

Congress must overhaul immigration: Bush

AP, Washington

President Bush urged lawmakers yesterday to come together on the complex and emotional issue of immigration, calling it "a critical challenge" now before the nation.

"We need a system where our laws are respected. We need a system that meets the legitimate needs of our economy. And we need a system that treats people with dignity and helps newcomers assimilate into our society," he said in his weekly radio address. "We must address all elements of this problem together, or none of them will be solved at all."

There are an estimated 12 million illegal immigrants in the country, and passions run high on what to do about them. Bush wants to establish a temporary worker program for some of them and create a path to citizenship albeit a difficult one for many. He says it is unrealistic to propose that millions of people be deported.

What he likes to call comprehensive immigration reform was once Bush's top domestic priority.

But the president was stymied by members of his own party, who controlled Congress until January. While business and industry are demanding more low-wage workers, many conservatives reject the president's

approach as putting the interests of illegal immigrants before those of American workers.

The Senate passed a plan last May that would allow illegal immigrants a chance at citizenship and create a temporary guest worker program for new arrivals. But the proposal died in the House, where tough new border security measures were the priority.

Last October, Bush signed a get-tough bill that authorized 700 additional miles of fencing along the U.S.-Mexico border.

Since then, the White House has been emphasizing that new efforts along the border are having an impact, while quietly looking for bipartisan compromise on broader legislation. Bush says he is determined to enact something and it is one of the few issues on which he might be able to claim victory with Congress in Democratic hands.

He gave that effort a renewed push by devoting his radio address to the topic, and making it the subject as well of a commencement speech he was giving Saturday afternoon at Miami Dade College in Florida.

Bush said the talks are bearing fruit, persuading some who had doubts about comprehensive reform to now be open to it.

Quality education

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He said more than half of primary school students, especially those with disabilities, living in urban slums, or those who are from ethnic minorities and ultra-poor families, drop out before completion.

Manzoor also said difference of quality in various streams of education—Bangla, English and madrasa—has reinforced divisions rather than facilitating social mobility.

"Education system and personnel management do not permit professionalism in key specialised areas and technical functions and decision-making," he said.

Rasheda K Choudhury, director of Campe, noted in her opening remarks that the constitution states the access to education as a right of the Bangladeshi people, but it should be a basic human right.

She said all Bangladeshi children must be enrolled in schools by 2010 to achieve universal primary education by 2015. As the children from minority and indigenous groups and shoal areas alongside the disabled children are absent from schools, they need to be enrolled at the earliest.

Immediate past education minister Osman Faruk said there is a need for greater examination of the factors behind the high dropout rates. He identified infrastructure, quality of education, materials and distance as the principal factors.

Faruk also noted that primary education has to be made attractive to students, with a greater focus on teaching quality and a strengthened school feeding programme.

He said there is no point in self-gratification with inflated literacy figures.

Former caretaker government adviser and secretary Akbar Ali Khan expressed his fear that the education-related MDGs might not be implemented due to lack of funds.

He said Bangladeshi students only get \$1 a day while meeting the MDGs requires \$55 per day for each student by 2010. Akbar compared this lack of education funds from donors with high agricultural subsidies given in Europe.

He stressed that in lieu of these funds, a smarter strategic vision is required which needs to engender more innovative, non-conventional methods of education.

Former education minister ASHK Sadique said political commitment can sustain education policy and the policymakers have to look at the policy from a global perspective.

Unesco Country Representative Malama Meleisea hoped Bangladesh will soon sign the UN Convention Against Discrimination in Education. He stressed that the government needs to implement policies and structures that ensure the sustainability of education if it is to meet the education MDGs.

Former adviser Kazi Fazlur Rahman, also chairperson of Education Watch, stressed the need for decentralisation of policymaking and administration for the education sector. He also said there is more to achieve than just literacy.

Former adviser CM Shafi Sami observed that there is a need for political will for improvement in education while it also requires simultaneous improvement in human security.

Former cabinet secretary Sadaat

Hasina

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Hasina, who was previously barred from entering the country by the current caretaker administration, is now planning to return home any day after May 3.

