

Bush signs harsh terror trial bill

REUTERS, Washington

President George W Bush signed a law yesterday authorizing tough interrogation and prosecution of terrorism suspects and took an indirect, election-year swipe at Democrats who opposed the legislation.

Bush, trying to help Republicans maintain control of the U.S. Congress by emphasizing national security, called the Military Commissions Act of 2006 "one of the most important pieces of legislation in the war on terror."

Human rights groups charge that the measure would allow harsh techniques bordering on torture, such as sleep deprivation and induced hypothermia.

In a White House East Room ceremony, Bush praised members of Congress who approved the law over the opposition of the Democratic leadership in both the Senate and House of Representatives.

"Every member of the Congress who voted for this bill has helped our nation rise to the task that history has given us. Some voted to support this bill even when a majority of their party voted the other way," Bush said.

Much of the new law, which critics say still does not protect detainees' rights and predict will face legal challenge, was negotiated in September after senior Republicans rebelled against Bush's plan.

The new law means Bush can continue a secret CIA program for interrogating terrorism suspects whom he believes have vital information that could thwart a plot against America.

Bush said the law will allow intelligence professionals to question suspects without fear of being sued by their later.

"This bill spells out specific recognizable offenses that would be considered crimes in the handling of detainees so that our men and women who question captured terrorists can perform their duties to the fullest extent of the law," he said.

Razzaq restricts

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spins Pakistan's fightback, while spinners Shoab Malik (2-34) and Shahid Afridi bowled tight in middle overs to end Sri Lanka's early flourish.

Sanath Jayasuriya (48), Kumar Sangakkara (39), Upul Tharanga (38), Marvan Atapattu (36), skipper Mahela Jayawardene (31) and Farveez Maharoof (22) all got starts, but none could convert in into a big knock.

Jayawardene also became the fifth Sri Lankan to complete 6,000 runs in one-day internationals after Jayasuriya, Aravinda de Silva, Atapattu and Arjuna Ranatunga.

Sri Lanka could capitalise only on early overs after winning the toss as veteran left-handed opener Jayasuriya went on the rampage and dominated a 63-run stand for the opening wicket with in-form Tharanga.

Jayasuriya, making a joint-record 368th appearance in one-

days, treated the new-ball attack with contempt as he punished both Rana Naved and Rao Ittikhar during his 35-ball 48 which contained two sixes and five fours.

India's Sachin Tendulkar is the other batsman to play 368 one-days.

Jayasuriya hammered Naved for 17 runs in an over, including a six and two fours. He then hoisted Ittikhar for a straight six and a four.

The run-rate declined after Jayasuriya's departure as off-spinner Malik and leg-spinner Afridi shared three wickets in the space of 45 runs.

Malik had Jayawardene caught by Imran Farhat off a top-edged sweep before dismissing Sangakkara, who was caught by Ittikhar at long-off after hitting five fours in his 47-ball knock.

Pakistan did not allow Sri Lanka to make the most of the last 10 overs as they conceded just 40 runs.

Caretaker govt

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ministries, told The Daily Star on condition of anonymity.

Many former advisers forecast a very tough time for the next caretaker government as nothing is certain yet about who will lead the interim government.

They observed that the next interim government will have to face difficulties to depoliticise the highly politicised civil and police administration for the sake of creating a level playing field.

"In view of the shortage of time and preparation, I personally believe, it will be rather difficult for the caretaker government to fulfil its constitutional obligations to create a peaceful atmosphere for holding a free and fair election," former adviser to the caretaker government Major General (ret'd) Moinul Hossain Chowdhury told The Daily Star.

"As the BNP and Awami League are still discussing the appointment of the chief of the caretaker government, there is an element of uncertainty about who will lead the interim caretaker administration," Moinul, who led a number of ministries including the home ministry in the immediate past caretaker government, said.

"Besides, appointment of the chief adviser and other advisers cannot be done overnight and these people will need orientation; they will also need to collect information and other necessary details to run the day-to-day administrative work and assist the Election Commission," he observed.

Echoing the view, former adviser ASM Shajahan said, "The constraint of time must be a big factor for the caretaker government, the main task of which is to assist the Election Commission and create a congenial

Hassan issue

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in accordance with the Constitution. And the president can go for other alternatives as per the Constitution if Hasan refuses to take oath.

In the context of the prevailing political situation, political observers are doubtful if the people would be able to celebrate the ensuing Eid-ul-Fitr in an atmosphere free from apprehension of political confrontations.

Some of them however expressed guarded optimism about success of the sixth round of parley between BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil scheduled for October 23. "The people will heave a sigh of relief before the Eid if the two leaders can come up with the breaking news of resolving their differences over Hassan issue," one observer noted.

