

France rejects Iran's request for talks

AP, Tehran, Iran

France rejected Iran's request for more talks on the Islamic republic's nuclear program, saying yesterday that Tehran first must suspend its atomic activities.

Iran asked for a ministerial-level meeting with France, Germany, Britain and the European Union, but its decision to resume some uranium enrichment-related activities "means that it is not possible for us to meet under satisfactory conditions to pursue these discussions," French Foreign Ministry spokesman Denis Simonneau said in Paris.

"Iran must return to a complete suspension of these activities."

U.S. Undersecretary of State Nicholas Burns supported the idea that Iran should suspend its program and return to talks.

"There is a consensus that Iran should turn back, return to negotiations and suspend its nuclear program," Burns told reporters in Bombay, India, during a South Asia tour. "But that's not the path Iran is on now."

The Bush administration sent Burns to London to coordinate a strategy with Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia on dealing with Iran. Burns conceded differences

MANPOWER EXPORT

Cabinet body for anti-trafficking, punitive clauses in govt policy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A meeting of the cabinet subcommittee on manpower yesterday asked the expatriate welfare and overseas employment ministry to incorporate some new provisions in a draft manpower export policy before finalising it.

The provisions are on checking human trafficking in the form of illegal manpower export and on punitive measures against Bangladeshi expatriates if they call strikes or get involved in the politics of the host countries.

The meeting held at the Cabinet Division also deliberated on how to stop irregular migration in the name of tourism. The subcommittee will hold its next meeting within a month, where it will finalise the government's manpower export policy now being drafted, meeting sources said.

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan chaired the meeting, participated by Law Minister Moudud Ahmed, State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfuzzaman Babar, State Minister for Civil Aviation Fakhrul Islam Alamgir and State Minister for Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment Mohammad Qamrul Islam.

The ministries of expatriate welfare, civil aviation and home affairs will hold a number of meetings and include the provisions in the policy before finalising it in the next month's cabinet subcommittee meeting, Qamrul Islam told The Daily Star.

The policy would be made public after cabinet approves it, he added.

The government undertook the initiative to prepare a comprehensive manpower export policy in 2003. But it has spent almost two years merely discussing the draft.

Though over 2.50 lakh people leave the country every year for jobs abroad, there is not and never was any policy guideline for manpower export, which has been damaging the sector a lot.

Bangladesh to be linked

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Chittagong. The project is expected to be completed next month, although its Turkish contractor Heshbel was supposed to finish the 160 km long installation by last November.

An international consortium has assigned Fujitsu and Alcatel to install the half a billion dollars South East Asia-Middle East-Western Europe-4 (SEA-ME-WE-4) submarine cable line.

The submarine system will span about 20,000 km across the eastern and western hemispheres providing an ultra fast terabit per second connectivity. Bangladesh will receive a 10 gigabyte bandwidth which is enough for the country's next 10 year's internet and telephony demands. Presently it uses about 150 megabyte bandwidth.

The engineers of Fujitsu and Alcatel last month finished installing all necessary equipment in a

remained after Tuesday's meeting.

"We reached a consensus on some points ... others need to be worked on," he said.

Burns repeated U.S. demands that the U.N. nuclear watchdog agency refer Iran to the Security Council where it could face sanctions for resuming research on centrifuges used in uranium enrichment. Russia and China oppose sending Iran to the Security Council.

Earlier yesterday, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice also brushed aside suggestions about a possible resumption of negotiations with Iran.

"There's not much to talk about," Rice said during a photo session at the State Department with the European Union's foreign policy chief, Javier Solana.

Rice noted that Iran recently broke a suspension on research into atomic activities.

Solana agreed that "there is not much point" in resuming talks if there is "nothing new on the table."

Rice said Iran must not be allowed to have a nuclear weapons capability or "to pursue activities that might lead to a nuclear weapons capability."

Iran's foreign minister earlier told state radio the nation's chances of being referred to the Security Council were slim. Manouchehr Mottaki did not give a reason for his view, but emphasized that Iran wanted to restart negotiations with Britain, France and Germany.

The European states, with U.S. backing, were calling for a Feb. 2 meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency to discuss taking action against Iran following Tehran's decision earlier this month to resume small-scale enrichment of uranium a process that can produce material for atomic reactors or bombs.

