

Hasina won't avenge

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The UK chapter of AL organised the rally, members of which told The Daily Star last night that leaders, activists and supporters of the party from across Europe came there to hear Sheikh Hasina speak.

Hasina, the elder daughter of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, said she knows that some people in Bangladesh 'are playing games', but she firmly believes that 'the law will take its own course'.

Over Law Adviser Mainul Hossain's comment that some AL and BNP leaders had encouraged the interim government to keep her out of the country, Hasina said she does not believe that could be true. "I don't believe anyone in Awami League was opposed to me during this crisis or that they collaborated with the caretaker government to keep me out of the country," she said.

Hasina said the party elected her as its president while she was in exile. "I never said I wanted to be its president. They picked me, the party workers -- all 2,800 councillors -- voluntarily elected me. So then why would they try and keep me out?" she asked the EC chief.

She said, "There are some people who have no support and who are ambitious to come to power. Perhaps they instigated these rumours."

She went on, "I was born in a political family. I grew up in a political family. We learnt to support our distressed people. We learnt to make sacrifices for them."

"My father had a dream of building a Golden Bangladesh. I plan to fulfil that dream," she said.

Replying to another query, the AL chief dismissed outright any suggestion that the crisis might have helped unite the two major parties' chiefs against a common foe.

Talking to The Daily Star last night Abdus Sobhan Golap, an assistant secretary to the AL sub-committee on international affairs who was accompanying Hasina in London, said the AL chief yesterday met Dr Charles Tannock, a member of the European Union (EU) parliament and sought support from the

Mainul

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Asked if a draft has been made, he answered in the negative.

He said the government believes there should not be party-affiliated student and labour bodies in public or private institutions.

"We are not talking about a complete ban on student politics, but we must keep the students out of party politics," Mainul said adding that the political organisations should not have wings in schools, colleges and universities.

The students and teachers would do politics but not being associated with any political party. The students would join politics only on completion of education, he said.

The EC has been requested to cancel registration of those parties that would have student bodies and trade unions, Mainul told the journalists.

The government plans to have laws prohibiting operation of trade unions as they tend to spoil the working environment, he observed.

The law adviser, however, did not elaborate on the other issues included in the proposals.

Referring to reform of the political parties, he maintained that the demand came from within the parties.

Some wanted reforms with their present party chiefs in place while others wanted the changes to be made in their absence, he said.

Asked for the names of those leaders, he said, "We don't need to mention the names, everybody knows them. It's a great success of the present government that the calls came from within the parties."

About the possible mode of reforms, he said if the Representation of the Public Order (RPO) does not cover the changes, the job could be done through amending the now defunct laws regarding the political parties or even a new law could be formulated if people want.

Everything depends on public opinion and support, he added.

Queried if the number of advisers would increase soon, he said, "You'd know if any such decision is taken."

Khaleda

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leader's Banani house where many party leaders, workers and supporters gathered to meet the chairperson.

Asked why the BNP chairperson did not attend the programme, Iskandar said, "I have the answer but I cannot tell you."

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, former chief justice Mostafa Kamal, BNP leaders Tanveer Ahmed Siddique, Dr RA Gani, Major General (ret'd) ZA Khan, Brigadier (ret'd) Hannan Shah, Goyeshwar Chandra Roy, Moazzem Hossain Alai, Jaliya Party leader Shah Moazzem and Jamaat-e-Islami leader Ali Ahsan Mujahid, among others, attended the programme.

The BNP leaders and workers urged her [Khaleda] to take decision about leaving the country after observing what happens regarding the return of the president of a political party who is in abroad now," Hannan Shah told reporters, apparently referring to Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina.

He categorically said Khaleda will take action against the corrupt and inactive leaders of the party who have failed to perform their duties in recent days.

Mushfiqur Rahman, adviser to the BNP chairperson, yesterday told a TV channel that Khaleda will implement reforms in the party soon after the restriction on indoor politics is withdrawn.

"But what kind of reforms she will implement will depend on the Election Commission's initiatives in this regard," he said.

EU parliament for holding a free and fair election in Bangladesh.

Golap said Tannock wanted to know when Hasina will depart for Bangladesh, whether there is any danger to her life, and how they could help her and her country.

