

Defence purchase

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that there had been a lot of anomalies in the purchase of F-7 fighters.

The government on June 26, 2005 signed an agreement with the China government to purchase 16 F-7/FT-7 BG fighters.

The air force headquarters in a report to the standing committee on defence on April 16 said the total price of the fighters stand at \$117.9 million.

Awami League (AL) lawmakers and member of the committee rejected the DGDP statement and said the government should come clean about the matter. They also expressed resentment at the prime minister's prolonged absence at the committee meetings.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia is in charge of the defence ministry.

"Defence minister should explain the allegations of corruption and irregularities in the procurement process," said Shawkat Ali, AL lawmaker and member of the committee. He asked, "Why the defence minister is not present here."

In reply to Shawkat, the committee chairman said the prime minister is too busy to be here and so she has sent her representative. "However, we will be happy if she attends the meeting as her presence will bring in more transparency," he said.

Meanwhile, Naval chief Hasan Ali Khan yesterday informed the parliamentary standing committee on defence that the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) has cancelled the move to purchase six high-speed boats following allegations of irregularities, said meeting sources.

The Armed Forces Division earlier sought the prime minister's clearance to procure these boats at a cost of Tk 14.5 crore. It procured six similar boats in 2005 for only Tk 9 crore. There were allegations of bid manipulation in the current procurement process.

Committee Chairman Mahbubur

Rahman said they have recommended that the ministry concerned arrange a monthly allowance for the freedom fighters from the armed forces who won gallantry awards for contribution to the Liberation War.

"It's a shame that a presidential order issued in 1972 showed that members of the armed forces division who received gallantry awards are not freedom fighters," Mahbub told the reporters at his office in parliament after the meeting.

"Such discriminatory order should be cancelled and the ministry should take immediate steps to this end," he added.

Dengue patients

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monitoring, a total of 710 dengue-infected people have been admitted to different city hospitals and none of them have died so far, claimed DCC.

The actual number of dengue-infected people is much higher than the DCC figures, a DCC official said requesting anonymity.

As a part of the ongoing anti-dengue drive by the DCC, a mass awareness rally was organised yesterday by DCC on the streets of ward 52 in Dhanmondi area that carried colourful banners with dengue-awareness slogans.

The DCC has identified Dhanmondi as a high dengue-prone area as a significant number of dengue-infected patients were detected in this area.

Dengue fever causes acute muscle and joint pain, high fever and severe headache while a more dangerous form can cause internal haemorrhage leading the patient to death.

Aedes mosquito spreads dengue and no vaccine for it has been invented yet.

Poor road work

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"It is very hard to restore a road to its previous condition once it is dug. Generally digging into the roads is causing the rundown condition," said the chief engineer.

Interestingly the city authorities allocated Tk 28 crore this year to dig into the roads.

Some contractors of the city corporation alleged that they are simply unable to deliver quality work as they have to pay no less than 40 percent of the total schedule price as bribes at different stages from getting the work to getting the payment for the work.

"Everything requires bribe. If you simply want to get the tender form, you have to bribe 20 percent of the total schedule price of the work. Then again 20 percent you have to pay as bribes to different people while carrying out the work and finally for getting the bill paid," said a contractor for the city corporation.

Buying the schedule, getting the work order, getting the work inspected, bill measurement, bill format, preparation of vouchers and signing of vouchers all these are done in the city corporation only in exchange of bribes, some contractors said requesting anonymity.

"This is very open. Everyone knows about the practice of bribery. But you cannot prove anything,"

said a contractor who has been working for Nagar Bhaban for seven years.

Sources in DCC said in collusion with some of the engineers of DCC, the contractors do not use good quality materials causing run down situations of the roads, although the city authorities spend a good amount for repairing the roads.

"We do not complete our work as mentioned in the tender. Then a field engineer comes to visit the site and finds the gap. But we strike a deal with him," said a contractor with a grin. "Generally the deal is sixty - forty. He gets forty percent of the cost of the unfinished section and I get sixty percent," he added.

According to the budget, every year, the city authorities have been spending more than Tk 100 crore to repair the roads. Besides, the city authorities spend a hefty sum of money to repair damaged roads after floods. But conditions of the roads remain the same years after years.

In 2004, DCC authorities sought Tk 415 crore from the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development to renovate damaged roads and footpaths.

al-Qaeda vows

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extending from Afghanistan to the Palestinian territories in order to liberate "the whole of Palestine."

