

US, N Korea ready for landmark talks

AFP, Washington

US and North Korean negotiators were set to open landmark talks yesterday on normalising relations amid questions over whether US intelligence had exaggerated the communist state's nuclear threat.

US officials cautioned that the talks in New York were only a small first step toward establishing diplomatic ties with a nation branded by US President George W Bush in 2002 as part of an "axis of evil".

They said North Korea needs to meet a series of denuclearisation benchmarks to end a half century of enmity between the two sides.

The chief US negotiator, Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill, and his North Korean counterpart, Kim Kyegwan, were to kick off meetings with a dinner late Monday at a New York hotel before a full day of talks Tuesday, US officials said.

They come as the UN watchdog International Atomic Energy Agency said its director Mohamed ElBaradei will travel to North Korea on March 13 to discuss how to monitor its promised dismantling of nuclear facilities.

The bilateral talks between Washington and Pyongyang meet a long-standing condition set by the reclusive regime for abandoning its nuclear ambitions and could bring the two sides to their closest since the division of Korea after World War II.

But in Washington, policymakers questioned whether US intelligence agencies overstated Pyongyang's alleged secret uranium enrichment programme in 2002, and whether their ability to provide information on the North was reliable.

"We still don't have the intelligence community overall to give us, as policymakers, the information that we need to make good decisions in North Korea, Iran and other places," Republican Representative Peter Hoeckstra said Sunday.

"You always make policy with imprecise information, but you know, there are some things that we've been disappointed with," he told the Fox News Sunday

programme.

"It's a concern about the leadership in the intelligence community, not the folks who are working this 24/7."

The New York Times reported Monday that US officials plan to tell their North Korean counterparts that Washington's doubts about how much progress the country has made in enriching uranium gives North Korea a face-saving way to surrender its nuclear equipment.

Monday's talks come as part of a six-nation deal reached February 13 to end North Korea's nuclear weapons programme.

Under the multi-phase agreement, North Korea agreed to shut down its main nuclear facility and begin steps toward giving up its programme in exchange for some 300 million dollars in aid and moves toward "full diplomatic relations" with the US.

While the rapid start to the normalization talks took many by surprise, US officials stressed the talks would yield no breakthroughs but would focus more on "organisational" issues such as setting an agenda for further meetings.

Still, observers of Bush administration foreign policy said Washington was turning a page.

6 JMB men

FROM PAGE 1

November 2005. One of them, Asadul Islam alias Arif, is absconding.

Senior assistant judges Jagannath Pandey and Sohel Ahmed were killed in the suicide bomb attack at Purba Chakdak in Jhalakati town in the wake of a series of bombings carried out by Islamist militants across the country.

The High Court (HC) on August 31 last year upheld the trial court verdict handing down death penalties to the seven convicts on May 29.

The Supreme Court on November 28 last year rejected the six convicts' petitions seeking permission to appeal against the HC judgement.

Rab men killing

FROM PAGE 16

Dhaka yesterday afternoon with a seven-day remand prayer.

In his forwarding report, he said that the three might have link with the killers of the two Rab personnel. "They needed to be interrogated during remand for information about the trawler, firearms used in the killing, whereabouts of the killers and names of their accomplices," it added.

Magistrate Quamrunnahar Siddiqui granted a five-day remand after the hearing.

The investigators have been looking for other two sons of Tara Mia-Karim and Fahim—who have been absconding since the killing.

On Sunday, police picked up Lengra Kabir, a Rab informant who connived with the killers and accompanied them when the two Rab personnel were boarded on a trawler from Salerup bridge area and were taken to the brickfield.

Criminal Anar and his five accomplices directly took part in the killing.

Ctg Airport

FROM PAGE 1

Assistance in customs matters at the next Saarc summit, informed the Chief Adviser's (CA) Press Secretary Syed Fahim Munainat at the post-meeting briefing at the CA's office.

"The council of advisers had a detailed discussion on whether the agreement with Thai Airways would be beneficial to Bangladesh after the airport started operation under the Open Skies system," said Fahim.

He said the advisers will send the matter to the law ministry to examine whether the clauses of the 2005 agreement will still apply under the new system.

"The government will consider the options after examining the legal aspects of the agreement and whether it will be profitable to the country," the press secretary said.

He affirmed the agreement will not be cancelled and can be modified in a number of ways, including the addition of a supplementary agreement.

The agreement is yet to be implemented and the airport remains under the management of the Civil Aviation Authority.

Qualifying for the Open Skies system opens up the airport to all international air carriers to apply for landing rights.

Fahim explained that when the deal was signed with Thai Airways in 2005, airlines from the western hemisphere were not allowed to apply for landing rights to the airport.

