

Hasina not allowed

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steps over Hasina's leaving country in consultation with the immigration authorities.

Earlier on Wednesday, Hasina was also prevented from visiting Chittagong, "for security reasons", where she meant to meet families affected by last week's rain and landslides, killing around 120 persons.

In April, the caretaker government imposed a ban on Hasina's return from an earlier visit to the US and the AL chief was stranded in London for about two weeks before local and international pressure forced the government to lift the restriction. Then the British Airways was also asked not to allow her to board the aircraft despite a valid confirmed ticket.

Earlier in the morning, Sheikh Hasina categorically accused the military backed caretaker government of trying to push her out of politics by having false cases filed against her.

"The government does not want me to compete in the elections. That's why it is having cases filed against me," the former premier told newsmen at her Sudha Sadan residence in the capital.

Denying all allegations brought against her, Hasina vowed to prove her innocence. She said, "We've the right to serve the people and the people have the right to get that service, but conspiracies are being hatched to keep me out of the elections. This is nothing but a crooked design."

"Police are investigating the cases filed against me. If I am found guilty, punish me but why should I not be allowed to go abroad?" she questioned.

Hasina alleged that a virtual section 144 has been imposed on her residence by disallowing entry of more than four people at a time.

The AL chief said she heard that some 30 extortion cases will be filed against her by forcibly making different businessmen file those. "Let them file 100 cases, let there be investigations. If I am proven guilty let them punish me. I know I didn't do anything wrong, but still they may punish me by filing false cases anyway," she said.

Hasina repeatedly tried to clarify that incidents of taking donations are being treated as incidents of extortion. "If someone voluntarily donates money, that is not extortion. Donations are an imperative to run a political party as the government does not provide funds for political parties in

7 accomplices of dirty bomb plotter jailed for 136 yrs in UK

AFP, London

Seven members of a British-based cell led by convicted al-Qaeda "dirty" bomb plotter Dhiren Barot were sentenced to jail terms ranging from 15 to 26 years yesterday.

Qaisar Shaffi, Mohammed Naveed Bhatti, Junade Feroze, Zia UI Haq, Abdul Aziz Jilil, Omar Abdur Rehman and Nadeem Tarmohamed were sentenced at Woolwich Crown Court, south-east London.

Shaffi was convicted of conspiracy to murder after a month-long trial, which ended earlier this week. The other six pleaded guilty in April to conspiracy to cause explosions likely to endanger life.

The court was told the seven were vital to plans by Barot, jailed for 30 years after his conviction last year, to carry out attacks in Britain and the United States using explosive-packed limousines and a "dirty" radiation bomb.

Sentencing the seven men, judge Sir Alexander Butterfield said: "Barot was the instigator of this terrorist planning, he was by some considerable distance the principal participant in the conspiracy.

"Each one of you was recruited by Barot and assisted him at his request.

"Anyone who chooses to participate in such a plan ... will receive little sympathy from the courts."

No textbooks

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to correct the books," he added.

NCTB delivery department officials said the printing process of the English version books began late and additional time is required as lots of spelling mistakes and other errors have to be corrected before go for final print.

Students of Biam Model School and College, one of the government-approved English medium schools in the capital, said there are no English versions of some books, especially on Hindu and Christian religions and a few chapters of certain books in Bengali were missing in their English translations.

For example, English version general science book of class nine has 25 chapters although the Bengali version has 26 chapters. English version general science book of class seven has 23 chapters while the Bengali version has 25 chapters.

Students of the English medium branch of Vigarunnisa Noon School said they face problems with the photocopies of old books, as the copies are obscure while several chapters are missing.

Guardians have to pay exorbitant prices to buy photocopies of the books. "Students bought photocopies of Islam Shikkha of class six for Tk 120 to Tk 150 but the price of the book was only Tk 25," said Sayma Banu, principal of Biam Model School and College.

Besides, students are learning backdated and wrong information by

Bangladesh," said the daughter of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

"I can swear I didn't seek anything personal throughout my political life."

Citing the examples of fundraising by Bandhu Sabha, a reader's forum organised by the daily Prothom Alo, and of the chief adviser's appeal for contributing to the relief fund for the landslide victims in Chittagong, Hasina asked whether those should also be called extortion.

