

Pakistan an important ally in war on terror: US

AFP, Kabul

Pakistan is an important ally in the "war on terrorism" and committed to the fight, a top US official said Thursday amid disquiet in Afghanistan about its neighbours' efforts against militants.

The United States supported the efforts of governments on both sides of the border to defeat extremism and boost development, the US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs, Richard Boucher, said.

"Pakistan is a very important ally in the fight against terrorism," he said.

"There are successes on both sides of the border, there are strong commitments on both sides of the border to deal with extremism ... there are also challenges on both sides of the border," he said.

"It is clear to me none of us will be safe unless we deal with both sides of the border... we are all in this together."

Boucher met Afghan President Hamid Karzai and Nato military

commanders during his visit to Afghanistan. He was due to leave for Pakistan later Thursday for similar talks.

The diplomat refused to comment on the latest row between the neighbours over Pakistan's plan to mine and fence parts of the shared frontier to stop the cross-border movement of fighters feeding a Taliban-led insurgency here.

Afghanistan has strongly objected, telling Pakistan to instead do more against the training camps and circles supporting extremist rebels.

Relations between the countries plummeted last year amid similar bickering over the insurgency, which was its bloodiest in 2006 with more than 4,000 people left dead, most of them rebels.

Boucher said he understood the border mining issue was "still under discussion" in Pakistan, which he said was committed to improving control of its tribally administered areas along the border through military, government and development means.

Emergency declared

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proclamation of emergency can be revoked by the president by a subsequent proclamation.

Although the president in the proclamation did not specify the timeframe for the enforcement of the emergency, it shall cease to operate at the expiry of 120 days unless it is approved by a resolution of parliament before the expiry.

The state of emergency was last declared on November 27, 1990 during the regime of autocratic military ruler HM Ershad and it was in effect until December 6, the day Ershad resigned from presidency following a mass upsurge.

POLITICAL CRISIS
The political crisis started to deteriorated from January 3 after the AL-led grand alliance's declaration to boycott and resist the January 22 elections. The grand alliance, at a public meeting on Wednesday, announced a series of agitation programmes including blockades, hartals and besiege programmes.

Donor agencies and diplomats continued to mount pressure on the caretaker government and the political parties to resolve the ongoing crisis. They also warned that the elections would not be acceptable without the participation of all political parties.

Seven envoys yesterday restarted their effort, which had failed earlier, to end the political crisis. The envoys who are collectively known as the Tuesday Group met Awami League General Secretary Abdul Jalil and his counterpart Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan separately.

US Ambassador Patricia Butenis and British High Commissioner Anwar Choudhury were among the envoys who joined a meeting at the Canadian High Commissioner Barbara Richardson's house in Baridhara.

CONSTITUTION ON PROCLAMATION OF EMERGENCY

141A. Proclamation of Emergency:
1. If the president is satisfied that a grave emergency exists in which the security or economic life of Bangladesh, or any part thereof, is threatened by war or external aggression or internal disturbance, he may issue a Proclamation of Emergency:
Provided that such proclamation shall require for its validity the prior counter signature of the prime minister.

2.A Proclamation of Emergency:
(a) May be revoked by a subsequent proclamation;
(b) Shall be laid before parliament;
(c) Shall cease to operate at the expiration of one hundred and twenty days, unless before the expiration of that period it has been approved by a resolution of the parliament:
Provided that if any such proclamation is issued at a time when parlia-

Censorship

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office gave them the verbal instructions on the matter and to convey the order to the media.

A high official at Bangabhaban on condition of anonymity told The Daily Star that the restrictions have been imposed as it had been during previous emergency periods.

The government directed the private electronic media not to broadcast news during the emergency. It also barred the media from telecasting any sort of talk-show or news analysis.

The private TV channels will only air the Bangladesh Television (BTV) news through their satellites, said sources.

It also asked the print media not to publish any news item criticising the government and its activities. Furthermore, political news including rallies, processions and related pictures, features, editorials, cartoons have also been banned.

The official orders will be issued soon, the PID official added.

