

'US image around world worsens'

REUTERS, London

The image of the United States has deteriorated around the world in the past year because of issues such as Iraq and prisoners at Guantanamo Bay, according to a poll by the BBC World Service released on Tuesday.

The proportion of people believing the United States has a mainly positive influence in world affairs dropped seven points from a year ago -- to 29 percent from 36, the results from 18 countries that were also polled the previous year showed.

Fifty-two percent thought US influence was mainly negative, up from 47 percent a year ago, the poll found.

The survey, released on the day President George W. Bush gives his State of the Union speech to Congress, found sharp disagreement with US policy on Iraq, which is ravaged by violence nearly four years after the US-led invasion.

In all, 26,381 people were questioned in 25 countries. Almost three in four people disapproved of US policy on Iraq, while two-thirds disapproved of US handling of terrorism suspects held at the Guantanamo Bay camp in Cuba.

"The US administration's recent decision to send more troops to Iraq is at odds with global public opinion ... This policy is likely to further hurt America's image," Doug Miller, president of pollsters GlobeScan, said.

Sixty-five percent disapproved of US policy on last year's war between Israel and Hezbollah guerrillas, 60 percent

of its handling of Iran's nuclear programme, 56 percent of its stance on global warming and 54 percent of its policy on North Korea's nuclear programme.

More than two-thirds believed the US military presence in the Middle East provoked more conflict than it prevented and only 17 percent thought US troops there were a stabilising force.

The poll found that the American public also seemed to have serious doubts about US foreign policy. Majorities of Americans polled disapproved of how the United States was handling the war in Iraq (57 percent) and global warming (54 percent) while half disapproved of US policy on Guantanamo and Iran.

Fifty-three percent of Americans said the US military presence in the Middle East "provokes more conflict than it prevents," the survey said.

The poll found US policy was regarded poorly in Britain, Bush's closest ally in Iraq. A majority (57 percent) of the British public saw US influence in the world as mainly negative and 81 percent disapproved of US actions in the war in Iraq, the BBC World Service said.

The poll, carried out between November 3 and January 9, covered Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Chile, China, Egypt, France, Germany, Britain, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Italy, Kenya, Lebanon, Mexico, Nigeria, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Russia, South Korea, Turkey, United Arab Emirates and the United States.

Sangu drains

FROM PAGE 1 procurements to help Petrobangla decide on the validity of the audit objections. Finally, it was resolved. This decision is awaiting board approval," said a Cairn official requesting anonymity.

But payments were made when the audit objections were yet to be resolved.

A senior Petrobangla official explaining why Cairn has been allowed to take out investment which fell under the purview of audit objection, said, "We have allowed so with the condition that this payment is provisional. When the audit objections will be resolved, Cairn will pay back the money if it is found to have taken excess."

This system is followed in dealing with Chevron's investment too.

Last year, a legal adviser to Petrobangla dealing with audit objections raised questions why it was giving such a provisional payment and under which clause of the agreement with Cairn.

"He said that the agreement does not demand such payments. Petrobangla should not pay this money unless the dispute is resolved," said a source quoting the legal adviser's opinion.

As Petrobangla's monitoring and financial scrutiny strength has diminished in the last six-seven years, it is now unable to take the right financial decisions, he added.

"It's been many years since the Petrobangla saw a professional financial personnel at the position of director function. It's ironic that the government never bothered about placing a highly competent person in this chair even though Petrobangla is fetching the government around Tk 3,000 crore a year and overseeing assets worth billions of dollars," the source pointed out.

"It's not Sangu's financial matter that's in a mess. The whole financial discipline related to gas production under PSCs (production sharing contracts) is now in a mess and demands attention of the government," he added.

The first round unsolicited oil and gas bid of the early nineties put the Chevron (previously Occidental) deal as the winning deal.