She alleged that pressure is being put on lawyers not to provide legal aid to accused people. Terming the move as a double standard, she said on the one hand the government wants to separate the judiciary and on the other it is trying to put pressure on lawyers.

Regarding the current talk about a 21-point reform proposal prepared by her party leaders which includes a proposed provision for barring the party president from becoming the prime minister of the country, Hasina said if such a reform is to be brought to her party then not only the party president, but its presidium members, general secretary, joint secretaries, and other office bearers should also be barred from becoming ministers of a government. But to bring those reforms, politics must be allowed first, said the AL president.

"We know that outdoor political activities and indoor politics are banned, but some people are carrying out political activities nonetheless. If they can do that then let me also convene meetings of my party's central committee and discuss the matters. Let politics be open," she said.

About the formation of a new party, Hasina said those who have been in the 'dustbin of politics' are being picked up to launch a new party, and a move is on to split the established parties.

About the reported restriction on her scheduled departure for the USA last night, she threw a question asking why she should not be allowed to be with her daughter who is expecting to give birth to a baby in three weeks.

At this point, Hasina broke down in tears urging the mothers of the world to ask why she should not be allowed to be with her expecting daughter.

Foreign ministry

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secretary. Incidentally the current acting foreign secretary never served as an ambassador.

Earlier, Tuhid served as the deputy high commissioner at the Deputy High Commission in Kolkata.

The post of a full-fledged foreign secretary has been vacant since Hemayetuddin joined the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC) in December last year. Later, the caretaker government headed by Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed appointed Bangladesh Ambassador to Germany Minzur Rahim as the foreign secretary, but the appointment was cancelled.

Among the names being considered were Humayun Kabir, and Bangladesh High Commissioner to New Delhi Liaquat Ali Chowdhury. However, after Humayun Kabir was given the important position of an ambassador in Washington DC, Liaquat Ali Chowdhury, a veteran and a skilled negotiator and diplomat is now being considered for the post of the foreign secretary.

Chowdhury, served twice in India as a diplomat – first as a counsellor and later as a deputy high commissioner. He also served as the ambassador to The Netherlands.

Shahdat Hossain, now serving as the high commissioner to Sri Lanka, who also served at the UN and as the deputy high commissioner in New Delhi earlier, is being considered for the post of the new high commissioner to India.

Meanwhile, Ismat Jahan, who had been appointed as the Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations, already taken over the charge. Sources said she was recommended very strongly by the foreign affairs adviser himself for the important position he relinquished after joining the caretaker government as an adviser, following a long and successful stint in that post.

reading the old books or photocopies, she said.

Shabnam Khan, a senior teacher of the English medium section of Vigarunnisa Noon School, said non-availability of the textbooks is also causing problems for the teachers in imparting education.

Around 50 thousand students from classes one to ten are now studying in government-approved English medium schools, and around 20 thousand of them are at the secondary level, education ministry sources said.

In the capital, several educational institutions including Saint Joseph High School, Rajuk Uttara Model School and College, Vigarunnisa Noon School, Biam Model School and College and Mohammadpur Preparatory High School have English medium sections.

English version NCTB textbooks are also followed in all of the 12 cadet schools across the country and in several schools in many districts including Chittagong, Rangpur and Rajshahi.

Earlier, the NCTB published for the primary level around 6.5 lakh English version books of 33 subjects including English, mathematics, social science, general science and religious studies, NCTB sources said.

EU backs govt move for reforms

UNB, Dhaka

The European Union (EU) has expressed its support to the efforts to institute political and electoral reforms in Bangladesh.

In a statement on Tuesday, the EU welcomed efforts by the caretaker government and the Election Commission to "create appropriate conditions for holding free and fair elections in 2008 and for ensuring sustainable democracy."

The statement said a EU Troika visited Bangladesh from June 6-9 for intensive and constructive discussions with the representatives from government, key institutions and civil society. This was the second EU Troika visit to Bangladesh, following the one in January last year.

As the largest trading and development partner of Bangladesh, the EU said, it attaches immense importance to its relationship with the country. The EU took around 52 percent of Bangladesh's exports, amounting to over 5 billion euro in 2006.

