

US, allies to toughen Iran sanctions: Bush

AFP, Washington

US President George W Bush said Thursday that he would work with European allies, Russia, and China to toughen sanctions on Iran for its defiance of UN demands to rein in its suspect nuclear programme.

"We need to strengthen our sanction regime," Bush said one day after the UN nuclear watchdog agency warned that Tehran had accelerated its uranium enrichment efforts, which can be a key step in atomic bomb-making.

Bush said he and US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice had discussed plans to beef up existing punitive measures on the Islamic republic and "we will work with our European partners to develop further sanctions."

The embattled US president, weighed down by the unpopular Iraq war, said he would personally try to overcome anticipated resistance to such a step from Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Hu Jintao.

"These leaders have got to understand that an Iran with a nuclear weapon would be incredibly destabilizing for the world. It's in their interests that we work collaboratively to continue to isolate that regime," said Bush.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) warned Wednesday that Iran was not just ignoring UN demands to freeze uranium enrichment but was expanding such work, which can also yield fuel for civilian reactors to generate energy.

"The world has spoken and said, you know, 'no nuclear weapons programmes.' And yet they're constantly ignoring the demands," Bush said at a White House press conference. Tehran denies seeking an atomic arsenal.

The United States has backed Europe-led diplomacy with Iran, specifically talks with Britain, France, and Germany, while the UN Security Council has twice imposed sanctions on Tehran over its nuclear programme.

Asked whether any new sanctions would target Iran's oil industry, a US State Department official who requested anonymity replied: "I certainly would steer you away from the idea that anyone is going to try and put in place some kind of energy sector sanctions. I do not think that anybody is talking about that."

Putin, on a visit to Luxembourg, said he wanted the situation to be "decided by political and diplomatic means, and not to lead the situation into a dead end." Washington has refused to take the military option off the table.

The UN report came as the United States ratcheted up tensions with the biggest display of naval power in the Gulf in years, even as Iran further soured ties with Washington by detaining another US-Iranian national.

"To the extent that these people

are picking up innocent Americans, it's unacceptable. And we've made it very clear to the Iranian government that the detention of good, decent American souls who are there to, you know, be beneficial citizens is not acceptable behaviour," Bush declared Thursday.

His comments came as US and Iranian diplomats prepared for historic talks on Iraqi security in Baghdad on Monday.

Ahead of those talks, the United States said Iran was escalating a proxy war against US forces in Iraq as the two nations sparred verbally over a number of their nationals being detained by each other.

Iran has repeatedly demanded that the United States release five Iranians arrested by US forces in Iraq, while Washington has expressed outrage over the detentions of at least two Iranian-Americans in recent weeks.

At the press conference, Bush said he was pleased with new emergency Iraq war funding legislation, but warned that fighting there could sharply worsen ahead of a September assessment of the months-old US security crackdown, and cautioned leaders in Baghdad that they must show political progress.

"As it provides vital funds for our troops, this bill also reflects a consensus that the Iraqi government needs to show real progress in return for America's continued support and sacrifice," he said.

"This summer is going to be a critical time for the new strategy," said Bush. "We're going to expect heavy fighting in the (coming) weeks and months."

800 vehicles

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region, he said.

The number of stranded vehicles on both sides of the ferry ghat might increase during the night, adding to the sufferings of the travellers, sources said.

Court asks

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would be given to him, said advocate Abu Bakr.

The judge's comment drew instant flak from lawyers and the judge replied, "I am not going to hear any word against Galib."

Meanwhile, intelligence agencies in 2005 found evidence that Galib channelled huge Middle Eastern funds to the militants using Tawhid Trust and its properties.

The court heard seven witnesses for Galib. Two of them -- Ahab second-in-command Abdus Samad Salafi and Organising Secretary ASM Azizullah -- were held along with Galib, but they were released sometime before the end of BNP-Jamaat rule.

6 more GIs killed

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Hussein, the two leading Democratic presidential hopefuls voted against the bill.

Senators Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama are battling for the support of their party's anti-war grassroots in upcoming primaries to select a Democratic candidate and are seeking to capitalise on growing public disenchantment.

"With my vote today, I am saying to the president that enough is enough," Obama said, while Clinton declared: "I believe that the president should begin a phased redeployment of our troops out of Iraq and abandon this escalation."

