

EU pledges 'bold' nuke offer to Iran

AFP, Brussels

The European Union is preparing to make a "bold" offer to Iran, including possible security guarantees, to persuade it to curb its atomic plans, the bloc's foreign policy chief said yesterday.

Javier Solana made the comment ahead of a meeting of EU foreign ministers including the so-called EU-3 – Britain, France and Germany – tasked with trying to defuse the West's diplomatic standoff with the Islamic state.

"It will be a generous package, a bold package, that will contain issues relating to nuclear, economic matters, and maybe, if necessary, security matters," Solana said.

"We are preparing a package (so) that it will be difficult for them to say no if what they really want is energy," he said.

The West fears that Iran is trying to develop a nuclear weapon behind the screen of a civilian atomic energy programme. Tehran says it only wants to generate energy.

The United States is seeking sanctions from the UN Security Council but it has failed to win support for the move and has given its European allies "a couple of weeks" to draft a fresh approach.

The EU, whose package must also satisfy Russia and China, has until May 19 – when negotiators from the

Security Council's five permanent members plus Germany meet in London – to complete its work.

Solana played down comments by Iran's hardline president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, rejecting any new EU offer that might demand that the Islamic republic halt uranium enrichment activities.

"Any offer which requires us to halt our peaceful nuclear activities will be invalid," Ahmadinejad was quoted as saying on Sunday by the state news agency Irna.

"I am surprised that a group of people hold meetings without us being present there and make decisions for us," he said.

Solana pointed out that the Iranians had yet to see the Union's offer.

As a signatory of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), Iran has the right to build a civilian nuclear programme, but it must submit to inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the UN watchdog body.

It has refused to fully cooperate with the agency and Ahmadinejad has pledged to forge ahead as international pressure to give up enrichment has increased.

"This is one of the last chances to resolve this conflict from a diplomatic point of view," Luxembourg Foreign Minister Jean Asselborn told reporters.

Power crisis

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'steps taken to face the ongoing power crisis' presented at the conference said even if the government could implement all its short-term and long-term projects still there would be a rise in load shedding next year.

While the country has a power deficit of 1259mw at present the paper projects as high as 1624mw deficit in 2007 and 1430mw deficit in 2008.

"You will have to have the chicken and the egg together to get chicks," Iqbal Hasan Mahmud, state minister for power, said. Saying that he tried to improve things since 2002, Mahmud claimed that it was lack of fund that always stood in the way.

He also pointed out that the donors have not provided any aid in the power sector for a long time. At one point they were only interested in investing in distribution, not in generation. Recently they have however assured the government of assistance in generation too, he said. "Power plants cannot be installed overnight, you will have to understand it. It's not about millions, but billions," he explained.

Power Secretary ANH Akhter Hossain presented the paper where he elaborately depicted the prevailing power situation, the government steps taken to overcome the situation, pick-hour load management, and coordination among different agencies under the power ministry.

Asked about the allegations of corruption that is said to be the main reason for the country's miserable

power situation Mahmud said the same was said by the World Bank's country director at a seminar in Hotel Sheraton. "I instantly rejected her claims and invited her to my office and offered her access to all my files. Later on I even wrote to her, but I have not yet received any answer."

The minister was accompanied by the chairman of Power Development Board as well as other high officials of the ministry.

Later in the morning while speaking as chief guest at a share offloading ceremony of Dhaka Electric Supply Company (DESCO) and Power Grid Company of Bangladesh (PGCB) at the Dhaka Stock Exchange, Mahmud said Bangladesh is not the only country to be experiencing loads shedding. "Even in Delhi there has been 10-hour long load shedding, but The Daily Star and the Independent print news of the country's power crisis in the front page and that of Delhi somewhere inside," the minister complained.

Meanwhile, 25 percent shares of the two companies have been offloaded. "Offering one-fourth shares of the two power producing entities to the public is needed to mitigate the liquidity crisis and to bring transparency and dynamism to the sector," the minister said.