This is the first time such censorship has been imposed on the press since the restoration of democracy in 1991. The last emergency was imposed during the regime of autocratic president HM Ershad.

Container

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They also urged political parties to resolve crises through dialogues and compromises instead of resorting to agitation programmes.

In a statement, BJSA Chairman Sabbir Eusuf yesterday said due to the container and ship congestion at Chittagong port, the country's exports and imports have become stagnant.

Highlighting the scarcity of diesel fuel caused by political agitation programmes, he apprehended that the country's 51 export-oriented jute spinning-mills would have to be shut down soon as their stock of diesel, required to run their power-generators, is running dry.

If the mills start shutting down, around 45,000 workers would be unemployed and thousands of families would suffer, he said adding that the situation might lead to workers' unrest.

The market for Bangladesh's jute-thread might be in the grasp of its competitors of neighbouring countries, Sabbir noted.

The statement also said, "If the present condition continued, the crises would deepen and the achievements the country made so far can not be kept intact."

Criminal killed

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Sensing the presence of the Rab men, Kala's cohorts opened fire, forcing the elite force to retaliate.

Rab sources said Kala received bullets during the "shootout" and died instantly, while his cohorts managed to flee. The law enforcers retrieved one light gun one pistol and two bullets from the spot.

Gagging

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President was repeatedly saying that he was acting.

Today we cannot understand why this restricting verbal order has been issued against the media. We find the verbal nature of the order to be against the public interest and suspect the action is the brainchild of some particular officials and not of the government. Any order of a government is always written. Since it is not a written order we cannot consider it to have the backing of the law. This move cannot serve the cause of betterment of the country and definitely not the cause of democracy. If holding a free and fair election is the ultimate end of the emergency then gagging the press is the exact antithesis of that end. There cannot be any public choice, public exercise of free judgement and practice of democracy with a censored press.

When there are so many problems to address, so many wrongs to right, so many manipulators of the election process to bring to book, so many abusers of power to identify and expose, the first action of emergency was a verbal order to gag the press.

Today one of the best achievements of Bangladesh is its free, responsible and independent press. The people feel proud of their media and the world rightfully praises and respects Bangladesh for that achievement. What an irony it will be if it should be the first victim of the new dispensation!

We believe this move to be against the interest of democracy and of Bangladesh. Just as mistakes after mistakes have brought us to this stage of political crisis, the decision of gagging the press is nothing but a continuation of those mistaken decisions. We demand an immediate verbal withdrawal of this decision, an apology to those who are responsible for giving such a verbal order. Let the media continue to play its constructive and facilitating role to resolve the present political crisis. Friends of democracy never gag the press, only autocrats do. The people of Bangladesh will never accept autocrats.

Ershad's case

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the defence lawyers were ready to take part in the hearing.

Earlier, the court recorded statements of seven prosecution witnesses and examined Ershad where he pleaded not guilty and demanded justice before the court.

A team of customs officials held four people including two foreign nationals at Zia International Airport on July 17, 1990 when they were attempting to smuggle around 3.6 kg gold worth about Tk 2.5 crore into Bangladesh, the prosecution said.

The same day, a smuggling case was filed against the four— Bernhard Rudiger of Germany, David Anthony Chalmar Chaker of England, the then manager of the Zia International Airport major (ret'd) Ashraf Uddin Sekender and Abu Taher, an airport security guard with the Cantonment Police Station.

The four were convicted and sent to prison on different terms on May 14, 1992.

During the investigation, the investigation officer found evidence of Ershad's involvement in the smuggling and his name was included in the charge sheet.

The trial against Ershad could not start due to a stay order from the High Court.

Ershad was acquitted and discharged of four graft cases in the last two months after his announcement to join the four-party alliance, sources said.

EC threatens

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Graham Elson told the press conference, "The decision to suspend the EOM is a logical consequence of the unfortunate circumstances which are presently governing the holding of the parliamentary elections. It is not the business of observer teams to scrutinise elections whose credibility falls short of international standards."

