearing retaliation

AFF, Washington

The United States said Tuesday it was closing its embassy in Yemen to the public indefinitely amid fears it may become a target for a terrorist attack in retaliation for the US killing of a top al-Qaida operative.

"The US embassy in Sanaa will be closed to the public on November 6 to review its security posture," said Lynn Cassell, a State Department spokeswoman.

"The embassy will re-open at the appropriate time," she said, declining to say when that might be.

The decision to close the embassy to the public came as US Deputy Defence Secretary Paul Wolfowitz implicitly confirmed the United States carried out a missile strike in Yemen that killed a top al-Qaida leader and five other al-Qaida suspects.

In an interview with CNN, Wolfowitz called it a "very successful tactical operation."

"One hopes each time you get a success like that not only to have gotten rid of somebody dangerous, but to have imposed changes in their tactics and operations and procedures," he said.

Earlier, senior US officials had declined to directly confirm reports that the Central Intelligence Agency was responsible for the killings but linked the heightened security at the Sanaa embassy to the deaths.

"There will probably be some very angry people today who may try to take revenge, so we're taking extra precautions," a senior State Department official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

A second senior official said the circumstances surrounding the men's deaths would have made the embassy and other US interests in Yemen a target regardless of the reports of CIA involvement.

"I think it's safe to say that people would be coming after us even if the CIA had nothing to do with this," the official said.

Police club DU students, teachers for ransacking vehicles

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Five teachers and 10 students of Dhaka University were injured Tuesday night when police clubbed them inside the Fazlul Haque (FH) Hall for ransacking vehicles after a student was hurt in a road accident.

The students damaged a number of buses on the road connecting the High Court and the Bangabazar after a speeding bus hit Imrul Kayes, a second year student of the FH hall, at around 9:00pm.

Seriously injured, Kayes was taken to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

Following the incident, students of the hall took to the street at around 9:00pm. They set a bus ablaze and damaged at least two others.

Police came to the spot at around 10:00pm and chased the students, who went inside the hall premises and hurled brickbats at the law enforcers. Police then lobbed at least five rounds of teargas shells, according to witnesses.

As some teachers were trying to pacify the students, police knocked down the hall gate and started clubbing students.

"When some house tutors and I were trying to control the agitating students, police broke down the gate and clubbed us at around 11:00pm," said FH Hall Provost Dr Yarul Kabir.

The injured students and teachers were taken to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital and given first aid.

Tuesday's road accident happened only within a week of the death of another DU student in a similar incident. Students had long been demanding a speed-breaker in front of the FH Hall.

Hasina

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freed even after arrest with arms. This, she observed, has encouraged criminals.

Referring to price hike of essentials, the ex-PM said price of daily necessities had gone beyond the purchasing capacity of common people. She asked the government to control price rises particularly in the month of Ramadan.

Hasina thanked the BCL leaders and workers to work unitedly against "repression" of the alliance government and strengthen the organisation at grassroots level.

Among others, Abdus Samad Azad MP, Abdul Mal Abdul Muhit, Abdul Mannan, Abdul Mannan Khan, Sultan Mohammad Monsur Ahmed, Asim Kumar Ukil, BM Mozammel Haque, BCL general secretary Nazrul Islam Babu and Rafiqul Islam Kotwal were present in the meeting. BCL president Liakot Sikder presided.

Solidarity Day

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independence and sovereignty. Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in her message said the significance of the day has a greater and far reaching significance in the national life. She said the people and the soldiers were united on the day to safeguard the country's independence and sovereignty.

She said the present government is determined to implement welfare-oriented programmes reflecting the spirit of November 7 and upholding the democratic values.

The national flag will be hoisted atop public and private buildings and roads and road islands will be decorated on the day. Public and private buildings will also be illuminated.

The day has been declared a public holiday.

Special prayer will be offered at mosques seeking divine blessings for peace and progress of the country. Prayers will also be offered at temples, pagodas and churches on the occasion.

National dailies will publish special supplements highlighting the significance of the day. Bangladesh Television and Radio Bangladesh will air special programmes on the day.

