

Govt must show

FROM PAGE 16 rather than casting the net too widely, will send the right signals and enhance the credibility of the ACC in the eyes of the public."

Patel also identified a lack of "implementation capacity" as a significant downside to the current interim administration. He observed that having only ten persons to manage the portfolios that were previously managed by some 40 ministers is "not satisfactory."

"This is surely going to cause overstretching in the span of control over the machinery and decision-making...and even day-to-day decisions." It creates a situation where "we (WB) are going to increase our support, but the amount of money on the table is not being implemented in a timely way," added Patel.

He said there is clearly a desire to improve the quality of politics and he has gained confidence that there are "competent people at the wheel" and he believes that the government will be able to implement its planned reforms in the electoral system and within political parties.

The public should consider the timeframe if they become impatient with the speed of change, and be reassured that "if all the reforms are done, the quality of politics cannot go anywhere but up," Patel said.

Bangladesh's potential growth rate of 8 to 9 percent has been hampered by "confrontational politics" and corruption in the past, and that 3 percent of "lost growth" has led to millions remaining in poverty unnecessarily, Patel observed.

The WB vice president also identified the rising inflation as a significant downside and he disagreed with the governments' position over the issue and encouraged the government to "think very hard about it."

Johnathan Dunn, mission head of IMF in Bangladesh however said although global and regional inflation levels are comparable to the levels in Bangladesh, it is important that the public understand that there is enough scope for the government to make policy adjustments to rein in the high inflation levels.

Currently, Patel said, consumer price index inflation in India and Pakistan were 7.6 and 7.7 percent respectively, in comparison to Bangladesh's 7.4 percent, which is higher than the central banks' comfort level. However, he added, inflation above the comfortable level will happen and measures against runaway inflation have to be taken.

Saying that it is important to bring down the current inflation level, Dunn suggested tighter monetary policy as well as adjustments to the demand side as possible policy solutions, but added that it is not good that people here are getting "used to" the high levels of inflation.

Dunn further advised, the exchange rate to be made more flexible to complement the monetary goals of reducing inflation, scope for further appreciation of taka, especially with high foreign reserves.

Patel said the change in the government after 1/11 "has not created any imbalance," and that the government has done well to take policy decisions that have been pending at the ministries for years.

"Through my discussions over the past three days it is clear to me that the present period provides a rare window of opportunity to make fundamental economic and political reforms which must be seized," said Patel, adding, the WB will continue to work with the government in reforms to crucial sectors—water, power and education.

During his visit, Patel met Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed, Finance and Planning Adviser M Azizul Islam, senior government officials, development partners, civil society members, and representatives of NGOs, private sector and the media.

"There should be no softening on the critical challenge of improving the lives of the poor during this important political transition" and the government is in a unique position to institute reforms with a lasting impact, he added.

The WB is set to disburse a total of \$450 million by the end of this fiscal year.

Patel said, "What matters is that we have the environment and conditions for the World Bank to provide the maximum support for the mission we pursue here, which are largely to eradicating poverty and for Bangladesh to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) by 2015."

The vice president for South Asia added that Bangladesh is one of the rare countries to be on its way towards meeting the MDGs within 2015 and many of them have already been met.

Patel cautioned saying, "Those making decisions on the eviction of road-side businesses or small business that are on government land [should] keep in mind the consequences for the poor people" because "this sector is the lifeblood of the poor and [it] makes an important contribution to growth [of the economy]."

Patel also expressed his satisfaction over the government's commitment to addressing weak revenue mobilisation, large energy sector losses, trade liberalisation and outstanding state-owned enterprise liabilities.

He said the WB will do all it can to assist the government to recover the illegally earned money that has been sent overseas and the WB is also hopeful that the strengthening of the ACC would bring greater efficiency in retrieving the illegally earned money.

The WB vice president also advised the media to ensure accountability in the government by publicising government inefficiency in recovering the ill-gotten money or prosecuting corruption suspects.