CAAB warned

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Biman)," says MA Momen, managing director of Biman. "If the aircraft was not good for flying, it would not have been allowed to fly to New York from the Brussels airport."

As the FAA did not allow the Biman aircraft to land in New York, the flight was diverted to Montreal on May 13 along with its passengers. The aircraft was inspected by the Canadian authorities and found okay, he said.

"I apologise to the passengers for the immense suffering they had to face. We have arranged their flights to New York. And we have also arranged alternative flights for some 60 Biman passengers from New York," Momen added.

CAAB sources said the FAA sent a long list of flaws in the DC-10, which have not been addressed.

"Of course when (FAA) inspectors inspect the aircraft, they make lists of flaws and we correct those flaws accordingly. On December 14, 2005, the aircraft was cleared by the FAA. After routine inspections, they had given us a list of flaws in February. We corrected those. It is not unusual, for any old aircraft to have some flaws."

Biman did not get any FAA notification disapproving the DC-10 landing in New York.

While this incident is an insult to the nation, it is not affecting the Biman financially. In fact, it is a blessing in disguise for Biman, which was incurring losses of up to Tk 55 lakh per flight on the New York route.

"We will close the New York office. May be, we will run an off-flight ticket centre there as in Toronto," Momen said.

"Now that this flight is off from the New York route, we will get more flying time. This flight can be operated on the profitable Middle East routes where we cannot provide higher frequency of flights due to lack of aircraft."

The Biman authorities and the FAA have had another conflict recently over a newly added Biman flight to New York from Manchester. Biman is a class-B operator in the world's aviation sector. A class-B operator is not allowed to operate from a third country. But before the launching of Manchester-New York flight, Biman was not aware of this regulation. When it ran three to four flights, the FAA imposed a huge penalty on it, and the route had to be cancelled.

Meanwhile, State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Fakrul Islam Alamgir told BSS that Biman's DC-10 fleet would be phased out and replaced by Airbus or Boeings either on dry lease or wet lease.

A study by the Boeing company and a set of recommendations of Biman suggest modernising its fleet with four wide-body Boeing aircraft

Judges killed

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Expressing anger for the denial, he said he had surrendered to the Rab on condition that he would be allowed to meet the press.

When the court wanted to know his profession Rahman said, "Murder, as Muijaheed of Allah."

Referring to the bomb attack on jatra mancha at Laxmigola in Bogra, the JMB leader said the police investigator had falsely implicated Asadullah Al Galib in the case. But Galib was not associated with JMB.

Siddiqui Islam alias Bangla Bhai claimed that he was not involved in the murder of the two judges at Jhalakathi late last year and pleaded not guilty of the charge.

Khaled Saifullah told the court, "I've finished my task by leading the squad to kill the judges on instruction from Abdur Rahman."

He said confessional statements of Ataur Rahman Sunny and Abdul Awal were extracted under physical torture. He compared the Joint Interrogation Cell of Dhaka with those in Iraq now under occupation of US Army.

Ataur Rahman Sunny told the court that their fight was against injustices in every

sphere of the society. He pointed to the Berlin based Transparency International reports and said Bangladesh had ranked as the most corrupt country for the fifth consecutive year for corruption at the state level.

"Our mission has not been completed," said Sunny, the military commander of JMB.

The hearing of the case will resume on May 18.

Extortionists

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Police, meanwhile, held Shafiqul Islam Firoye, a manpower trader and "rival" of Shahabuddin, at the Zia International Airport when he was about to fly for Saudi Arabia in the early hours yesterday in connection with Sunday's incident.

According to Shahabuddin, Firoye has "good links" with top criminal Tanvir Ahmed Joy who organised the attack on the Turki Associate for Firoye.

When contacted over telephone, Shahabuddin told The Daily Star from Saudi capital Riyadh, "The criminals are now threatening not only to kill me but also my family and employees."