She will deliver a lecture at London School of Economics on May 1 and meet Commonwealth Secretary General Don McKinnon on May 3.

Meanwhile, Awami League presidium member Suranjit Sengupta and BNP leader Brig Gen (Retd) Hannan Shah have urged Law and Information Adviser Barrister Mainul Hossain to disclose the names of their party leaders who suggested reforms by keeping Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia abroad.

Play starts

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straight title and fourth in all, both unprecedented achievements in the nine-edition history of the World Cup.

They came into this match on the back of a record run of 28 games unbeaten in World Cup cricket, including 22 straight wins.

They are unchanged from the side that beat South Africa by seven wickets in Wednesday's semifinal in St Lucia.

This match is also set to be fast bowler Glenn McGrath's last before retirement. The 37-year-old is appearing in his fourth successive World Cup final, having also been on the losing side when Sri Lanka beat Australia in 1996.

Ahead of the final, he has 70 World Cup wickets; his 25 to date in the 2007 edition already a record for a single event.

Sri Lanka, whose team contains three survivors from the side that won the World Cup 11 years ago (Sanath Jayasuriya, Chaminda Vaas and Muttiah Muralidaran), are also unchanged following their 81-run win in Tuesday's semifinal against New Zealand in Jamaica.

Fast bowler Dilhara Fernando, whose five overs against the Black Caps cost an expensive 45 runs, retained his place despite reports from Sri Lanka he would be dropped.

Australia beat Sri Lanka by seven wickets in Grenada when the sides last met in a Super Eights, second round, World Cup match on April 16.

However, for that match Sri Lanka were without strike bowler Lasith Malinga, then suffering an ankle injury but now set to play his first one-dayer against Australia, and rested left-arm quick Vaas and off-spinner Muralidaran.

This match also sees West Indian umpire Steve Bucknor extend his own record by standing in a fifth successive World Cup final.

TEAMS

AUSTRALIA: Matthew Hayden, Adam Gilchrist, Ricky Ponting, Michael Clarke, Andrew Symonds, Michael Hussey, Shane Watson, Brad Hogg, Nathan Bracken, Shaun Tait, Glenn McGrath.

SRI LANKA: Upul Tharanga, Sanath Jayasuriya, Kumar Sangakkara, Mahela Jayawardene, Chamara Silva, Tillakaratne Dilshan, Russel Arnold, Chaminda Vaas, Lasith Malinga, Muttiah Muralitharan, Dilhara Fernando.

Umpires: Steve Bucknor (West Indies) and Aleem Dar (Pakistan).

Sirajganj plant

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requesting not to be named.

The Power Cell has not even cancelled the contract of its technical director whose level of competence and fairness has been questioned over the last two years. "On the contrary, the two-year contract of the technical director is likely to be extended again by May," said a source. The technical director is supposed to provide all clarifications to the bidders.

"There are five bidders awaiting the Power Cell's response. Of them, we can safely say that AES, Summit-Globelaq, YTL and GMR are the competent ones we would like to have in any given power bids," he said, adding, "So, replacing the Sirajganj bid is simply pointless."

The tenders for the Sirajganj project have seen a series of bad decisions in the past. The first tender failed to attract enough bidders while the second tender in 2003-04 lacked competition but bagged an offer from the local Summit Power. The World Bank and the ADB were ready to finance Summit Power.

However, in early 2004, the then prime minister Khaleda Zia cancelled the tender at its final stage without any explicit reason and sent it for re-tendering. But under the influence of Hava Bhaban and with incompetent manpower handling technical issues, the Power Cell could not launch the third tender until late 2006.

Ministries asked

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neighbouring countries and looked at options at how its benefits can be 'delivered to everyone'.

Currently the government restricts VoIP operations and plans to draw up the guideline to streamline VoIP operations to reduce huge revenue losses from illegal operations.

The current caretaker government has come down hard on illegal VoIP operations since taking over on January 12, with the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) busting a few dozen commercial firms in the last three months.

