

WORLD BANK ROLE FOR WOLFOWITZ

Europe cool, aid groups dismayed

AFP, London

European capitals reacted coolly Thursday to the nomination of US Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz to be the next head of the World Bank, but aid groups voiced dismay and some puzzle.

Reaction to the surprise nomination ranged from the outright hostile -- "a disaster," one critic said -- to the tepid, with diplomats cautious in their language.

In London, a spokesman for Prime Minister Tony Blair's office said Britain would hold "consultations" about any appointment.

"It's for the Bank's board to take the decision on the appointment of the president of the Bank, and we are not going to get into a commentary on that selection process," he added.

Britain's finance minister Gordon Brown earlier hailed Wolfowitz as "a very distinguished person" but avoided other comment.

However, Britain's former international development secretary Clare Short denounced the nomination of an arch-conservative seen as a key architect of the US-led war on Iraq.

US President George W. Bush's choice to name Wolfowitz was akin to showing "two fingers to the world," she said, referring to a vulgar British gesture.

"This is really shocking. It's as though they (the Americans) are trying to wreck our international systems," she told Channel 4 news.

In Brussels, a European Commission spokesman said it hoped the next World Bank chief would "put development at the centre" when current president James Wolfensohn stands down later this year.

She dodged a question on whether European nations, deeply divided over the Iraq war, would try to scupper Wolfowitz's appointment, pointing out that the commission -- the executive arm of the 25-member European Union -- "is not on the board" of the Bank.

French Foreign Minister Michel Barnier called the nomination a "proposal" which would be examined.

Germany's Development Minister Heidemarie Wiese-Zorek-Zeul noted that "the enthusiasm in old Europe is not exactly overwhelming."

"I doubt the Europeans will be able to block it as (US President) George W. Bush probably cleared it among European leaders: Tony Blair and possibly even Jacques Chirac," Fraser Cameron, director of studies at the European Policy Center in Brussels, told AFP.

"It appears to be a done deal," Jerome Sgard, of the Paris-based International Information and Prospective Studies Center, concurred.

The head of the French branch of the anti-globalization group Attac, Jacques Nikonoff, said the selection of Wolfowitz confirmed "the determination of the United States to maintain its control of the World Bank, not to develop its original mission, which is to promote development, and to integrate it into its political-military strategy."

"I think this will trigger many negative reactions, both from Western countries and from poor countries," he told AFP.

Some critics called for an overhaul of the "gentleman's agreement" process under which the World Bank chief is generally nominated by Washington and the head of the International Monetary Fund by Europeans.

"Governments should abolish the unspoken 'gentleman's agreement'," said Bernice Romero, advocacy director of the British charity Oxfam International.

"The administration in power will put people in charge who fit their world view," said Matt Phillips, head of public affairs at Save the Children UK. "So clearly the Bush administration is going to put a Bush appointee into its little fiefdom at the World Bank."

Peter Hardstaff of the World Development Movement called Wolfowitz's "a truly terrifying appointment," and the environmental group Greenpeace International saw him as "a disaster for sustainable development, as we fear Wolfowitz will serve US interests first."

In London, the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development said it was surprised by Bush's choice and viewed it with "apprehension."

"If you look at Africa, for instance, his main concern has been the war on terrorism," CAFOD's public policy head George Gelber said. "As far as development is concerned, he

Laurel

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Thomas announced the name of the Special Achievement Award winner and Square Group Chairman Samson H Chowdhury named the Business Person of the Year at a gala ceremony at the Hotel Sonargaon ballroom in the city.

Business leaders and magnates, intellectuals, entrepreneurs, professionals, diplomats and government officials attended the function.

As the names of award winners were announced one by one amid pin drop silence, the audience burst into applause hailing the business heroes. Two giant screens displayed in brief their exemplary successes.

is an unknown quantity."

Some public support was forthcoming. Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, a Bush ally, thought the appointment was "fine" and would have backing from the Tokyo government.

And in Beijing, Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Liu Jianchao said that "Whoever will become the next president of the World Bank, we will work with him as a president of the World Bank."

EU trade commissioner Peter Mandelson said Wolfowitz should be allowed time to prove himself.

"It is true this nomination has come as a surprise to some in Europe," his spokeswoman said. Wolfowitz "should be allowed to define himself before anyone else defines him. We should wait and see."