BNP programmes include hoisting of national flag at its office in the morning. Prime Minister and BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia will visit the mazar of President Ziaur Rahman at 10 am. A discussion meeting will be held

at 11 am at Ramna Green. Secretary General of the party and LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan will attend the discussion as chief guest.

The offices of BNP and its front organisations throughout the country will be illuminated.

Besides, BNP and its front organisations across the country will hold discussions and milad mahfil on the occasion.

Man gets ten yrs' RI for killing wife

UNB, Bagerhat

A court here yesterday convicted a man and sentenced him to 10 years of rigorous imprisonment for killing his wife.

The convict was identified as Abul Kalam of Madhabkati village in Kachua upazila.

According to the prosecution, Abul Kalam killed his wife Asma Begum, 22, by strangulation on April 19, 1999, following a family feud.

After examining the records and witnesses, Additional District and Sessions Judge M Golam Rabbani handed down the verdict acquitting four others.

Prancing greenback

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crossing the limit set by the central bank in selling dollars, meting sources said.

He also sought an explanation from the MD of Sonali Bank regarding its selling of dollar to other banks at a rate higher than the approved one. The Sonali Bank MD told the finance minister that they had done so keeping the central bank informed of it.

Then, the minister asked for explanation from the central bank. One central bank deputy governor said they had only told the bank to sell dollar using their own judgement by observing the market situation, the meeting sources said.

However, Saifur termed the dollar crisis an "artificial one". He said, "There is enough foreign currency reserve. Some private banks have created this (crisis) by opening junk letter of credits (LCs)," he told newsmen after the meeting.

He also said the criminals are now on a "buying spree" of dollars as they are fleeing the country to avert arrest in the face of the ongoing anticrime drive. "This is one of the reasons which has created a sort of crisis," Saifur said.

The minister brushed aside the widespread speculation that taka would be further devalued against the greenback. "I am not in favour of devaluation. And there is no possibility of devaluation even in the distant future."

Meantime, the bankers have put down the 'crisis' that upped the dollar price to many reasons. They said as the finance minister earlier declared he would introduce free float of the exchange rate from mid-November, many banks tried to create a reserve of its own to avoid any crisis and also reap benefit of the free exchange rate regime.

However, the finance minister on Tuesday went back on his earlier declaration and said he would not opt for free float of the exchange rate unless the foreign currency reserve touches the three billion dollar mark.

According to sources, the Sonali Bank, the major supplier of foreign exchange, recently had to pay around Tk 500 crore in foreign currency in payment of petroleum. This had put pressure in the foreign currency market. Failing to get guarantee from the finance ministry, the Bangladesh Petroleum

Corporation (BPC) took loan from the SB for purchasing petroleum products.

Many bankers said ahead of Ramadan there was high demand of imports of some essentials. And the import demand soared at a time when some private banks are facing foreign currency shortfall following low remittance earnings and export receipts.

Meantime, the business community expressed concern over the situation and said it was unlawful on the part of a NCB to sell dollar at a rate higher than the approved one.

The Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) in a statement yesterday said it would have multiple negative effects on import of essential consumer goods and other commodities causing miseries to the common people.

"(The) DCCI strongly feels that scheduled banks should sell dollar at the approved government rate and not at a rate which is harmful to the business community and ultimately would put pressure on the consumers," the statement said.

Prices stable

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Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury was attended by FBCCI President Yussuf Abdullah Haroon, Commerce Secretary Sohail Ahmed and representatives of different trade bodies, including the Cold Storage Owners Association and the Edible Oil Refiners Owners Association.

The commerce minister asked cold storage owners and potato traders to keep the retail price of potato below Tk 10 a kg. Otherwise, the government will go for import of potatoes from India.

The meeting also decided to lower the import duty on potato from 32.5 per cent to 7.5, if necessary.

Potatoes retail at Tk 12-14 a kg. The government also decided to keep the prices of chickpea and soybean oil in a reasonable curve by increasing their supplies.

Chickpeas retail at Tk 30-34. The supply of chickpea will increase significantly, as 40,000 tons already arrived at the Chittagong Port, with more to come soon.

The government asked soybean-oil traders to keep the price below Tk 40, which now sells at Tk 45-55 a litre.

