

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 AsharqAl-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 elections.

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

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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.

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.

Car park

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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 Titag Gas were present.

Farmers' rights

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tions 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 form other SAARC countries also took part in the workshop.

Kejriwal

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in Dhaka alleging that Kejriwal used his Singapore business office to cover up the fraud.

The case said he showed import of raw materials under back to back L/Cs and later readymade garments were shipped to Singapore from where he did not bring back the export earnings.

The case said the accused should be punished for violation of foreign currency regulation act of 1947.

Shazneen case

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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, Shaniram 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, Shaniram, 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 Mosharraf Hassain 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 Shahzehr Haq Shehzi, the fourth prosecution witness in the case, recorded by the IO on October 5, 1998.

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PHOTO: STAR

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan speaks at a 20-day programme the Jatiyataabadi Samajik Sangskritik Sangstha 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

With Islamabad showing no signs of relenting on infiltration in Jammu and Kashmir, the government has given a go ahead to raising of four more battalions of Special Forces, who would be trained in Israel for specialised counter insurgency strikes.

The proposal for raising these new elite commando forces, specially 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.

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.

India already has a Brigade Strength Special Forces comprising four battalions, 1 Para Commandos, 9 Paracommandos, 10 Para Commandos and 21st Para Commandos. While, 1 Para Commandos, with deep sea divers in its ranks, specialises in Anti-Hijacking and Hostage crises, the 9 Para, with experienced mountaineers, is dedicated Mountain guerrilla force. The 10 Para is for desert

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

The army brass was tightlipped 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".

Crew remains found

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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.

In one Texas field, wisps of gray smoke rose from a vast patch of blackened grass where debris had scorched the earth.

With active duty members of the military aiding operations, F-16 fighter jets screamed overhead to look for debris along a path running roughly southeast from the city of Rice to Nacogdoches.

Police and national guardsmen fanned out to guard pieces of wreckage ranging in size from a postage stamp to the trunk of a car, marking

them with a traffic cone or yellow tape, until NASA officials could collect them.

Police Lt. Darrell Trawick in Nacogdoches stood for hours over a six-inch-long charred bit of metal.

Passersby left their vehicles to look at the object, gathering in quiet groups in a scene that had the air of a memorial.

Local officials said dozens of people went to area hospital emergency rooms to be checked by doctors after handling debris. They were told to wash with soap and water and were sent home.

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."

Blast destroys Lagos block: 20 killed

AFP, Lagos

At least 20 people were killed yesterday after an explosion ripped apart a block of shops and apartments in central Lagos, Nigeria's economic capital and Africa's most populous city.

Witnesses told AFP at the scene that around two dozen bodies had been pulled out of the rubble of a bank and two four-storey mixed business and housing blocks on Lagos Island, in the commercial heart of the city.

"When I arrived they had got six or seven bodies out and into police vehicles and ambulances," said Laure Adiboun, a 37-year-old engineer. "I saw many more trapped. There were at least 20, maybe more."

The cause of the blast remained unknown as an ambulance crew

member confirmed that 20 bodies had been removed, including 10 children, and that more were thought to be trapped.

Amid scenes of chaos, machete-wielding looters scrambled to snatch cash from the ruined bank. Heavily armed police were moving around the area, but appeared overwhelmed.

Lagos police spokesman Emmanuel Ighodalo said: "We are trying to find the cause of the wreck-age. We have reports of four dead, but we are waiting for an update."

"I pulled some bodies out myself, with my hands, my hands," wailed a sweating, thickest young man in a basketball jersey. AFP saw one body being removed.

The walls of the bank were ripped off by the blast, while the two apartment blocks collapsed entirely.

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 the 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.

Plain-clothes police to be deployed at cattle markets

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) will deploy adequate police force including plain-clothes personnel at 18 temporary cattle markets in the city on occasion of the Eid-ul-Azha to ensure security of the buyers and sellers and prevent toll collection.

Mobile police teams will keep the cattle market areas under their vigilance from today, DMP sources said.

"We will also enhance our vigilance on roads to ensure smooth transportation of sacrificial animals to the capital," Deputy Commissioner of the DMP Sazzad Hossain said.

This time the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) has permitted setting up of 18 cattle markets for the Eid-ul-Azha as against 22 last year. Of those, 15 have already been leased and three more would be leased in two days.

The 15 markets are located at Nawab Yusuf Market at Nayabazar, Khilkhet Tanpara market, Jigatola-

Hazarbagh market, Gopalbagh market, Rahmatganj playground, Dhupkhola market, hosani dalan road market (Chankharpool crossing), Dholaikhal market at Narinda, Palashi Bazar, Uttara-Azampur market, Merul Bazar, Bangladesh Bank staff quarters, Meradia Postagola and the Panthapath. Three more markets would be set up at Doyaganj, Arambagh and Dhanmondi.