He said a man called him in Saudi Arabia over his cell phone on April 18 from Singapore. "Introducing himself as Joy, he demanded Tk 50 lakh within a week. He threatened to attack on my office and kill my family and employees in case I fail to pay the sum," Shahabuddin said in a complaint lodged with the Bangladesh Embassy in Riyadh on May 8.

Shahabuddin also informed the matter to Singapore police through his nephew, requesting an inquiry.

The same caller phoned Shahabuddin again a few days later and increased the extortion money to Tk 5 crore as he refused to pay the previous amount.

About two weeks ago, Firoye's younger brother Shamsheer Alam Nashu contacted Shahabuddin, proposing a negotiation with Joy about fixing the sum at Tk 1 crore.

"When Nashu last called me on Saturday, I refused him again. He said they will now deal the matter in their own way. The attack at the Turki Associate office was conducted the following day," Shahabuddin told The Daily Star.

He said he received at least 20 phone calls yesterday from the same persons regarding the demand. All these people are members of an international extortion syndicate controlled by Joy, Shahabuddin added.

Shahabuddin also said Joy told him that his men made a similar attack on at the Orbit International in Gulshan 10 days ago.

Meantime, the condition of Shahjahan, one of the five injured in the attack now undergoing treatment at Dhaka Medical College and Hospital, was reported to be critical. Four others were released after treatment yesterday.

Officials of Turki Associate yesterday said the agency will bear the treatment expenses for the injured and compensate the family of dead Ramzan Ali, who went to their office to see off his brother to Saudi Arabia.

They said three of their 20 staff stopped attending office out of fear while others are panicked about further attacks.

Bomb goes off

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Tarique Zia said sensing sure defeat in the next elections the opposition alliance is pressing for their 'illogical' demands for reforms in the Election Commission and caretaker government system.

He blamed the opposition parties for destabilising the country and destroying its image.

The BNP leader will address meetings in Gouranadi, Agoljipara, Babujan and Jijpur upazilas of Barisal district today.

Some 50 people were injured in BNP factional clashes, collapse of an over-crowded tin roof, and transport accidents at different places of the district yesterday.

Man held

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highly explosive substance, sources said.

Assistant Director of Rab-6 FM Badruzzaman lodged an FIR in Khulna Sadar Police Station the same night as complainant SI Rafique has been assigned to investigate the case.

Kartik Saha holds from Mathurapur village under Sathkira Sadar upazila and is a shrimp trader by profession. He has fallen sick due to intense interrogation by Rab before being handed over to Khulna police.

He will be further interrogated after being taken on remand, said the IO (investigation officer) of the case.

Procurement of uranium and its use are not only banned in Bangladesh but all over the world.

Minu blames

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reasons and identify the persons responsible. And they will be brought to book."

He asked government officials to remain vigilant against recurrence of such incidents.

Minu did not reply to questions whether action would be taken against the local BNP lawmaker, who allegedly ordered the police to fire on people.

DEMANDS MET

Minu announced the government has met all the 14 demands of Kansat people while the REB has withdrawn some charges and reduced many other fees for all the PBSSs in the country, a day before the deadline for fulfilling the Kansat peoples' demands expires today.

PBUSP Convenor Golam Rabbani expressed satisfaction over the government steps.

The legislator said the government has already sent Tk 83 lakh as compensation for those killed or injured in police atrocities at Kansat. Distribution of the money will start with its disbursement among families of the 17 people killed at a May 24 grand rally at Kansat.

Families of those killed will get Tk 2 lakh each and one person blinded in police action will get Tk 1 lakh.

Ten seriously injured 10 persons will get Tk 50,000 each, 100 others with less injuries Tk 25,000 each and 600 more with minor injuries Tk 3,000 each.

"Some cases filed against the PBUSP leaders will be withdrawn

within a day or two," said Minu.

