

Crisis at Titas Gas field

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The energy ministry instantly decided on this solution.

"It is also important that we now hire, on an urgent basis, an international consultant to handle this situation as per a previous suggestion of the BGFLC. The people in charge should start surfing the Internet right away to find out which companies are most experienced in handling disastrous situations like this," the source pointed out.

With high officials from Petrobangla and Bapex present at the site Friday night, the Bapex started its action to kill the third well where gas pressure anomalies indicated deep structural problems.

"To stop the gas flow from this well, technicians first injected a heavy chemical called Brine Solution. This chemical is supposed to balance the well pressure so that the well can be gradually killed. But the injection left no impact. The chemical seemed to be spreading inside the well and into the formation of the gas field," one source pointed out.

"As a secondary measure, Bapex then started pumping in heavy mud. Instead of controlling the pressure, this measure increased gas pressure immensely and soon it started gushing out at various points in full force. And this was a situation closest to a blow out."

The source went on, "In such an uncontrolled situation, the best Bapex could do is to put a flame in the uncontrolled gas and let it burn freely. This method is called bleeding the gas. This way we avert a blow out or further damage to the field's formation.

Sparse gas leakage from various points of the ground in Brahmanbaria had been noticed for the last three to five years. But since the last dry season, this phenomenon has become alarming. Local villagers and farmers had told The Daily Star in February that gas was leaking through more than 3,000 big holes-- including some 30-foot diameter ones-- in IRRI paddy fields, water bodies and the Titas river. The emitting gases through some of the holes were burning with high flames.

During that time, eight local and foreign experts reviewed Titas Gas Field's situation and data, warned of an impending disaster and strongly recommended hiring an international consultant to advise the government what actions should be taken. Later, the site was visited by experts from Chevron and Thai Petroleum company PTT, who stressed averting a disaster as soon as possible.

But the caretaker government apparently did not pursue the matter with utmost seriousness and left the matter to be dealt with by people lacking capability to do so, alleged an expert.

In late February, the BGFLC board discussed the matter and relied on the suggestions of two experts in its board-- a retired Petrobangla official and a Buet teacher. Both the experts suggested that Bapex was enough to do the job and that hiring foreign consultant would be unnecessarily costly.

Without reviewing Bapex's capabilities and experience, the BGFLC board assigned Bapex to do the job in late February. The Bapex board, headed by the energy secretary, also accepted the assignment without understanding its own strength. Bapex mobilised its rig to the site early last month.

Meanwhile, high officials warned Bapex and BGFLC officials not to talk to the press about the gas field's leakage in a bid to give the public an impression that everything was under control.

With the initial impression of the problem, Bapex wanted to initiate a work over procedure in Well Number-10, which was built in 1988 using low quality cement.

But a senior Bapex official saw different signs in the gas field's data and he pointed out that the main

source of the problem was with Well Number-3. This well was built by Shell Oil in the late sixties. When his observation was ignored, he wrote to Petrobangla and the energy secretary for their attention. In a follow up meeting, he presented his data and argument, and everyone was convinced that the culprit was the third well.

"It goes to show that the whole operation was not well planned because those who made decisions did not understand the gravity of the situation," noted an official.

Titas field produces 400 mcmcf gas as against the country's total gas demand of 1,500 mcmcf. 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).

TROUBLE AT THE THIRD WELL
Shell Oil built the third well in 1969. Shell's original well design contained a basic flaw, which coupled with lack of monitoring of the well's health by the BGFLC, led to the present situation, sources pointed out.

"In a traditional well design, we use several smaller to larger casings to contain gas pressure and to ensure safety and control. Traditional designs start with a 30 inch casing, inside which we place a 20 inch casing, then a 13.38 inch one, then 9 point five by eight inch one, then 7.5 inch and finally 4.5 inch (total six casings)," said a geological expert.

Well Number-3 was built with five casings and it did not have the 9 point five by eight inch casing. "This means they installed the 7.5 inch casing inside the 13.38 casing. There has been a wide gap between these two casings and this served us for 38 years," he added.

Gas is supposed to flow through the 4.5 inch production tubing inside these casings only.

