

# US Senate rejects Iraq pullout plan

AFP, Washington

Democrats cranked up pressure on the White House over Iraq Thursday, scoring an initial coup in the House of Representatives, but then failed to ram a troop withdrawal plan through the Senate.

Rancour between Congress's majority Democrats and President George W. Bush and his Republican backers hardened amid fierce debate over two bills advancing a timetable to get combat troops out of Iraq's cauldron of violence next year.

The Senate rejected a Democratic bill by 50 votes to 48, which set a goal of a withdrawal of troops by March 2008, in the latest twist of a bitter political tussle sparked by a war, which has claimed 3,209 US lives.

One Democrat, Ben Nelson of Nebraska, voted against the measure, while one Republican, Gordon Smith of Oregon, who has already broken with the president over the war, voted with the Democrats.

Bush, who accuses Democrats of trying to micromanage the war and of trying to handcuff his constitutional powers as commander in chief, had threatened to veto the bill.

Democrats had harboured little hope of piling up the 60 vote super-majority they needed to assure passage, but their strategy was designed to publicly tighten the screws on Republicans over the unpopular war.

In the House, Democrats did succeed in forcing a separate attempt to pull troops out of Iraq by September 2008 through the powerful Appropriations Committee.

Members voted to insert the deadline in Bush's 120 billion dollar budget request for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, overriding Republican opposition and in defiance of another presidential veto threat.

The full House is expected to consider the bill next week. In the Senate, both sides claimed

victory after their latest fracas, and immediately dug in for a new round of legislative infighting over the war, likely to intensify with presidential and congressional elections looming in 2008.

"We have had a very good day. The Republicans are rubber-stamping the president's failed policy, that is the message here, said Democratic majority leader Harry Reid.

"This is part of a process, a process to bring our troops home," Senator Joseph Biden, Democratic chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee predicted Republican Senators would soon feel rising political heat.

"It is only a matter of time before our Republican colleagues come to that conclusion ... In the meantime a lot of innocent lives are going to be lost."

Republican Minority leader Mitch McConnell however said the Senate had made a landmark declaration against a precipitous withdrawal from Iraq.

"I am very pleased that the majority of the Senate today expressed themselves in opposition to a specific timeline for a withdrawal of troops," he said.

"That is like sending a memo to the enemy: just hold on to a certain date and we are out."

In a clutch of Iraq votes, the Senate also voted 96-2 to pass a Democratic bill expressing support for the troops in Iraq and calling for the provision of adequate medical care when they return home wounded.

The largely symbolic measure states that supporting the troops also means giving them proper training before they are deployed.

Some Democrats have accused the Bush administration of sending soldiers into harms way before they are ready to enter combat or are properly equipped.

A third resolution, perceived by some as an attempt to force Congress to finance all military

operations, was also passed.

Congress theoretically has the power to cut funding for the war, but Democrat leaders have so far declined to take the politically explosive step that could be seen as deserting troops while they are locked in combat.

Democrats believe they have a mandate from US voters to begin a troop withdrawal, after winning control of Congress in November elections and a stream of opinion polls showing strong public support for leaving Iraq.

But Republicans have so far blocked all attempts to interfere with Bush's surge strategy that will see more than 21,500 troops deploy in a last-ditch attempt to pacify Iraq.

US Vice President Dick Cheney led resistance to Democratic tactics earlier this week in a speech to the powerful American Israel Public Affairs Committee lobby group.

"A sudden withdrawal of our coalition would dissipate much of the effort that's gone into fighting the global war on terror and result in chaos and mounting danger," he said.

"For the sake of our own security, we will not stand by and let it happen."

## Manzarul

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smashed Rana's head. The microbus could not be detained.

Rana, who was 22, was the youngest son of contractor Kazi Monirul Islam of Mujgunni under Khalishpur thana.

