

# al-Qaeda rebuilding in Pakistan: US

REUTERS, Washington

al-Qaeda's leaders are holed up in a secure hide-out in Pakistan, from which they are revitalising their bruised but resilient network, US intelligence chief John Negroponte said on Thursday.

In an unusually direct statement on the whereabouts of the militant group's top echelon, Negroponte told the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence that Pakistan is the centre of a web of al-Qaeda connections that stretches across the globe into Europe.

"al-Qaeda is the terrorist organisation that poses the greatest threat to US interests," the US director of national intelligence said in his annual assessment of worldwide threats against the United States and its interests.

"They are cultivating stronger operational connections and relationships that radiate outward from their leaders' secure hide-out in Pakistan to affiliates throughout the Middle East, North Africa and Europe," he said.

It appeared to be the first time in congressional testimony that Negroponte has singled out Pakistan as the locale for the headquarters of the network. It is accused of the Sept. 11 attacks on New York and Washington that killed about 3,000 people in 2001.

Up to now, US officials have said that al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden and his second-in-command Ayman al-Zawahri are hiding somewhere along the rugged mountainous border between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Negroponte did not cite bin Laden or Zawahri by name and did not say where in Pakistan US intelligence believes al-Qaeda

leaders are hiding.

Negroponte, who became US intelligence chief in April 2005 and will soon leave to become deputy secretary of state, told the same panel a year ago that al-Qaeda's leadership posed a threat to the United States from bases in the Pakistan-Afghanistan border area.

"We have captured or killed numerous senior al-Qaeda operatives, but al-Qaeda's core elements are resilient. They continue to plot attacks against our homeland and other targets with the objective of inflicting mass casualties," he said on Thursday.

US officials have long complained about Islamist militant activity in Pakistan, which has been blamed as a source of increasing Taliban and al-Qaeda attacks in neighbouring Afghanistan.

"Pakistan is our partner in the war on terror and has captured several al-Qaeda leaders. However, it is also a major source of Islamic extremism," Negroponte said in written testimony submitted to the panel.

"Eliminating the safe haven that the Taliban and other extremists have found in Pakistan's tribal areas is not sufficient to end the insurgency in Afghanistan but it is necessary."

He noted the political problems facing Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf due to a potential for tribal rebellion and a backlash by Islamic political parties opposed to the US military presence in Afghanistan and Iraq.

"With elections expected later this year, the situation will become even more challenging for President Musharraf and for the US," Negroponte said.

# Rapid raids to capture

FROM PAGE 1

DHOS, Mirza Abbas' house in Shahjahanpur and Salahuddin's house in Demra.

None of the persons alleged to be on the list of 'corruptocrats and godfathers' could be reached over the phone yesterday although sources said Moudud Ahmed is staying in his residence.

Troops searched Haji Selim's house on Water Works Road in Lalbagh and took position in front of his house, according to the sources.

Troops also took position in front of Nasiruddin Pintu's house on Moneshwar Road, the sources said. Talking to The Daily Star, Pintu however denied the presence of army personnel in front of his house and the authenticity of the report of a raid.

The army arrested Kamal Majumder from his Banani house around 1:30am yesterday. As they knocked on his door in C Block, Kamal himself opened the door. He was handed over to Gulshan police around 4:00am.

"The army personnel arrested him on charge of patronising political clashes," duty officer Jasim (full name could not be known immediately) of Gulshan Police Station told The Daily Star.

He was later taken to the office of riot police in Mirpur-12 for interrogation. Gulshan police said he was also sent to court. Kamal's family

# 2 outlaws killed

FROM PAGE 16

under Khoksa upazila at about 2:30pm on Thursday and took him to Kushtia Rab office for quizzing.

On his statement, the Rab team along with Santu started for Patiladangi to recover hidden firearms and arrested his accomplices.

When they reached Simulia village under the upazila at about 3:30am, Shantu's cohorts opened fire, prompting the elite force to retaliate.

During the "shootout" Santu tried to flee from Rab vehicle and received bullets. He died instantly, while his accomplices managed to flee, Rab sources said.

One shutter gun and two bullets were recovered from the spot. Police said Santu was an accused in three murder cases filed with Rajbari and Khoksa police stations.