Huge arms

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Chhara area. The 500-strong raiding party comprising privates from Ali Kadam Army Cantonment and Naikkhongchhari BDR Zone led by the zonal commander, Lt Col Abdul Awal, stormed the camp and captured the Rohingya rebels, BDR sources said.

In the last operation before yesterday's, the security forces on January 3 arrested three other Arakan Liberation Party cadres in the same area and recovered a British light machinegun, an AK47 and five M16 rifles, two .303 rifles, seven Pakistan-made guns, 32 magazines and 7,000 bullets.

Over the last couple of years, military, paramilitary and law enforcement forces have recovered a mammoth amount of explosives, firearms and ammunition from the remote Naikkhongchhari forests. Since February 2004, seven USA-made M79 rifles, three M16 rifles and 12 sawed off barrels of M16 rifles, 451 bullets and eight locally made rifles have been recovered from Tombru and Eidgor areas of Naikkhongchhari.

In a series of operations in June to August last year, a machinegun and a submachine carbine (SMC), 21 rifles including eight of .12 bore, 33 foreign pistols, TNT, 22,655 bullets and a large quantity of combat equipment were seized.

In the first week of September last, a British heavy machinegun and an SMC, 20 AK47 rifles, 32 German pistols and some 30,000 bullets were captured at Lembuchhari in Naikkhongchhari. And in December last, the BDR seized several Russian AK47 rifles and .79mm German pistols in the same upazila.

landing station at Old T&T area in Zhilanga, Cox's Bazar.

The submarine cable network starts from Malaysia and ends in France touching Thailand, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Tunisia, Italy and Algeria. A landing station in each of these countries have already been set up except in Pakistan, while India has set up two landing stations in Chennai and Mumbai, the officials said.

Construction work of the landing station facilities worth Tk 1.5 crore in Cox's Bazar started in last April. It has an administrative building, two residential buildings, and a dormitory.

Monwar Hussain, project director of the submarine cable scheme said, two large ships have been kept standby to supervise repairs and other installation works. There will also be some sub-centres in the 2000 kilometre area.

Govt mulls

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court has been beefed up for providing additional security to the court and judges.

The meeting asked the police to provide gunmen for the women and children repression control court judges who come by private cars and decided to provide police escorts to the minibuses carrying the members of the judicial associations.

Police was also asked to collect information about the people who rent houses in the capital and in Dhaka district.

The cases of robbing and snatching taxicabs in the capital reduced following police actions in some city suburbs where the robbers often take shelter, the meeting was told.

AUG 17 BLASTS

Jessore cops files another case

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jessore

Police have lodged another case accusing 14 arrestees of involvement in the series bomb blasts on August 17 last year.

The accused are Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) 'ehsar' Matiur Rahman Masud of Gangni in Meherpur, Rakib alias Nuruddin of Mohonpur, Rajshahi, Aslam, Habib, Nayeem, Liton, Hasan, Mintu, Amin, Tahir, Zahid, Shafik and Emran.

Officer-in-charge (OC) of Kotwali Police Station Abu Hena Mostafa Kamal lodged the case on Tuesday.

Earlier in August last year, nine cases were filed with the police station in connection with the series blasts. The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) submitted charge sheet in the cases, accusing five people.

Matiar and Rakib, arrested by Rab and police on December 30, confessed in the court of a first class magistrate on January 9 that they were involved in the bomb blasts in front of Kotwali Police Station.

PM blasts AL

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She reminded that her party had participated in the election under the Election Commission and caretaker government. And BNP and alliance formed the government after holding of a fair election.

The next elections will be free and fair and people will cast their votes for BNP as the party believes in the politics of development, production and people's welfare, the prime minister said.

Today it is clear to the people that the BNP believes in the politics of development, production and people's welfare while "another party indulges in politics of chaos, destruction, terrorism, arson and anarchy".

Khaleda, also chairperson of the ruling BNP, expressed the optimism that the next election will be held in 2007 and people will again bring the BNP and alliance to power.

Abbas blames

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behind the destruction of the country. "Some newspapers are out to assassinate

character of the BNP leaders."

The minister went on: "Having seen some newspapers it appears they are acting as foreign agencies."

He accused vernacular dailies like Prothom Alo, Jugantor and Bhorer Kagoj of writing as they like.

The newspapers are misusing the freedom of the press. The BNP leader told his audience and reminded the press of the days when it was "gagged". "If there were only four newspapers like in the AL regime, where would be the freedom?" He posed a question.

