

Polls must for no return

FROM PAGE 1
potential is at stake. Bangladesh won't be able to meet its future potential if the roadmap does not succeed, he observed.

As part of the roadmap, Miliband also stressed the role of politicians, indicating a return to the political deadlock and corruption evident before 1/11 would be unacceptable to the international community.

"His statements make Britain's message to Bangladesh clear that any derailing from the roadmap would be suicidal for the country," said Prof Imtiaz.

Along those lines, his visit's agenda was successfully met with the assurances from the government of sticking to the roadmap and from the army chief that the military's role is "independent, separate and above the politics".

While senior US state department official Donald Camp also stressed the quickest possible transition to an elected government and wanted to be assured of the army's return to barracks.

The chief election commissioner assured both Miliband and Camp that all preparations target to hold elections by this year.

But the Election Commission has not completed a number of tasks that were supposed to be

completed by this time. Dialogues with the political parties on electoral law and institutional reforms were not held during September-October last year as per the EC roadmap.

The commission has also yet to formulate rules it was empowered to do last August for legalising ongoing procedures for preparing the voter list with photographs and publication of its draft.

However, neither Miliband nor Camp received any assurances about possible a date of lifting the state of emergency, even though both clearly called for that.

Miliband said: "The state of emergency must be lifted to all extents. A fully functional democracy cannot operate under a state of emergency."

But he received no clear deadline for the emergency to be lifted, leaving British High Commissioner Anwar Choudhury to reiterate government promises to lift the emergency when it is "practical".

Camp also made US wishes clear: "The sooner the state of emergency is lifted the better, the sooner the election can be held, the better." He also did not receive any clear deadline in this regard.

"Full democracy is vital to the country. Full participation in the electoral process is vital to democ-

racy," Camp said, stressing the need for the quickest possible transition to an "elected government".

Miliband left without judicial assurances of fair trials and judicial independence during the emergency, a concern mentioned also by Camp.

The British foreign secretary said all trials must follow due process, without deference, fear, favour or discrimination, when asked about his thoughts on trying high-profile corruption suspects, including the two detained former premiers.

Specifying even further about what Britain's perception of the trials' political consequences, he said the court must find someone guilty following due process of law but there must not be 'prejudice' against particular individuals.

Camp's statements about the trial of detained former prime ministers Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina echo Miliband's perspective.

The High Court on February 6 declared Hasina's trial under the Emergency Power Rule illegal as the alleged crime was committed before declaration of the state of emergency.

Miliband was not appeased by reports of lower human rights abuses under this government, saying, "Any human rights abuse is too much, there are basic standards that need to be adhered to."

Camp was more specific about US concerns with human as well as 'civil rights'. He said US concerns about the freedom of press, freedom of speech and labour rights featured his discussions with the government.

But he stopped short of saying that he received assurances from the government saying they "understand the concern and have received the message".

Yet, by the conclusion of Miliband's trip, the international community's sights are set firmly on the elections for which they were willing to overlook their own concerns with the due process of trials, human and civil rights.

This reveals that what is at stake is not only Bangladesh's future, as Miliband stated, but also reputation of the international community who have so strongly backed this government.

E Timor president

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shot and wounded him during what officials called a failed coup attempt.

Jose Ramos Horta was taken in an induced coma to the northern Australian city of Darwin after being shot during the attack on his home in Dili, East Timor's capital. The tiny nation's prime minister escaped a separate attack unharmed.

"During his transfer from Dili to Darwin he remained stabilized but in critical condition," said Ian Badham of CareFlight International, the medical evacuation service that conducted the flight for the president.

"He remained on a ventilator in an induced coma, which he was put into to control his breathing" as he underwent surgery in Dili and maintained during the flight, Badham said.

Ramos Horta had received multiple blood transfusions, Badham said.

He was delivered to the Royal Darwin Hospital, where staff were doing a full assessment of his condition.

