

'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.

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 AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury said, "Bikalpa Dhara 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."

Common agenda

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Both the AL and JSD however expect that relatively 'compromised' 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.

CMP

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Section of dishonest policemen from different police stations has been involved in criminal activities and gets regular share from the crime syndicates. Police harassment of innocent public for toll is another common allegation in the port city.

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.

When contacted, a CMP official told 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 spree.

Karachi on high alert after killing of 2 Sunni clerics

AFP, Karachi

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 Mufti Atiq-ur-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 pelting passing vehicles with stones ahead of the clerics' funerals, police and witnesses said.

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.



PHOTO: STAR

Left to right, body of slain Jubo Dal leader Sagir being carried away from hospital; a policeman who was shot while chasing Sagir's assailants; Shaon, one of the assailants who was caught by law enforcers and later killed.

Fresh blowout

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did not have any option but to flow and burn off this gas at the surface...from top of the well through the rig. The rig eventually caught fire...."

Advisor to the energy ministry Mahmudur Rahman yesterday told newsmen that the government will form a probe committee within a day or two to see whether there were any technical flaws on Niko's part.

"Bapex [Bangladesh Petroleum Exploration Corporation] also cannot shrug off its responsibilities. There were no engineers from Bapex present at the site yesterday (Thursday)," he said.

On the question of realising compensation, Mahmudur said it might be adjusted against the price the government will have to pay Niko for buying gas from the Feni gas field.

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.

At about 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.

Panicky people from the nearby villages as well as adjacent Tengratila bazar left their homes to safer places. Police and

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) personnel from the nearby border outposts were deployed around the gas field location.

Asked about the cause of the blowout, a Niko official said it might have taken place due to heavy pressure of gas in the relief well. The drillers most probably could not imagine the high pressure of the gas, he said, adding, "The lower soil structure had gone too loose."

The Niko is planning its next steps "to contain this situation in consultation with Bapex, Petrobranga, and the Government of Bangladesh and we expect to present our solution for the approval to the authorities very shortly," said the Niko press release.

Prior to the start of drilling the relief well, as many as 77 families from the gas field area had been asked to leave their homesteads for safety reasons. Moreover, the Niko marked 37 shallow tube wells in the adjacent areas and asked the villagers not to use them as gas was coming out from the tube wells, albeit without any pressure.

A high level committee headed by the additional secretary of the Ministry of Energy & Mineral Resources probed the January 7 blowout. It reported flaws in the drilling plan and serious negligence on the part of the Niko as well as Bapex, the state run company and a partner in the venture.

The energy secretary, Bapex officials, Niko chairman and other officials were on their way to the Tengratila gas field location, an official in the Sunamganj district administration said.

Munna demands

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and peaceful election. But the CEC stayed aloof from doing anything in this regard. Instead, the CEC played a partisan role to ensure the alliance candidate's victory."

He emphasised reforms in the Election Commission (EC) saying the by-polls has proved the commission under the current system cannot hold a free and fair election.

He alleged ruling alliance cadres cast false votes with the help of presiding officers and law enforcers during the by-election. The local administration played a key role to ensure the victory of the four-party alliance candidate, he added.

"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

Kabir Khokon, have unleashed a reign of terror since the Wednesday's election. They beat up Munna's followers and even attacked their houses.

The locals said the supporters of the defeated candidate have started fleeing the locality fearing reprisal by Khokon's followers.

Instead of defending the onslaught on Munna's supporters, police are playing the role of silent observers, they alleged.

Mamun Ullah, 30, and Mohsin Miah, 32, were admitted to Narsingdi General Hospital as Chairman of Hajipur Union Parishad Saiful Islam, a supporter of Khokon, allegedly severed their ears on Thursday.

Khokon's supporters have also looted the houses of Billal Hossain and Nazmul. The cadres also broke the hands and legs of independent candidate supporter Monir Hossain, 37.

They ransacked and looted six houses in Dilapur village including one of Sirajul Islam and Shahan Shah Shahin.

More than 100 houses of the supporters of the defeated independent candidates were ransacked in the post-election violence, sources said.

Jubo Dal leader

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his house in observance of the third death anniversary of his mother.

"Hearing the gunshots, I peeped through the window and found Sagir lying in a pool of blood on the road," said Shihab, a local youth.

Soon locals and devotees chased the assailants who started running through the alleys and got on two motorbikes parked nearby.

The killers were fleeing through the Raishaheb Bazar intersection where a patrol police team intercepted them. Havilder Rafiqul Islam of Kotwali Police Station received bullets in the abdomen as the killers opened fire on the police team. Rafiqul was operated upon at Dhaka Medical College and Hospital (DMCH).

