

Russia to sell warplanes to Malaysia

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Visiting Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday wrapped up a 900-million-dollar deal to sell warplanes to Malaysia and sets his sights on more sales in the region.

"With the delivery of the Sukhoi, hopefully it will promote Russian aviation technology to Southeast Asia," Putin said at the launch of the Malaysia-Russia Business Council here.

The centrepiece of Putin's first visit to this mainly Muslim nation is the signing of an agreement to supply 18 Sukhoi Su-30MK fighter jets to the Royal Malaysian Air Force.

The combat aircraft forms part of a major arms procurement spree by Malaysia which includes French submarines, British and Russian missile systems and Polish attack tanks.

The squadron of Sukhoi will join Russian-made MiG-29Ns, US-made FA-18/Ds and British-made Hawks in Malaysia's combat aircraft fleet, officials said.

Analysis in Moscow had predicted that Putin would use the trip to Malaysia, the first by a Russian

president, to boost his country's position in the Asian arms market.

Under fire for its nuclear cooperation with Iran, Russia is not keen to further rile the United States by increasing its arms sales to the Islamic regime and is instead seeking alternate customers, they said.

The Sukhoi deal is a sign that Russia is turning back to Asia after the relationship that flourished with the US after the September 11 attacks cooled over the US-led war in Iraq, said analyst Viktor Kremenyuk of the USA-Canada Institute in Moscow.

Malaysia is also a strong critic of the US invasion of Iraq, and the issue was raised obliquely at a question and answer session after Putin's address to several hundred businessmen at an hotel in the capital Kuala Lumpur.

In reply to a question on the "unilateral trend" in world affairs, Putin said through an interpreter: "In our view, a multi-polar world will serve as a basis where the rule of law triumphs and the practise of leading international organisations is complied with."

US watchdog body

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his third-floor room and left him outside the dormitory. University students later carried him to the hospital," stated the letter.

"... four of Tusher's assailants have been expelled from the party. But ousting them hardly qualifies as just punishment for such a ruthless assault. Furthermore, the two JCD leaders, who Tusher's colleagues suspect of organising the attack, are still at large."

"... the attack on Tusher is not an isolated incident, but rather one in a series of attacks by members of the JCD, a violent student wing of Your Excellency's own party. For instance, on June 19, JCD members beat and kidnapped Abul Bashar, the local correspondent for the Bengali-language national daily newspaper Janakantha in southern Bangladesh's Shariatpur District."

"The second assault against a journalist in Bangladesh occurred on July 28 when unidentified assailants beat and kidnapped Jahangir Alam Akash, a reporter for the Bengali-language daily Sangbad, in Rajshahi, a city in northwestern Bangladesh."

"Although Akash did not sustain severe injuries, he remains deeply shaken and fearful. Sangbad regularly publishes Akash's articles about the criminal activities of smugglers in Rajshahi and about the protection local

Benazir, Zardari sentenced in Switzerland

AFP, Islamabad

Swiss authorities have issued former Pakistani prime minister Benazir Bhutto and her husband Asif Zardari with a six months' suspended sentence and fined them 50,000 dollars each in a graft case, their lawyer announced here yesterday.

"The Swiss Investigation Officer Devaud has on July 31 ... passed an order pronouncing six months of suspended sentence and a fine of 50,000 dollars each" to Benazir and Zardari, lawyer and senator Farooq Naek said in a statement.

Naek said the order, which was the outcome of a five year inquiry into a corruption case, was communicated to the Swiss government on Monday.

ODI today

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Mohammad Ashraful and Mashrafe-bin-Mortuza.

It will be Ashraful's first one-day outing while Mashrafe, the only Bangladeshi bowler who made an impact on the tour, will be back after being rested for the second one-day

But there will be little respite for Khaled Mahmud's men as Australia's one-day captain Ricky Pointing said that his side would be as aggressive as ever to complete a clean sweep.

The only good news for Bangladesh is that tearaway Brett Lee will be missing in action in the match. Jason Gillespie is taking his place.

Australia, who won both Tests by an innings last month, lead the one-day series 2-0 after victories by eight and nine wickets in the northern Queensland city of Cairns last week.

Three to do life for killing housewife in Comilla

UNB, Comilla

Three people were awarded life imprisonment by a court here yesterday for killing a housewife in 1999.