In response, the AL president told him that she could fly anytime to her country, but before departing she will have to keep the appointments she has with ministers and lawmakers of the British parliament, different professionals, human rights groups, an appointment with Commonwealth Secretary General Don McKinnon on May 3, and with other people.

"Only then I will fly for my country," Hasina was quoted by Golap. He also said the AL chief told Tannock that she has not been officially informed of the government's decision withdrawing the restriction on her return home, and that she learned about the decision from a government press note issued in Dhaka.

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh Society of London School of Economics is scheduled to organise a discussion tomorrow with Hasina as chief guest. Manzila Pola Uddin, a Bangladesh born Labour Party politician who is also the first Muslim woman member of the House of Lords will preside over the discussion.

US may hold talks

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Minister Manouchehr Mottaki to represent Iran at the conference in the Egyptian Red Sea resort came after a flurry of diplomatic activity aimed at persuading Tehran to take part.

Mottaki's participation raises the possibility he could hold rare bilateral contacts with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice although Tehran has refused to discuss this issue until its participation was confirmed.

US President George W. Bush has said that Rice, who is also set to attend the conference, "could" hold talks with Mottaki at the Red Sea resort should Iran decide to participate.

Tehran had shown a reluctance to sign up for the May 3-4 conference in Sharm el-Sheikh, citing unhappiness with the decision to include world powers such as the United States alongside Iraq's neighbours.

Iraqi officials have been seeking to persuade Tehran to take part, and Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari held talks last week in Tehran with Mottaki. Tehran's attendance also appeared to be complicated by the continued detention by Washington in Iraq of five Iranian officials arrested in January on accusations of seeking to stir trouble there.

Iran's top national security official Ali Larjani arrived in Baghdad on Sunday afternoon for a three-day visit to discuss the conference and other issues on a previously unannounced mission, state television said.

"The visit of Mr Larjani is in the framework of bilateral relations. He will probably talk about security questions and the international conference," foreign ministry spokesman Mohammad Ali Hosseini told reporters.

A visit by Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister Barham Saleh to Tehran later on Sunday was cancelled after Larjani decided to go to Iraq himself, state media reported.

Zebari's visit failed to win a clear pledge from Iran to attend the conference, but there had been mounting calls from influential voices inside Iran for Tehran to participate.

Former foreign minister Kamal Kharazi, who is now a member of the strategic foreign policy council that advises the Islamic republic's supreme leader, said on Friday that Iran should attend the conference for the sake of Iraq.

Hasina's writ

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Speaking to the reporters, they said some flaws were there in the way the power of attorney has been given to the AL chiefs' Protocol Officer Manzila Faruque.

Shafique said they would move again after rectifying the errors.

Meanwhile, the government has yet to respond to an HC rule on BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's alleged confinement.

The HC on April 22 issued the rule asking the interim administration to explain within five days why the court will not direct that the former prime minister be produced before it to prove that she is not confined to her residence.

The rule followed frenzied speculations that Khaleda was under pressure to go into exile. Additional Attorney General Salauddin Ahmed who stood for the state told The Daily Star that the reply is ready but as the matter was not on the cause list yesterday, they could not submit it.

He said they will submit the answer as soon as the matter is back on the cause list.

BB sends finds

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branches of these banks, sources said. Some of the officials of the banks concerned were also involved in the scam, they added.

Of the amount, Nurunnabi withdrew Tk 310 crore as loan from First Security Bank (Agrabad branch), Tk 75 crore from Bangladesh Commerce Bank Limited (Agrabad), Tk 100 crore from Mutual Trust Bank (Khatunganj), Tk 58 crore from Jamuna Bank Limited (Agrabad), Tk 4 crore from Social Investment Bank Limited (Agrabad), Tk 31 crore from IFIC Bank (Shah Amanat Market Branch), Tk 7 crore from National Credit and Commerce Bank Limited, Tk 34 crore from Premier Bank (Agrabad), Tk 9 crore from Dhaka Bank (Agrabad) and Tk 16 lakh from Sonali Bank (Mitthaoil).

Mamun

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illegal firearms and ammunition.

Mamun was arrested from his Banani DOHS residence on March 26. Police seized a .22 bore Spanish pistol and eight bullets at his house.

