



A woman shows colourful kites at a kite exhibition organised by Dhakabashi at the National Museum in the city yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Thwarted Saudi militant plot mirrored Sept 11 attacks

AP, Riyadh

Some of the militants arrested in a terror sweep in Saudi Arabia trained to use civilian aircraft in suicide missions, an official said yesterday, detailing a plot that reflected the Sept 11 attacks on the United States.

Maj Gen Mansour al-Turki, the Interior Ministry spokesman, said the group of 172 Islamic extremists "are carriers of al-Qaeda ideology, working on achieving al-Qaeda goals, which is to take over the society."

Saudi Arabia announced Friday that one of the largest terror sweeps to date in the kingdom had stopped plans to mount air attacks on the kingdom's oil refineries, break militants out of prison and send suicide attackers to kill government officials. Al-Turki said that some of those arrested had trained abroad as pilots.

"They were trained on civilian aircraft, to use the aircraft as a tool to carry out suicide operations," al-Turki told The Associated Press.

His comments marked a rare

Bones of prehistoric camel found

AFP, Los Angeles

The bones of a prehistoric camel believed to be about 10,000 years old have been discovered at the site of a future Wal-Mart store in Mesa, a suburb of Phoenix, The Arizona Republic reported yesterday.

The newspaper said the find was made by John Babiarz, owner of a local citrus nursery, after his company had dug up a hole to plant an ornamental tree.

"There's no question that this is a camel," Brad Archer, curator of the geology museum at Arizona State University, is quoted by the daily as saying. "These creatures walked the land here until about 8,000 years ago, when the same event that wiped out a great deal of mammal life took place."

Babiarz has pursued his hobby of hunting for paleontologic artifacts for more than 30 years, The Arizona Republic said.

Emergency might stay past 120 days

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Questions are now being raised about the coming scenario, as the state of emergency is set to complete its 120 days on May 11. In absence of a parliament, many are questioning whether the state of emergency will be automatically lifted after May 11 or the president will extend it through another proclamation.

Some legal experts termed the prevailing situation as unique and suggested that the matter should be sent to the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court for explanation.

Contacted by The Daily Star yesterday, Law Adviser Mainul Hossain however said the constitutional provision is not applicable to the present situation since no parliament exists. "We don't see any constitutional problem as there is no parliament. Now it depends on the government whether the state of emergency will be continued or not," said the law adviser.

"The people are not interested in whether the state of emergency

will continue or not. They want a meaningful change through a free and fair election and the government is working for it," Mainul quipped.

A former judge of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court, Ghulam Rabbani, said the situation is very unusual. The parliament does not exist and there is no scope to constitute a new parliament during the 120 days term of emergency, he said.

"So, the matter should be referred to the Appellate Division for explanation," the former judge told The Daily Star.

Constitution expert Dr M Zahir however told The Daily Star yesterday that the ongoing state of emergency may continue until the formation of a new parliament. "There is no ambiguity in the constitution," he asserted.

A well-placed source in the caretaker government said the state of emergency might continue even till the holding of the next parliamentary election, which is

likely to be held by the end of 2008 as the chief adviser had recently announced. Similarly, the ban on indoor politics also might not be lifted soon, the source added.

"The situation might deteriorate further if the state of emergency or the ban on indoor politics is lifted. Things might even spin out of control due to provocative political speeches once the ban on indoor politics is lifted," an adviser to the government told The Daily Star on condition of anonymity.

Meanwhile, the Election Commission (EC) could not hold dialogues with political parties to finalise the proposals for electoral reforms due to the ban on indoor politics.

"We cannot invite political parties for talks due to the ban. If we invite them, they will have to hold policy meetings to take decisions regarding proposals for electoral reforms. But the political parties cannot hold any meeting due to the ban," Chief Election Commissioner

(CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda told reporters last Thursday.

The CEC on April 4 at a meeting with the law adviser asked the government to lift the ban on indoor politics allowing the EC to hold talks with the political parties.

But the council of advisers to the caretaker government believes that the present situation does not permit lifting of the ban on indoor politics, sources said.

The government's recent move for sending the chiefs of two major political parties, Awami League and BNP, into exiles for the sake of reforms in the parties triggered much criticism both at home and abroad, putting the government in a rather awkward situation.