The convicts are Firoz, Khokan and Delwar of Bhagatpur village in Daudkandi Upazila.

Sessions Judge Md Ansar Ali also fined the convicts Tk 50,000 each, in default, they are to suffer three more years in jail.

According to the prosecution, the convicts called Parul, daughter of Abdul Majid of the village, out of her father's house on the night of July 13, 1999 and killed her in a pre-planned way.

The following day, the victim's father filed a case with Daudkandi Police Station accusing the three.

After examining documents and witnesses, the judge found them guilty and gave the verdict.

Gram Sarkar

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strated in front of the office of deputy commissioner (DC), demanding cancellation of the GS formation.

They also handed over a memorandum containing eight-point demand to the DC for sending it to the prime minister.

They demanded cancellation of the Gram Sarkar Act, 2003, strong union councils and Gram Adalat, and empowerment of woman members in union councils.

Speakers at the rally, chaired by Motiur Rahman Tapan, Sardaha union council (Charghat upazila) chairman, threatened greater movement in the union level if the government did not cancel the GS formation.

They heavily criticised the government for introducing the Gram Sarkar, vowing that people's movement will force it to cancel the GS Act like in the past.

They also feared the formation of the GS will contribute to the deterioration of law and order at villages as the ruling coalition loyalists are being selected for different GS posts.

Ali Majid Abdul Khawaza, chairman of Jhikra union, Bijon Sarkar, chairman of Govindapur union, Mohammad Mohsin and chairman of Shuvodanga union (Bagmara upazila) also spoke.

Workers' Party Politbureau Member Fazle Hossain Badsha and the district's General Secretary Rafiqul Islam Piarul also attended the meeting, extending their support to the movement.

Peacekeepers

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Charles Taylor's decision to quit office on August 11. Since Monday, small contingents of regional forces have begun to move into the West African nation beset with months of fighting.

More than 1,000 people have died so far in the civil war between forces loyal to President Charles Taylor and the Liberian United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD).

Empowered by a new resolution passed by 12-0 votes Saturday, the vanguard elements of a 1,300-strong Nigerian force had already landed in Monrovia airport Sunday. Small contingents of 250 soldiers each are joining the Nigerian team from neighbouring countries forming the Economic Council of West African States (ECOWAS).

Earlier, France, Germany and Mexico abstained from Saturday's voting in the UNSC due to insertion of a special clause in the resolution that exempted US forces from trial for war crimes under the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (ICC). The US always opposed the creation of the ICC.

Some 2,300 US forces are now patrolling Liberian coasts but President George W Bush is yet to decide whether US troops should move in as peacekeepers.

Troops for Iraq

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"There has to be a particular environment for sending the troops and the environment is defined by the legitimacy of the cover," foreign ministry spokesman Masood Khan said, referring to Pakistan's repeated demand for a UN or Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) green light.

"The other factor is whether or not the people of Iraq will be hospitable to this kind of mission."

Khan confirmed that Britain and the United States had requested two brigades of Pakistani troops to join peacekeeping forces in post-war Iraq.

Other countries the United States has approached for help, including India and Turkey, have also said they couldn't send troops without a new UN mandate.

Debate on a draft to replace Resolution 1483, which confines the UN role in Iraq to humanitarian and political assistance, is set for August 21.

However, as casualties mount, US and British governments are under increasing pressure to share the burden.

The British government is exploring the possibility of a new UN Security Council resolution setting up a multinational force in Iraq, Britain's special representative to Iraq said in an interview Monday.

Preliminary negotiations on such a resolution could start within weeks, the Financial Times daily said quoting John Sawers.

Shell's quit spills slick

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first evaluation by the government in August-September 1999. This evaluation was, however, never made public.

But within October, Shell realised it needed more than just economic predictions and enthusiasm to do business in Bangladesh. Signs of corruption and shifting of direction surfaced in October when Shell, the world's biggest oil company, saw that the government offer a little known small Irish company the blocks in which it had unofficially qualified. Shell was also refused more than one block. Again this lone block was the least important one.

As Shell became disappointed with such deviation, the government offered it two blocks. Again, during negotiating the two blocks -- it tried to pass block 10 to Unocal, another preferred company of the government.

By 2000 and 2001, a lot of shifting of decisions, procedural delay, inaction in expanding the country's gas network and a general lack of government attention to really push the gas sector to a new height started clouding all the enthusiasm of investors. The hopes turned out to be a mere bubble to many.