Since signing of the PSCs on block-15 and 16 in 1994 and 95, Cairn invested a total of \$664.86 million by 2005. Of this, \$108.91 million invested on block-15 is non-recoverable as Cairn could not hit any single gas or oil field in that block.

In block-16, however, Cairn's investment continues to shoot up stunningly every year. The Sangu field remains Cairn's lone success till date.

Since the May 5, 1994 PSC was signed, Cairn invested half a million dollars in 1994, \$15 million

in 1995, \$26 million in 1996, \$165 million in 1997, \$102 million in 1998, \$34 million in 1999, \$55 million in 2000, \$22 million in 2001, no investment in 2002, \$31 million in 2003, \$46 million in 2004 and \$57 million in 2005.

In contrast, Chevron (originally Occidental, then Unocal) invested \$474 million between 1995 and 2005 in three blocks, block-12, 13 and 14, under two PSCs.

Unlike Cairn, Chevron's deal included an already discovered gas field, Jalalabad. Apart from that, Chevron discovered and developed Moulavibazar and Jalalabad gas fields -- all within \$474 million -- and is supplying more than 340 mmcfd gas.

Cairn started recovering its investment for Sangu from 1998, with \$11.95 million in the first year, then \$38.86 million in 99, \$71.71 million in 2000, \$80.74 million in 2001, \$90.44 million in 2002, \$81.7 million in 2003, \$35.18 million in 2004 and \$80.75 million 2005.

Chevron started recovering investment for Jalalabad from 1999 with \$21.4 million in the first year, followed by \$39 million in 2000, \$45 million in 2001, \$51.89 million in 2002, \$18.86 million in 2003, \$9.25 million in 2004 and \$18.7 million in 2005. It invested \$205 million and has recovered it entirely -- allowing Petrobangla's gas share to increase to the maximum level.

Chevron also recovered another \$70.93 million from Moulavibazar where it has invested \$81.36 million till 2005.

Official documents show that in dealing with Cairn, Petrobangla made its biggest audit objection in 1998 worth of \$106 million. Cairn has accepted the objection and resolved the \$105 million claim. Such status contradicts with the last year's committee decision to lift the audit objections.

Thailand

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after finding the virus in ducks in the central province of Phitsanulok.

Thailand has been among the countries hardest hit by the deadly H5N1 strain of the virus, recording 25 human cases, 17 of them fatal, since the outbreak began here in 2004.

The last bird flu fatality was in August last year, when a 59-year-old farmer in northeastern Thailand succumbed to the virus.

Thailand was criticized for being slow to respond to the outbreak of bird flu, but now is considered one of the countries best prepared to battle the disease. It aims to be completely free of the virus in three years.

Thailand has stockpiled 1.5 million capsules of the anti-viral drug oseltamivir, a generic version of the drug Tamiflu, which the kingdom began producing this year.

Bird flu has badly hurt Thailand's poultry industry, once the world's biggest, after countries around the world slapped bans on raw Thai chicken after the 2004 outbreak.

Thailand, the world's fourth-largest exporter of poultry, now only exports cooked chicken.

Schoolteacher

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body there. The law enforcement agency described Dilu as a top cadre of the outlawed Biplobi Communist Party.

Dilu was accused along with 12 others in the killing of Sayeed's brother Bokul, a night guard of the Agrani Bank Kumarkhali branch, on March 26, 2002.

Sayed filed a case with the Islamic University Police Station on March 27, 2002, without naming Dilu. His name was also not included in the charge sheet of the case.

A relative of Bokul mentioned Dilu's name during the hearing of the case at a magistrate's court.

Dilu was later granted bail and he appeared before the court regularly--last time on January 16.

Dilu's relatives claimed that Sayeed used to threaten Dilu's family with dire consequences.

His colleagues and people of Radhanagar village claimed that Dilu was not involved with any outlawed party and demanded judiciary inquiry into the incident.

Radhanagar Non-Government Primary School Headmaster Aminul Islam, Assistant Headmaster Taizuzzman, advocates Anup Kumar Nandi and Harunur Rashid attended the press conference.