The EOM will wrap up its activists by this Sunday, including the 1.5 million euro (Tk 29 crore) project for raising awareness among voters, after looking into the lack of transparency, a "contentious" voter list and impartiality of the administration, Elson said.

Flowein said his delegation was given the duty to inform through the media that European Commission's External Relations Commissioner Dr Ferrero-Walden decided Wednesday to suspend all EOM activities.

Expressing his disappointment at the failure of the political stakeholders to reach an agreement towards a democratic and credible elections, Flowein said, "This stands as a disservice to the democratic aspirations of the people of Bangladesh and feeds harmful instability and tragic violence."

In a message, Ferrero-Walden referred to "major efforts...undertaken by the EU and other international partners" to urgently work towards an election process that meets international standards and the rights of Bangladeshis, saying, "Unfortunately, these have not been successful to date."

The message added that in view of this and also because of the decision of major parties to withdraw from participating in the January 22 elections, it has become clear that the EOM cannot be pursued as hoped.

The decision to withdraw EOM was taken after extensive discussions with EU partners and Chief Observer Alexander Graf Lambsdorff.

Flowein said the decision was taken in light of the standards stipulated in the UN's International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, which states that elections have to be genuinely participated by political parties and genuinely contested. "The standards are not of that level," he said.

UN
"The announced cancellation of numerous international observation missions is regrettable. The United Nations has had to suspend all technical support to the electoral process, including by closing its International Coordination Office for Election Observers in Dhaka," a spokesperson of the UN secretary-general said in a statement.

"The United Nations is deeply concerned by the deteriorating situation in the country, and urges all parties to refrain from the use of violence. It is hoped that the army will continue to play a neutral role, and that those responsible for enforcing the law act with restraint and respect for human rights."

"The United Nations urges the non-party caretaker Government and Election Commission to create a level playing field and ensure parties can have confidence in the electoral process."

"The United Nations is concerned that Bangladesh's democratic advances and international standing will be negatively affected if the current crisis continues. It urges all concerned to seek a compromise that

will serve the interests of peace, democracy and the country's overall well-being," the statement said.

UK
British Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett called on the caretaker government and the Election Commission to create the right atmosphere and effective mechanisms required to bring all parties to participate in the elections.

"I call on the Caretaker Government and the Election Commission to create the right atmosphere and effective mechanisms, which will make all parties feel able to participate in elections," Beckett stated in a statement released in London.

"I have noted with concern the decision of some of the major parties to boycott the elections in Bangladesh on January 22. I regret the lack of flexibility, which has brought this about," she said, adding, "The people of Bangladesh deserve the right to elect a government that reflects the popular will in free, fair, credible, peaceful and universally accepted elections."

Beckett urged the political parties "to look to the greater interests of Bangladesh and work constructively to resolve their differences while exercising restraint and refraining from political violence."

UNB adds: British High Commissioner to Bangladesh Anwar Choudhury met with Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad at the latter's Baridhara residence and expressed concern over the decision of some of the major political parties to boycott the January 22 elections.

Asked if the next government elected through the January 22 election would get any legitimacy, Choudhury said, "The British foreign secretary is saying that elections need to be free, fair and credible and obviously it is our concern that this is not the case."

The high commissioner also urged all parties to try to find a way forward at this very late hour so that "we can have a free, fair and credible elections. And we can have a situation where we don't have this level of violence and so much so many people are at risk."

In reply to a question, he said, "We understand it is getting very late in the day but we don't give up and still some way could be found to settle the problem."

Asked about a possible solution, Choudhury said this is an issue of Bangladesh and Bangladeshi politicians and people must find it out. "Being a foreign country, we cannot interfere into it."

"As a development partner what we can say [is that] we stand for democracy, development, peace and stability in Bangladesh and that's the British government's position," he added.

Asked whether the British development aid would be affected if there is no credible government in the country, the envoy said, "We are looking at all these issues. At this moment, I can't say anything but they will be looked at."

The British high commissioner had a nearly 40-minute meeting with Ershad discussing the current political situation. Jatiya Party Presidium member Barrister Anisul Islam Mahmud was present at the meeting.