The dialogue that began on October 5 claimed progress after each round but finally on October 16 left the Hassan issue to be settled on return of the prime minister and the leader of the opposition. Khaleda returns from Saudi Arabia on October 21 and Hasina will be back from US on October 23.

Bhuiyan and Jalil resume talk on the day public holiday for the Eid begins—October 23. The Eid holiday ends on October 25 while the tenure of the present government expires on October 27.

Wrapping up the fifth round of negotiation on Monday, Bhuiyan and Jalil claimed they have reached a stage where they need approval of their respective party chiefs and consultation with their parties and alliances to finalise the decision.

But no one knows on which point they have reached a consensus as they did not give details about their talks. This has triggered apprehension in public mind whether the dialogue will be a success.

Many political analysts believe the dialogue may not reach any decision to break the stand off during the tenure of this government. To substantiate their belief, they noted that the ruling coalition does not want to see the opposition parties celebrate their 'political victory' at the tag end of this government's tenure.

Sweden Aslam

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Judge SM Mujibur Rahman of the First Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court handed down the sentence in presence of Aslam and three others at a packed courtroom.

The convicts are Abul, Babul, Shakil alias Shaikhya, Abul Mannan alias Roni, Babu alias Badal and Harun-Ur-Rashid. Of them, Shakil and Babu were present in the court during the delivery of the verdict while Abul, Babul, Mannan and Harun were tried in absentia. Another acquitted Anwaruzzaman alias Anwar is also in the custody.

In his verdict, the judge said that the prosecution failed to prove the allegations against the acquitted while the charges brought against other six were proved. The punishment of the fugitives will be effective from the day of their arrest or surrender, he added.

Earlier, the prosecution and the defence completed their arguments and the court recorded statements of 13 prosecution witnesses.

According to the prosecution, one of the accused, Mannan, called Mohammad Ali out of his house at East Rajabazar in the city's Tejgaon at about 11:30am on March 29, 1996 and took him to a nearby place where his accomplices Shakil, Abul, Babul, Babu and Harun shot him dead.

Victim's elder brother Delwar Hossain filed a murder case against Mannan and five others the same day and the investigation officer pressed charges against Sweden Aslam and seven others on February 10, 1998.

Court sources said, 14 other criminal cases are also pending with different courts in the city against Sweden Aslam.

Nobel hero

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The Nobel laureate will return home on October 31.

Prof Yunus received over 60 national and international awards before winning the Nobel Peace Prize 2006.

Meanwhile, Pakistan Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz has congratulated Prof Muhammad Yunus on winning the Nobel Peace Prize 2006.

He said it is a befitting recognition of the innovative banking concepts and the remarkable services rendered by Prof Yunus in alleviating poverty not only in Bangladesh but also in many other developing and developed countries, according to a message received in Dhaka yesterday.

Extending heartiest felicitations to the Nobel hero, the Pak premier said the prize is an honour not only for Prof Yunus and Bangladesh but also for the entire developing world.

He said the innovative methods of micro-credit introduced by Prof Yunus have helped millions of people across the world pull themselves out of the vicious circle of poverty on self-help basis.

Shaukat Aziz said Pakistan has benefited tremendously from the Grameen Model. "I am personally grateful to Prof Yunus for his constant help in introducing micro-credit in Pakistan," he added.

20 top defaulters

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banks concerned will get rid of the burden of huge defaulted loans."

The BJMC's outstanding loan amounts to Tk 699 crore with Tk 234 crore of it defaulted.

While the BTMC has outstanding loan of Tk 196 crore and the whole amount is classified.

Chittagong Jute Mills has a total classified loan of Tk 86 crore while the closed down Khulna Newspaper Mills' total outstanding loan is Tk 77 crore with Tk 72 crore of it defaulted.

Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation's (BADC) total outstanding loan is Tk 75 crore, all of it defaulted. A court has asked the bank concerned to arrange auction against the BADC to realise the money but it will be difficult since the BADC is a government entity.

The banks concerned repeatedly sent letters to the defaulting government entities asking them to reschedule the loans with no response as yet. The finance ministry recently took an initiative to repay the defaulted loans but it is not certain when that will be done.

Another top defaulter with government guarantee for its loan - Bangladesh Autorickshaw Chalak Samity, a cooperative society of autorickshaw operators - has an outstanding loan of Tk 77 crore, and the total amount is defaulted. A banking source said the loan was given from three nationalised commercial banks (NCBs) with guarantee for it by the previous government.

