

Reserved gas blocks

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system is an easy by-pass for a competitive bidding and this ensures low risk investment for foreign oil companies. At the same time, it practically gives away local resources to foreign companies at nominal prices.

Sources said a controversial Petrobangla high official, under the influence of certain local agents of foreign oil companies, has prompted this move. He has justified this suggestion on ground of lack of finances.

"This is just a lame excuse. Financing oil and gas exploration projects did not get due priorities in the past though the contribution of Petrobangla's companies are significant. There were always adequate funds and a lack of political will," said an energy ministry high official.

Nine companies under Petrobangla annually contribute more than Tk 3,000 crore to the national exchequer as tax, supplementary duties and profit.

"More importantly, three gas production and exploration companies -- Bangladesh Gas Field Company (BGFL), Sylhet Gas Field Company (SGFL) and the lone exploration company Bangladesh Exploration Company (Bapex) -- annually pay Tk 1,800 crore to the government as tax and supplementary duties. As per the company rules, these companies are supposed to be able to keep 20 percent of their earnings, which does not happen," he said.

"The government in 1994 had given away the discovered Jalalabad gas field with its proven 1.5 tcf gas to Occidental (now Chevron) but why? Back then Bapex asked for just Tk 200 crore to drill wells and set up gas processing plants to develop this field but the government said there is no fund. Then after Occidental developed it and started supplying gas, the government paid the foreign company Tk 300 crore in just one year as payment of gas," the official noted.

"I see self-contradictory actions, and not lack of fund," he added.

A Petrobangla official asked, "Is it really difficult for the government to allocate Tk 100 crore a year to each of these three companies to allow them to explore and develop the resources?"

He went on, "Alternatively, the government can simply give Bapex a one-time allocation of Tk 500 crore to

build its own business and contribute to the nation." In India, the national oil company ONGC was given 500 crore rupees as one-time investment a couple of decades back. Now, this company has turned into a Rs 30,000 crore giant.

In 2004, Bapex was forced to sign a controversial joint venture deal with Canadian company Niko resources to develop "marginal" (previously used) gas fields owned by Bapex. In the list of three fields, one field -- Chhatak (or Tengratila) was unexplored and therefore deserved, at least, open tender to ensure competent and fair exploration programmes. Incompetent company Niko caused two rounds of blowouts in Tengratila area, which experts believe has the potential of one trillion cubic feet of gas.

"It seems we have either stopped believing in ourselves, or we are too eager to give everything away to foreign companies for personal gains," said a senior official. "The Niko deal is a glaring example of how we undermine our own interest, and how can Petrobangla want to follow that example?"

PETROBANGLA'S MOVE
Earlier on July 3, in a letter to the energy secretary Petrobangla set the ground for the idea of JVA. The letter notes that the country is presently producing 1,800 million cubic feet per day (mmcf) gas against a demand of 1,750 mmcf. Gas demand is projected to go up to 1,800 mmcf in 2008 and 2,850 mmcf in 2012. Therefore, the country must take up programmes to enhance gas supplies.

In its two-page letter describing the history of exploration activities and block bidding in the country, Petrobangla said the country has taken the initiative for off-shore block bidding this year and taken legal steps to lift the court injunction on signing new Production Sharing Contracts (PSCs). It said in the upcoming bid offering 23 blocks, oil companies might be interested in blocks 15, 22, 3, 6 and 4.

Then it went on suggesting that Bapex may open its ring-fenced areas of Sitakunda, Kamta, Mobarakpur, Semutang, Patharia etc and blocks 8 and 11 reserved for Bapex for joint venture deals with foreign companies.

The energy ministry on July 16 issued a letter on "On-shore" oil and

gas exploration programme announcing a government decision to take legal measures to withdraw court injunction on signing PSCs and to take steps to sign JVAs in ring-fenced and reserved areas of Bapex.

RING-FENCED RESOURCES
Other than two large blocks of 8 and 11, Bapex was given exclusive rights to several zones where previous exploration indicated strong possibilities of oil and gas resources.

The Kapatia and North Bhairab gas structures are relatively smaller but there are strong indications of gas resources there. The Kamta gas structure located in block 9 also has similar promises.