"We cannot watch these rockets raining down their fire on our brothers in Gaza and Lebanon and remain inactive and submissive," Zawahiri said in the footage.

It was the first reaction by al-Qaeda to the onslaughts which started in late June in Gaza and on July 12 in Lebanon, triggered by the capture of Israeli soldiers by Palestinian militants and Lebanon's Shia Hezbollah movement.

"The rockets and missiles tearing apart the bodies of Muslims in Gaza and Lebanon are not purely Israeli. They come from and are funded by all the countries of the crusader alliance," Zawahiri said in a reference to the United States and Western allies.

"Hence, everyone who took part in the crime must pay the price ... The whole world is an open field for us. Like they attack us everywhere, we too attack them everywhere."

Zawahiri's comments -- in which he invoked revered Shia figures like Prophet Mohammed's grandson, Imam Hussein, and as well figures revered by Sunnis -- indicated that al-Qaeda, which is made up of Sunni Islamist extremists, was prepared to help Hezbollah despite differences with the Shia sect.

"The war with Israel ... is a jihad (holy war) for the sake of God ... a jihad that seeks to liberate Palestine, the whole of Palestine, and to liberate every land which (once belonged to) Islam, from Andalus to Iraq," Zawahiri thundered.

"These events (in Lebanon and Gaza) show the importance of the Jihad fronts in Afghanistan and Iraq. All Muslims must assist them so that America's forces get out of them crippled ... and pay the price of its aggression against Muslims and its support for Israel," he said.

"Iraq has the benefit of being close

to Palestine. Muslims must therefore back its Mujahadeen until a Mujahad Islamic emirate is set up there that would take the jihad, with God's help, to Palestine's borders.

"Then, the Mujahadeen would join hands at the entrance of Palestine for the great conquest, God willing," Zawahiri added.

The turbaned al-Qaeda number two, apparently referring to Washington's Shia allies in Iraq, said the "crusader-Zionist aggression" might perhaps prompt "the traitors in Iraq to retreat from their shame and treason and stop justifying and backing the US-crusader presence" in the country.

Zawahiri also called for "the oppressed and downtrodden" throughout the world to close ranks with Muslims in "confronting injustice."

He slammed the "impotence and complicity" of Arab and Muslim governments and expressed outrage at world condemnation of the capture of Israeli soldiers whereas no one lifted a finger to free 10,000 Arabs held in Israeli prisons.

Hezbollah captured two Israeli soldiers with the declared aim of swapping them with Lebanese and possibly others held by Israel, and has insisted on an exchange despite the devastating Israeli offensive that has killed hundreds in Lebanon and smashed the country's infrastructure.

al-Qaeda was behind the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States and has since been blamed for a string of bombings in Western and other countries.

Zawahiri had last appeared in a video also aired on Qatar-based Al-Jazeera June 23 to vow that al-Qaeda would avenge the death of its Iraq frontman, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who was killed in a US air raid June 7.

EC secy admits

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be possible to complete the task within the scheduled time limit of August 10.

In addition to the procedure for updating the voter list at their offices from July 1, the EC started sending its staff for door to door visits from July 21.

The EC assigned officials working under different departments the task of voter list updating through door to door visits but they have shown lack of interest in the work due to uncertainty about their remuneration, said officials at the meeting.

The EC secretary told the meeting that they will get the fund for the task next week and then they will clarify the issue of remuneration for the staff, sources said.

The EC Secretariat at the meeting also decided to initiate steps for making preparation for setting up polling stations for the next parliamentary election.

It will send letters to the deputy commissioners asking to submit reports about the status of polling stations used during the last elections.

Ministries of education and primary and mass education will be requested to repair, if necessary, the school buildings to be used as polling stations, sources said.

The EC Secretariat will also take steps for repairing the ballot boxes that will be used for the next election.

Power sector

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"We can hire a world famous consultant to work for us, to bring about a change in the power sector but no reform will yield dividend if the present practice is not changed and if the projects are not implemented properly," he said.

Expressing his frustration over mismatch between income and expenditure, he said Power Development Board (PDB) is buying power at higher prices but selling them at lower prices. So, there is already a gap.

Moreover, Dhaka Electric Supply Authority (DESA) is buying power from PDB and not making payments. "How do you adjust with these types of situations?" he posed a question.

"If we could utilise for the power sector the money allocated for the annual development programme we would not even need assistance from the World Bank and Asian Development Bank," he said.