Jalil tells joint forces

FROM PAGE 1 from suspected criminals in exchange for saving them from the law.

Detained former FBCCI president Abdul Awal Mintoo might be made a state witness in the case against Awami League (AL) president Sheikh Hasina in connection with a high-tech frigate purchase scam, sources said. Mintoo told interrogators that Korean company Daewoo bribed Hasina Tk 1 crore to close the deal. The amount was deposited to an account which she supposedly has been using for the purposes of her party politics on her own discretion.

Sources said detained AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil told TFI that his party chief Hasina regularly received money from several industrialists and businessmen. He said she used to receive Tk 50 lakh to Tk 1 crore from each of those businessmen before launching any political programme or a movement.

Jalil also confessed that before the recently stalled general election, established businessmen and other wealthy people competed for AL tickets, and it was not a problem for people with illegally earned money to win party nominations, the sources said.

During the period some younger party leaders like Hasina's cousins Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim and Sheikh Helal, Obaidul Quader, and Jahangir Kabir Nanak also partook in the thriving nomination trade.

Jalil, who was arrested from his Marcentile Bank on May 28, is now on a four-day remand, being quizzed by TFI about the AL leadership, Marcentile Bank, the infamous April 30 deadline, formation of syndicates which monopolised the business of essentials giving rise to price spirals, and about the affairs of Janatar Mancha.

Meanwhile, detained former state minister for home Lutfozzaman Babar admitted to earning a humongous amount of money and properties through corruption. He became close to Tarique Rahman by playing a vital role in arranging a regular flow of extortion money from different businessmen for Tarique.

Apart from taking bribes from Bashundhara Group, Babar also received a large sum of money from the suspected killers of Chittagong businessman and BNP leader Jamal Uddin Ahmed, and the killers of another shipping businessman

Eminent citizens

FROM PAGE 1 who was also a BNP leader, in exchange for saving the suspects from prosecution. The shipping businessman was abducted and killed for a ransom of US\$ 70 lakh.

Sources said Babar admitted to the interrogators that the killers of the shipping businessman bribed Babar with US\$ 4 lakh in Singapore for saving them from the murder charges.

Detained AL Presidium Member Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim admitted to the interrogators that while he was the health minister, he took two percent of \$27 million from East Coast Group, a local agent of a Russian power generation company, for letting the company have a contract for setting up a section of Sidharganj power plant.

He also admitted to taking Tk 5 lakh as a bribe from Nasimul Alam Chowdhury of Borura in Comilla in exchange for an AL nomination.

Another detained top businessman and Partex Group Chairman MA Hashem explained to the interrogators how he increased his wealth. He told them that he himself does not even know the total amount of land he owns, but he could recall that he owns 549 bighas of land in and around the capital, of which 500 bighas are either of the government or disputed lands.

They said regular check-up, taking necessary medicines, nursing and a friendly environment is a "must" for his life.

The signatories to the statement are Prof Kabir Chowdhury, Justice KM Sobhan, Poet Mahbubul Alam Chowdhury, Poet Syed Shamsul Haque, folklore researcher Shamsuzzaman Khan, Ramendu Majumdar, Dr Atiur Rahman, Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique, Dr Harun-or-Rashid, Dr Anwar Hossain, Nasir Uddin Yusuf, poet Belal Chowdhury, Dr Muhammad Samad, and architect Rabiul Husain among others.

Kamal

FROM PAGE 1 politicians whose words contradicted their deeds.

"We (political leaders concerned) publicly said that we would not break our pledges, but regrettably some of us, not all, broke those," Dr Kamal said in an interview with Channel i adding "I apologise, because from simple and naive belief, I was with them."

"Those who have broken their pledges have been identified and they should say sorry publicly and I apologise on their behalf," the veteran politician said. Such leaders should withdraw from politics, he added.