Again, the BGFLC should have strictly enforced monitoring routines using bottom hole pressure measuring device. It turned out in recent monitoring that gas was flowing through three casings--from the 4.5 inch to the 13.38 inch ones-- with equal pressure. "This indicates that there must be some cracks in these casings," the geologist pointed out.

But these conclusions were drawn only recently, just because a Bapex official noticed the readings of all the wells of Titas.

"This is most unfortunate that although there had been adequate warnings, we have not treated Titas field seriously. This field is still the country's energy lifeline," he observed.

Land allotment

FROM PAGE 16
Dhaka; Dastagir Enterprise of MA Kashed of Siddhirganj in Narayanganj; Afsana CNG of Ms Afsana Khan of Mohakhali in Dhaka; Aminul Haque CNG Filling Station of Maulana Aminul Islam of Siddhirganj in Narayanganj; Agam CNG Filling Station of Nazmul Haque of Kalabagan in Dhaka; Surut Ali CNG of Syedabad in Dhaka; Begum Shamsun Nahar of Shahbag in Dhaka; Shanto Bin Salam CNG Re-fueling Station Ltd of MA Salam of Bijoynagar in Dhaka; M Giasuddin Associates of Kafrul in Dhaka; BB CNG Gas and Car-parking Station Ltd of Babul Ahmed in Dhaka; Highway Filling Station of Lt Col (ret'd) M Wali Khan of Mohakhali in Dhaka; SS CNG Filling Station

and Conversion Servicing Centre of Begum Mahmuda Khanam Swapna of Uttara in Dhaka; and Chandra CNG Filling Station and Servicing Centre Ltd of Humayun Kabir Khan of Kaliakoir in Gazipur.

There were reports of irregularities in giving land allocation during the rule of the immediate-past four-party alliance government, sources concerned said.

amended CrPC. It also fixed next hearing date on March 18.

The rules are Judicial Service Commission Rules 2002, Bangladesh Judicial Service Pay Commission Rules 2002, Bangladesh Judicial Service (Service Constitution, Composition, Recruitment, Suspension, Dismissal and Removal) Rules 2002, and Bangladesh Judicial Service (Posting, Promotion, Leave, Control, Discipline and other Service Condition) Rules 2001.

Barrister Shamsul Hasan told The Daily Star that three out of the four rules except the Bangladesh Judicial Service Pay Commission Rules have been published through gazette notification after correction of flaws.

Now the government will have to submit the corrected rules to the court regarding pay commission by May 6, said Hasan.

Barristers Hasan and Moniruzzaman Asad were present yesterday during the hearing on behalf of Barrister Amir-UI Islam, counsel of the judiciary separation case.

Judiciary separation

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approval, the file would be sent to the president for his approval.

On Sunday, the AG submitted a prayer requesting four weeks' time extension while it was mentioned in a letter of finance division that the government needed eight weeks' time to complete the process. When the court yesterday asked the AG to explain why the government needed eight weeks for the task, the AG prayed only for four weeks' time. The court then granted three more weeks as final time.

The Supreme Court on March 18 granted four weeks' time for the separation of the judiciary from the executive following a prayer by the government seeking time to correct a number of flaws in the four related rules and the amended Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) Ordinance 2007.

The court had also asked the government to submit all the information regarding the lower court, judges, number of cases and infrastructure by last Sunday.

Earlier on February 26, the SC ordered the government to correct the flaws in the rules and the

Purchase body

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Saibham Power Ltd for a 10MW plant in Habiganj, Youth Spinning Mills for a 20MW plant at Tangail, Comilla Spinning Mills for a 20MW plant at Narsingdi, and Energypac Confidence Power Venture for a 10MW plant at Sirajganj.

Although the nine companies were short-listed from 18 firms that took part in the bidding, they failed to provide sufficient documents required as per the tender specifications, sources said.

LC fraud
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different banks for importing various goods from India, said a Bangladesh Bank official in Bogra.

BB in a primary investigation found nearly four hundred cases out of around 1,000 allegations when bills of entry against opened LCs were not submitted.

BB sources said that investigation would be conducted initially in the banks that already opened such LCs. If gross anomalies are found, further investigation would be conducted at all 41 banks in the area that are authorised to open LCs.