AL MPs

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important issues of public interest. AL General Secretary Zillur Rahman and senior leaders Abdul Jalil, Suranjit Sengupta, SAMS Kibria, Rahmat Ali, AKM Jahangir Hossain, Faruq Khan, Mirza Azam, Shawkat Ali, Lutfar Rahman, Shamsur Rahman Sharif and Tanjim Ahmed Sohail Taj, among others, spoke at the ALPP meeting.

Later in the evening, opposition leader Sheikh Hasina was apprised about the decisions taken at the ALPP meeting.

Faruq's death

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The victim's mother and wives alleged that a garment employee named Azad had Kala Faruq killed by giving money to police. They said Faruq knew about Azad's criminal activities and that is why he was killed.

Sajeda alleged that she went to the Kafur Police Station to meet Faruq, but she was not allowed to see him.

Bangladeshi shot dead by BSF in Sylhet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

A Bangladeshi national was shot dead by Indian Border Security Force (BSF) near Jaintapur border yesterday.

The dead was identified as Jahangir Alam, 25, son of Amir Ali of village Kamolapur under Jaintapur upazila.

BSF men of Muktarpur Border outpost opened fire on Jahangir while he was returning home from Jungle area. He died on the spot.

BSF men took away the body. BDR sent a letter to its Indian counterpart protesting the killing, official sources said.

IGP's home

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sent to jail on a one-month detention.

In Mymensingh, our correspondent reports, the army arrested a union parishad chairman, Shamsur Rashid Ranju of the BNP, and two others.

According to our Bandbaran correspondent, two listed criminals were arrested from the hill district.

Dipu Chy

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erative society at Narda in the city's Uttara area, was gunned down by an armed gang on February 8 last year.

Victim's brother Nurul Islam filed a murder case with Uttara thana accusing Dipu Chowdhury and 22 others the following day.

But the then IO of the case submitted a chargesheet to the CMM's Court, Dhaka on July 9 last year against 22 people dropping the names of Dipu Chowdhury and three others.

On April 24, this year, the CMM's Court ordered further investigation into the murder following a narajit petition, submitted by the complainant of the case.

Bush sends best wishes to Muslims for Ramadan

AFF, Washington

US President George W Bush praised Islam Tuesday as "a peace-loving faith" and celebrated Muslim nations as "vital partners" in the war on terrorism as he sent his best wishes to Ramadan celebrants.

"Laura joins me in sending our best wishes for a blessed time. May you be well during Ramadan and throughout the coming year," Bush said in a statement ahead of the Muslim dawn-to-dusk fasting month.

Bush made no explicit mention of his efforts to rally the United Nations for possible military action to disarm Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, a campaign no Muslim nation has openly supported as yet.

"America remains committed to freedom, justice, and opportunity for all people. During this season of reverence and examination, we continue to work together for a future of peace, tolerance, and understanding," he said.

Ever since Muslim militants flew commandeered airliners into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, Bush has taken pains to praise mainstream Muslims and denounce the extremists as terrorists who hijacked Islam.

"Islam is a peace-loving faith that is practised by more than one billion people, including millions of American Muslims," he said late Tuesday.

"These proud citizens contribute to the diversity that makes our country strong, and the United States is grateful for the friendship and support of many Muslim nations that are vital partners in the global coalition to fight against terrorism."

HC: judges

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Chowdhury also issued rule upon the government to show cause why the Public Service Commission (PSC) advertisement relating to the recruitment of assistant judges as part of the BCS should not be declared unconstitutional and without lawful authority.

Moving the petition, advocate Shaheen Malik submitted that the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court in a landmark judgement in 1999 in the Ministry of Finance vs Mazdar Hossain and others case had set aside the recruitment of judges of the subordinate court through BCS (Administration) cadre.

So, the PSC cannot recruit assistant judges to the subordinate courts along with other civil service officials, he argued.

The Appellate Division had also directed the government to create a separate and independent Judicial Service Commission comprising senior judges of the Supreme Court and its subordinate courts for recruitment to the judicial service, the lawyer submitted quoting the verdict.