Outlaw killed

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accomplices opened fire on them prompting the law enforcers to retaliate.

Moni died when he got caught in the 'crossfire' during the shootout, while his accomplices fled, police said.

Two guns, seven gun cartridges and four rifle bullets were recovered from the place of crossfire.

Two constables were also injured during the shootout and were undergoing treatment at Bagerhat General Hospital.

According to police, Moni was one of the accused in journalists Manik Saha and Humayun Kabir Balu murder cases filed with Khulna Police Station. He was also one of the suspects of Khulna city Awami League (AL) President Advocate Manzurul Imam and Morrelganj upazila AL leader Salam Sikder murder cases.

Bangladeshi

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Protesters hostile to the United Nations presence in Ivory Coast clashed with the Bangladeshis at Guiglo in the morning when four people were killed and 12 wounded, French and Ivorian army sources said.

The Bangladeshis had opened fire with live rounds when they were attacked in the morning by the activists claiming loyalty to President Laurent Gbagbo, who started clambering over their armoured vehicles.

Guiglo and Duekoue have in the past been conflict flashpoints in the divided west African country where the 500 Bangladeshi soldiers are part of a UN force of some 7,000 peacekeepers patrolling ceasefire lines between the army and rebels in the north.

"There were no incidents when they left," the FDS office said.

The Bangladeshis headed for the demilitarised confidence zone also patrolled by 4,000 French troops deployed in the former colony where a coup bid triggered the civil war and division in 2002.

More than half the UN force in Ivory Coast comes from Bangladesh.

The violence began on Monday in Abidjan and some other towns when hundreds of pro-Gbagbo youth militants brought the economic capital to a halt with road-blocks and began targeting UN bases and the French embassy in anger at a decision by a UN-backed working group that parliament should be wound up to hasten the peace process.

Zakaria finds

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he said the reporters at first talked to the two new election commissioners and then to the two other election commissioners -- M Munsef Ali and AK Mohammad Ali. "You are putting us face to face," Zakaria said in an annoyed tone, adding, "It has been too much. There needs to be a limit."

Zakaria also declined to say whether or not the task for preparing a fresh voter list is going on even after the HC directives for revising the existing one as "the matter is related to the court".

As the secretary to the EC Secretariat, Zakaria under the directives of the chief election commissioner (CEC) had ordered the filed level manpower to continue their task of preparing a fresh voter list, ignoring the January 4 guidelines of the HC.

Zakaria has worked in various posts at the EC Secretariat for the last 30 years. He was the secretary to the EC Secretariat from April 1, 2002, to January 15 this year, a day before his controversial appointment as an election commissioner.

After taking oaths, he blasted election commissioners M Munsef Ali and AK Mohammad Ali on Monday for opposing the ongoing fresh voter listing.

He became even more offensive

to them on Tuesday. "They [Munsef and Mohammad] know nothing. They are illiterate. They have tarnished the image of the Election Commission by talking nonsense, which must be stopped right away," he said at a courtesy meeting with the EC Secretariat staffs.

During his tenure as the secretary to the EC Secretariat, Zakaria was engaged in conflict with former CEC MA Syed and has not attended any meeting of the EC for about last two years of Syed's tenure.

Under his direct patronisation, the EC Secretariat officials have been divided. The appointment of Zakaria to his new post was greeted with disappointment by many in the secretariat while sending the camp loyal to Zakaria into triumphal celebrations.

Galib denied

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Earlier on December 22, 2004, 15 people were injured in a bomb attack on a jatra (open stage drama) show in Takier Bazar in Palashbari upazila.

Galib was brought from Bogra on Saturday under tight security measures to attend the court proceedings.

Bar demands rescinding

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for what it said is their anti-people and unconstitutional role, and demanded legal action against Mahfuz for his comments on the High Court (HC) directive that the Election Commission is not obliged to comply with it.

The SCBA said the CEC's non-compliance with the HC directive to consult his colleagues to decide on the voter list, continuing preparation of a fresh list and appointment of 'disputed' persons as election commissioners expose 'dishonest attitude' of the CEC.

The CEC ignored the other two election commissioners -- Munsef Ali and AK Mohammad Ali. Appointment of the two new election commissioners is intended to justify his unconstitutional move and contempt court of court, the SCBA said.