Indian serial killer suspect admits sex with dead bodies

AFP, New Delhi

A suspect in the gruesome murders of 17 people, mostly children, near the Indian capital has told investigators he had sex with the dead bodies and ate their organs, a report said yesterday.

The Times of India said Surender Koli admitted to carrying out the crimes alone and that his employer, businessman Moninder Singh Pandher, who has also been arrested and charged, was unaware of the killing spree.

The grisly revelations emerged after the two accused were subjected to "narco-analysis" — including truth drugs, polygraph tests and brain mapping — at a national forensic laboratory.

Results of the tests are not admissible as evidence in court, but are designed to help police with their investigation.

Residents say at least 38 people, mostly children, have disappeared from the area, and that police had ignored their complaints that the children were missing. The killings have dominated the front pages of all newspapers.

The two were arrested on December 29 in New Delhi's affluent Noida suburb after an overwhelming stench led to the discovery of carefully chopped-up body parts in a drain next to Pandher's home.

But Pandher was apparently unaware that his servant used sweets and chocolates to lure the victims to the house, before killing them and raping their bodies, the Times of India said.

Koli, who previously worked as a cook in a hotel, narrated how and when he killed his 17 victims with precision. He also remembered the names of 15 victims, the newspaper said, quoting unnamed investigators involved in the tests.

"Sahab (master) did not know," Koli was quoted as telling investigators,

adding the murders were committed when Pandher was away.

Asked what he had done with the missing torsos of the victims, Koli disclosed that he ate some of the organs and cut up others and flushed them down the toilet. The dismembered parts were disposed of separately.

Koli said his first victim was a four-year-old girl. He admitted to trying to eat the child's liver, but said he vomited immediately.

His co-accused, meanwhile, emerged from the tests as a womaniser who used Koli as a pimp to find him prostitutes.

Pandher's family said the reports of the narco-analysis test results were a relief.

"I had always thought Surendra (Koli, the servant) was behind all this. My father used to be out of town for long periods on business," Pandher's 23-year-old son, Karan, told the newspaper.

Police in Noida had been investigating whether organ trade was a motive for the killings because the torsos of the victims were not found and only their skulls, limb bones and clothes were recovered from the sewer near Pandher's house.

But according to the Times of India, Koli might have been trying to cure his "impotency".

India's federal Central Bureau of Investigation said it would begin its probe into the case from Thursday.

"Our director Vijay Shanker has said that we received a notification from the federal government asking us to begin a probe into the killings," a spokesman for the agency told AFP.

"Our office received the notification yesterday (Wednesday) evening," he said, adding the agency will attach the "highest priority to the case" and "probe its entire ramifications."

Ex-BNP MP Pintu

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group of Jubo Dal and Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) leaders and activists led by Pintu attacked the activists of Jubo League when they were pasting posters in favour of Awami League leader Haji Selim on the wall at the Palasi crossing at around 11:30am on December 29 last year.

Pintu along with his four bodyguards picked up Jubo League leader Sarwar Hossain Tipu from the spot and injured him by ruthlessly beating with a firearm.

Following the information, law enforcement agencies including Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) rescued the victim. The next day, an Awami League activist Erfan filed an attempted murder case with Lalbagh Police Station against Pintu and eight others.

Mokhles

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them over phone to include books of that particular publisher for class six to nine beside the board books.

Narayanganj district administration sources said a person from Niloy Prokashani came to Deputy Commissioner (DC) Ahsan Habib on Monday with a letter where the president's adviser Mokhlesur Rahman recommended the books of that publisher beside board books.

The DC sent the letter to the ADC's (education) office from where the instructions were passed over phone to different schools including those in Narayanganj, Fatulla and Siddhirganj.

Narayanganj ADC (education) Kazi Shakhawat Hossain admitted receiving the letter and said, "It was not an order. Rather, it was a recommendation letter of the adviser against a petition by that publisher. If the school authorities find the books of that publisher of good quality, they could include those in their text. No obligation was imposed in the letter."