The law adviser on Friday however disclosed that leaders of the two major parties themselves had encouraged sending the two top leaders abroad in a bid to reform their parties.

Compliance with Montreal Protocol hard journey for Bangladesh

BSS, Dhaka

Bangladesh has so far made its maximum efforts to comply with the Montreal Protocol, a global treaty to combat depletion of the earth saving Ozone layer in the atmosphere.

But some practical reasons are now compelling the country to be non-compliance, particularly for the essential use of chlorofluorocarbon (CFC) in producing the Metered Dose Inhaler (MDI) for patients.

Over the last 20 years since signing of the Montreal Protocol, the developing countries, including Bangladesh side by side with the developed world have been making their concerted efforts to get rid off the invasive use of some gases, widely known as the Ozone Depleting Substances (ODS), which are largely responsible for greenhouse effect and global warming.

As the global treaty (Montreal Protocol) will be celebrating its 20th anniversary this year, according to United Nations Ozone Secretariat, the Asian countries including Bangladesh are enormously contributing towards the efforts to phase-out the consumption and production of nearly 100 such ODS gases.

Bangladesh, a signatory to the protocol, is set to phase out some of these gases by 2010 and a number of others by 2015. But, it becomes very difficult for the country to phase out the Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), a very effective and widely used ODS, by 2010 as per schedule.

At a recent media workshop held in Singapore, the UNEP officials cautioned about the trouble facing some medium level

consumers in Asia and the Pacific Region. Some countries are now nearing a non-compliance situation, they said.

Thanavat Junchaya, regional network coordinator of UNEP, disclosed in the workshop that the Asia-Pacific region accounts for more than 80 percent of the global production and consumption of ODS.

It includes the largest producers and consumers like India, China and South Korea and also the smallest countries like the Pacific Island nations. Some countries including Bangladesh are in non-compliance situation, he said.

With its baseline use of 581.6 tonnes of ODS annually in Bangladesh, the country might be classified as a medium category user along with Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Vietnam.

But, actual ODS consumption in Bangladesh is more than the baseline accounts as its use in the essential sector has not been calculated during the baseline survey while the additional requirement of ODS used in the essential sector has created non-compliance situation for it.

Ozone officials of Bangladesh told BSS that the problem was created during the baseline survey when the country's total consumption of ODSs was calculated only on the basis of use in the servicing sector during 1995-1997 but the use in the essential pharmaceutical sector was mistakenly dropped.

Although Bangladesh framed the "Ozone Depleting Substances Control Rules" in 2004 and import of ODSs is being controlled under it, the use of CECs for producing essential drugs by four private

pharmaceutical companies cannot be contained.

Being faithful to its commitment, Bangladesh has been making its total endeavors to fully comply with the Montreal Protocol and already phased out the use and import of some ODS gases to an additional proportion that was required under the protocol, the officials said.

As per the 2005 status, Bangladesh has phased out around 50 percent of halon gas from the fire extinguishing sector, 54 percent CEC from the refrigerant and air-condition sector and made the aerosol sector completely free from ODS.

In addition, the country has successfully discarded the use of Methyl Bromide in agriculture sector and cut off 45 percent Methyl chloroform from the industrial sector used for cleaning purposes.

As per the data for baseline use, Bangladesh's total permissible limit to import ODS is only 87 tonnes this year, 71 tonnes in 2008 and 53 tonnes in 2009 to be completely frozen in 2010.

But, the officials said, Bangladesh needs additional 90.8 tonnes of CFC this year for its essential pharmaceutical sector while the requirement is to rise to 106 tonnes and 125 tonnes respectively during the next two years.

The government so far supplied CFC to the pharmaceutical companies by reducing its use in the servicing sector. But the officials said it would be impossible to continue the supply as the total limit of import has been reduced to a large extent this year.

Presuming the difficulties, they said, Bangladesh requested the Montreal Protocol Multilateral Fund in 2005 for exempting its MDI

sector till 2009 from the CFC use and helping the country to convert its CFC-based MDI sector to the non-CFC one.

After a long debate on the request of Bangladesh, the Montreal Protocol Multilateral Fund (MLF) in its meeting held in July 2006 prepared an 'Option Report' which did not favour Bangladesh as it recommended for continuing supply of CFC to the MDI sector by reducing the use in other sectors.