Bills of entry against 27 LCs worth \$18.99 lakh opened with Marcantile Bank in Naogaon from 2001to 2006 have not been submitted yet. Bills of entry against \$11.9 lakh worth of LC for import of rice, lentil and other commodities by one of the export-import firms in Naogaon, Rituraj Enterprise, were not submitted, said the sources.

In Bogra, bills of entry against 54 LCs worth \$17 lakh opened with City Bank Bogra branch from 2005 till 2006 were not found. The bill of entry against an LC for \$9.08 lakh opened by Sarkar Flour and Rice Mill in Bogra was not found either.

ACC team raids
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the joint forces personnel to other buildings, shrimp enclosures and land properties of the AL leader, who has been absconding since his name was included in the ACC list of 50 corrupt suspects.

The ACC and the joint forces members gathered information about Shuja's wealth during the raid, which was led by ACC Deputy Director Moniruzzaman Khan.

Harris Chy
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On February 18, the ACC directed Harris to submit his wealth statement within 72 hours, but neither he nor his representative on their behalf submitted the statement.

The anti-graft body at a meeting on March 29 gave approval for filing the cases, sources said.

Gulshan police on Sunday confiscated some household goods from the Gulshan residence of Harris, who has been absconding since the crackdown on corruption suspects started.

Arafat
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chairman of a national co-ordination committee for combating crime and corruption, said the government will investigate case by case and people with specific allegations will be arrested.

The Anti-Corruption Commission will file specific cases against them after investigation of the taskforce, he said, adding that the ongoing drive against corruption will continue.

Matin was talking to the journalists after emerging from a board meeting of Bangladesh Shipping Corporation at the conference room of the Ministry of Shipping at the secretariat.

No more gunmen
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home ministry for police protection," he said at a press briefing.

The meeting, held at the ministry of law, discussed an option for issuing limited arms licence to government officials.

The home secretary said acts of militancy are visible in some parts of the country and the law enforcement agencies are taking "proper steps".

The committee took note of labour unrest in garment factories at Mirpur in the capital and in Narayanganj and Chittagong and requested the commerce ministry to resolve the problems through discussion with the BGMEA and BKMEA.

Taking a further measure, the committee decided to send notice with timeframe for demolishing illegal structures in Mirpur area and the slums around Suhrawardy Hospital.

In the meeting, it was decided that a 500-bed government hospital would be set up at Mirpur after demolishing the illegal structures on the land of Bangladesh Shipila Rin Sangstha.

Among others, Communications Adviser Major General (ret'd) MA Matin, Education Adviser Ayub Quadri, the cabinet secretary, the principal staff officer of the Armed Forces Division, IGP, directors-general of BDR, Ansar and Rab and other high officials concerned attended the meeting.

Outdoor ad business

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Due to Arafat's flagrant violation of government regulations, such as not paying spot-rent for the billboards on time, the DCC earned only Tk 70 lakh during the years 2004 and 2005 whereas the target revenue for the period was Tk 30 crore.

Business sources allege that Arafat pulled rank on the DCC, Roads and Highways, and Bangladesh Railway to cancel the advertisement deals with the other firms before the Saarc beautification started in late 2003.

Some firms allege that the DCC had removed all billboards from the Airport Road but later handed the spaces to Advance Ad and some small advertisement companies.

The head of one of the oldest billboard advertisement agencies told The Daily Star yesterday, "The government had promised to compensate us for the ad hoardings knocked down but we weren't given any of the spots when they allowed billboards on the road again."

Advance Ad charges clients as high as Tk 10 lakh per year, disregarding the government rates of Tk 50 per square foot for private property and Tk 150 per square foot for government property.

According to the rates, the firm's income from the Airport Road alone should be around Tk 30 crore a year.

The way Advance Ad set up advertisements on the medians on Manik Mia Avenue, broke road dividers to put up billboards, and installed unipoles along railway tracks is unprecedented and suggests how he flouted all relevant regulations at will.

No one from the DCC authorities

was available for comments on the matter.

According to government guidelines, all billboard advertisements should have the name of the company. But none of the billboards rented out by Advance Ad contain its name.

Despite repeated attempts, The Daily Star could not contact the Advance Ad officials for their comment on the allegations. The office was under lock and key.

