

# 'US acknowledges torture in Guantanamo, Iraq and Afghanistan'

UN officials seek to visit Guantanamo

AFP, AP, Geneva

Washington has for the first time acknowledged to the United Nations that prisoners have been tortured at US detention centres in Guantanamo Bay, as well as Afghanistan and Iraq, a UN source said yesterday.

The acknowledgement was made in a report submitted to the UN Committee against Torture, said a member of the ten-person panel, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"They are no longer trying to duck this, and have respected their obligation to inform the UN," the Committee member told AFP.

"They will have to explain themselves to the Committee. Nothing should be kept in the dark."

UN sources said it was the first time the world body has received such a frank statement on torture from US authorities.

The Committee, which monitors respect for the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, is gathering information from the US ahead of hearings in May 2006.

Signatories of the convention are expected to submit to scrutiny of their implementation of the 1984 convention and to provide information to the Committee.

The document from Washington will not be formally made public until the hearings.

"They haven't avoided anything in their answers, whether concerning prisoners in Iraq, in Afghanistan or Guantanamo, and other accusations of mistreatment and of torture," the Committee member said.

"They said it was a question of isolated cases, that there was nothing systematic and that the guilty were in the process of being punished."

The US report said that those involved were low-ranking members of the military and that their acts were not approved by their superiors, the member added.

The US has faced criticism from UN human rights experts and international groups for mistreatment of detainees - some of whom died in custody - in Afghanistan and Iraq, particularly during last year's prisoner abuse scandal surrounding the Abu Ghraib facility there.

Scores of US military personnel have been investigated, and several tried and convicted, for abuse of people detained during the US-led campaign against Islamic terrorist groups.

At the Guantanamo Bay naval base, a US toehold in Cuba where around 520 suspects of some 40 nationalities are held, allegations of torture have combined with other claims of human rights breaches.

The US has faced widespread criticism for keeping the Guantanamo detainees in a "legal black hole," notably for its refusal to grant them prisoner of war status and allegedly sluggish moves to charge or try them.

Washington's report to the Committee reaffirms the US position that the Guantanamo detainees are classed as "enemy combatants," and therefore do not benefit from the POW status set out in the Geneva Conventions, the Committee member said.

Four UN human rights experts on Thursday slammed the United States for stalling on a request to allow visits to terrorism suspects held at the Guantanamo Bay naval base, and said they planned to carry out an indirect probe of conditions there.

Meanwhile, UN human rights investigators, citing "persistent and credible" reports of torture at the US

base in Guantanamo Bay, urged the United States on Thursday to allow them to check conditions there.

The failure of the United States to respond to requests since early 2002 is leading the experts to conclude Washington has something to hide at the Cuban base, said Manfred Nowak, a specialist on torture and a professor of human rights law in Vienna, Austria.

"At a certain point, you have to take well-founded allegations as proven in the absence of a clear explanation by the government," Nowak said.

However, he added: "We are not making a judgement if torture or treatment under degrading conditions has taken place."

Washington's response is delayed because the US review process is "thorough and independent" and involves the Bush administration, Congress and the judicial system, said Brooks Robinson, spokeswoman for the US mission to UN offices in Geneva.

"The main point is that their request is being addressed and discussed and reviewed in the United States," Robinson told The Associated Press. "That process is underway."

But one investigator, Algerian magistrate Leila Zerrougui, said: "The time is up. We have to act now. If not, we won't have any credibility left."

For more than three years, UN investigators have made numerous requests to visit foreign terror suspects at the US Naval base in Cuba and at US facilities in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere, the four independent specialists told reporters.

## AL: Hartal June 30

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budget session as we did not want to shoulder the responsibility for the deceptive act of the present government."

He said government has increased prices of a number of commodities including fuel only a few days before placing the budget, and in such context, the proposed budget is nothing but deceiving the people.

Asked about other opposition parties' stance on the fresh agitation programmes, Jalil said, "We have taken up the programmes as we believe it's our responsibility to protest the proposed budget. At the same time we are discussing with other parties as well and hope to take them aboard."

Number of senior AL leaders were present at the press conference.

### AL DEMANDS

In the morning, the ALCWC at its emergency meeting chaired by the party's acting president Zillur Rahman adopted a resolution with 13 suggestions on the proposed budget.

The resolution asked the government to take immediate steps to contain the price hike of essentials. It also suggests withdrawal of proposed 19 percent VAT on salt, powder milk, diesel, and kerosene.