But to say this was entirely a government failure in the gas sector would be wrong. Governance failure in all other sectors has also contributed to the frustrations.

Deteriorating law and order and institutionalised corruption meantime have also been dampening hopes in all other sectors. Business grew at a slow pace. Political chaos and visionless government policies also kept on retarding the country's economic growth.

Consequently, instead of an aggressive economic growth predicted by foreign investors, the overall failure of the governance resulted in a mediocre growth.

There had been no significant investment in any sector other than energy between 1996 and 2003. Oil companies that thought the gas market would grow rapidly became disappointed when it did not. And people saw that the benefits of gas sector investment did not reach their homes. Gas did not reach new communities (with one exception) in any form.

Ultimately, Shell signed an inactive deal with the government for blocks 5 and 10 that basically

gives the company the chance to hold two blocks for five years without any exploration or development. If Shell thought the local gas market was expanding, only then it would begin operations in these blocks.

But nothing changed after the change of government. Corruption became even more dominant. In the last two years, there were virtually no new investors in power and gas sectors. And those who came in to tap markets were introduced to top political leaders instead of the Power Development Board or Petrobangla.

An executive of a leading power company of Singapore came to Dhaka to invest in a 2000 MW power plant in 2002. During his four-day stay, he met a certain influential young political leader and a senior minister who are not related to the energy sector. He did not meet the power board, the energy ministry or Petrobangla, but he was given assurance that a deal would be signed soon. Ultimately, nothing happened.

In the last two years, oil companies witnessed gradual ineffectiveness of the designated offices of Petrobangla and the PDB in taking their own decisions. A lot buzzwords like 'unbundling', 'reforms' and 'gas export' were heard. And the present government blamed everything on the previous government but did virtually nothing new itself.

A simple example of how poorly the government handled the energy sector is evident in the fact that Petrobangla always owed Shell over \$100 million for purchase of Sangu gas (equivalent to five months' gas billing) when it could have paid all arrears in due time.

Petrobangla earns as much as Tk 2,000 crore a year even after buying Sangu gas all year round five months behind schedule. Petrobangla is not allowed to keep its earnings to its accounts and it submits all its earnings to the national exchequer. It pays through the finance ministry as the payment is made in dollars. Therefore, the responsibility of gas payment actually falls on the government -- not on an individual institution like Petrobangla. It was the responsibility of the higher authorities to ensure that Shell or other oil companies got their payments in time.

The ministers concerned always

used this fact to justify the premise of gas export and that the country did not have adequate foreign currency to buy PSC gas.

But imagine the country without Sangu gas. Sangu supplies up to 160 million cubic feet of gas per day (mmcf) when the total gas consumption is over 1250 mmcf.

If Sangu gas were not there, what would have the government done to meet this basic energy need? Petrobangla top officials say in that case the country would have imported oil and used that to run power plants and divert gas lines to cater to the gas-fired fertiliser plants. And what is the cost of this oil import? The answer is three times the cost of gas. And would any oil exporting country allow Bangladesh to leave arrears of \$100 million for purchase of oil? No. Only an investor inside Bangladesh that predicted a huge market growth could be made hostage to this situation. In this case, Shell was the victim of shortsighted economic management of the government.

When US company Occidental rolled out from Bangladesh, it did not really matter -- because Occidental was responsible for negligence in Magurchara. And when US company AES started the process of selling off its two power plants to British company Globelec, again it did not really matter. Because AES is globally facing a financial crunch and it had to cut down its size to survive. But the Shell case has a lot of serious implications for Bangladesh.

"The exit of Shell is now a fact, and it cannot be reversed. But if there is any lesson here, the government should learn that," says a Shell official.

Pvt varsities

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quality education, and said an accreditation council would be formed to monitor standards.

He also criticised private universities that have moved away from the concept of a broad education, and called on them to teach a variety of subjects to ensure students obtained a rounded education.

MP profiling

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Awami League President Sheikh Hasina mentioned her previous profession as prime minister and present one, politics, sources said.

Communications Minister Nazmul Huda did not complete the form, nor did he sign it. He also did not state his profession or involvement with any organisation.

Land Minister M Shamsul Islam mentioned his present profession as minister and previous profession as ambassador.