Later, an arms case was filed against him and he was placed on a four-day remand for interrogation.

MAMUN'S GRAFT CASE

The same court will frame charges against Mamun, a close friend of BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Tarique Rahman, in connection with the graft case filed by the ACC.

On April 5, the commission's Assistant Director SMM Akhter Hamid Bhuiyan lodged the case against Mamun for not submitting his wealth statements to the commission within the stipulated time.

Following the case, the sessions judge's court issued arrest warrant against him and directed the authorities concerned to send a copy of the arrest warrant to the police stations concerned.

The ACC on February 18 directed Mamun to submit his wealth statements within 72 hours, but neither he nor any representatives on his behalf submitted the statements. The anti-graft body at a meeting on March 29 gave approval for filing of the case, sources said.

Finance adviser

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where officials concerned were present for the exercise of resource assessment and allocation for the upcoming budget for 2007-08.

This is for the first time in Bangladesh's history that a neutral, nonpolitical caretaker government is going to present a full-fledged national budget.

However, there is the precedent of budget making and placing without parliament on two different occasions. Prof Wahiduddin Mahmud placed a three-month budget under the 1996 caretaker government. And at the early stage of Ziaur Rahman's rule, a full-fledged budget was presented outside parliament.

Without giving any specific information about subsidy in the next fiscal year's budget, Mirza Aziz said there is a possibility of increasing subsidy to the agriculture sector.

The adviser also agreed that revenue collection would suffer a shortfall this fiscal year, but it would be 12 percent higher than the last fiscal year's mark.

He said yesterday's meeting decided that transparency and accountability will be ensured in public spending.

About the size and other related issues of the budget, he said: "It is not finalised yet. After initial discussions, we'll send it to the Council of Advisers for approval."

He said that for the next fiscal year the government has fixed GDP growth at 7 percent and inflation rate at 6.5 percent.

"Taking those into consideration, we will try to increase the revenue-GDP ratio and expand the revenue after counting foreign resources and deficit financing," he said.

From the meeting the government has decided to expand the Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED) website to infuse transparency in public expenditure.

"There is an allegation that government did not maintain balance in public expenditure in different regions of the country. On the IMED website we will put all the information about the expenditure region-wise and people will monitor the expenditure," he said.

Project delayed

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major decision should have been taken in the presence of the energy adviser who is now in abroad on vacation.

The Power Cell selected these eight bidders for the third tender of the Sirajganj power project late last year. Five of the eight bidders--GMR, AES, YTL, Globeleq-Summit and Manning--purchased tender documents and have been seeking various clarifications from the Cell since December last year.

The authorities, however, failed to reciprocate with their queries due to a lack of qualified technical staff.

Earlier on April 12, the power ministry through the Economic Relations Division conveyed to the ADB its decision to accept its consultant to supervise the Meghnaghat-3 and Sirajganj private power schemes.

In a letter, the ministry said if the ADB supervises the project, nobody would raise questions about its transparency and it would be more acceptable internationally. Bidders would feel comfortable and encouraged and such a process would also encourage lower price offers.

The tendering process for the Sirajganj power project has seen a series of bad decisions in the past. The first tender failed to attract enough bidders. The second tender in 2003-04 received an offer from Summit Power but the then prime minister cancelled it without any explicit reason. Since then the technically crippled Power Cell could not even bring itself to launch the third tender until late 2006.

Voter List, National ID

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Election Commissioner Sahul Hossain said the consultants will have the project proposal ready within the next two months and the EC will complete other preparatory works, like procurement of materials, within the next four months. Then implementation of the project will begin, which will take 12 months to be completed, the election commissioner added.

So, if everything goes as planned, the 18-month timeframe will end in the first week of November next year. In the meantime the chief adviser to the caretaker government recently announced that the stalled ninth parliamentary election will be held by the end of 2008.

The CEC and two other election commissioners have been repeatedly saying that the timeframe set is the required minimum for preparing a voter list with photographs.

"We will welcome, if anybody have any idea for doing the job in four months," Election Commissioner Brig Gen (ret'd) M Sakhawat Hossain told reporters yesterday adding, "We will not retreat from our position of preparing a voter list with photographs."