The Rab, however, refused to make any comment on the issue. They did not also specify which Rab team went to Dilu's house.

EU

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team led by party Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan at the BNP's election office at Banani in the capital.

Earlier, the EC had suspended all its election-related activities in Bangladesh amidst uncertainty about the January 22 election, which has already been cancelled.

"We are meeting here many political stakeholders and business bodies to understand what is happening," Frowein said. They discussed matters related to the election at the meeting with BNP and got some fine and interesting information that they could not tell right now, he added.

"The EC team (poll-related) now here will return to Brussels soon and submit a report on its activities," he said. After assessing the report, the next team led by the chief observer may come back within the next two or three weeks.

The EC delegation at yesterday's meeting included its election monitoring member Halean Camblee, local mission First Secretary C Whittly and Jaohanes Hacinger, another official.

The BNP team included Reaz Rahman and AHM Mofazzal Karim, advisers to party chairperson Khaleda Zia.

The BNP leaders expressed their views for holding an election as early as possible to ensure continuity of the democratic process, meeting sources said.

Reaz Rahman, also former foreign affairs adviser, later told newsmen that the EC team wanted to know from them about the current political situation as well as the next general election.

"We told them that we (BNP) want the election to be held as soon as possible."

He said, the EC delegation showed interest in sending observers for monitoring the election.

Illegal structures

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said Kamruzzaman Khan, chief estate officer of the DCC.

The same day the railway department conducted an eviction drive in Borolekha and Ashuganj to recover its land that had been grabbed on different occasions.

CHITTAGONG DRIVE Our Chittagong Bureau office reports: The Chittagong Development Authority (CDA) yesterday continued for the sixth consecutive day its drive against encroachers.

Its demolition squad bulldozed some 250 illegal roadside structures. Led by magistrate Tahera Ferdous, the drive went on along the road between Probartak Intersection and Sholoshahar Gate No-2 and also the stretch between Sadarghat and Majhirghat area.

The ongoing drive that began Thursday aims at widening the roads with a view to ease the severe traffic congestion in the port city, sources said.

As per the CDA master plan, the roads were to be expanded, bearing in mind the fast growth of the country's second largest city. But influential quarters with the blessings of successive ruling parties have swallowed vast roadside properties belonging to the CDA, they said.

The road from Probartak to Sholoshahar was narrowed down to only 25 to 30 feet because of the rampant encroachment on either side, said a CDA official.

"The same is the case with the road from Sadarghat to Majhirghat," he added.

The official told The Daily Star that they have plans to expand both the roads up to 60 feet.

The CDA eviction team however had to spare some of the structures due to an High Court ruling.

Britain, India

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To another question, Choudhury said Britain supports democracy in Bangladesh and "We're saying the caretaker government will fulfil its programme as soon as possible to have the general election."

He however said the timeframe for the election will be decided by the caretaker government and the Election Commission.

Indian High Commissioner Pinak Ranjan Chakravarty said, "Bangladesh is a democratic country, India is also a democratic country. We want Bangladesh to have a successful democracy and Bangladesh will decide how to learn to be a successful democratic country."

He said India believes that the electoral system in Bangladesh should inspire confidence in voters by being transparent and neutral. A comprehensive voter roll, published well in advance of the polling day, is fundamental to the people's right to exercising their franchise.

Chakravarty said, "We're willing to support any initiative, including those the president may take, in the coming days and which will help address the reservation being expressed by major political parties on the issue of holding free and fair elections, and resolution of which will ensure the participation of all political parties."

The Indian envoy said it is crucial that there be no interruption in the democratic process of Bangladesh. This is not only vital for strengthening democracy in Bangladesh, but also for the country's future and long-term stability.

"As a friendly neighbour, we're naturally interested in Bangladesh remaining peaceful, democratic and stable," he said, adding, "It's our hope that the people of Bangladesh will be able to elect a government of their own choice in a free, fair, credible, peaceful and democratic election with the participation of all political parties."