CORRUPTION IN BTV
Arafat is also reported to have benefited from monopolising advertisements on Bangladesh Television (BTV). The state-owned broadcaster reportedly stretched its rules of business to allot Advanced Ad's sister concern Ad Media an hour of the peak time advertisements, between 8:30pm and 9:30pm.

Ad Media was also given advertisement chunks for the most popular BTV shows, for which they sold the ad rights to numerous companies.

According to BTV guidelines, it cannot allocate such a large peak time slot to a single company. But the then government high-ups leaned on the authorities to approve the Ad Media contract.

CRICKET BOARD
Arafat was the chairman of the Development Committee of Bangladesh Cricket Board. He also became a member of the board's advisory group even though he had no previous experience.

Sources in the BCB said Arafat had used his posts for huge financial gains from renovation of the Mirpur Sher-e-Bangla Stadium.

KHALEDA'S FORMER PRIVATE SECRETARY
Khaleda's former private secretary AHM Nurul Islam in an interview published on February 30, 2007 accused Arafat of lobbying to win Global Agro Trade Private Ltd the contract to handle the Inland Container Depot (ICD).

With no experience or necessary equipment, the company was given the contract though the proposal was rejected by the purchase committee.

Nurul Islam also recalled an incident of early 2003 when Arafat visited Hong Kong with six or seven of his friends. When the head of the Bangladesh consulate could not arrange for his friends' visas as quickly as Arafat wanted, he called right away his mother, the then PM, and demanded the consul general's immediate dismissal.

Khaleda ordered immediate return of the official, who had served in the foreign ministry for 25 years. Although the withdrawal was cancelled, he was deprived of several promotions because of direct intervention from the government head in the later years.

Joint forces quiz
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He was asked about his brother Tarique Rahman, senior joint secretary general of BNP, and his business link with Giasuddin Al Mamun.

The sources also said the intelligence officials have prepared a list of Arafat's close friends and some of them have already been quizzed.

Intelligence sources said they gleaned information about Arafat's alleged corruption when they quizzed Tarique and a number of detained BNP leaders, former ministers and lawmakers who are already behind bars.

EC probe finds
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tasks worth Tk 10 crore to 38 printers.

According to the probe report, the printers were awarded the jobs in exchange of money, as they did not meet the conditions required to get the job.

The report however did not name any officials involved with the process, sources said.

Most of the printers had failed to complete their jobs on time in accordance with the agreement.

Meanwhile, the EC formed another probe body on Sunday to investigate alleged irregularities in recruiting 280 third and fourth class employees in 2005.

The body would start probing the allegation in a couple of days, sources said.

No more duty-free

FROM PAGE 1
under the same facility after eight years.

The law was further amended on August 22, 2005, which stated that an MP would be able to purchase a car only after two years of being elected. This amendment, in effect, barred woman MPs selected under extended quota in 2005 from importing duty-free cars.

The amendment further added that an MP could purchase cars for the second time after seven years of being first elected and that they could not sell a car within four years of purchase.

The engine size of the duty-free cars was also set at 1650cc and SUVs at 3000cc.

But, parliamentarians got involved in selling the permits for cars under the duty-free privilege during the first BNP rule, and during the last BNP-led coalition government each permit for duty-free cars was sold for as high as Tk 25 lakh.

A number of companies who sell luxury cars in Bangladesh became involved in buying out the permits, with four luxury car distributors' cartel buying out the permits from 200 MPs, sources said, adding that the companies sold the cars to local businessmen with a good amount of profit.

These luxurious cars and sport utility vehicles (SUV) purchased by the former MPs belong to prestigious

brands like Mercedes Benz, BMW, Hummer, and Porsche.

According to information received in 2006, 54 of the 275 cars imported by MPs were BMWs, the cost of which is Tk 20 lakh to Tk 84 lakh without tax.

The MPs also imported 40 Mercedes Benz cars (priced between Tk 25 lakh and Tk 1 crore 18 lakh) and SUVs (priced between Tk 51 lakh and Tk 73 lakh).