The DCC would earn more than Tk 35 in lease money this time, sources said.

Petro dealers

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bear the cost for setting up petrol pump. But now they are not getting the facility either from the government or from petroleum companies.

Mohammed Nazmul Haque, coordinator of the association, read out a written statement at the press conference. Among others, Afzal Hossain, Harun-ur-Rashid, Mizanur Rahman Ratan, Sazzadul Karim Kabul, Mahasinur Rashid, Mahbubur Rahman Chowdhury and Abdur Rahman were present.

Replying to a question, Nazmul Haque said the Bangladesh Standard and Testing Institute (BSTI) has served show cause notices on 39 dealers for allegedly stealing fuel while selling.

DU finally drops JCD leader from teachers' fold

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka University yesterday refrained from recruiting Noor Jahan Begum Shanta as a teacher and appointed three others to the development studies department.

Vice-chancellor of the university Prof. SMA Faiz said the selection body had recruited the teachers on their merits and the syndicate approved it.

Earlier, controversy arose when some pro-BNP teachers lobbied with the selection board for the recruitment of Shanta, a leader of the Jatiyataabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), despite her unimpressive academic results.

Besides, Shanta is allegedly one of those responsible for the police attack on Shamsunnahar Hall students last year.

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.

Bottled water

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brands had used water supplied by the Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (WASA).

The findings revealed that consumer rights are not protected and the practices the manufacturers follow to control the quality of drinking water are largely flawed.

Besides, severe inconsistency and errors exist in the specifications declared on the labels of the bottles.

About half of the contents specified on the labels of the bottles, analysed in laboratory under strict quality assurance and quality control (QAQC), were found wrong.

The study also showed 80 per cent of the manufacturers did not mention address or location of their plants as required by the regulation. Some of those addresses were also found to be false.

The researchers though did not mention whether any measures were taken to prohibit further production or marketing of such bottled water.

The Bangladesh Academy of Sciences in a draft recommendation said the government should take emergency measures to have a 'safe water act' within which a safe water regulatory body would be formed to reduce public health hazards.

It also recommended introduction of a total quality management system. They suggested forming a reference laboratory for quality assurance and quality control (QAQC) to validate test data produced by reliable laboratories.

National Professor Nurul Islam of the University of Science and Technology, Chittagong, Dr Shamsher Ali, vice-chancellor of South East University, Dr M Khaliuzzaman and Prof. Kamal Uddin spoke in the seminar.

Hasina gets bail

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joint secretary of defence ministry Mohammad Hossain Semiat and managing director of a business firm -- Unique Group--Noor Ali.

The Leader of the Opposition in the Jatiya Sangsad went to the court at around noon in a bulletproof Mercedes Benz. Security in the court area was stepped up as slogan-chanting AL workers and onlookers crowded the area.

The Bureau of Anti-corruption had filed the case with Tejgaon Police Station in December 2001 alleging that Sheikh Hasina and the other accused had caused a loss of 123 million US dollars (Tk 700 crore) to the national exchequer in purchasing eight Russian-made Mig-29s in 1999.

Charge sheet in the case was filed with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court and Later the case was transferred to the Divisional Special Judge's Court.

In the bail prayer, defence counsel Rokonuddin Mahmud said the eight Mig-29s were purchased "on approval by all the authorities concerned."

Besides, the Hasina government conducted a state-to-state negotiation in this regard and made the purchases at much lower prices -- 123.98 million dollars while the quoted price was 289 million dollars, he maintained.

Opposing the bail, Public Prosecutor Anwar Zahid Bhuiyan

told the court that Tk 700 crore (123 million dollars) was wasted in the purchase deals by floating a tender as an 'eyewash'.

While leaving the court, Hasina addressed an impromptu gathering at Shankhari Bazar. She blasted the government for 'falsely' implicating her in the graft case only to 'harass' her.

Senior AL leaders including Zillur Rahman, Abdul Jalil, Abdur Razzak, Tofail Ahmed, Suranjit Sengupta, Motia Chowdhury and Hasina's political secretary Saber Hossain Chowdhury were present in the court.

Shahriar, Mamun

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speak against the government," said Shahriar.

"On January 31, I went to Mirpur to attend a public meeting of the Ghatik-Dalal Nirmul Committee. The organisers of the meeting informed me that police warned of arrest if I speak against the government."

Muntasir said, "I saw plain-clothes police around my home. Detectives follow me every day."

Both Shahriar and Muntasir were arrested on December 8 under Section 54 and given a one-month detention each under the Special Powers Act. They were released in early January.