Despite recent setbacks, Bush is determined to push on with his so-called "surge strategy", under which the number of US troops in Iraq will increase to more than 160,000 in a bid to quell sectarian fighting around Baghdad.

The deployment of four additional combat brigades -- a fifth is due by next month -- has helped reduce death squad killings, but Al-Qaeda bombers continue their deadly campaign and fighting has worsened north and west of the city.

Two weeks ago, insurgents ambushed and wiped out a small US patrol manning an observation post south of Baghdad. They destroyed two Humvees, killed four soldiers and an interpreter and dragged off three American troops.

One of the three, Private First Class Joseph Anzack, was found on Wednesday floating in the Euphrates in Mussayib, 55 kilometres (34 miles) south of Baghdad. Iraqi police said he had been shot in the back of the head.

Thousands of troops are still searching for his missing comrades -- Private Byron Fouty and Specialist Alex Jimenez -- and May remains on track to be one of the deadliest months for US soldiers since the invasion.

Two were killed when their patrol hit a roadside bomb in the Sunni western half of Baghdad on Thursday, the military said in a statement. An Iraqi interpreter also died and another soldier was wounded in the blast.

Four more soldiers died in a series of attacks since Tuesday, it

said.

Many of the dead were victims of roadside bombs, the single deadliest threat facing soldiers here. On Friday, US and Iraqi forces stormed the east Baghdad hideout of a gang suspected of smuggling these devices from Iran.

After calling in an air strike, the squad captured an Iraqi militant accused of "acting as a proxy for an Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps officer", the military said, in the latest of a series of accusations levelled at Tehran.

India in driving

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right-handed buried the nightmarish experience in the Chittagong Test. He was also fortunate not to get dismissed in the second ball of the post-lunch session when Rafique floored a simple return catch.

On way to his fourth hundred, the 29-year-old not only played the sheet-anchor role but also sweetly flicked and executed the on-drive against a buffet bowling.

Having reached the half-century with an excellent pull in 101 balls, he geared up to race to the 100-mark in 185 deliveries, on-driving Rafique for his 13th boundary.

During his five and half-hour

essay, he he faced 229 balls featuring 17 foures.

His departure on 281 brought Tendulkar, who virtually played second fiddle to David (88 off 131 deliveries) in the last hour to make sure Bangladesh remain witless for the second time in Test cricket after failing to dismiss any opposition batsman on the second day of the Chittagong Test against South Africa in April 2003.

It were Jacques Rudolph and Boeta Dippenaar, who batted throughout the second day adding 280 runs in 90 overs during the highest ever stand against Bangladesh, an unbroken 429 for the third wicket.

The Indian captain cracked eleven foures and the only six of the day -- a dead straight drive against Mohammad Ashraf -- to bring the 300.

Myanmar extends Suu Kyi's detention

AFP, Yangon

Military-run Myanmar yesterday extended the detention of democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, police sources told AFP, despite growing international calls for her freedom.

"We issued an order of further detention," a police source said without giving further details.

The Nobel peace prize-winner's latest period of detention began in May 2003 and was set to expire this weekend.

Japanese Jiji press news agency said the junta extended the house arrest for another year, but the police source declined to comment.

An Asian diplomat in Yangon said a police car was seen entering her lakeside home here during the afternoon.

The 61-year-old Aung San Suu Kyi has spent most of the past 17 years under house arrest and has little contact with the outside world, apart from her live-in maid and visits from her doctor.

The last time the opposition leader -- the only Nobel peace laureate in detention -- was able to leave her house was November 2006, when the junta allowed her to meet visiting UN envoy Ibrahim Gambari for one hour.

The extension of her house arrest was widely expected, with observers saying the junta is fearful the hugely popular democracy leader could threaten its rule.

Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) won a landslide victory in 1990 elections but was never allowed to govern.

Political figures from across the world have ramped up calls for her release, with ex-US president Bill Clinton and 58 other former world leaders sending a joint letter last week to junta head General Than Shwe.

Two other Nobel peace laureates -- former US president Jimmy Carter and former South Korean president Kim Dae-Jung -- were among those who signed the appeal.

US First Lady Laura Bush on Wednesday called on China, an ally of Myanmar, to join efforts to free her, saying that American women "stand with her and that we watch her and we think about her a lot."

Citing Myanmar's rights violations, including Aung San Suu Kyi's detention, the United States last week renewed sanctions against the regime for another year, as did the European Union in April.

