

Nobel laureate Ebadi warns West against war on Iran

AFP, Tehran

Nobel Peace Prize winner Shirin Ebadi warned the West yesterday against launching a military attack against Iran or imposing economic sanctions over its contested nuclear programme.

"We not only are against military action on Iran but are also against economic sanctions," Ebadi said in a speech in Tehran.

"They would spread destitution in Iran and we will do our best to prevent this disaster occurring," the 2003 Nobel peace prize winner said, according to a transcript of her speech.

Her address marked the formation of a "National Peace Council" of around 70 dissident Iranian politicians, social activists and intellectuals.

The list of people who signed on as founding members of the council included figures like Ibrahim Yazdi, head of the outlawed but tolerated Freedom Movement and Hashem Aghajari, who was sentenced to death but pardoned for apostasy.

Ex-Philippines lawmaker arrested in new coup plot: Police

AFP, Manila

A former high profile Philippines lawmaker and four retired police and military officers have been arrested for allegedly plotting to overthrow President Gloria Arroyo, police said yesterday.

"We are continuing the investigation and are conducting follow-up operations to find out who (else) is involved in the new coup plot," national police chief Avelino Razon said on national television.

Police arrested Homobono Adaza, a legislator during the time of dictator Ferdinand Marcos, and the four on Wednesday, after they allegedly tried to blackmail a Japanese businessman for four million dollars to finance the coup.

Razon said in a statement Thursday that police were also tracking a retired military colonel implicated in the plot. Another army colonel was among those already arrested.

"They said the Japanese (businessman) has to come up with four million dollars otherwise they will kill two Filipinos and pin the blame on my client," said Raymond Fortun, lawyer for the unnamed businessman.

Thai court blocks Thaksin's trip to China, Britain

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's Supreme Court has denied ousted premier Thaksin Shinawatra permission to travel to China and Britain as his first corruption case is set to go to trial, an official said yesterday.

Thaksin was required to surrender his passport after he was arraigned on corruption charges, but the courts so far have regularly granted him permission to travel overseas.

He has made several trips to Britain, where he owns the Manchester City Premier League football club, while also travelling around Asia.

But the Supreme Court on June 24 rejected a request to visit China and Britain, saying Thaksin had not provided enough reason to justify his travels.

"The judge ruled that while the court is in the process of deliberations, receiving testimony and other evidence, his request for travel was not justified," a court official said, in the first public comments on the issue.



People stand outside the destroyed headquarters of the ruling Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party in Ulan Bator yesterday, after the deadly riots on July 1. The violence ended in deaths of five people, with police firing tear gas and rubber bullets to contain around 8,000 protesters before soldiers were called out.

India to push ahead with nuke deal

AFP, New Delhi

India's ruling Congress party has decided to press ahead with a nuclear energy deal with the United States despite threats by its left-wing allies to bring down the coalition, officials said yesterday.

Faced with losing its majority in parliament because of communist opposition to the pact, the Congress party of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has been trying to strike a deal with other parties that would keep it in office.

Indian media said the socialist Samajwadi Party (SP), from the key northern state of Uttar Pradesh and which has 39 MPs in the 545-member national parliament, has signalled a deal on reshaping the coalition was close.

"We are talking to a number of parties including the Samajwadi Party to secure support," said a senior Congress leader who wished to remain unnamed.

"The meeting between SP leaders and the national security advisor yesterday (Wednesday) was part of this. We are going ahead with the deal," he said.

Though the Samajwadi Party did not offer a clear pledge of support to Singh's administration on Wednesday, it was expected to make a formal announcement after consultations Thursday.

The nuclear deal -- agreed in principle in 2005 -- would allow India to buy atomic power plants and technology despite not signing international non-proliferation pacts.

Prime Minister Singh argues the pact is crucial for India's energy security.

Tensions between Singh and the communists have been running high for months, and the likelihood of early elections -- ahead of May 2009 as scheduled -- has been seen as increasing after a crisis meeting last week between Congress and the left.

The United States has been pressing India to move on the deal before the end of President George W. Bush's tenure, warning the pact may not survive in its current form under the next administration.