Regarding the Cabinet Division report on the government's performance, Fahim said between January 12 and March 20, the caretaker government held 20 meetings, discussed 60 issues and took 81 decisions.

The report also stated that seven advisers committees have been formed and they have held a total of 16 meetings, while the government has promulgated three ordinances.

Inflation to cross 10pc

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people due to oil price hike.

The study estimated that industrial production will fall by 2.2 percent. However, most of the fall in prices is likely to impact upon the small and medium enterprises.

The reduction of poverty will be halted meaning that the past record of nearly 1% drop in the poverty rate per annum will be wiped out due to higher inflation and its subsequent impact on the economy, it said.

The urban economy largely consists of service sectors and some of the industries.

However, according to the analysis, urban service sector will not be significantly affected by the increase in fuel price. Analysis has shown that in current prices the service sector's value addition will rise by 4.16 percent but in real terms the value rise is only 0.12 percent.

While the economy is projected to slow down by nearly 1 per cent due to higher inflation, the government, however, gets a positive boost due to increase in the government revenue earnings.

The study said government revenue will register an increase by 1.32 percent or nearly Tk 627 crore whereas its expenditure will also rise due to inflation in the economy about 0.82 percent to Tk 498 crore. Thus, the government's net income (in nominal terms) will increase by Tk 129 crore.

"This gain is the net benefit for the government due to increase in fuel price; and consequently under ceteris paribus condition, there will be a fall in budget deficit by 1 percent," it said.

In their policy recommendations, the study said against the backdrop of sustained (net) loss over two years, price increase is justified on all possible criteria that one may think of.

However, ad hoc jumps are more harmful to the economy and the costs of adjustment become more painful. In addition, the price increase came during a period when there was upward pressure on prices for various other reasons, it said.

The revised price regime will

generate net positive earning to the government. Therefore, two options may be considered: To lower the price marginally, or to find better instruments to distribute subsidy (out of the net earning) to targeted sectors and people.

"For establishing credible policy regime, we favour the second option, and suggest that the first option remains open for review in the coming months," it said.

To effectively administer the subsidy plan (for agriculture) the study suggested using 'fuel coupon' issued to the irrigation pumps used in agriculture.

"Similar to the arrangements under monthly cash allowances administered through the banks and relying on lists prepared locally with assistance from DSW and later from MWCA, one may use the good office of the Bloc Supervisors (DAE) and local bodies to identify the irrigation pump operators who may receive 'pump-subsidy' from the bank on the condition that the irrigation prices are not raised from the last season."

Subsidy to small and medium sized producers using diesel for their production could be provided in the aforementioned manner or by reducing VAT rate for them, it said.

US wants

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democracy there. That includes free and fair elections. That includes certainly upholding people's rights and whether that's freedom of expression or other human rights, certainly it includes upholding the constitution and the rule of law in those countries."

Casey, however, said: "But let's also understand that these are countries that are in a process of transition and the important thing is that these are decisions that the people of Pakistan and the people of Bangladesh are discussing themselves and are going to be working through."

He said the United States is certainly committed to doing what it can to help Bangladesh and Pakistan as they seek to advance their own democratic process.

Reforms a must

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moderated by Masud Hasan Khan of BBC Bangla Service.

Hannan Shah said a certain quarter and some individuals are now speaking about the two party chiefs with ulterior motives. "Why they are targeting the two ladies?" the BNP leader asked adding that only the parties concerned can decide whether they should remain in the chairs or not.

Noor, who is also a former lawmaker from AL, said Hasina did not inherit her political position rather the necessity of a certain time gave rise to her as a leader and AL leaders elected her as their president while she was in exile.

"If you say it is dynastic, it would be wrong. As a leader, we have no objection to anyone coming to the leadership based on qualifications. But we will surely oppose if anyone establishes monstrosity in the name of dynasty," said the AL leader.

Brig Gen (ret'd) Hannan said with the changes over time, reforms were brought to both the parties according to their constitutions.

Noor said reforms are imperative for facing the challenges of democracy, economic development, and for surviving in the era of globalisation. But reforms must be started from the grassroots level and gradually should reach the top level, he stated adding that AL is a principle based 60-year old traditional political party, which, in his

words, adopted new ideas over the years.