Sources said the committee that took the loan on behalf of the samity no longer exists, and a new committee has been formed. A case has been filed against the previous committee. The new committee has applied for fresh loan and waving of interest on the defaulted loan but the bank concerned will not entertain the fresh application of new loan.

Among the private defaulters, Beximco group is at the top. Shinepukur Holdings Ltd, one of its enterprises, has Tk 138 crore outstanding loans, of which Tk 101 crore is defaulted.

Besides, Beximco Engineering

Ltd, another subsidiary of the group, has Tk 52 outstanding loan with the whole amount defaulted.

According to Sonali Bank sources, Shinepukur Holdings deposited Tk 15 crore to the bank for rescheduling its loan. The company will deposit another Tk 35 crore for this. "We are expecting another Tk 35 crore from Shinepukur," said a high official of the bank.

A trial is now going on against Riverside Leather and Footwear Ltd of late Maulana Abdul Mannan as the company has an outstanding loan of Tk 80 crore with the total amount classified.

Shamsul Al-Amin Cotton Mills Ltd, an enterprise of a former Awami League lawmaker, has Tk 88 crore outstanding loan and Tk 77 crore of the amount is defaulted. His sons are now negotiating with Sonali Bank to reschedule the loan, seeking waiving of interest.

Desma Shoe Industries, owned by Mohammad Ali, senior vice-president of the FBCCI, has an outstanding loan of Tk 56 crore, totally defaulted. Sonali Bank filed a case several years ago to recover the amount but failed to do so.

Dhaka Jute Mills Ltd, owned by a BNP lawmaker, has Tk 59 crore outstanding loan, all of it defaulted. The company is now negotiating with another business group to sell out the entity and repay the loan.

Mainamati Textiles Mills, owned by Hasan Yusuf Jamil, has an outstanding loan of Tk 51, wholly defaulted. Agrani Bank has written off the loan and also filed a case against the borrower. On the other hand, the borrower has filed a writ petition against the bank.

The other defaulters on the list of top 20 are Phoenix Leather Complex with Tk 69 crore classified loans, Lina Textile Tk 68 crore, Dosh Beverage Company Ltd Tk 62 crore, Protein Foods Ltd Tk 50 crore, Sreepur Textile Mills Ltd Tk 50 crore and Lexco Ltd Tk 50 crore defaulted loans.

Sircar tells

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forum. With heartfelt thanks in anticipation of dropping the matter," he said in his reply to the July 20, 2006 letter of the IPU, the international organisation of Parliaments of sovereign States.

The speaker sent his letter to the IPU during its ongoing conference on October 16-18 in Geneva. In the reply he also lauded the government's initiatives to probe the grenade attack that killed 23 AL leaders and activists and injured several hundred including a number of lawmakers.

"The government of Bangladesh has made every effort to unearth the real culprits. Thorough investigation, by high officials of the home department is continuing. It is regrettable that neither at the investigation stage nor any other stage did Awami League leaders extend any manner of cooperation for a fully-fledged investigation," the speaker continued.

The resolution, which was conveyed to the speaker, affirms that "attempts on the life of a parliament member stand as a threat to all members of that parliament and, ultimately, to the institution of parliament as such and to the people it represents."

It also considers that "the parliament of Bangladesh has a vested interest in closely following the investigations into the grenade attack of 21 August 2004 in order to ensure due administration of justice..."

Sources in the Jatiya Sangsad Secretariat said the speaker was scheduled to attend the Geneva IPU conference. The parliament secretariat was also making preparations in this regard, but Sircar suddenly cancelled his visit to Geneva.

His personal secretary went to Geneva as the assistant official of the Bangladesh parliament delegation along with the secretary to the parliament secretariat, the sources added.

The delegation led by BNP lawmaker Ziaur Rahman Khan includes BNP lawmaker Lt Gen (ret'd) Mahbubur Rahman, Rabeya Chowdhury, Jatiya Party lawmaker Rawshan Ershad and Jamaat-e-Islami lawmaker Mia Golam Parwar.

Judicial enquiry

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of the security guards of National Shooting Federation, asked the chauffeur of DIG Dr Sadiqur Rahman to park the four-wheel-drive vehicle to another place when the driver was attempting to park it in front of the federation complex at 12:15pm.

But the chauffeur Havidar Abdul Khaleq became angry with the guard and was locked in an argument with him, which soon turned into a scuffle. Other guards and employees of the complex came out and joined the confrontation while the chauffeur asked the on-duty patrol police of the area for help.

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A three-member police patrol team led by Sub-inspector Jasim rushed to the spot with North Zone Deputy Commissioner of Police Obaidur Rahman Khan, Assistant Commissioner Zannatul Hasan and OC of Gulshan Police Station Mahbub Alam Khan.