Lutfuzzaman Babar, state minister for home, also mentioned his present profession as state minister and previous profession as industrialist. He stated that he passed the S.S.C. exams but did not mention the school's name where he studied.

Anwarul Kabir Talukder, state minister for finance and planning, and Gautam Chakrabarti, state minister for water resources, also mentioned their present profession as minister.

Majibar Rahman Sarwar mentioned his present profession as MP and mayor of the Barisal City Corporation and his previous profession as trade unionist and social worker.

S A Khaleque (BNP), Sultan Mahmud Babu (BNP), Abdul Karim Abbasi (BNP) and Ataur Rahman Khan (BNP) did not mention their profession.

About educational qualifications, S A Khaleque wrote that he was educated. He mentioned that he performed Hajj twice, which he said was among his extra-curricular activities.

Ruling BNP lawmaker Mujibur Rahman Manju mentioned that he studied up to class nine but did not mention the name of the school.

authority's price. But the joint secretary of the New Market Traders Samity, M Eskander Mia, claimed the price was put in consultation with traders and the daily price rate of the Department of Agricultural Marketing (DAM) was followed.

A clerk of the samity however said DAM has not been providing the daily price rate for nearly 20 days.

Md Momirul Haque, a director of the DAM, admitted initially about not providing the rate report but then said he needed to check out to be sure. "We do regularly send price rates to main bazaars. But it's the DCC's responsibility to jot it down properly," he said.

M Babul Mia, president of Karwan Bazar kitchen market, said DAM often does not send the daily price chart regularly.

Price chart appeared to be troublesome to Shahabuddin, a leader of the Plashi Bazar Traders Samity. "Maintaining a price chart is not possible. It does not exist currently and nobody is maintaining it."

World Bank VP vows development alliance

UNB, Dhaka

World Bank Vice-president for South Asia Pratul C Patel yesterday pledged to strengthen assistance and partnership for socio-economic development of Bangladesh.

The assurance came when he called on Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at her office in the afternoon.

Patel, visiting Dhaka for the first time since his appointment as vice president in July, said Bangladesh's development in some cases could be a model for other countries.

He said steps have been taken to strengthen the World Bank's Dhaka Office to make more contribution in the development of Bangladesh.

Lauding the measures for economic development, the World Bank executive said the efforts have helped to change Bangladesh's position in the human development index.

He also expressed confidence

Rumi's father wants the noose for daughter's stalkers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Father of Umme Habiba Rumi, the second year student of Nazirhat College who committed suicide on Friday, is doubtful about the sincerity of the administration's efforts to arrest the two brothers whose continuous harassment led his daughter to take her own life.

Before hanging herself, Rumi left a suicide note relating her traumatic experience due to sexual harassment by the two brothers Mohammad Azam and Mohammad Nazim.

"Five days after my daughters death, the two main culprits are still at large. Would I be accused of overreacting if I now question the administration's sincerity about arresting the culprits who harried my beloved daughter to death? Except for the officer-in-charge of the Fatikchhari Police Station, none of the top officials of the district or police administration deemed it necessary to visit us," Rumi's father Abul Kalam told reporters at the Chittagong offices of the daily Prothom Alo and The Daily Star yesterday.

The bereaved father recalled the fond memories of his deceased daughter, and narrated how much his "jovial and bright child" cherished the dream of becoming a lawyer to help poor litigants, and how earnestly he hoped to see her dream come true. "But now both my child and her dream are buried forever."

"I demand capital punishment to the culprits," Abul Kalam said in a choked voice.

Meanwhile, Rumi's elder sister Nahida Akhtar Sumi lodged another case with the Fatikchhari Police Station under Women and Children Repression Prevention Act Saturday, accusing four including Azam and Nazim. The two others accused are Md. Saifuddin alias Shahabuddin and Abdul Haq alias Fenzu. Police arrested Fenzu from his house at Roshangiri yesterday.

AL protests Gopalganj judge's decision

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gopalganj

Bangladesh Awami League (AL) and its front organisations arranged a rally against the district and sessions judge of Gopalganj yesterday.

Mohammad Ali Khan Abu Miah, president of AL district unit, and other senior leaders blamed the judge for bailing unlawfully the accused in the case, who tried to kill the former prime minister Sheikh Hasina in 2000.

The AL leaders demanded withdrawal of the judge in a meeting organised after the rally in front of the deputy commissioner's office.

that Bangladesh's economic growth would surpass the 7 per cent target.