REB NOTICES

In an official notification, REB Executive Director Sayed Sarwar Hossain yesterday cancelled all types of meter charges for PBS subscribers and withdrew the provision of imposing fines on subscribers for pilferage of transformers.

The notification also said minimum charges will be Tk 78 per month for use of 25 units, there will be no fine for side connections for religious purposes but the REB must be notified of it.

Another circular of the REB said it will not charge its subscribers in Kansat for the pending bills between August 2005 and April 2006, when the agitation was going on.

The REB will also arrange payment of arrear bills in nine instalments.

GRAND RALLY

The government and the PBUSP will jointly hold a 'grand rally for peace' at Kansat Rajbari ground on May 24 for announcing fulfilment of the demands.

Members of the government negotiation committee and PBUSP leaders will be present at the rally.

Kushtia journos

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constituency filed an extortion case with Bheramara Police Station against the journalists on May 9.

On May 10, Azad Bishwas, one of the supporters of Shahidul Islam, filed another extortion case with Kushtia Sadar Police Station against the journalists.

Barrister Tania Amir and Barrister Moniruzzaman Asad moved for the petitioners.

SC returns

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seizure of the video cassette, not allowing reporters to enter some courtrooms and other issues.

The SC registrar told the reporters that the seizure of the videotape was a misunderstanding. The members of the CJ's escort thought that the camera crew was taking shots of the chief justice, he explained.

After some discussions he handed over the cassette to the ATN Bangla reporter.

Businesses decry

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The economy cannot afford the closure of the port even for an hour, and urged the quarters concerned to resolve the issue through meaningful dialogue, read the statement undersigned by leaders of different chambers and industrialists.

"Politics over Chittagong port should be stopped forthwith and must not be repeated in the interest of our economy and future growth and development."

The business leaders said immense potentials of the Chittagong port, which is a gateway to the outside world for Bangladesh, could not be harnessed due to inefficient administration, mismanagement as well as man made problems.

"Lack of proper facilities and properly trained manpower are not only causing inordinate delays in releasing goods but also adding huge extra cost for doing business. As a result, Bangladesh business is becoming uncompetitive in a globalised world market", the statement said.

Chittagong port is considered as the most expensive port in the region, it said.

Suggesting the government to privatise the container handling at the port, the business leaders said a number of terminals in the region have been handed over to the private sector for efficient, cost effective and speedy handling of the containerised cargo.

"The government must take immediate steps to privatise the operation and management of the

under-construction New Mooring container terminal of Chittagong port and appoint a competent operator having proven track record in management of such facility."

Increasing foreign trade and investment flow make the efficient operation and management of the container terminal all the more important for Bangladesh, the statement said, adding that an efficient and dynamic international seaport with modern container handling facilities will make a positive impact on the country's trade as well as foreign direct investment (FDI) which is needed for our economic upswing.

President of Federation of Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry Mir Nasir Hossain, President of International Chamber of Commerce Bangladesh Chapter Mahbubur Rahman, President of Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry Latifur Rahman, President of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry MA Momen, President of Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry Saifuzzaman Chowdhury, President of Bangladesh Chamber of Industry AK Azad, Chairman of Bangladesh Textile Mills Association MA Awal, President of Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association Fazlul Hoque, President of Bangladesh Aushadh Shilpa Samity SM Shafuazzaman and President of Foreign Chamber of Commerce and Industry Mashihul-Karim signed the joint statement.

Students allege

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1,200 students," a student of Pharmacy department said.

While the chairman of Pharmacy department said they applied for accreditation on Wednesday, Mashur Rahman, a member of Stamford University Board of Trustees, contradicted the statement and said he himself will move for the accreditation and complete the process in a week.

A student has to register his or her name for the next semester before the results are published and if one waits for the result, Tk 500 is charged as 'late fee'.

A student has to bribe the guard if he or she forgets to bring the ID card, said a student, adding, "Sometimes the amount is up to Tk 200 as the guards do not allow us to enter even during the examinations."