However, after the Shah Amanat Airport met all the 'prerequisites' during the tenure of the present caretaker government, it adopted the Open Skies system, he said.

He could not provide details of the prerequisites or on which specific date the airport had adopted the system.

Asked about reports in several newspapers that the caretaker government had taken the decision in principle to revive the National Security Council, Fahim said he was not aware of such a decision.

according to some sources, who identified them to be the members of Hazi Group. According to sources, two arrests – Saleh and Nurul Islam – are also members of the same gang.

Talking on the motive of the murder, an investigator told The Daily Star preferring anonymity that the group was enraged due to Rab operation that got on the way of their drug trade at and around Aminibazar, a major point of smuggling drugs into the city.

"Killing of some four members of the same group in Rab 'crossfire' further added to it," he said, echoing some other investigators. "It is definitely a well-planned revenge killing which was also aimed at making their drug trade undisturbed," he added.

Meantime, our correspondent from Barisal reports: Slain Rab deputy assistant director Humayun Kabir was buried at his family graveyard at Bokshir Char village in the district yesterday evening.

His body was brought to the area at around 9:30am on Sunday after an autopsy at Dhaka Medical College morgue.

MOSTAK'S ARREST

Acting on information gathered from 26 people rounded up on Saturday, the Rab personnel raided Hazirpur village in Dhamrai on Sunday and arrested professional killer Mostak. But he managed to slip through and fled to Sherpur.

Later, being informed that he was hiding in Pakuria union parishad in Sherpur Sadar, the law enforcers made announcements from loudspeakers in the area and raided the house of Mobazzal Haq at Fakirpara on 10:00am yesterday. Sensing presence of the law enforcers, Mostak tried to flee, but villagers chased and caught him and later handed him over to Rab.

He was later taken to Rab headquarters.

Tigers' injury

FROM PAGE 16

against a depleted Zimbabwe and Scotland, Bermuda and Canada.

Their clash against the Black Caps is more than only another limited-overs game.

There was however hardly anything encouraging for the Tigers from their past record against New Zealand as they have lost their previous seven encounters badly except the last one which they lost by a narrow margin of three wickets in Dhaka.

New Zealand are also the only ICC full-member country against whom Dav Whatmore's charges have never posted 200 runs.

BANGLADESH

Habibul Bashar (captain), Tamim Iqbal, Javed Omar, Afib Ahmed, Shakib Al Hasan, Mohammad Ashraful, Mashrufe Rahim (wicketkeeper), Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Abdur Razzaq, Tapash Baisya, Syed Rasel and Shahadat Hossain.

UP chairman

FROM PAGE 1

might have some links with Harish's killing.

The dead bodies were sent to morgue for autopsy.

No case was filed as of yesterday evening, sources said.

Moudud accounts

FROM PAGE 1

banks to furnish the CIC director general with statements of all accounts—current, savings, term deposit, credit, foreign currency, and credit card—the aforementioned taxpayers.

The statements should include information about any closed account that the six would previously hold.

The letter on Moudud additionally asks the banks to inform the CIC of his locker and savings instruments.

When The Daily Star contacted the former law minister for his reaction on the matter yesterday evening, he said, "Let me receive the notice (the NBR letter) first and then I can say what I think of it."

Delhi

FROM PAGE 1

complementarities. In our region also, the energy output from various sources varies in different seasons and there are surpluses and deficits that could complement each other," he added.

"Facilitating and promoting trade in energy in South Asia has been identified as one of the key areas for cooperation... In view of the potential for regional cooperation, an Energy Ring has been conceptualised in Saarc," Shinde said.

This Ring would consist of trans-national lines for trade in electricity, gas and oil, he said at the conference being attended by energy ministers of all member countries of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation.

The Saarc Working Group on Energy is also formulating the Terms of Reference for study on energy trade in the region, the minister said.

"This is an evolving area and we have high expectations from this dialogue for providing further inputs in this area. We could also look at successful experiences of developing inter-country grid connections," he said.

30 get training

FROM PAGE 1

been used properly due to a selection process dogged by favouritism," regretted a high official of the commerce ministry.

Besides, the WTO Cell has been running with seven out of its nine posts filled by officials from the administrative cadre.

Only seven trade cadre officials are currently posted in the commerce ministry while it has 55 posts for such cadres.

International trade expert and Executive Director of CPD Debapriya Bhattacharya said challenges have always been there before Bangladesh in dealing with international trade but it will get a new dimension as the Doha Development Round has resumed.

"The technical capacity cannot develop if the WTO Cell itself remains paralysed," Debapriya added.

He said a major task of the government will be to mobilise local expertise and opinions of the business community to supplement government capacities on the one hand and to provide proper feedback to the Bangladeshi Mission in Geneva on the other.