Asked whether the 18-month timeframe will become a 19-month one, as a month since the time of the announcement of the timeframe will already be gone before the consultants will start working, Election Commissioner Sakhawat said, "I can't respond to such a technical question. Preparation of the voter list might require less than 18 months or it might require an additional 15 to 20 days."

The election commissioner however claimed that the EC is not sitting idle. "We are working hard and have advanced a lot," he said.

"The voter list will be prepared only once to be used for holding elections to the parliament, upazila parishes, union parishes, and the municipalities. Besides, we don't want to revisit January 11," he said hinting at the recent proclamation of the state of emergency amid a grave political situation centring a discord between two opposing political alliances regarding a grossly flawed voterlist.

About the growing demand for holding the election as soon as possible, Election Commissioner Sakhawat said it seems that politicians cannot live without elections. "The people don't think like the politicians regarding elections," he said.

Meanwhile, Prof SM Lutful Kabir, director of the Institute of Information and Communication Technology of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet), and AR Azimul Hoque Raihan, chief executive officer of NEWAGE InfoTech Services Ltd, joined the EC Secretariat yesterday.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday Prof Kabir said the EC will hold a meeting with them very soon. "We will understand their [EC's] requirements once the meeting is held," he said. "It's our responsibility to prepare a project proposal for the voter list, national identity cards, and for the introduction of e-governance. I think it will require two to three months to complete the task," Prof Kabir said.

"Our task is to prepare guidelines for voter registration," another consultant Azimul said. They also said two foreign consultants, an Australian and a Swedish, were supposed to arrive in Dhaka yesterday.

Another consultant, who will deal with procurement, will join later. EC SECRETARIAT Election Commissioners Sahul Hossain and Sakhawat said the EC in principle decided to seek opinion from constitution experts on whether it is possible to free the EC Secretariat from the control of the Prime Minister's Office without amending the constitution.

"We have found that it is not possible to separate the secretariat from the Prime Minister's Office without amending the constitution. But some legal experts are saying that an amendment to the constitution is not required for it," Sahul Hossain said.

"Now, we will examine whether there is a way to separate the secretariat without amending the constitution," he added. The EC wants to have an independent secretariat like the one exists in Jatiya Sangsad, the election commissioners said. "We don't want to free the EC Secretariat just on papers... We want independence in everything including budget preparation and recruitment ... It should be like the Parliament Secretariat," Election Commissioner Sakhawat said.

"At the moment our top priority is to prepare the voter list, not the EC Secretariat's independence," he added. The case was filed under sections 26 and 27 of the ACC Act 2004, section 409 of the Bangladesh Penal Code (BPC), section 5 (2) of the Anti-corruption Act 1947 and section 15 (Gha) 5 of the Emergency Ordinance 2007.

CASE AGAINST NASIR ACC DDs Sharmin Ferdousi and Abdullah Al Zahid, the IOs of the case, submitted the charge sheet of the case filed against Nasir and his son Helal with Gulshan Police Station on March 6. In their charge sheet, the IOs mentioned that they had accumulated assets worth over Tk 24.39 crore through illegal means. Moreover, Nasir's son Helal transferred Tk 2.83 crore from their different bank accounts after joint forces arrested Nasir, the IOs said. The case was filed under sections 26 (1), 26 (2) and 27 of the ACC Act 2004, sections 409 and 109 of the BPC, section 5 (2) of the Anti-corruption Act 1947 and section 15 (Kha) of the Emergency Ordinance 2007.

CASE AGAINST AMAN ACC DDs Abdulla Al Zahid and Jibon Krishna Roy, the IOs of the case, submitted the charge sheet of the case filed against Aman and his wife Sabera with Kafrul Police Station.

In the charge sheet, the IOs said they acquired properties including house and vehicles valued over Tk 10 crore, even though the FIR (first information report) of the case mentioned Tk 8.28 crore.

It said there is a wide discrepancy between income and expenditure of the former BNP lawmaker from Keraniganj. He had made vast wealth by abusing power and bribery. Besides, the DDs accused Aman's wife Sabera Aman of giving false information in her statement to the anti-graft body.