However, Talukdar said different problems facing the power sector today have been specifically identified and there will be a tremendous improvement in the power situation within the next 40 to 50 days.

"We need to improve the overall situation of the power sector for the sake of our economic development," the state minister said adding that electricity is now one of the indicators of development of a nation.

250 shanties

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informed the fire service of the incident soon after it began. "The loss in the fire would have been much less, had the fire fighters reached the spot earlier," said victim Rehan Ahmed.

FACTORY FIRE
Around 6:45pm yesterday, the fire fighters were still pumping water inside the seventh floor from a crane. Around 14 firefighting units were called to douse the fire.

Factory staffs alleged the fire spread to seventh floor around 10:30am yesterday due to negligence of the firemen. They alleged the fire spread when two of the firefighting units left the spot.

Witnesses said the incidents lay bare the serious dearth of necessary equipment of Fire Brigade and Civil Defence Department. They found it very difficult to reach water to the sixth and seventh floors due to lack of equipment to pump water to high-rise buildings.

"We faced difficulties in pump water to all the rooms on the seventh floor due to the walls. We could not even enter the rooms due to severe heat," said a fire fighter official seeking anonymity. He said they could not enter even after wearing fireproof jackets.

Meanwhile, Minister for Commerce Hafiz Uddin Ahmed visited the scene yesterday afternoon.

He said the owner of the factory assured him that he would move the factory to another place and continue to pay salaries to the workers and officials of the factory. He also asked the police not to allow anyone near the building as it may collapse anytime.

The fire caused extensive damage to the garment's machinery, accessories and readymade cloths. Golam Kabir Chowdhury, one of the owners of the Hong Kong-Bangladesh joint venture factory, said they initially estimate the loss to be between Tk 10 and 12 crore.

Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) has formed a three-member probe committee headed by the chairman of civil engineering department of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET).

President of BGMEA SM Fazul Haque said the factory was compliant to all the factory regulations.

ARF meet today

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growth rate of more than 6 percent for almost a decade.

He highlighted the initiatives of the present government in promoting education, empowerment of women and microcredit.

Mentioning that a large number of Bangladeshi students are studying in Australia, he wished to see the numbers to grow in the coming years, to which his counterpart responded positively.

Thai Deputy Prime Minister Dr Surakiart Sathirathai congratulated the Bangladesh foreign minister upon Bangladesh's joining the ARF.

Surakiart briefed him on Asean endorsement of his candidacy for the position of UN secretary general.

Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar shared with the Bangladesh foreign minister his concern over the crisis in Lebanon and the occupied territories as a result of Israeli aggression and atrocities.

They agreed on the urgency of an immediate and unconditional ceasefire stressing the mandated role of the UN Security Council.

Morshed thanked his Malaysian counterpart for their strong support for Bangladesh's entry into ARF. He appreciated Malaysia's decision to restart recruitment of workers from Bangladesh.

The two foreign ministers felt the need for ensuring a smooth recruitment process.

In his meeting with South Korean Foreign Minister Ban Ki Moon, the Bangladesh foreign minister stressed the economic cooperation and investment relations between the two countries.

They discussed regional and global security issues as well as matters relating to the election of the UN secretary general.

In the afternoon, Morshed along with the ARF foreign ministers called on Prime Minister of Malaysia Abdullah Bin Ahmad Badawi, where he conveyed the greetings of the prime minister of Bangladesh to her Malaysian counterpart.

CPA to protest

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mentioned 22 piracy incidents in the first six months of this year and termed Chittagong port most dangerous port in the world.

Actually, IMB often terms petty theft or stealing of ropes from ships as piracy even though piracy actually means armed robbery at sea, Hossain said when asked why IMB mentioned the 22 piracy incidents.

According to him, armed robbery at sea hardly ever happens in Bangladesh territory. The last two such incidents were recorded in 2004. There was no report of piracy in 2005 and 2006, he said.

However, 27 theft incidents or stealing ropes were recorded until July 12, this year.

The number of such petty thefts in the Chittagong port was 58 in 2003, 52 in 2004, and 28 in 2005.

The CPA chairman claimed the piracy incidents reduced significantly following regular patrol of coastguards on two patrol boats provided by the CPA.

CPA sources said the crew of foreign ships often sell the ropes and other valuables of the ship while remaining at the outer anchorage. They tell the ship authorities that those goods were stolen which is eventually referred to IMB.

