

Israel, Hamas agree to Gaza truce

6 Palestinians killed in Israeli airstrikes

AFP, Cairo/Gaza City

Israel and Palestinian militant groups including the Islamist Hamas movement which controls Gaza have agreed to a truce in and around the territory, the deal's Egyptian mediators said yesterday.

The first phase of the ceasefire, which is the fruit of months of tough negotiations, will go into effect from 0300 GMT on Thursday, a senior Egyptian official told state media.

The Palestinian and Israeli sides have accepted the first stage of a reciprocal and simultaneous period of calm, starting in the Gaza Strip, from 6 am on Thursday, the official

MENA news agency quoted the official as saying.

The truce announcement came after Israeli air raids killed six Palestinians in Gaza in a new day of violence in the territory, which has seen the lion's share of the 515 people killed in fighting since the revival of peace talks in November, according to an AFP count.

Five people were killed and several wounded in an air strike near Qarara village, near the southern city of Khan Yunis, according to Muawiyah Hassanein, the head of Gaza emergency services.

A sixth person was killed and five more wounded in two air strikes in

the nearby town of Deir al-Balah, hospital officials said.

"There were three aerial attacks... two of them were against vehicles carrying terror operatives and one of them was against terror operatives without a vehicle," an Israeli army spokeswoman said.

Egypt has been mediating indirect talks between Israel and the main Palestinian armed factions for months in a bid to secure a truce and lift a year-old Israeli blockade of the aid-dependent territory.

Israel has said it is willing to give the truce a chance, but stressed it was also readying its troops for a possible ground offensive aimed at ousting

Hamas from the agreement.

And a top military official on Tuesday warned ahead of the Egyptian announcement that such a ceasefire would have its limitations.

"If a truce is achieved with Hamas and the terrorist groups in the Gaza Strip, it would be temporary and fragile," said General Yossi Baidatz, who heads the military intelligence research division.

Hamas said the proposed truce would include the lifting of the blockade Israel imposed on Gaza and the opening of border crossings.

Israel has said such a truce must include a halt to the smuggling of weapons from Egypt.



Arab League Secretary General Amr Mussa gestures toward Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas during a meeting in Amman on Monday. Mussa blasted Israel's settlement policy in the West Bank and east Jerusalem, warning that it threatens Palestinian-Israeli talks and the Middle East peace process.

Bush, Musharraf least trusted leaders across the world: Poll

PTI, New York

Embattled Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf and his US counterpart George W Bush are among the world's least trusted leaders along with Iran's Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a new survey in 20 countries, including India, shows.

Musharraf has the poorest ratings around the world. Only in China, 37 per cent of the people feel that he inspires confidence as a leader, outweighing negative views (30 per cent), the poll conducted by WorldPublicOpinion.Org found.

Nigeria is divided over the Pakistani leader and the other 18 nations lean negative.

Just two countries, India and Nigeria give Bush a positive ratings while Thailand is divided. Sixteen of the 20 countries surveyed say they lack confidence in the US President. Only Musharraf is rated negatively in more nations. Bush also got the highest average percentage of negative ratings (67 per cent).

France plans return to Nato

AFP, Paris

President Nicolas Sarkozy yesterday launched a major overhaul of the French military, cutting back the armed forces, beefing up intelligence and setting a course for France's return to Nato command.

A leaner, more mobile and high-tech military will allow France to confront new threats, in particular terrorism which poses the greatest danger, Sarkozy said in an address

to some 3,000 officers in Paris.

Bringing France closer to the United States on defence, Sarkozy confirmed that France will soon return to Nato's integrated command, which it left in 1966 when Charles de Gaulle rejected US dominance of the alliance.

"Today, the most immediate threat is that of a terrorist attack", said the president in a defining speech as commander-in-chief.

"The threat is there, it is real and

we know that it can tomorrow take on a new form, even more serious, with nuclear, chemical and biological means," he said.

To face up to the threat, Sarkozy announced a "massive investment effort in intelligence" to make use of satellites, drones and other airborne surveillance equipment.

The investments will be offset by cuts in the armed forces, with the army, navy and air forces to be downsized to 225,000 troops, from

their current level of some 270,000.