7 soldiers killed in Thai ambush

AFP, Yala

Islamic insurgents in Thailand ambushed and shot dead seven soldiers yesterday in one of the deadliest attacks this year on security forces in the country's Muslim heartland, police said.

The attack came just two weeks after 12 soldiers were killed in a similar attack as the government struggles to keep a lid on separatist violence that has left more than 2,200 people dead in three years.

Bombings, shootings and arson attacks have become daily events in the three Muslim-majority provinces in Thailand's south, and the latest bloodshed followed another night of deadly unrest across the region.

Soldiers were travelling to a school in Yala province to provide security for teachers and students when a roadside bomb exploded near their vehicle, police said. The rebels then shot the troops dead at point-blank range.

"Seven soldiers were killed and one injured. They were the security team for local teachers," said local police commander Colonel Aniruth Im-arb.

The victims had to be airlifted to hospital because the rebels had blocked the road with trees and spikes, police said.

Soldiers have been pressed into duty to try to protect students and teachers, regular targets of the insurgents – who see them as trying to impose Buddhist Thai values on the Muslim and ethnic Malay region.

But they have ended up targeted themselves, while the violence against students and teachers has continued. Five teachers were shot dead in the region this week, while at least 14 schools were torched.

Meanwhile more than 260 schools in the region closed down this week due to security fears. Two of the teachers shot this week were women gunned down inside an elementary school library in front of their horrified students.

"Mililitants see teachers as important figures in the south because they can influence the minds of children. Militants are not happy with teachers," said Srawut Aree of the Muslim Studies Centre at Chulalongkorn University.

"Teachers are easy, soft targets for militants," he said.

Human Rights Watch denounced the attacks on schools and urged the government to do more to ensure the security of children.

"Insurgents are attempting to close down all government schools," Brad Adams, Asia director at the US-based rights group, said in a statement.

"Their campaign of terror strikes a serious blow to public education in the southern border provinces, which already retain the lowest test scores in Thailand," he said.

Three local Muslim government leaders were also killed overnight in an attack on their car. One suspected militant died when he accidentally detonated a five- kilo (11-pound) bomb that he was planting on a roadside, police said.

Thailand's three southern-most provinces were once an autonomous sultanate, until the Muslim-majority region was annexed by mainly Buddhist Thailand a century ago.

The Thai military currently deploys some 30,000 troops in the provinces in a bid to stem the ongoing violence.

Top outlaw

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Police and locals rushed to the spot after the shootout and found Dulal lying wounded. He was taken to a local health complex where doctors on duty declared him dead.

Rab personnel recovered a 17-inch long locally made gun, a 12-inch pipe-gun, three gun cartridges, two bullets of .303 rifles, three knives, a machete, and a sword from the scene.

Govt to jeopardise

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said although she supports the government reforms, "There is a limit to what one can do in a limited period of time."

The government would jeopardise its legitimacy and legacy if it denies the people the right to elect its leaders at the earliest, she added.

Reiterating US support for the caretaker government, Butenis said, "I think they are going in the right direction. We are going to continue to speak out, mostly privately and sometimes publicly, where we think it's going wrong."

Stressing the need for a level playing field for all political parties, she said, "People are telling us that they are being pressured to leave their party and join this third party."

"I think there is a lot of activity there, which seems to be allowed to go on. I think the other existing parties should be allowed to operate," she added.

Asked for her thoughts on the "minus-two" theory that both Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina should be sent into exile, Butenis said, "I will say, as I have said before, I think political parties have to change. I don't know if they understand that or not. They say they do...I think it will be hard—and it is hard—for political parties to change with the current leadership in place."

"I think sometimes the political parties feel that they own politics—that anybody who isn't a politician had no right to even offer an idea," she said.

She also said since political parties are a key element of any democracy, "You can't reform politics without getting buy-in from political parties." Citing popular support of the two major parties, she added, "Whatever changes they should make, they have to be engaged on some level."

"I really do think that even the Election Commission is ready to talk to the parties," she said, but "The parties are afraid of discussing things, because they fear they might be violating the ban."