The CPA also issued a notice informing all captains of the ships to submit a report whether there were any incidents of theft or stealing while remaining in the port or at outer anchorage.

The ships must submit the report before getting no objection certificate (NOC), said a high official of the CPA. In absence of any such incidents, the ships will also have to give an undertaking in this regard before leaving the port, he added.

The CPA called an anti-piracy meeting on August 4 to discuss the whole issue of piracy in Chittagong port. According to sources, the IMB report is very important as it is circulated worldwide tarnishing the image of the port and the country as well.

The former secretary of shipping Ismail Jabihullah in an international meeting protested the IMB piracy report as it often mentions petty theft or stealing as piracy.

Meanwhile, a meeting under Bangladesh chapter of International Ship and Port Security (ISPS) code held on July 20 this month did not find any reports of piracy at Chittagong port in the last two months.

The meeting discussed six incidents of stealing mooring ropes of ships while remaining anchored at the port.

Road march

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At least 10 people including five workers of 14-party opposition combine were injured when the JCD cadres attacked a road march in Madhupur upazila headquarter yesterday, reports our Tangail correspondent.

Several vehicles and shops were also damaged during the clashes.

The march led by local lawmaker Abdur Razzak started from near Madhupur Hospital at around 3:30pm and ended at Madhupur Bus Stand where they held a brief rally.

Armed cadres of JCD attacked the 14-party rally, leaving five injured, witnesses said.

After the JCD men vandalised the local AL office, the activists of opposition combine and JCD locked into clashes in which at least five more people including passers-by were injured.

Armed ruling party cadres attacked their peaceful road march programme without any instigation, said lawmaker Razzak.

The opposition's road march

was peacefully held in nine upazilas of Rajshahi district, reports our staff correspondent from Rajshahi. Several thousand party workers as well as common people spontaneously attended the marches.

Hundreds of people from 16 unions under Bagmara upazila held a brief rally on the upazila office premises.

Opposition leader Sardar Amjad Hossain, AHM Khairuzzaman Liton and Fazle Hossain Badsha led the march in Paba upazila.

Marches were also held in Godagari, Tanore, Durgapur, Puthia, Charghat and Bagha upazilas.

Our Chittagong correspondent adds: Hundreds of party workers participated in the peaceful road march to different thana headquarters in the port city yesterday.

The opposition combine held a big rally at Mukti Sarani under Mirersarai upazila at 4:00pm with former minister Mosharraf Hossain in the chair.

Another rally was held at Hathazari Bazar.

Gulshan plot

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"For the last 10 years, a project proposal for planned development of the lake and its proper demarcation is lying with the Planning Commission. Unless we start the process, these individuals will legally keep on building structures on the lake," he said.

But owners of plots along the lake yesterday told this correspondent that they received allocation from Rajuk. To substantiate their claim, they showed a Rajuk map indicating the plots.

Identifying himself as caretaker of a similar plot on Road- 26 measuring 10 kathas, one person said the plot bears holding number 20VA/1. The plot was clearly 'extracted' from the lake for making of a walkway. He showed a Rajuk map signed by its architect Nargis Tanzim and Town Planner Jahul Haque and Member (Planning) Nashir Uddin, dated, January 19, 2006. This was one of the proofs for genuine allocation of the plot, he said.

Throughout the lake area new plots are slowly emerging every day and new signboards are being put up. The owners are invariably well-equipped with documents for the

President urged

FROM PAGE 1
The July 22 roundtable resolution also asked the government to take immediate initiative for talks on the reforms of caretaker government system and Election Commission.

The resolution asked all political parties to nominate devoted and well-reputed candidates in the election and prevent unauthorised use of money and muscle power in the election.

Removal of the CEC and the two commissioners can be considered for their 'crime and inability', it said.

"Public money has been wasted as the voter list prepared earlier was not accepted and became unusable. The voter list was prepared in violation of the High Court verdict," it said, adding that the failure of the CEC and two commissioners is an assault on the constitution and structure of the democratic state.

Govt anomalies

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dominance over the judiciary.

Observing that the basic concept of the judgement and the constitution regarding separation of the judiciary had been overlooked, he requested the court to scrutinise the rules that contradict the objective of the 12-point SC directives.

Barrister Amir-UI Islam termed the government rules 'great fraud' committed against the constitution, court and the 12-point SC directives. By framing the rules the government has again committed contempt of court, he added.