Taking part in the discussion, Dr Sadeqa Halim, professor of sociology at Dhaka University, emphasised on bringing reforms to the structure of the parties rather than changing the persons in positions. President of Bangladesh Political Science Association Prof Ataur Rahman said reforms in both AL and BNP have been obstructed as all power lie in the hands of the two chiefs of the parties.

Praising the role of the army and the present caretaker government for their different initiatives Prof Ataur severely criticised politicians for corruption. In response, Hannan said the caretaker government should look into the allegations of corruption against other professionals too.

Noor said those who get involved in corruption in the name of politics are not actually politicians. They should be brought to book according to the laws, he added. Sadeqa Halim said those who dote out first classes and appoint less qualified persons as teachers, should also be treated as corruptionists. They should be put on trial too, she added.

Writ petition

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petitioner. Manzila has been given the power of attorney.

He added that they might also act to secure an anticipatory bail for the former prime minister in a murder case filed by Jamaat-e-Islami in October. Hasina is one of the charge-sheeted accused though her name was not in the first information report (FIR).

The lawyers were planning to challenge legality of the April 18 press note that imposed restrictions on Hasina's coming home. But now there's no need to do so as the government Wednesday withdrew the press note, he added.

The AL president went on a personal visit to the US on March 15.

She was scheduled to return on April 23 by a British Airways (BA) flight. She reached London on April 19. But a day before her departure from Washington, the military-backed government issued the press note and asked different airlines not to fly her home.

Besides, it had an arrest warrant issued against her. Despite the developments, Hasina went to the Heathrow on April 22 to take the scheduled BA flight. But the carrier declined to issue her a boarding pass.

The interim administration had reportedly warned that any airliner carrying her would not be allowed to land at the Zia International Airport.

A day after she had failed to leave London for Dhaka, a court suspended operation of the warrant for her arrest.

BSF kills 1

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Indian Border Security Force (BSF) gunned down a Bangladesh national at Enayetpur border under Biral upazila of the district yesterday.

The dead Md Mozahar Ali, 36, son of Khoda Boksh, hailed from Dharmapur of Biral upazila.

Gobrabill camp BSF personnel fired at least three bullets at the victim near main pillar no 321 while he was returning home from his relative's residence in India, BDR officials said quoting witnesses.

Mozahar Ali died on the spot, said the officials adding the BSF took his body to their side of the border and is yet to return.

The BDR sent a letter to the BSF protesting the killing and urged them to return the body.

Rafiquel Anwar

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flat for only a few days, but before his arrest yesterday, he had been staying there for about 20 days."

In the press release issued yesterday, police claimed that they arrested the former lawmaker from room 110 of Hotel Sea Queen at Gulshan at around 1:35am with a pistol, two magazines and four bullets.

The hotel authorities however said that they were not aware of any raid in the hotel on Friday night.

Rafiquel Anwar was included in the second list of the government's 50 corruption suspects.

15 killed

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kilometers (21 miles) northeast of the provincial capital of Peshawar, police and local officials said scores of people could have been injured.

The border province has a large community of Afghan refugees, most living in camps in the troubled region.

Pakistan has been hit by attacks including five suicide bombings this year, killing more than 50 people.

2 aides

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God Gift International Recruiting Agency at Gulshan.

A gang of four extortionists including the two arrestees fired twice at Baki Billah, the security guard of the recruiting agency, at around 8:30am and left the scene running.

Hearing the gunshot, locals screamed out for help and a nearby police patrol led by Sub-Inspector Somen Barua chased the criminals. The police caught up with the assailants near Road 43 and seized the two loaded firearms -- a pistol with four bullets and a revolver with six.

Their two other cohorts -- Setu and Zahid -- however managed to dodge arrest.

The guard was admitted to a local clinic with bullet injuries to his left arm.

Officials of the recruiting firm said Khandakar Tanvir Islam Joy had been demanding Tk 5 crore from the owner of the firm over the last couple of months by sending messages and calling over the phone from India.