Another student said they are not allowed to bring snacks from outside while they have to buy a singara for as much as Tk 8 from the university canteen.

A female English student said they have few books in the library, although the authorities charge them an annual library fee of Tk 1,000.

Students said the university

Governance

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The 2004 government performed badly in the areas of voice and accountability, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, control of corruption, political stability, and rule of law, the WB indicators show.

The indicators developed by the WB institute show that the performance of the 1998 government in these six areas hovered between 26 and 45 percentage points, while the 2004 government's performance hovered between 10 to 26 percentage points.

In 2004, Bangladesh's percentile ranking was 10.3 for control of corruption, 11.7 for political stability, 13.3 for regulatory quality, 22.2 for rule of law, 26.4 for government effectiveness, and 28.6 for voice and accountability. All these corresponding figures were around 100 per cent higher back in 1998.

"But because of large (though declining) margins of error, there is not enough evidence to conclude that Bangladesh's governance improved or worsened except in the case of regulatory quality—where it is possible to say, at a 90 per cent confidence interval, that there was a perceived decline—and control of corruption—where it is possible to conclude that there was no improvement and probably a deterioration," the report pointed out.

The perception-based indicators have been used since 1998 to measure performance in six main dimensions of governance in some 209 countries.

SUST

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they said taking advantage of an administrative vacuum, a vested quarters is trying to create an unwanted situation on the campus. The faction also handed over a memo to the registrar of the university with a call for taking steps to end the crisis.

The faction of teachers backed by the ruling alliance demanded a judicial probe against the teachers and students who provoked the vandalism. The General Secretary of SUSTTA Rafiqul Islam told The Daily Star the meeting was informal and an emergency meeting of the executive committee of SUSTTA has been called at 11:00am today.

Students and teachers of the department of BBA brought out a mourning procession on the campus yesterday. Later, a brief rally was also held. A memo on behalf of the BBA department was handed over to the registrar later. The five-point demand in the memo includes a judicial probe into the incidents. Mosharrar Hossain Shamim who died on Sunday was a 4th year student of the BBA department.

The Jatrayabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) also brought out a mourning procession and held a rally on the campus. The JCD and Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS) also handed separate memos to the registrar demanding judicial probe.

While talking to The Daily Star SUSTTA President Mostafa Hassan demanded an enquiry about Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) Gias Uddin Ahmed who had ordered the firing on agitating students on Friday night.

Three deans, out of six, held a meeting with the Registrar Jamil Ahmed Chowdhury yesterday afternoon. Prof Muhammad Jafar Iqbal, Prof Habibul Ahsan and Prof Enam Uddin Ahmed Chowdhury were also present in the meeting.

The deans called upon the registrar to take immediate measures to ensure security on the campus. They called upon the registrar and teachers to arrange for funds for the treatment of the injured students.

The registrar told The Daily Star there is no administration in the university. "We are trying to manage things for the time being until specific orders or instructions from the authorities concerned arrive," he said.

Benazir, Sharif

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November 1996, left the country in April 1999 amid a string of corruption allegations.

Six court cases are still pending against her in Pakistan, which has filed a request with Interpol for her arrest, and Swiss authorities charged her in 2004 with laundering 11.7 million dollars in purported bribes paid by companies seeking customs inspection contracts.

Benazir has repeatedly dismissed the corruption charges against her as politically motivated.

"I really see these allegations as more of an attempt to pave the way for military intervention by condemning the political class as corrupt," she told the BBC.

Benazir said she and Sharif had agreed to create a politically neutral accountability commission to ensure that corruption allegations were pursued in a "transparent manner without becoming a political witch-hunt."

FM

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withdrawn in next two years and tariffs will be reduced 0.5 per cent in next 4 years, he added.

Morshed had bilateral meetings with the Indonesian president and the Pakistan prime minister as well as with his counterparts of Indonesia, Egypt, Turkey and Pakistan on the sidelines of the summit.