In the past week the junta has detained at least 60 pro-democracy activists as they went to pagodas to pray for Aung San Suu Kyi's release, and 45 people, mostly NLD members, still remain in custody.

Amnesty International said Wednesday the human rights situation in Myanmar had worsened over the past year with authorities stepping up repression of political opposition.

The United Nations has estimated there are 1,100 political prisoners in the country formerly known as Burma, which has been ruled by the military since 1962.

Pay phone

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Ferdous of stealing the cellphones and the money as Litu could not find him inside the shop and those were missing from the shop.

When Litu returned to his shop later on he discovered Ferdous lying in a pool of blood kept hidden at a corner of the shop. Blood was coming out of his abdomen. Litu immediately rushed him to DMCH.

Bombs recovered

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later handed them over to the police.

BDR suspected that smugglers might have left the bag containing the bombs, sensing the presence of BDR patrol team in the morning.

On Thursday, police recovered three bombs from a house at Dharmachaki village in the same upazila. Acting on a tip-off, Gangni police raided the house of Year Ali at around 8:00am and found the bombs wrapped with red tape in the kitchen.

They arrested Year Ali's son Afazuddin for his alleged link with an outlawed party.

Hard rock

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last year. The second block went into operation on October 17, third on October 27, fourth on November 20 and the final block on November 27 last year, said sources.

The mine was ready for hand-over after a successful 24-hour run involving all the five blocks on December 12, said Asadullah, a mining engineer of the project.

The project was supposed to go on a test run in June last year but failed due to technical glitches.

The target of granite extraction is around 1.65 million tons a year while the pit's life span has been estimated to be 46 years.

After the commissioning ceremony, Maqbul-E-Elahi, MGMCL Managing Director Abul Mansur Mohammad Azaad, and other officials of Petrobangla and the project inspected the underground installation.

Israeli jets hit guardhouse of Palestinian PM's home

AFP, Gaza City

Warplanes pounded the Gaza Strip for a ninth day yesterday as Palestinians continued to fire rockets into Israel despite a call from Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas for a truce.

Israeli aircraft launched seven sorties overnight, striking buildings and posts operated by Islamist movement Hamas, the senior coalition partner in the Palestinian government, whose fighters have fired rockets at Israel.

Local medical sources cited five people wounded in strikes that Palestinians said hit a small guard-house near the home of prime minister Ismail Haniya in the Shati refugee camp, but the military denied his house had been the target.

Three days ago, Israel warned Hamas, of which Haniya is a prominent member, that none of its leaders was immune from attack after a rocket fired by its militants killed an Israeli woman.

Other targets included buildings operated by Hamas's controversial paramilitary Executive Force, a money-changing office and a weapons workshop.

The military said it attacked two Hamas posts in Gaza City and the southern town of Khan Yunis, three buildings operated by Hamas in the northern Gaza Strip and a business "involved in transferring funds to terror organisations".

A "weapons-manufacturing facility" used by Hamas's smaller rival Islamic Jihad, which has claimed most of the attacks on Israel in the past two years, was also attacked in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip, the military said.

It accused Palestinians of trying to fire 19 makeshift rockets in the past 24 hours, eight of which hit Israel, and added that two mortar shells caused damage near the Erez crossing terminal separating the Jewish state from Gaza.

An army spokeswoman said fighters fired five rockets from Gaza into Israel's Negev desert on Friday, causing no damage or casualties.

The violence came one day after the beleaguered Abbas urged Palestinian fighters in Gaza to hold their fire and called for a truce with Israel.

"We don't need these futile firings of rockets and they have to cease so that we can reach a reciprocal truce with the Israelis in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank," he said after meeting EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana.

A six-month ceasefire has collapsed amid a sharp increase in rocket attacks and air strikes, which Israel resumed on May 16 in response.

Air raids have killed 13 Palestinian civilians and 25 militants, but have failed to halt the rocket bombardment, with more than 130 slamming into Israel over the past week and a

half, killing the woman and wounding 16 other people.

Overnight Wednesday to Thursday, Israeli soldiers took the campaign against Hamas to the West Bank by detaining 33 senior party members, including a cabinet minister and three members of parliament.

Israel seized the 33 Hamas officials in raids centred on Nablus. Those held included education minister Nassereddin al-Shaar, who was detained in a previous clampdown last year, three lawmakers and at least seven mayors.

