US intelligence chiefs ask Pakistan to wage war against militants

AFP, *Washington*

US intelligence chiefs urged Pakistan to wage a more vigorous pursuit of terrorism, warning that its lawless region bordering Afghanistan has become a sanctuary for al-Qaeda and Taliban diehards.

But despite its own intelligence community's misgivings, the US administration of George W. Bush is standing by President Pervez Musharraf as Pakistan's military ruler faces one of his gravest crises yet.

"Musharraf is a strong ally in the war against these extremists. I like him and I appreciate him," President Bush said Tuesday after Pakistani forces stormed a pro-Taliban mosque sheltering scores of women and children.

In an audiotape posted on the Internet, al-Qaeda second-in-command Ayman al-Zawahiri urged Pakistanis to revolt against Musharraf following the assault on the Red Mosque in Islamabad, which left at least 82 people dead.

The threat coincided with a new US intelligence report suggesting al-Qaeda is gaining strength and has established a safe haven in remote tribal areas of western Pakistan for training and plotting attacks, The Washington Post reported Thursday.

The intelligence assessment, which is due to be discussed at a White House meeting on Thursday, concludes the group has rebuilt itself despite extensive US efforts to destroy the network, the paper wrote.

Appearing before Congress Wednesday, top US intelligence officials fretted that more aggressive action against extremists sheltering inside Pakistan's anarchic northwest could spark a broader anti-Musharraf uprising.

"It is not too great an exaggeration to say there is some risk of turning the problem in northwest Pakistan into the problem of all of Pakistan," argued Thomas Fingar, deputy director of national intelligence.

The United States remains fearful of undermining a key "war on terror" ally even as criticism mounts that it is getting little in return for huge sums lavished on the Musharraf regime since the September 11 attacks of 2001.

A secret US operation in early 2005 to capture senior al-Qaeda members in Pakistan's tribal areas was aborted at the last minute after top officials decided it was too risky and could jeopardize relations with Islamabad, the New York Times reported this week.

Fingar was pressed on why bin Laden was still at large and Afghanistan's Taliban were resurgent despite estimated funding of 10 billion dollars extended by Washington for Pakistani counter-terrorism operations.

"The answer has to be yes, that provision of assistance should be properly tied to expected outcomes," he told a hearing of the House of Representatives armed services committee on global security threats.

"And the outcomes for which people have committed, they should be held accountable for."

John Kringen, the CIA's director of intelligence, said al-Qaeda and Taliban extremists appear "fairly well settled into the safe haven" of north-west Pakistan, benefiting from more training, money and communications.

Kringen expressed particular regret over Musharraf's peace deal last September with tribal elders in North Waziristan.

The Waziristan region is a hotbed of pro-Taliban militants supporting the bloody insurgency in Afghanistan against the US-backed government of President Hamid Karzai.

"We would agree that the peace deal in Waziristan has not been helpful in terms of the anti-terrorist effort," the Central Intelligence Agency official said.

Musharraf's rationale for the controversial peace pact was to halt cross-border attacks and enlist tribal help to expel al-Qaeda fighters.

"From our assessment, we have not seen developments going in that direction but actually in a negative direction," Kringen said.

Fingar said that Musharraf looks weaker after massive pro-democracy protests sparked by his suspension in March of Pakistan's chief justice.

"With tribal opposition to the US military presence in Afghanistan and Iraq widespread and elections expected later this year, the situation will become even more challenging -- for President Musharraf and for the US," he warned.

Shajahan Siraj

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seven-day remand prayer to interrogate detained former communications minister Nazmul Huda, held in connection with an extortion case, did not proceed as he was not produced before a court.

CASE AGAINST FARZANA

Senior Special Judge Mohammad Azizul Haq of the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court, Dhaka issued the arrest warrant against Farzana, wife of Rajib Siraj, after Syed Zakir Hossain, deputy tax commissioner of Companies Circle of NBR, filed the case.

In the order, the judge said the arrest warrant was issued against Farzana as the charges brought against her under sections 165/166 of the Income Tax Ordinance 1984 were preliminarily found to be true. The court set deadline of July 16 for the arrest warrant's implementation.

In his complaint, Zakir said Farzana had evaded Tk 80.45 lakh in income tax during fiscal years 2004-2007.