GP taking internet

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remained untapped and GSM will be the main access method for data transfer and internet in the future. Besides, GSM will also be used for money transfer and payments.

"The CIC will be useful for health, education and self-employment," he added.

Currently Bangladesh has 5.9 lakh fixed Internet users while the government policy targets delivering broadband internet to all villages by 2015.

The country has 2.9 million personal computers, 15 million mobile subscribers and 1.4 million fixed telephones. Of the 15 million mobile subscribers, Grameen alone claims 9.5 million.

As noted that Bangladesh has 4 million workers abroad, each of them sending home \$100 per month. The expatriates are eager to stay in touch with their families in rural areas, but due to absence of infrastructure, internet communication facilities cannot be offered widely. The CIC is addressing this issue.

The CIC is a business venture, not a charity. It demands investment of only \$10,000 to \$14,000 each. Each centre can serve 30,000 to 40,000 people of 10 to 15 villages.

As pointed out that it is easier to set up the internet access using GSM technology than fixed lines. Therefore in the near future GSM will serve as the main access method for data exchange.

The GSMA Development Fund is also being used for development of other social and environmental initiatives that may or may not be directly linked with mobile phone operation. According to GSMA Director of Strategic Initiative Ben Soppitt, an environment friendly and cost-efficient bio fuels programme is being implemented under GSMA fund in Nigeria and the same will be implemented soon in India and Bangladesh.

Outlaw killed

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also known as a loyal hit man of local BNP lawmaker Reza Ahmed Bachchu Mollah.

According to the Rab 12 statement, a Rab team arrested Majnu from his house at Charsadipur, 45 kilometres off Kushtia town, on Monday evening.

He was taken to Kushtia for interrogation at Rab Kushtia office where he confessed to having firearms hidden in different areas.

Later, Rab took him along to Charsadipur village to retrieve firearms.

As they reached Charsadipur at around 3:30am, the gangsters from Lachad Bahini opened fire on the Rab team and Rab returned fire resulting in a half-hour-long gunfight.

Majnu was caught in 'crossfire' and died on the spot as he tried to escape Rab custody, claimed Rab.

Rab recovered a pistol and three bullets from the spot.

Majnu was accused in several cases including three for murders, said police.

So far, a total of 112 alleged criminals, highest across the country, have been killed in Kushtia since June 2004.

Lanka hits back

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Monday's bombing exceeded the January 1996 bombing of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka where 91 people were killed.

It also came in the wake of a battlefield defeat for government forces in the north of the island last week.

More than 2,300 people have been killed in Sri Lanka in spiralling violence since December, putting an end to a truce agreed in February 2002.

Addict kills uncle

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uncle with hammer on the head. As Afsar was crying out for help, Jewel also stabbed him in the abdomen, police said.

Witnessing the incident, the next-door neighbours shouted 'robber, robber', prompting other neighbours to rush to the spot and close the door of the house from outside confining Jewel. Later, police came and arrested Jewel inside the house.

The police also recovered the bodies of Afsar and his wife Tajira from the room. They also seized a hammer, a chisel, a knife and Tk 1,000, which Jewel took breaking open his aunt's wardrobe, police said.

Police also said that they will produce Jewel before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka today.

100 injured

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10:00am with truncheons in their hands and their demonstration went on for about an hour.

After the procession reached the Bipile crossing, police and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) charged on the procession at about 11:00am leading to a chase and counter chase leaving around 100 workers and several law enforcers injured.

Officer-in-Charge of Ashulia Police Station Obaidul Hoque said he had no alternative but to charge batons as hundreds were about to attack the garment factories.

The clash triggered panic in the area and many factories at Jamgora, Bipile and EPZ area were closed down. Local businesses were also shut down for several hours during and after the clash.

Nat'l reception

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A preparatory committee was also formed with Khandoker Ibrahim Khaleid, former deputy governor of Bangladesh Bank and managing director of Pubali Bank, as the convener, while Nasiruddin Yusuf, Khushi Kabir, Anisul Huq and Debapriya Bhattacharya were made co-conveners.

A meeting was held yesterday at the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), which will function as the secretariat of the committee.

