

Bush defends Iraq war, gives voters 'a choice'

AFP, Washington

US President George W. Bush swung his reelection bid into high gear, defiantly defending the invasion of Iraq and urging voters to keep the war on terrorism on track by giving him a second term.

"We face a choice. We can go forward with confidence and resolve, or we can turn back to the dangerous illusion that terrorists are not plotting and outlaw regimes are no threat to us," he said in his annual State of the Union speech late Tuesday.

Addressing a joint session of Congress and millions of television viewers three years to the day after taking office, Bush hoped to snatch the spotlight from opposition Democrats vying to challenge him in the November 2 election.

The result was a wide-ranging

speech in which he signalled support for a possible effort to ban homosexual marriage, claimed credit for the reviving US economy, and fiercely defended the US-led March invasion of Iraq.

But while Bush unveiled a doubling of monies aimed at promoting democracy in the Middle East, he did not once mention the conflict pitting Israel against the Palestinians or reassert his support for creating a Palestinian state.

On Iraq, he charged that those who pushed for explicit UN approval of the war or worried about opposition from traditional allies like France and Germany would have imperiled US security over "the objections of few."

"America will never seek a permission slip to defend the security of our country," said Bush, who also brushed aside the embar-

assing failure of US-led forces to find the weapons of mass destruction.

Scaling back the more explicit charges he made in last year's State of the Union, Bush said investigators had found evidence of "mass destruction-related program activities" and insisted that "we are seeking all the facts."

But "had we failed to act, the dictator's weapons of mass destruction programs would continue to this day," he insisted, as veteran Democratic Senator Ted Kennedy shook his head in disbelief.

House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi later countered that Bush "has pursued a go-it-alone foreign policy that leaves us isolated abroad and that steals the resources we

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Agitating teachers of non-governmental primary schools pass the last hours of their two-day hunger strike with exhaustion spreading all over their faces at Muktangan in Dhaka yesterday.

Vajpayee for close ties between Bangladesh, N-E states

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, from New Delhi

India's northeastern states can serve as an 'economic bridgehead' with South East Asia by promoting trade with immediate neighbours Bangladesh, Myanmar, Singapore and Thailand, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee said on Tuesday.

Vajpayee urged the seven northeastern states to take advantage of their proximity to markets in Bangladesh, Singapore, Myanmar and Thailand and underlined the need for strengthening regional and sub-regional

trade and economic links.

Addressing chief ministers and leaders of trade and industry from the northeastern states, he said given India's active 'Look East' policy, these states could serve as a vital link between 'us and South East Asia'.

Vajpayee felt the northeastern states stand to benefit the most from regional economic cooperation.

He said the federal government was keen on economic development of northeastern states which

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A Lexus 430 is on display at the launch of the luxury car brand at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in the capital yesterday.

Anti-graft body to have prosecution power

Moudud tells roundtable

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The proposed independent anti-corruption commission will be empowered to prosecute on its own anybody found corrupt including serving top government officials and ministers, Law Minister Moudud Ahmed said yesterday.

"We did not hurry to pass the anti-corruption commission bill to incorporate public opinion and civil society recommendations into it," he said at a roundtable organised by Campaign for Good Governance (CGG) in the city's LGED conference hall.

The minister said the recommendations on giving the commission financial independence, prosecution authority and incorporating section 109 of Bangladesh Penal Code would hopefully be included in the proposed bill.

"The anti-corruption commission will curb the attitude of the people in power that they are above the law ... by scrutinising whether the public functionaries misappropriate public office and money," Moudud said.

While the present Bureau of Anti-Corruption itself is considered a hub of corruption, it is a big step forward in the face of rapidly spreading corruption in the country, he said.

Other discussants noted that mere formation of a commission would hardly help curb the all-pervading corruption and that a set of favourable measures has to be taken too to achieve the goal.

Financial freedom and prosecution authority have to be incorporated in the proposed bill as it lacks them to make the commission effective, said Prof. Muzaffer Ahmed at the discussion titled

"Our recommendations to remove drawbacks in formation of anti-corruption commission".

Citing the success of Singapore in this regard, he suggested a proactive private sector and a vibrant media letting out people's voice alongside a deterrent legislation.

Demanding elimination of political corruption, Prof. Khan Sarwar Murshid of Transparency International Bangladesh said the lawmakers who get elected by splashing out money do not represent the people, nor do they remain accountable to them.

