

Bush must take Cong nod before attacking Iran

Say US lawmakers

AFP, Washington

US lawmakers on Thursday demanded President George W Bush win approval from Congress before using military force against Iran, even as officials again denied that any attacks are in the cards.

Legislation calling on Bush to obtain congressional backing before any military strike against Iran was put to the US House of Representatives as Defence Secretary Robert Gates visited the Middle East seeking to line up support against Tehran.

The resolution proposed by a half dozen Republican and Democratic lawmakers was meant to prevent the United States from becoming embroiled in another intractable war like the one raging in Iraq.

"Congress will not stand by idly - it won't be railroaded into another war that will only make America and the world less safe," Democratic Representative Martin Meehan, a co-author of the bill, said at a news conference Thursday.

Meanwhile Gates, during a swing through the Gulf aimed in part at rallying Arab allies against Iran, told reporters in Manama that the United States did not want a conflict with Iran, and there were many other courses of action it could take short of force.

"I don't think anyone wants another military conflict in this region," Gates said in the Bahraini capital.

But the US defence secretary also accused Tehran of overplaying its hand on the world stage.

"There clearly is concern about Iranian ambitions, and they certainly expect the United States to play a role in containing those ambitions," he said.

Gates, who travelled to the region for meetings with Saudi King Abdullah Wednesday night and the emir of Qatar, described Iranians

as being "very aggressive" in trying to take advantage of Washington's perceived misfortunes in Iraq.

Officials in Tehran, he said, "believe they have the United States at some disadvantage because of the situation in Iraq."

Meehan pointed to such Bush administration statements -- along with recent US military manoeuvres -- as evidence that an attack on Iran could be in the offing.

"The indications of the initial sabre-rattling are everywhere," the Massachusetts congressman said. "I'm not here to tell you that I trust Iran, but I am here to say that I don't trust the administration," Meehan said.

Bush announced last week that he had ordered a second US aircraft carrier battle group to the Gulf and was to deploy a Patriot antimissile battalion to the region to protect allies against potential Iranian missile strikes.

In a speech on January 10 unveiling his new strategy for Iraq, the US president also vowed to "seek out and destroy" any networks funneling weapons or fighters from Syria or Iran into Iraq.

Those moves fuelled speculation that a US attack might be imminent, despite the administration's repeated denials.

"There is a growing concern -- justified or not -- that some US officials are contemplating military action against Iran," said US Representative Walter Jones, another sponsor of the bill.

He added that in his view, an invasion of Iran would flout the US Constitution.

"If the president is contemplating committing our blood and treasure in another war, then he and his administration must make the case to Congress and the American people why it would be in the national security interests of the United States to engage militarily in Iran," Jones said.

Lanka takes key

CROSS said in a statement earlier in the day.

The pro-rebel Tamilnet.com website said civilians were fleeing Vakarai by foot, bicycle, tractors and even boats in the face of heavy shelling by government forces from early Friday.

"Civilians who had sought refuge in the hospital area, were forced to flee as heavy shelling was stepped up during the early hours on Friday," Tamilnet said. "Six civilians were injured Thursday night."

Local officials in Batticaloa, 300 kilometres (180 miles) east of Colombo, said some 9,000 civilians had fled Vakarai on Friday and had gathered along the de facto border seeking shelter in government-held areas.

Three weeks ago, Sri Lanka's army chief Sarath Fonseka said he planned to clear the island's multi-ethnic eastern region of Tiger guerrillas.

Vakarai originally housed about 35,000 civilians, but an estimated 20,000 had fled fighting the area in recent weeks.

The United Nations and other charities had asked the Tigers to

allow civilians to leave the firing line and also urged the military to avoid targeting non-combatants.

Meanwhile, a Sri Lankan police commando was killed and three others wounded Friday when suspected Tamil Tiger rebels set off a powerful landmine in the eastern district of Ampara, police said.