President Jose Ramos-Horta, a Nobel Peace laureate, was injured in the stomach and was in serious but stable condition, while Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao escaped the attack on his motorcade unharmed.

East Timor's Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao on Monday declared a state of emergency for 48 hours, with a curfew to be implemented, after President Jose Ramos-Horta was shot and wounded.

The emergency -- to be formally approved by the acting head of state, first deputy of the national parliament Vicente Guterres -- would see a curfew begin from 8:00 pm (11:00 GMT), Gusmao said.

Army spokesman Maj. Domingos da Camara said notorious rebel leader Alfredo Reinado and one of his men were killed in the attack against the home of Ramos-Horta, while one of the president's guards also died.

"I consider this incident a coup attempt against the state by Reinado and it failed," Gusmao said. He called it a well-planned operation intended to "paralyse the government and create instability."

"This government won't fall because of this," he said.

The attacks plunged the tiny country into fresh uncertainty after the firing of 600 mutinous soldiers in 2006 triggered unrest that killed 37 people, displaced more than 150,000 others and led to the collapse of the government.

Australia announced it would send scores more soldiers to the international peacekeeping force it heads in the country.

Reinado was one of several army commanders who joined the mutiny. While most have returned to their homes, Reinado and an unknown number of armed supporters had remained in hiding, refusing pleas to surrender.

Ramos-Horta underwent surgery in an Australian army hospital in East Timor, officials said. He was then flown to the northern Australian city of Darwin for further treatment, said Ian Badham, a spokesman for medical evacuation service CareFlight International. Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd said Ramos-Horta was in "very serious but stable" condi-

tion. Gusmao urged the country to stay calm. "I also appeal to the people not to spread any false rumours and information," he said.

Two cars carrying rebel soldiers passed Ramos-Horta's house on the outskirts of the capital, Dili, at around 7 a.m. local time and began shooting, da Camara said. The guards returned fire, he said. Reinado, former head of the military police, took part in the attack and was killed.

Reinado was due to go on trial in absentia for his alleged role in several deadly shootings between police and military units during the violence in 2006. He was briefly arrested but escaped from jail later in 2006 and had since evaded capture.

Despite the outstanding charges, Ramos-Horta had met on several occasions with Reinado in recent months to persuade him to give himself up.

The attack on Gusmao's car was led by another of the rebel commanders, Gustao Salsinha, said one of Gusmao's bodyguards, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to address the media.

Australian-led troops restored calm after the 2006 turmoil and peaceful elections were held in which Ramos-Horta was elected president and Gusmao prime minister. Low-level violence had continued in the country of 1 million people since then.

Australia said Monday it would send extra help, including a "company strength" deployment of troops. Australia has almost 800 troops and dozens of police in the country. Troop numbers in East Timor would total about 1,000 after the new deployment, Rudd said. The neighbouring nation also pledged more police officers to the 1,400 strong UN-led force already there.

"Someone out there tried to assassinate the political leadership of our friend, partner and neighbour," Rudd said. "They have asked for some help, and we are about to provide it."

Deposed Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri has maintained Ramos-Horta's government was illegitimate. His political party immediately condemned Monday's attacks in a statement released to the media.

East Timor, a former Portuguese colony, gained independence in 2002 after voting to break free from more than two decades of brutal Indonesian occupation in a UN-sponsored ballot.

Gusmao, who led the armed struggle against the occupation, has vowed along with Ramos-Horta to tackle rampant poverty and restore damaged relations between the country's police and army.

The Brussels-based International Crisis Group warned last month that East Timor risked lapsing back into unrest if lingering resentment following the 2006 violence was not addressed by the government and the United Nations.

Ramos-Horta shared the 1996 Nobel Peace Prize with countryman Bishop Carlos Belo for leading a nonviolent struggle against the occupation.



Winners of Dhaka Post Gold Medal 2007 pose with the guests, including Justice Latifur Rahman and Justice Abdur Rouf, at the 17th founding anniversary of the weekly Dhaka Post at the National Press Club in the city recently.