Most British have no trust in politicians: poll

AFP, London

With an expected general election less than three months away, a new survey published yesterday found that almost 80 percent of British people quizzed do not trust politicians to tell the truth.

The BBC/ICM poll also revealed that 87 percent of people who took part felt that politicians promised things before an election and failed to deliver.

"Seventy-three percent say politicians have shown themselves to be dishonest too often," said the survey, which forms part of a day of BBC programmes on the issue of trust in politics.

Half of those surveyed thought that politicians were merely out for themselves in comparison to a mere 16 per cent who believed they were acting in the best interests of the whole country.

Prime Minister Tony Blair is expected to call a general election for May 5.

ICM, a member of the British polling council, interviewed 1,000 adults across Britain between the 25 and 26 February.

BBC to cut 1,500 extra jobs in 3 yrs

REUTERS, London

The BBC is to cut 1,500 jobs from news and other programmes over three years to save 200 million pounds (\$384.7 million), media reports said yesterday.

"We are going to make an announcement to staff on Monday about savings in output and content," said a spokesman for the world's biggest public broadcaster, which has already cut other jobs.

This would cover all the BBC's programme-making divisions, including news, drama, entertainment, children's and radio, the spokesman said. Monday's announcement is due at 1430 GMT.

Details of the cuts were leaked to the BBC's labour affairs correspondent by a senior well-placed source, the BBC's news Web site reported.

Last week, BBC Director General Mark Thompson said 1,730 jobs would be going from the broadcaster's Professional Services division, which includes finance, personnel and marketing.

Jamaat hates Islamist militants, says Nizami

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Industries Minister and Ameer of Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh Moulana Matiur Rahman Nizami has said the killers of journalists Manik Saha, Humayun Kabir Balu, Shaikh Haroon-ar-Rashid will not go unpunished.

"The coalition government is determined to bring the killers to book and give them exemplary punishment under the law of the land," said the Jamaat chief while addressing the representatives' conference of the party's Khulna region at Khulna Stadium yesterday.

Presided over by central Nayeb-e-Amir Makbul Ahmed, the conference was addressed, among others, by Senior Nayeb-e-Amir Moulana AKM Yusuf, Moulana Delwar Hossain Saidee MP, Shah Mohammad Ruhul Quddus MP, Whip Ashraf Hossain and City BNP President M Nurul Islam MP.

Nizami said Jamaat has no connection with any Islamist militant organisation. It hates Islamist militants and wants them to be crushed, he said.

The Jamaat Ameer said there is no power on earth to break the unity of the four-party alliance despite deep-rooted conspiracy with this end in view.

Referring to the demand of the Awami League for reforms in the caretaker government system, Nizami said the party wants to grab power through the backdoor.

Over 15,000 leaders, supporters and activists of Jamaat and its front organisations from several districts of Khulna division attended the conference.

12 INCIDENTS SINCE 2004

No headway yet in Khulna bomb, grenade attacks

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

There has been no headway in the investigations of any of the 12 bomb and grenade attack cases recorded with different police stations of Khulna district in the 14 months since January 15, 2004, till February 11 this year.

Of these incidents, in which three journalists, two politicians and a policeman were killed, only the charge sheet of journalist Manik Saha murder case was submitted to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court in November last year although it left the godfather and mastermind of the murder out.

Eleven other cases, however, have been shelved stalling investigation for unknown reasons.

The three journalists killed in bomb attacks during last 14 months are Manik Saha, Humayun Kabir and Belaluddin. BNP leader and UP chairman Amir Azam Khan and Awami League leader Manzur Morshed Labu are the other victims. The police personnel killed is Havidar Akram Hossain of Khulna Metropolitan Police (KMP).

Besides, many people including four journalists were injured in these bomb and grenade attacks.

There is nothing to be worried about as investigations of all these cases are going on with due importance, said a senior KMP officer.

Dead elephant found in CHT

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

An elephant was found dead in the deep forest in Rajapara near Rajnagar BDR (Bangladesh Rifles) camp in Langdu upazila on Thursday.

How the aged elephant died could not be detected immediately. Sources however said it died a natural death.

A BDR official yesterday said forest officials have reached the spot and were waiting for a veterinarian.

"It can be said after examining the dead animal whether it died of illness or was killed," he added.

"No-one now can reach the carcass as a herd of about six elephants is guarding it," he said.