Besides, 10 Porsches priced between Tk 26 lakh and Tk 3 crore, Lexus cars and SUVs priced between Tk 18 lakh and Tk 47 lakh, 16 Land Rovers priced between Tk 46 lakh and Tk 54 lakh, four Hummers priced between Tk 20 lakh and Tk 91 lakh, and four Cadillacs priced between Tk 20 lakh and Tk 49 lakh were imported by the ex-MPs.

Other cars include 42 Toyota Land Cruisers priced at Tk 35 lakh each, three Lincoln SUVs priced between Tk 20 lakh and Tk 50 lakh, three Nissan 56 Infiniti cars priced between Tk 20 lakh and Tk 40 lakh, 15 Nissan Patrol SUVs and two Nissan Pathfinders priced between Tk 16 lakh and Tk 31 lakh, 37 Mitsubishi Pajero V-6 SUVs priced between Tk 12 lakh and Tk 25 lakh, two Toyota SUVs, and one Toyota Corolla.

6 JMB cadres

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Judge Akter Hossain framed charges against JMB Chittagong Divisional Chief Javed Iqbal alias Mohammad and Zahid Hossain alias Bomb Mizan in the two cases filed in connection with the November 29, 2005 attack.

Charges were also pressed against Mohammad, Zahid, Alauddin Rubel and Arshadul Alam in connection with the case filed for August 17, 2005 serial bomb attacks in Chittagong.

The judge also pressed charges against Mohammad and Zahid along with two others-- Naimuzzaman and Rafiqul Islam alias Rummel--in connection with the December 14, 2005 arms and explosives haul case, sources said.

Abdur Rahman, Sunny and Bangla Bhai were accused in all the four cases while Abul Hossain was accused in the explosion and murder cases filed in connection with the suicide bomb attack that left three people including a policeman and an upazila Jubo League leader dead on November 29, 2005.

Ershad
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Moreover, the verdict was not delivered on March 6 and later on March 27 as the judge was on leave on those days.

A gold smuggling case was filed with Cantonment Police Station on July 17, 1990 after a team of customs officials held four people, including two foreign nationals, at Zia International Airport the same day while they were trying to smuggle around 3.6 kg of gold worth around Tk 2.5 crore into Bangladesh.

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.

US happy
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She observed if a new Bangladesh ambassador to Washington is appointed, the bilateral cooperation will be further enhanced.

Responding to her, the chief adviser said the Election Commission needs logistic support, and a coordinated cooperation of the development partners will be helpful.

The CA said task of the Election Commission towards holding elections and the government's other activities, including keeping wheels of the economy moving, will go simultaneously.

Appreciating a number of pragmatic initiatives and actions, the US envoy said the caretaker government has attained a lot of achievements in a short time and is enjoying tremendous popular support.

Citing a survey carried out by the US Coast Guard, Butenis said the Chittagong seaport is now working properly as clockwise which is laudable.

She also mentioned the celebration of Pabeha Baisakh, the first day Bangla new year, amidst huge participation of people from all walks of life in a jubilant mood, which reflected the prevailing sound and secure environment.

The envoy also appreciated the government's good handling of avian influenza (bird flu) through cooperation of WHO and USA.

On anti-corruption drive, Butenis said they are in touch with the Anti-Corruption Commission and have offered help, particularly in training affairs.

The chief adviser informed Butenis about his meeting with US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs Richard Boucher in New Delhi on the sidelines of the recently held 14th Saarc Summit.

Shipping

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very poor, the corporation has to spend several crore taka every year for repairing those age-old ships, sources said.

During the fiscal year 2005-06, the corporation spent Tk 8 crore for repairing purposes and Tk 4 crore for dry dock expenses.

A recent government investigation committee found that Banglar Gourab, a ship belonging to the corporation, incurred a loss of Tk 7 crore only in 10 months as it needed engine repair many times and remained idle for several months.

The ship has remained stuck up in an Indian port for several months due to engine failure. The corporation formed a technical committee to assess whether it would be economically viable to bring the ship back home or declare it abandoned there forever.

Of the other 12 ships in the BSC fleet, six ships were given on charter to the private operators. Two ships are used for transporting export items from Bangladesh to Pakistan while four age-old ships are in dilapidated conditions.