In reply to a question, the high commissioner said India is keen to remain constructively engaged with this government and "We want to know whether we can move forward on various issues, meetings and we got a very clear signal today that this

government will remain constructively engaged with India."

Pakistan High Commissioner Alamgir Babar said they want the caretaker government will fulfil its programme as soon as possible to have the general election.

He said Pakistan and Bangladesh have very positive relations both at the working and political levels and "our relationship is moving forward very smoothly."

In reply to a question, the high commissioner said it is the expectation of the people of Bangladesh that the caretaker government will hold the general election as early as possible. "We support the expectation of the people of Bangladesh," he added.

Judicial probe

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In his complaint against Jalil, Tarique quoted the AL general secretary as telling the newsmen on November 16, "Tarique's APS Apu pressurised the inspector general of police to post 15 BNP men as officers-in-charge (OCs) at different police stations under Gopalganj, Faridpur, Shariatpur and Madaripur."

In the complaint against Sheikh Hasina, Tarique mentioned that she (Hasina) told a public meeting at Paltan Maidan on November 3, "The son of 4-party alliance chief drives Tk 2 crore car, wears suit worth lakh taka and squanders thousands of crore taka in gambling abroad," and "A syndicate of 2 lakh and 86 thousand crore taka is being run at Hawa Bhaban."

In the charge against Obaidul Quader, the complainant said he (Quader) at a press briefing on November 4 said "The New York Stock Exchange has awarded Tarique Rahman with a medal. How much taka is needed to get it, what is the source of this money, people want to know."

Quader also said, "People want to know what Tarique Rahman carried in 435 suitcases and bags on his trip to Saudi Arabia for performing the Umrah? Why and how the Malaysian government has confiscated the money of Tarique?" The petitioner said all these widely published and telecast statements of the AL leaders are false and baseless aiming to undermine his political image.

Long stay for ships

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postponed for 53 hours. Kota Rukan left the terminal on December 22 after remaining for 13.4 hours under operation handling a total of 823 TEUs.

This is a common picture of the country's premier Chittagong port as the ship movement report of the port's traffic department shows that most of the ships stay between 24 to 99 hours at the terminal.

Monitoring the movement of 13 ships anchored at the port between December 15 last year and January 2 this year it was found that each ship spent 20 to 75 hours idle time at the terminal before starting cargo handling. Ships also waste 30 to 66 hours due to breaks in handling containers.

Although the political situation in the country was relatively less volatile at that time, the ships badly suffered due to delay in discharging goods. According to an estimate of the Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI), the ship owners lost as much as \$ 286 million in the last financial year due to delay in discharging export and import goods at the premier port.

"If the turn around time could be reduced, the ship owners would have been able to save that amount of money," said Amirul Haque, chairman of port and ship standing committees of CCCI and FBCCI.

The country lost around 200 times of the amount as the slow functioning of the port shattered the total economy, he said.

The delay of ships at Chittagong Port costs millions of dollar every day to the garment sector, BGMEA President Fazlul Hoque said, adding that sometimes the garment owners lose export order or they have to go for air shipment that decreases the profit margin.

The ship operators said if a vessel is delayed for one day it suffers a financial loss of around \$ 12,000. The average rate of charter for a medium ship is around \$10,000 per day and another 2,000 dollars are for additional berthing fees and operating cost, they pointed out.

The people are the ultimate loss bearers as the ship owners add the cost to the freight of the cargo. Amirul Haque said, port operators, stevedores and traffic department are mainly responsible for delay in handling goods and making the port most expensive in the region. The stevedores compel the traffic department to hire labour only from a pull of 1,435 workers and fix the number of workers in a gang, he added.

In the absence of any fixed cut off time for ships, the traffic department 'whimsically' fixes the time for each ship and a ship can stay longer for loading additional cargo.

