

US economy in danger: Bush

Calls for talks with Obama, McCain

AFP, Washington

Warning "our entire economy is in danger," US President George W Bush has called for unprecedented crisis talks with White House rivals John McCain and Barack Obama and congressional leaders.

Bush announced the summit in a prime-time televised speech Wednesday seeking public support for his 700-billion-dollar Wall Street rescue plan and to pile pressure on angry lawmakers who declared the shock proposal dead on arrival.

"We're in the midst of a serious financial crisis," Bush said in his 13-minute speech from the White House.

"Without immediate action by Congress, America could slip into a financial panic," the vastly unpopular president said. "Ultimately, our country could experience a long and painful recession."

Six weeks before US elections and four months before he hands the battered US economy to a new steward, Bush said inaction could wipe out banks, threaten retirement nest eggs, send home values into freefall, foreclose skyrocketing and create millions of new jobless.

"We must not let this happen," urged the president, who said a rare "spirit of cooperation" in Washington in the face of the crisis had led him to invite McCain, Obama, and top House and Senate leaders of both parties to the White House.

Bush had invited Obama in a personal telephone call 90 minutes before his speech, the White House said. The Democrat's chief spokesman, Bill Burton, confirmed in a statement that the Illinois senator would attend.

Obama has worked all week with top lawmakers, Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson, and Federal Reserve chairman Ben Bernanke and "will continue to work in a bipartisan spirit and do whatever is necessary to come up with a final solution," said Burton.

"We will discuss the progress we have made to improve the administration's deeply flawed plan to address this unprecedented crisis," Democratic Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid said in a statement.

"As I have said throughout, tomorrow's meeting and future deliberations must be focused on solutions, not photo ops," Reid said,

after other Democrats mocked McCain's decision to suspend his campaign over the crisis as a gimmick.

Opinion polls show the US public is angry at Wall Street but deeply divided about a remedy, with many ready to blame Bush and his Republican party -- which itself has fissured over the plan amid fierce objections from conservatives.

They have expressed dismay over the massive government involvement in the economy, while Bush's Democratic foes have pushed for more government oversight and stronger consumer protections, and both sides have balked at the price tag.

Speaking to his angry allies, Bush explained: "I faced a choice, to step in with dramatic government action or to stand back and allow the irresponsible actions of some to undermine the financial security of all."

Addressing suspicious Democrats, he promised that the plan must ensure that reckless executives do not reap a "windfall" from taxpayer funds.

He also said he recognized the package would "present a tough vote for many members of Congress," acknowledging "it is difficult to pass a bill that commits so much of the taxpayers' hard-earned money."

But lawmakers "must ensure that efforts to regulate Wall Street do not end up hampering our economy's ability to grow," he warned.

It was not clear how much impact what is arguably the president's most potent political weapon -- the ability to command national attention -- would have with just four months left in his term.

"At this point, there are real doubts about the president's ability to be seen as a trusted and credible source on the economy by the American public," a conservative Republican congressional aide told AFP on condition of anonymity.

But public remarks from all sides suggested that Bush could count on a consensus that inaction could trigger a global financial meltdown.

"Now is a time to come together -- Democrats and Republicans -- in a spirit of cooperation for the sake of the American people," McCain and Obama said in an unusual joint statement.

BDR shuts

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1 lakh city dwellers each day. They worked six days in a week, he added.

They have sold about 1.30 lakh tonnes of rice since the operation was launched, he said, adding that 2000 tonnes of pulses and 3500 tonnes of edible oil had been sold at the outlets across the country.

They have sold essential commodities worth about Tk 400 crore in the past one and a half year.

The BDR Sector Commander, however, urged the government to strengthen the market monitoring system to check the trend of price hike of essentials.

He suggested introducing cooperative markets in upazila, zila and city (if necessary) levels where the farmers can sell their goods directly.

"The main responsibility of the BDR is to ensure border security and we will attach priority to this effect," he said, adding, BDR feels no necessity to run the outlets as the prices of essentials have already begun to plummet in the markets across the country.

The income and expenditure from the outlets are equal as the money they had earned by selling commodities was spent on construction of the outlets and transportation, he said.