Farzana, managing director of Garden Fresh Preservations Ltd in Savar, gave false information to the income tax department about her income and expenditure and did not show her income tax returns. She also concealed information about her real income of Tk 2.91 crore, the complainant added.

CASE AGAINST HUDA

A metropolitan magistrate yesterday fixed July 17 for hearing on a seven-day remand prayer to interrogate Huda in connection with an extortion case.

Managing Director of Uttara Motors Ltd Matiur Rahman on July 5 filed the case against Huda with Dhanmondi Police Station saying Huda had forced his company to pay Tk 1 crore.

According to the case statement, Huda threatened to kill the complainant and shutdown his business if he failed to pay.

Rahman paid Huda Tk 50 lakh in three instalments at Huda's office on December 1, 2002; Feb 19, 2003; and March 11, 2003. The rest Tk 50 lakh was given in cash at Huda's home.

The joint forces arrested Huda at his Dhanmondi home on February 4 on charges of corruption.

CASE AGAINST MOUDUD

A Dhaka court yesterday adjourned the proceedings of the case filed against former law minister Moudud Ahmed until July 15.

The case was filed in connection with possessing liquor at his home.

Judge AKM Enamul Haq of the Second Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court passed the order following a time petition from the defence lawyers as the lawyers had not received any certified copy of the High Court stay order of the case that was issued earlier.

OIL IMPORTER SUED

Ilias Brothers Ltd, a leading crude oil importer, was fined Tk 1 crore and its licence revoked on charges of tax evasion, UNB reports from Chittagong.

Customs officials said Ilias Brothers dodged Tk 8 crore of tax by hiding transactions of 15,450 tonnes of crude oil worth about Tk 22 crore.

Joint forces last week arrested Dipen Chandra Pal, an official of the company, on charge of hiding transactions.

The oil company has been asked to pay the entire money it owes to the government along with the fine (total Tk 9 crore) within a month.

MINU'S DETENTION EXTENDED

The detention of Rajshahi City Corporation Mayor Mizanur Rahman Minu was extended three months yesterday, our Rajshahi University correspondent reports.

Police sources said the home ministry yesterday granted local police's appeal for the extended detention of Minu. The month-long detention Minu is serving was supposed to end on July 14. Magistrate Rabiul Alam fixed July 30 for producing Minu before the court.

On June 6, Minu was arrested in connection with an extortion case filed with Rajpara Police Station.

He obtained bail on June 11 but he was arrested again under Emergency Powers Rules 2007 a day later. He received one-month detention on June 14.

CASE AGAINST 14-PARTY

Ten leaders and activists of Awami League (AL) and Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) were acquitted in the case filed in connection with obstructing police duty on January 28, 2005 in the capital.

Metropolitan Magistrate ABM Abdul Fattah acquitted them, as the charges brought against them were not proved.

The acquitted are Ashraful Haq Jhantu, Asifur Rahman Babu, Firoz Alam, Siddiqur Rahman, Mostafa Alamgir Ratan, Abdullah Al Mamun and four others.

The case was filed against them as they allegedly created obstruction to police duty during hartal hours on January 28, 2005. The hartal was called for protesting the killing of AL leader and former finance minister Shah ASM Kibria.

Belief in rebirth

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visit the house every night after their prayers, and called on them to meet him soon where eternal peace prevails, the ASP told the journalists.

"On the planet, we are the only family that is independent and self-dependent," reads the diary.

Locals and police believe that such a "bizarre train of thoughts" might have influenced the family to choose to die the way they did.

Superintendent of Police in Mymensingh Rafiqul Islam said they have found books on science, economics, business administration, and novels in the house, but nothing on religion.

Rafiqul Alam Dulal, 70, a cousin of Hena, told the journalists that the family became estranged from its relatives immediately after Anwar Fakir had died. "We weren't even allowed to enter their house," he said.

Lima, a student of Ananda Mohan College and a neighbour of the Fakir family, said they would rarely come out of their house and whenever they had to, they would move together and speak to none.

Describing the incident as the most horrible he has ever seen, Banchu Ranjan Sarker, a construction worker who was at the spot, said that all the nine were sitting on the railway track and they did not waver in the face of deafening whistles from the train.

Banchu passed out as soon as the train thundered by, crushing them like an empty can.

Meanwhile, the post mortem of the bodies was done at the morgue of Mymensingh Medical College Hospital (MMCH) yesterday.

