

Saddam may be toppled within a month

Top Pentagon official says

AFP, Riyadh

Iraqi President Saddam Hussein could be toppled before the next Arab summit meeting in March, a senior aide to US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said in remarks published yesterday.

"It's time to get rid of him (Saddam). We have no intention of keeping US troops abroad for fun," Richard Perle, chairman of the Pentagon's Defense Policy Board, told the Saudi-owned newspaper Asharq Al-Awsat.

Asked if there could be a new Iraqi regime when Arab leaders hold their annual summit in Manama, the hawkish Perle replied: "Why not?"

He said the United States could win a swift war to overthrow the Iraqi regime "within 30 days" with "a large number of allies besides us".

"Even if we don't have a single ally, we will be capable of doing what we need to do. Saddam Hussein

must go by any means sooner or later. This is the message," Perle said.

The United States has no intention of occupying Iraq or appointing a US general to rule in Baghdad after ousting Saddam, he said. "The United States is not planning to become an imperialist power."

Washington will not accept "half solutions" in dealing with the Iraqi regime. "We are talking about the change of the regime and not individuals. Saddam is the result of an evil regime that has caused tremendous suffering to the Iraqi people," he said.

"My feeling is that it will happen soon," he said of a war. "Based on my knowledge, the United States can settle the issue within 30 days."

He categorically ruled out Saddam remaining in power until the next US presidential election.

Perle also scoffed at the possibility that France could use its veto

against a second UN Security Council resolution authorizing force against Iraq.

"This will not happen ... In any case there will be no French veto. The French are aware that if they use the veto we will ignore it. They also know that Saddam will not win," Perle said.

He expected that France would eventually be on the US side as in Afghanistan, but he criticised Paris for "giving Saddam a false hope" that he can bargain until the next US elections.

He also said a 40-billion-dollar deal between Baghdad and TotalFinaElf should be renegotiated after the establishment of a democratic government in Iraq.

Arab support for US policy on Iraq was "more than sufficient", he said, adding that not one Arab country was working against Washington.

Indemnity bill

FROM PAGE 1

Suranjit Sengupta objected as the law minister sought the Chair's permission to introduce the bill.

This is unprecedented in the world history that a bill has been brought to indemnify heinous crimes like killing and torture, Suranjit told the House. "It is the saddest day for the parliament that it witnessed such a bill. It will disgrace the House, the democracy and the armed forces of the country."

Terming the bill unconstitutional and violative of human rights, the veteran parliamentarian asked the government to take the bill back. He also warned the prime minister that, if passed, the bill would encourage killing and bloodshed for unconstitutional means of grabbing state power.

Refuting Suranjit's contention, Moudud Ahmed told the House that speaking for the constitution, democracy, human rights and the armed forces did not suit the AL. "He (Suranjit) has gone out of track," he said and added that article 46 of the post-independence AL-government-framed constitution provides for such indemnity. "Of course, the bill is very much constitutional."

On the question of the legality of the bill, the law minister said: "It is the judiciary, not the parliament, that will resolve the issue."

Later, Sheikh Hasina at a press briefing at the opposition conference room said her party would leave no stone unturned to block passage of the anti-human bill in the House.

"The constitution guarantees every citizen to seek justice. But the (proposed) law will deny this fundamental right. This will project Bangladesh as a barbaric nation," she said, referring to protest by the international community against the government move.

The opposition leader warned that the law would put at stake the reputation Bangladesh's armed forces have so far earned in UN peace-keeping missions. "Misrule, human rights violation and police oppression have already isolated Bangladesh from the world community and this law will harm the nation further."

Hasina wondered how the BNP lawmakers whose followers were victimised by the anti-crime drive could gladly accept the bill.

"In fact, the bill has been brought to protect the prime minister who ordered all those killings and tortures. Maybe a few of the army personnel are responsible for deaths in the anti-crime drive, but the bill has labelled the blame on the armed forces as a whole. Besides, the bill confirms that there were deaths and tortures in custody, which the government denied earlier."

President Iajuddin Ahmed promulgated an ordinance on January 9, indemnifying all killings and tortures during the anti-crime drive. This sparked off a raging debate among opposition political parties, human rights groups and other social forces.

Yesterday's bill seeks to make the ordinance a permanent law that would block legal options to challenge any acts by the army troops and others concerned in the anti-crime drive from October 16, 2002 to January 9, 2003.

The Awami League boycotted the opening of the current winter session on January 26 as the president addressed it.

Meanwhile, the AL has submitted at least 36 notices seeking disapproval of the controversial ordinance. The House is supposed to dispose those off before the bill is

passed.

Earlier, the prime minister and the opposition leader stood face to face in the House over the issue of inclusion of Bangladesh in the US terror-risk list and blamed each other for it.