The ACC filed the case under sections 26 (2) and 27 of ACC Act 2004, section 109 of the BPC, section 5 (2) of Anti-Corruption Act 1947.

Following the submission of the charge sheets, Metropolitan Magistrate Jagannath Das Khokon yesterday scrutinised it and directed the authorities concerned to place these before the CMM court for taking next steps regarding transfer of the cases.

Current budget

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Besides, government borrowing from the banking sector is increasing every year. Borrowing was Tk 76,795 crore till February this year as against Tk 45,162 crore in FY 02, according to Bangladesh Bank data.

Another reason for non-development expenditure rise, one source said, is that expenditure has increased in subsidies sector because of a number of reasons that included the previous government decision to provide 100 per cent basic salaries of non-government primary school teachers.

Moreover, a huge amount of money was spent on election preparations, and Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) was allocated a big chunk from the budget.

Implementation of the ADP is very poor in the current fiscal with only 25 percent of the allocated funds spent until December last.

Finance ministry officials think the pace of ADP implementation has not increased after that. Besides, the present caretaker government is very strict about release of funds for development projects. The government is scrutinising projects and their justification before releasing funds, they pointed out.

Sources said receipt of foreign aid was less in the current fiscal year

20 to die

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two others, including the principal accused, were dropped as they died in jail during the long-drawn trial. They were Mohammad Hasan Ali and NoorAhmed.

The convicts in jail are Rafique Ahmed, MAbdullah, Mohsen Ahmed, Syed Ahmed, Rashid Ahmed, Siddik Ahmed, M Ismail, Dela Miah, Shafiqur Rahman, Siraj Ahmed, Siddik Ahmed, Noor Sultan, Shahabuddin and RamijAhmed.

The fugitives are Ali Ahmed, M Ibrahim, Hafez Ahmed, Mostak Ahmed, Syed Ahmed and Kala Miah.

There had reportedly been a long dispute between two landlords -- Hasan Ahmed and Mohammad Hasan Ali -- in the coastal upazila over land that led to the gruesome murder of the former.

Ershad

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his wife though all broadcasting facilities were available in his secretariat.

The same court also adjourned the proceedings of another graft case against the former president until May 30 following a time petition by the prosecution lawyers.

According to the case, filed with the same police station, it was alleged that Ershad, defying the authorities' decision, directed to accept donation from France instead of Finland for setting up 'microwave telephone lines' in 49 upazilas.

Due to Ershad's unilateral decision, the government had to pay Tk 28 crore to France in interest, as the plan was not implemented finally, sources said.

Indian diplomat

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break-in that police suspect occurred between 12:00 midnight and 5:00am.

"I went to sleep at about 1:00am and woke up at 7:45am and saw the mess in the house," Sarvajit told reporters.

The two police guards were posted at the entrance of the house. Perhaps they were sleeping at that time, the Indian diplomat said.

He filed a case with Gulshan Police Station yesterday afternoon mentioning the stolen goods and their estimated value.

Police could neither recover any stolen goods nor could they arrest anyone in this connection until 7:00pm.

A nine-member Crime Scene Investigation team of Criminal Investigation Department visited the house with a mobile evidence collection van.

Deputy Commissioner (Gulshan Zone) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police Rezaul Karim told reporters that police are working on the investigation and they will hunt down the burglars.

EU proposes

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social and even political effects that this massive influx of refugees could have on the internal situation" in Syria, Michel said.

He had "proposed meetings at a technical level between the Syrian and Iraqi authorities and the European Commission" so that Europe "can bring all of its expertise so as to reinforce the absorption capacity" of countries hosting refugees from Iraq. Michel said the EU had "the ability to put to work the financial means at its disposal" to help refugees, and added that he may visit Iraq in July to prepare for the proposed talks.

Before leaving for his week-long tour to the region, launched in Israel and the Palestinian territories, Michel called the Iraqi humanitarian issue one of Europe's main concerns.

"The massive displacement of population resulting from the conflict needs to be addressed urgently," he said.

"Host communities, who are already dealing with large numbers of Palestinian refugees, need to receive more support. Our operational partners are already achieving a lot, but steps also need to be taken at a political level."

Europe recently allocated 10.2 million euros (13.9 million dollars) in relief aid for victims of the Iraq crisis.