The BSC has shown a net profit of Tk 30.8 crore in its balance sheet for the fiscal year 2005-06 while the corporation has Tk 295.46 crore long-term liabilities, sources said.

Sadr bloc pulls out

FROM PAGE 16
wish to serve the interest of the people and the country," it said.

Rubaie explained the reasons for quitting the government.

"The main reasons are the prime minister's lack of response to the demands of nearly one million people in Najaf asking for the withdrawal of US forces and the deterioration in security and services," he told reporters.

On April 9, a rally organised by the group, saw huge crowds of Shias gathering in the holy city of Najaf and demanding the withdrawal of foreign troops from the war-ravaged country.

Estimates of the true total size of the demonstration varied widely, with the US military reporting that 15,000 turned up while Iraqi officials claimed hundreds of thousands took to the streets.

Maliki has declined to offer any timetable for withdrawal of foreign troops, saying any decision on the timing of their departure will be guided by the security situation on the ground.

Sadr's bloc forms the biggest single political group in Maliki's fragmenting coalition, but the prime minister will be able to cling to power if he keeps the support of smaller Shia and Kurdish groups.

In recent months there have been clashes between fighters from Sadr's Mahdi Army militia and Shia-led security forces, while US forces have rounded up many militia leaders in raids around the country.

The young cleric -- he is thought to be in his early thirties -- is the wild card in Iraqi politics, with more power to disrupt than to encourage the country's small, faltering steps towards national reconciliation.

He has not been seen in public since October last year, and US commanders believe he is in hiding in Iran, a claim denied by his supporters.

Despite this apparent dispute between the former allies -- Sadr's votes ensured Maliki's election -- some analysts said the prime minister could use the defection to strengthen his own position.

Tareq Harb, a political analyst, said Sadr will not call a confidence vote to unseat Maliki while the prime minister will use the threat of a radical opposition to extract more aid from the United States.

"He will use this to exert pressure on the Americans to prepare for their withdrawal and intensify the training of the Iraqi troops," he told AFP.

In August 2004, US forces fought bloody street battles with Sadr's Mahdi Army, but since then he has preferred to be seen as part of Iraq's troubled political process.

The International Crisis Group's Iraq expert Joost Hiltermann warned that Sadr's movement remains unpredictable, but said that the Shia firebrand was gambling on being able to wait out his US foes.

"Sadr does not want to restart a fight with the Americans as there is a feeling that they will go away next year. He wants to wait it out. But he has to consolidate himself," Hiltermann told AFP.

"This is an internal debate within the Sadr movement. Sadr wants to consolidate his ranks. His decisions are being challenged by his own people."

"Sadr continues to be strong. He is the only popular movement in Iraq. He is going through difficult times as he has a loosely managed organisation which is not disciplined," he added.

There was tension in the southern city of Basra as a new movement called Jamahir al-Basra (People of Basra) organised a protest against the provincial governor.

Thousands protested in the centre of Iraq's second largest city

against governor Mohammed al-Waeli who accused them of representing only his political foes, including Sadr's Mahdi Army militia.

Waeli is a member of the Shia Al-Fadhila Islamic party which is the leading political force in Basra, but less important nationally, holding only 15 seats in the 275-member Iraqi parliament.

Meanwhile, insurgent gunmen attacked an Iraqi army checkpoint on a road in northern Iraq on Monday and killed 13 soldiers, army Major Qassim Abdullah said.

"A large group of terrorists drove up in five cars and opened fire immediately on the Al-Hadhar checkpoint, before making off," the commander told AFP in the northern city of Mosul.

Four soldiers were wounded in the attack, Abdullah added.

Hadhar is a remote town on a major road south of Mosul, 300 kilometres (185 miles) north of Baghdad in an area where Iraqi security forces often clash with Sunni insurgents linked to the al-Qaeda network.

Separately, two university academics were gunned down in Mosul itself.

Gunmen ambushed Talal Yunis, dean of the political sciences faculty of Mosul University, and killed him near the campus in the Shurat neighbourhood of northern Mosul, said police Major Mohammed Ahmed.

Attackers also murdered Jaafar Hassan Sadeq, a professor of art history in front of his house in the Kafat neighbourhood in the north the city, said Brigadier General Abdul Karim Khalaf al-Juburi.