Asked about his meeting with Pakistan Prime Minister Saikat Aziz Khan, he said all bilateral issues, including FTA, were discussed and they agreed to accelerate the process of the bilateral free-trade agreement.

Foreign Secretary Hemayetuddin, Commerce Secretary Abdul Karim and other senior officials were present at the airport.

BD Foods chairman

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smuggling grilled him briefly at the CID office yesterday, but could not elicit any significant information from him.

CID Inspector Nurul Islam, the investigation officer (IO) of the case, also told the court that Nazmul, Mokhesur, and some others had trafficked 75.5kg heroin to the UK last year in two consignments of foodstuffs, handicrafts and floor tiles.

Some portion of the heroin was smuggled under cover of two fake companies –M/S Emdad Trading and Jamil International Trading Agency.

The IO also told the court that Badruddoza had used Nazmul, Mokhesur, Mohammad Mainuddin, detained manager of BD Foods, and some others to organise an international drug ring. And all this has tarnished the country's image abroad.

He needs to be remanded for vital clues to the drug running and whereabouts of his other cohorts involved in the widely publicised crime.

The defence lawyers submitted a petition for cancellation of the remand prayer, saying that their client had secured a High Court order in that he is not harassed or arrested within two months.

In response to a writ petition, the

High Court on April 9 ordered the law enforcement agencies not to arrest or harass him without any regular case.

Besides, the defence argued that their client's name was not included in the First Information Report. So, he should not have been arrested or be taken on remand.

The prosecution said as his name came up in confessional statements of the two accused, there should be no bar to placing him on a remand.

BD Foods official Mohammad Mainuddin was taken on a three-day fresh yesterday on completion of earlier eight-day remand.

Meantime, Abul Bashar, proprietor of Green Heaven Enterprise, and his associate Delwar Hossain were placed on a five-day fresh remand in connection with the smuggling of 54kg heroin to the UK. The CID filed the case with Sutrapur Police Station recently.

TWO DETECTED IN UK

Sources in the CID said two UK citizens of Bangladesh origin—Tajuddin Ahmed Mintu and Abul Kalam—worked for the international drug cartel in the UK.

Recently, the home ministry has requested the UK government for details about the two who now are on the run from the British police.

Corrupt power sector

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ACC, Patel said: "It is an ineffective institution and it has become a joke. I have also mentioned it to the prime minister yesterday (Sunday)."

The WB, which has taken a tough stance on governance and corruption, said its future assistance will depend on the improvement of governance that includes reducing corruption.

Launching the CAS for Bangladesh covering 2006-09, Patel said they have cancelled a number of projects for procurement related corruption.

During the CAS period the WB will be more aggressive in its tough stance against corruption and the bank has already informed the government about it, he said.

Patel said three power plants, which are in the pipeline, will be funded jointly by the WB and the ADB. "But the procurement has to be transparent in these projects."

Replying to a question on a possible hike in petroleum prices in Bangladesh, the WB vice-president said not only the WB, private sector businesses are also suggesting it. If energy prices are not raised, ultimately the private sector will suffer, he said.

"The World Bank's strategy is strongly focused on governance. The CAS's two pillars – improving the investment climate and empowering the poor – reflect the focus of the bank's sectoral programmes," Patelsaid.

The WB has already committed \$2 billion and during the CAS period it will give \$3 billion more. Patel said to make sure that there is no leakage of this resource, they will create a separate risk analysis unit, which will closely monitor the progress of the projects.

Bangladesh is getting assistance from the WB and three other donors – the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Japan and UK Department For International Development (DFID) – in the country's three-year poverty reduction programme.

Representatives from the three donor organisations were also present at yesterday's press conference. They also focused on improvement of governance in Bangladesh.

ADB Country Director Hua Du said ADB will lend Bangladesh \$600 million a year during the CAS period, which is double its earlier assistance