

US, N Korea ready for landmark talks

AFF, 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 the North Korean counterpart, Kim Kye-gwan, 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 over-stated 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 Hoekstra 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

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 link with the killers of the two Rab personnel. "They needed to be interrogated during remand for information about the tawler, firearms used in the killing, whereabouts of the killers and names of their accomplices," it added.

Magistrate Quamrunnahar Siddique 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 conspired with the killers and accompanied them when the two Rab personnel were boarded on a tawler from Salehpur 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 Advisers' (CA) Press Secretary Syed Fahim Munaim 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.

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 Soheli Ahmed were killed in the suicide bomb attack at Purba Chadkati in Jhalakathi 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.

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--of 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."

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 transnational 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 ministers 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 Bangladesh Mission in Geneva on the other.

Huda, 9 other

FROM PAGE 1
Manjurul Ahsan Munshi, Mosaddek Ali Falu and Ali Asgar Lobi, and Firoz Mia, a BNP-backed trade union leader at BTBT.

The Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court had rejected their bail after police produced them before the court on February 5, 6 and 7.

In his order, the judge said the charges brought against them were primarily proved and they were arrested under section 16 (2) of the Emergency Ordinance of 2007. The charges are also non-bailable, added the judge.

The joint forces arrested them from their residences on different dates for alleged involvement in activities against the state, corruption and hoarding of goods. Later, all were sent to Dhaka Central Jail giving a 30-day detention.

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.

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 pointed out.

A Petrobangla official said, "We hope the BGfCL operation will succeed. We are losing precious

gas every day and we don't know if the situation could get worse overnight."

In their primary study on the gas leakage spread over an area of about 1,000 acres of land, the experts expressed their belief that the leakage has originated from the main Titas gas field reservoir near location number-3.

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
Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro, Under-Secretary-General for UN Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Marie Guéhenno and diplomats from different countries during his nine-day visit to New York, 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 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 corrected his statement and added that they would consider Bangladesh a model if next governments follow the steps and policies adopted by the present caretaker government.

Replying to another question if the UN secretary general wanted to know about the timeframe of holding the general elections, Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury said, the election will be held when time comes.

The adviser also met with UNDP Administrator Kamal Darbesh during the visit. Commenting on UNDP, he said the UNDP has pledged support to its current projects on governance and electoral support programme.

The adviser noted that Bangladesh 's signing of the UN Convention against Corruption was

More relief goods

FROM PAGE 16
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 Sarderpura 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 Jatitya Party and 16 sheets from the house of Kumodpur UP Chairman Mozammel Hoque.

Police yesterday recovered 27 CI sheets from the shop owned by Nagarghata UP Jamaat Ameer Mehedi Hasan at Nagarghata 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 Razzak of Komorpur village.

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

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

In Narayanganj, the joint forces arrested former UP chairman Daud Molla, who faces six criminal cases, from court area on Sunday afternoon.

Fire at towel factory

FROM PAGE 16
control until filing of this report at 7:00pm.

They said black smokes hindered their efforts to extinguish the fire.

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.

Anti-graft drive

FROM PAGE 1
undertaken various institutional reforms, including the recasting of the Election Commission and the Anti-Corruption Commission, aiming to hold free and fare elections and achieve progress in economic sector.

Citing the faster economic growth of China in the recent years, the chief adviser said Bangladesh, as a regional neighbour, is highly inspired from the achievement of its friendly country.

He said the caretaker government is trying to bring back good governance and made it clear that "none is above the law".

Chai Xi congratulated Fakhruddin Ahmed on behalf of the Chinese prime minister and his government on his assuming the office of chief adviser of the caretaker government.

Naser

FROM PAGE 16
Nuruzzaman filed an extortion case against Naser Rahman and seven others including Sylhet city BNP chief Ariful Haque Chowdhury, Moulvibazar Pourasava Chairman Moyun, and some Roads and Highways officials. In the case, Nuruzzaman alleged that on October 10 of 2003, Naser had demanded Tk 2 crore as toll in connivance with others.

Ariful and Moyun, who are close to the former finance minister, were also remanded for a day last week. They may be taken on fresh remand soon, said an official.

Musharraf

FROM PAGE 16
Both Musharraf and Yunus discussed different regional issues, including the Saarc movement across the region.

"I am a strong supporter of the Saarc... It's my dream that Saarc will be first region in the world to send poverty into the museum," the Nobel laureate told the Pakistan president.