New Delhi still needs to negotiate an accord with the International Atomic Energy

Agency to allow inspections of its atomic plants and earn a waiver from the 45-nation Nuclear Suppliers Group before it can enter the global nuclear trade.

Political analysts predicted Congress would be able to muster the numbers to survive and carry the pact forward besides putting off early polls.

"The SP has been saying the main challenge is to keep communal forces at bay," said political analyst and author Rasheed Kidwai.

"This means they would like to ensure that the Congress government survives and keep the (opposition Hindu nationalist) Bharatiya Janata Party out. Also, they asked the prime minister to clarify some issues about the deal, which has been done."

Columnist Neeraj Choudhury said the move by Congress to court groups like the Samajwadi Party underlined the party's determination to push through the deal.

"It also shows that Congress party chief Sonia Gandhi is a pragmatic politician" who can work out alliances with former rivals, she said.

Pakistan should focus on security, not Musharraf

Boucher tells press in Islamabad. Sharif blasts remarks of the top US official

AP, Islamabad

Pakistan should focus more on critical issues, such as security problems, rising food costs and power shortages, and less on the future of embattled President Pervez Musharraf, a top US diplomat said Wednesday.

Assistant Secretary of State Richard Boucher also insisted that the US supports the new ruling coalition which appears at risk of unraveling but expressed only cautious support for its efforts to end militancy along its border with Afghanistan through peace deals.

"Frankly, President Musharraf is not the issue right now," Boucher told reporters who persisted in asking about the future of the longtime US ally.

"This is not the problem that Pakistan faces right now," Boucher said. "The problem that Pakistani people face are that there's dangers of bombings and suicide bombers.

There's rising food prices. There's energy difficulties. Their electricity is being cut off through load shedding."

It was a message Boucher said he tried to get across to Pakistan's new ruling coalition, which is packed with foes of Musharraf who came to power after winning February elections. They have called for the president to step down or face possible impeachment.

Musharraf is deeply unpopular in Pakistan. A recent poll found 73 percent of Pakistanis had an unfavorable view of the president. Critics also challenge the legitimacy of his re-election in a vote last year by the outgoing Parliament, which was stacked with his supporters.

Yet Boucher's comments could reflect US concern about Pakistan's ability to aid in the fight against terrorism as the new civilian administration grapples with

an economic crisis and its own internal disputes.

PTI adds: In an angry rebuke to the US, former premier Nawaz Sharif yesterday said his country did not need any foreign advice over handling Pervez Musharraf after a top American official contended that the fate of the President was not the most pressing issue confronting Pakistan.

"Pakistan will take decisions on its own. What is to be done with an unconstitutional President is Pakistan's internal matter. There is no need for any foreign advice," Sharif told reporters at Islamabad airport shortly after his arrival here from Lahore yesterday morning.

Sharif, the chief of the PML-N which is a key partner in the ruling coalition led by the Pakistan People's Party, criticized the operation launched by security forces against militants in the tribal region.

Correction centres not much of help

FROM PAGE 16

Since their establishment, months he had fallen into bad company again and was arrested for killing a man with a machete.

Ratan is in Dhaka Central Jail while he is tried for hacking a man to death.

That was in 2004. Ratan is in Dhaka Central Jail now while he is tried for the killing.

The percentage of juveniles slipping back to committing offences could not be determined as neither the KUKs nor the department of social services, who run the KUKs, have any mechanism to follow up on the juveniles out of the centres.

The KUK at Tongi, with a capacity for 200 juveniles, was set up in 1978, the centre at Jessore was set up in 1992 and the centre at Konabari in Gazipur -- only for girls -- in 2002. The latter two centres can accommodate 150 juveniles each.

Until 2004 the centres were known as correction centres but are now known as development centres.

per course and they are often not skilled enough to deal with such large groups.

As a result youngsters, once out of the centres, find themselves unable to return to a normal life. Without proper employment to support themselves, they stray back to their old lives easily, experts say.

Some insiders suggest making the courses at the centres more timely and pragmatic. They suggest increasing technical facilities so that inmates of the centres can earn employable skills like training on repairing electric appliances like cell phone, radio or television sets.

Another suggestion is that youngster be provided with some funds at the end of their stint at a centre so that they can set up their own small businesses.