Regarding the ongoing drive against corruption, he said that top political leaders, rather than second or third ranked leaders, should be put on trials on a priority basis. Although some top leaders are on trials, most of the detained party people are second or third-ranked, he observed.

Earlier, the Gono Forum president had told the same television channel that he has taken an initiative to float a new political platform.

Dr Kamal said that he has already started talks with honest people and those personalities who had taken a stance against corruption. This move was prompted by a concern for national interest, he added.

"It is not the time to stay put at home. The need of the hour is to rise for national unity," he said.

While his attention was drawn towards the ban on politics, he replied, "The ban would not stand in the way as we can talk to each other as citizens of the country. We are having talks in the people's interest and for their cause."

Power shortage

FROM PAGE 1 The government has approved Tk 3,633 crore in the coming fiscal's ADP allocation for the power sector. Sector-wise, it is the highest allocation and 31 percent more than the preceding year's, planning ministry sources said.

Of the allocation, 56 percent is meant for setting up 14 new power plants with an electricity-generating capacity of 2,505 megawatts. The Economic Relations Division (ERD) will seek \$300 million from the Bretton Woods institution for the power development projects.

The revised allocation for the sector in the current fiscal is Tk 2,779 crore, which is 6 percent less than that of preceding year.

Allocation for the power sector decreased by 0.47 percent in FY 04-05 and it witnessed a slight increase (0.47 percent) in FY 05-06.

The government may ask for the allocation under the Bank's special scheme Power Sector Development Credit (PSDC) programme instead of the existing Development Support Credit (DSC) programme.

Allocation for the power sector between FY 02 and FY 07 was Tk 17,244 crore, mostly for developing distribution lines. The expenditure was Tk 14,040 crore as of December 2006.

Mohiuddin

FROM PAGE 1 Earlier in mid-March, the court had declared him fugitive and rejected his petition for allowing him to stay in the United States. Last week, the court also refused to hear his case once again.

A source in the foreign ministry yesterday said Mohiuddin's lawyer convinced the court to get his application reheard.

Sources in Dhaka and Washington hinted that the deportation "might be delayed until all legal options are exhausted". They said if his lawyers fail to get any redress in the Circuit Court, they might move to the US Supreme Court.

The San Francisco court had ruled Mohiuddin "assisted or participated" in the persecution of others for political reasons and said the August '75 coup that assassinated the country's founding father and first president Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and most members of his family was an act of terrorism.

After the court verdict, the US authorities arrested and kept him detained at an immigration detention centre near Long Beach, Calif., since mid-March.

The first attempt to deport him after the San Francisco court's judgment was stayed by the intervention of California Republican Congressman Dana Rohrabacher.

Meanwhile, Amnesty International has urged Canada to grant asylum to Mohiuddin, days after his daughter made an emotional appeal to Ottawa to take him following the US court's order to deport him.

The international human-right watchdog urged the Canadian government "to ensure that he (Mohiuddin) is not returned to Bangladesh to face the death penalty".

A similar plea was also made by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Price spiral calls

FROM PAGE 1 solution," he said.

According to CPD, the rate of inflation is not likely to fall below seven percent in the near future.

Lack of institutional monitoring mechanism, information gap among different stake holders, market concentration, increased production cost of domestic commodities, too many market intermediaries, dislocation in market structure due to anti-corruption drives and increased transportation costs are the major causes behind creeping price inflation—particularly in the food sector, according to a CPD study.

CPD observed that the economy of the country is passing through various challenges and the benefit of the current reform measures is unlikely to produce good results in the next couple of years.

"We have to wait for having the benefit of the structural reforms which are being undertaken in various sectors like Biman, shipping and power. But these would definitely contribute in forming a strong base for the future economy," Mustafizur Rahman pointed out.

He expressed doubt about the government's projection of achieving 7 percent growth in gross domestic product (GDP) in the next fiscal of 2008 and suggested lowering the target by at least a half percent to make it realistic.

