

# Italy to beef up military contingent in Afghanistan

AFP, Rome

The Italian government yesterday announced it was beefing up its military presence in Afghanistan, sending five new helicopters, 18 armoured vehicles and 145 additional troops.

Defence Minister Arturo Parisi told a special commission of the Senate that the aim was to reinforce

the security of the Italian contingent's operations through speedier responses and movement, ANSA news agency reported.

But it "will not modify the nature of our participation in the ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) mission, nor the objectives of our presence," he said.

The cost of the operation was estimated at 25.9 million euros (35 million dollars).

There are some 2,000 Italian soldiers in Afghanistan deployed between Kabul and the western city of Herat, far from the country's restive south. They are part of the 37,000-strong ISAF force in the country.

Italy's deployment in Afghanistan is a sensitive issue for the fragile centre-left coalition of Prime Minister Romano Prodi.

In February, far-left elements

sparked a major political crisis by voting against Prodi's foreign policy in the Senate, prompting Prodi to resign before being reinstated and surviving confidence votes in both houses of parliament.

On March 27, Italy said it would reinforce its troops in Afghanistan after the ISAF launched a sweeping offensive against the Taliban.

## India tackles sex trafficking with maid ban

AFP, New Delhi

India will ban women under 30 from emigrating to work as domestic help in the Gulf and parts of Africa and Southeast Asia in a bid to curb sex trafficking, a report said yesterday.

The move came after Renuka Chowdhury, the minister for women and children, said overseas domestic workers had complained of being pushed into prostitution after their employers had seized their passports.

A ban will be "imposed on granting emigration clearance to women below 30 if they are seeking employment as housemaids," Chowdhury, who recently returned from Kuwait, was quoted by the Times of India as telling parliament.

Some 17 countries will be covered by the ban, which was aimed at halting the trafficking of women for prostitution, the newspaper reported.

Chowdhury said she was considering a move to require overseas domestic workers to deposit their passports with the local Indian embassy or consulate, aping a model used by Singapore for its citizens, according to the report.

Millions of Indians work overseas, particularly in the six oil-rich Gulf Arab countries of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

As many as six million Indian expatriates send home 20 billion dollars a year from Gulf states.

## Clashes with Pakistan to harm ties Says Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

Clashes between Afghan and Pakistani border guards that left more than a dozen dead will further strain ties between the two neighbours, Kabul said yesterday.

The fighting erupted on Sunday and continued into Monday, when a Nato soldier and a Pakistani trooper were killed in an ambush after a meeting on the Pakistani side of the border aimed at calming the tension.

Pakistan has said the gunman was "unidentified", but Afghan President Hamid Karzai's senior spokesman Karim Rahimi repeated Monday the claim that "a Pakistani officer" had opened fire on the group.

Islamabad has denied the allegation.

"Such incidents will have unpleasant effects on the relations between the two countries," Rahimi told reporters in Kabul, also accusing Pakistani guards of initiating the fighting at the weekend.

The Pakistani military has said the other side triggered the clashes which involved heavy weapons and left 13 Afghans dead, about half of them policemen and the rest civilians, including children.

The Afghan government has

complained to the United Nations in a letter "strongly opposing this flagrant interference and irresponsible action by the Pakistani army," the foreign ministry said.

On Monday it summoned Pakistan's ambassador accusing the neighbouring army of an "intrusion" into Afghan territory and of being provocative.

"Such incidents will no doubt affect our relations and are against the international norms and against agreements between the two brotherly countries to fight together against terrorism," the spokesman said.

He was referring to a meeting last month between Karzai and his Pakistani counterpart Pervez Musharraf in Turkey's capital, at which they agreed to boost cooperation in the fight against terrorism.

"This is a very serious issue. We are trying through different diplomatic channels to assess the situation (and) to see the reason behind that," Rahimi said.

The spokesman said his government was making efforts to see that similar incidents are avoided, but added that his country would be resolute.

"Afghanistan is ready to defend every inch of its soil. Our police are weak but they bravely defended

their positions," he said.

Relations between the neighbours, both allies of the US-led "war on terror" launched in late 2001 ahead of the collapse of the Taliban government, are already strained over recriminations over the extremist violence.

## 30 Suu Kyi men arrested in Myanmar

AFP, Yangon

Some 30 supporters of Myanmar democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi were arrested yesterday as they headed to pagodas around Yangon to pray for her release from house arrest, a party spokesman said.

They were arrested at different spots around Yangon as they prepared to join a weekly prayer vigil, said Han Zaw, a spokesman for her National League for Democracy party.