The delay at the terminal occurs also due to inefficiency of the port operators and non-availability of handling equipment at the yards.

The CPA operators of rubber

2,500 more held

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his two brothers for their alleged involvement with illegal alcohol business. Rab also recovered 36 bottles of alcohol from their possession.

Noor and his accomplices had been running the illegal alcohol business behind a homeopathy business in the north Bengal region for the past 15 years, Rab sources said. Milu Das and Mahfuzur, employees of Noor, were also picked up by Rab at Phulbari area in Bogra town.

In Moulvibazar, the joint forces arrested 28 people in connection with the Monday night's incident of snatching a pistol from a Rab member in Gandhichhara forest area of Srimangal Upazila, reports UMB.

SI Manna went to the area on that night in the guise of a gunrunner to arrest alleged criminal Kamal and his accomplices.

While he was talking to the criminals, they identified him as a Rab member and snatched his pistol after beating him up.

Later, police and Rab personnel launched a massive hunt in the area and arrested the 28 people, including Kamal's accomplices and family members, but Kamal could not be captured.

In Natore, Mahdul Islam Nabab, joint secretary of Natore municipal BNP, was arrested from the central mosque area yesterday morning, reports BSS quoting police. He was a wanted criminal in police list, the law enforcers said.

Two time bombs

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recovered the bombs and the materials.

The bomb-manufacturing materials include 200 gm sulphur powder, 200 gm explosive gel, 10 blank containers, five packets of ball bearing, a detonator and electric wires.

The DCI bomb disposal team exploded the bombs yesterday.

Detectives suspected the bombs were made to carry out attack on an Urs (religious gathering) of Bara Aulia shrine slated for January 30.

2 wounded

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At around 2:00 pm, the assailants started firing indiscriminately into Haji Sobhan Steel at Dholaikhal. The victims were inside the store and sustained injuries to their legs, hands and chest.

The criminals fled the scene soon after the firing.

Police suspect that extortionists might have carried out the attack.

Acting CEC

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free and fair election. He, however, acknowledged that the job is a difficult one as constitutionally, the government cannot sack or remove the CEC or the election commissioners.

They must stand aside willingly for the crisis to end, he noted.

Then on Friday, the law adviser told The Daily Star that soon a new CEC would be appointed. He observed that there was no question of sending the commissioners on leave anymore; they must resign.

"How long can we keep them on leave," he asked.

Meanwhile, Election Commissioner Mahmud Hasan Mansur yesterday declined to comment while the reporters asked him about Mainul's suggestion.

He only said, "We all want peace and the well being of the country."

On Monday, the other two election commissioners--Modabbir Hossain Chowdhury and Saiful Alam--told newsmen that they would leave their posts only if the president asks them to do so.

UK offers

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He appreciated the initiatives taken by the present nonparty caretaker government for holding an impartial election in Bangladesh.

The envoy assured the adviser that the assistance for different ongoing DFID-funded development projects in Bangladesh would continue.

The adviser said the caretaker government has taken and implemented various initiatives for the development of Bangladesh and the welfare of its people.

He also informed the British high commissioner that the government would ensure transparency in all of its activities in holding the election to be acceptable to all.

3 JMB men

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the district, including the Judge Court premises, as part of the JMB's synchronised countrywide bombings on August 17, 2005.

Four other accused militants -- Jobair, Tamim, Musa and Elias -- were not produced before the court, as the police could not identify them correctly due to their pseudonyms. They will be produced as soon as the law enforcers become sure about their identities, sources said.

Oriental Bank

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against fake accounts.

"Such incidents fall under criminal acts and the Oriental Bank should file cases against the accused without any delay," the BB letters says.

Koyes Sami was aware of the matter, and as chief of the management, he is similarly involved in the crime, it added.