Indian 'spy' lost on Pakistan death row for 35 years

AFP, Islamabad

A Pakistani minister yesterday said he had discovered an alleged Indian spy who has languished on death row in Pakistan for the last three and a half decades.

Indian national Kashmir Singh was arrested in 1973 on espionage charges and sentenced to death by a court martial, Pakistan's Minister for Human Rights Ansar Burney said in a statement.

Singh, a father of three, had become "mentally disabled" after spending the following 35 years in a cell under a secrecy act without ever seeing the sky or receiving a single visitor, Burney said.

Burney said he was tipped off about Singh by the Indian commu-

nity in London and, after searching various Pakistani prisons, found him in the central jail in Lahore, where he was being kept under the Official Secrets Act.

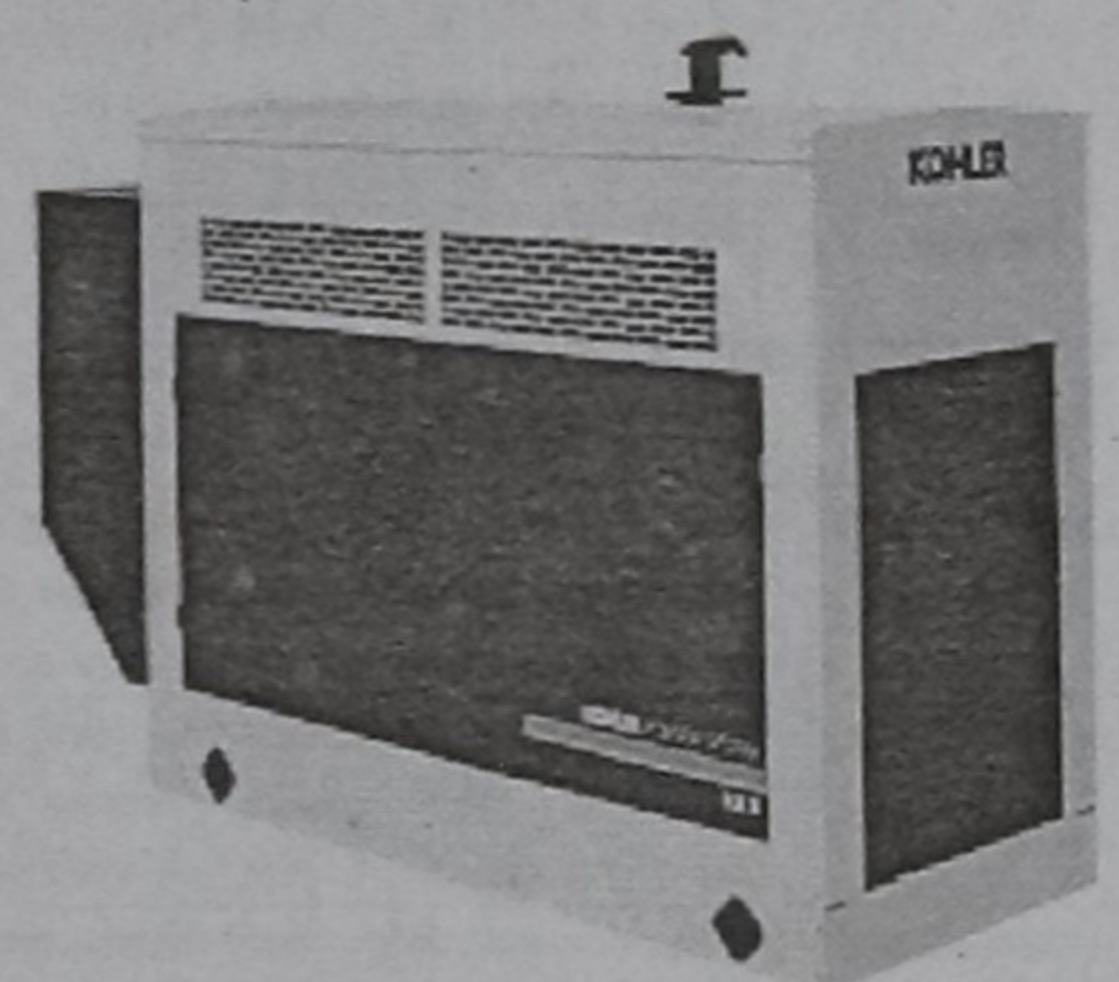
"During all these years he had never received a single visitor or even seen the open sky, sun or moon," the statement said.