Earlier, railway police recovered the bodies from Kashore Itakhola and sent those to MMCH for autopsies.

An unnatural death case was filed with Jamalpur Railway Police Station in this connection.

Meanwhile, police sealed off the house of Anwar Hossain Fakir following orders from First Class Magistrate and Senior Assistant Commissioner ASM Mustafizur Rahman.

According to police, none came to receive the bodies till yesterday afternoon. If the bodies are not received by any of their relatives, those will be handed over to local municipality for burial.

If the municipality does not take the responsibility, they will seek an alternative measure.

Saarc meet

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a long and painstaking process of identifying and counselling of the victims so that they can be sent back to their home countries.

"Most often, these women and children do not have any papers [documentation] to prove their nationality. And they have to wait in police stations [in custody] under inhumane conditions while two countries battle it out over the victim's place of origin," the official added.

Aminul Haque

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gate of the house.

The notices asked Haque and his wife to submit their wealth statements to the office of the ACC secretary in Dhaka within seven working days.

The former minister has been in hiding since the declaration of the state of emergency in January. He was accused in seven cases including two for patronising JMB militants.

Meanwhile, The ACC secretary at a regular weekly briefing at the ACC headquarters in Dhaka yesterday said the commission will also investigate the allegations of corruption against reformist politicians, reports UNB.

"No one is above the law. If we get allegations of corruption against them, we must investigate the charges," said ACC Secretary Mokhlesur Rahman.

He informed that the commission is investigating the charges made against two officials of the commission. But he did not disclose the names of the two.

He said the commission has so far received a total of 42,000 allegations. Of them, 22,000 have been recorded.

T&T staff

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building that housed the computer firm when Rab officials, following a tip off, went there to arrest them around 5:30pm. Azaharuddin was handed over to Tejgaon police while Mejbah was admitted to Shaheed Suhrawardi Hospital with leg injuries.

Police sources said the two T&T employees demanded Tk 7,000 bribe from Alamgir Hossain, manager of Pioneer Computer Ltd, on July 9 for a land phone connection to his firm. Alamgir had paid all official fees required for the connection.

Alamgir paid them Tk 3,000 on July 9 and told them that he would pay them Tk 2,000 more on Thursday [yesterday]. He filed a case under Speedy Trial Tribunal Act 2002 in connection with the incident.

President

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The president will also make a courtesy call on Singapore President Sellapan Ramanathan.

A regular aircraft of Singapore Airlines will carry the president and his entourage. He will return home on July 19.

Huge NU funds

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classes. But I was compelled to postpone the programme in the face of protest from the teachers," Prof Wakil told The Daily Star. "They alleged that words used in the notice were incorrect and indecent."

The idea of a teachers' pool was introduced in 1992 by appointing four teachers so that teachers can be sent to NU-affiliated institutions for taking classes. The number of teachers has gradually reached 86, 50 of them recruited during 2003-04, allegedly on political consideration.

According to NU service rules, teachers are supposed to be present on the NU campus in Gazipur on every office day, but following NU higher authority's direction they will have to go to any of the 1,600 NU-affiliated colleges to take classes.

But there are allegations that these teachers do not come to the NU campus regularly and usually sign attendance registers once a week or two.

These teachers draw around Tk 10 lakh in monthly salaries. "Their basic salaries range between Tk 12,000 and Tk 18,000," said an official of the NU accounts section.

The teachers had never been asked to take classes before the June 26 notice, NU officials said. NU Teachers' Association President Prof Fakir Rafiqul Alam, however, claimed that one teacher was sent to Ananda Mohan College in Mymensingh in 2003.

On the June 26 notice, Rafiqul told The Daily Star, "We protested because nepotism worked while making the list of the 38 teachers. Besides, 12 of these teachers are on study leave. The language of the notice was also incorrect and indecent."

These teachers got involved in other activities like checking exam papers and inspecting educational institutions before introducing any new course. Many also take part-time classes at private institutes for higher financial benefits.

There are allegations that a few of these teachers do not even have proper educational qualification and submitted false certificates at the time of recruitment.

These teachers also allegedly take bribes from different colleges during inspection.

On June 14, Barisal Mahanagar College Principal M Khairul Alam filed a general diary with Joydevpur Police Station in Gazipur saying NU Assistant Teacher ANM Fazlul Haq Saikat and 12 other teachers and officials beat him mercilessly.

