

# Gates, Abdullah discuss Iraq, Iran, Mideast peace

AFF, 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 Iran, 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 ruler 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 it.

The Bapex engineers barely avoided 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.

M Mujiur 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 Shyampur 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

King Abdullah, meanwhile, "stressed to the defence secretary the importance of advancing peace in the region in accordance with a two-state solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict," the palace said in a statement.

The issue "remains the core conflict in the region and international and regional actors should make the establishment of an independent Palestinian state a priority in order to realise regional peace and stability".

The king called for support for the Saudi-inspired Arab peace initiative.

An Arab summit held in Riyadh last month offered Israel peace and normal ties with Arab countries in exchange for withdrawing from Arab land occupied during the 1967 Six Day War, the creation of a Palestinian state and the return of refugees.

Abdullah and Gates also "reviewed the situation in Iraq and the efforts exerted to foster security and end the cycle of violence", the palace said, but did not mention talks on Iran.

The United States is seeking to drum up greater Arab public opposition to Iran's controversial nuclear programme and to Iranian support for the Hezbollah militia in Lebanon.

Washington has accused Iran of fomenting sectarian violence in Iraq and supporting anti-US insurgents in the country, charges denied by Tehran.

Gates also downplayed the exit of radical Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr's anti-American faction from Iraq's coalition government.

"There is an opportunity to turn what might seem like a negative potential into a positive development," said Gates.

"Anything that can be done that advances the reconciliation process, perhaps including broadening representation in the cabinet, would probably be a positive thing."

Gates added: "But that is a judgement that the Iraqi leadership is going to have to make. It's really their business."

Gates is next scheduled to travel to Egypt and Israel.

## Khaleda

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leave the country taking Tarique with her or at least wants to see him at the jail.

But a high prison official told The Daily Star that they have not yet received any information that Khaleda will visit her son at the Dhaka Central Jail.

Reliable sources said although Khaleda agreed to leave the country with her younger son Arafat Rahman, wives of her two sons and their children, she is still negotiating to take Tarique with her.

In case Tarique cannot go with her due to legal procedures, Khaleda wants a specific time frame on when the government will release Tarique and send him to Saudi Arabia, sources said.

However, Communications Adviser Maj Gen (ret'd) MA Matin yesterday told reporters that Arafat was taken for interrogation on certain allegations and released after the quizzing. "For Arafat there is no bar to going abroad, but there is no scope for his elder brother Tarique to get freed as there is a case against him."

Speculations ran high after the High Court yesterday stayed for six months the proceedings of an extortion case against Tarique. Sources said Tarique's counsels will move soon for his bail.

Meanwhile, sources said Khaleda's elder sister Beauty and her husband, younger brother Maj (ret'd) Syeed Eskander and his wife met with her yesterday afternoon and discussed their well-being. A source said the family members were making initial preparations for their departure.

With conflicting reports and speculations shrouding the possible timing of Khaleda's departure for Saudi Arabia, inquisitive journalists from both print and electronic media kept a close watch on each Saudi-bound flight from Dhaka.

Dhaka court yesterday adjourned the proceedings of the extortion case against Tarique until April 22, following submission of a time petition by the defence lawyers.

Metropolitan Magistrate Abdur Rouf Khan of Speedy Trial Court-2 passed the order after defence lawyers filed a petition seeking stay order on the processing of the case.

The same court also rejected another defence petition for providing Tarique with division in jail custody.

In yesterday's petition, the defence lawyers told the court that they submitted a petition with the HC on April 4, seeking quashment of the case. After the hearing, the HC had fixed yesterday for order on the petition.

The defence lawyers said the proceedings of the extortion case should be adjourned until the HC order is passed.

After hearing both the sides, the court granted the petition for seeking stay order on the proceedings of the case but rejected the petition for providing Tarique with division.

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.

## 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 Shyampur area.

Police sources said the joint forces raided the house of DCC commissioner of ward no 88, Abdul Rashid 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," Jalil said in the letter.

