

Pre-emptive strike against Iran 'not on agenda now'

Differences over Iran mark Rice's UK trip



Condoleezza Rice

AFP, REUTERS, London

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said here yesterday that a pre-emptive strike against Iran was "not on the agenda at this point in time".

Asked after talks in London if Washington was planning a pre-emptive strike on the Islamic republic, which it claims is developing nuclear weapons, Rice answered: "The question is simply not on the agenda at this point in time."

Rice said that her government was still pursuing diplomacy in dealing with Iran's controversial nuclear programme.

"We have many diplomatic tools still at our disposal and we intend to pursue them fully," she said after talks with British counterpart Jack Straw.

Britain and its EU partners Germany and France have been pursuing diplomacy with Tehran, which has agreed to suspend some of its nuclear activities while talks

are ongoing.

Earlier Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice met British ally Prime Minister Tony Blair yesterday as differences over Iran marked the start of a tour intended to repair US ties with Europe over Iraq.

Rice -- whose visit comes ahead of a trip to Europe by President Bush this month -- thanked Blair for his leadership and the British people for their support.

"We have lots of work to do ... especially as we try to bring Israel and Palestine a chance of a permanent peace," she added as the pair headed in for breakfast.

On her first foreign trip since taking office, Rice is also visiting the Middle East, where Europe wants to see a stronger US push for peace.

Blair congratulated her on her new post: "I look forward to working with you in the months and years to come. We will be discussing Iraq, the Middle East and various other

issues," he said as they met at his Downing Street office.

En route to London, where she will also meet Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, Rice made clear the United States was reluctant to get involved in Europe's nuclear talks with Iran.

"The Iranians know what they need to do. It's not the absence of anybody's involvement that is keeping the Iranians from knowing what they need to do," she told reporters.

"They need to live up to their obligations, they need to agree to verification inspection, they need to stop trying to hide activities under cover of civilian nuclear power."

Iran -- grouped by Bush in an "axis of evil" with pre-war Iraq and North Korea -- denies US charges it is pursuing a nuclear bomb. It says its programs are for peaceful power generation needed to keep up with

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PHOTO: STAR
The main opposition Awami League brings out a mourning procession in the capital yesterday blaming the BNP-led coalition government for the recent grenade attacks and killings. It also demands resignation of the government.

Top outlaw killed in 'crossfire'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

A regional leader of outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP-red flag) was killed in 'crossfire' with police and his accomplices at Raghunathpur village in Santhia upazila of Pabna early yesterday.

Three policemen and an ansar were injured in the shootout.

Police said they arrested Alimur Rahman Manik alias 'Koshai' Manik, a regional leader of the underground outfit, at Chalchilapara village in Sujanagar upazila Thursday evening.

On his statement, two contingents of police from Sujanagar and Santhia police stations started for Chalchilapara taking Manik with them to retrieve firearms. When they reached the village at about 4:00am, the PBCP cadres fired on them. Police returned fire, resulting in a half-an-hour gunfight.

Police said Manik was caught in the shootout while his accomplices managed to flee. They (police) sent the outlaw to Pabna Sadar Hospital where doctors declared him dead.

Police recovered one revolver, one shotgun and four bullets from the spot.

They said Manik was an accused in six criminal cases, including two for murder, filed with Sujanagar and Santhia police stations.

KANCHPUR-JATRABARI ROAD A perennial traffic jam remains unresolved

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

The road between Kanchpur bridge and Jatrabari, a major entry and exit route of the capital for people of eastern and northeastern regions, is almost always choked with traffic, causing lot of suffering and loss of time to thousands of commuters every day.

The perennial traffic snarl-ups are mainly due to mismanagement by traffic sergeants and policemen, gross violation traffic rules by unruly bus and truck drivers, and activities of local hoodlums, who in connivance with police engage scores of vendors to sell different items to stranded bus passengers and others. Even when traffic flow is normal, at times the hoodlums deliberately block the road or the pretext of business activities.

Moreover, delay in widening of the highway by the Roads and Highways Department is adding to the traffic chaos.

Plying of a large number of vehicles also generates huge dust in the densely populated area causing environmental degradation and exposing passengers and local people to various health hazards.

According to traffic department

officials, every day more than 12,000 vehicles enter the capital through Jatrabari point. These vehicles, including over 3,000 trucks, from Narayanganj, Chittagong and Sylhet regions and other places create a chaotic situation regularly.

Ansar Uddin Khan Pathan, deputy commissioner (south) of metropolitan traffic department, however gave a different explanation for the chaos. He said the road leading to Jatrabari is too narrow to accommodate the large number of heavy and light vehicles. The situation worsens when trucks start entering the city at 8:00pm. Although two traffic sergeants and six constables man the Jatrabari point round the clock, traffic congestion becomes inevitable, he said.

A BDR official told this correspondent that the BDR urged its Indian counterpart to stop shooting Bangladeshi citizens at the frontier, push-in bids, illegal border crossing of the Indians and construction of infrastructure within 150 yards from the border pillar.

BDR sources said the Indian border guards agreed to take effective measures to resolve these issues, but they did not sign any paper in this regard.

The only solution to this traffic chaos is building the proposed Dhaka eastern by-pass and five-kilometre-long flyover from Jatrabari to Gulistan, for which the process is on. The by-pass would divert a considerable number of heavy vehicles which now pass through the capital on way to northern and western districts, he pointed out.

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BDR-BSF border talks end without headway

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

The four-day border conference between Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and Border Security Force of India (BSF) ended here yesterday without any fruitful results.

Bangladesh Rifles issued a press release, saying that the conference was held in a cordial atmosphere where both sides agreed to play effective role in combating cross-border crimes.

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In a statement, Marine Corps Commandant Gen. Michael Hagee praised Mattis as "one of this country's bravest and most experienced military leaders."