Sarkozy stressed that France would remain "an independent ally" and keep its nuclear deterrent forces under strict national control when it re-joins Nato command, which officials have said is expected to take place in 2009.

"We can renew our relations with Nato without fearing for our independence and without the risk of being unwillingly dragged into a war," said Sarkozy.

While France is a member of the 26-member alliance, it is not part of the integrated command structure even though it participates in political decision-making bodies.

Rejoining the military command is seen mostly as a symbolic gesture that would entail the appointment of several French generals to Nato military headquarters and to the alliance's defence planning committee.

Indirect talks with Syria will continue Says Israeli official

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel and Syria concluded a second round of indirect peace talks under Turkish mediation on Monday and agreed to continue meeting on a regular basis, a senior Israeli official said.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's top advisors, Shalom Turjeman and Yoram Turbowitz, ended two days of discussions in Turkey which touched mainly on procedural issues, the official told AFP, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"The discussions were held in a positive and constructive atmosphere. The two sides reiterated their commitment to make progress in the talks and to meet on a regular basis," he said shortly after the talks were concluded.

He added that the teams set dates to meet twice again in the coming weeks "within the same

framework."

The Turkish foreign ministry said in a brief statement that the two sides held two days of talks in a "constructive and positive atmosphere" and that they had agreed to meet regularly.

According to the Israeli official, the Turkish mediators shuttled several times between the two hotels in Istanbul where the two negotiating teams sat.

The official hinted at the possibility of Olmert meeting Syrian President Bashar al-Assad during an international summit in Paris next month where President Nicolas Sarkozy will launch a new Mediterranean Union.

"The prime minister has repeatedly said he is willing to meet any Arab leader. The French have invited us to attend this meeting of Mediterranean leaders and we hope to attend it," the official said.

Khan denies selling advanced nuke blueprint

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan on Tuesday denied selling blueprints for an advanced nuclear weapon to Iran or North Korea, telling AFP that Western countries were to blame.

Khan's comments came a day after a former arms inspector said in a report that the United States and the UN atomic watchdog must be allowed to question Khan to learn if he sold the plans.

"This is all a lie, there is no truth in this. It is total bullshit," Khan told AFP by telephone from his Islamabad villa, where he has been kept under house arrest since confessing to proliferation activities in 2004.

"The Western countries are suppliers of the technology, they sold it, they are the proliferators... Why don't they publish juicy stories about Israel. There is not a single word about Israel on the nuclear issue," he added.

Astronomers discover clutch of 'super-Earths'

AFP, Nantes

European scientists on Monday said they had located five 'super-Earths', each of them between four and 30 times bigger than our planet, in a trio of distant solar systems.

The discovery suggests that at least one third of stars similar to our own Sun host these difficult-to-detect celestial bodies, multiplying previous estimates by five.

It also brings astronomers closer to finding planets outside our solar system, called exoplanets, that could potentially duplicate the conditions that gave rise to life on Earth.

"In a year or two, it is likely that we will find habitable planets circling small stars" such as the Sun, said Setphane Udry, a researcher at Switzerland's Geneva Observatory and a member of the team that made the

discovery.

Three of the five 'super-Earths' -- so-called because they are several times the mass of our own planet -- orbit a star known as HD 40307 some 42 light years away, the scientists reported.

One light-year is roughly equivalent to 9.5 trillion kilometres (6 trillion miles). They have 4.2, 6.7, and 9.4 times the mass of the Earth, and orbit their sun in periods of 4.3, 9.6, and 20.4 days, respectively.

The rapid orbits make the super-Earths easier to detect -- but it also means that they are probably gaseous balls of fire inhospitable to life as we know it.

The first exoplanet was detected in 1995, and less than 280 had been catalogued before today's findings, unveiled at an astronomy conference in Nantes, France.

NEWS ANALYSIS Sadr reforms movement to consolidate power

AFP, Baghdad

A decision by Iraq's firebrand cleric Moqtada al-Sadr to boycott provincial elections and restructure his militia aims to reform his powerful Shia movement and consolidate power, analysts said.

The move by the hardline politician aims to bide his time in a multi-pronged strategy to pool the political and military firepower to challenge his Shia political rivals, they said.