Elephants in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) region are on the verge of extinction due to a scarcity of sufficient food and unchecked poaching of the wildlife species.

Transport strike in Ctg, Sylhet March 20

UNB, Comilla

Bangladesh Sarak Paribahan Sramik Federation called a 12-hour transport strike in 15 districts of Sylhet and Chittagong divisions for March 20 demanding the release of its leader Haji Yakub, arrested in the Chittagong arms haul case.

Shahjahan Khan MP, president of the federation, gave the call from a press conference at Circuit House here yesterday.

The Awami League lawmaker said the government arrested Yakub in a bid to "hide the main culprits" involved in the smuggling of 10 truckloads of arms seized in Chittagong.

Haji Yakub Ali, an accused in the case, was arrested in the capital early Thursday.

Dying rivers

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surrounding the city to save them from demise. These rivers are silting up at an alarming pace, mainly due to rapid environmental deterioration, he told The Daily Star.

The study report suggests for a route from the mouth of the New Dhaleswari 'spill channel offtake' through the Pungli and Bangshi rivers to feed the Turag, Balu and the Buriganga in the dry season. It warns that dredging alone cannot solve the problem.

If the mouths of these rivers are dredged and left without any structural control, the entire region would be inundated with up to 2,700 cubic metres of water per second in the monsoon. Under the current conditions, the rivers around the city receive between 500 and 600 cubic metres of water per second during the monsoon.

The IWM report suggests removing 56 million cubic metres of silt manually and 16 million cubic metres of silt by dredging to ensure the water flow through the designated channel. It also suggests building a sluice gate with a 'fish pass' to regulate water flow during the monsoon, since fish from the Jamuna are a major source for fisheries in the region.

The project is estimated to cost around 700 crore taka.



PHOTO STAR

Political leaders and civil society members take part in a roundtable on 'Militant activities in the name of Islam and role of the government' organised by Workers Party of Bangladesh at the Jatiya Press Club yesterday.

Constitution should

FROM PAGE 1

(AL) for raising such issue with what he said was an 'ill motive'.

The minister talked in length about the caretaker system and blasted the AL for bringing proposals to reform it. He also blamed a section of lawyers for not raising this issue during the last AL government.

Awami League was in power for five years from 1996 to 2001, he said, adding, "And in no point of time they raised any question about the system of the interim government."

Only after they had lost the election in 2001, the AL started raising questions about the system, the law minister said, adding, "This itself speaks about their motive."

He said the caretaker government is a settled issue and this system has become an integral part of the basic structure of the constitution. Under this system two elections have already been held, one in 1996, when AL won, and another in 2001, when BNP got elected, Moudud added.

"In 1996, when Awami League got elected, they praised the system and said because of this system they obtained the mandate of the people." Now, after loosing the election in 2001, they have started raising question about the same system, he lamented.

On the opposition demand for amendment to the caretaker government law, the law minister said the constitution is a sacred document and it should not be changed frequently.

"One should not think of changing the constitution after every election, because one party or other will loose and the losing party will start demanding to change the constitution," he said.

Under any circumstances, continuity of the parliament and system must be honoured and upheld, said the constitutional expert.

He, however, did not brush aside the demand to make elections transparent, free, fair, peaceful, violence- and black money-free, and said discussion can always take place with the opposition and as such with anyone in this regard.

"On issues, particularly reducing the process of black money and terrorism in the electioneering process, discussion is acceptable and welcome," he said.

About the AL demand for choosing an 'acceptable' person to all by consensus to head the caretaker government, Moudud posed the question, "Is there any person who will be acceptable to every one. Is it possible?"

"It's a fallacious proposition and there cannot be any such thing in the constitution," he said, and asked, "Will election be postponed, if we fail to choose an acceptable person to all to head the caretaker government?"

Cairn, ONGC

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An agreement for the collaboration between ONGC and Cairn Energy is expected to be signed for joint exploration in offshore and onshore fields.

Cairn Energy is in exploration activities in the desert Indian states of Rajasthan and Gujarat and ONGC has interests in those two states as also in Assam.

The Indian exploration company is eyeing Cairn equity in oil blocks in Bangladesh.

Earlier, ONGC had bought from Cairn two oil blocks on the east and west coasts of India at an estimated price of 135 million dollars.

The idea of the tie-up between the two companies is to blend the experience of ONGC and technology of Cairn.