"While I understand that some people may take issue with the comments made by him, I also know

Koirala urges people to take to streets against King

AFP, Kathmandu

Former Nepal prime minister Girija Prasad Koirala called yesterday on the country's citizens to take to the streets to restore democracy in the wake of King Gyanendra's seizure of power.

Lt. Gen. James Mattis, who commanded troops in Iraq and Afghanistan and is slated to be portrayed by star actor Harrison Ford in an upcoming Hollywood movie, made the comments at a conference on Tuesday in San Diego, California.

"Actually it's quite fun to fight 'em, you know. It's a hell of a hoot. It's fun to shoot some people. I'll be right up front with you, I like brawling," Mattis said.

"You go into Afghanistan, you got guys who slap women around for five years because they didn't wear a veil," Mattis said during a panel discussion. "You know, guys like that ain't got no manhood left anyway. So it's a hell of a lot of fun to shoot them."

In a statement, Marine Corps Commandant Gen. Michael Hagee praised Mattis as "one of this country's bravest and most experienced military leaders."

"I call upon all the pro-democratic journalists, political workers, youths and students and Nepalese brothers and sisters to oppose this unconstitutional step of the king," Koirala said.

"I call upon them to take to the streets to restore the sovereign power of the people and safeguard the constitution of 1990," he said in a statement.

"The groups, who have accused both sides of atrocities, are concerned the army may use emergency rule and the muzzling of the media to try to brutally suppress the nine-year-old revolt."

In 1990, seven weeks of demonstrations and riots forced the king's late brother Birendra to bow to demands from democracy activists and led to the establishment of parliamentary government.

Ghulam Azam blames RAW for attacks

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ghulam Azam, former ameer of Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh, yesterday blamed Indian secret service Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) for the grenade attacks on main opposition Awami League (AL) rallies in Dhaka and Habiganj.

He also said that the Indian government refused to join the 13th Saarc (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) summit to gratify the wishes of AL and its chief Sheikh Hasina.

He was speaking as the chief guest at a discussion on 28th founding anniversary of Bangladesh Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS), the student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh at Paltan Community Centre in the city.

The government does not make public the report of the probe committee on the August 21 grenade attacks in Dhaka for fear of India, he observed.

"A few days ago, I told some ministers of the ruling BNP that it is in the interest of the four-party alliance that the government should reveal immediately the conspiracy and offence committed by RAW," Ghulam Azam said.

He urged the ICS activists to rear more Islamic soldiers in the country and resist the RAW to safeguard the Islamic ideology in the country.

"India can never be a friend of

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No decision yet on merger of nat'l nutrition project

NAIMUL HAQ

The National Nutrition Project (NNP) will be included in the ongoing Health, Nutrition and Population Sector Programme (HNPS) under a proposed nutrition directorate or be a sub-sector in the Directorate of Health or Directorate of Family Planning, sources said.

The government is determined to run the NNP up to 2010 as a 'separate entity' considering the acute malnutrition in Bangladesh. The development partners (DPs) have also agreed in principle to finance the project, an official pointed out.

Against this backdrop, the health ministry approved expansion of comprehensive nutrition intervention to 120 upazilas from last month, raising the number of upazilas the programme to 225.

Several studies showed that more than 50 percent of the under-five children in Bangladesh are underweight and about 48 percent stunted. Among the rural women, over 45 percent have body mass index (BMI) of less than 18.5, which is indicative of critical food insecurity. About 51 percent of the pregnant women suffer from iron deficiency anaemia, and consumption of vitamin A is still low, suggesting the causes of vitamin A deficiency should be looked into urgently.

The NNP is designed to reduce the prevalence of severe underweight in children, increase pregnancy weight gains and reduce the incidence of low birth weight and iron deficiency among women and adolescents.

"We want to give NNP an institutional shape. But the project must have a linkage with both the directorates (health and family planning) so that regular activities related to nutrition, such as creating awareness and bringing change in food habit, continue to benefit the vulnerable population," Health Secretary AFM Sarwar Kamal told The Daily Star.

The idea of running the NNP as a separate programme apparently originated when some Tk 110 crore of the four-year project's fund remained unutilised, and the co-financiers -- the World Bank (WB) and the Canadian and Dutch governments -- agreed to extend the credit up to the end of December this year.

The WB on December 14 last year informed the health ministry of their decision to extend the credit. Moreover, the Bangladesh government and the pool financiers have

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LOW NUMBER OF CNG-RUN BUSES BRTA issuing route permits at will, bus owners allege

ASHIQR RAHMAN

Failures on the part of the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) are responsible for the low number of CNG-run buses on Dhaka roads, according to Bus Truck Owners Association (BTOA) and individual private bus owners.

The BTOA also alleges that the 43 routes on which CNG buses are allowed to run have been chosen indiscriminately and without any feasibility studies.

"For many routes, a huge number of permits have been issued although the buses were not actually required; at the same time BRTA gave a very small number of permits for some important city routes where passengers' demand for transport is very high," Bus Truck Owners Association (BTOA) Chairman Golam Mohammad Siraj MP said.

It is understood that many bus owners have stopped importing CNG-run buses and do not want to resume the import until the alleged mismanagement is dealt with. Bus owners recently stopped a deal that would have resulted in the import of many CNG buses for the city.

"It's very understandable that bus owners would never want to import CNG buses if they have to incur huge financial losses," Siraj said.

It is also alleged that BRTA officials harass bus owners in order to get money from the bus owners.

"It will be very tough to implement the government plan to introduce CNG buses to the city roads if the private bus owners stop importing CNG-run buses," the BTOA chairman said.

He also expressed concern over lack of progress in giving route franchises to private bus operators.

The city needs at least 2000 CNG-run buses while the present number

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