His eldest brother Majharul Islam Rony is a computer engineer and another brother is Mahmudur Rahman Rimon. His father Kazi Monirul Islam is now undergoing treatment in Mumbai, India.

According to his family sources, Rana and Setu were going to Abash hotel at Chuknagar to take lunch after playing a local cricket match between Boyra Tarun Sangha and Flying Pigeon Club at the Bir Shreshtha Flight Lt Matiu Rahman Stadium, which is about 200 yards from his residence.

It was also learnt that cricketers Nahidul Haq Shaown and Mohammad Salim were accompanying Rana in another bike to the hotel, some 30 kilometres from Khulna city.

Hundreds of people including officials of civil and police administration rushed to the Khulna Medical College Hospital where the dead bodies were brought from Dumuria at 7:30 pm.

Rana's mother Jamila Khatoun received the news of her son's death at 6:30 pm and was repeatedly losing sense. All other family members were outside Khulna.

Setu, a Premier League cricketer in Dhaka who also played for Khulna Division in the country's first-class competition, was the son of Abdul Matin, a businessman who hails from Bagmara under Khulna Sadar thana.

Both the cricketers had featured in Khulna's final match of this season's National Cricket League in Dhaka on Thursday. Rana was also due to leave for Colombo on March 24 to represent Bangladesh A team.

## Urea crisis

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Abul Bashar, deputy director of the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) in Bogra, said about 30,000 hectares of boro cultivated lands in the district are yet to be fertilized properly.

The BCIC sources said 11,995 metric tons of urea were supplied from the buffer stock in Bogra while the requirement is 13,203 metric tons. In Rangpur, 4,963 metric tons were supplied from the buffer stock while the requirement is 6,887 metric tons. BCIC officials said the situation is almost the same all over the region.

Our Sirajganj correspondent reported after visiting Daulatdia area that the urea crisis is entering a severe stage due to delays in the supply chain but the army is trying to keep the situation under control in rural areas.

The correspondent found that about 11 to 12 vessels were waiting at the temporary terminal for unloading, while supply agents were delaying the work in the name of labour shortage.

On the other hand, some farmers of the region told The Daily Star that a farmer who is an owner of a one bigha land and a farmer who is an owner of 10 bighas of land are getting the same quantity of fertilizer.

They also urged the government to start open market sale of fertilizers to meet the demand of the farmers.

Our Nilphamari correspondent reported that the crisis is partly attributable to the fertilizer distribution system in the district where no specific criterion is maintained by the authorities concerned in appointing fertilizer dealers.

# Rich, poor nations seek way through climate deadlock

AFP, Potsdam

Environment ministers from 13 major nations agreed here on Friday to assess the economic cost of Earth's rich biodiversity in a bid to stem species loss and sought common ground in the world's global warming crisis.

The meeting at the Cecelinhof chateau -- the venue of the 1945 Potsdam agreement that reshaped Europe -- gathers the Group of Eight (G8) countries and five major developing nations: Brazil, China, India, Mexico and South Africa.

The 13 ministers agreed a "Potsdam Initiative" on biodiversity that would seek to calculate the economic costs from dwindling species, said German Environment Minister Sigmar Gabriel, hosting the meeting.

The study would be like the Stern Report on climate change, Gabriel told a press conference, referring to the landmark document issued by British economist Sir Nicholas Stern last year that estimated the economic costs from the effects of global warming.

The 13 countries account for more than two-thirds of the world's carbon emissions, the invisible gases that trap heat from the Sun and threaten havoc with the planet's delicate climate system.

Gabriel said the talks, taking place in "an excellent atmosphere," also sought a way forward on how to cut emissions of greenhouse gases.

"There has been no negotiations," stressed Gabriel, saying the goal was to find common ground ahead of a G8 plus Five summit in June in the Baltic resort of Heiligendamm.

Breaching a low-key security ring, Greenpeace activists aboard a sailing vessel and five Zodiac dinghies sailed up the Havel river next to the chateau, and unfurled banners demanding urgent action against global warming by the G8.