Col Mujibul said they had to run their outlets being haunted by loss and amid inadequate storage and wastage of commodities. "We have been able to create a positive impact on the market through the fair price outlets," he boasted.

He said that BDR asked the Dhaka City Corporation to take responsibility of the open markets in the city, which are also running under the project of the Operation Dal Bhat.

The BDR, however, was yet to take any decision regarding the BDR shops in the city, as these shops are not running under the operation, he said.

Visiting different outlets in the capital, The Daily Star found that BDR members had already removed some portions of their outlets as a preparation to round off their outlets.

3 criminals

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rounds of bullet from the scene.

Our Magura correspondent adds: The police arrested Raju at his residence at Chaklapara in the town at about 3:20 am.

Following his confessions, police took him to a place near Char Muraridaha village to recover illegal arms.

When the policemen reached the spot, Raju's accomplices fired shots at them prompting the law enforcers to retaliate, said a police official.

Raju was killed in crossfire while his cohorts managed to flee, he said adding that a police constable was also injured in the incident.

Police said Raju was wanted in a number of cases.

Jumatul Wida

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capital. Thousands of Muslim devotees will take part in the congregation and seek blessing of Allah for peace of the departed souls of their near and dear ones and also for the peace and prosperity of the Muslim Ummah.

"We have achieved two important goals -- announcement of the election schedules and assurance of the political parties to take part in the polls," he said, adding all uncertainty over elections has been removed with these decisions.

Regarding post-election stability, he said he was planning to hold an all-party dialogue to reach an understanding about the matter.

He said the government is also working to create a level-playing field for all the parties in the elections.

Earlier, barrister Rafique, counsel for both Hasina and Khaleda, initiated the move to organise a meeting between the two leaders at a neutral venue. Later the interim administration requested him to persuade them to sit for talks with the government.

Rafique also talked to the two former prime ministers over telephone and both responded positively to holding the talks.

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Barapukuria graft case

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The accused former ministers of BNP are M Saifur Rahman, Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, M Shamsul Islam, MK Anwar, barrister Aminul Haque, Altaf Hossain Choudhury, and AKM Mosharraf Hossain.

Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojahid and Motiur Rahman Nizami are the accused ex-ministers of Jamaat.

Of the former ministers, nine were members of the cabinet purchase committee.

The other five accused are former acting secretary to the energy and mineral resources ministry Nazrul Islam, former Petrobangla chairman SR Osmani, former Petrobangla director Mainul Ahsan, former managing director of Barapukuria Coal Mine Company Ltd (BCMCL) Sirajul Islam and Hosal Group Chairman Moazzem Hossain.

In the case filed with Shabbagh Police Station, the 16 were accused of causing a loss of over Tk 158.71 crore to the public exchequer by awarding the production, management and maintenance contract to Chinese company CMC abusing their power.

ACC Assistant Director Shamsul Alam filed the case.

Sources in the ACC said the high-profile politicians are charged with misappropriation government money and abusing power for personal gains.

THE CASE Shandong Ludi Consortium was adjudged the lowest bidder in the international tender floated to employ a contractor for production, management and maintenance of Barapukuria coalmine in Dinajpur.

Of the three bidders, Suju Coal Mining Group Consortium was the second lowest bidder while China National Machinery Import and Export Corporation (CMC) consortium was the highest.

Following recommendation of the government committee on purchase and approval of the prime minister, a deed for the work worth Tk 335.08 crore was signed between the Barapukuria Coal Mining Company Ltd and Shandong Ludi Consortium on April 24, 2004.

Instead of submitting bank guarantee and performance guarantee as per the rules, Shandong came up with conditions irrelevant to the deed. Among others, they proposed raising the contract value.

Even though legally there was no room for allowing anything beyond the deed, the energy and mineral resources ministry suggested that Petrobangla examines the proposals of Shandong, which caused delays.

The government did not go for a re-tender on grounds that there was not enough time for that.

Following manoeuvrings in favour of CMC, it cut a deal with the

government on June 4, 2005, 14 months after the deal with Shandong.

According to tender rules and Public Procurement Regulations 2003, the second lowest bidder, in this case Suju, was supposed to be given the job. But the deal went to CMC whose offer was over Tk 158 crore higher than Shandong's.