The United States has voiced concern, with State Department spokesman Tom Casey saying the detentions "raise particular concerns."

"Certainly Hamas is a foreign terrorist organisation engaged in terrorist attacks against Israel. But we have previously noted when these kinds of issues came up before, that the detention of elected members of the Palestinian government and legislature does raise particular concerns," Casey said.

The bloodshed in Gaza over nearly two weeks was sparked by a renewed bout of clashes between Hamas and Abbas's Fatah, caused widespread international concern and undercut hopes of reviving peace efforts.

9 picked up

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(DB) are conducting operations in the city and its adjacent areas to identify the people involved in the mugging. Besides, several teams of Rapid Action Battalion are also conducting operations in the capital.

Rusho was killed in Dhamondi on Thursday during a mugging incident after he drew Tk 4.45 lakh from the Satmasjid Road branch of NCC Bank. His death came just after a day when the DMP at a press conference claimed a decrease in mugging incidents in the capital.

The law enforcers are now picking up suspected muggers listed with different police stations in the city to find out if they had links with the killing.

However, the law enforcers, as of 9:30pm yesterday, did not arrest anyone in this connection.

"None was arrested yet. Operation is going on in and outside the capital," Officer-in-charge of Dhamondi Police Station Monwar Hossain, who is investigating the case, said last night.

"Mugging incidents have decreased in number and Thursday's incident was a sensational one which would be properly looked into," he added.

Meanwhile, the body of Rusho was laid to rest at Banani Graveyard yesterday.

Gas vanishes

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handle their technical problems.

"The idea of separating exploration from a gas company through creation of Bapex in 1989 was wrong. The idea of creating Sylhet Gas Field Company (SGFL) was also wrong. There should have been just one company," said a senior official.

"If we had just one company to oversee all gas resources of the country, we would not have to go for tenders to get a consultant for a simple technical operation. The overhead cost would have been also very low. Operation of the fields would have been more efficient," he added.

But as the BGFL now plays the role of a manager only, it must depend on expertise of Bapex and get approval from various ministries for any technical job and thereby lose vital time and money to address a problem. "This is what happened with the Titas field," said an official.

The BGFL detected a sharp drop of gas flow pressure in well-3 in December 2003, which caused gas production from that well to halve. But the BGFL officials did not realise that this drop in pressure was an indication of leakage of gas, which was already surfacing two to four km off that well.

Based on the experience of a similar incident, the BGFL assumed that pressure had dropped due to narrowing down of the well casing due to carbon accumulation. To resolve this, the BGFL prepared a proposal for a well work-over programme in early 2004.

"It took about a year for the planning ministry to approve this project. Then it took another year for the BGFL to complete a tender process in compliance with the Public Procurement Regulation. Finally, the BGFL late last year chose Bapex for the job, and materials required for it started arriving at the site," says a high official.

If the plans had not changed in March, Bapex would have proceeded with the work-over programme for yet another year.

"This is so bureaucratic. This is not how a gas company should work. We work with natural resources. There are situations which need immediate technical action. We cannot operate like other government machinery. The BGFL may be a company but it functions like an ordinary govern-

Lt Gen Masud

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build a better Bangladesh, a corruption free country, and so that we can have one of the best governed countries in the world."

"I am sure that the whole country is moving towards that end and we will definitely achieve that," he added.

"If we can rear our new generations properly, we will have a lovely Bangladesh where there will be no violence, and no corruption," he said adding, "We want to build our country in such a way where our new generations will be able to say proudly that they are the children of a prosperous Bangladesh."

"A process is on to submit charge sheets against a good number of corrupt people," he said.

Asked whether the drive against corruption has slowed down, Masud Uddin said, "Collecting evidence of corruption and producing them before the court is a time consuming affair."

"We don't have much of a trained manpower and relevant equipment," he added.

About the delay in putting corruption suspects on trials, he said, "It's normal because we need to abide by the present rules to carry out the trials."

"The trials will neither be under martial law nor on camera but in open courts," he said.

The book launching ceremony was organised by the Federation of Bangladesh Associations Overseas.

ON LATEST PROMOTIONS

Justifying the latest promotions of the military top brass, Lt Gen Masud Uddin Chowdhury said the promotions were long over due.

"There are many countries where the numbers of army personnel are lesser than ours but their army chiefs enjoy the rank of four-star generals," Masud said adding, "This creates some problems in respect to protocols when the army chief or any army officer goes to visit a foreign country."