For achieving the growth target of 7 percent, the country would need huge investments—at least 29 percent of the GDP. This would not be possible due to the existing socio-economic conditions, Rahman observed.

From the investment perspective, a target of 6 to 6.5 percent growth rate for fiscal 2008 seems rather more realistic, he added.

Presenting various significant features of the economy, Debapriya said while the total number of the poor in the country remained unchanged, the number of hardcore poor increased to 2.7 crore in 2005—up from 2.5 crore in 2000.

Debapriya said despite an inspiring achievement in national poverty reduction, regional disparity is glaringly apparent. Barisal, Rajshahi and Khulna turned out to be the most poverty-prone areas in the country.

"We are demanding a poverty-friendly growth," he said.

He said it would be realistic to project and achieve a lower target. The projected GDP growth is unlikely to be achieved due to lower growth in agriculture, industry and construction sectors.

The agriculture sector has been suffering mainly due to fuel price hike and fertiliser crisis. Low growth in the agriculture sector is holding the economy back from achieving the projected growth, observed Debapriya.

Crisis of fertiliser and fuel (electricity and diesel) for irrigation as well as chita (unfilled grain) are the main reasons behind lower agricultural growth, according to CPD.

At least 1 to 2 percent GDP growth can be achieved through reducing corruption and ensuring

ADP's top priority

FROM PAGE 1 have development funds though economists had suggested reducing the number of projects in the next ADP. Of those, 927 projects are included in the main development programme while 406 remain unapproved and without allocation.

The National Economic Council (NEC) at a meeting yesterday finalised the outlay. Chaired by Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed, it also decided to take a number of measures for quicker implementation of the ADP.

According to the meeting, the government has identified repeated changes in project directors as the main reason for slower pace of implementation.

"The project directors should be allowed to continue in their posts for over six months since project completion," Mirza Azizul Islam told reporters after the meeting.

He added, "We have taken a number of decisions and the secretary committee will take some more with regards to ADP implementation."

Of Tk 26,500 crore for the ADP, Tk 13,525 crore (51 percent) will be mobilised from local resources and Tk 12,975 crore (49 percent) from foreign. More than Tk 2,100 crore would come under the World Bank's Power Sector Development Credit (PSDC) scheme, sources said.

The power sector receives the highest allocation as a single sector in the FY 07-08.

The revised allocation for the power sector in the current fiscal is Tk 2,779 crore, which is 6 percent less year-on-year.

Out of Tk 3,633 crore, the government allocated Tk 1,155 crore for power generation, which is Tk 740 crore in the current fiscal.

The education and religion sector gets the highest priority in the next fiscal's ADP. The allocation for the sector stands at Tk 3,750 crore.

A total of Tk 3,303 crore has been allocated for the transport sector. The rural development and health receive Tk 3,556 crore and Tk 2,728 crore respectively while Tk 1,587 crore has been allocated for agriculture sector.

Tk 1,413 crore has been allocated for local government, special areas and for emergency development. Of the amount, Tk 896 crore has been earmarked for local government institutions and Tk 326 crore for emergency development.

Sources said the government may come up with allocations for special benefits to the poor in cases of natural disasters and price hike of essentials.

As per the regional allocation, the government allocated Tk 2,953 crore for the development work in Rajshahi division, and Tk 2652 crore for Khulna and Barisal divisions.

More than 2 percent of the entire ADP is meant for the ICT development. This includes the voter identity card project of the Election Commission.

good governance, the CPD study suggested.

The CPD executive director said the government is going to declare the national budget without any midterm policy as the PRSP (poverty reduction strategy paper) has been delayed for one year without valid reasons.

The country needs a mid-term policy as the economy is going through massive changes. The mega reform programmes in Biman, the ports and the power sector would help strengthen the core of the economy, CPD executive director said.

On the question of various challenges for the year 2008, CPD observed that stabilising market prices, especially the food prices, realistic growth projection, addressing inequality, investment augmentation, improving domestic savings are the major challenges for the economy.