A two-member AL delegation comprising its Assistant Publicity Secretary Ashim Kumar Ukil and Assistant Office Secretary BM 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 Jalil at a city hospital where he is undergoing treatment, said a party insider.

They decided that Jalil 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 Secretary.

"Actions will be taken as per the findings of the report to avert recurrence of same mistakes in future," the election commissioner added.

# 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 BGFL 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 BGFL 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. Again, the Bapex board, which is also headed by the energy secretary, accepted the BGFL assign-

ment without assessing whether it had the technology, knowledge base and the capability to handle a disaster and to solve Titas Gas Field's problems.

Meanwhile as the leakage of gas remained steady at the field, the authorities were apparently convinced that there was nothing to worry about and that the media had sensationalised the problem. Consequently, high officials instructed the officers concerned not to talk to the media. The instruction was based on the principle of – no news, no problem – a much discredited philosophy for avoiding responsibilities.

Bapex mobilised its rig at the site in March and started working on well number 3 on Friday. It tried to 'kill' the well, which was showing serious gas pressure anomalies, by pumping in special chemicals and heavy mud. At one point, the gas pressure went out of control and a blowout became inevitable until Bapex deliberately put fire to the gas uncontrollably leaking through various apertures, averting a blow-out and possible damage to the gas field's inner structure.

Given Bapex's limitations, it did the best it could.

But the energy ministry had no limitation in choosing remedial actions in February it could have simply asked for operational help from any of the foreign oil companies operating in Bangladesh under various contracts, or could have brought in reputed international experts. If a few million dollars were spent for the purpose, it would not be a waste of money.

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 biased 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 MA 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 Mainul Hossain 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," Mainul told journalists at his office when his attention was drawn to reported government bid to send Khaleda abroad.

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.

The BNP chief is now staying at her cantonment residence in the capital while the AL chief is in US on a private visit.

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 a case would be

filed against the two top leaders, Matin, who is also chairman of the national coordination committee for combating crimes, said, "At this moment there is no allegation against them."

He also said the government has no plan to deprav any political leaders from going abroad.

"So far my knowledge goes, there is no bar in this regard."

In reply to a question Matin said Arafat was picked up by the joint forces for interrogation on some specific cases, and on the basis of confessions by some arrestees.

"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 to 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.

## PID advice

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"You are requested to be more vigilant to ensure that the mass media do not provide any room for activities, propaganda or reports that are unnecessarily harassing or misinformative about anyone," the letter stated.

"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 added.

"Moreover, it has also been noticed that some newspapers are publishing motivated and exaggerated reports about government officials, businessmen, professionals, intellectuals, and politicians in an effort to create confusion among the people," the letter went on.

"A few of the news media are spreading intentional misinformation about people of different classes and professions as a strategy for illegally extorting money, which is counter-productive to healthy, constructive and responsible journalism," Iftekhar said in the letter.

The letter also stated, "The mass media's role in carrying out the government's ongoing multifaceted reform programmes has been praised by all quarters. Because of this positive role, the government is always proactive in maintaining the freedom of the electronic and print media in spite of the country being under a state of emergency."

"As a result, the government has been flexible and tolerant in implementing the provisions of the Emergency Powers Act, 2007," the letter said.

## Ex-Jamaat MP

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

Later, 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 law-maker'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 Majlish-e-Shura member of Jamaat-e-Islami, was elected member of parliament from Satkhira 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 Jubo League President Kamruzzaman Jamal, district Chhatra League President Shaikh Abu Hanif, Rupsha AL President Sadhan Kumar Mitra and another AL leader Mortaza Rashidi 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 the scheme activation, further Tk 1,00,000 within 24 months after 18 months of the scheme activation, further Tk 1,00,000 within 30 months after 24 months of scheme activation, further Tk 1,00,000 after 36 months after 30 months of the scheme activation, further Tk 1,00,000 within 42 months after 36 months of the scheme's starting, 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 and remaining balance after 60 months of the scheme's starting.