He also suggested taking initiative to introduce Saarc passport and scholarships for the citizens of the member countries to make easy cross-border visit to increase cultural and social exchanges between peoples of the region.

Later, Pakistan Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz hosted a banquet at the Prime Minister's House in honour of the micro-finance pioneer. More than 100 people, including senior ministers, government officials and social elite, attended the banquet.

During a meeting with Prof Yunus, the Pakistan prime minister requested him to replicate his ideas and experiences in Pakistan through opening Grameen Bank.

"Really, we have been proud of you as you earned the honour for the whole South Asian region as well as for the Muslim world," said Shaukat Aziz.

He said micro-finance movement in Pakistan was inspired by Prof Yunus and Grameen Bank.

Prof Yunus suggested the Pakistan prime minister to set up social business enterprise like Grameen-Danone Yogurt company to improve nutrition status of the poor.

He also urged the Pakistani leaders to establish a social stock market in which the social enterprises could be enlisted for trading their shares.

Gold smuggling case

FROM PAGE 16
Around 16 years ago on July 17, 1990, a team of customs officials held four people including two foreign nationals from Zia International Airport during their attempt to smuggle around 3.6 kg of gold worth around Tk 2.5 crore into Bangladesh.

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

During the investigation, the IO found evidence of Ershad's involvement in the smuggling and his name was included in the charge sheet on August 31, 1991.

Kamal Majumder

FROM PAGE 16
Section 491 of the CrPC challenging the detention orders under the Special Powers Act, 1974.

Earlier, on February 26, a High Court division bench declared illegal the detention of Kamal Majumder and three others.

JP wants polls

FROM PAGE 16
Replying to a query, the JP chairman said he does not think that the EC would need more than two years for the task.

About the Upazila Parishad election, the JP chairman said he hopes the Upazila Parishad elections would be held before the parliamentary election.

The JP delegation discussed with the EC the possibility of holding Upazila Parishad elections ahead of the parliamentary election.

The CEC informed the JP delegation about the EC's initiatives for electoral reforms.

28 die in Baghdad

FROM PAGE 1
Shias' commitment to the US-promoted campaign to drive militants from the capital.Iraq's prime minister, meanwhile, ordered an investigation into a British-Iraqi raid on a police intelligence headquarters in southern Iraq that captured an alleged death squad leader and found 30 prisoners with signs of torture.

West of Baghdad, US soldiers described a raid last week that uncovered a suspected Sunni "torture site" and rescued of two Iraqi captives, who apparently had been spared immediate execution because the militants' video camera broke and they wanted to film the killing.

The quiet but dramatic advance in Sadr City involving nearly 1,200 US and Iraqi forces who didn't fire a shot marked one of the most significant developments in the security clampdown in Baghdad since it took effect nearly three weeks ago.

But it only received the green light after drawn-out talks between US commanders and political allies of radical Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr and his powerful Mahdi Army. Both sides are watching each other for any wrong moves on the same streets where they battled in the past, including intense urban warfare in 2004.

Al-Sadr's militiamen lowered their profile under intense government pressure to give the security operation a chance to root out both Sunni and Shia extremists. US military leaders, however, must walk a fine line as part of the tacit truce. They are seeking suspected Shia death squads leaders, but must keep from squeezing al-Sadr's militia too hard and risk collapsing the entire drive to reclaim Baghdad from extremists and gangs.

The indication that we are getting is a lot of the really bad folks have gone into hiding," said Lt Col David Oclander shortly after troops moved into Sadr City's teeming grid of low-rise buildings in northeast Baghdad.

Oclander said "not a shot was fired" as troops entered the area, which was constructed in the 1960s to house poor Shias seeking work in the capital and was known as Saddam City until the former Iraqi leader's fall in 2003.

As the insurgency picked up steam in the past few years, Sadr City became the site of frequent battles. Among the US casualties was Spc. Casey Sheehan, whose death on April 4, 2004, began the anti-war campaign of his mother, Cindy Sheehan.

Last week, US and Iraqi forces began pinpoint raids into Sadr City seeking suspected leaders of Shia death squads blamed for thousands of execution-style slayings of Sunni rivals in recent years. Since Friday, military planners have worked inside a Sadr City police station in apparent preparations to create a permanent outpost, police said.

Despite the calm crossing into Sadr City, some quickly protested the strong US presence.

An al-Sadr ally, lawmaker Falah Hassan, claimed the Sadr City pact called for Iraqi forces to lead the searches and only call in US units if they faced resistance. He called the front-line US role a "provocative act."