Speakers at the rally, chaired by SCBA Vice President Shah Mohammad Jahurul Haque, expressed deep concern that the democratic order will be destroyed with the 'politicisation' of the EC, which they noted is one of the basic institutions which ensures exercise of their franchise.

Appointment of the new election commissioners clearly proves the BNP-Jamaat coalition government has politicised the administration, police and judiciary to manipulate the next general election, said Barrister M Amir-Ul-Islam.

He alleged that Zakaria was the key person in all vote riggings during Ershad's autocratic rule and also the BNP rule. So, his appointment as election commissioner is not at all acceptable, and it shows the present

government's ill intention to cling to power by manipulating the next elections, he said.

"This government even appointed partisan people, excluding the minorities, as upazila election officers through the politicised Public Service Commission," the eminent lawyer said.

He called upon all to boycott the CEC and the new election commissioners and demanded enactment of laws specifying necessary qualifications and conditions for appointment of election commissioners.

Former SCBA president Abdul Baset Majumder said the government is destroying the foundation of democracy by politicising the EC.

The CEC is making all efforts to have majority support in the EC to help the present government cling to power in an autocratic way, he added.

SCBA Secretary Enayetur Rahim said the CEC is violating laws since his very appointment to this post, and the two new election commissioners would back him in this regard.

He mentioned that the law minister is justifying the new appointments saying it is aimed at ending inactivity of the EC. It is unfortunate for the nation, he regretted.

The lawyers' leaders asked all to strengthen the people's movement to resist such undemocratic activities.

The SCBA will hold protest rallies at noon on January 22 at all the bar associations across the country protesting appointment of the new election commissioners and demanding their removal.

Fortified CEC now

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talk to the press. He said, "I have already said what I had to say."

"If the High Court had issued a rule and if that rule became absolute then it could be called a directive," he argued on Tuesday, adding, only then it would become mandatory for the EC to comply with it.

Zakaria, who on Tuesday became more offensive and slurred Munsef and Mohammad, did not make any comment on the ongoing fresh voter listing and the implementation of HC directives. Zakaria, who had been EC Secretary until January 15, directed the field-level staffs to continue working to prepare a new voter list as per the HC's decision and ignoring the HC directive.

However, he yesterday refused to say whether the task that began on January 1 is still going on. "I will not say anything about it, as the matter is related to the High Court's directive," Zakaria said, adding, "The meeting will discuss the issues."

CEC Aziz, who from the very beginning had no accord with Munsef and Mohammad, and had been alone until Monday, has now gained a one-member majority in the EC with the new two colleagues.

The CEC had verbally requested the government to appoint two new election commissioners to strengthen his hand in the EC. When he received a positive response from the government, he asked the EC Secretariat on Sunday afternoon to send a file to the election commissioners seeking their opinion on the voter list issue.

In the file, Munsef and Mohammad on Monday wrote notes wanting an immediate meeting of the EC. The CEC finally convened the meeting yesterday, though the HC in its January 4 directive had asked him to hold it immediately.

Election commissioners Munsef and Mohammad told reporters they were yet to know about the meeting.

It was Zakaria who told the press that CEC Aziz called the meeting.

Two EC Secretariat officials later informed the press that they served the meeting notice to the election commissioners yesterday afternoon.

CHRONOLOGY OF EC ORDER TO ECEMET

Disposing of two writ petitions, the HC on January 4 asked the EC to revise the existing electoral roll and hold a meeting immediately.

But the EC Secretariat under the directives of the CEC continued the activities for preparing a fresh voter list on the excuse that it did not receive any certified copy of the HC directive.

The Supreme Court registrar's

Illegal outfits on Ctg port property razed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) yesterday bulldozed several illegal structures in Chaktai and Asadganj and recovered about 7.25 katha of land worth about Tk 1.5 crore.

Three businessmen were illegally occupying the land in the city since 1992 when the CPA cancelled its lease awarded about 65 years ago.

The businessmen erected unauthorised commercial structures on the land, said CPA Magistrate Mohammad Munir Chowdhury, who conducted a daylong eviction drive yesterday.

The CPA team reinforced by law enforcers demolished a two-storey tin-shed boarding, 10 to 12 mess quarters, a hotel and restaurant and a timber shop, the magistrate told The Daily Star.

Sources said late Khan Bahadur Meah Khan Sawdagar was the first leaseholder of the land in 1941-42. His heirs enjoyed the lease by renewing it until the Liberation War in 1971.