Both the arrestees confessed that they carried out the attack under instructions of Sabbir, who runs criminal activities for most wanted fugitive Joy, currently staying in India.

Police said the attack was carried out to intimidate the authorities of the firm since they did not make any move to contact the extortionists after the demand for toll was made.

Earlier on March 18, the firm filed a general diary with Gulshan Police Station regarding the demand for toll.

KM Hasan

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auditorium in the city.

Democracy is a global phenomenon these days and everyone strives for it, observed Justice Hasan, who appeared before the media for the first time since October last year.

As per the constitution, he was supposed to become the chief adviser to caretaker government. But in the face of fierce opposition from the Awami League-led 14-party alliance, he chose not to take the helm apparently to avoid further political crisis.

Asked about the performance of the present government, he said, "It has done some good jobs and is gaining experience."

They [government] have made some mistakes as well but sought to rectify those, he noted.

On the chief election commissioner's statement that the commission would need at least 18 months to hold the next general election, Hasan said he does not have detailed information in this regard. "I hope they would not take time longer than what is required."

Asked about the latest political developments, he said, "I have no comment. I can only speak about academic matters."

Colombo sealed off

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The extraordinary security measures came as Sri Lankans prepared to watch their team play Australia in the finals of cricket World Cup in Barbados later on Saturday.

The moves followed heightened security in the capital after defence ministry reports that Tamil Tiger guerrillas had entered the air space of the island's only international airport overnight on Thursday.

The sky over the Katunayake international airport near Colombo -- where government war planes share a runway with civilian jets -- was lit up with anti-aircraft gunfire in response to the incursion by a "suspicious aircraft."

Electricity to the capital was switched off so potential targets would not be illuminated.

The rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), who have been fighting the government for 35 years and run a mini-state in the north of the island, bombed the Katunayake air base a month ago in their first ever air strike.

The separatists staged a second air raid on the Palaly military complex in the north early on Tuesday.

The following day the Tigers held their fire while Sri Lanka beat New Zealand to qualify for Saturday's finals.

However, security forces in the northern and eastern regions were told to step up their alert on Saturday amid fears the Tigers could strike later in the day while attention was riveted on the cricket telecast, police said.

Sri Lanka's state-run Rupavahini television station said more than 14 million people out of the 19.5 million population were expected to watch the live broadcast of the finals.

"Senior officers in the operational areas have been told to maintain maximum alert today (Saturday)," a police spokesman here said. "They must ensure that the men under them do not abandon their posts to go and watch cricket."

The tightened security came as security forces shot dead two suspected Tamil Tiger rebels across a defence line on Friday in the island's north, the defence ministry said.

The guerrillas were travelling in a vehicle when troops opened fire at them, it said. The attack came after the Tigers shot dead three naval troops in the northeast of the island earlier on Friday.

More than 60,000 people have been killed in Sri Lanka's long-running Tamil separatist conflict.

A 2002 Norwegian-brokered truce is in shreds with more than 4,000 people killed in a new wave of fighting since December 2005.

Death in coalmine

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are Mortuza Faruk Ahmed Chisti, deputy general manager (environment and security) and Samsul Alam, a Petrobangla official.

Sheikh Abdur Rashid Khan, chairman of Petrobangla, arrived at the mining site on Friday afternoon and had several meetings on Friday and yesterday with the officials of CMC--the Chinese company that won the contract for mining--British consultants as well as officials and staffs of BCMCL.

The chairman expressed his concern over the incident, which claimed the life of Davis. He returned to Dhaka yesterday, officials said.

On Thursday, Davis, 62, died and Nicolas Sharon Woodburn, 26, also a British consultant, becoming ill after they went down 430 meters in the Barapukuria coalmine to examine how to resume production at a sealed-off part of the coalmine.

Official sources said a rescue team entered the mine after receiving a distress call from Nicolas that Davis was missing.

The team rescued both in unconscious state and sent them to nearby Syedpur Combined Military Hospital (CMH) where doctors declared Davis dead. Nick is undergoing treatment there.