"We have a kind of a paralysis right now. I don't think anything imposed is going to work, frankly," she said. On political future here, Butenis said, "Part of me wants to say 'who knows', because it is so hard to predict where we are going."

Recalling her experience during the intense political negotiations preceding the declaration of state of emergency, Butenis said, "All I ever did, and I did it constantly, was to beg people, to beg them, 'Can't you compromise? Can't you come up with a solution that would be acceptable to the opposition so they would participate in elections to ensure there is some sense, it is fair?'"

Butenis said she pleaded with the then jaiuddin-led government, "Why do you want to go ahead with one-sided elections which people will find impossible to believe as credible?" She, however, denied having a formula for a political compromise: "That's not my job. My job was to say, 'Please, can't you sit down and work this out?'"

Butenis expressed disappointment at the breakdown of the Mannan Bhuiyan-Abdul Jalil talks in September. "Nobody was willing to do it. We tried. I was the promoter and trying to facilitate dialogue early in September," she said, adding, "I had no idea whether the political parties were serious. They agreed to talk. I had no idea if they were genuine. I chose to accept that they were trying

Indor politics

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interest of pro-reform politicians. "We'll have to think of the election to establish honest politics and a democratic system and we have taken up the roadmap towards that end," he told reporters responding to repeated calls by US Ambassador Patricia A Butenis for lifting the ban on politics.

He said indoor politics is not everything. It is important to implement the roadmap for salvaging democracy.

The adviser said the government is creating an environment for bringing about reforms, which is a prerequisite for lifting the ban on indoor politics.

"We are moving a bit slow, as pro-reform politicians need some time. As we move slow, it will be easier for them to complete the reforms."

Earlier on Sunday he appreciated the political leaders who are speaking for reforms in the two major parties excluding Khaleda and Hasina.

"Several leaders of Awami League and BNP are now talking about their parties' reform and for changing their top leadership. That is good. We have created this awareness among the leaders," he said.

The law adviser also said those who are involved in corruption and destroyed democracy couldn't lead the nation.

Senior leaders of both the AL and BNP are now holding meetings and consultations among themselves for radical reforms in the parties, excluding Hasina and Khaleda. "They have identified the two top leaders as the main obstacle to reforms in their parties," said a source close to both the sides.

"Interestingly, leaders of the two arch rival political parties are now maintaining close contact among

and I tried to facilitate that."

The outgoing US envoy named political parties, business leaders, civil society members and journalists and said she spoke to "everybody" during the politically chaotic period. However, asked if she had also spoken to the military at that time, Butenis skirted the question, repeating she had spoken to "Everybody."

Citing the scorn of major political parties towards Nobel laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus' efforts to form a party, Butenis said, "It was with the same attitude that 'This is our and the only option for the public on voting day is to vote for either A or B'. This was shocking to me."

Butenis said she also brought up a worst-case scenario of a military takeover with the political leadership in order to make them understand the possible fallout from their deadlock, but she said the BNP did not expect the military to intervene while the Awami League felt it would be in its favour for the military to prepare the voter list.

"My response was, 'Why would the army come in and clean up the mess the parties made and hand it back?'" she said.

"So, if the political parties could not even predict that we would be here, much more so can I," she said, but added that the US and other countries' support for the return to a "fully elected government" may guide the government.

Butenis said Bangladesh has a lot of potential to act as a "bridge" between two regions, but cited politics as the main obstacle. She also spoke of further cooperation between the US and Bangladesh regarding counter-terrorism.

Hill cutting

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nirbahi officer in Khagrachhari.

But nothing fruitful came as the hill-cutting syndicate comprising local political leaders, government officials and law enforcers continued business as usual, raising the spectre of landslides and flash flood in the CHT, said Fazle-Elahi, president of Global Village, an NGO based in Rangamati.

The syndicate supplies soil to the districts and also to the port city and adjacent areas at the expense of local hills, he added.

Those soils are used to fill up canals and lowlands chosen as construction sites for houses and markets.

"Supplying soil has become a profitable business as it needs only a little investment. A truckful of hilly soil sells at Tk 500," Abdul Haq, a trucker from Banderban said.

Besides, the hill cutting accounts for diminishing soil fertility in the districts, observed Additional Deputy Commissioner (Rev) Tapan Kanti Ghosh of Khagrachhari.