A foreign company named Steinback explored another zone called Hazipur in 1952 and discovered oil. With technologies of those days, the reserve was marked as small, while most geologists now believe it has a great potential.

The country's biggest gas structure discovered so far is Sitakunda, located in block 15. But this 70 km by 10 km structure is situated in a hilly belt full of faults, making it technically difficult for Bapex to undertake conventional exploration programme.

"The Sitakunda structure has 48 gas seepage points in the surface and three oil seepage. Foreign oil companies had drilled four wells there between 1910 and 1914, and Petrobangla drilled one in 1983. This zone demands patient and high tech exploration programme because we believe, once we can access this field, it will produce both oil and gas," said an official.

The Patia zone located in block 16 also has a 40 km by 15 km large gas structure where foreign oil company PPL drilled a well in 1952. "During those times, they used thicker mud (twice the density of water) drilling. Such drilling can stop gas from coming out, and therefore they did not discover gas. Nowadays we use mud with equal density of water. We believe if we undertake drilling programmes now, we will find gas there," he added.

The Jaldi structure also spreads around a significant 32 km by 7 km area. Gas was discovered there in 1964 when explorers drilled three wells there.

Khaleda

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"I cannot go to them due to the changed situation, but I will stand beside them if I get the chance," she said in a statement signed by Mohiuddin Khan Mohon, former assistant press secretary to the prime minister.

She said, "The flood situation is deteriorating day by day. Better preparations and necessary steps should be taken to protect lives and properties."

Urging the authorities concerned to be more careful, she said they should be prepared for post-flood rehabilitations as many people lose their properties and livelihood due to river erosion. Besides crops are damaged and different diseases break out during that time, she added.

She said, "Natural calamities cannot be prevented but it is possible to minimise casualties and damages by handling the crisis efficiently."

Fertiliser crisis

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more RI and M Harun-or-Rashid, teacher of a kindergarten school, to 3 years and 4 months imprisonment and fined Tk 6,000, in default, to suffer more four months.

Another accused Abdur Rahim, a farmer, was acquitted.

Upazila Agriculture Officer Shamsul Haq filed the case accusing the three persons as they tried to stage a drama in protest of 'fertiliser crisis' in front of Damurhat UNO office on March 27 this year, police said.

After examining the witnesses and records, the Judge of the Speedy Trial Tribunal Yusuf Ali handed down the verdict.

Road link

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trade between the two countries.

Supporting the road-link project, which will link Dhaka with Kunming via Myanmar, Yang said it is a 'constructive idea' that would encourage people-to-people contact.

He suggested that a tripartite meeting could be held after technical experts conduct a feasibility study on the project.

Yang also thanked Iftekhar for Dhaka's continuing support for Beijing's 'One China' policy.

Iftekhar invited yang in Bangladesh. Accepting the invitation, Yang said, "It is his dream to visit the country which is not just a close neighbour but such a dear friend."

Manju seized

FROM PAGE 16
The speedboats were kept at the jetty under strict watch.

Sources said Manju bought the speedboats when he was the communications minister.

He used one of the three to reach his constituency at Bhandaria in Pirojpur from the capital in the shortest possible time while his staff used the rest two.

Manju also used the speedboats during his election campaign in 2001, sources added.

CA says govt ready

FROM PAGE 1
Bagua Anantapur High School and College at Anatur in the Ulipur upazila in the morning.

Earlier, the chief adviser took a helicopter tour over the flood-affected areas of the district and saw for himself the flood situation and the havoc caused by the flood.

Expressing satisfaction over the government activities to help the flood victims, Fakhruddin said coordination committees at district and upazila levels, comprising civil administration, army, and NGOs, are working round the clock to tackle the situation.

Replying to a volley of questions from the reporters, the chief adviser said his government, after assessing the situation, would formulate projects to reconstruct and strengthen various embankments in the next dry session for long-term flood prevention and thus saving lives, property and crops.

About seed distribution, the chief adviser said he has directed the agricultural department, local administration and army to take immediate steps for providing seeds to the farmers in advance for the next Aman sowing.

There are standby medical teams to provide treatment to patients of waterborne diseases during and after the flooding, he said adding, "There is also enough stock of water-purifying tablets and other relief materials are being sent from Dhaka as per demand."