Another demand is for withdrawal of the Tk 1200 tax on SIM cards and 7.50 percent tax on the charge and accessories of mobile phones. AL also asked the government to withdraw 10 percent tax on software exports.

Demanding more subsidies for agriculture, the AL asked the government to slash prices of agricultural implements.

Besides, the main opposition demanded to cancel the proposed provision for whitening black money.

Another suggestion was increasing the allocation for development budget from the 38 percent of the entire budget. The AL is also against new taxes to be imposed on small and medium industries.

It called on the government to ensure transparency in every strata of the government by ending corruption and wastage of national resources.

### Akhtaruzzaman

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"No party chief of the 'grand alliance' shall be the head of the government," he said to mention one of his conditions.

This condition is to avert any chance of autocracy in governing the country, he added.

The parties which will initiate forming the greater alliance should make public their commitments about ways to eliminate violence and corruption, ways of developing the country and democratic practice at all strata of the government and parties will.

He praised the present government's initiative to curb violence by involving the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), but said a little progress has been made so far.

The former lawmaker criticised the RAB, other opposition parties and some foreign countries for what he said was "creating obstacle to tackle criminal activities alleging violations of human rights by the RAB."

The main opposition also proposed spending cluster allocation against the Gram Sarker through elected local government bodies like union parishad, paurasava, and city corporations.

### GRENADE ATTACKS INVESTIGATION

Abdul Jalil at the press conference alleged that the government is conspiring to present a false investigation report on the August 21 grenade attack case to shift the blame on AL, and for this, they are counting on statements made by a top terror like Arman.

The BNP-Jamaat alliance government is trying to attach legitimacy to its stage-managed drama on the heinous crime by exploiting the image of FBI and Interpol," he observed.

He further alleged that the government does not want a fair investigation of the BNP-Jamaat attacks as they [ruling BNP-Jamaat] were directly involved in the August 21 carnage.

Immediately after the last year's August 21 grenade attacks, many senior leaders of BNP made public statements accusing the AL and a neighbouring country, and even in the current budget session the ruling party lawmakers made the similar statements, he said.

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Meanwhile, parts of a marginal area at Bagdorha of Nohali Union, cross dams at Joyramoja and Dhamur under Lakhmitari and Gangachara sader unions were also damaged with the rise of water level in the river.

Tofazzal Hoque, executive engineer of Water Development Board of Rangpur said wireless network of the board has been snapped at Dalia and Kounia points and therefore, he could not give the actual reading of the water level in Teesta.

### Drug peddler

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reach the Mill Barracks area under Shyampur Police Station at midnight, a Rab press release said.

Following his statement, Rab men accompanying Yasin, took position in the area. At 12:00 in the night, an engine-boat reached the spot and some people unloaded several packed sacks.

As the Rab men approached, the criminals opened fire on them, prompting the law enforcers to retaliate, said the press release, adding that the drug peddlers retreated after a while, leaving one foreign-made pistol, one foreign-made revolver, three bullets and 1040 bottles of phenesidyl in 11 sacks.

Rab men recovered the bullet-hit body of Yasin who had tried to flee from the scene, handed over the body to Shyampur police who sent it to Dhaka Medical College, and Morgue for autopsy.

Two Rab men were also injured in the "encounter" with criminals, the release said.

The protests erupted in Pakistan's largest city yesterday after gunmen on motorcycles shot dead two Sunni Muslim clerics in the latest sectarian killings to shake the country, police said.

Scholar Mufi Aliqur-Rehman was gunned down in his vehicle late Thursday after delivering a sermon at a mosque in the centre of violence-prone Karachi, senior police official Tariq Jamil told AFP.

Another scholar who was in the vehicle, Mohammed Irshad, died in hospital Friday, and Rehman's son was injured in the shooting, Jamil said.

Jamil said police were unsure about the motive but Karachi has a history of similar attacks on members of both Pakistan's 80 percent majority Sunni community and on their minority Shia rivals.

Police and paramilitary forces have been put on "high alert" after the killing and security was immediately tightened in sensitive areas of the city, he said.

In Karachi's industrial areas dozens of bearded students of Islamic seminaries burnt tyres, blocked roads and pelted passing vehicles with stones ahead of the clerics' funerals, Saifur Rahman said.

He called for collective efforts by the member states in the field of intra-trade, transfer of technology and mobilisation of resources to face the daunting challenges of globalisation.