He said a police commando, two constables and a paramilitary homeguard were wounded in the blast, which came in Ampara, where troops had captured a dozen rebel bases after a two-week offensive.

Four Tamil civilians were also gunned down by unidentified gunmen in the town of Vavuniya, 260km north of here, police said.

The men were slain three days after a similar killing spree in which six Tamils were shot dead in the same area, police said.

An escalation in violence last year killed over 3,800 people, despite a Norwegian-arranged truce in place since 2002.

Over 60,000 people have been killed in Sri Lanka's Tamil separatist conflict in the past 35 years.

Devastating storm

FROM PAGE 16 British meteorologists said the "severe gale force" was the strongest recorded since another major storm in January 1990.

Falling trees and pylons claimed the lives of six motorists in Britain. A two-year-old boy, Saurav Ghai, was killed when a brick wall fell on top of him in north London.

Winds eased on Friday but there was still disruption at London Heathrow and other British airports. British Airways cancelled more than 130 domestic flights on Thursday.

The cross-Channel port of Dover reopened late Thursday and Eurostar high-speed train services from London to Paris and Brussels said operations would return to normal on Friday, after being halted.

In Germany, an 18-month-old baby died after being crushed by a door, which was ripped off its hinges by high winds in Munich. A 73-year-old man was killed in Augsburg after a barn door fell on him.

For the first time in its history, Deutsche Bahn railway company suspended all services across Germany Thursday as a precautionary measure after high winds blew trees on to the tracks, in Berlin, a two-tonne steel girder fell more than 40 metres (130 feet) at the city's main rail station.

More than 200 flights in and out of Frankfurt airport were cancelled because of the winds, authorities said.

Freah accidents occurred across the storm's path. In the southern Dutch town of Riel an 11-year-old boy died after he was hit by a car, whose driver said the

Ershad

FROM PAGE 1 He said, "People are disappointed with the two woman leaders of the country for their failure to run the state properly during the past few regimes. Now, they want me again."

Replying to a query he said, "I will be with Awami League-led grand alliance in the upcoming elections. I will contest in two seats in Sylhet division -- Sylhet-3 and Habiganj-3."

The JP chief visited the shrine of Hazrat Shahjalal after a court on Wednesday said he did not need to serve time in connection with the Japanese boat purchase case.

Ershad also offered fataha at General MAG Osmani's grave. Later, he offered fataha at the shrine of Hazrat Shahporan in the suburbs of Sylhet city before leaving for the capital.

JP leaders Kazi Zafar Ahmed, Ruhul Amin Hawlader and Atiqur Rahman Atique accompanied him.

BNP men

FROM PAGE 1 that time would stop thinking about many of the misdeeds done during the four-party rule, said a leader seeking anonymity.

Another leader said the election should be held as early as possible, or else the BNP would lose whatever sway it still has over the administration.

Police gun down

FROM PAGE 1 Ignoring the request of the villagers, police picked up Daud in their patrol car and took him away. Later, the bullet-hit body of Daud was found in a field in the morning.

Protesting the killing, the villagers put up a barricade on the Kushtia-Jhenidah highway for two hours. On information, police rushed to the scene and beat up the protesters, leaving 10 people injured.

Meanwhile, Additional Police Superintendent (ASP) SM Emran Hossain told reporters that Daud was killed during a "shootout" between police and robbers. He identified Daud as a robber, but admitted that he (Daud) was not an accused in any case.

Remove

FROM PAGE 1 pro-Jamaat officials praised the immediate past BNP-led four-party alliance government.

They said the National Teachers' Day should be a day to commemorate educationists like Dr Kudrat-e-Khuda, Dr Muhammad Shahidullah, Satyen Basu and Principal Ibrahim Kha.

Drive soon

FROM PAGE 1 We also collected samples of small fish including kachki, puti, mola, baila and tengra from Palashi, Hatirpul and Karwan Bazar and found formalin in them.