Road accidents

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11:00am, killing one of its passengers on the spot and injuring six others.

Of the injured, one succumbed to his injuries at Jessore hospital, while others are undergoing treatment there.

The dead are Jasim Uddin, 40, zonal manager of a pesticide company and Bappi, 8, son of Jasim's brother-in-law Joyнал Abedin.

Abu Hanif, 40, an employee of a school, was crushed under the wheels of a speeding bus on the Jessore-Benapole highway at Lanjani at about 6:00am.

In Faridpur, four people, including two siblings, died in separate road accidents in the district yesterday.

Sima, 21, and her brother Siam, 5, died on the spot and their father was injured when a truck rammed a motorcycle they were riding on the Dhaka-Faridpur highway at

Bahirdia in Sadar upazila at about 10:15am, according to the UNB.

In two other mishaps, truck helper Yusuf was killed on the spot as he jumped out of the vehicle when it met with an accident at Rajbari crossing in Sadar upazila at noon. Tamanna, 2, was run over by a bus on the Faridpur-Barisal highway at Laskardia in Nagarkanda upazila at about 8:45 am.

In Nilphamari, two children died and 25 others were injured in a collision between a bus and a pick up van on the Syedpur-Nilphamari highway.

The dead are Mishu, 8, and Rakib, 7. The injured are undergoing treatment at a local hospital.

Immediately after the accident, locals put up a barricade on the highway, disrupting traffic for two hours.

Bangladesh to become

FROM PAGE 1

AL presidium member Zillur Rahman chaired the meeting.

Briefing newsmen, Jalil said the main opposition party is considering taking legal actions against the persons involved in the conspiracy.

On reforms of the caretaker government, he said the AL has just launched a campaign to chalk out reform proposals regarding formation of the Election Commission and the interim government.

"Our precise proposals are yet to be finalised. We'll finalise the proposals after consulting at party forums and also with our alliance partners," he added.

Once finalised, the AL and its allies will submit the proposals to the government, he said, adding that if the government rejected those, they would mobilise public opinion.

"We want to reform the caretaker government system so that its flaws identified in the last general elections can be removed," he said. "Why the government is so afraid of the proposed reforms?" he asked.

On the premier's speech in parliament, the meeting observed it had ignored the major problems of the country.

"The prime minister has failed to touch the major problems of the

public including price hike of essentials and acute crisis of power, water and gas," Jalil said quoting the meeting's discussion.

The meeting has decided to form a high-powered committee to monitor the upcoming Chittagong City Corporation election. It will be comprised of party leaders Suranjit Sengupta, Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, Obaidul Quader and Abdul Mannan.

On contesting the upcoming Habiganj-3 by-polls, Jalil said, "We're now running an anti-government movement and had earlier decided not to take part in any election under it."

The parliamentary seat fell vacant as AL lawmaker SAMS Kibria was assassinated in a grenade attack in Habiganj on January 27.

Yesterday's meeting has also decided to bring out a colourful procession in the capital on March 26 to observe the Independence Day.

Meantime, the AL central leaders will take part in tomorrow's no-confidence human walk to be formed at upazila and thana levels in their respective areas.

The AL will also bring out a 'hunger procession' across the country on March 23 as part of previous decision to protest the price hike.

SUBMARINE CABLE

Dhaka will enjoy its benefits by year-end: Moeen

UNB, Dhaka

Even though Bangladesh is going to be connected with the submarine cable by July or August, people will have to wait six months more to get its benefits, said Science and ICT Minister Moeen Khan.

"Dhaka city will enjoy the high speed of the submarine cable by the year-end," Moeen Khan told reporters at a press conference at National Press Club yesterday.

Ministry of Science and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Bangladesh Computer Samity (BCS), Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services and Internet Service Providers Association of Bangladesh jointly organised the press conference.

Explaining the reasons behind the delay in getting the submarine cable facilities, Moeen Khan said the base station of the submarine cable for Bangladesh was to be set up in Chittagong. "But it has been relocated to Cox's Bazar following objection by the Chittagong Port Authority," he said.

Now there is a fiber optic network from Chittagong to Dhaka, but it will need to make the network from Cox's Bazar to Chittagong to get the benefits of the submarine cable, the minister said.