Parliament witnessed an unusual happening amid uproar when the lawmakers belonging to the main opposition, including its leader, demanded discussion on the foreign minister's statement on his recent US visit.

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan was delivering a statement under rule 300 of the rules of procedure over the inclusion of the country under the United States' National Security Entry-exit Registration System (NSEERS).

In a more unusual gesture, the prime minister rose to her feet well before the opposition leader ended her speech and sealed any discussion on this issue.

On the other hand, the opposition leader said the government's wrong foreign policy, violation of human rights, political persecution and patronization of the "terrorists" led the US to list the country as a terror-risk. "And the country has now become friendless," she added.

Immediately after the question-answer session, the chair allowed the foreign minister to make a statement. After its ending, the opposition lawmakers demanded discussion on this issue, but the speaker clarified that there was no scope for discussion.

At that point, Hasina took the floor and emphasized the need for discussion in the House as to why the country was included in the terror-risk list. She told that there was nothing new in the foreign minister's statement.

The opposition lawmakers staged a stormy walkout twice over the same issue. First at 5.30 pm when the foreign minister was delivering his speech although the *magrib azaan* (call for evening prayer) was going on.

They again staged a walkout after the prime minister sealed off any discussion and the Chair did not allow the opposition leader on the floor to speak afterwards. However, they came back within minutes.

Iqbal

FROM PAGE 12

arrested in the case on January 23 while he was in custody.

On October 24, the army-led joint forces raided the residence of Iqbal while he was abroad and seized some 6 bottles of unauthorised foreign liquors. Gulshan police filed the case against Iqbal under section 22 (ga) of the Narcotics Control Act.

The same bench comprising Justice Syed Amirul Islam and Mirza Hossain Haider granted ad interim bail to Dipu Chowdhury, son of AL leader Mofazzel Hossain Chowdhury Maya, in a murder case.

Dipu, who is in custody since July 2001, was shown arrested in the murder case on November 19, 2002.

The Court also issued rule upon the government to show cause as to why the accused should not be granted regular bail.

Barrister Tania Amir appeared for Iqbal while Barrister Rokonuddin Mahmud moved the petition for Dipu, who faces at least half-a-dozen criminal cases.

Manpower

FROM PAGE 12

unscrupulous recruiters and have to come back empty-handed failing to get any jobs, and called upon recruiters to prevent this from happening.

The BAIRA leaders hailed the petition moved by the lawyers of Hasan, Minu and Parvin, seeking stay of the hearing till supply of the certified copies of the statement of Shahzeh Haq Shehzai, the fourth prosecution witness in the case, recorded by the IO on October 5, 1998.

Car park

FROM PAGE 1

BSS adds: Different construction works under the Dhaka Urban Transport Project (DUTP) including Mohakhali fly-over and Tongi link road will be completed by the stipulated time in June 2004, the communication minister said while chairing a DUTP review meeting at the communication ministry yesterday.

The meeting also reviewed progress of other DUTP projects including development of corridors from Saidabad to Rampura Bridge and Mohakhali to Moghbazar, developments of Gabtoli, Saidabad and Mohakhali bus terminals and repair work of 34 roads in different city wards.

State Minister for Communication Salahuddin Ahmed, secretary Syed Hayat and senior officials of Dhaka City Corporation, WASA, T&T and Titas Gas were present.

Farmers' rights

FROM PAGE 12

of developing countries under TRIPs should be resisted, he said.

Addressing the workshop, Law Minister Moudud Ahmed said the government will certainly protect farmers' rights as they have a great contribution to the national economy.

Bangladesh government officials and NGO representatives from other SAARC countries also took part in the workshop.

Shazneen case

FROM PAGE 1

domestic help Shahid was missing after the incident.

The Investigation Officer (IO) of the case recorded his statement in the afternoon on October 5, 1998 at his father-in-law's Gulshan residence in the city, Arshad told the court.

Arshad went on, "Shehzi, Simeen Hossain, her husband Waqar Hossain and I reported the April 1 incident (Hasan) behaving very indecently with Shazneen" to my father-in-law and mother-in-law on May 2, 1998, after their health condition improved."

"In my statement of October 5, 1998 to the IO of the case, I said that Hasan and Badal hired Humayun, Minu, Parvin, Shainram and Shahid with money to rape and kill Shazneen," Arshad told the court.

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.

All the six accused Shahid, Hasan, Badal, Shainram, Minu and Parvin were produced in the court yesterday.

Special public prosecutors (PPs) Arfan Uddin Khan, Mahbub Ahmed and Saima Khanam appeared for the state, while advocates Mosharrif Hassan Kajol, Mohammad Hanif, Anwarul Kabir Babul and MA Kamrul Hasan Khan Aslam appeared for the accused.