Many traders inject formalin into the stomach and head of big fish with a syringe and dip the fish into the formalin solution several times before displaying it for sale, experts said.

Formalin is imported mainly from China and Italy for use in tanneries and the plastic industry, but the fish traders can easily buy the preservative popularly known as 'medicine' in the city's kitchen markets including Karwan Bazar.

"If we soak the fish with 'medicine water', it remains fresh for several days. Otherwise, it rots within hours," said a trader in Kathalbagang Bazar.

Talking with quite a few fish traders who requested anonymity, it became evident that almost all of them put the fish into the formalin water before displaying it for sale.

Magistrate Rakanuddoullah, who conducts mobile courts in the capital, said grape traders told him that they dip the grapes into the water mixed with 'medicine'.

This correspondent also talked with grape traders in the city who claimed that imported grapes had already been dipped in formalin before they reached Bangladesh to prevent them from rotting.

"Yes, I have heard that some traders use medicine in fruits. But I do not do it," said a grape vendor.

Rokanuddoullah requested the environment department to import some kits to identify formalin in fish on the spot, the magistrate said, adding that they are hopeful of getting the kits next month when they would launch raids in the fish markets to punish the culprits.

BNP celebrates

FROM PAGE 1 to the late president. Different socio-political organisations also arranged programmes to mark the day.

Ziaur Rahman was born on January 19, 1936 at Bagbari in Bogra.

BNP arranges a discussion meeting and milad at the Institution of Diploma Engineers building at 3:00pm today as the party has chalked out two-day programmes to celebrate the day.

Party Chairperson Khaleda Zia will attend the programme.

Party Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan in a statement yesterday urged the BNP and its front organisations to take part in the programme.

Probe remains stalled

FROM PAGE 1 acquitted," he said, requesting anonymity.

He also said they have already completed investigations in Bangladesh, tracked down the masterminds and persons involved, and that four of them have already given confessional statements before the magistrates.

The UK customs sent a message through the British mission in Mumbai, India in May 2005, accusing five Bangladeshi business firms of smuggling heroin to that country in the guise of food items, toiletries, cosmetics and floor tiles.

On being informed, National Board of Revenue (NBR) started an investigation and confirmed the validity of the allegations and involvement of the BD Foods Ltd, Emdad Traders, Jamil International, MM Enterprise, and Green Haven Enterprise in the smuggling racket.

Following a home ministry directive, a five-member team--comprising members of the CID, Special Branch (SB) of police, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), Bangladesh Bank, and Department

of Narcotics Control--investigated the smugglings.

On May 14 last year, the police arrested BD Foods Chairman Badruddoza Chowdhury Momen after Nazmul Haider Bhuiyan Bulbul, a former official of BD Foods, and his cohort Mokhesur Rahman Nayan, a cargo handler, told a magistrate that they had smuggled 21.5kg heroin to the UK at the directive of the top authorities of the company.

Momen also admitted to the CID-led team to smuggling "illegal goods" to the UK in the guise of legitimate items. He was later granted bail by the High Court.

The probe team also arrested six persons for their involvement in the drug running racket. They are Mainuddin and Abu Bakar Siddique Mithu of BD Foods, Mokhesur Rahman, an associate of Abu Bakar, Nazmul, Kazi Zafar Reza of Rainbow Enterprise, and Abul Bashar of Green Heaven Enterprise. All of them are now in jail custody.

Reza and Bashar also confessed later to smuggling 54kg heroin to the UK.

Rejoinder

FROM PAGE 1 transparency and ethics holds a very high level of international reputation as I worked with various governments worldwide for last two decades such as Bangladesh, Tajikistan, Pakistan, Maldives and USA; along with prestigious international organisations such as World Bank, Asian Development Bank, UN, etc."

He added, "The Chief Adviser formally offered me the position of an Adviser to the present government after discussing the status of my nationality while I was abroad."