"One group leader, Su Su Nway, and about 20 people were arrested on their way to a pagoda in Insein Township for their prayer vigil," Han Zaw told AFP.

"Another 11 people were also arrested in separate incidents. They were spotted because they were wearing T-shirts saying 'Free Aung San Suu Kyi'," he said.

Police declined to comment on the arrests.

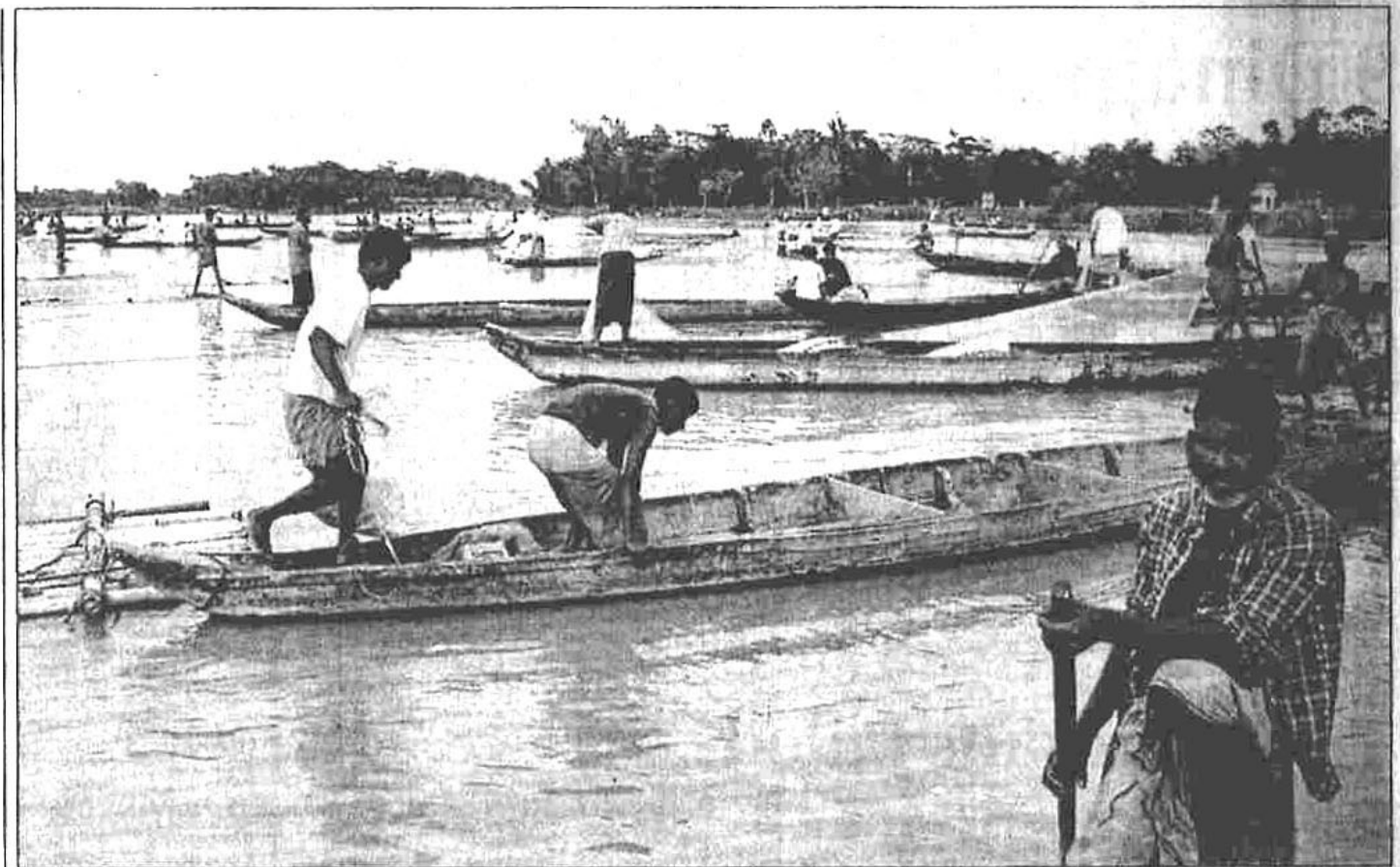
Aung San Suu Kyi's supporters began holding a weekly prayer vigil on May 1 to seek her freedom. The order confining her to her home comes up for renewal on May 27, although it has been routinely extended in the past.