He alleged that he gave Fazlul Haq Saikat Tk 1.5 lakh on June 4 for granting permission to run BA and BSS courses at his college. "The permission is yet to be granted and they beat me when I asked them to return the money," he said.

NU Officers' Association condemned the incident and issued two days' ultimatum to the VC for taking stern action against these teachers. The NU authorities formed a probe committee but it is yet to submit the report.

The NU syndicate is virtually inactive and the VC mainly deals with vital issues like recruitment of new teachers and officers. "The NU VCs have so far been appointed mostly on political consideration and they did not take any action to stop these irregularities," an NU official said.

Prof Wakil said a probe committee has been formed to investigate the allegations against these teachers and stern action will be taken if the allegations are proved.

"The NU recruited these teachers to help colleges that do not have sufficient teachers to complete their academic courses. The teachers are recruited through BCS [Bangladesh Civil Service] examinations under the Public Service Commission, but the colleges do not get sufficient teachers due to delay in PSC recruitment," said NU Officers' Association President Enamul Karim.

Lankan ministers

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other countries of our region. Sri Lanka is a good friend and an important player in the regional and international spheres," Foreign Adviser Iftekhar A Chowdhury told reporters revealing the Sri Lankan ministers' arrival.

Bogollagama will hold formal talks with Iftekhar. He is likely to be accompanied by Sri Lankan Mass Media and Information Minister Anura Priyadarshana Yapa, Cultural Affairs Minister Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena, Religious Affairs and Moral Upliftment Minister Pandu Bandaranaike, and Minister for Highways TB Ekanayake.

They are also expected to make a joint call on Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed.

The visiting ministers will receive Gautam Buddha's hair from the government as a gesture of goodwill to take back to Sri Lanka.

Motia slams

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in limited numbers everyday

Referring to "security hazard" as mentioned by the inspector general of police (IGP), she questioned how Hasina's security would be threatened if one or two leaders meet her at Sudha Sadan or at Bangabandhu Memorial Museum.

Motia, who is vocal against the process of reform proposals made by some senior Awami League leaders, said former prime minister Hasina must be allowed to exercise her democratic, civic and constitutional rights.

The AL leader was critical of Law and Information Adviser Mainul Hosein for describing Hasina and Khaleda as "failed leaders" and his call for boycotting them.

She said Mainul, being an adviser of non-party caretaker government, cannot say who is failure or successful and he has lost his neutrality through his remarks.

Replying to a question, Motia said cases were filed against Sheikh Hasina with "political motive".

Interestingly, those who filed the cases against Hasina remained missing for several days prior to the filing of cases, she said.

The AL leader said: "If any case is filed on a transparent base, a law-abiding citizen will have no objection. But if it's done with a presupposed idea, then it will be described as politically motivated."

BB plans

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At the same time, the central bank would keep a close watch so that priority sectors like agriculture, small scale industries and employment are not adversely affected due to its contractionary monetary policy.

The policy paper stated that the BB has already decided to introduce a refinancing scheme for housing loans for lower and middle income groups and the step would give an impetus to the housing sector that provides a large number of people with employment.

"In order to boost credit in the agriculture sector, Bangladesh Bank has requested the private commercial banks to come forward, and in response to the call, they have assured [us] that they will provide over Tk 1,000 crore as credit for agriculture over the next 12 months," Salehuddin told reporters.

Still, he said, "Monetary and fiscal policies are not enough to contain the inflationary pressures; we will have to make the supply side more efficient."

Deputy Governors Nazrul Huda and Ziaul Hasan Siddiqui, Economic Adviser Habib Ullah Bahar and Executive Director KM Jamshed uz Zaman were also present at the press conference.

The policy statement said, "The BB's monetary stance will continue to be cautious in FY08 keeping in view the prevailing price situation and enhanced excess liquidity emanating from moderating private sector credit demand and increase in net foreign assets."

Despite the adoption of a cautious policy, growth in both money supply (estimated) and reserve money has exceeded the programme levels at the end of June 2007, it noted.

"Against this backdrop, further review of policy interest rates may be necessary. Since the bond/bill market is not yet developed to reduce the inflationary expectation in the longer term, interest rate of the instruments of the shorter tenor may have to be revisited relative to that of longer term," the statement continued.

Turning to the inflation situation, the policy statement said annual average inflation went down to 6.72 percent in January 2007 from 7.16 percent in June 2006.