He also said the civil society's watchdog role has to be institutionalised to curb corruption.

However, Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad Chairman Dr. Kazi Kholiquzzaman said corruption could not be eliminated from

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Meet demand or face oust govt action

Hasina threatens

UNB, Gopalganj

Awami League (AL) President and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina has said the 15-point demand will be turned into a "one-point oust-government movement", if the government fails to meet the opposition's demands by February 10.

"The demands we have put forward gained overwhelming public support as those reflect their desires. Had the government been a pro-people one, they would have

accepted the demands," she said.

The AL chief made the remarks while talking to a group of journalists of Gopalganj Reporters Club, Barguna Press Club and the journalists accompanied her from Dhaka

at the library of Bangabandhu Samadhi Sowdha (memorial) Complex at Tungipara in Gopalganj yesterday.

Replying to a query about the next general election, Hasina said if

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Non-govt primary teachers give ultimatum

UNB, Dhaka

Teachers of non-government primary schools, now on hunger strike, threatened to go for a greater movement if their one-point demand for nationalisation of their job is not met by today.

Their ultimatum came on the second day of the 48-hour hunger strike, announced by Bangladesh Non-government Primary Teachers' Association and joined by several hundred teachers at Muktangan in the city.

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25 important persons given gunman security

UNB, Dhaka

The government has appointed gunman security for 25 important persons, including 16 MPs and two diplomats in the country, parliament was told yesterday.

They are in addition to ministers

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Correction

On page 12 of our yesterday's edition, a photo caption on Shaheed Asad mistakenly introduced him as a Language Movement martyr. In fact, Asad embraced martyrdom during the mass upsurge in 1969. We sincerely regret the error.

Prayer Timings		
January 22		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fair	5-45	6-20
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-00	4-15
Maghrib	5-44	5-50
Esha	7-15	7-45
Source: Islamic Foundation		



"Cancer Home" has sprouted out of nowhere in Mohakhali in the capital, offering unsuspecting patients low-cost treatment, if any.

Doc runs cancer clinic without registration

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A general medical practitioner without any specialisation has been attending to critical cancer patients and running a cancer clinic in the city without registration.

He along with some doctors and class four employees of the country's only public sector cancer hospital is luring cancer patients with a dubious signboard, a false visiting card and low-cost treatment offer.

Any unsuspecting cancer patient will be attracted to the signboard of the 'Cancer Home' at 67, Mohakhali in front of BRAC University and the visiting card of Dr GM Abdus Salam, which claims him to be the registrar of a non-existent cancer hospital in the capital.

The 12-bed clinic located near the National Institute of Cancer Research and Hospital (NICRH), also claims availability of multiple services for outdoor and indoor cancer patients including biopsy and chemotherapy; that too, without any government approval, it was learnt.

Dr Salam, who is also a medical officer at the Prime Minister's Office, admits that he has no special qualifications for treating and prescribing for cancer patients. But he claims having seven years' experience as the registrar of a hospital, which treated cancer patients. He also admitted that the clinic was registered not as a specialised but as a general one.

When asked how he runs a specialised clinic without the help of any expert in the field, Dr Salam

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4.5 lakh non-govt teachers, staff to get festival allowance

PM announces at education week

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday announced festival allowance for over 4.5 lakh teachers and employees of 17,000 non-governmental schools, colleges and madrassahs from this year.

Addressing the concluding function of the National Education Week 2004 at Osmani Memorial auditorium, the prime minister announced the allowance -- 25 percent of the basic salary for teachers and 50 percent of the basic salary for employees.

Ministers, MPs, university vice-chancellors and a large number of teachers, students, guardians and officials attended the function.

Education Minister M Osman Farruk, Prime Minister's Adviser on Primary and Mass Education Prof Jahanara Begum, State Minister for Education ANM Ehsanul Haq Milon and Education Secretary M Shafiqul Islam, among others, addressed the function.

The prime minister also distributed awards among 57 students and five educational institutions for their outstanding performance in extracurricular activities.

Khaleda, in her address, said the government is not only increasing allocation for education every year, which is the highest in national budget, but also giving utmost importance to education in all development programmes.

She said the government has formed an education commission to make the country's education capable to face the challenges of globalisation.

"The report of the commission will be available soon and we will be able to make necessary changes in education system on the basis of the recommendations," she said.

Referring to the observance of a good education year last year, she

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