After the two-day visit to Syria, Michel's regional tour will take him next to Jordan, which also hosts hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing the carnage in neighbouring Iraq.

Matin

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Railway at Rail Bhaban yesterday.

The meeting that reviewed the progress of 29 development projects undertaken in 2006-07 fiscal year under the railway was told that on an average 44 per cent progress of those projects was achieved till March this year.

The progress rate in the corresponding period of the previous FY was 33 per cent, the meeting was told.

Bangladesh Railway budget for the current FY is Tk 654 crore -- Tk 614 crore being government allocation and rest 40 crore project aid, meeting sources said.

The adviser stressed the need for increasing efficiency of the services and attracting more people towards train journey to make Bangladesh Railway a profitable organisation.

The government is unlikely to increase the railway fare although fuel price went up several times since the rail fare was fixed in 1992, sources said.

Juvenile accused

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remain practically vacant, an analysis of Save the Children, UK noted.

While there were 446 juvenile inmates till December 31 in 2006, in the first three months this year they were -- 461 till January 31, 469 as of February 28 and 511 as of March 31. The sharpest rise in number was marked between February and March, by 42.

Between these two months, the number of children rose slowly in 24 jails, but drastically in four other jails (Dhaka: 10, Cox's Bazar: 15, Brahmanbaria: 15 and Sylhet: 10). The numbers were stable in 10 jails and reduced in 19 jails, according to the statistics compiled by the NGO.

The present capacity of the three juvenile correction centres in Tongi, Jessore and Konabari is 700, but there are only 237 residents, it added.

According to a division-wise analysis, the numbers of children imprisoned have increased in Dhaka, Chittagong, Sylhet and Rajshahi division and decreased in Barisal and Khulna division.

Expressing grave concern over the rise in number of children in jails nationwide, the NGO noted that the non-bailable provision of recent amendment to the laws might be the reason behind it.

The High Court on March 4 this year issued a suo moto rule on the government regarding the confinement of the children in jails and non-implementation of the 2003's High Court verdict.

The rule was issued to the principal secretary to the chief adviser, secretaries to the Ministry of Social Welfare, Ministry of Law, Justice & Parliamentary Affairs, Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Women & Children Affairs, inspector general of the police and prison and six divisional commissioners.

The interim government is yet to reply to the rule.

The national task force also has not met since September 2006, although the High Court asked it to hold meetings at least every two months for evaluating the progress of juvenile justice, sources said.

The activities of the district task

Tigers bomb

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"The two squadrons returned safely after the mission and the pilots have confirmed that they have hit the targets," he said by phone from the Tamil Tiger stronghold of Kilinochchi in northern Sri Lanka.

The latest attack comes after the rebels used their new air wing last Tuesday to bomb military positions in the northern Jaffna peninsula, killing six soldiers. The planes did not reach their intended target a military base that serves as the operational headquarters in the fight against the guerrillas.

Sri Lanka's separatist conflict flared in 1983 when separatist rebels started fighting for an independent homeland for the country's 3.1 million ethnic minority Tamils, who complain of discrimination by the majority Sinhalese.

More than 69,000 people have been killed in the conflict.

Karbala carnage

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immediately south of Baghdad.

"Three soldiers and two marines assigned to Multinational Force West were killed on April 27 while conducting combat operations in Al Anbar Province," another statement said.

Anbar province in western Iraq is a hotbed of Sunni insurgents.

With two days left, April is already the seventh deadliest month for coalition forces since a US-led invasion force overthrew dictator Saddam Hussein in March 2003, only to come under attack from a violent insurgency.

The scale of the carnage, more than 10 weeks after the start of a major US and Iraqi security plan, will serve as another blow to the authority of Iraq's Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and US President George W Bush.

Bush has seen domestic support for his war strategy collapse, and this week he is expected to veto a bill passed by Congress to tie further military funding to a plan to begin withdrawing US troops in October.

The rage in Karbala after Saturday's attack -- in which protesters were quicker to blame the failure of the Iraqi security forces than the bomber -- underlined Maliki's fragile authority.

The blast followed a pattern suggesting an attempt by Sunni extremists to foment sectarian violence. The suicide bomber detonated his payload near a gate to Ibn Abbas