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No request, Iraq expressed its hope: FM

UNB, Dhaka

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan yesterday said interim Iraqi Prime Minister Iyad Allawi did not make any request to Bangladesh for sending troops to his country.

"He (Allawi) expressed his hope for troops and named some countries," Khan told reporters at Zia International Airport on his return from Vietnam.

The foreign minister, however, said a request could be made in various ways and forms.

A BBC report said Prime Minister Allawi sought troops from six Muslim nations including Bangladesh.

"Allawi has expressed his hope. But what he has stated is not our main consideration. Our main consideration is to see what the Bangladesh government and the people of Bangladesh want," Khan said.

Iraq asks 6 Muslim nations for troops

CNN ONLINE, Baghdad

Iraq's interim prime minister has asked six countries -- Egypt, Morocco, Oman, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh -- to send troops to his country as he continues to fight a violent insurgency.

According to The Associated Press, Ayad Allawi said he was turning to "our neighbors and brothers in the Islamic world to close ranks to fight terrorism."

The interim prime minister made the announcement Thursday, not long after 17 people died in a series of insurgent attacks over 24 hours.

Allawi also announced a new intelligence service will be called the General Security Directorate and will "annihilate those terrorist groups, God willing."

AFP adds: Thailand has started withdrawing its troops from Iraq and ten Philippines soldiers have left their base in Iraq for neighbouring Kuwait yesterday, starting a troop pull-out demanded by militants threatening to behead a Filipino truck driver, the government said.

"The 10 members of the humanitarian contingent began their journey out of Iraq around 1:00 pm Philippine time (0500 GMT) today and will be met by the Philippine

embassy officials in Kuwait, from where they will take their commercial flight for Manila," Foreign Secretary Delia Albert said in statement.

President Gloria Arroyo agreed to speed up by a month the withdrawal of the Philippines' 51-member military and police contribution to the US-led force in Iraq in response to the demands of militants who kidnapped Filipino truck driver Angelo de la Cruz last week and threatened to behead him.

Meanwhile, Thailand has started withdrawing its troops from Iraq and the pullout is to be completed

SEE PAGE 11 COL 8

ADMISSION RUSH 5 city schools may be turned into colleges

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government contemplates upgrading at least five reputed schools into colleges in the capital to ease the possible heavy rush for admission to good colleges as the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examination results markedly improved this year.

The education ministry has already made a preliminary selection of the schools likely to be upgraded, official sources said.

"We are considering upgrading of at least five reputed schools into colleges to accommodate several thousand students in view of the likely rush of admission-seekers at

SEE PAGE 11 COL 5

Greece manpower export missed on ministry tussle

RAFIQ HASAN

Bangladesh has missed the opportunity to open formal manpower export to Greece because of a tussle between two ministries over a demand placed by a private company for 159 workers.

A private Greek shipping company, Tranship Maritime Company, placed an order to the government for the first time to hire 159 workers from Bangladesh including some captains, masters and crew in the ocean-going ships, according to sources.

But the company cancelled the order following the press reports on the opposing views of the Ministry of Shipping and Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employment over the issue, the sources said.

The owner of the shipping company, Constantin G Englezos, spent about two months in

Bangladesh on recruitment. He met State Minister for Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employment Quamrul Islam and talked about opening manpower export to his country.

Englezos told the government officials manpower shortage in Greece is acute and at least 50,000 Bangladeshis could get job only in the shipping sector once the market opens.

Over 10,000 Bangladeshis are now staying in Greece and most of them went there through unofficial channels, the sources said.

The overseas employment ministry inquired about the existence of the company and authenticity of the demand through Bangladesh Embassy in Rome and gave formal approval for interview of the intending workers. Local recruiting agent Rabbi International also published an advertisement in the national

dailies inviting the overseas job seekers for interview.

The shipping ministry however circulated a government handout saying the advertisement was false and illegal as the local agent consulted neither the shipping ministry nor the overseas employment ministry.

According to the Department of Shipping, the government has separate rules and regulations for sending workers in the shipping sector. No-one should take job in a foreign ship without training in the marine academy or seamen training centre, said a high official of the department.

Rabbi International cancelled the interview supposed to be held on July 4, 5 and 6.

The Greek employer, who was supposed to take the interview, left Bangladesh embarrassed and

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7



PHOTO: STAR

Only a coconut tree remains of Dahari port, left, in Lauhojag after the fierce-flowing, flood-swollen Padma eroded its bank with full fury; a boy, right, use a makeshift pier connecting Mukhtarpur ferry terminal to the main road on the Dhaka-Munshiganj Road yesterday. Floodwaters rolling down from upstream swamped large swathes in central Bangladesh including the region.

Plastic factory fire kills 2 in Lalbagh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two people died while another suffered severe burns in a fire at a plastic factory in old Dhaka's Lalbagh area on Thursday night.

The dead were identified as factory workers Aminul Islam, 35 and Mintu, 14. The former burned to death while the latter died from suffocation, sources said. Harun, another worker, who sustained serious burns, is undergoing treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

The three were on the first floor of the three-storey building at 27, Atashkhana Lane when the fire broke out at around 11:30pm, locals said.

They were packaging plastic electric boards lighting a candle as power went off in the area since 3:00pm. Locals and fire fighters suspected either the candle or a short circuit caused the fire.