Joerg Fedder of Greenpeace Germany came to the chateau entrance where, under police escort, he sought to hand a petition to Gabriel.

Earth's surface temperatures have been steadily rising for the last few decades, driven by the release of billions of tonnes of carbon gases from burning fossil fuels.

The only worldwide pact for reducing these dangerous emissions is the UN's Kyoto Protocol, which runs out in 2012 but will deliver a cut of only a few percentage points compared with 1990.

That reduction will apply only to industrialised countries, not big developing ones, which do not have bind-

ing, targeted pledges under the present format and are now becoming hefty polluters in their own right.

Worse, Kyoto has been virtually crippled by a walkout by the United States, which by itself accounts for nearly a quarter of world pollution.

Negotiations are underway for Kyoto's post-2012 format, but the big challenge is to coax an agreement from Washington and tough commitments from big developing countries, which all fear the economic burden of switching to cleaner, more fuel-efficient technology.

At a summit last week, the 27-nation European Union (EU) pledged to cut its own greenhouse-gas emissions by 20 percent by 2020 and deepen it to 30 percent if "international partners" follow suit.

British Environment Minister David Miliband, whose last week unveiled the most ambitious national legal blueprint for curbing greenhouse gases, said the EU's offer was "a significant attempt to break the log-jam."

"I hope there will be some new thinking, some new ideas, some openness, because that is what the G8 plus Five process is designed to contribute," he told reporters.

Meanwhile, the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) reported on Thursday that the Earth had its warmest December-February period since records began 128 years ago.

A record warm January worldwide pushed average temperatures in December-February to 0.72 C (1.3 F) above normal for the 20th century.

In January, the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) pointed to the loss of alpine glaciers and snow cover, retreating permafrost and shifting rainfall patterns as signs that global warming had started to interfere with the climate.

By 2100, global average surface temperatures could rise by between 1.1 and 6.4 C (1.98 and 11.52 F).

The Potsdam meeting ends on Saturday.

President Hasanul Huq Inu and General Secretary Syed Jafar Sajjad in a statement yesterday paid tribute to the founder of the nation.

AL, its front organisations, and different socio-cultural groups have taken up programmes on the occasion of Bangabandhu's birth anniversary.

However, the programmes have been kept short due to the state of emergency.

Bangabandhu Sangskritik Jote, Bangabandhu Janmadin Uddipan Committee, Bangabandhu Lalitakala Academy and Sonar Bangla Jubo Parishad will pay tributes to Bangabandhu by placing wreath on his portrait at the Bangabandhu Memorial Museum in Dhanmondi in the capital.

A three-member delegation led by Sheikh Hasina's Political Secretary Saber Hossain Chowdhury will visit Tungipara and lay wreaths on the grave of Bangabandhu today.

# Bangladesh meet India

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warm-up triangular series and the official warm-up games has intensified the expectation of the cricket crazy fans.

The Tigers suddenly got special attention after their astonishing two-wicket victory against New Zealand in the first warm-up match in Barbados.

After that, they made many believe that they have the potential to beat any side in the world and that their recent one-day success against cricket minnows was not a fluke.

The Indian side, including skipper Rahul Dravid, also admitted that Bangladesh have emerged as serious challengers to the sport's big names and neither India nor Sri Lanka can now afford to take Bashar's side lightly.

Banking on players like Sourav Ganguly, Sachin Tendulkar, Virender Sehwag, Yuvraj Singh and the skipper himself and taking pleasure from previous record where they have won 13 matches out of their 14 one-day encounters, India will definitely start as favourites.

But the Tigers can also take inspiration from their 15-run victory against their next-door neighbours that to beat India is nothing new.