Meanwhile, the court rejected the petition moved by the lawyers of Hasan, Minu and Parvin, seeking stay of the hearing till supply of the certified copies of the statement of Shahzeh Haq Shehzai, the fourth prosecution witness in the case, recorded by the IO on October 5, 1998.

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The cause of the blast remained



PHOTO: STAR

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan speaks at a 20-day programme the Jatiyatabadi Samajik Sangskritik Sangsta arranged at the Central Shaheed Minar yesterday to mark the International Mother Language Day.

India to raise 4 new battalions of special forces

PTI, New Delhi

A high-level defence ministry delegation is scheduled to visit Israel next week as part of the moves to clear the decks for training of special forces.

India and Israel recently signed a 30-million dollar agreement to arm these special forces with Israeli Tavor Light weapons systems. The system is said to be the most advanced in contemporary warfare.

The proposal for raising these new elite commando forces, especially in "irregular warfare", has been cleared by the Cabinet Committee on security (CCS) and additional funds have been allocated for it, highly placed army officials told PTI.

The officers and men from these newly-raised battalions would be sent to Israel for special anti-insurgency warfare training, the officials said.

Operations and the 21st was raised recently for jungle terrain.

The army brass was tight-lipped about the role of the newly raised special forces, which would make India, only the fifth country in the world, to have Division Strength Special Forces after United States, Russia, China and UK.

However, sources said the newly raised forces specially trained in high risk hit-and-run tactics would be assigned to target militants staging points near the LoC and seek and destroy mercenary ammunition dumps near the border and in hinterland in Jammu and Kashmir.

The government is understood to be giving top priority to beef up operational warfare in the context of the lessons learnt from year long operation "Parikrama".

The incident had led to student unrest on the campus, forcing then Vice-chancellor Prof. Anwarullah Chowdhury to step down.

Moreover, a judicial commission formed to investigate the incident, said in its report that there were arms at room No. 235 of the hall. Lucy, Shanta and two other JCD activists, Lily and Kanon were there on the night of the police attack.

The three recruited as lecturers of development studies are Rownak Jahan, Rezaul Haq and Suchita Sharmin.

Rownak Jahan stood first class from the economics department of Dhaka University both in her bachelors and masters degree. She also completed masters in development studies from the University of Dublin, Ireland.

Likewise, Rezaul Haq obtained the same distinction both in bachelors and masters programme from the Department of Public Administration of Dhaka University.

And, Suchita Sharmin obtained first classes both in the bachelors and masters programme from the psychology department of the university.

Crew remains found

Reuters adds: Debris from space shuttle Columbia rained down onto fields, highways and a cemetery in Texas on Saturday, sending dozens of residents to hospitals after they handled the smoldering metal wreckage.

All seven astronauts on board were killed in the break-up, which scattered potentially toxic debris across a 120-mile swath of eastern Texas.

A cloud of ash and metal fragments stretched 100 miles in the sky above the state's wide open rural spaces and into neighboring Louisiana, weather officials said.

There were no reports that falling debris injured anybody or caused much damage on the ground.

William Pinkston, a resident just outside Nacogdoches, told Reuters he informed police he found a patch of human hair among debris that fell into a front yard.

Several police and other officials were scouring the yard. Police cars and an ambulance were parked outside.

"We heard a rumbling sound. We thought it was a tornado and then -- wham! -- something hit the trailer," Bradley, Pinkston's father, said after

another small piece of debris bounced off the roof of his mobile home, causing a hole in its outer shell about three inches across.

CNN said a family reported finding a leg in a field in Hemphill, Texas. Investigators later carried a black body bag from the area and placed it into the back of a hearse as they bowed their heads.

"We are not ready to confirm that we have found any human remains," Nacogdoches County Sheriff Thomas Kerrs said.

He added that among the roughly 1,000 calls reporting debris, some people said they found remains of crew members.

Columbia was traveling 12,500 mph at 207,000 feet above Earth -- only 16 minutes from its scheduled landing at Kennedy Space Center in Florida.

"It was louder than a sonic boom. It shook the house and the whole neighborhood," Hank Calhoun, a Palestine resident. "There was a rumbling going on for about two minutes."

In the surrounding streets and alleyways a dozen buildings were severely damaged. Trails of blood led down glass-strewn alleys leading from the blast site, where residents desperately pulled at hunks of concrete and twisted metal to rescue people from the wreckage.

Among the huge crowds thronging around the site, shocked women wept and howled in anguish, while emergency vehicles struggled to force a way through the mayhem towards the scene.

Fears that more buildings could collapse close to the blast site in a rundown area, an overcrowded warren of street markets and slum housing, sent waves of panic through the onlookers packing the surrounding streets, triggering dangerous stampedes.

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