The chief adviser said he is getting updated information every day from the flood coordination and monitoring cell opened at the CA's office and giving necessary directives.

Replying to a question, he said he would visit more flood-hit areas where necessary to see for himself the situation and the extent of damage.

Fakhruddin said Bangladesh, as a calamity-prone country, has better experience in management of natural

disasters, including flood.

He said his government as well as the field-level administrations were following standard and tested strategies to tackle the flood situation.

About rehabilitation, he said the government has plans and preparation for the post-flood massive rehabilitation of the flood victims.

At Ulipur, Brigade Commander Brig Gen M Ferdous Mia briefed the CA about the flood situation and relief operation in the district.

The CA was informed that 54 unions, out of 85, in nine upazilas of the district have been hit by the sweeping flood, affecting some 3.6 lakh people and killing one person at Nageshwari upazila.

Beside, standing crops on 39356 hectares of land in the district were damaged by the current flooding.

Eighty-three medical teams are working in the district as diarrhoea has broken out in many flood-hit areas, affecting 19 people.

So far, the government has distributed 222 metric tons of rice and Tk 3.4 lakh among the flood-affected people of the nine upazilas. It has also set up 50 flood centres in the district where some 10,500 people have taken shelter.

Food and Disaster Management Adviser Tapan Chowdhury, Principal Staff Officer of the Armed Forces Division Lt General Masududdin Chowdhury and CA's Press Secretary Sayed Fahim Munaim, among others, accompanied the chief adviser.

Rangpur Area Commander and GOC of Rangpur Cantonment Major General Fatemi Ahmed Roomy, Kurigram DCAR Mollah and other civil and military high officials were also present during the CA's visit to the flood-affected areas in Ulipur.

He left Ulipur at noon for Dhaka and saw various flood-affected areas of Sirajganj district from helicopter.

EC wants new law

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of Tk 2,000," a source said quoting the EC proposal.

Discouraging or asking someone not to register their names in the voter list with photographs by visiting voter registration centres will be considered as a punishable offence under this law, he added.

Besides, the EC sought power to formulate rules and authority to ask any government offices to provide information, if necessary, for preparing the voter list.

Interestingly, the Council of Advisers on July 21 approved in principle the previous EC proposals to amend the Electoral Rolls Ordinance, 1982.

The draft of Electoral Rolls Ordinance 1982 (amendment) Ordinance 2007 was also sent to the law ministry for scrutiny. The law ministry, however, sent it back to the EC on last Thursday with some queries and asked to change the language of the proposals to Bangla.

On Sunday and Monday, the EC held meetings over the issue and looked for options to avoid further controversy and conflict with a Supreme Court (SC) verdict regarding the voter list.

The meetings also reviewed the previous bitter experiences in preparing the voter list. In the past one year, the SC declared the voter list prepared for the stalled ninth parliamentary elections null and void, as it was prepared ignoring the electoral laws and court directives.

Some legal experts have also questioned the EC move to prepare the voter list with photographs despite the SC directives for updating the existing electoral voter list in line with the

current electoral rolls ordinance.

Amid growing concern over the fate of the new venture of the voter list with photographs, the EC finally decided to go for a new law repealing the existing electoral rolls ordinance, sources said.

The EC now hopes that the council of advisers will approve its proposals in its next meeting and the president will promulgate an ordinance to make the new law, as the chief adviser is scheduled to inaugurate the field level task for preparing the voter list in RCC area on August 5. However, the field level task in the area began unofficially from July 29.

Officials in the Cabinet Division said the proposals would be placed in the next meeting of the Council of Advisers.

"It's is now our target to include the Election Commission's proposals in the meeting agenda whenever it is held," a senior official told The Daily Star.

Election Commissioner Mohammed Sohul Hussain on Monday told The Daily Star that the EC is moving to change the Electoral Rolls Ordinance, 1982 for preparing the voter list with photographs in such a way that it will not come in conflict with the court's directive.

The SC guidelines for preparing the voter list will have no effect if the original law, Electoral Rolls Ordinance 1982, is repealed.

In addition, the Electoral Rolls Rules 1982 formulated under the authority of the abovementioned ordinance, will also turn ineffective once the ordinance is repealed.