According to our Jhenidah correspondent, a team of Rab-6 arrested Mohiuddin Mohi, 48, at Vaina village under Harinakundo upazila at around 12:10pm on Thursday and took him to Rab office in the district town.

Following his confessional statement, the Rab team, taking Mohi with them, went to the village at about 1:30 am yesterday to recover hidden firearms and arrest his cohorts.

Sensing the presence of the Rab men, some members of the outlawed outfit opened fire. Rab returned fire.

Rab sources said Mohi was shot during the encounter and died on the spot while his accomplices managed to flee.

Officer-in-charge (OC) of Harinakundo Police Station said Mohi was a regional leader of Sramajibi Mukti Andolan and wanted in five cases including two for murder.

# Punish plunders to ensure fair polls: Oli

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) Executive President Col (ret'd) Oli Ahmed in a statement yesterday demanded arrest of the corrupt people and their punishment to ensure transparency and accountability in the country's politics.

The people who failed to hold the election even after wasting time and money should be identified and those who made the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) dysfunctional by enacting faulty laws should be brought to book, he said.

The officers in the police and civil administration who are linked to any political party should be suspended and replaced by competent and non-partisan officers, Oli said.

He demanded freeing the administration from politics, proper reconstitution of the Election Commission and preparation of a correct voter list.

The judiciary should also be made free of partisan influence to recover its pride, the LDP leader said.

"I think solution to these problems is possible with only a little intervention of the military," he said.

He blamed former chief adviser of the caretaker government President Iajuddin Ahmed and the leaders of BNP-Jamaat alliance for creating a 'critical political situation' in the country.

# BSF guns down

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post to a Sakhira hospital morgue for postmortem, police said.

Cattle traders Afsar Ali and Kawsar Ali of village Basantapur told this correspondent that they along with the victims went to India to buy cattle on Wednesday.

BSF men of Rameswar camp in Hasnabad thana under South 24 Parganas district of West Bengal arrested Ratan Das and Nityanada Das at Rameswarpur on Thursday when they were returning to Bangladesh with the cattle, they said.

Prof Muzaffer Ahmed said, "It seems one alliance may not support the new caretaker government."

He also thinks the 'new' CG, formed under a state of emergency, may have to face legal complications.

Referring to the previous council of adviser's swearing in programme, former adviser major general (ret'd) Moinul Islam Chowdhury said, "Our political parties have kept up their tradition of not attending a function that a rival party attends."

Moinul further said, "It is not clear to the people whether it would be a caretaker government or an interim government."

He suggested that legal experts should give their views on the issue. Former adviser Ali Akbar Khan hailed Fakhruddin as a 'capable person' but he declined to make any comments on political aspects.

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# Mokhles' last dirty trick

FROM PAGE 1

claimed to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Bangla Service that he resigned from the post and was not removed.

Soon after the declaration of a state of emergency Thursday night, Mokhles unilaterally called all private television channels and radio stations and issued a verbal order to immediately stop broadcasting of all news bulletins and political talk shows.

He also slapped a ban on newspapers from publishing news or cartoons criticising the government.

When Editor of The Daily Star Mahfuz Anam queried President Iajuddin Ahmed yesterday about the ban, the president said he was unaware of any such move and that if any such move has taken place it had been made without his knowledge.

The Public Information Department (PID) also informed The Daily Star last night that Mokhles personally ordered the PID to call the private television channels and radio stations for stopping their news broadcast.

Earlier, Mokhles repeatedly attempted to mislead the public by releasing to the media information that contradicted the decisions

taken by the council of advisers.

The last glaring example of Mokhles' misdeeds was revealed when former adviser Dhiraj Kumar Nath categorically contradicted a statement Mokhles had released to the public on January 9, 2007.

Mokhles was appointed the president's press secretary in 2004 and was later given the extra-constitutional post of adviser to the president after Iajuddin took up the added responsibility of chief adviser to the caretaker government.

Bangabhaban sources accused Mokhles of violating regulations by attending the advisory council meetings and supplying confidential minutes of those meetings to the BNP while serving as the president's adviser.

On numerous occasions, Mokhles also spoke in those meetings—despite strong protests from the advisers—on possible courses of the caretaker government's action, sources added.