In that happy-hunting match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium in December, 2004, pace spearhead Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (unbeaten 31 runs and two wickets) and dashing Attab Ahmed (67) shaped Bangladesh's first-ever

## BNP

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amassing fortune for themselves through illegal means and morally, they have no right to front an organisation like BNP," said a leader of Jubo Dal, the youth wing of BNP.

According to the party sources, a group of senior leaders of the party and its front organisations believe that Tarique and his close aides are responsible for the present situation. So they want a fresh start with a new person as their leader.

Some of the leaders, who still have positive image among the people met Mannan Bhuiyan several times and urged him to pick up the baton of leadership for the sake of the party's survival.

But Bhuiyan himself has yet to say anything in this regard. A source close to him said he is watching the situation closely and if called for he will take necessary steps once the government lifts the ban on political activities.

Tarique Rahman, Salauddin Quader Chowdhury, Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain and two other standing committee members and two vice-chairmen were at the forefront in last five years as the party chairperson depended heavily on them for running the party as well as the country. But most of them are now behind bars on charges of corruption.

Corruption allegations have been raised against the front organisation leaders as well.

Most of them have gone into hiding since the drives against corruption and other crimes began.

## JCD, BCL clash

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Police and members of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control.

The police picked up Sumit and the girl from the room and sent them to Shahbagh Police Station.

The injured BCL activists were rushed to Dhaka Medical College and Hospital.

There are allegations that the JCD men turned a few hall rooms, including rooms No. 252 and 337, into a haven of drug addicts during the BNP-led coalition government's rule. Dwellers of these rooms and their friends used to take girls to the rooms, many hall residents said.

Although girls' entrance into the rooms of male students' dormitories is restricted, the rule has always been violated in Jagannath Hall, sources said.

Proctor Prof AKA Firoz Ahmed said the hall authorities told him that the incident had no political links. He asked the authorities to strictly check girls' entrance into the rooms of the hall.

## Saarc car rally

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Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed inaugurated the first-ever Saarc car rally at Cox's Bazar on Thursday.

UNB from Cox's Bazar adds: 15 journalists, who came here from Dhaka to cover the Saarc car rally, were injured in a road accident at Patiya in Chittagong yesterday.

The accident took place at Dohajari on the Cox's Bazar-Chittagong Highway as a bus, carrying the newsmen, collided with a truck at about 9:00am.

The injured received treatment at the local health complex and later returned to the capital in another bus.

## Masud, Babul

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on the business-related allegations against them," said a press release signed by Shahenur Mia, senior information officer of home ministry.

"They were arrested neither due to any false allegation nor was it to harass them, not even for any news or views published in their newspapers."

"Through publishing newspapers, a section of businessmen and industrialists are trying to create confusion about the unfair activities in their business by publicising themselves as owner or editor," the release said.

## More arrests

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Hossain, executive director of a non-government organisation (NGO), from the district town yesterday.

ASP of Rab-12 Saifuzzaman Faruki said in the last four to five years Billal had collected about Tk 2 crore as 'deposit' from locals of Harinathpur at Hizla upazila in Barisal after opening a branch of an NGO there.

Soon after the state of emergency was declared, he went into hiding and those who had been conned out of the huge sums filed a case against him with Hizla Police Station, Faruki added.

Our Kushtia correspondent adds: The army-led forces rounded up two leaders of Awami League (AL) and BNP and a union parishad (UP) chairman in separate drives in Meherpur, Jhenidha and Chuadanga Thursday night.

They raided the house of former Gangni upazila BNP secretary Mohammad Murad and arrested him at about 11:30pm. Another team held Shajahan Ali, Pantapara UP chairman, at Mohespur upazila in Jhenidha.

The same night the forces arrested Damurhuda upazila AL president Sirajul Alam Jhantu in Chuadanga town, police added.

Our Moulvibazar correspondent reports: The crime busters arrested Shamim Ahmed, a local BNP leader and Akhai-kura UP chairman, at Kusumbag of the district town Thursday. Later he was handed over to Moulvibazar police.