Huda, 9 other

FROM PAGE 1

attacking journalists who went to Kalaroa to cover news of the then leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina on August 30, 2002.

In Rangpur, the joint forces recovered 94 CI sheets from the Sardarpur house of Upazila Statistics Officer Moinul Islam yesterday morning.

They also recovered 46 CI sheets from the house of Khalilur Rahman, general secretary of Mitipur union unit of the Jatiya Party and 16 sheets from the house of Kudumpur UP Chairman Maj Gen (retd) Moinul Hossain.

Police yesterday recovered 27 CI sheets from the shop owned by Nagarghat UP Jamaat Ameer Mehedi Hasan at Nagarghat village in Tala upazila.

They also recovered 24 CI sheets from local Zia Parishad office at Kamarali in Kalaroa upazila and 25 sheets from the possession of local BNP leader Abdur Razzaq of Komporu village.

The police recovered 27 CI sheets used in the shop owned by Sonabaria UP Jamaat Ameer Maulana Sirajul Islam at Sonabaria Kalaroa upazila.

The joint forces recovered 42 CI sheets from an organisation formed by Mathureshpur union BNP General Secretary Abu Toha at Nijdepur village and a shop of Rawshan Ali of village Burdhaman in Kaliganj upazila.

Another Dhaka court yesterday rejected a bail petition of detained ex-BNP lawmaker Hafiz Ibrahim accused in an arms case filed with Gulshan Police Station on February 5, 6 and 7.

Metropolitan Magistrate Mamun Al Rashid passed the order after a petition seeking bail was placed before the court.

CASE AGAINST HAFIZ IBRAHIM

Another Dhaka court yesterday rejected a bail petition of detained ex-BNP lawmaker Hafiz Ibrahim accused in an arms case filed with Gulshan Police Station on February 27.

Metropolitan Magistrate Mamun Al Rashid passed the order after a petition seeking bail was placed before the court.

CASE AGAINST ADAB OFFICIAL

Another Dhaka court rejected a prayer for a 14-day remand sought by investigation officers to interrogate Aminul Islam, an official of Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh (ADAB), in two criminal cases filed with Dhanmondi Police Station in October last year.

Metropolitan Magistrate Selina Akhter rejected the remand prayers saying Aminul's name was not in the first information report though he was shown arrested in the cases.

Aminul was arrested on January 12 for his alleged involvement in anti-state activities and later sent to Dhaka Central Jail giving a one-month detention.

Abdur Rahman, executive director of the mill, said all of some 500 workers and officials managed to come out from the burning factory owned by Ilias Brothers.

The factory also used to produce towel for others under sub-contracts, Rahman added.

Titas gas field

FROM PAGE 16

suggestions of an eight-member primary investigation committee. That committee however suggested hiring a world class contractor for logging the troubled well.

Well logging is a technique used in oil and gas industry for recording rock and fluid properties to find hydrocarbon zones in geological formations within the earth's crust. This technique is also used for stabilising a volatile well.

An official involved in the initial investigation into the field's leakage source said poor cementation of Number-10 well was the 'top suspect'.

"When wells number 8, 9 and 10 were developed, Titas used low quality cement to save money," he said.

"But the origin of this leakage may be elsewhere. We can't say for sure. This is why we believe the government should have a world class consultant planning and overseeing the remedial action. But Petrobangla seems to have taken the matter rather lightly since it is not going to hire any internationally known expert having experience of tackling this kind of situation," he said.

"The study submitted to Petrobangla on Sunday says it seemed that the leaked gas was flowing through a well path and then at some point underground it was spreading horizontally and gushing out through various points on the ground.

The experts, who include three senior geologists and five engineers from Petrobangla and outside, suggested immediate appointment of a world class consultant to deal with this kind of situation.

The recommendations of these experts were seconded by experts from Chevron who also visited the troubled site last month.

Discovered in the early sixties by Shell Oil, Titas was estimated to have a gas reserve of 5.12 trillion cubic feet (after four decades it now has 2.78 tcf).

Int'l community

FROM PAGE 16

greatly praised. When asked if he would take up new assignment as the secretary general of ESCAP (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific), the adviser said it was a speculation only and that no offer has been made to him yet. "I will give it a thought when they make the offer considering me as a potential candidate for the post."

"The path we are following and if we could establish a political and social system free of corruption, muscle power and black money, then Bangladesh will remain as a model for many countries," he observed.

When asked how the world community could consider Bangladesh as a model without democracy or an elected government for more than four months, Chowdhury said, "they have perceived that a renaissance has taken place in Bangladesh where the people have taken up the control of their destiny."

"The path we are following and if we could establish a political and social system free of corruption, muscle power and black money, then Bangladesh will remain as a model for many countries," he