In view of this, Bangladesh gave a letter to the MLF Implementation Committee mentioning about its probable 'non-compliance' status and requested for reconsidering the decision along with the country's proposal for giving extraordinary exemption for the MDI sector.

In the 18th meeting of the parties (MOP) held in New Delhi last year, Bangladesh's request received overwhelming support from many developed and developing countries leading to taking a decision to allow the country to prepare a project for conversion of its private MDI producing factories to non-CFC ones with MLF funding.

In line with the decision, UNDP has appointed a British consultant to prepare the Transition Strategy and Conversion Project Proposal for the MDI sector in Bangladesh and it is expected to be placed in the next meeting of the MLF executive committee.

Upon preparing the project and getting pragmatic response from the government and other stakeholders, Bangladesh is likely to get exemption on use of CFC in the MDI sector and thus the country may come out of the non-compliance situation.



Participants of Chulu West Mountain expedition pose for photograph with the guests at a press conference at National Press Club in the city on Friday.

French election sheds light on women

AP, Paris

France has championed the Rights of Man for centuries but didn't give women the right to vote until the end of World War II decades after Turkish and Soviet women were casting ballots.

Things aren't much better today: Afghanistan, Iraq and 83 other countries have a larger ratio of women in parliament than France. That's why Segolene Royal's fight for the French presidency is so pivotal and, she says, so tough.

If the Socialist candidate wins May 6, she will have overcome not only a formidable rival in conservative Nicolas Sarkozy, leading in polls a week before the vote, but also a male-driven political culture that has kept France well behind its peers in embracing women in leadership.

Even if she loses, change is in the air. Both she and Sarkozy say their governments would be half female, half male. Sarkozy included feminist icon Simone Veil in his campaign team. Female candidates on left and right hope to capitalize on the Royal phenomenon for parliamentary elections in June.

"Not so long ago everyone said

you slept with someone to get your job" when a woman reached the top rungs, said Margie Sudre, a former government minister and one of the first female regional governors. "They even said it about Edith Cresson," she said, referring to France's only female prime minister, who served 11 months in 1991-1992.

Sudre was among 12 women appointed to Prime Minister Alain Juppe's government in 1995 in a burst of egalitarian enthusiasm. Five months later, Juppe dismissed eight of the so-called "Juppettes" in a cost-cutting reform and just one male minister.

France isn't buried in a bygone era, though. It gave the world the morning-after pill, mandates generous maternity and paternity leave, and is the envy of mothers in neighbouring countries for its free preschools and day care.

The French revere Joan of Arc and feminist Simone de Beauvoir, and French women treasure their access to state-funded abortion. Yet many cling to traditional standards of beauty and stereotypes of the fashionable, flirty French female.

"If you don't play the role of a woman who's a bit seductive, you

struggle," said Noelle Lenoir, the first woman to head the Constitutional Council, one of the highest powers in the land, and France's minister for Europe from 2002-2004.

"The fact that for the first time in the history of France a woman is in the (presidential) runoff is a considerable shift in mentality," she said.

BMTC team leaves for Nepal on May 1 to explore Chulu West Mountain

A four-member team of Bangla Mountaineering and Trekking Club (BMTC) leaves for Nepal on May 1 to explore 21049-foot high peak of Chulu West Mountain, says a press release.

At a press conference at the National Press Club on Friday, Enamul Hoque, the first Bangladeshi of an Antarctica expedition, discussed the plan and objective of Chulu West expedition.

Team leader Sajal Khaled gave a detailed description of the proposed expedition.

Three other members of the team Musa Ibrahim, MA Muhi and Nur Mohammad were present at the press conference.

Journalist Anisul Hoque, actors Asaduzzaman Noor and Tony Diyes, and General Manager of Transcom Beverages Limited (Bottler of Mountain Dew in Bangladesh) Khurshid Irfan Chowdhury were also present on the occasion.

Mountain Dew is sponsoring the mission of BMTC while the Prothom Alo Channel-i and Bangladeshinfo.com are the media partners.



'Multimedia Centre' was opened at Kakrail in the city on Friday. Chairman and creative chief of 'Unitrend Ltd' Munir Ahmed Khan and Artist Shishir Bhattacharya are seen in the photograph.