"As regards to the MRP project, I believe Ministry of Home Affairs went through all GOB [The Government of Bangladesh] guidelines while hiring me as their Sr. IT Consultant. I met all their requirements including being an individual of Bangladesh origin having international experience of designing large ICT projects."

"While selecting the MRP bidders Ministry of Home Affairs strictly followed all GOB and relevant World Bank guidelines after having concurrence from CPTU [Central Procurement Technical Unit] through different inter and multi-ministerial committees with absolute transparency. The technical as well as financial evaluations of the bidding firms were conducted by committees comprising external GOB members," he said.

Faiz Khan added that the news published in The Daily Star reflected issues of some interest groups only to tarnish his professional as well as personal image in pursuit of the newspaper's dishonest goals.

OUR REPLY The home ministry's recruitment process of Faiz Khan itself violated the Public Procurement Regulation (PPR) 2003, as two committees had to be formed just to recruit one man Faiz Khan. The PPR does not allow more than one committee for a recruitment process.

Faiz Khan might have served different countries and the World Bank or other reputed organisations but he was not qualified for the MRP project. According to his resume given to the home ministry, most of his past works include IT related projects, financial reforms, or other generic jobs.

MRP on the other hand is a sophisticated technology which is also very new in most countries of the world.

When Faiz Khan was inter-

viewed by a recruitment panel headed by the additional secretary, he was categorically asked technical questions about the technology of machine readable passports.

His answers were not considered satisfactory to any of these technical questions, according to the files of the committee. The committee reported that Faiz Khan himself had admitted of not knowing the technology in detail. The committee observed that he lacked the technical knowledge although he seemed to have some managerial abilities.

When the recruitment committee's report was submitted to the state minister for home, he decided to take the matter in his own hand and formed a high powered committee with himself at the helm. This committee unconventionally appointed Faiz.

Upon his recruitment, Faiz published an Expression of Interest (Eoi) to shortlist bidders for the MRP scheme. This Eoi was not approved by any other committee.

Then, the Eoi along with its seven or eight criteria for potential bidders was found to be framed in such a way that only certain companies could qualify. This is why, although initially 34 companies participated at the Eoi level, such a huge participation dropped to only four overnight. And then soon enough, only two companies submitted bids. This alone is enough to raise questions about how the project was being handled.

Contrary to the claims of the rejoinder, the CPTU of the Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation Department (IMED) of the planning ministry strongly opposed the way Faiz Khan was handling the scheme. The CPTU in a note to the home ministry observed that the MRP scheme involves goods procurement. Such procurement should be done by publishing a Request for Proposal (RFP) and not an Eoi. Such a way of initial handling can drastically change the outcome of any procurement.

The MRP scheme was not processed through inter-ministerial committees. The Daily Star ran detailed reports on the matter in the past.

In his rejoinder, Faiz Khan did not address the question of his dual nationality, which makes him ineligible to be an adviser to the caretaker government.

Musharraf seeks another 5-year term

PTI, Islamabad

Ending months of speculation, the Pakistan government has said that President Pervez Musharraf would seek re-election for another five-year term from the present National and Provincial assemblies before they would be dissolved in November this year.

The decision was taken at a cabinet meeting presided over by Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz on Wednesday.

"Hopefully, the present assemblies will complete their term and since the tenure of the president expires on November 15, his re-election will be sought from the present assemblies in accordance with constitutional provisions," Information Minister Mohammad Ali Durani told reporters after the meeting.

He, however, did not say whether Musharraf would continue to hold the dual post of the Chief of Army staff as well as the head of the state.

The cabinet was briefed on the constitutional and legal aspects of the presidential elections by a team of experts led by Aziz's senior advisor Sharifuddin Pirzada, a Musharraf confidante.

The Pakistan president's present five-year term would end almost a week before the completion of the tenures of the sitting assemblies on November 16, 2007.

"The cabinet was told that as per the constitution, the assemblies would complete their term on November 16.