The 61-year-old Nobel peace laureate has spent more than a decade confined to her home in three major periods of house arrest. Her latest forced isolation began after a pro-junta mob staged a deadly attack on her convoy four years ago.

Former US president Bill Clinton and 56 other former world leaders on Monday appealed to Myanmar's military regime to free Suu Kyi, according to the Oslo Centre for Peace and Human Rights.

The NLD on Monday also called for her immediate and unconditional release.

The party won a landslide victory in 1990 elections, but the junta never allowed them to take office. Myanmar has been ruled by the military in various guises since 1962.



Fishermen take preparations to collect spawns in Halda river, the lone natural breeding ground for fishes in the country, as fishes started releasing spawns yesterday. (Story on Star Chittagong)

## E-governance a must for better public services

Speakers tell workshop

BSS, Dhaka

Speakers at a workshop yesterday put emphasis on expansion of e-governance in the national administrative process for providing better services to people.

The daylong inception workshop of the UNDP-supported programme "Access to Information (A2I) programme" was held in the press briefing room of the chief adviser's office.

Principal Secretary of the Chief Adviser's Office Ali Imam Majumder chaired the workshop addressed by Secretary-in-charge Kazi Aminul Islam and UNDP Deputy Country Director Larry Maramis.

National Project Director Mahub Sarwar gave the welcome address.

About 120 high officials of the

government, including the Secretaries and the ICT stakeholders, took part in the workshop.

Majumder said practice of e-governance will make the administration more efficient, transparent and service oriented.

Referring to technological changes in the global perspective, he said the focus of ICT should be changing the fate of the poor and marginal people.

The government offices should effectively use ICT to increase professional skills and competence of the officers and employees so that they can contribute more to national development, he added.

Governance means delivery of services to the people as they need, Aminul said and added e-governance is a higher-level process of reaching services to people.

He laid emphasis on formation of legal and institutional framework for introduction and expansion of e-governance in the country.

Maramis said practice of e-governance will make public service better and smarter and ICT should be used to change the fate of common people.

UNDP sources said an "e-Governance Cell" in the chief adviser's office has been established to lead and provide coordination support to all e-governance initiatives taken at various levels of the government.

An umbrella programme with UNDP Bangladesh has also been formulated and now is under operation to support this cell, the sources added.

## DIIT denies UGC allegations

DU CORRESPONDENT

Daffodil Institute of IT (DIIT), which was declared illegal by the University Grants Commission (UGC) recently, yesterday denied the allegations and claimed that the institution is being conducted legally.

DIIT authorities at a press conference at Dhaka Reporters' Unity (DRU) said they are going to take legal actions against the declaration of University Grants Commission.

Country's lone university watchdog UGC on May 8 published a notice declaring activities of 56 private universities illegal, as they are neither affiliated by the UGC nor the Ministry of Education. Most of these universities are wings of different foreign universities. The notice contains a list of those universities that also included DIIT.

DIIT Chairman Md Sabur Khan explained journalists why the activities of the institute cannot be termed 'illegal'.

The list of illegal universities as declared by the UGC included universities, but DIIT is not a university, Sabur Khan claimed. After starting as a general computer training centre in 1990, the institute achieved the affiliation of NCC Education, UK in 1997 and was affiliated by National University in 2000.

DIIT Executive Director Md Nuruzzaman and Academic Director Dr Fakhrul Hossain were also present on the occasion.

## Russia to build N-centre in sanctions-hit Myanmar

AFP, Moscow

Russia said yesterday it had agreed to help build a light-water nuclear reactor and research centre in Myanmar, an Asian state run by a military junta that is under European and US economic sanctions.

"The agreement foresees cooperation in the design and equipping of a centre for nuclear research in Myanmar," including a light water nuclear reactor, Russia's atomic energy agency Rosatom said in a statement.

Rosatom head Sergei Kiriyenko and Myanmar's Science and Technology Minister U Thaung signed the deal for construction of the centre yesterday in Moscow, the statement said.

## Exhibition highlights need to protect sea lanes

AFP, Singapore

Asia Pacific naval forces kicked off the region's biggest sea defence exhibition in Singapore yesterday, highlighting the need to protect the world's key shipping lanes from extremist threats.

Warships from around the world docked at the city-state's Changi Naval Base to participate in the four-day International Maritime Defence Exhibition and Conference (IMDEX Asia).

As globalisation pushes up trade volumes, the need to protect sea lanes is growing, and the region's navies could increasingly be called upon to help maritime authorities beef up security, delegates were told.

