

Gates, Abdullah discuss Iraq, Iran, Mideast peace

AFP, Undated

US Defence Secretary Robert Gates yesterday met Jordan's King Abdullah II for talks on Iraq, Iran and the Arab-Israeli peace process, on the first leg of a Middle East tour.

Gates, in the region to rally support for Iraq's government and counter Iran's growing influence, arrived in Jordan on Monday.

"We had very wide-ranging conversations," Gates told reporters after meeting the king.

On the two sides "agreed that diplomatic and economic pressure was the most profitable way to get Iranians to change their behaviour," the defence secretary said.

The focus of their talks on Iraq was "the current situation ... and how we can make it work".

"I think that there is not yet confidence in the region that Iraq's government represents all Iraqis," Gates said. "The more encouragement (Iraq's) neighbours can provide (and) the more they support the Iraqi government," the more representative the government would become.

US officials have expressed displeasure over the pace of reconciliation in Iraq. Gates, however, was more diplomatic in his wording on Tuesday.

"The most concrete manifestations of the reconciliation process would be progress on key pieces of legislation," Gates said, referring to the hydrocarbons law, the revenue-sharing law and legislation on de-Baathification.

Sharing Iraq's vast oil wealth among the country's divided communities and reintegrating members of the former ruling Baath party of Saddam Hussein are particular bones of contention in the new Iraq.

Gates said he was last in Amman in 1987, when he was deputy CIA director, by invitation of the late King Hussein, King Abdullah's father.

A senior US military official in Gates' delegation said Washington wanted its Arab allies Jordan and Egypt to show more public support for the government of Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki.

Gas burning

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According to sources, the Petrobangla recently authorised Bapex, a local gas exploration company, to control the gas leakage of the third well.

The well was about to explode as gas pressure increased unexpectedly after Bapex engineers applied a liquid into the well to control gas pressure inside.

The Bapex engineers barely averted a disaster that day as they successfully released a huge amount of gas to reduce the excessive pressure in the well.

Although the Bapex engineers installed four additional pipe outlets to let the gas out, pressure in the well is not normal yet, said one of the sources.

High officials and engineers of Petrobangla, Bangladesh Gas Field Company Limited (BGFCL) and Bapex are now monitoring the situation closely.

Mujibur Rahman, secretary of BGFCL, confirmed that the gas pressure rose alarmingly in the third well during the Bapex engineers' attempt to control its leakage.

A BGFCL official on condition of anonymity expressed his doubts about the local engineers' capability to fully stop the gas leakage.

Excessive gas pressure in the third well runs the risk of damaging adjacent gas wells as well, speculated experts.

Worried day labourers in the area have been demanding double the pay for working in crop fields while many panic-stricken villagers already moved out of their homes.

Omar Ali from Shyamprup village complained that the BGFCL authorities did not pay attention to the leakage problem when the villagers informed them of the matter about a year ago. It is a sign of sheer neglect and disrespect to the affected people of the area as the authorities, after such a long time, are only now trying to control the leakage.

Case against Tarique

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April 5 was fixed for framing charge at a Dhaka court, but on April 4 Tarique appealed in the HC to quash the case and the trial court had adjourned proceedings of the case until yesterday.

The government took initiatives to hold trial of the case under Speedy Trial Act 2002, according to which the charge sheet will have to be submitted within seven days of the incident if any accused is not caught red handed.

Tarique's lawyers argued that the charge sheet had not been submitted within seven days as per the law since the case was filed two months after the incident of the alleged extortion took place on January 4.

The prosecution lawyers, however, argued that it was not possible to submit the charge sheet within seven days of the incident as the case was filed later.

Meanwhile, the state counsel yesterday informed the HC that the government amended the Speedy Trial Act 2002 provision for submitting the charge sheet within seven days. According to the amended Act, the charge sheet will have to be submitted "as soon as possible".

Terming the amendment "unfair", the HC bench said, "The amendment has been done to obstruct the proceedings of the court." Then the court issued the rule on the government.

Our court correspondent adds: A

Car, motorbike seized from DCC commissioner's house

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The joint forces yesterday seized a car, a motorbike and valuables from the residence of a Dhaka City Corporation ward commissioner in the city's Shyamprup area.

Police sources said the joint forces raided the house of DCC commissioner of ward no 88, Abdul Rashed Badshah, between 5:00pm to 6:00pm on Muradpur High School Road.

They seized a private car, a motorbike, two 20 inch colour TVs, a computer, 40 costly sarees and some important documents.

However, the joint forces did not arrest Badshah, who was present during the raid.

Police did not clarify the reason behind the raid and filed a general diary in this connection.

13 JMB cadres

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Yet to be named militant organisation. The law enforcers are conducting drives in different areas to bust other dens of the militants, the OC added.