Thereafter, annual average inflation rate showed an increasing trend owing to rises in prices of fuel, metal, food grain and other essentials in the international market coupled with supply problems in the domestic front, like selective depreciation in exchange rate, revision of fuel prices, production shortfall of food items and political unrest. The inflation rate reached at 7.06 percent in May 2007.

The BB paper projects a GDP growth of 7 percent for the FY08.

Explaining the growth situation, it said projection for real GDP growth for FY07 has been revised down to 6.5 percent following setbacks in the agriculture sector that experienced a moderate growth mainly due to inadequate rainfall, distribution problems relating to fertilizer, and shortages of power for irrigation.

"Growth in the industry sector continues to be strong in FY07 reflecting steady growth in export-oriented manufacturing and increased domestic demand. Industry and service sectors are expected to continue the robust performance in FY08," the paper expects.

Falu's house

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During the raid that lasted one and a half hours, police searched through the 1st floor flat of the building where Falu's close relatives lived and made a list of household items.

Police said they did not attach any property because none of the properties they came across belonged to Falu's wife.

A Dhaka court on Wednesday ordered to attach properties of Mahbuba Sultana immediately in connection with a tax evasion case filed by the National Board of Revenue (NBR).

Earlier on July 5, the same court issued the arrest warrant against her after Mohammad Masudur Rahman Masud, deputy tax commissioner of Tax Circle of the NBR, filed the case.

According to the case statement, Mahbuba evaded Tk 1.58 crore in income tax from 2001 to 2006.

Andhra Pradesh

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house," police chief A Sabharwal said from the port, adding that no casualties were reported.

The attacks came just a few days after troops fought a bloody battle with Maoist rebels in the jungles of nearby Chhattisgarh state. A total of 24 soldiers and 20 rebels died in the fighting, which ended Tuesday.

Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh are believed to be the Maoists' strongest power bases.

The Maoists, who launched their campaign in 1967 and operate in 14 of India's 29 states, say they are fighting for the rights of landless farmers and have stepped up attacks in remote district centres they control.

Fertiliser

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from morning onwards. The dealer's men and police got locked in scuffles with some farmers when the latter demanded more fertiliser than what was being distributed among them.

At one stage, the dealer's men and police beat up some farmers, angering them. Minutes later, when policemen tried to thrust aside those who had already purchased fertiliser, farmers attacked policemen with brickbats.

During the attack, the Upazila Nirbahi Officer Sarwar Jahan and Upazila Agriculture Officer Mosarraf Hossain, who were present on the spot, were kept under siege by some farmers.

At around 12pm, a team of army men and Rajshahi Sadar circle ASP Moazzem Hossain Bhuiyan rushed to the scene. They brought the situation under control and resumed the distribution.

According to farmers, they had been looking for fertiliser at dealer Wali Ahad's shop from July 4. The dealer and local officials started distributing fertiliser from Wednesday in quantities as small as 5kg, instead of the scheduled 10kg urea for each bigha of cropland.

Farmers complained that such small quantity of fertilizer could do little for their lands.

Azizul Haq of Vatupara said he got only 8kg for his one and a half bighas of land.

Agriculture officer Mosarraf Hossain said, authorities are releasing fertiliser from the mill gate phase by phase. "Small quantities of fertiliser are being distributed to every farmer". Meanwhile, authorities were forced to suspend fertilizer distribution and call for military forces and police to avert trouble spurred by angry farmers in the area on July 9.

CHT district

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The notification was signed by Nazma Khanam, senior assistant secretary (Council-1) of CHT affairs ministry. According to sources, the notification stated that following its issue, the present councils were immediately dismissed. New interim councils formed by the current Caretaker Government will take charge on July 15, sources added.

Sources said the present district councils have been dissolved by the direction of the President of the State, in accordance with District Council Act 4, (sub-clause) 1989.

Though Rangamati and Bandarban district councils have been fully dismissed, in Khagrachhari district only councilors have been replaced, while its chairman Monindra Lal Tripura remains unchanged, HDCs sources said.

Retired superintending engineer of Public Work Department (PWD) Jagat Jyoti Chakma and retired professor Thanjama Lusai have been made chairmen of the Rangamati and Bandarban district councils respectively.