The EC will formulate new rules, if necessary, for preparing the voter list with photographs.

Hasina's bail

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(EPR) is linked to the writ petition filed by Hasina. So, it is beyond the HC's jurisdiction to grant bail to her without giving an explanation of the EPR, he added.

Opposing the government plea, Hasina's chief counsel Barrister Rafiqul Haque said the extortion case against her cannot be brought under the EPR. The case was brought under the EPR before submission of chargesheet on July 24, he added.

The HC on Monday also issued a rule on the military-backed interim government to reply within two weeks why it approving the case to be under the EPR should not be declared illegal.

Earlier on Sunday, the Awami League chief had filed a writ petition with the HC seeking bail and challenging the government move to have the extortion case against her tried under the emergency power rules.

Following the HC order and rule, the government on Tuesday filed an appeal with the Chamber Judge of Appellate Division of the SC seeking stay on the HC order.

After primary hearing, the Chamber Judge decided to send it for full-bench hearing and fixed yesterday for the hearing.

Azam J Chowdhury, managing director of Eastcoast Trading Pvt Ltd, lodged the case with Gulshan Police Station on June 13 this year. He accused Hasina and AL presidium member Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim of extorting

Tariqul, wife

FROM PAGE 1
Earlier, former deputy minister Ruhul Kuddus Talukhdar and 37 others were sued in Mozaffar Hossain murder case filed with a magistrate court in Rajshahi on Tuesday.

The court yesterday ordered the Bagmara thana OC to investigate the allegations and take necessary steps.

Fatema Begum, the wife of the victim, filed the case.

Floods cause huge damage

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According to witnesses, police and officials of the district administration, 20 to 25 people of adjacent villages were standing on the bridge when it collapsed into the river. Locals recovered at least eight people using boats. It is feared that the heavy current washed many away.

The bodies of Hazera Khatun, 60, and her granddaughter Iasmin, 8, were recovered Tuesday night, while the body of Rubel, 18, was recovered from Dapnagar village yesterday morning.

Ruhul Amin Khokan, chairman of Gharinda union parishad, told The Daily Star that they were trying their best to recover the missing people. "We suspect all the missing people have drowned and their bodies have been washed away."

Mohammad Yousuf Ali, additional deputy commissioner (ADC) of Tangail after visiting the spot told The Daily Star that the rescue operation there lacked strength as there was no underwater rescue team in the district.

Mirpur, Railway Colony and Mahmudpur areas of Sirajganj were inundated yesterday, our Bogra and Sirajganj correspondents report.

Most roads, houses and commercial structures went under floodwater forcing people to take shelters on higher grounds, embankments and roofs of buildings.

The correspondents during their visits found many people living under the open sky and a lot of them were suffering from food shortages.

"The flood affected 3,86,000 people, and the relief materials allocated for them are inadequate," said Sirajganj Sadar Thana Nirbahi Officer (TNO)

Jobless

FROM PAGE 16
As a friend of Hakim tried to console him, both of them broke down in tears holding each other.

Hakim, who hails from Nalchithi in Barisal, is entitled to get Tk 25,000 as pending salary and Tk 90,000 as provident fund.

"I have nowhere to go as there is nothing left in my village home. Even I do not have the money for the bus fare to go back home," said a sobbing Hakim.

Most of the labourers of the mill have similar tales to tell.

Abdul Hakim, who joined the mill as a daily-basis labourer in 1985, got his job regularised after long 17 years. Then he got married and started living a new life with the 'satisfactory salary' he drew as a permanent worker.

But the happy days did not last long and at one stage his salary became irregular.

One month back Hakim had to leave the mill quarters following notice from the authorities.

As the clock struck 12:00 on Tuesday night, the security guard blew the last whistle for the mill. A sudden silence descended upon the retrenched crowd who started moving backward.

Our staff correspondent adds from Khulna: Brac, a non-government organisation, yesterday donated Tk 48,000 to forty students of Khulna People's Jute Mills High School.

Each student got Tk 1200 to meet educational expenses for six months.

Brac also gave Tk 24,000 for twenty students of the same school in June this year.

Khulna Brac office counsellor M Saidul Islam said they donated the money under the social protection project for the retrenched workers and the donation will continue in phases.