Attorney General AF Hassan Arif, explaining the government's position in this regard, submitted that draft rules, titled "Judicial Service Commission Rules, 2002," for setting up of such a commission and for recruitment of assistant judges have already been framed in accordance with the Supreme Court judgement.

Meanwhile, the recruitment of judges to the subordinate courts remained suspended following the 1999 Supreme Court verdict.

Republicans seize control

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A 51-seat majority in the Senate means Republicans are not so dependent on Vice-president Dick Cheney's tie-breaking vote to give them the advantage.

Republicans retained Senate seats in North Carolina and New Hampshire where relatives of past GOP officials -- Elizabeth Dole, wife of former presidential candidate Bob Dole, and John Sununu, son of former White House chief of staff John Sununu -- won.

Each party scored at least one upset. In Georgia, Republican challenger Saxby Chambliss ousted Democratic incumbent Max Cleland in an extremely tight race for the state's contested Senate seat, according to projections.

That win nullified a Democratic gain in Arkansas where Mark Pryor upset incumbent Republican Tim Hutchinson.

Democrats had sought to woo voters preoccupied with the floundering US economy and possible war against Iraq to maintain or increase their one-seat majority in the 100-seat Senate and win seats

in the 435-member House of Representatives.

In the House, with seven races deemed too close to call, the Republicans appear to have clinched 226 seats -- eight more than the 218 needed to control the body -- while the Democrats had 203, with one independent and five undecided, according to network projections.

Regaining control of the Senate was a clear prize for Bush, as it will cement his efforts to make a mammoth 10-year tax cut permanent; speed federal funds to religious charities; and appoint conservative judges.

The White House said Bush had been "cautiously optimistic" about Republican control over the Senate but trumpeted the fact that he had "made history" by bucking the historical trend in which the party in the White House loses seats in the House of Representatives.

In key battleground states like Florida, where Jeb Bush defeated Democrat Bill McBride, and New York, where incumbent Republican George Pataki beat Democrat H

Carl McCall, the Democrats' optimism appeared misplaced.

In a surprise result, Republican candidate Robert Ehrlich defeated the presumed favorite, Democrat Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, a scion of the famed Kennedy clan, for the Maryland governorship, according to network projections.

And in Republicans also picked up control of the South Carolina statehouse where Republican challenger Mark Sanford defeated Democratic incumbent Jim Hodges and in Georgia where Republican challenger Sonny Perdue defeated Democratic incumbent Roy Barnes to be the first Republican governor there since 1872.

Democrats, for their part, were poised to take over Republican governorships in Illinois, New Mexico, Kansas, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Tennessee, according to US media projections.

Democrats also were leading in the Republican-held states of Arizona, Oklahoma and Wisconsin, while a Republican candidate led in Hawaii.

6,000 more soldiers

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The PIO further said the drive has also been strengthened in the offshore islands with more navy and coast guard personnel engaged in it.

Replying to a question, he said the main task of the troops is to nab criminals and recover illegal arms. Harassment of innocent people is not part of the drive, he noted.

About the death of listed criminal Kala Faruque, the PIO said he died due to excessive bleeding as police shot him when he tried to escape. A case has been lodged in connection with his death.

He told another questioner the government was now investigating how Kala Faruq got passport clearance, became a member of a cultural delegation and crossed the immigration section at the airport. Legal action would be taken against persons involved in the process, he said.

Replying to a query whether the IGP's residence was raided, Colonel Nazrul Islam of the ISPR, who was present at the briefing, said the joint force went to the house of a distant relative of the IGP on the basis of an allegation and inquired about the

complaint. But none was arrested and nothing was recovered from the house.

The colonel brushed aside allegations of harassment of innocent people on roads and said the army must take action if it gets any allegation. He urged all to lodge complaint if any untoward incident involving troops takes place.

When his attention was drawn to specific news reports and pictures in different newspapers about assault on and harassment of ordinary people, Colonel Islam said the authorities would soon take steps so that people could make complaints in such cases.

He mentioned that the army authorities have constituted several inquiry committees to investigate the deaths in custody and the investigation continues.

In this context, the PIO said legal action would be taken on completion of the investigation. He confirmed deaths of 16 people in custody in the 21 days of the drive.

Responding to a query, he reiterated that the drive would continue as long as required.