The new councilors of the Rangamati District Council are UP chairman Bihari Ranjan Chakma, principal of Rangamati Charukola Academy Ratikanta Tangchangya, Aungsusain Chowdhury and Moniruzzaman Mohsin (Rana).

Advocate Aminur Rashid, TS Bom, Chinsa Pru and Usainu Marama have been selected as members of the Bandarban District Council.

Animesh Dewan, Sanumong Marma, Ruibi Karbari and Abubakkar Siddique have been appointed as Khagrachhari District Council members.

Bhuiyan proposes

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countries to help ensure security and face crises... This institution has a fruitful role in ensuring balance of power in the governance system," he said in his proposal.

Substantiating his contention, the BNP leader said national councils are operating effectively in countries like US, UK, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Turkey, Pakistan, India, Indonesia and Malaysia. If a Security Council is formed in Bangladesh, it will help protect the country's independence, sovereignty and ensure security.

"It will also contribute to ensuring law and order, curbing terrorism and militancy, and protecting energy, food and water resources," he said.

He replied in the negative when asked if there is any link between the army chief's reported reform proposals and those of his. He however said they will also take the army chief's proposals into consideration.

In reply to a question, the former LGRD and cooperatives minister said some of his proposals can easily be implemented right now and others like amendments to constitution will have to be approved in parliament.

"A committee like the Law Commission can be formed now so that they (committee) can make necessary proposals after scrutinising our proposals," he said. Parliament can adopt those later.

Asked about the BNP council, he said, "We will tell the party chairperson (about it) after completing preparations to hold the party council and we will finalise it when she gives a date."

He also said the provision concerning the party chairperson, as proposed by him earlier, that a person would not be eligible for this post more than twice would also be applicable for the post of party secretary general.

"The provision would also be applicable for those who have already become chairperson or secretary general (of BNP) for two terms," he said.

In his 13-point proposal, Mannan Bhuiyan said all parliamentary standing committees should be formed in the second session of parliament with provisions for holding their meetings regularly and taking their recommendations into consideration.

He proposed that the chairmen and members of the committees should be rationally selected from both the ruling and opposition parties but the chairman of public accounts committee must be nominated from the opposition.

Bhuiyan also proposed for two deputy speakers in parliament -- one of them to be from opposition parties.

"Opposition parties will never [be able to] boycott the parliament under any circumstances and membership of the parliament would be cancelled if a member is absent in the house for 30 consecutive days," he said adding that the opposition parties must be given a fair amount of chances to speak at the session and if necessary, amendments should be brought in the rules of procedures.

According to the existing provision, membership of a member is cancelled if the member is absent for 90 consecutive days in the house without the permission of the speaker.

"The opposition parties should be constructive and programmes like hartals and blockades should be banned considering public sufferings," he said. He also recommended stern action against destruction of properties under the cover of political programmes.

"Ombudsman should be appointed to ensure administrative transparency, accountability and good governance," said the former minister.

Regarding Public Service Commission (PSC), he said the system of appointments at the PSC should be changed so that honest, competent and neutral persons can be appointed in the future.

Illegal intervention in the administration needs to be stopped, accountability in it has to be ensured and the officials have to be barred from having political affiliations. Promotion and postings in the administration should be based on merit. The administration has to be regulated to make it more efficient, Bhuiyan said.

About the Election Commission, he said, "An independent election commission secretariat, direct budget allocation for the commission, increased manpower and the capacity to formulate [its own] rules are necessary to make the commission stronger and [truly] independent."

The BNP secretary general proposed to ensure full independence of the judiciary by ending government interference and appointing competent judges in all levels.

He also proposed to take effective measures for strengthening all local government bodies.

Lauding the government for its steps that turned the Anti-Corruption Commission into an effective institution, he called upon the government to adopt a new appointment system so that competent and neutral persons can be appointed there in the future.

Bhuiyan criticised the existing political culture and said that the promulgation of state of emergency has created an opportunity to change that culture. He urged all to work together so that a fair political culture can be attained for the next generation.

Prior to announcing the revised and comprehensive proposal, Bhuiyan talked with senior leaders of the party at his residence.