The guardians of the students have expressed the fear of eviction from the mill colonies following closure of the factory, said the headmaster of the school.

"We are deeply concerned about the academic future of our students as the high school run by the BJMC may also close," he said, adding, "Brac has come forward to help the students financially. But we still don't know who will bear other expenses of the school."

Moeen

FROM PAGE 16
affected people, reports our Netrokona correspondent.

He said the army had been trying to rescue the marooned people and also distributing relief materials among the victims.

The army chief also said that an army medical team had been working there and district administration has taken preparations to tackle the crisis.

General Moeen also urged the concerned authorities to take necessary preparations for rehabilitation of the flood-affected people.

Diraj JMalakar, secretary for relief and disaster management, Maj Gen Mujahid Uddin, Brigadier Gen Anwarul Azim, Lt Col Azim, district commissioner Ayatullah Majumdar and police superintendent Shakhawat Hossain accompanied the army chief.

District commissioner Ayatullah Majumdar told the journalists that about 1.75 lakh people of seven upazila in the district have been affected and at least 9000 houses were damaged in flood.

"The government has already allotted rice and cash for the affected people," he added.

Meanwhile, the army chief has postponed his upcoming India and Pakistan tour in view of the exigencies of floods in the country, said UNB.

"The army chief has already informed his counterparts of India and Pakistan about the postponement of his forthcoming tour through dispatching letters," said an announcement from ISPR Wednesday.

Gen Moeen yesterday started cross-country supervision of relief and rescue operation conducted by army to help the civil administration in the flood-affected areas.

Mozaffar Ahmad.

The Padma was flowing 136cm and 92cm above danger levels at Goalundo and Bhagyakul yesterday and is likely to rise further inundating more areas of Manikganj, Munshiganj, Faridpur, Rajbari, Madaripur, Shariatpur and Dohar and Nawabganj upazilas of Dhaka, according to Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre (FFWC).

The Shitalakhya was flowing 6cm above danger level at Narayanganj and Tongi canal was flowing 4cm above danger level at Tongi, while the Balu at Demra is likely to cross danger level in a day and the Turag at Mirpur in the next two days.

The Meghna was flowing 40cm above danger level at Bhairab Bazar yesterday and is likely to swell further inundating low-lying areas of Narsingdi, Brahmanbaria and Narayanganj.

The water level of the Jamuna also rose and was flowing 50cm, 71cm, 83cm, 117cm and 112cm above danger level at Noonkhawa, Chilmari, Bahadurabad, Sirajganj and Aricha.

Troops and NGOs joined hands with district administrations in distributing relief materials, while military engineers were struggling to protect vulnerable flood control embankments damaged by flood, according to BSS.

According to the state-owned news agency, train communication between Jamalpur-Sarisahabari and Islampur-Dewanganj has been suspended.

Our correspondent in Narayanganj reports: New low-lying areas of the town were inundated, while the Shitalakhya was flowing 30cm over the danger level at Baniadi point of Rugganj and the Meghna 33cm above danger level at Sonargaon yesterday.

A correspondent from Faridpur reports: Six lakh people have been affected by the flood in 60 unions of eight upazilas of the district. An embankment at Minshibazar collapsed inundating Dhaka-Barisal Highway at Maniknagar.

Our correspondent from Tangail reports: Only a small portion of over 3.5 lakh flood-affected people in the district received relief, while the 15 flood shelters the government set up is inadequate.

Many flood-affected people of Sadullapur, Gala, Pitchuria, Mogra,

Khaleda, Saifur

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"We have heard about this, but did not get the papers yet," he said adding that the NBR will decide whether Saifur's submission will be accepted or not once the papers came to the NBR office.

"We have paid taxes for legalising undisclosed money as per the rules and instructions of the NBR,"

Khaleda's lawyer Ahmed Aazam told The Daily Star. "Khaleda Zia has paid income tax as well as five percent of the total amount of the money as fines," he added.

Asked about NBR chairman's claim that the former prime minister did not submit returns lawfully, Aazam said, "I did not find any gross irregularity in submitting the return."

Shimul Biswas, a BNP leader and Khaleda's lawyer, said that Khaleda has been submitting tax returns since 1991 when she became prime minister. "But some of her income, which were not shown in previous returns, have been submitted under the present amnesty scheme," he added.