Divisional Forest Officer in Bandarban Abdul Mabud said the CHT is in grave danger of chain mudslides. An integrated approach is necessary to avert situation similar to Monday's.

Contacted, Banderban Superintendent of Police Mohammad Abdul Kader too expressed alarm about the disaster that looms.

He however said they are taking steps to stop hill cutting following up complaints lodged by different individuals and organisations.

themselves to achieve their goals of reform, and they have made the two top leaders isolated within their parties," the source said seeking anonymity.

Talking to The Daily Star, a standing committee member of the BNP said, "Political future of party Chairperson Khaleda Zia has almost been settled, and she will have to quit the post. Most members of the (party) standing committee want her retirement from the party as they want an end to dynastic politics in BNP and the era of corruption."

A significant number of BNP leaders and former lawmakers led by party Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan are working for radical changes in the party.

Of them, Standing Committee Member Lt Gen. (ret'd) Mahbubur Rahman told The Daily Star that Khaleda should quit politics considering the prevailing situation.

On the other hand, a number of senior AL leaders led by presidium members Abdur Razzak, Tofail Ahmed, Amir Hossain Amu and Suranjit Sengupta are working for reforms in the AL, excluding Hasina. Suranjit recently spoke for radical reforms in the party, if necessary, leaving out Hasina.

They have already prepared a 21-point proposal for drastic reforms in the party.

On April 5, the EC formally announced its proposals for massive reforms in the electoral system and in political parties.

Earlier, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda at a meeting with the law adviser on April 4 asked the government to lift ban on indoor politics allowing the EC to hold talks with political parties to finalise the reform proposals.

Khaleda

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proposals, reformist leaders are trying to contact district and upazila level leaders to reorganise the party without Khaleda once the ban on indoor politics is lifted. Almost all of them want tough disciplinary action against all Hawa Bhaban-related men, accusing them of unbelievable corruption, party sources said.

Former minister and BNP Vice President Hafiz Uddin Ahmed yesterday told the press that Hawa Bhaban men interfered in economy, politics and activities of ministries when the party was in power. "Khaleda should have controlled her relatives so that they could not involve in corruption but she did not ... Her son brought misfortune for her."

Stressing reforms, he said, "Unlimited power of the chairperson as per the party constitution is not needed. Even the party and government should not be run by the same person simultaneously, and Khaleda Zia should come up with her idea about reforms."

According to sources, the party chief was surprised and embarrassed that some senior party leaders did not respond to messages from her in the last few days.

A standing committee member met Khaleda last week while other senior leaders of the party did not agree to meet her to discuss party matters, party insiders said. Only a few leaders like former chief whip Khandaker Delwar Hossain and Abdul Matin Chowdhury still support her.

The BNP chief and former prime minister has expressed dissatisfaction over the move of party secretary general and his close aides to bring reforms in the party. But most of the party leaders are mounting pressure on him to take over leadership of the party, insiders said.

10 Pak troops

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"It was a retaliatory strike and such attacks will continue," he vowed.

President Pervez Musharraf said last month that his forces had eliminated almost all of the more than 60 Baluch rebel camps. He also offered an amnesty offer to tribesmen and announced 2.2 billion dollars in investment.

But the rebels oppose all involvement of the federal government in the province's affairs, claiming that it is creaming off profits from gas and mineral reserves in Baluchistan.

Hundreds of people including civilians have been killed since the tribal rebellion -- which has no known links to the Islamist Taliban insurgency along the Afghan-Pakistan border -- flared up in late 2004.

The rebels have attacked Pakistani security forces, railway tracks, power plants and other government facilities. Pakistan's military has replied with major military offensives.

Ashiyani City owner

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and Abdul Hannan made the conspiracy against Mujibur to implicate him in a false arms case since Nazrul had previous enmity with Mujibur.

The law enforcers called Nazrul and Mannan to Dakkhin Khan Police Station over phone on Thursday night and arrested them on arrival.

However, the IO said Nazrul Islam, managing director of Ashiyani Lands Development Limited, claimed ignorance about the incident.