Staff shortage is another complaint at the centres. At the Tongi KUK only 42 out of the 57 posts have been filled. Two of the most important posts of "home parents"

-- who would act like foster parents during the youngsters' stay at the centre -- remain vacant.

Sources say the quality of food at the centres is low and insufficient, vocational training programmes do not provide certificates of qualification and the equipment is inadequate.

While the KUKs aim to provide an individual case management approach, they do not have adequately trained and qualified staff to fulfil this function. The emphasis remains on confinement, rather than rehabilitation.

Corporal punishment is officially sanctioned under the Children Rules, which permit "caneing not exceeding ten strikes" as a punishment for violating any one of the 30 stipulated rules of conduct.

Experts working with juveniles and children have been asking for long that these facilities are improved to save the children from, more often than not, a life of crime.

Bush to send more troops to Afghanistan

AP, Washington

Grappling with a record death toll in an overshadowed war, President Bush promised yesterday to send more US troops into Afghanistan by year's end.

He conceded that June was a "tough month" in the nearly seven-year-old war.

In fact, it was the deadliest month for U.S. troops in Afghanistan since the conflict began.

"One reason why there have been more deaths is because our troops are taking the fight to a tough enemy, an enemy who doesn't like our presence there because they don't like the idea of America denying safe haven (to terrorists)," Bush told reporters. "Of course there's going to be resistance."

Bush said it was a tough month too for the Taliban. But the once-toppled Islamist regime in

Afghanistan has now rebounded with deadly force.

More U.S. and NATO troops have died in the past two months in Afghanistan than in Iraq, a place with triple the number of U.S. and coalition forces.

In June, 28 U.S. troops died in Afghanistan. That was the highest monthly total of the entire war, which began in October 2001.

For the full U.S.-led coalition in Afghanistan the death toll was 46, also the highest of the war.

Bush confronted the grim direction of the Afghanistan conflict during a sun-splashed Rose Garden appearance. The president used the event to tout his agenda for an upcoming Group of Eight meeting in Japan with world leaders, then addressed Iran, climate change and gasoline prices in a short Q&A session with reporters.

The Pentagon predicts the pace of attacks in Afghanistan by a resur-

gent Taliban is likely to rise this year, despite U.S.-led efforts to capture key leaders.

"We're going to increase troops by 2009," Bush said, without offering details about exactly when or how many.

It amounted to a reiteration of a promised buildup of U.S. troops in Afghanistan by Bush. He said coalition forces have doubled in size over two years, and pledged that the twin strategy of fighting extremists and supporting Afghanistan's civil development "is going to work."

The Pentagon's top military officer said Wednesday that if security continues to improve in Iraq he is hopeful he will begin to have troops available to shift to Afghanistan by the end of this year. Adm. Mike Mullen, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said more troops are essential to stem the violence.

"The Taliban and their supporters have, without question, grown more effective and more aggressive in recent weeks, and as the casualty figures clearly demonstrate," Mullen said. He added that "there's no easy solution, and there will be no quick fix."

In terms of public attention, the war in Afghanistan has been obscured by the far costlier and deadlier one in Iraq.

But it is a matter of consensus within the Bush administration, and between the U.S. and key allies, that there are far too few troops in Afghanistan to fight the accelerating Taliban and to train Afghan soldiers and police.

Overall, roughly 32,000 U.S. troops are in Afghanistan, including 14,000 serving with NATO forces and 18,000 conducting training and counterinsurgency.

That's the largest U.S. presence since the war began.

7,000 spared from gallows in Pakistan

BBC NEWS, Karachi

The Pakistani cabinet has approved a proposal to commute the sentences of thousands of prisoners on death row to life imprisonment, officials say.

The move will benefit some 7,000 prisoners condemned to death in various cases, they say.

It is still not clear if prisoners sentenced under drugs, terrorism or spying charges would also benefit.

The commutations will only come into effect after final approval by President Pervez Musharraf.

In 2002, the government headed by Mr Musharraf granted a similar commutation to juvenile prisoners on death row.

The latest round of commutations was first announced by Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani on 25 June, but the cabinet approved the proposal only on Wednesday.

Briefing the press after the cabinet meeting, Information Minister Sherry Rehman said the decision would benefit about 7,000 prisoners sentenced to die.