UNB adds: Aazam said Khaleda has moveable property worth over Tk 2.5 crore, including fixed deposits, bank balance and savings certificates. She also possesses immovable property worth Tk 10,000.

Giving an explanation about possessing immovable property worth only Tk 10,000 that include two houses

Boro Basalia and Vaeta of Sadar upazila took shelters on Tangail-Mogra Road along with their livestock.

A correspondent from Munshiganj reports: 50,000 people living near Mawa-Bhagyakul embankment are under threat as breaches that developed in the embankment Monday is yet to be repaired.

Our correspondent from Kishoreganj reports: Floodwater from northern districts is entering the haor areas of the district deteriorating the flood situation there. Niklee upazila remains cut off from the rest of the district as Kishoreganj-Niklee road was washed away at Pachrokhri and Kholsiha five days ago.

Our correspondent from Gaibandha reports: New areas of Gaibandha Sadar, Fulchari and Shaghata upazilas were flooded as breaches developed in different embankments along the western banks of the Brahmaputra and Ghagot.

Gaibandha-Balashighat road communication remains snapped as over three kilometres of road went under three to four feet of floodwater.

People who took shelter on the embankment along the western bank of the Brahmaputra are living in makeshift sheds and are suffering from food and drinking water shortages.

Our correspondent from Nilphamari reports: Diarrhoea and other water-borne diseases have been reported as the floodwater recedes in the district.

The floods damaged about 400 metres of two bank-protections of the Teesta at Dakshin Sonakhuli and Vedabari.

Our staff correspondent from Sylhet reports: Over 300 vehicles were stranded as the road link between Sylhet and Comiganjanj and Gowainghat upazilas snapped following severe landslide at Barsala early yesterday. However, Roads and Highways officials re-established the communication around 5:00pm removing earth from the road.

The flood situation in the district further deteriorated yesterday as the Surma was flowing 40cm above danger level at Sylhet city, 60cm above at Sunamganj town and 14cm above danger level at Kanaighat.

(one each in Gulshan and Cantonment), one piece of land in Savar, Aazam said it's because the statement will only have the acquisition value of the houses. "For instance, the current value of her Gulshan residence on 1.5 bigha of land is about Tk 40 crore, but she got it from the government for only Tk 101."

The BNP chairperson has a total of 11 FDRs and 2 savings accounts (Agrani Bank, RAF branch and Sonali Bank, Cantonment Branch).

Apart from the two houses in Dhaka, there is a piece of land in Savar bought by late Ziaur Rahman in the early 1970s for Tk 9,000. Khaleda has another small piece of land either in Uttarkhan or Dakhkhinkhan, also bought by her husband. She could not discover any details of that land, now occupied by others, Aazam said.

"There are three unused vehicles registered with the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority under her name. She used these vehicles (2 Toyota jeeps and one Nissan Patrol) during the 1991 election."

Asked how she reacted to the issuance of the notice, Aazam said, "She took it very easily. Given the activities since January 11, she was convinced that as she was the head of the government, she would be asked to submit wealth statement. She is viewing this issue from a legal perspective."

Bombings kill

FROM PAGE 16
Aziz al-Hakim and previous attacks of this kind have been blamed on Sunni extremists.

A third car bomb went off in the southern neighbourhood of Dura, one of Baghdad's most notorious districts, killing three more people and wounding another five, according to security officials.

Separately a roadside bomb damaged and set fire to a US army Bradley infantry fighting vehicle, an armoured troop transporter patrolling in the Al-Amin neighbourhood of southeast Baghdad, witnesses said.

The military confirmed the attack, but could not say if troops were hurt.

The blasts came as new numbers released by three government ministries revealed that the number of Iraqi civilians killed in the country's brutal civil conflict rose by more than a third in July.

The spike came despite a five-month-old surge in US troop levels designed to stabilise the capital to allow Iraq's politicians space to hammer out crucial political agreements to stem the country's sectarian bloodshed.

At least 1,652 civilians were killed in Iraq in July, 33 percent more than in the previous month, according to figures compiled by the Iraqi health, defence and interior ministries and made available to AFP.