Suju's bid was cancelled for not renewing its bid bond but the company was later shown as an associate of CMC in the contract.

Khaleda Zia has been included as the accused as she was responsible for the ministry in question and any decision was supposed to be taken with her full knowledge.

Besides, the FIR says that she approved the cabinet purchase committee's proposal without considering the difference of over Tk 158 crore between the highest and lowest bidders and ignoring prospect of a re-tender.

Hosal Group did not participate in the bidding directly, they were the local agents of both the lowest and highest bidding companies. In fact, the Chinese companies worked in collaboration with each other throughout the tender and Hosal Group Chairman Moazzem Hossain, who was their common chairman, used his connections to pull off the deal, the FIR read.

World leaders, NGOs join hands to battle global poverty

AFP, United Nations

World leaders join hands with top officials from the private sector, foundations and civil society yesterday to breathe new life into the flagging battle against global poverty.

The poverty summit, held amid heightened concern about the negative impact of the global financial crisis, is hosted by UN chief Ban Ki-moon and Nicaragua's Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, the current president of the 192-member UN General Assembly.

It features a plenary session at UN headquarters along with 40 partner events around New York focusing on malaria control, education, water and sanitation for all, gender equality and food security.

Among those taking part are British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, his Chinese counterpart Wen Jiabao, Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, President Paul Kagame of Rwanda, World Health Organisation head Margaret Chan, World Bank President Robert Zoellick and U2 singer and global anti-poverty campaigner Bono.

Reformist Hafiz

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the reform issues raised following her arrest on September 3 last year and about the "mastermind" behind the initiative.

Khaleda also instructed Hafiz, known as a pro-reform leader, to engage in party activities with new inspiration forgetting the wrongs of the past.

During the half-an-hour meeting Khaleda talked about the reunification process of the party and said BNP had to pay a lot and it is time the wrongs were mended.

She also instructed Hafiz to work united and make preparations for the upcoming parliamentary election.

Hafiz told the party chief that many former lawmakers known as pro-reformist want to meet her. Khaleda responded positively saying, she would talk to them at a convenient time.

Hafiz had supported the reform proposals of Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan even before Khaleda's arrest. He was made the party acting secretary general at a controversial meeting of the BNP standing committee held at former finance minister Saifur Rahman's residence on October 29, 2007.

Meanwhile, BNP Joint Secretary Goyeshwar Chandra Roy yesterday said the BNP chairperson is surrounded by flatterers and she will have to be rid of them.

The BNP chief was more powerful and strong when she was behind bars and now she does not have that courage, Goyeshwar said at an Iftar party at Bhashani Bhaban at city's Naya Paltan.

Khaleda's wealth

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other benefits of her husband late president Ziaur Rahman.

The other sources of her income are house rent collected during 1982-2007 from her Gulshan residence allocated by the government, honorarium and allowances received during her three terms as the prime minister and one term as the opposition leader, and government travel and dining allowances.

The statement showed Tk 1.89 crore as her bank balance and FDR worth Tk 24.36 lakh, of which Tk 4 lakh was declared forfeited. Now the FDR balance stands at Tk 20,36,243 while the total balance with profit stands at Tk 1,65,15,105, says her statement.

Khaleda showed immovable properties worth Tk 12,405 while her movable properties include seven sofa sets, two sets of dining tables, 20 lamps, one coat, 10 air coolers, three carpet and two television sets.

Her wealth statement also includes a 1300cc Toyota car bought in 1995, two Toyota SUVs and one Nissan SUV bought in 1990.

Khaleda's wealth statement also includes wealth accumulated by Ziaur Rahman--10 kathas of land in Savar, Tk 2,359 at the Janata Bank branch adjacent to Bangabhaban and FDR worth Tk 50,000 in her name at the same bank.

US Congress

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Most notably, first time ever, the congress urged the US president to make democratic transition in Bangladesh a "high priority of United States foreign policy."

The congress affirmed willingness of the United States to provide assistance to Bangladesh in its quest for a peaceful transition to democracy.

The resolution was moved in the influential Committee on Foreign Affairs with co-sponsorship of as many as 41 congressmen.