Among others, BNP standing committee members Lt Gen (retd) Mahbubur Rahman, vice president MK Anwar, Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf and Hafiz Uddin Ahmed, joint secretary generals Ashraf Hossain and Selima Rahman, advisers to BNP chairperson Inam Ahmed Chowdhury, Mofazzal Karim, MA Hakim and ZA Khan, former state ministers Rezaul Karim and Zafrul Islam Chowdhury, former lawmakers Justice Mozammel Haque, Rezaul Bari Dina, SA Sultan, Abdul Hye and Sardar Shakhawat Hossain Bakul were present.

Speaker claims

FROM PAGE 1

Speaker sent a rejoinder to The Daily Star protesting the news through the public relations section under the Jatiya Sangsad Secretariat.

At the press conference, he criticised The Daily Star for such a wide coverage of the news. He said the news could be published on the back page or on any inside page of the newspaper. "But the newspaper gave such a wide coverage that it seems I am more important than Army chief Gen Moeen U Ahmed," Sircar said referring to The Daily Star's Thursday issue in which the news on him was made the lead and the army chief's speech the second lead.

"It has violated all the norms of journalism. The news was published only to undermine me and the office of the Speaker," Sircar said.

The Speaker in his written statement said he had sent a summary to the then prime minister's office regarding his medical bill. "It was mentioned in the summary that former Speaker Humayun Rashid Chowdhury was granted Tk 35, 71,192 for kidney treatment and he withdrew [drew] the said amount and former chief whip Abul Hasnat Abdullah was granted Tk 5,74,00 and he withdrew [drew] it," Sircar said.

Asked whether the former prime minister or the then Speaker approved the medical bill exercising the Special Medical Attendance Rules 1950, Sircar said the then prime minister approved it.

"I think the then prime minister did not check the Jatiya Sangsad Act 1994 that allows the Speaker to approve such a medical bill," Sircar said, adding, "I even did not check the act in details. But when the Prime Minister's Office sent back the summary with suggestion to settle it according to the Jatiya Sangsad Act 1994, I checked the act in details."

He claimed according to Section 18 of Jatiya Sangsad Act 1994, Speaker is the final authority for approval of the expenditure of the allocated money for the Parliament Secretariat.

When his attention was drawn to the fact that the office of the Comptroller and Auditor General had given objection to the medical bill of former chief whip Abul Hasnat Abdullah as the bill was approved by the then Speaker, Jamiruddin said he was not aware of it.

Asked whether he exercised Clause 12 of the Special Medical Attendance Rules 1950 to approve his bill, the Speaker said he referred to the relevant rules in the summary sent to the Prime Minister's Office.

But in his written undertaking, the Speaker claimed that by parity of reasoning the Speaker is the final authority to approve money through exercising Clause 12 of the Special Medical Attendance Rules.

In his yesterday's statement, the speaker also said he drew the medical bill keeping in view sections 18, 9 and 14 of the Parliament Secretariat Act.

The Speaker is the authority to allocate money for the Parliament Secretariat's budget, he said.

When his attention was drawn to the pro-reform BNP leaders' yesterday's statement that the last parliament was virtually ineffective, the Speaker said people could say whether the parliament was effective.

Asked whether the Speaker played his role for smooth functioning of the parliamentary standing committees, Sircar said he took several steps in this regard.

He denied the non-functioning of several standing committees in the last parliament.

He claimed that no specific allegation of corruption was raised for discussion in the last parliament.

Asked for his comment about the present caretaker government, the Speaker said the Constitution does not say that the present government is illegal. "You can at best say that there might be some constitutional irregularities. The irregularities, if there is any, can be corrected in future. But the present situation is within the ambit of the Constitution," he said.

Child marriage

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Station urging him to take action to stop the child marriage.

When the OC informed Satkhira Police Super (SP) Mirza Abdullahel Baki of the incident, he hurriedly summoned Siddique Sana, Habiba's father, and asked him to stop his minor daughter's marriage, as it is illegal. Habiba's father had to sign a bond that he will not marry off his daughter while she is still a child.

The wedding was to take place at Puratan Satkhira in the town today.

Habiba, a student of Abdul Karim Girls' High School, did not agree when her hard-up father fixed her alliance with a 23-year-old neighbour youth, but she did not dare protest.

When she told her friends about it, one of them requested her father to talk to Habiba's father and stop the marriage, but he did not pay heed to it.

Finally, her friends decided to inform the Sadar OC when Habiba came to school yesterday and said that her father did not change his mind.

The schoolgirls' stand and action against child marriage has caused quite a stir in the town.

Contacted, SP Baki confirmed the incident.