They were arrested following information gleaned from militants arrested at Tangail town on Saturday, police sources said.

They said the names of the militants are in the "JMB activists' list" which they prepared after the countrywide serial bomb attacks on August 17, 2005.

AL asks govt

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"So, I earnestly request you to take necessary security measures for our leader on her return to the country," Jali said in the letter.

A two-member AL delegation comprising its Assistant Publicity Secretary Ashim Kumar Uki and Assistant Office Secretary SM Md Mozammel Haque met Matin at his office and handed him the letter.

In reply, the communications adviser told the AL leaders that he is not the one to make the security arrangements, it is rather the duty of the home ministry. He, however, assured them that he would talk to the ministry over the matter.

The decision to send the letter came at an informal meeting of the senior AL leaders visiting Jali at a city hospital where he is undergoing treatment, said a party insider.

They decided that Jali should both talk and write to the chief of National Coordination Committee over Hasina's return and security measures.

Before dispatching the letter, the AL general secretary had informed the former prime minister of the decision. He was to talk to the adviser last night about the issue.

Speculations have been rife that the government would not allow Hasina to return. The recent extortion and murder charges brought against her only added to the rumours.

In response to the developments at home, she had decided to get back home on April 14, much earlier than the planned date that was sometime in the last week of April.

But on April 11, she postponed her coming back on request from the caretaker government high-ups.

EC to talk

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parties as soon as the government withdraws the restriction," Sakhawat said.

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda at a meeting with the law adviser on April 4 asked the government to withdraw the restriction on indoor politics so that the EC can hold talks with the political parties.

At a press conference on April 5, he disclosed a set of proposals for electoral reforms, which the EC said would be completed by July.

The EC has always emphasised the necessity of political parties' opinions on any electoral issues and invited them first for talks.

Meanwhile, a pilot project for the feasibility study on the EC plan to prepare voter list with photographs and national identity cards simultaneously will begin at the end of next month.

The EC project for preparing the voter list will be conducted initially in two areas—an urban and a rural-to-identify possible problems the EC might face while working, Sakhawat told reporters.

On the EC's plan to remove controversy over the appointment of 320 upazila election officers, he said the recruits will have to sit an examination early next month to prove their capability for the job.

Asked if the probe report on the alleged irregularities in awarding the task for printing the controversial updated voter list was submitted, he said the report is now at the EC Secretariat.

The former prime minister's son has also been shown arrested in connection with a case for extortion of Tk 81 lakh filed with Gulshan Police Station on March 27.

Who's to be blamed

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of action for saving the gas field and the precious national resource.

The Daily Star also printed a photograph showing how gas was leaking through a hole in a paddy field and burning in Brahmanbaria. The reports attached the highest importance to the need for addressing the problem since Titas Gas Field is the country's energy sector's lifeblood.

Yet after the first report, officials concerned became defensive for unknown reasons and tried to convince the decision makers that the angle of the photograph made the gas leakage look magnified in the paddy field and that such leakages in the locality 'were not unusual', although in that specific case, there were 'some reasons' to be careful about it.

While the government should have acted with utmost priority, it proceeded on the matter with a seemingly 'business-as-usual' approach instead. The matter was discussed at the Bangladesh Gas Field Company Ltd (BGFCL) board, headed by the energy secretary. BGFCL, which owns Titas Gas Field, itself shared the views of the eight experts who recommended hiring an experienced international consultant for the job of fixing the wells and plugging the leaks. But in late February, the BGFCL board depended on two experts' on its board—one from Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet) and another, a retired Petrobangla official. These experts ruled out the necessity for hiring any foreign consultant saying that it would impose unnecessary costs and they thought Bangladesh Petroleum Exploration & Production Company Ltd (Bapex) was good enough for the job.

None of these experts had actually analysed the problematic facts lying with Titas Gas Field. The expert from Buet does not even have the necessary field experience to back up his confident opinion. Nonetheless, without a second thought the BGFCL board assigned the job to Bapex which is a competent exploration company despite its limitations of fund and technology. However, Bapex is not an expert in handling such troubles in a fully operational large gas field like Titas. Through Monday's disastrous incident, it has been proven that the energy ministry did not have the wisdom to seriously listen to experts' warnings. This blasé attitude is now costing the nation a fortune through the daily loss of gas at the rate of 15 to 18 million cubic feet per day (mmcf).

The Titas field produces 400 mmcf of gas while the country's total demand is for 1500 mmcf. Discovered in the early sixties of the last century by Shell Oil, Titas was estimated to have a gas reserve of 5.12 trillion cubic feet (tcf), after four decades which now has 2.78 tcf.

Advisers still deny plan

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Adviser M A Matin said while talking to journalists at his office.