Soon other policemen and members of the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) patrolling nearby fired back on the assailants and Shawon received two bullets in the head and died on the spot. A pistol and a magazine loaded with five bullets were seized from the spot, police said.

With bullet wounds in his head, chest and back, Sagir was rushed to the DMCH where doctors declared him dead.

LGRD and Co-operatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Dhaka City Corporation Mayor Sadek Hossain Khoka, Housing and Public Works Minister Mirza Abbas, and State Minister for labour and manpower Amanullah Aman visited the hospital to see Sagir. Several hundred Jubo Dal and Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) leaders and activists also

thronged the DMCH.

Mannan Bhuiyan told newsmen at the hospital that whoever the killers are, they will be arrested and put to trial.

The police could not ascertain the reason behind the killing. They also could not arrest anyone and no case was filed until 8:00pm yesterday.

"We do not have any clue yet as to the reason of the murder. We do not even guess what could be the reason of the killing," Awlad Hossain, officer-in-charge (OC) of Sutrapur Police Station told The Daily Star last night.

The police said Sagir, who was vice president of the JCD for two terms, was accused in around more than a dozen cases including murders and he patronised notorious criminals of Sutrapur and Kotwali areas. Kajol and Guddu, two accused in the killing of businessman of old Dhaka Shamsul Islam and his son, were close associates of Sagir.

The police and party sources suspected that Sagir's role in forming of the JCD Jagannath University College unit, his supremacy in the area and winning tender bids might lead to the killing.

Sources said although Sagir was no longer with the JCD, he controlled the politics and tender bids at the Jagannath University College. He was also a first class contractor of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC).

Locals said Sagir constructed 38 gates a few months back in his locality to stop mugging in the area. Angered by the step, the local criminals might have carried out the attack, they said.

DU dean protests

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Prof Harun said in the first phase there were advertisements for two lecturers in November 2002. But the selection committee meeting was cancelled several times with the intent to have as faculty members the applicants who are less qualified but favoured by some top university officials.

He said in the second phase, four lecturers' and two assistant professors' positions were advertised without his consent.

"It was clearly a violation of tradition and rules that require the authorities to have the respective dean's consent before placing advertisements for new recruits," he said adding that it shows clearly that the authorities are desperate to recruit their favoured candidates.

"But as a dean my stand is that the teachers must be appointed fairly and on academic grounds," he said adding, "The selection committee will sit tomorrow to appoint the teachers though the vice chancellor (VC) and pro-VC had promised us to cancel the meeting and issue a fresh advertisement."

A total of 30 teachers including dean of Science Prof RIM Aminur

Rashid, Dhaka University Teachers' Association (DUTA) President Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique, General Secretary Prof Aktheruzzaman, Syndicate members Prof Kazi Shahidullah, Prof Sadeka Halim went to the VC Office on June 22, and demanded fresh advertisements.

"They told the VC and the Pro-VC that under the circumstances, the selection in no way would be fair, said Prof Harun.

"To bring transparency in recruit-

ing the teachers, we suggest issuing fresh advertisements," he added.

He said it has become a common practice for the selection committees to expedite the appointment procedure when there are "chosen" candidates and, otherwise, delay it. Also the authorities all too often appoint their favoured candidates without recommendations of the C&D committee.

Talking to The Daily Star Pro-VC Prof AFM Yusuf Haider earlier said the selection committee meeting at the Political Science department was delayed as the department wanted more time for fresh advertisements.

Dhaka sheltering

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their whereabouts were known to Indian intelligence agencies even if Dhaka denied it, he said.

Bhattacharya also criticised infiltration from Bangladesh, which, he said was changing the demography of some of West Bengal's border districts.

"Some demographic changes are taking place in the border areas. Bangladeshis are outnumbering Indians in some pockets also. This is a serious problem. We cannot allow this in the future," the CM said.

Floods

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Teesta embankment. The situation will improve if there is no rain in next few days, he added.

Our correspondent from Rangpur reports: The Rangpur Town Protection Embankment along Teesta has become a serious concern lately for the locals as it has developed a number of breaches due to the rise of water level during last three days' rainfall and onrush of water from hills of India.

Water Development Board sources said water level of Teesta at Dalia point was rising fast and it might cross the danger mark within next 24 hours if rainfall and onrush continue.

Meanwhile, parts of a marginal dike at Bagdohara of Nohali union, cross dams at Joyramojha 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 mid-night, 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 phensidyl 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 Hospital morgue for autopsy.

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

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, Jailil 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 hopeful to take them aboard."

A 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 charger 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 as well.

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 AL, 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".