Chinese company CMC developed the mine in 1994. It went into production in 2005.

A part of the mine developed a leakage of gas on September 30, 2005 and that part was sealed off. Petrobangla appointed a British consultant company to examine how production could be resumed in that part of the coalmine.

Benazir to return

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for some time (but) they have not led to an understanding.

"And so all this talk of an 'understanding' I find very confusing."

Musharraf is negotiating to win Benazir Bhutto's support, a minister and officials said earlier this month, as the president faces a series of challenges to his rule, including a crisis over the removal of Pakistan's chief justice.

Benazir Bhutto, chair of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), said it was too early to start thinking about working alongside Musharraf. She accused the military leader's party of believing that "they can rig the election so there's no need for free election or a future parliament headed by the PPP...which is why it is premature to talk about working alongside General Musharraf at this stage."

But she also did not rule out becoming prime minister again, with Musharraf as president, despite a ban on politicians serving more than two terms, as she has.

"If the people vote for my party and parliament elects me as prime minister, it would be an honour for me to take up that role and General Musharraf would be there as president, so I think that a good working

relationship between him and me would be a necessity for Pakistan," she said.

Pakistan is expected to hold elections at the end of this year or early next and the Times said that Benazir Bhutto, who is in exile in Dubai and London, has had high level contacts with Washington and possibly Britain about her plans.

She said she would not reveal full details about her plans for a return as she fears being arrested or killed.

"I think the threat very much remains because my politics can disturb not only the military dictatorship in Pakistan, but it has a fall-out on al-Qaeda and a fall-out on the Taliban," she said in remarks quoted by the paper.

Benazir Bhutto stressed that she believed democracy could work in Pakistan "if the West stops upholding military dictatorships through their financial and political support."

"Our tragedy has been that the military has been able to exploit the West's strategic interest in Afghanistan for almost two decades," she said.

Bush vows to veto

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Perino said it was unlikely that Bush would use a Tuesday trip to the Tampa, Fla.-based headquarters of Central Command, which oversees military operations in the Middle East, including Iraq, for the veto.

"I invited the leaders of the House and the Senate to come down soon after my veto so we can discuss a way forward," the president said. "I'm optimistic we can get a bill, a good bill and a bill that satisfies all our objectives."

Later, White House deputy press secretary Scott Stanzel said invitations were extended Friday afternoon to nine top congressional leaders, from both parties, to come to the White House on Wednesday. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nevada, urged Bush on Friday to "carefully read this bill."

"He will see it fully provides for our troops and gives them a strategy worthy of their sacrifices," Reid said. "Failing to sign this bill would deny our troops the resources and strategy they need."

The bill would provide \$124.2 billion, more than \$90 billion of which would go for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Democrats added billions more for domestic programmes, and while most of the debate focused on the troop withdrawal issue, some of that extra spending also has drawn Bush's criticism.

The legislation requires a troop withdrawal to begin July 1 if Bush cannot certify that the Iraqi government is making progress in disarming militias, reducing sectarian

violence and forging political agreements, otherwise by Oct. 1.

While the beginning of a withdrawal is mandated, the balance of the pullback is merely advisory, to take place by April 1, 2008. Troops could remain after that date to conduct counterterrorism missions, protect US facilities and personnel and train Iraqi security forces.

Abe was given the coveted invitation to the Camp David presidential retreat in part as a gesture of appreciation for Tokyo's commitment to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Japan is the largest financial contributor, after the United States, for the rebuilding effort in Iraq, and is the third largest contributor in Afghanistan. Japanese defence forces have conducted refuelling operations for the US and coalition forces.

Abe expressed thanks "for the noble sacrifice the United States is making" in Iraq. On Thursday, the Japanese leader went to Arlington National Cemetery to pay respects to US war dead, and visited injured troops at Bethesda Naval Hospital.

"The president expressed his strong determination to carry through for the task of Iraq's reconstruction," Abe said. "And I told the president that Japan understands and supports US efforts for the stabilisation and reconstruction of Iraq and Japan will carry on its own efforts to the same end."