Bhattacharya said the growth in revenue collection and foreign direct investment was not satisfactory. Foreign aid was also lowest during the period in the recent times. Government investment was also poor.

The recovery of money that was smuggled out of the country would contribute significantly in meeting the deficit in revenue earnings, he said.

Stressing the need for a statistics commission, the CPD observed that the policy makers of the country make policies while being in the dark due to absence of adequate information on various sectors.

The balance of payment situation of the country is in a very good position and therefore there is no need to sign any fresh agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) at the cost of sovereignty of framing independent policy, he said.

Describing the investment scenario as miserable, the CPD executive director also put emphasis on quick decision making on mega investment proposals such as Tata and Asia Energy.

He however pointed out that agreements with foreign companies for investments should be more transparent as a telephone company reportedly obtained licence of operation through bribery.

The CPD executive director was critical of demolition of illegal business structures in slum areas. The businesses, belonging to the poor, contributed to the economy in an informal way, he told the newsmen responding to a question.

Replying to another question, he said banks in the country have a liquidity of around Tk 10,000 crore. So the banks can provide money as required.

CPD research fellow Uttam Kumar Deb, Fahmida Khatun and Anisatul Fatema Yusuf were also present at the briefing.

Crowd, police clash at protest of G-8

ROSTOCK, Germany

Masked demonstrators hurled stones and flagpoles at police during a demonstration yesterday by tens of thousands of people against the upcoming Group of Eight summit in Germany, engulfing the harbor of this northern port city in chaos.

Officers in helmets and body armor at one point briefly retreated before a hail of stones, while other officers chased down fleeing protesters at the rally in Rostock in northern Germany.

Police marched in a line through a harbor-side street to scatter demonstrators, and were pelted with stones from behind. One of the organizers pleaded for calm from a loudspeaker: "The police are heading back so we can hold our protest in peace, that is what we want."

Cordula Feitchinger, a police spokeswoman, said one officer was slightly injured. She had no immediate total for arrests.

There are massive assaults on police officers at the city's harbor right now," police spokeswoman Cordula Feitchinger said. "The situation is currently very chaotic and we have to get it under control before I can tell you how many people have been arrested."

Feitchinger said one police officer was slightly injured but remained on duty.

The officially permitted march took place before the three-day summit beginning Wednesday where German Chancellor Angela Merkel hosts the leaders of the other G-8 nations Britain, France, Japan, Italy, Russia, Canada and the United States. The leaders are expected to discuss measures against global warming, the fight against AIDS and poverty in Africa, and the world economy.

Earlier, a group of protesters attacked the hotel where an American delegation was supposed to stay during the G-8 summit this week, and some demonstrators also battered police cars with rocks, bottles and paint bombs, authorities said.

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Rangs Bhaban

FROM PAGE 16 the president under Article 141C(1) of the Constitution, the hearing of any case involving enforcement of fundamental rights should be postponed till the Emergency is lifted."

He said, "It may be mentioned here that the writ petitioners in the present case filed the writ petition under Article 102 read with Article 44 of the Constitution i.e. for enforcement of fundamental rights. The High Court Division while deciding the case has also relied on fundamental rights, specially Articles 31 and 42 of the Constitution. In spite of the objection taken by the Rangs Group regarding hearing of the appeals during the continuation of the emergency in the country, the Appellate Division on the prayer of the learned attorney general has specially fixed the appeals to be heard on June 13, 2007 during vacation. It is further learnt that the advocate of Rangs Group has decided to file another application drawing attention to the honourable Appellate Division that if the appeals are heard during the Emergency, then that will be illegal and violation of the Constitution. It was pointed out in the said application by the advocate of Rangs Group that in the past the honourable Appellate Division has refused to hear any such appeal involving fundamental rights. But this case has been taken as an exception for the reasons best known to the Appellate Division. If the Appellate Division is of opinion that the Emergency has been ceased due to expiration of 120 days, then there is no bar to hear the Appeals."