Al-Sadr, too, has complained about the heavy US role in the raids around the city. In a statement last week, he also decried the security plan's inability to stop car bombs and other attacks blamed on Sunni insurgent groups against Shia civilians.

The comments raised worries that he could order his Mahdi Army to confront forces carrying out the security operation. But he didn't attempt to raise the stakes a possible sign of newfound caution from al-Sadr.

Late last year, Washington strong-armed Shia Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki into pulling his protection for the firebrand cleric, who is based in the Shia holy city of Najaf in southern Iraq and is a major political ally of the prime minister.

"We don't know if he has a change of heart, but certainly there is a change of tactic," the US ambassador to Iraq, Zalmay Khalilzad, told CNN.

Harris Chy's house

FROM PAGE 1
Found the peacocks confined in a cage on the ground floor of the two-storey building.

The birds were later taken to Dhaka Zoo in Mirpur.

Harris Chowdhury is one of the 50 corruption suspects listed by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC).

The officials found no one but two security guards at the house. The guards said that the peacocks had been there in the cage ever since they had started working at Harris residence about a year ago, police sources said.

According to the forest preservation act, rearing peacocks without due approval is a punishable offence. No case however was filed as of writing this report at 9:00pm yesterday.

Meanwhile, a Dhaka court yesterday placed Harris' chauffeur and his brother-in-law on a fresh remand of four days each.

On completion of their three-day remand, Harris' chauffeur Abdus Salam and brother-in-law Mohammad Masum were produced before the court of Metropolitan Magistrate Jagannath Das Khokon with a prayer for a fresh remand of seven days to interrogate them.

Last week on Wednesday, Rapid Action Battalion had seized a luxury sport utility vehicle (SUV) owned by Harris Chowdhury and arrested his two brothers-in-law along with the driver of the car.

In yesterday's forwarding report, the investigation officer of the case Sub-Inspector Mustaque Hossain of Dhanmondi Police Station said he gathered significant information about the seized car and needs to quiz both the arrestees further to know whereabouts of Harris and his associates.

For a third consecutive day, Baghdad was spared a car bombing or attack bringing mass casualties. But there was still bloodshed. A Shia newspaper editor and a police officer were gunned down.

After nightfall, US artillery was heard across Baghdad. In recent days, US gunners have hit suspected Sunni insurgent staging grounds south of the city.

Around the capital, US forces reported the discovery of a series of weapons caches.

In southern Iraq, a joint British-Iraqi raid Sunday on the National Iraqi Intelligence Agency in Basra, about 340 miles southeast of Baghdad, discovered 30 prisoners, including one woman and two children, with signs of torture and abuse, the British military said.

The raid also captured an alleged death squad leader and four other suspected militiamen blamed for "kidnap, torture, murder and involvement in roadside bomb attacks on multinational forces and civilians," said Maj David Gell, a British military spokesman.

Al-Maliki, the prime minister, ordered an investigation into the raid and vowed to punish "those who carried out this illegal and irresponsible act."

West of Baghdad, troops taking part in an operation that began Wednesday also stumbled upon an apparent hide-out west of Baghdad that was used by Sunni insurgents for torture and summary executions. Lt Col Valery Keaveny described breaking through a double-locked door to find an Iraqi police officer and another Iraqi man who had undergone "considerable torture." The policeman had been shot in both ankles and the other man had been dangling from the ceiling and "beaten severely by a pipe for a good deal of time," Keaveny told reporters.

The captives told US soldiers they had been convicted to death by an insurgent court at the site about 18 miles west of Baghdad near the village of Karmah and had the choice of either beheading or a fatal gunshot, said Keaveny.

They were spared immediate death, Keaveny said, because the insurgents' video camera didn't work and they had gone to get a new one to film the executions. "(The insurgents) said they would be back in the morning," he said. "And that's when we came in, that night."

3 ex-state ministers

FROM PAGE 1
Sharmin Ferdous has been assigned to file cases against Mir Nasiruddin and his son, another DD Abdullah Al Zahid against Aman and his wife while Jibon Krishna Roy will file a case against Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir.

Habibur Rahman said the amount of illegal assets of those persons might be more as the investigation is still on.

"We have decided to file cases on the basis of our findings so far," Habibur said, adding that if more assets are found in the course of investigation those would be included in the charge sheets.

The ACC commissioner said even fresh cases might be filed against them if necessary.

Sources said the commission is preparing also to file separate cases against some of the five for alleged misuse of power.

The three state ministers were among the 50 graft suspects asked by the ACC to submit wealth statements.</