Academics have become a target of choice for Islamist extremists opposed to liberal teaching in Iraq, and many hundreds have been killed or fled the country in the chaos since the US-led invasion of March 2003.

Lankans lose way
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erratic Shaun Tait, who conceded 33 off his four overs, but could not counter a Bracken in-dipper. Replays suggested that the ball might have been a tad high but Bracken must be complemented for keeping a tight line. He delivered a peach of a delivery soon after, inducing an edge off Upul Tharanga that flew straight to first slip. Ricky Ponting started to go for the catch but stopped just in time for Matthew Hayden, at first slip, pouch a controlled take.

Jayawardene and Silva saw off the tight spell before counterattacking in style. Silva pulled confidently and anything even slightly full was despatched through the off side. They had little trouble in paddling the spinners and kept the rate just above four an over at the 38-over mark, setting up a launching pad that could take them towards a competitive score. But the Lankans floundered while trying to step up the gas, losing four wickets for 17 runs.

Both Australia and Sri Lanka however have already qualified for the semifinals.

Defending two-time champions Australia, on a 25-game unbeaten run at the World Cup since losing to Pakistan during the 1999 tournament in England, made one change to the side that beat Ireland by nine wickets in Barbados on Friday with the previously rested Nathan Bracken returning in place of Stuart Clark.

The Lankans on the other hand drafted in leg-spinner Malinga Bandara and pace bowler Nuwan Kulasekara as replacements for Vaas and off-spinner Muralidaran, two of their leading wicket-takers and stars of the 1996 World Cup-winning team.

Iran says it won't back

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over the 15 captured navy personnel -- Ahmadinejad also warned world powers not to misuse the UN Security Council.

"Do not misuse the international organisations that you yourself have built. You cannot create a crack in the will of the Iranian people."

"Give up your bullying methods! Otherwise rest assured that you will lose and you will impose great losses on your nations. What did you gain in Iraq, what did you gain in Palestine and Lebanon?" he asked.

The UN Security Council has already imposed two sets of sanctions on Iran over its refusal to suspend uranium enrichment, and the Islamic republic faces further punitive measures if it does not comply.

"Follow the path of justice and improve your relations with others," Ahmadinejad admonished the Western powers.

The United States has refused to rule out the option of military action to bring Iran to heel should sanctions fail to work. Iran insists that its nuclear programme is peaceful.

The Iranian army's top commander warned on Monday that any aggressor would be "destroyed" by Iran.

"We intend no harm to others, but if they want to harm us we will destroy the enemy and the enemy knows this," Attaollah Salehi said.

Despite Iran's announcement last week that its nuclear programme has reached an industrial level, it has still not disclosed how many centrifuges it has installed to enrich uranium at a nuclear plant in Natanz.

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) chief Mohamed ElBaradei said last week Iran still had installed only "hundreds" of

centrifuges at Natanz, well short of its medium-term goal of 3,000.

Iran's foreign ministry replied on Sunday that ElBaradei would know the exact progress of Iran's nuclear programme when IAEA inspectors return home from an ongoing regular inspection visit.

Russia has said it has seen no sign that Iran has made any breakthrough in its nuclear programme "that would change the character of the work in the field of enrichment."

A Russian contractor is building Iran's first nuclear power plant in the southern city of Bushehr.

Meanwhile, the United States has no plans to attack Iran and its beefed-up naval presence in the Gulf region is meant to keep the area peaceful, the chief of US naval operations said Monday.

Admiral Michael Mullen, who is visiting key US ally Pakistan for talks with officials, said efforts were focused on a diplomatic solution to resolve the ongoing row over Tehran's nuclear programme.

"There is no plan for an attack on Iran," Mullen told reporters after the talks.

"We've had a strong naval presence in this part of the world for many, many decades. We recently added some ships that are meant to provide reassurances to our friends, to show continued commitment to the area," Mullen said.

"This is a vital region and the goal is to provide the strength and stability that we need to ensure that it remains quiet and peaceful."

"So there is absolutely no plan that I am aware of that involves an attack on Iran."

The US has two aircraft carriers in the Gulf, the highest level US naval presence in the strategic oil shipping channel since the US invasion of Iraq in March 2003.