After independence, successors of Khan Bahadur refrained from renewing the lease and enjoyed the financial benefit by renting the land for commercial purpose. However, businessmen Zakir Hossain Sawdagar, Kabir Ahmad Sawdagar and Badsha Sawdagar virtually took hold of the land in the early 90s, they added.

The sources said the CPA cancelled the lease of the land in 1992 due to its unauthorised use. The CPA magistrate inspected the land on Monday and asked all encroachers to vacate the land in 24 hours.

Earlier on December 28 last year, he recovered another four-katha land of the port from encroachers.

Four forest

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Shawkat, attacked Haldibunia forest out at dead of night and took away two .303 rifles, one SLR (self-loaded rifle) and 183 bullets.

When contacted, Assistant Conservator of Forest (ACF) Rezaul Karim confirmed the incident.

Opposition kicks

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this afternoon and bring out a procession led by top leaders of the alliance.

Senior Awami League leaders yesterday held a joint meeting with leaders of the party's front organisations and asked them to make the agitation programmes successful.

The Paltan rally on January 23 will coincide with the first sitting of the parliament of the year.

Meanwhile, almost all the AL parliament members including the party chief and Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina have skipped House proceedings for over 70 working days while absence in parliament for 90 consecutive days will result in losing their membership.

Addressing a joint meeting of different front organisations, AL leaders yesterday asked them to prepare for an all-out movement to force the BNP-Jamaat-led coalition to quit.

They said the situation has reached at the point of no return and there is no alternative to strengthen the ongoing street agitation.

Held at the AL's central office on Bangabandhu Avenue, the meeting was presided over by AL Presidium Member Sajeda Chowdhury, where AL leaders Abdul Jalil, Tofail Ahmed, Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim and Obaidul Quader addressed.

Senior AL leaders also suggested the Dhaka city unit of the AL to resolve its internal crisis quickly for the sake of strengthening movement in the capital.

No more 'guns'

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Security personnel in presence of officials from Chittagong Port Authority (CPA), customs and representatives from Dhaka Telephone Company and C&F agent Emess Shipping started searching cargos loaded on 10 trucks on Tuesday.

They also searched 10 other trucks that passed out of the restricted area of the port.

The three-member probe committee headed by CPA Deputy Director (Security) Lt Commander Shahed Karim is scheduled to submit a report by this evening.

Burial

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Locals gathered in scores and opposed the Ahmadiyyas, saying the community members are non-Muslims and cannot be buried at a Muslim graveyard.

Upazila Nirbahi Officer Abdus Sattar and Officer-in-Charge of Nabinagar Police Station Golan Faruq turned up in the evening and tried to settle the matter in vain.

Over 5,000 bigots assembled in the early morning yesterday to settle the dispute in arbitration. They handed down a decision that Mortuzan 'lost her eligibility to be buried at Muslims' graveyard' as she had embraced Ahmadiyya belief three years ago.

The authorities finally decided to set up a separate graveyard for the Ahmadiyyas on three and half decimals of land where the woman was buried at 2:30pm.

Locals said Mortuzan's family had contributed land for the village graveyard where the Ahmadiyya claim to have buried their community members earlier.

Abbas may resign if policies opposed

AP, Ramallah, West Bank

Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas said yesterday he might resign if the government formed after a January 25 parliament elections opposes his policies, including peace talks with Israel.

The militant Hamas group, which calls for the destruction of Israel and has carried out scores of deadly attacks against Israel in recent years, was expected to pose a strong challenge to Abbas' ruling Fatah Party in the election and earn a spot in the next government.

A coalition government with Hamas would make it difficult for the two sides to restart long-frozen peace efforts.

"If I feel that I can't fulfill this program ... then the seat is not my ultimate ambition," Abbas told reporters at his office, referring to his post as Palestinian Authority president.

However, he held out hope that regardless of the election results, he would be able to pursue his peace plans.

"Who knows, Hamas may change its policy," Abbas said.

Abbas spoke a day after acting Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said that after the Palestinian poll and Israel's March 28 election he hoped to begin negotiations leading to "a permanent peace agreement between us and the Palestinians."

Olmert said he would only resume negotiations if Abbas dismantles militant groups after the vote.

Abbas enthusiastically welcomed Olmert's overture but did not address a possible crackdown.

"We will not hesitate to get into such a negotiation," Abbas