About formation of the board of directors, the proposals say it will consist of 13 members – 10 from sponsor shareholders and the three others from general shareholders. The BB will approve the first board of directors for three years. The BB will also appoint the first chief executive officer for a three-year term.

The central bank will have the authority to settle any dispute that arises under the new schemes.

## Criminal held

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the house, Rab sources said.

Staff Officer of Rab-7 ASM Jahangir Alam Sarker said the recovered arms and ammunition were kept beneath a guava tree.

Rab-7 members were quizzing Osman at their office as of 6:30pm yesterday.

# al-Qaeda-linked group making own rockets

## Five US troops slain in Iraqi attacks

AP, AFP, Cairo/ Baghdad

A voice purported to be of the leader of an al-Qaeda-linked group in Iraq claimed in an audiotape posted on the Internet Tuesday that the group had begun manufacturing its own rockets.

The voice, said to be that of Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, leader of the Islamic State of Iraq, was in an audiotape posted on an Islamic Web site routinely used by militant Islamic groups. The authenticity of the tape could not immediately be verified.

The rockets, called al-Quds-1, or Jerusalem-1, "have moved into the phase of military production with an advanced degree of range and accuracy," he said.

The claim that the group was making rockets would be virtually impossible to verify and al-Baghdadi did not elaborate further on the nature of the new weapon.

An alliance of Sunni groups headed by al-Qaeda in Iraq said it has executed 20 Iraqi policemen it kidnapped last week in the north of the country, in an Internet statement posted yesterday.

"After the period expired given by the Islamic State of Iraq to the infidel government of (Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-) Maliki about the 20 personnel of the interior and defence ministries, the sharia (Islamic) court has decided to implement the rule of God on them," the Islamic State of Iraq said.

The arms manufacturing capabilities of insurgent groups fighting US and Iraqi forces since 2003 are believed to be very limited, with them relying almost entirely on weapons looted from Saddam Hussein's massive depots in the lawless days and

weeks that followed the collapse of his regime.

Weapons are also believed to be smuggled from across the Syrian and Iranian borders.

Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis had been employed in Saddam's huge arms industry, making artillery shells, rifles, land mines, mortars and missiles. The military factories have been abandoned or looted but some of the workers are thought to have joined the insurgency or offered their expertise in the fight against US forces and their Iraqi allies.

Insurgent groups in Iraq have been using a range of Soviet-era rockets like Katyusha and shoulder-fired ground-to-air Sam-7 missiles. The ground-to-ground Katyushas have not been used with great accuracy and anything that the insurgents could make locally was not likely to be an improvement.

Meanwhile, five more US troops have been killed in a series of attacks in Iraq, the military reported Tuesday, taking the losses to 50 in this month alone.

Two marines were killed on Monday in combat operations in the western restive Sunni province of Anbar, the military said.

Another two soldiers were killed and two wounded when their vehicle was struck by a roadside bomb in Fallujah also in Anbar on Saturday. The casualties were announced on Tuesday.

Another soldier died when hit by an explosively-formed projectile (EFP), a kind of a roadside bomb, in southern Baghdad on Monday, a separate statement from the military said.

# 33 die in worst

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Flaherty said a 9mm handgun and a 22mm handgun had been recovered from Norris Hall.

He said ballistics tests indicated one of the weapons was used in both shootings but could not say whether Cho was the only gunman and would not exclude the possibility he had help carrying out the massacre.

"It certainly is reasonable for us to assume that Cho was the shooter in both places, but we don't have the evidence to take us there at this particular point in time," Flaherty said.

"The ballistics test says that one of the weapons used in Norris Hall was also used in the (first) shooting," he said.

"We are exploring whether or not there was someone that may or may not have helped Cho at any point during his planning or his execution of this particular event," he added.

As police pursued their investigation into the rampage, the campus of this university of 26,000 students in southwestern Virginia prepared to welcome President George W. Bush and First Lady Laura Bush for a memorial ceremony.