Government officials have alleged that Mokhles tried to exert his influence over postings and, in some cases, received money in exchange. He is also accused of demeaning senior government officials while speaking to them.

# Civil society

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that did not attend the oath-taking ceremony at the Bangabhaban, former adviser Hafiz Uddin Khan said, "I don't know if it is a bad omen as they did not come to the ceremony. We thought the decision (on new CG) came through consensus of all the parties. But the other major alliance seemed quite happy."

He went on, "I wish history does not repeat, and hope that both the alliances would support the new caretaker government."

Prof Muzaffer Ahmed said, "It seems one alliance may not support the new caretaker government."

He also thinks the 'new' CG, formed under a state of emergency, may have to face legal complications.

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# 4-party 'absent'

FROM PAGE 1

asked about the party's stand on the latest political development.

However, a few leaders close to party Chairperson Khaleda Zia ensured that she got the invitation.

Khaleda went to her Banani office around 7:00pm followed a few minutes later by senior party leaders, including Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Standing Committee member and former minister M Saifur Rahman, Khadaker Mosharraf Hossain, Vice-Chairman Nazmul Huda, former adviser to PM Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury, former ministers Abdul Moyeen Khan, Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury and Aman Ullah Aman.

Sources said the BNP leaders discussed the latest political situation.

Jamaat-e-Islami Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mujahid and Joint Secretary General Mohammad Amaruzzaman also met Khaleda, top leader of the four-party alliance, to discuss the matter.

Meanwhile, the scene at Hawa Bhaban was completely different yesterday. No leaders and activists—even those who had been regular visitors for the last few months—were seen on Hawa Bhaban premises yesterday evening.

# EC's poll activities

FROM PAGE 1

Alam and EC Secretary Abdur Rashid Sarkar.

The ninth national parliamentary elections were supposed to be held on January 22 amid Awami League-led grand alliance's boycott of the polls. They had also decided to resist the polls. A total of Tk130 crore has been spent so far for the January 22 elections.

The acting CEC sat with the three ECs and the EC secretary at 11:00am and the meeting went on till lunch hour. The meeting resumed around 3:30pm. Neither the acting CEC nor the EC secretary talked to reporters about their discussions in the meeting.

Election officials from different districts and upazilas came to the EC office to receive election materials yesterday morning but the EC officials informed them about the postponement of the elections and sent them back. Buses and trucks were seen gathered in front of the EC office to carry the election materials to different districts and upazilas.

The printing of ballot papers also stopped, said a number of the EC officials wishing anonymity.

"Everything is now clear after the president's speech last night (Thursday)," Election Commissioner Modabbir Hossain Chowdhury told newsmen, adding, "But the EC is yet to give formal decision on postponing the elections."

"We will inform you of if any decision is made," he said.

Acting CEC Mahfuzur Rahman following the meeting said, "There is no news, no news. If there was any news, we (the EC) will let you know."

# JMB cadre held

FROM PAGE 1

Hassan and Shoyeb were arrested with a huge amount of explosives and bomb making materials in Badda area of the capital early Wednesday.

The bomb making materials and other items seized from Tangail include 500 grams of zinc oxide, 100 grams of carbon powder, 800 grams of lead nitrate, eight plastic boxes, some masks, 16 plastic circuit boards, three cartridges, 11 negatives of films, 53 audio cassettes and one mobile phone set.

The JMB cadre Selim Miah alias Babu, who rented the house at Karatia Bazar, however managed to escape arrest, Rab sources said.

Rab filed two separate cases against the arrested JMB cadre Arman with Tangail Sadar Police Station.

Abdur Rashid, officer-in-charge (OC) of Tangail Sadar Police Station, said they will produce the arrested JMB cadre Arman in the court today, seeking remand.

# Low gas pressure

FROM PAGE 16

on dispute resolution in the contract. The United Group has not yet informed the power ministry the shipment date of its plant equipment. Meanwhile low gas pressure at Shahjibazar has also made the project uncertain for now.

The power rental agreement for Kumargaon 20 MW plant was initiated and finalised last week.

Dealing with the 20MW Barabkunda plant, Hosaf has already asked the