Sadr, with his fiercely anti-American stand and his militia's past record in battle, announced on Sunday that he would replace his 60,000-strong Mahdi Army with a leaner force to target the US-led occupation.

Other members of the militia will refocus their work on cultural and religious issues in the poverty-stricken slums of central and southern Iraq, Sadr's main power base.

"This seems to be another attempt to assert control by rebuilding his organisation top-down," said Reidar Visser, editor of the Iraq-specialised website www.historyia.org.

"If he acquires better control of his militia, his political movement will have considerable potential for electoral support."

The timing of Sadr's announcement coincides with an expected Iraqi and US-backed military assault this Thursday in the southern Shia province of Maysan and its capital Amara.

His orders through top aides to fighters to avoid confronting the Iraqi troops backed by US forces in the Shia stronghold is also seen as an attempt to avoid being seen as the one perpetuating violence in the country.

While the black-bearded cleric is hugely popular, many Iraqis have also grown disillusioned with him after the inter-sectarian violence that erupted in 2006, three years after US-led forces toppled

Saddam Hussein.

"His strategy since early 2007 has been to avoid direct confrontation with US and government forces," said Joost Hiltermann, Middle East director of International Crisis Group, a private think-tank.

"He has much to lose and little to gain from seeking an all-out fight when he knows the Americans will leave sooner rather than later, and that he will be in a better position to face off with his rivals," especially the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council of Sheikh Abdel Aziz al-Hakim.

Since last August, Sadr has ordered a freeze on his militia's activities, which earned plaudits from the US military.

Although fierce fighting broke out in March between his fighters and security forces in Baghdad and other Shia areas, US commanders avoided blaming Sadr directly, instead pointing the finger at renegade Mahdi Army militants.

"The loose elements that ignore his command gave his movement a bad reputation. He'd rather be rid of them, and if the US and Iraqi government will help him in achieving this, so much the better," Hiltermann said.

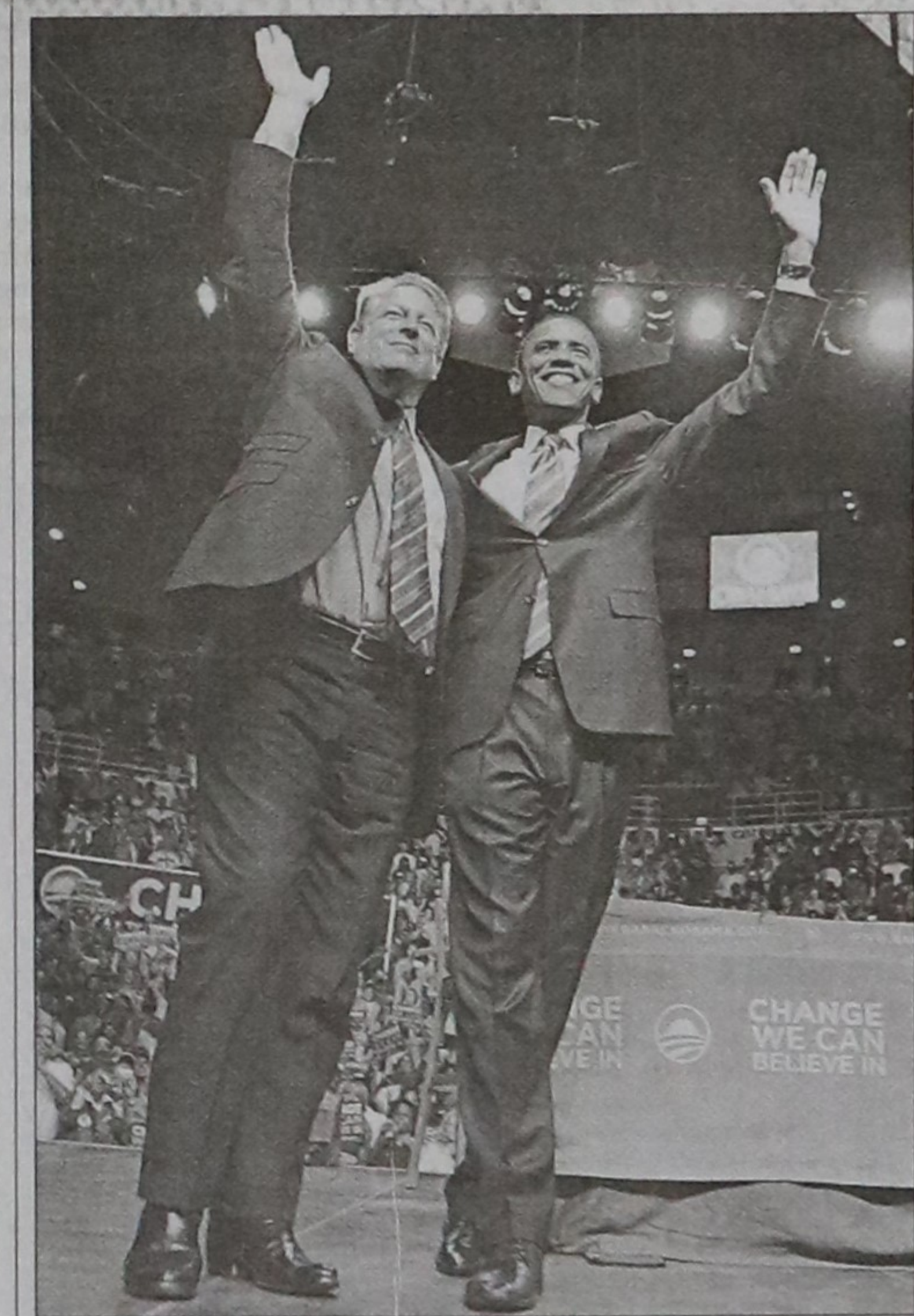
Meanwhile, analysts said that Sadr's move not to contest the elections allows him to retain his military wing but and at the same time to influence the political process via independent candidates.