"You know, we are bringing many reforms in the political system but till this moment there have been no discussion or decision under the reform programme on whether the two leaders will stay home or go abroad," Matin said when asked about the fate of Khaleda and Hasina.

Law and Information Adviser Md Mainul Hosen said, "There is no initiative from the government to send any political leader abroad."

"Political reforms are going on in the country, and if anybody wants to leave the country to avoid being jailed or punished, that is something different," Matin said when asked about the fate of Khaleda and Hasina.

"A task force is working under the committee for combating crimes, and the case of Arafat was part of its job," he said.

Matin had told journalists on Sunday that Arafat was arrested on specific charges of corruption, and that a task force would investigate the allegations against him.

The adviser said yesterday there is no bar on Arafat's going abroad but the question of Tarique's leaving the country does not arise as a case against him is pending with court. A decision about him would be taken on the basis of court verdict, Matin added.

Matin claimed that he has no knowledge if Khaleda has agreed to go abroad. "I have just read it in newspapers."

Asked whether press reports in this regard are correct or false, the adviser replied, "I should not say all those reports are false as I have no idea about that."

According to newspaper reports, the military-backed caretaker government has started a process of sending Khaleda abroad and preventing Hasina's return home.

Khaleda reportedly agreed to leave the country along with her two sons. The joint forces released her younger son Arafat Rahman within 24 hours of picking him up. And a process is reportedly on for release of her elder son Tarique Rahman from jail as per an 'understanding'.

Asked whether any case would be

Ex-Jamaat MP

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Nazrul falsely implicated Rashid's son Rabiu Islam and Amzad Gazi from the same village in the Mizan Gazi murder case influencing Arab Ali, the complainant of the murder case.

Meanwhile, Gazi Nazrul through his uncle Sobhan demanded Tk 50,000 from Rashid in return for dropping his son's name from the murder case.

Desperate to clear his son's name from the case, Abdur Rashid complied with the former lawmaker's demand and handed over Tk 50,000 to Gazi Nazrul at his house at Islampur in Shyamnagar upazila on May 7 in 2005, the allegation said.

Officer in Charge Nawsher Ali of Shyamnagar PS confirmed the incident.

Gazi Nazrul Islam, central Majlis-e-Shura member of Jamaat-e-Islami, was elected member of parliament from Sathkira 5 (Shyamnagar) in 2001 with BNP-led 4-party alliance ticket.

Cop jailed

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Monday acquitted all the 19 accused as neither SI Zahid nor the IO could produce any evidence and prosecution witness during the trial.

According to the judgment, SI Zahid, now attached to Police Super's office, will have to suffer six more months' rigorous imprisonment in default of paying the sum.

The STT judge also directed the Inspector General of Police and Khulna Police Super to take departmental action against the IO.

The acquitted AL leaders include Khulna Judo League President Kamruzzaman Jamal, district Chhata League President Sheikh Abu Hanif, Rupsha AL President Sadhan Kumar Mitra and another AL leader Mortaza Rashid Dara.

Joint forces raid

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the gymnasium on 8th and 9th floors during the raid.

Panic gripped people inside the shopping mall when the joint forces entered the mall. On April 11, the crack forces raided the office and picked up 14 people who were later released.

Bashundhara Group Chairman Ahmed Akbar Sobhan (Shah Alam) was mentioned in the Anti-corruption Commission's first list of suspected corrupt people and was given 72 hours on February 18 to submit his wealth statement to the commission. He, however, has been absconding since then.

Rakhains

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and springs seeking divine blessings for peace and prosperity.

The festival originating from the indigenous communities is also celebrated by the Bangalees with much enthusiasm. Tourists have flocked to the region to enjoy the festival.

Oriental Bank

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the stock market. One of the schemes has also kept the provision for issuing the general shares among the depositors on the basis of the amount deposited.

The schemes also outlined the ways of paying out liabilities of the bank. As per the draft, if depositors wish the bank will pay first Tk 1,00,000 within six months after two months of activation of the scheme. Further Tk 1,00,000 will be paid out within 12 months after six months of scheme activation, further Tk 1,00,000 within 18 months after 12 months of scheme activation, further Tk 1,00,000 within 24 months after 18 months of scheme activation, further Tk 1,00,000 within 30 months after 24 months of scheme activation, further Tk 1,00,000 after 36 months of scheme activation, further Tk 1,00,000 within 42 months after 36 months of scheme activation, further Tk 1,00,000 within 48 months after 42 months of scheme activation, further Tk 1,00,000 within 54 months after 48 months of scheme activation, further Tk 1,00,000 within 60 months after 54 months of scheme activation, further Tk 1,00,000 after 60 months of scheme activation.

"The government hopes that the country's mass media will take greater care in publishing/broadcasting apolitical and substantial news, features, discussions, satirical sketches and cartoons, in order to maintain the positive role of the electronic and print media," the letter went.