The president should be elected between September and October 2007 and the interim set-up will be put in place in line with the constitutional provisions," Durani said.

Also Musharraf had discussed the issue with members of the cabinet at a dinner hosted by Aziz last Friday.

The decision was a forgone conclusion because under article 41(1), the president's tenure would expire on November 15 this year and he needed to be re-elected before October 15 as the rules say that the election should take place within 30 days.

Significantly, all the Ministers of Muthahida Quami Movement (MQM), a key ally in the ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Q (PML-Q) were conspicuous by their absence at the cabinet meeting.

However, Minister for Ports and Shipping Babar Khan Ghauri, who is one of the senior MQM leaders, played it down saying that it was purely a coincidence that all the ministers belonging to his party were busy, attending the marriage of party leader Adil Siddiqui's sons till late Wednesday night.

Musharra's election in a referendum in 2002 was endorsed by the present assemblies after general elections in the same year.

Opposition parties which threatened to resign if he went ahead with the re-election plans say that it is an indication that Musharraf was not certain about pro-military alliance returning to power in general elections.

The government said if the opposition parties resign, it would hold by-polls and fill the vacancies.

The opposition parties have termed the cabinet's decision to re-elect him by the sitting assemblies as "unconstitutional, undemocratic and unethical".

Student

FROM PAGE 16 as she had behavioural issues.

Following the allegations, House Tutor Mustafizur Rahman asked Upama not to go to the dormitory TV and dining rooms for seven days and issued a show cause notice against her on January 11.

On Thursday, the authorities issued another notice asking her to leave the dormitory by January 27.

Talking to newsmen, Upama said her third year finals are going on and now she has nowhere to stay. "I am a victim of the JCD leaders' conspiracy," she said.

Hall Provost Airun Banu Luchi said Upama was expelled as the complaint filed against her by the students was proved to be true.

Two die

FROM PAGE 1 General Hospital as his condition deteriorated around midnight.

After treatment at the hospital, the Jubo League leader was sent back to the police station where he died at about 4:00am, police added.

The law enforcers said Shamsuddoha was an accused in a few criminal cases. The body was sent to Noakhali General Hospital for autopsy.

According to our Kishoreganj correspondent an army team arrested Asad on January 16 and handed him over to the Kotiadi police at 2:00pm on Thursday.

Shahadat Hossain Sharif, officer-in-charge (OC) of Kotiadi Police Station, said they sent Asad to Kotiadi Upazila Health Complex in a free and fair manner.

Adviser Anwarul Iqbal stressed the need for improving the law and order for a clean and credible election. "We'll do everything to maintain the law and order situation," he said.

Hunt for illegal arms

FROM PAGE 1 chaired by Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of Police, Khulna range, Mezbannabi, reports our Kushtia correspondent.

The districts are Kushtia, Chuadanga, Jhenidah and Meherpur of Khulna Division, Pabna in Rajshahi Division and Rajbari under Dhaka Division.

Police held 13 in Chuadanga, nine in Kushtia, 30 in Jhenidah and two in Rajbari, including two outlaws.

The drive will continue on the basis of a fresh list of criminals and outlaws in the districts, high officials of police told The Daily Star.

Police sources said the directive for the special drive came in the wake of information that the outlaws and criminals, who were sheltered by their political godfathers, are regrouping in these districts ahead of the next parliamentary election.

The law and order in the region sharply deteriorated in the last 18 days with criminals killing at least 34 people including their rivals since January 1.

In Kushtia, 13 people were killed during this time, nine from rival outlawed groups.

At least nine people were killed in Pabna, four each in Chuadanga and Jhenidah, three in Rajbari and one in Meherpur.

More than 26 bombs were blasted in the districts during the period.

BORDER SECURITY TIGHTENED Our Khulna correspondent reports that security measures have been tightened at Benapole border to prevent outlaws and other criminals from fleeing the country.