Advisers okay

FROM PAGE 16 experienced IT consultant on voluntary basis from the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) to introduce machine-readable passport and machine-readable visa in the Immigration and Passport Department.

It has been informed that many countries in the world will introduce machine-readable passport and visa within 2010, and the proposal was approved, aiming to introduce such system also in Bangladesh.

Chaired by Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed, the meeting also approved a draft agreement between Bangladesh and Saudi governments on capital investment, development and preservation.

Already, the Saudi government has approved the finalised bilateral capital investment agreement with consent of the two countries.

In a further step on the economic front, the council approved in principle the draft of Grameen Bank (Amendment) Ordinance 2007.

The amended law has a provision for reducing the ownership of government and its controlled organisation on the share and capital of the Grameen Bank and reducing the number of government-nominated directors on the bank's board of directors.

It also has a provision for expanding Grameen Bank's operations all over the country.

The power of appointing chairman has been vested with the board of directors. And the Securities and Exchange Commission, instead of the government, will give approval in case of selling bond and credit documents.

The meeting also approved ratification of a deal for establishment of Saarc Food Bank, which was signed during the 14th Saarc Summit in New Delhi in the first week of April this year.

Members of the Council of Advisers, the cabinet secretary, the chief adviser's press secretary and the secretaries concerned attended the meeting at the Chief Adviser's Office.

Smallpox outbreak

FROM PAGE 16 is searching with the help of the health workers of Expanded Immunisation Programme (EIP) in the remote areas of the country.

"So far we can say that it is just a rumour. We have found nothing in last three days but our search is going on," said Dr Biwas MK Zaman, national professional officer (Epidemiology) of WHO.

If the matter is found to be true it would be a big incident for the world as the last case of smallpox was found in 1977, he said.

In Bangladesh the last case of smallpox was reported in 1975. WHO announced total eradication of smallpox from nature in 1977 and they stopped their worldwide smallpox vaccination programme in 1982. Smallpox killed some 300 to 500 million people in the 20th century.

Right now no country including Bangladesh has the smallpox vaccine in their stock. WHO sources said, adding that the laboratory of WHO head office has the germ to develop the vaccine again.

"If we find a case right now we would quarantine the patient," Dr MK Zaman said.

According to the recent reports published in several newspapers in India, smallpox and measles have been spreading among children in Burma-Bangladesh border areas. Local health workers said many

children in Maungdaw township of Myanmar are now suffering from the diseases, which broke out in the area at the beginning of last month.

Indian media reports from border town Nila in Teknaf stated that many children in the area are suffering from smallpox and measles.

Bengali newspaper Anandabazar reports the sudden outbreak of smallpox in Rajshahi also.

The WHO officials said that they have been monitoring the situation since last Thursday.

"Our health workers have conducted extensive search at Nila in Teknaf but they did not find anything. We are also keeping in touch with the WHO office in Myanmar, they would inform us if they find any case," said Dr MK Zaman.

Meanwhile, Kolkata Newsonline put up news on May 31 that the state government has issued smallpox alert throughout West Bengal after receiving preliminary unconfirmed reports of the disease from areas bordering Bangladesh and Myanmar. The chief medical officers in all the districts, especially those bordering Bangladesh, have been alerted and asked by the state health department to be on the lookout for the symptoms of the disease.

different names," said a law enforcer requesting not to be named.

The law enforcers are looking for two brothers-in-law—Khalek and Mintu—who were Gani's helping hands in smuggling timbers from different forests to various sawmills in the capital.

It is also reported that five of his relatives became millionaires with the blessings of the forest boss. The dishonest government official earned money through different means including bribery for appointment, transfer, promotion and implementation of different government projects regarding forest, and smuggling timber. He also leased out forestlands at lower prices after taking bribe. A number of forest officials remained at their preferred places in Chittagong zone for years by bribing him Tk 6 lakh to 7 lakh.