"He, like other condemned prisoners, was locked in an overcrowded death cell for 23.5 hours a day, only allowed out for 30 minutes to stretch his legs."

Burney, a prominent rights activists who is part of a pre-election caretaker government, said President Pervez Musharraf had expressed "shock and disbelief" and agreed to grant Singh his freedom in coming days.

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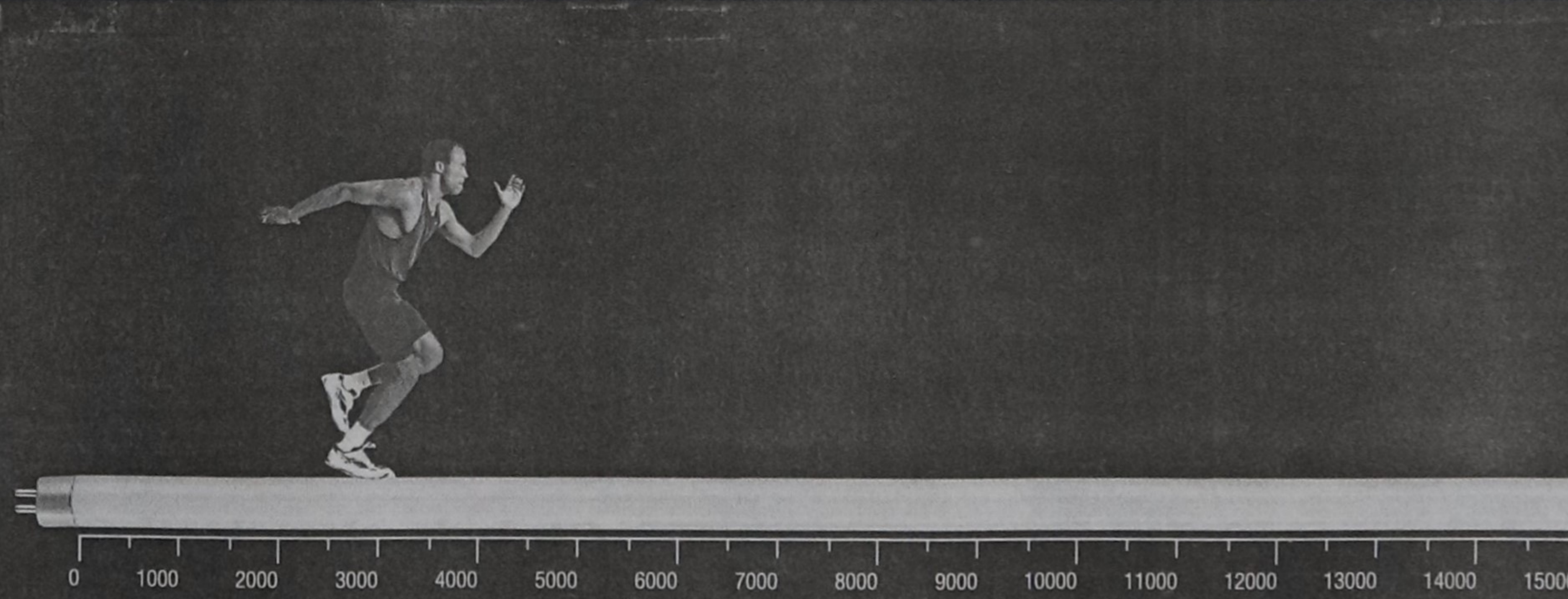
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