In the name of competent authority, the ministry has been entrusted with control over the judiciary, he said noting that the judiciary will continue to be in the grip of the executive for the 'competent authority'.

He submitted that the judicial officers were compared with the first class gazetted executive officers. But the verdict had clearly stated that none of the judicial services could be compared or tied up with executive service.

The Daily Star

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an accident her mobility was greatly impaired and she had been bed-ridden for several months.

She is survived by her husband, Harun-ur-Rashid, a sub-editor of The Daily Star, parents, brothers, sisters and hosts of friends and well-wishers.

Poet Rafiq Azad is Novera's father.

We pray for salvation of her soul and eternal peace.

Opposition

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dialogue with the government and the opposition, Jalli alleged the government is making fun with the opposition in coming to a dialogue on the electoral reforms. 'There must be a dialogue... we'll realise our demand.'

He said the people have expressed their "no confidence in the alliance government by spontaneously joining the opposition's road march."

Addressing the meeting, Gono Forum President Dr Kamal Hossain alleged the BNP-Jamaat alliance government wants to stay in power with the help of evil forces, ignoring the people's power.

Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon said the opposition will announce a greater movement against the government. He termed the road march a rehearsal of such movement.

AL presidium member Amir Hossain Amu said if the government changes the present chief election commissioner under pressure from the opposition and appoints another CEC, the combined opposition will not accept such arbitrary change.

"The CEC will have to be appointed through consensus of the opposition parties"

AL presidium member Suranjit Sengupta MP alleged that at first, the BNP-Jamaat government had conspired to hold election without the 14-party. "Now it is conspiring to foil the election," he said.

Leaders of the 14-party combine Dilip Barua, Pankaj Bhattacharya, Syed Jafar Sajjad, Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya, Obaidul Quader and Haji Selim, among others, spoke at the meeting.

8 to die

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Mujibar Sheikh.

On April 3, 1999, chairman of Shurkhail union parishad under Batiaghata upazila Sheikh Mostafa Habib was gunned down and later slaughtered in the house of one Shukhlal Mondal.

Amena Begum, mother of the slain, lodged an FIR with Batiaghata Police Station naming nine persons and nine unidentified others for murdering her son.

Investigation Officer (IO) Sub-inspector Atiar Rahman of Batiaghata Police Station submitted charge sheet on April 4, 2002 accusing 12 persons.

On the charge sheet, the IO recorded that Sheikh Akram Hossain, the prime suspect, master-minded the murder after his rival Mostafa Habib defeated Akram in the UP election.

Saddam's first trial

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me that would be better than what you said to me before."

Bandar's stand-in lawyer made a brief statement in his defence, arguing that as a judge in a Saddam-era revolutionary court, his client had only done his duty in signing the Dujaill villagers' death warrants.

"He was a man applying the law and all the defendants were transferred to the revolutionary court legally," the lawyer said.

US legal expert Michael Newton said: "The judicial chamber will now consider all the evidence in light of the defence arguments made this week and the prosecution arguments to try to reach a judgment by the next trial session."

While the verdict in the Dujaill case is awaited, attention will turn to Saddam's next trial. On August 21 he is due to face prosecution for his role in his regime's bloody Anfal campaign against Iraq's Kurds in the early 1980s.

For the Dujaill case, Saddam's defence team was based in the Jordanian capital Amman, from where they periodically issued statements arguing that the trial was unfair and that it was unsafe for them to travel to Baghdad.

Court-appointed lawyers were brought in to ensure that the trial could not be stopped by the defence boycott and are advised by foreign legal experts.

"One of the big lessons of this first trial is how critical the IHT defence office is," said Newton, a professor at Vanderbilt Law School and an advisor on international law to the court's judges.

"There were several times in the trial where they stepped in to guarantee the due process rights to a fair trial when the retained counsel

weren't doing their job," he said, calling the defence boycott "shameful".

Saddam was not present at Thursday's final hearing, but had attended the previous day's hearing, where he refused to recognise the court appointed defence council or the court and called on Iraqis to fight US-led forces.

He also expressed a preference for the firing squad rather than the noose if he is found guilty, arguing that as a former military man -- he made himself a field marshal as president -- he deserved to die by a bullet.

The judges will be expected to decide on a method of execution if and when they reach a guilty verdict, officials said.

The defendants were captured at various times following Saddam's overthrow by a US-led invasion in April 2003, and are being held in US custody, but their trial is the responsibility of an Iraqi High Tribunal set up after the war.