However, no books of Niloy Prokashoni were found at bookstores in Narayanganj town and even most salespeople never even heard the name of that publisher.

Different school authorities said preparing and distributing booklet for 2007 have been delayed since the directive came from the adviser. The schools that already distributed the booklets are under pressure from the administration to withdraw the distributed booklets.

Retiring judge

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standard, dignity and image of the highest judiciary cannot be upheld by making laws and punitive measures. "It needs judges' honesty and rising above lust and greed."

He underscored the need for immediate separation of the judiciary from the executive for restoration of the "lost" prestige of the apex court.

A member of Lincoln's Inn, Justice Islam, appointed as a High Court judge in February 1994, told the SCBA members that he would join the Bar after his retirement from the bench.

According to the provision, a retired judge of the High Court is eligible to practise in the Appellate Division only.

Bangladesh Bar Council ex-officio chairman Attorney General AJ Mohammad Ali, Supreme Court Bar Association president Barrister M Amir-ul Islam and senior members of the SCBA were present on the occasion.

Predicament

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with a low intensity unrest, then the economy will come to a standstill," Dr Mahmud forecast. "But in any case, foreign investment has already been jeopardized."

"We had experienced an intense and prolonged crisis in 1996. But this time the impact will be greater because the global market is much more competitive now," he asserted.

Sri Lanka is case in point here. Its economic fortune has been decided by the prolonged civil war and the country failed to capitalise on the opportunity to breakthrough towards an emerging economy. Its social indicators are now reverting as well.

But more than that, image is the most precious thing that would take the beating if the country's politics fails to correct itself. Rwanda and Burundi are two cases here. After the genocide years ago, nobody now bothers to know whether the Hutus or the Tutsis had violated laws. All they have in mind is that those are two dangerous countries that should be avoided in any investment decision.

Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya, executive director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, sees no immediate threat of the economy collapsing because of the turmoil as, he says, the economy has developed a resilience of its own to withstand turmoil and inefficiency.

"The informal sector, exports, agriculture... they can absorb external shocks," he explained. "The entrepreneurs will make up for the current loss by using their underutilised capacity. But the real predicament is Bangladesh will forgo its potential at the margin. Another 2-3 percent of growth could accelerate our poverty reduction efforts and our potential as an emerging economy will be undercut."

HR violation

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Bangladesh's "already poor human rights record worsened, as security forces continued to commit numerous abuses, including extrajudicial killings, excessive use of force, and custodial torture." "A culture of impunity, reinforced by legislation, which largely shields the security forces from legal challenge, and by government praise for many of the unlawful killings, leads to abuses going largely uninvestigated and unpunished," it said.

In Bangladesh, this month's general elections were also shrouded in "fears of widespread violence." The opposition, led by the Awami League, are boycotting the January 22 polls and violence during protests since April has killed at least 35 people.

In Sri Lanka, an upsurge in fighting between government troops and the Tamil Tigers has "resulted in a dramatic increase in serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law."

"Government forces were implicated in several massacres of civilians, indiscriminate aerial bombing and shelling, and complicity in the abduction of children for use as combatants," HRW said.

The Tigers were also branded as "responsible for direct attacks on civilians with landmines and suicide bombings, targeted killing of political opponents, and the continued recruitment of children into their forces."

"International expressions of concern about the situation in Sri Lanka were greater in 2006 than at any time in recent memory, but these did not translate into international action on human rights," the report added.

India, widely hailed as the world's largest democracy with a vibrant press and civil society, also came in for stiff criticism.

"Officials and members of the security services who abuse their power are rarely if ever brought to justice for torture, arbitrary detentions and extrajudicial killings in places like Jammu and Kashmir, the insurgency affected states in the northeast, and in areas where there is an extremist Maoist movement," HRW said.

In Kashmir, the report said "the Indian government has effectively given its forces free rein, while Pakistan and armed militant groups have never taken any action against militants who carry out atrocities."

Human Rights Watch also condemned India's failure "to protect the rights of children, religious minorities, those living with HIV/AIDS or those belonging to vulnerable communities such as tribal groups, Dalits and other 'backward' castes."