According to sources at Benapole immigration office, lists of criminals wanted by different law enforcement agencies have been hung with their photographs so that they can be identified while crossing the border to evade arrest.

Names of godfathers of these elements in the lists include some former lawmakers from Khulna Division.

Both BDR and police have been put on high alert at Benapole and its adjacent areas since the declaration of state of emergency. People going to India are being thoroughly checked.

The law enforcers are carrying out body and luggage search of those going to India and also coming from that country.

Meanwhile, Indian Border Security Force (BSF) has also been put on high alert at Petrapole so prevent any infiltration from Bangladesh. Indian intelligence agencies are also reported to have been very active at Petrapole for the last one week, sources said.

According to a highly placed source, the 25 people who have been absconding include two former lawmakers of BNP and another from Jamaat, an influential AL leader, four Jubo League leaders, six leaders of Jubo Dal, a former president of Khulna Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) and an influential member of Khulna city BNP convening committee.

The source said all of them went into hiding to evade arrest by the joint forces. Their names and photographs have already been sent to immigration offices at Benapole and Bhomra borders to prevent their escape from the country.

They had allegedly harboured criminals with political motive and for monetary gains through extortion, toll collection, tender manipulation, land grabbing, illegal occupation of shrimp farms and creating artificial

Jalil, Mannan

FROM PAGE 1 worry," Abdul Jalil observed.

Jalil questioned, "How could he accuse all politicians of dishonesty and say that politicians are only in it for money?"

"If all politicians are considered as dishonest for the dishonesty of some, then are all the development activists are to be considered dishonest also for the dishonesty of some?" Jalil asked.

"Are we to consider all bankers corrupt for the corruption of some?" Jalil went on questioning.

Mannan Bhuiyan in his statement said, "Such a remark from a prudent person like Dr Yunus is not acceptable as there are good and bad persons in every profession both at home and abroad."

Dr Yunus on Thursday in an interview with AFP said Bangladesh's politicians are only in it for the money.

"It's about power, power to make money. There is no ideological thing, simply who gets the bigger booty," Yunus said of the recent tussle between the main political alliances in the country in a bid to influence the electoral process towards their own favour.

The 'banker of the poor', Yunus, also said, "Nothing gets done unless you pay the bribe. It's a part of life."

Referring to Yunus' comment Bhuiyan said in the statement, "The allegation can't be an overwhelming truth since the politicians of a country, which was established through sacrifices of thousands of people, who often suffered repression and even sacrificed their lives for independence, can't be in it only for money."

"Politics is a noble profession, the best way to serve the people and society, but such a profession like all other professions have come into question due to activities of some bad people. So sweeping comments like, politics and politicians have no ideology, cannot be correct," Bhuiyan added.

"Are we to blame our Nobel Laureate Yunus for a reported suicide of a poor woman for failure to pay interest on the money she had borrowed at a 36 percent interest

scarcity of essentials.

Sources said some of them are trying to manage court order to be able to move freely.

Army held Abdul Gafur, chairman of Jalma union parishad under Batiaghata upazila of Khulna district, at 6:00am from his house.

The arrestee is a vice president of Batiaghata upazila BNP. He was wanted in 35 criminal cases including six for murders. He is also a financier of outlawed New Biplobi Communist Party, police said. In the past, he was arrested by Joint forces during Operation Clean Heart and later released on bail.

KHAGRACHHARI Police and army in separate drives across four upazilas in Khagrachhari early yesterday arrested at least seven people.

Police said two of them were picked up from Mohalchhari, two from Manikchhari, two more from Ramgour and a woman from sadar upazila.

The arrestees are involved in either AL or BNP politics and are accused in different criminal cases.

They include Mohalchhari union Jubo League Secretary Milky Mamma, Manikchhari AL activists Dulal Chandra Dey and Laxman Chandra Dey and Khagrachhari BNP activist Moriam Bibi.

MUNSHIGANJ