It is not clear whether the cabinet decision will benefit Sarajit Singh, an Indian man on death row in Pakistan for spying and carrying out bomb attacks.

His case has commanded international attention, with India repeatedly calling for his life to be spared.

Earlier, an adviser to the prime minister on home affairs indicated the decision may exclude certain categories of prisoners, such as those sentenced in cases involving drugs and terrorism.

Ms Rehman was not available to clarify the cabinet's position on the categories of prisoners who will remain on death row.

Rain cripples city life

FROM PAGE 1

They were inundated as the drainage system was clogged with rubbish deposited by the flow of water.

The sufferings of the commuters worsened in places where road digging works of different utility service providers severely interrupted smooth vehicular movement.

The roads including and around Gabtoli, Mohakhali and Sayedabad intercity bus terminals, major intersections at Jatrabari, Bijay Sarani, Songargaon Hotel, Bangla Motor, Shahbagh, New Market, Matshaya Bhaban, Motijheel, Shantinagar and Mirpur Road and many streets of Old Dhaka saw unending traffic jams.

"It took me almost three hours to come to Karwan Bazar from Uttara," said Monirajobholder of Karwan Bazar.

Another service holder, Salma, said that it took her over two hours to get to Karwan Bazar from Shahbagh at around 2:00 in the afternoon.

Badda, Demra, Madartek, Manda, Shantinagar, Trimohoni, Motijheel, Shantinagar, Fakirapoo, Shonargaon Road, Monipuripara, Kazipara, Mirpur-10, Pallabi, Mohammadpur, Manik Mia Avenue, parts of old town and DND areas were the worst affected in water-logging, which is a common sight even in moderate rainfall for locals living there.

Managing director of Dhaka WASA Raihanul Abedin said they have taken different initiatives to tackle the water logging but that it takes time to drain-out the clogged water during heavy pours.

"We have taken up a plan to set up 145 temporary pumps at different places in the city and 73 have already been set up," he said.

Three permanent pumps of WASA and Dhaka Water Development Board are also active at Narinda, Kollayapur and at Goran-Chatbari, he said.

13 die in landslides

FROM PAGE 1

A quarter of an hour after the landslide, another section of the same hill slid on to the house of Abu Tayab at Fakirpura killing five people including him and his three children.

The victims are Abu Tayab, his daughters Rehana Akter, 10, and Hamida Begum, 8, his son Mazid Alam, 6, and a relative of theirs Petan Ali, 40, who was staying at the house on a visit.

However, Tayab's wife Fatema Begum escaped death only to bear the pain of losing her whole family.

Police with the help of locals recovered the bodies.

Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Altaf Hossain Chowdhury, Officer-in-Charge (OC) of local police station Jasim Uddin and Tefnaf Upazila (Sadar) Union Parishad Chairman Zafar Ahmed rushed to the spot and made arrangement for burial of the bodies, sources claimed.

Upazila administration started evacuating around 200 families living near the hills in Dumperang and Fakirpura as a precaution.

When contacted UNO Altaf said they were making announcement through loudspeakers asking people to leave the place within 24 hours. "However, the evacuation was being seriously hampered due to torrential rain,"

headed.

Asked about rehabilitation, the UNO told The Daily Star that the upazila administration was asking people to move to safer places. "After that we would rehabilitate them on government land where they would be allowed to stay in makeshift homes until they can return to their homes after the monsoon."

Deputy Commissioner Sajjadul Alam of Cox's Bazar also visited the spot in the afternoon.

In Runkha Barabell of Ukhia upazila in Cox's Bazar, a wall collapsed on Sarika Begum, 4, killing her on the spot.

Meanwhile, two people drowned in surging water in Cox's Bazar upazila. One of them was identified as Abul Kashem, 35, of South Mamunpara in Khurshulch while the identity of the other victim could not be known.

GOVT MOVE

The food and disaster management ministry sent Tk 5 lakh for distribution among the victims. Families of the nine dead in landslide already got Tk 4,000 for each victim while families of each of the other victims would get Tk 1,500.

The ministry also sent Tk 1 lakh for building houses and 50 tonnes of rice for distribution among the affected people.

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