The situation in Nepal, where Maoist rebels declared an end to the decade-long insurgency and signed a peace deal with the government, gave some reason for cheer.

The human rights situation improved markedly after April 2006" when mass protests forced King Gyanendra to abandon direct rule and paved the way for the peace deal, HRW said.

But it also said both the Maoists and the government had "failed to institute accountability for past violations by their troops" and noted continued reports of abductions and murder.

Afghan, Nato forces

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the Taliban and their allies, including al-Qaeda.

Isaf headquarters in the Afghan capital Kabul said the force had a "variety of means" with which it observed movements across the border but could not go into details.

"These people were observed, they gathered, they moved across the border clearly intent on conducting an attack somewhere in Afghanistan," Major Ian Clooney told AFP.

"Isaf and Afghan forces took the necessary action to prevent that attack occurring," he said.

"The attacks from our side used a mixture of ground fire and air-delivered weaponry," including bombs, he said.

"We particularly watch the border regions ... that is ongoing business for us. That aspect is routine for us," Clooney said.

The strikes were ordered amid a row between Afghan and Pakistani officials about the movements across the border of Taliban-linked militants waging the insurgency.

The rebel campaign was launched months after the Taliban regime was driven from power in a US-led operation after it refused to surrender al-Qaeda allies blamed for the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States.

Last year was the deadliest in Afghanistan since then. Around 4,000 people, mostly rebels, were killed in 2006 in insurgency-linked violence, according to officials.

Human Rights Watch has said about 1,000 civilians were also killed.

After complaints from Kabul that it was not doing enough to stop fighters crossing over from bases and training camps in Pakistan, Islamabad has proposed fencing and mining parts of the porous 2,500-kilometre (1,500-mile) frontier.

Afghanistan has strongly criticised the proposal, saying Pakistan would do better to address the root causes of extremism.

The United Nations and Canada have also expressed concern over the mining plans.

Bush vows

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He warned Middle East nations that an American defeat in Iraq would create a "new sanctuary for extremists" and be "a strategic threat to their survival."

As he ordered more than 20,000 additional troops into Iraq and unveiled a last-ditch 6.8 billion dollar plan to curb chaos in the war-torn nation, Bush said a key to the success of his new strategy was cutting off Iranian and Syrian support to "terrorists" in Iraq.

"These two regimes are allowing terrorists and insurgents to use their territory to move in and out of Iraq," Bush said in a prime time television address to an American public fed with the nearly four-year war that has left more than 3,000 US troops dead.

He accused Iran of providing material support for attacks on American troops and vowed to disrupt these raids.

"We will interrupt the flow of support from Iran and Syria. And we will seek out and destroy the networks providing advanced weaponry and training to our enemies in Iraq," he said.

The US leader also announced other steps to bolster the security of Iraq and protect American interests in the Middle East.

"I recently ordered the deployment of an additional carrier strike group to the region. We will expand intelligence sharing — and deploy Patriot air defence systems to reassure our friends and allies," he said.

"We will use America's full diplomatic resources to rally support for Iraq from nations throughout the Middle East," he said.

Citing countries such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, and the Gulf States, he said they needed to understand that an American defeat in Iraq would "create a new sanctuary for extremists — and a strategic threat to their survival."

"These nations have a stake in a

successful Iraq that is at peace with its neighbours — and they must step up their support for Iraq's unity government," he said.

"From Afghanistan to Lebanon to the Palestinian Territories, millions of ordinary people are sick of the violence, and want a future of peace and opportunity for their children," he said.

"And they are looking at Iraq. They want to know: Will America withdraw and yield the future of that country to the extremists — or will we stand with the Iraqis who have made the choice for freedom?"

Bush also said that the United States endorsed the Iraqi government's call to finalise a so called "International Compact" that will bring new economic assistance in exchange for greater economic reform.

On Friday, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice will leave for the Middle East to build support for Iraq, and continue "the urgent diplomacy" required to help bring peace to the region, he said.