The other officials of Oriental Bank against whom the BB asked to file criminal cases include SM Harun, senior vice president, AQM Mahmud Ullah, senior assistant vice president, Mohammad Yameen, senior assistant vice president, Mohammad Fazlur Rahman, assistant vice president, Quamrul Islam, vice president, Alamgir Kabir, assistant vice president, Tarique Alam, executive officer, Mohiuddin Ahmed, assistant vice president, Syed Mahmud Hasan, assistant vice president, Shahid Uddin Khandaker, senior officer, Mohammad Ermdad Hossain Bhuiyan, executive officer, Mohammad Firoz Kabir, senior officer, Manjurul Amin, senior assistant vice president and Saiful Aziz Pavel.

The former officials are Istiaq Ahmed Chowdhury, former executive vice president of Oriental Bank and now working as deputy managing director of Trust Bank, Mustaq Ahmed, former assistant vice president of Oriental and now manager, One Bank, Syed Sarfaraz Shah, former assistant vice president of Oriental and now working in State Bank of India, Dhaka, AZM Saleh, former manager of Oriental and presently working as manager of One Bank, Khandaker Shahrukh Ahmed, now working in the IFIC Bank, Arifur Rahman, now working in One Bank, and ANM Asifur Rahman, former senior assistant vice president of Oriental Bank, now absconding.

Oriental Bank sources said they are discussing the matter with lawyers on filing criminal cases against the culprits. **BAIL PETITION OF EX-ORIENTAL BANK OFFICIAL REJECTED** Our court correspondent adds: A

Katsav, Israel's first president from a right-wing party, has vigorously denied the charges against him, vowed to clear his name and has steadfastly refused to resign unless formal charges are brought against him.

"I am the victim of a despicable libel campaign," he said in a statement following Mazuz's brief.

"I intend to fight to the end to prove my innocence," he said. "The president is hurting, but is not afraid. The president is completely certain of his justice and innocence."

Be honest and neutral

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the country's economy," the CA said.

He said the caretaker government will do all it can to revitalise all sectors of the economy.

Emphasising the need for strengthening the power sector, the CA said all steps should be taken immediately to ensure power supply to factories, offices and households.

"Mismanagement in the power sector has caused much suffering to the people and it has to stop," he said.

The CA also urged the secretaries to put an end to the price hike of essentials by taking immediate and meaningful steps.

Stating that the law and order situation has improved over the past week, Fakhruddin said the caretaker government is resolute in making it sustainable to ensure public security. "Criminal activities will not be tolerated under any circumstances. Effective measures have to be taken to recover illegal arms and arrest criminals,"

The CA praised small farmers for sustaining the country, and said they have been let down by the lack of assistance from the government, especially regarding supply of fertilisers.

Noting that the widespread scarcity of fertilisers in the country has been caused by mismanagement, Fakhruddin said government officials must focus on increasing supply of fertilisers to the farmers.

He also said relationships with friendly countries should be strengthened and steps should be taken to brighten Bangladesh's image abroad.

The CA also urged the secretaries to be more proactive in ensuring implementation of ongoing development projects.

"Any delay or failure in implementing projects will not be tolerated," the

Ethiopian troops

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occupation and that as soon as Somali forces are able to take care of their security, the Ethiopian forces would leave Somalia," he added on condition of anonymity.

"That time has now come as Somali forces are efficiently taking care of their own security."

Somali deputy premier Hussein Mohamed Aidid, who also attended the send-off ceremony, praised the role of the Ethiopians whose intervention on behalf of the interim government prompted the Islamists to flee Mogadishu on December 28.

"The heroic army of Ethiopia supported the transitional government to restore normalcy to the country after 16 years of violence... I thank the people and the government of Ethiopia on behalf of my government," he told AFP.

"The withdrawal of Ethiopian troops shows that the troops did not have any political agenda, but were only interested in stabilisation."

Zawahri

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destroying the equivalent of 10 armies.

He reiterated past offers to the US people of security by reaching an "understanding" with Muslims, and said peace would be impossible if Americans continued to follow the