He was responding to a question about Thursday's promotions of the military top brass.

"When the status of the army chief was of a lieutenant general, the number of army personnel was 50,000, now the number has multiplied three times," he said justifying the promotions.

He also said, "We were not being able to send our army officers as force commanders to UN peacekeeping missions as there was no three-star general in the Bangladesh Army, although Bangladesh contributes the largest number of troops to UN peacekeeping missions," he added.

Having force commanders in UN peacekeeping missions is a prestigious thing for a country, Masud said.

"Now some of us will be able to join UN peacekeeping missions as force commanders as we have been promoted as three-star generals," he added.

Fingerprint

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several countries use the biometric system to prevent fraud in migrations from one country to another.

Surprisingly, above 400 workers' fingerprints did not match during checks at the immigrations in Kuala Lumpur since the resumption of manpower export to Malaysia in October last year.

Additional Deputy Commissioner of Dhaka Maksudur Rahman, who had been appointed as the administrator of Baira, said misplacement of fingerprints in the data of the workers might be one of the reasons behind such mismatches.

"The technicians at Baira might have deliberately made such mismatches with ill intentions or this might have happened by mistake," said another source of Baira requesting anonymity.

Maksudur Rahman said following directives from the ministry, they are trying to identify the reasons behind the mismatches, which have serious consequences for the workers who spent at least Tk 2 lakh to Tk 2.5 lakh for the chance of working in Malaysia. Many of them got the money through selling their lands or by borrowing from lenders.

Secretary to the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Abdul Matin Chowdhury said they are also contacting Glory Multimedia, the Malaysian computer firm that installed the online system between Bangladesh and Malaysia, to identify the cause of the mismatches.

Asked how these returnee workers will be compensated, Matin said there is a wage earners' welfare fund but that cannot be used as those workers could not even enter their workplace.

Apart from the biometric fingerprint mismatch issue the workers had no other problem, he said adding, "Once the cause behind the fingerprint mismatches is identified, we will be able to come to a conclusion and decide what to do with those workers." There must be a way out, he noted.

Khaleda denies

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that end once the ban on indoor politics goes," she said referring to the much-talked about reform of the political parties.

Replying to a query, Khaleda said, "We have discussed a lot of issues. They (US) want early elections and so do we."

A party insider said that during the one and a half hours meeting that began at 4:30pm the BNP chairperson questioned the 18-month time frame set for holding the election.

"Five to six months are enough to have the job done," she was quoted as saying.

Asked if she is under pressure to leave the country, she replied, "As you can see... I am still here."

Khaleda came out of her cantonment residence yesterday for the first time in the last two weeks.

Talking to the journalists, Butenis said, "We touched on a lot of issues including election, reforms and the voter list. I think it would be difficult for the political parties to share ideas on these if the ban is not lifted."

She said, "I call on the government to lift the ban on indoor politics and I hope they will do so."

The US envoy made a similar call after meeting Awami League President Sheikh Hasina on May 16.

According to party sources, before the formal meeting began, Khaleda talked with Butenis for about 30 minutes behind closed doors. Tarique's wife Zobaida Rahman accompanied her mother-in-law at that time.

Butenis enquired about Tarique Rahman. She wanted to know if he is being treated properly in jail. She also asked Khaleda if his human rights have been violated, added the sources. BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Standing Committee members Dr RA Gani,

Chowdhury Tanveer Ahmed Siddique, Khandaker Delwar Hossain, Vice-president Lt Gen (retired) Mir Shawkat Ali, chairperson's advisers Justice TH Khan, Reaz Rahman and Mushfiqur Rahman were present during the meeting.

After the meeting, Khaleda spoke to her party colleagues for about 20 minutes, said the sources adding that the chairperson discussed mainly the present political situation.

Reaz Rahman, adviser to the BNP chairperson, at a press briefing termed the meeting a 'farewell' to Butenis.

He said both Khaleda and the US ambassador hoped that an election would be held well ahead of the time frame announced by the Election Commission.

1 killed

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Satish Chandra Rajbanshi, 35, of Elasin village in Delduar upazila.

The injured were admitted to Tangail General Hospital, Delduar Upazila Health Complex and Mirzapur Kumudini Hospital.

Rab arrests

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boy the same day after his mother Rikta Rahman gave them Tk 25,000 out of