11 forest officials

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There have been allegations for long that the forest officials working under the Sundarbans Forest Division amassed huge wealth through corruption and plundering the resources of the Sundarbans, the world's largest mangrove forest.

Our staff correspondent adds from Khuna: The Anti-Corruption Commission will interrogate in a week or two nine officials of Sundarbans Forest Division, as arrested chief conservator of forests Osman Gani mentioned their names as his accomplices in plundering huge forest resources.

The nine officials are Mizanur Rahman, Mozaharul Islam, SM Shahidullah, Sazzad Hossain, Abul Kalam, Mahmudul Islam, Syed Mohammad Ullah, Md Yunus Ali, Abdul Jabbar and Sirajul Islam.

Bangla Bhai

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College Hospital at Charpara in the district town yesterday morning.

The arrestee was identified as Salah Uddin Mollah, 42, of Mundupara under Nakshi Para of Nadia district of West Bengal.

Police said that the arrested person, an accused in a cheating case, used different names -- Michael Nepal Chandra Sarker, Emran Hossain, Abdus Salam --to cheat the common people.

A Rab team also arrested Wazed Ali, 32, a drug peddler, with two kg of hemp from Kanchijuli Bazar in the district town yesterday.

The three arrested were handed over to Kotwali police.

Hamas offers

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murderer Dahlan that was cleansed by the holy warriors," read graffiti sprayed on the wall. Donkey carts outside the house waited to take on more loot.

Because Fatah recognises Israel and past peace agreements, a boycott of the Palestinian government imposed by Israel and the international community after Hamas' electoral successes may no longer apply to the West Bank only Gaza.

Abbas yesterday tasked political independent Salam Fayyad with forming an emergency government after dismissing the Hamas-led cabinet, an official said.

"The president charged Salam Fayyad with forming the new government," Abbas advisor Hikmat Zeid told AFP.

The US-educated technocrat Fayyad, who was finance minister in the outgoing national unity government, is widely respected in the West for past efforts to bring greater transparency to Palestinian finances and fight corruption.

Gaza City's main Shifa Hospital was still grappling with the aftermath of battle. More than 90 people were killed in five days of fighting, and dozens wounded. The morgue was overflowing, with four bodies lined up on the floor, and some of the wounded were sleeping on cardboard on the floor, instead of mattresses or beds.

The buildings that symbolized Fatah's power, the National Security headquarters, Abbas' residence, were guarded by Hamas men. Outside Abbas' residence, a boy draped a green Hamas flag over a low wall as a Hamas guard looked on smiling.

Earlier Friday, Hamas announced it had arrested 10 of the most senior Fatah leaders in the strip, including the commanders of Abbas' own elite guard unit and the chief of the National Security force. However, Hamas spokesman Abu Obeideh later declared an amnesty for all Fatah leaders, and several Fatah leaders, including spokesman Tawfiq Abu Khousa, were released shortly afterwards.

Abu Obeideh said his group will "offer amnesty" to all those who were with different opinions. "Our battle is not with Fatah ... but with the group that tried to implement an external agenda," he said.

However, Hamas also said that a Fatah supporter was thrown to his death by the family of a man he was accused of having killed earlier. Elsewhere, a senior Fatah official committed suicide after learning he was on Hamas' wanted list, Fatah said.

Abu Obeideh also called for the immediate release of Alan Johnston, the BBC journalist who was kidnapped in March and is believed held by a powerful Gaza clan whose members had ties to both Hamas and Fatah. "We will not allow for his continued detention," Abu Obeideh said of Johnston.

The battle for Gaza ended Thursday night when Hamas forces

Iraq Sunni shrine

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of the Shia Al-Askari shrine in the city of Samarra, north of Baghdad.

Immediately after the bombing, at least four Sunni mosques were targeted, three south of Baghdad in the town of Iskandariyah and one in the capital.

Three more were hit on Thursday and the US military said a Shia mosque in the town of Mahmudiya, south of Baghdad, was also attacked.

But the imposition of curfews in both Samarra and Baghdad helped prevent any wider outbreak of sectarian violence.

It was an attack on the same Samarra shrine by Al-Qaeda militants in February 2006 that triggered the sectarian fighting between the Shia majority and the Sunni minority that rages on to this day.