Bangladesh welcomed the admission of Nigeria as the 56th member of the IBD.

Violence erupted in the city late last month after a suicide attack on a Shia mosque.

A mob burned down a KFC restaurant on May 30, killing six, shortly after five people including two militants were killed in the bombing of a nearby Shia mosque, allegedly carried out by a Sunni extremist group.

Sectarian violence has claimed at least 4,000 lives in Pakistan in the past five years.

## Assets, income

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The Anti-Corruption Commission must probe corruption of all levels freely and publicly, he said.

He criticised political link of the teachers and corruption in their employment process and said politics of arms in the educational institutions renders the genuine and talented students helpless.

"Nowadays, this too is heard that political link of the students has become a factor in securing first or second class in the university examinations," Dr Kamal said.

He termed widespread unemployment one of the major reasons for unabated crimes in the country and said the nation cannot evaluate our talented students properly.

BDB President AOM Badruddoza Chowdhury said, "Bikalpa Dharha has already set an example that it does not flex muscle, but nurtures the politics of talent that is free from violence."

BDB Organising Secretary Mahi B Chowdhury said specific programme-based politics rather than blame game is needed for the country.

AL district president professor Hanif, AL leader Golam Mohiuddin Latu also spoke at the meeting presided over by BDB Secretary General Major (rtd) Abdul Mannan.

## Ahmadiyya

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and fire fighters reached there.

At least 15 to 20 cocktails were exploded at different points of the road in Ahmadiyya area after deployment of police in the area. But police said they recovered three live cocktails from three points of the road.

Local Ahmadiyyas claimed the attackers hurled 8-10 home made bombs on a mosque at Bhadughar in the same area.

When contacted, the officer-in-charge (OC) of Sadar Police Station said: "We have recovered three cocktails from the spot and are now examining those."

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investigators have made numerous requests to visit foreign terror suspects held at the US Naval base in Cuba and at US facilities in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere, the four independent specialists told reporters.

## Common agenda

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Both the AL and JSD however expect that relatively 'compromising' parties in the left-leaning alliance would not mind bridging whatever gaps are there among the three reform agenda prepared separately by the AL, JSD and 11-party.

JSD sources said if today's 11-party meeting agrees on forging a common reform agenda with the AL, JSD and NAP, the 14 opposition parties will sit tomorrow to start the groundwork for preparing it ahead of Opposition Leader Sheikh Hasina's return home on June 28 from a visit to Europe.

At 3:00am, the drillers set fire to the flare line to divert the gas pressure. After some time, however, gas started spreading around and the situation went out of control as the relief well caught fire with a sudden explosion.

By 6:30am the fire almost died out only to begin at about 1:10pm shooting flames up to 100 feet, local officials informed. Gas and sand were coming out of the well with terrible gurgling sounds, locals informed.

Sources said the drillers had been experiencing heavy pressure on the well head for the last two days and that they could not properly monitor the well's behaviour.

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When contacted, a CMP official said the The Daily Star that the authority already received some allegations against some police personnel and that it has taken the matter seriously.

"To check questionable role of the cops, we are now planning to monitor their day-to-day activities and take note of them for further departmental measures," the official said asking anonymity.

Earlier, the CMP had identified 53 crime points in the city for surprise checking together with the Rab. However, little progress has so far been noticed in this regard.

Earlier this month, the Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) leaders met with CMP Commissioner Mazedul Haque and expressed their concern at the deteriorating law and order situation and urged him to check the crime spike.

He further alleged that the government does not want a fair investigation of the BNP-Jamaat attacks as they [ruling BNP-Jamaat] were directly involved in the August 21 carnage.

In recent times, two constables of the Kotwali Police Station were found guilty of mugging Tk 10 lakh from a businessman in the name of settling down a case. The CMP authority later suspended the two cops.

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"The four-party alliance candidate instigated ruling party cadres to sever ears of two of my supporters after the by-election. They also chopped and critically injured former municipality commissioner Humayun Azad," Munna alleged.

The cadres also attacked his supporters' houses even after the polls result was announced, he told the reporters.

UNB adds: Hundreds of Munna's supporters were running scared in the face of attacks by musclemen of the ruling alliance candidate.

Locals alleged unruly supporters of the victorious candidate, Khairul

## IDB loan

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region for a three-year term from January 2006.

Bangladesh has also been elected vice-chairman of the Islamic Cooperation for the Development of the Private Sector, a sister organisation of the IDB, for a three-year period.