Police said Shamim was arrested on charges of land-grabbing, harassing people by filing false cases and misappropriating government funds meant for different programmes.

# Honest action against terrorism must for regional development

## Delhi tells its neighbours

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

India yesterday asked South Asian countries to take honest and transparent action to tackle terrorism saying it was crucial for reaping the immense developmental benefits the region offers.

New Delhi also underlined the need for upgradation of connectivity between the countries of the region, including building of transnational infrastructure, and said it was ready to go the 'extra mile for a better future' of South Asia.

Addressing a seminar on 'Economic Security for Peace and Development in South Asia' in New Delhi, Indian External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee said maximisation of economic growth and development would depend on the ability of the region to tackle issues like terrorism, drug trafficking and money laundering which have assumed transnational dimensions.

Countering them requires joint action through enhanced vigilance, information sharing, improvement of border infrastructure, capacity building and mutual legal assistance in criminal matters, besides extradition treaties, he said.

"International terrorism, particularly, can be dealt with much more effectively if nations cooperate honestly and transparently," Mukherjee told security experts of various countries of the region.

"Economic security in the South

Asian region cannot be defined merely in terms of investments, energy security or greater flow of goods and services," he said.

"There can be no double standards in tackling the collective challenge (of terrorism)," Mukherjee said while seeking early implementation of the Convention and the Additional Protocol on terrorism adopted at the last Saarc summit in Dhaka.

He noted that groups and individuals involved with organised crime and drug trafficking operate from both inside and outside the region and often have linkages with terrorist groups, providing them logistics support and funding.

This relationship between organised crime and terrorism, Mukherjee said, requires a thorough analysis to enable states to develop appropriate countermeasures.

Pointing out that immense potential for development and growth of South Asia existed, particularly due to globalisation, he said establishment of adequate and efficient infrastructure is the key to economic development of the region.

It constitutes "one of the foremost challenges before the South Asian states in achieving security and development," he said, stressing the importance for all countries of the region to create or upgrade infrastructure for world class connectivity, which "would not only open up to each other but also to the world beyond."

# Petrobangla Cos

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In the past, many arbitrary procurements by these companies had come under close scrutiny of the ministry and that had stopped corruption or misuse of funds. But in recent years, such check and balance became absent mainly due to political interference by the then ministers.

Officials holding positions in multiple companies enjoy several cars and draw remuneration for attending meetings. "This is why these posts are seen as lucrative for them, though it may not add to productivity of the companies," notes the official.

While successive energy secretaries have been holding Titas chairman's post for many years now, it did not improve corruption situation there. Through jugglery of figures, Titas in recent years tried to show a lower systems loss but the fact is every year this company loses Tk 200 crore worth of gas to a syndicate of thieves comprising some officials, union leaders, bureaucrats and even ministers.

"Therefore, any argument in favour of a centralised control of Titas or other gas concerns is illogical," the source pointed out.

"Then even if this is not about corruption, this is about efficiency. No matter how efficient a secretary or an additional secretary is, if a bureaucrat already holding an important post is made chairman of four companies, how could he deliver?"

Other than the secretary, an additional secretary is now heading Bakhrabad Gas Systems Ltd, a joint secretary is heading Jalalabad Gas Transmission and Distribution Systems Ltd, and another joint secretary heads Pashchimanchal Gas Company Ltd.

Newly appointed Petrobangla Chairman Sheikh Abdur Rashid has been made chairman of the boards of Sylhet Gas Fields Ltd, Gas Transmission Company Ltd (GTCL), Madhyapara Granite Mining Co and Barapukuria Coal Mining Co.

Again, some senior Petrobangla officials have been placed on multiple boards in the similar fashion.

One such Petrobangla official has been made director in four companies, including one where he had previously served as managing director (MD). That company is now processing a highly technical Tk 113-crore gas processing plant deal with a disqualifying Chinese bidder ignoring strong reservations of the project's consultant.