The meeting was presided over by Laila Rahman Kabir, member of CPD Board of Trustees and managing director of Keadarpur Tea Company Ltd, and was attended by Dr Qazi Faruque Ahmed, president of PROSHIKA and chairman of ADAB, Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed, managing director of PKSF, Aminul Alam, deputy executive director of BRAC, Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, Rasheda K Choudhury, director of CAMPE, Dr Zafarullah Chowdhury, project co-ordinator of Gonoshasthya Kendro, Dr Omar Haider Chowdhury, research director of BIDS, Anisul Huq, former president of BGMSEA, Dr Muhammad Ibrahim, executive director of Centre for Mass Education in Science, Dr Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh, M Tajul Islam, director, Federation of NGOs in Bangladesh, Khondkar Ibrahim Khaleid, former managing director of Pubali Bank, Dr Wajedul Islam Khan, general secretary of Bangladesh Trade Union Kendra, Ayesha Khanam, general secretary of Bangladesh Mohila Parishad, Dewan Mallik of Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies, Ma Momen, president of DCCI, Mustafa Monowar, chairman of EPDC, Dr Ainun Nishat, country representative of International Union for Conservation of Nature, Dr Faustina Pereira, director of Ain-o-Salish Kendra, Matiur Rahman, editor of the Prothom Alo, Dr Atiur Rahman, chairman of Unnayan Samannya, Latifur Rahman, president of Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry and managing director of Transcom Group, Alaus Samad,

advisory editor of the Amar Desh, Khairul Anam Shakil, general secretary of Chhayarat, Dr Meghna Guho Thakurta, executive director of RIB, Nasiruddin Yusuf, president of Sammilito Sanskritik Jote, Prof Mustafizur Rahman, research director, and Anisatul Fatema Yousuf, additional director, of CPD, also attended the meeting.

The next meeting of the preparatory committee will take place today at the CPD.

DCC ACCORD Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) will also accord a civic reception to Dr Mohammad Yunus on November 3, reports UNB.

Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka met Yunus at his Grameen Bank office in Mirpur yesterday and extended the invitation.

Accepting the invitation, Yunus told the mayor the caretaker government is supposed to take over by Nov 3 and it would be better if advisers to the caretaker government are present at the reception.

British troops pull out of Afghan district

AFP, Kabul

British troops were yesterday pulling out of a previously Taliban-infested district in southern Afghanistan at the request of officials and tribal elders, the Nato-led force said.

The move in the once-volatile district of Musa Qala in the southern province of Helmand was a first for Nato's International Security Assistance Force that is battling Taliban extremists waging an intense insurgency.

Helmand province governor Mohammad Daud said there had been no deal with the Taliban and rejected a reported statement by the rebel group that the Afghan flag would no longer fly in the district.

"The British military is pulling out of Musa Qala at the wish of governor Daud and with the agreement of tribal elders," a spokesman for the Nato-led International Security Assistance Force told AFP.

The move would involve about 120 British soldiers, he said.

The governor said the district leadership had also been changed, at the request of the tribal elders. "They asked for good governors," he said.

BB rejects

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owners enjoying management's support.

The BB board members were informed at yesterday's meeting about the findings of the investigation on financial irregularities in Oriental Bank, sources said.

A central bank director told The Daily Star they questioned the BB's supervision of commercial banks when some unscrupulous people at the Oriental siphoned off huge money despite the 'so-called' strong monitoring. In response to the board members' queries, the BB authorities told the meeting they would form a committee to review the existing monitoring system, he said.

"Steps will be taken on the basis of the review committee's recommendations," a high official of the central bank said.

The Oriental board in its appeal said they took the charge in November 2004 and did not interfere in the day-to-day affairs in operating the bank. On the other hand, CM Koyes Sami claimed the bank's performance improved under his management.

However, BB officials told the board members the magnitude of corruption in case of the Oriental Bank has beat all of those in the past.

The investigation found involvement of the Oriental Bank's owners and management in misappropriating Tk 596 crore when they siphoned off the money showing false vouchers.

The entire sum of Tk 596 crore was drawn between 2003 and 2006, mostly during 2005-2006, until the

Korea nuclear test

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Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill as he arrived for crisis talks in Seoul.

China's foreign ministry spokesman Liu Jianchao said Beijing would "resolutely oppose" a second nuclear test by its neighbour.

US Under Secretary of State Nicholas Burns said China was already taking action to check goods crossing into North Korea.

But China's worries about the possible collapse of the impoverished and highly militarised state on its border has prompted concern it may not rigorously enforce sanctions.

China's UN Ambassador said on Monday his country would carry out inspections to spot any suspicious arms from North Korea, but ruled out interdiction, an apparent reference to stopping cargo on the high seas.

"Inspections yes, but inspections are different from interception and interdiction," ambassador Wang Guangya told reporters.

The resolution did not make it mandatory for nations to inspect cargo to and from North Korea, he said.

Spokesman Liu said Beijing, as a permanent member of the Security Council, always strictly enforced its resolutions.

Liu declined to comment on Japanese media reports that China