Owner of a huge amount of ill-gotten wealth, Osman Gani did not properly look after his widowed mother and two mentally challenged sisters living at his ancestral home at Kriparpur village of Homna upazila in Comilla, locals said.

Our staff correspondent from Khulna reports: Gani realised Tk 57 lakh from officials and employees of east and west wings of Sundarban Forest Division threatening them to transfer to 'unattractive' places. Deputy ranger Mohammadullah and tour assistant Yunus Ali of the west wing collected the money, sources said.

While working as conservator of forest in Khulna from 1998 to 2002, Gani misappropriated Tk 3 crore by selling 368 lots of sundari wood.

US warship bombs

FROM PAGE 16 coastal area and the mountainous sites where the Islamists had their trenches," he said.

The CNN television channel reported that the destroyer was targeting a suspected al-Qaeda operative believed to have been involved in the 1998 attacks on US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania that killed 224 people, mostly Africans.

A Puntland military official said the attack came three days after authorities there reported the entry of Islamist fighters and foreigners of Arab origin into Bargal, a coastal town about 1,250km northeast of the Somali capital Mogadishu.

"Our forces have fought with Islamic fighters, including foreigners linked to al-Qaeda," said the official, who requested anonymity.

"After the fighting a US Navy ship shelled three targets on the outskirts of Bargal in the mountainous area," he said.

"We cannot get information on casualties, but the shelling continued for hours.... The Puntland troops are still chasing Islamic fighters in the mountainous area," he added.

On Wednesday, Puntland said its troops had killed at least two foreign fighters who had sailed into Bargal in two boats accompanied by heavily-armed Somali gunmen.

"These are al-Qaeda fugitives who fled from the southern part of Somalia. We do not know the motive of their arrival here, but it is definitely terrorism-related," Yusuf said.

Witnesses said the attacked areas were remote and difficult for Puntland ground troops to access.

A US force called the Combined Joint Task Force/Horn of Africa is permanently based in Djibouti and patrols the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden with the aim of reducing the threat of terrorism.

Earlier this year, a US aerial gunship bombed positions in southern Somalia after Ethiopia-backed Somali government forces ousted a powerful Islamist movement from the country's southern and central regions. Local elders said more than 100 civilians were killed.

The targets were suspected al-Qaeda operatives blamed both for the 1998 US embassy bombings and the 2002 suicide attack on an Israeli-owned hotel in the Kenyan port of Mombasa that killed 15 people.

Among the so-called "high value" al-Qaeda militants believed to be in Somalia are Fazul Abdullah Mohammed from the Comoros, Kenyan Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan and Sudanese national Abu Taha al-Sudani.

Others are Sheikh Dahir Aweys, the headline cleric heading Somalia's Islamic Courts Union and Adan Hashi Ayro, the commander of the Islamists' militia wing, the Shabaab.

US intelligence says that the movement loyal to Osama bin Laden has stepped up operations in Somalia, a nation of about 10 million people wracked by lawlessness since the 1991 ouster of dictator Mohamed Siad Barre.

Northern Somalia's Puntland and neighbouring Somaliland broke away from Somalia proper and declared a form of autonomy.

Puntland president Adde Mussa said al-Qaeda planned attacks in northern Somalia, which has been spared the recent heavy fighting between Somali government forces and Islamist and clan insurgents.

Ashrafu

FROM PAGE 16 fourteenth in the shorter version.

He will lead the Tigers in the forthcoming tour to Sri Lanka where Bangladesh will play three Tests and as many ODIs.

22-year-old Ashrafu, who will have inspirational pace spearhead Mashrafe Bin Mortaza as vice-captain, is being appointed as skipper till the Twenty20 World Championship in South Africa in September this year.

Ashrafu is the youngest captain of Bangladesh at 22 years and 330 days. He has played 35 Test matches and 101 one-day matches.