"First I saw a plume of black smoke and then flames growing higher and higher," said Rajan, a fax-

phone shop owner who witnessed the incident. He said the locals could not go to the trapped workers' rescue as the main entrance to the factory was locked.

Soon the fire spread in all directions engulfing the ground floor and the second floor. Two private cars and a motorbike parked on the ground floor were burned down while two rooms on the second floor that had been rented out, were completely gutted.

Owner of the building Mahmud Hossain said one Lokman Hossain rented a big room on the first floor to live in. But, instead he used it as a factory-cum-warehouse of plastic made electrical goods.

Seven fire fighting units from the Headquarters, Lalbagh and Palashy Fire Stations rushed to the spot and doused the flames at around 1:00pm.

Lokman Hossain, owner of the factory, identified the bodies of Aminul and Mintu yesterday afternoon.

Rab rounds up 5 JCD men at Nilkhet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) activists of Dhaka University last night vandalised two cars and laid siege to the residence of the vice chancellor demanding release of their fellow activists whom the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested at Nilkhet.

A group of about six JCD men bought dairy milk from a confectionery shop at 11:15pm and gave a 100-taka note to the owner.

The shopkeeper failed to give change and teased them saying he wouldn't have given them milk if he knew that they would pay in a 100-taka note.

The JCD men went back to their dormitories and informed their friends and other JCD activists of the matter.

After a short while, JCD men in a body came to the Nilkhet area and attacked the shop. At this stage, other shopowners encircled the JCD men, caught one of them and beat

SEE PAGE 11 COL 8

4m in flood-hit areas cry for food, medicine

Death toll rises to 58

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

More than four million people in the 33 flood-hit districts are facing food, medicine and safe drinking water crises in absence of adequate relief operations.

Raging flood in almost half of the country yesterday left at least five people dead -- two each in Pabna and Gaibandha, and one in Sherpur -- raising the death toll in the last eight days of deluge to 52, apart from the six killed in the embankment-sabotage at Dhunoi, Bogra. In addition, no less than 60 people, who went and remain missing in the vandalism, are also feared to be dead.

Official estimates however put the number of deaths at 26.

According to government sources, the current spell of flooding has affected around 800,000 families in the 33 districts, damaged 650km of embankments, inundated crops in more than 100,000 hectares of land, and snapped road and rail communications at many points.

But, the government is not yet willing to seek foreign help to manage the emergency.

Officials at the Flood Control Room of Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief said they so far have distributed 5,850 tonnes of rice, Tk 5.15 million in cash, 404 tons

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Hasina accuses Jamaat of issuing death threats

UNB, Dhaka

Leader of Opposition and Awami League (AL) chief Sheikh Hasina yesterday accused the Jamaat-e-Islami of issuing "death warrant" to top AL leaders, country's intellectuals and progressive teachers including the president of Dhaka University Teachers Association (DUTA).

"The Jamaat-e-Islami is patronising 16 communal criminal groups having illegal fire arms. They've already killed many people including journalists and issuing death warrant through letters to many others," she alleged.

Top Awami League leaders including Tofail Ahmed and Duta President Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique, among others, received death threats, she mentioned.

Hasina was addressing a gathering at the AL central office on Bangabandhu Avenue in the afternoon when newly elected municipal chairmen from Pirojpur and Mathbaria -- Habibur Rahman Malek and Rafiuddin Ahmed Feroz -- and new office bearers of Rajshahi

SEE PAGE 11 COL 8

Prayer Timing		
July 17		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-15	4-50
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	5-00	5-15
Maghrib	6-54	6-58
Esha	8-15	8-45

Source: Islamic Foundation

Biman probe finds huge cargo graft

M SHAMSUR RAHMAN

Investigators have found 'massive irregularities' in cargo operations of Biman Bangladesh Airlines in Dubai, Sharjah and Ajman that deprived it of crores of taka in revenue.

A high-powered probe team dispatched to Dubai recently has unearthed involvement of a section of Biman officials and a freight operator run by a non-resident Indian in shipping cargoes far more than the recorded volume, forging airway documents.

Freight operator Darwish Murad Clearing and Shipping Services forged bills and shipped excess cargo to Dubai in each consignment, sometimes up to six tonnes, team leader M Shahab Ullah told The Daily Star over telephone last week.

Biman carries about 80 tonnes of cargo to Dubai a month, about 80 per cent of it handled by Darwish Murad.

"Some Biman officials have been

extending special privileges to Darwish Murad run by EK Hamza, a non-resident Indian, in exchange for money and other favours," said Shahab, who is joint secretary at the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism.

Some letters issued on behalf of Biman and signed by its officials confirm Darwish Murad has been given preferential treatment bypassing other general sales agents (GSAs), he mentioned.

Biman's GSAs are Dnata in Dubai, Transworld Travels (TAT) in Sharjah and Al Ahl Travel in Ajman. Darwish Murad does not represent the national flag carrier in any of these emirates, officials mentioned.

During a week-long probe, the team interviewed Biman officials and GSAs and examined documents, invoices and letters. It found 'massive irregularities' in Biman's Dubai, Sharjah and Ajman cargo operations causing it a loss of crores of taka, he said.

The three-member team

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

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