After launching a crackdown on the militia in the main southern port city and oil hub of Basra in March, Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki vowed to ban any political party with militias from participating in the provincial elections.

Iraq is due to hold local elections on October 1 in its 18 provinces, a key benchmark set by Washington to stabilise the violence-wracked country by giving more power to local councils, especially for economic projects.



This artist's impression by the European Organisation for Astronomical Research in the Southern Hemisphere (ESO) website shows a trio of super-Earths discovered by a European team. European scientists on Monday said they had located five 'super-Earths', each of them between four and 30 times bigger than our planet, in a trio of distant solar systems.



Democratic presidential candidate Sen Barack Obama (D-IL) (R) and former US vice president Al Gore appear on stage together after Gore endorsed him at a rally at Joe Louis Arena on Monday in Detroit, Michigan.

Obama plans pre-polls trip to Iraq, Afghanistan

AFP, Washington

Democrat Barack Obama, bidding to shut down scornful attacks on his White House credentials by Republican rival John McCain, said Monday he plans a pre-election trip to Iraq and Afghanistan.

Senator Obama, newly endorsed by former vice president Al Gore, also went after McCain on the economy as the candidates intensified a war of words on the long march to November's vote.

"As I've said, I'm interested in visiting Iraq and Afghanistan before the election," said Obama, who has been vilified by McCain for visiting Iraq only once, in January 2006.

Senator McCain, who has been to Iraq eight times, said he had no doubt that the US military "surge" was working and that Obama's plans to pull most combat troops out of the troubled nation would trigger "chaos and genocide."

"I am convinced that we are on the path to victory. And that victory means Americans come home, but they come home with honor in victory, not in defeat," McCain told reporters in Virginia.

Obama, who has attacked McCain's trips as glorified photo opportunities, argues the real front of the "war on terror" is Afghanistan and that the US involvement in Iraq has been a diplomatic and financial disaster.

Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh			
Headquarter, Kurmitola, Dhaka			
Invitation for Tenders			
1. Ministry/Division	Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism.		
2. Agency	Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh.		
3. Procuring entity name	The Chief Engineer, CAAB, HQ.		
4. Invitation for	Supply of CCR for Runway Lighting System at Zia International Airport, Kurmitola, Dhaka.		
5. Invitation Ref No & date	CAAB/CEW-569(E/M)/Capital/(P-9)(KA)/1918, dt 11-6-2008.		
6. Procurement method	Open tendering method.		
7. Budget and source of fund	Available from CAAB own fund.		
8. Tender package No.	No. 81/CAAB/E-M-III(O&M)/2007-2008.		
9. Tender package name	Supply of CCR for Runway Lighting System at Zia International Airport, Kurmitola, Dhaka.		
10. Tender last selling date	15-07-2008 up to 1700 hrs.		
11. Tender closing date & time	17-07-2008 at 1200 hrs.		
12. Tender opening date & time	17-07-2008 at 1230 hrs.		
13. Name & address of the office(s)			
- Selling tender document (principal)	The Chief Engineer, CAAB, HQ, Kurmitola, Dhaka.		
- Selling tender document (others)	i) Superintendent Engineer, E/M Circle, CAAB, Kurmitola, Dhaka. ii) Director, CEMSU, CAAB, Kurmitola, Dhaka. iii) Executive Engineer, E/M Division-II, CAAB, Kurmitola, Dhaka. iv) PA to Member (O&P), HQ, CAAB, Kurmitola, Dhaka. v) PA to Member (Finance), HQ, CAAB, Kurmitola, Dhaka. vi) PA to Director, ZIA, CAAB, Kurmitola, Dhaka.		
14. Receiving tender document	The Chief Engineer, CAAB, HQ, Kurmitola, Dhaka.		
15. Opening tender document	The Chief Engineer, CAAB, HQ, Kurmitola, Dhaka.		
16. Eligibility of tenderer	"A" class CAAB enlisted E/M contractors/bonafide E/M contractors enlisted in other gov't/semi-gov't/autonomous department having valid ABC licence, 5 years experience as contractor, 16.00 lac taka work experience in E/M/similar nature of works in a single work order at least within last 5 (five) years supported by completion certificate from any gov't/semi-gov't/autonomous department.		
17. Brief description of goods or works	Supply of CCR for Runway Lighting System at Zia International Airport, Kurmitola, Dhaka		
18. Brief description of related services	1. 15 KW CCR Unit. 2. 10 KW CCR Unit.		
19. Price of the tender document (Tk)	Tk. 1000/- (one thousand) only (non-refundable).		
20. Lot			
No	Location	Tender security amount (Tk)	Completion time in days/weeks/ months
01.	Zia International Airport, Kurmitola, Dhaka.	Tk. 1,20,000/-	90 (ninety) days.
21. The procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject all tenders or part thereof.			
22. Special instruction	In case of any unavoidable circumstances if the transport & communication systems are totally disrupted on the last date of receiving & opening of the tender, the tender will be received & opened on the next office day. Other terms & conditions of the tender will remain unchanged.		
23. Details of procuring entity & official inviting tender	Harunur Rashid Bhuiyan Chief Engineer (C/C) Civil Aviation Authority, HQ, Dhaka		
CAAB/PR-88/2008/390 Date: 12-6-2008 GD-2853			

Invitation To Bid (ITB)

Procurement of Retrofit tools and kits for the National ODS Phase-out Plan Component

UNDP Bangladesh

Sealed Bids are invited for The National ODS Phase-out Plan - UNDP Component, under Department of Environment is in the process of procuring retrofit tools and kits from authorized/certified vendors with the detailed specification and price.

Submission of Bid: The envelope should state "Invitation to Bid for procurement of retrofit tools and kits under the project National Phase-out Plan - UNDP Component" and should be marked as "Confidential" and addressed to the UNDP Business Center, IDB Bhaban (14th Floor), Begum Rokeya Sharani, Agargaon, Dhaka-1207. The selection of Bids will be done based on the UNDP procurement rules and regulations and only the successful bidder(s) will be contacted. However, UNDP, Dhaka reserves the right to accept or reject any bid(s) without assigning any reasons whatsoever.

The detailed bid documents are available on the website: http://www.undp.org.bd/proc_more.php. Hardcopy of specifications are also available at the Procurement Cluster of UNDP, Dhaka. Bids must be submitted before 16:00 hrs on 26 June, 2008.