Singapore's Second Defence Minister, Ng Eng Hen, said global

maritime trade has soared nearly 50 percent in the 10 years to 2005 to 7.11 billion tons (6.4 billion tonnes).

He told the IMDEX Asia 2007 show more than 80 percent of the world's trade passes through water, and 90 percent of general cargo is transported through shipping containers.

"While maritime trade facilitates global trade and development, it also has increasingly become a potential target and means for dangerous and illegal activities," Ng said.

"This is exacerbated by the difficulty to precisely discern movements, activities, cargoes, intentions or ownership of maritime and coastal assets. In recognition of these significant threats, many governments are increasing security measures to deter attacks on their vital and yet open system."

Host Singapore is one of three countries bordering the Malacca Strait, a narrow waterway that has one of the world's busiest shipping lanes. Security experts believe it could be targeted by terrorists.

The cost of any disruption of trade in the strait, which carries half the

world's oil supplies from the Middle East to Asia, would be astronomical, Ng warned.

IMDEX Asia 2007 is being held amid a naval buildup in the region. Navies are expected to spend 108 billion US dollars on boosting submarine and other maritime defences over the next 10 years, outstripping maritime defence expenditure in the US and Europe.

Nearly 30 percent, or 30 billion dollars, will go to acquiring submarines. The most orders will come from emerging Asian power China, including five nuclear-powered missile submarines and 30 attack submarines to add to its current fleet, organisers said.

India plans to acquire up to two nuclear and five conventional submarines, while Japan plans to acquire two.

Indonesia plans to buy four submarines, Singapore is to acquire two, and neighbouring Malaysia will buy two French boats by 2010. The country does not currently have any submarines.

## Entries wanted for Bimstec postcard design contest

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand will organise a design competition titled the "Discover Bimstec Postcards" as part of series of communicative activities to mark the 10th anniversary of the establishment of Bimstec, says a press release.

It aims to raise awareness about Bimstec and build a sense of community among the youth in the region.

The competition is open to all Bangladeshi secondary-school students aged 12-18. The award consists of an honour certificate and US\$ 140 (in cash).

Information pack for "Discover Bimstec Postcards" Design Competition, Guideline and Procedures and application form can be downloaded from website WWW.mfa.go.th/Bimstec/Bimstec web/index.html and www.Bimstec.org.

The designed postcard, application form, two passport-size photos and a certified copy of participant's citizenship or certificate of registration have to reach the Director (Saarc, Bimstec & ACD), Room No A-305, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh latest by June 1, 2007.

In this connection, Ministry of Foreign Affairs invites all the secondary-school students in Bangladesh to participate in this innovative competition.

## India unveils draft law to curb road deaths

AFP, New Delhi

India yesterday unveiled a draft law to discipline reckless motorists and try and restore order on its chaotic roads, where tens of thousands die in crashes every year.

Transport Minister TR Baalu introduced the bill in parliament

## Toll climbs to 29 in Indian bus fire

AFP, New Delhi

The death toll from a head-on smash between a passenger bus running on compressed natural gas and a chemical tanker rose to 29 yesterday, the Press Trust of India said.

Police told the news agency they had recovered 29 bodies and that another 14 people were injured in the accident, which occurred when the bus tried to overtake another vehicle on a highway in western Gujarat state Monday.

Six of the dead had been identified but most bodies were charred beyond recognition by the flames that engulfed the bus, police said.

as a replacement for a colonial-era law to cope with the growing number of accidents on India's sprawling network of highways.

"Motorists caught driving excessively fast on speed cameras will now face a minimum penalty of 1,000 rupees (23 dollars) in a first-time offence and double the amount for a subsequent offence," Baalu told parliament.

The call for a more than 100-percent hike in penalties came a month after a court in New Delhi ordered sweeping measures including a ban on drinking or smoking while driving in the city of three million vehicles.

Road accident deaths in India jumped almost 46 percent to 277,260 in the decade ended in 2004, according to figures from the Delhi-based Institute of Road Traffic Education of India.

The institute also said India accounts for nearly 10 percent of all fatal accidents worldwide.

Some 1.27 million people are also injured annually in India, it said, attributing the high number to a lack of professional training programmes in the country of one billion-plus people.

Baalu said the bill would also increase compensation for victims of road accidents to 100,000 rupees (2,220 dollars), an almost three-fold increase in the amount currently paid on insurance claims.



This CNG filling station at Tejgaon in the city remains closed for several hours yesterday due to power outage.

PHOTO: STAR

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