Sources mentioned that as the past MD of that company, this Petrobangla official had manipulated the tender in favour of the Chinese bidder. Now, as a director on the board, he was pushing the company to complete the deal. "Again, check and balance has been compromised," noted an official.

## AUTONOMY VIOLATED

On April 6, 2003, the then cabinet noted that although these nine companies legally enjoy autonomy and financial freedom, their activities have been interfered with and as a result, they were not performing properly. The

## NZ in control

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But at Warner Park in St Kitts, South Africa were at 48 for one against Netherlands in 10 overs after over-night rain delayed the start of the match.

AB de Villiers fell off the second ball of the match to seamer Billy Sterling but skipper Greame Smith and experienced batsman Jacques Kallis were repairing the early loss with some scrumptious boundaries.

Smith was unbeaten on 27 while Kallis reached 22 as the Proteas looked to settle at the ninth edition of this competition.

## Tarique

FROM PAGE 1

or be shifted to cell", he further said.

Tarique Rahman was arrested at the cantonment residence of his mother former prime minister Khaleda Zia in the early hours of March 8.

cabinet decided that from now on the energy ministry and Petrobangla would ensure their autonomy and financial freedom.

"The companies' structures dictate that 'Any director may be appointed or removed from the office of the company in general meeting at the option of Petrobangla/ government. Any vacancy in the office of directors shall be filled in from the nominees of Petrobangla / the government.'" In other words, Petrobangla is mandated to change the structure only through its annual general meeting (AGM).

But within 10 days of that decision, the ministry brought in a teacher of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet) and two senior assistant secretaries, and appointed them as directors of these companies. In addition, it appointed as directors two businessmen belonging to private companies working in same sectors of the two Petrobangla companies.

Since then, this trend continued to worsen and by late 2006, there were as many as 25 political appointments on the boards of these 11 companies, which held a total of 59 posts. By the time, the present caretaker government took over in January, the number of political appointees on these boards came down to 19. The latest reshuffle put the number down to 11.

The political appointees still serving the Petrobangla companies are ex-vice president of Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce Abdul Hafiz Chowdhury (in Titas), Professor of Public Administration at Dhaka University Dr Saleh Uddin Md Aminuzzaman (Bakhrabad), Dr M Tamim of Buet (BGFCL), former Buet vice chancellor Dr Anwarul Azim (RPGCL), Editor of Manabzamin Matiu Rahman Chowdhury (RPGCL), Nitul Group chief Abdul Matlub Ahmed (RPGCL), Dhaka University economics teacher Prof Abu Ahmed, Director of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry AYM Kamal (GTCL), Dr Ezaz Hossain of Buet (GTCL), former chief of Bangladesh Petroleum Institute (BPI) Md Imdadul Haq (Maddhyapara) and Board of Investment member Emdadul Haq (Barapukuria).

# Mayor of Sadr City injured in attack

Two more US troops slain

REUTERS, AFP, Baghdad

The mayor of Sadr City, a Shia militia stronghold in Baghdad, was wounded when gunmen opened fire on his car and a senior police officer was killed, Iraqi and US officials said yesterday.

Sheikh Raheem al-Darruji has been a key figure in facilitating a recent US and Iraqi security crackdown in Sadr City, long a no-go area for US forces and a bastion of the Mehdi Army, a militia loyal to radical cleric Moqtada al-Sadr.

An Iraqi police source said Darruji was driving in a private car with Colonel Mohammed Mutashar on Thursday afternoon in the Habbibiya district of Sadr City when gunmen in another car opened fire, killing the policeman and wounding the mayor.

The driver of the car was also killed, a US military spokesman said, confirming the attack.

He said the mayor was treated at a US hospital and was in "good condition" on Friday.

"He has been helpful to the coalition and the efforts to establish the joint security station inside of Sadr City," Lieutenant Colonel Scott Bleichwehl said of the mayor.