The World Bank assistance would continue and increase wherever necessary, he added.

Referring to the approval of a new \$105 million World Bank grant for the government's priority sectors, Patel said it was a reflection of the bank's growing confidence.

He assured that the World Bank would support visits of public and private sector groups to exchange ideas on development in different areas in other countries.

The World Bank vice president appreciated Khaleda Zia's leadership in socioeconomic development of Bangladesh.

The prime minister apprised the World Bank official of her government's programmes in various sectors, including health, rural development, agro-based industry, poultry and fisheries.

Rural electrification, she added, has brought new momentum in the development activities.

World Bank Country Director for Bangladesh Christine I Wallich, PM's Principal Secretary Dr Kamal Siddiqui and ERD Secretary Mirza Tasadduq Hossain Beg were present during the meeting.

Ctg businessman not yet rescued

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Kidnapped businessman and BNP leader Jamal Uddin Chowdhury remained untraced till yesterday.

The much hyped rescue operation and a series of coordination meetings held so far to trace him have produced no results, even 13 days after his kidnap.

The law enforcement agencies deployed to rescue the businessman could not make any headway apparently due to leakage of information regarding their activities. Lack of coordination among Chittagong Metropolitan Police, district police and the para-military BDR has made it all the more difficult to rescue the businessman, sources said.

Attachment of some movable property of Kanchan Nagar UP Chairman Abul Kasem Chowdhury at Fatikchhari and arrest of one of his relatives in the city in connection with the kidnapping were the only noteworthy developments that took place on Monday.

Police arrested Tariqul Hasan Chowdhury alias Sagor, 23, a cousin of Kasem, on Monday night.

The CMP and district police held a coordination meeting at the CMP headquarters at Lalidighi in the city yesterday afternoon.

The meeting presided over by CMP Commissioner Shahidullah Khan decided to go for further intensifying the rescue operation.

Sources said the abducted businessman might have been handed over to the armed members of Osman Bahini. The kidnappers were holding the victim at Manikchhari in Rangamati and Kanchan Nagar, they said.

5-yr-old boy

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some alleged extortionists at Mohammadpur as he refused to pay them toll on Monday night.

The victim, Faruk Molla started for Sohrawardy hospital at 11.30pm as his father was admitted there, after closing his furniture and automobile shop at Town Hall. The extortionist caught him up at Sher Shah Suri Road and shot his both legs and back.

He was rushed to Chest Diseases Hospital immediately and shifted to DMCH yesterday as his condition was deteriorating.

Faruk told journalists that the attackers demanded Tk 20,000 few days earlier and attacked him as he refused to pay. But police, quoting locals, said Faruk was also known a criminal and the shooting might be sequel of rivalry with other local criminals.

None was arrested in this connection till last evening.

Cops, JCD men attack

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secretary of the BCL DU unit, on the campus and turned him over to police.

The BCL leaders at a rally at Bat Tala near the High Court alleged that JCD leaders were not eager to end the DU deadlock triggered by Thursday's overnight attacks on BCL activists.

They vowed that the BCL-enforced strike into its fourth day yesterday would continue and they would not sit for any dialogue with the university authorities until the JCD stopped attacks on its leaders and workers.

The BCL has enforced the strike since Saturday in protest at attacks on its leaders and activists by the JCD men and the JCD virtually sealed off the campus to the BCL.

The left-leaning Progressive Student Alliance (PSA) submitted a memorandum to DU Vice-chancellor Professor SMA Faiz yesterday, demanding a quick end to the deadlock.

Prof Faiz said the university authorities did not permit anyone to hold programme at the Shaheed Minar yesterday.

The BNP student affairs secretary, Fazlul Haq Milon MP, met the DU vice-chancellor yesterday morning to discuss the campus standoff. Prof Faiz, who also discussed the matter with AL Joint Secretary Obaidul Kader over phone, hoped the situation would improve in a couple of days.

Obaidul Kader told The Daily Star that the BCL demanded that the DU vice-chancellor start rehabilitating the ousted BCL men to dormitories.

About any dialogue with the DU authorities, he said the BCL leaders would first gather at Madhu's Canteen and join a meeting with the vice-chancellor. He said any backdoor negotiation would not be accepted.

The JCD leaders said they would not allow BCL activists back to the campus until they backtracked on the strike.