He said the government has given priority to rapid development of the ICT sector in Bangladesh. "For that we have set up an ICT

incubator and now more than 200 acres of land has been acquired for setting up a high technology park," Khan said.

Turning to the recent interest of the foreign investors to invest in Bangladesh's ICT sector, he said "The costs of ICT-related work have gone up in China while the quality in India has fallen as they got more work than what they can deliver. So the investors are now showing interest in Bangladesh."

The ICT minister told the newsmen that the government had set up a company in the Silicon Valley in California, USA.

Describing the government programmes to make Bangladesh self-reliant in the ICT sector, Khan said, "We've introduced an internship programme and under this programme we're distributing Tk 3,000 each among 500 people every year, who received ICT certificates from different organisations, for making them capable to compete in the world."

In the 3rd Asian ICT ministers' summit at Manama, Bangladesh will exhibit their products and for that the science and information and communication technology ministry has managed a free pavilion there. World-renowned ICT companies will exhibit their products in the show.

The ICT minister will lead a nine-member Bangladesh delegation to the summit.

UN AND DONORS SAY

Nepal is nearing to humanitarian crisis

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal is nearing a humanitarian crisis, the United Nations and donor agencies warned yesterday, urging security forces and Maoist rebels not to block vital aid and to protect civilians.

"The United Nations and bilateral donor agencies in Nepal urge all parties to ensure that movement of supplies and vehicles intended to alleviate the suffering of civilian populations are not restricted," they said in a joint statement issued here.

Reminding the warring parties of their duty to protect civilians caught up in the conflict, the statement said: "Every effort should be made to ensure that civilians have access to essential humanitarian supplies and that medical emergencies are given free passage at all times.

"Insecurity, armed activity and Maoist blockades are pushing Nepal towards the abyss of a humanitarian crisis," it warned. The Maoists have since 1996 waged an increasingly bloody struggle to overthrow the monarchy and install a communist republic in the world's only Hindu kingdom.

King Gyanendra, who sacked the government and seized power on February 1, said he was acting to end the rebellion, which has cost more than 11,000 lives.

The power grab, which has been widely condemned internationally, spurred the rebels into intensifying their activities. A transport blockade called by the Maoists last month reduced the traffic to a trickle for two weeks.

A second blockade, which began on Monday, however, has been largely ignored, with police reporting normal traffic flows.

"Children are especially threatened: supplies of vaccines, Vitamin A capsules, deworming tablets and essential drugs must reach rural areas over the coming months to prevent wholly avoidable deaths," Friday's joint statement said.

"Within the past few weeks, there have been credible reports of women dying in childbirth because they could not reach medical treatment."

"In addition, there have been incidents throughout Nepal of humanitarian and development activities being restricted, stopped or threatened by parties to the conflict," it said.

The joint statement was issued by 11 foreign missions and donor agencies including the Canadian International Development Agency, Danish International Development Agency, Britain's Department for International Development, the UN in Nepal, German Technical Cooperation, USAID/Nepal and the Finnish and Norwegian embassies.

"Common Article of the Geneva Conventions says that civilians shall in all circumstances be treated humanely and not be subject to violence towards life and persons or other cruel treatment," it said.

"The conflict in Nepal has impacted significantly on some of the poorest and most marginalised people in the country. It is the duty of those who are in a position to control civilians to ensure their safety and their rights."

The statement said there was "particular concern" for 100,000 Bhutanese refugees in the south-east of Nepal who depend on the regular arrival of relief supplies.

The Bhutanese of Nepalese descent have been living in the camps since 1990 after they were driven out of their homeland by

Bhutan's rulers. Meanwhile, Nepal's royal-appointed government Thursday ruled out holding peace talks with Maoists unless they first lay down their arms and abandon violence.

"I don't agree to sit across the negotiating table with the Maoists unless they lay down their arms and stop the violence," Senior Vice Chairman of the Council of Ministers Tulsii Giri told reporters.

He also criticised previous multi-party governments for welcoming rebel leaders who came for peace dialogue.

"The Maoists were accorded a heroic welcome and the prime minister shook hands and sat together with them at public functions but the rebels at the end suddenly backed out of the negotiating table," Giri said.

"In over the past one decade, none of the multi-party governments was able to stop the Maoists killing innocent villagers and expelling them from their native villages," he said.

"The army and the police were humiliated by the governments that failed to stop the rebels from committing heinous crimes," he said.

Invective