Indo-US nuke
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V. Bush's Republican Party, soundly rejected an amendment that would have forced India to halt fissile material production as a condition of the nuclear deal.

The House also rejected an amendment that would forbid India from capitalising on a new ability to buy US nuclear fuel by diverting all its domestically produced uranium for weapons use. India now uses half of its domestic uranium for energy production and half for weapons, lawmakers said.

A surprise move to defer a vote until India did more to back US efforts to contain Iran failed by 235-193.

The Bush administration had warned such amendments would kill the deal, seen as crucial to an evolving strategic alliance between India and the United States, frequent Cold War adversaries.

But proponents said requiring India to halt production of weapons-related fissile material would help ensure US technology aided India's energy production, not bomb-making.

As a signatory to the NPT, the United States is obligated not to help India and other states advance their nuclear weapons programmes.

Lawmakers made clear US nuclear technology should only be used to meet India's growing energy demands, warning America's cooperation would end if India tested another nuclear weapon, as in 1998.

The deal has also faced criticism in India, with communist parties that shore up Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's coalition and the opposition Hindu nationalists accusing Washington of setting new terms in the legislation.

Lebanon battles rage

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to retrieve a third serviceman held captive by Palestinians militants.

A total of 24 Palestinians were killed on Wednesday alone in the bloodiest day since the offensive was launched in late June. A total of 140 have been killed since then.

Israel carried out new air strikes against the southern port city of Tyre, with rescue officials warning that dozens of people were trapped under rubble.

Olmert, who has said he was determined to press on with Israel's war on Hezbollah, proposed the creation of a security zone in Lebanon to protect its border but he insisted there was no question of another occupation.

He also said during a tour of northern Israel that the offensive would not "last months," but declined to give any timeframe.

Countries at the Rome meeting also agreed to hold multilateral talks soon on an international buffer force, an idea espoused by Rice who ended a lightning visit to the Middle East Tuesday.

Israel however, was not at the talks, nor were Syria or Iran, which both back Hezbollah and are accused by both the Jewish state and Washington of stoking the conflict.

Governments around the world expressed shock and anger at the deaths in the Israeli raid on Tuesday, which Annan said appeared to target the observer post.

"I am shocked and deeply distressed by the apparently deliberate targeting by Israeli Defence Forces of a UN observer post in southern Lebanon that has killed two UN military observers, with two more feared dead," Annan said.

Israel's UN ambassador Dan Gillerman said he was "surprised at these premature and erroneous assertions."

Olmert however phoned Annan and expressed "deep regrets" over the killing in Khiam, once the site of an infamous Israeli jail but now a Hezbollah stronghold, and said he would order a comprehensive inquiry.

Amid international outcry, the UN Security Council agreed to condemn the attack.

But UN ambassadors announced the failure to agree a statement following a day of intense haggling among the 15-nation council.

China, home to one of the dead soldiers of the UN mission in Lebanon, or Unifil, had originally demanded the statement condemn the attack. But the United States would not accept any criticism of its ally Israel, diplomats said.

The four dead observers were from Austria, Canada, China and Finland, a Lebanese security source said.

Washington has appeared increasingly isolated in its steadfast support for the Israeli campaign, facing accusations that it was allowing Israel the time to complete its aim of wiping out Hezbollah.

But there was also no sign of any let-up from Hezbollah, the fundamentalist Shia "Party of God" which was created after Israel's bloody invasion of Lebanon in 1982.

Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah vowed to hit back with rocket attacks into the heart of Israel as he made a new television appearance following repeated attempts by Israel to kill him in bombing raids.

Israel has repeatedly said it believes the Shia militant group has longer-range rockets capable of reaching beyond its third city, as far as the commercial capital Tel Aviv, or even the southern city of Beersheva.

Several rockets landed Wednesday on Haifa, wounding at least six people.

In a flickering sign of some relief for Lebanese trapped by Israel's blockade, a Jordanian military plane carrying UN humanitarian aid landed at Beirut airport and Unicef announced that a first convoy of humanitarian aid for children had arrived in Tyre.

Much of Lebanon's infrastructure lies in ruins from Israeli bombing and food, fuel and medical supplies have been disrupted with some 800,000 Lebanese displaced. The UN food body has warned of a "major food crisis".

Tens of thousands of foreigners have also fled, with Americans completing their final evacuation Wednesday. Most have been pulled out by land or sea with the airport closed to commercial traffic because of Israeli air strikes.