Congressman Joseph Crowley, who is also co-chair of Congressional Bangladesh Caucus, sponsored the resolution.

The Bangladesh embassy in Washington DC worked closely with Congressman Crowley and other congressmen to get this resolution passed, according to a message received in Dhaka yesterday.

Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed, who is presently attending the 63rd session of the United Nations General Assembly, welcomed the initiative of the US Congress and stated that this is indeed a recognition of the creative efforts undertaken by the democracy loving people and the government of Bangladesh to strengthen democratic and accountable governance, which could serve the interest of the common people.

He once again expressed resolve of his government to hold free, fair and credible elections in Bangladesh on December 18, 2008.

Hasina's wealth

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leader and benefits from inherited properties.

Hasina has about Tk 2 crore in eight accounts with Sonali Bank, Rupali Bank, Pubali Bank and Agrani Bank. Her husband's Sudha Sadan residence, which is estimated at about Tk 60 lakh, in the capital's Dhanmondi was also included in her statement.

Her other assets include a jute warehouse on a 10-katha land in Digulha, Khulna. The warehouse inherited from her mother has been priced at about Tk 50 lakh.

The AL president also showed 10 kathas of land and a pond on a six-katha plot in Gopalganj inherited from her grandfather Sheikh Lufar Rahman.

She said she shares with her sister Sheikh Rehana a few bighas of land in Gopalganj's Tungpara inherited from their father.

Apart from these, Hasina's wealth includes two cars she received as gifts from party leaders.

AL, BNP to carry on

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should take part in the upcoming parliamentary elections.

Norman said this while talking to reporters after holding meetings with BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain and AL acting General Secretary Syed Ashrafur Islam at their NAM flats in the capital.

BNP and AL assured Norman of taking part in the upcoming national elections, scheduled for December 18, if the government creates a level playing field.

AL, however, expressed its fear of militant attacks on electoral campaigns ahead of the elections.

"We have information in this regard," said Ashraf claiming the British envoy also fears militant attacks in the country ahead of the elections.

Norman went to the meetings with three messages--the parties' taking part in the polls, their staying away from violence and strengthening of democratic institutions.

"I came with the same three messages for BNP which I gave to Awami League," he said after the meeting with Delwar.

After meeting Ashraf he said politics of conflict cannot be good for the development of a developing country like Bangladesh.

He said Bangladesh unfortunately has a history of violence during elections. He said he thinks it should not happen this time as there is no reason for violence. The British envoy said BNP and AL have clearly committed that they do not support violence.

"I tasked Awami League and BNP to participate in the December

elections because it is important to the people of Bangladesh. It will give the people of Bangladesh the opportunity to elect a government they want to take them into 2009 and forward," he said.

Briefing newsmen Delwar said he told the British envoy that a level playing field is a must for taking part in the elections.

"We told him that BNP is an election-oriented party and always takes part in elections. We also told him that we must participate in the election if the government ensures everything to hold a free and fair election and removes the remaining obstacles," he said.

Terminating political parties' registration with the Election Commission and the Representation of the Peoples Order obstacles to taking part in the polls, the BNP leader said they are yet to make the final decision on participating in the elections.

Briefing newsmen, Syed Ashrafur Islam said they want the elections to be held in a peaceful manner.

"The British envoy also fears militant attacks in the country ahead of the elections. Those who do not believe in democracy can do anything. The JMB [Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh] has not been finished yet and they still exist in different names," said Ashraf.

Expressing deep concern over the security of AL chief, Ashraf demanded the government makes arrangements of special security force for Hasina.

About Hasina's letter to some party leaders, he said neither he nor the party office got any email or any letter from Hasina, Ashraf said.

No campaign

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polls, no prospective candidates or anyone on their behalf can donate or promise to donate to charities or other organisations openly or secretly.

None will be allowed to bring out procession or stage showdown during filing candidacy applications.

Processions or any showdows using buses, trucks, motorcycles, trains, water transports and other vehicles will not be permitted. Besides, none will be allowed to bring out torch processions.

The code of conduct will also ban pasting posters on vehicles and public establishments across the country, and buildings, walls, trees and electricity pillars under the city corporation and municipalities areas.

Scrawling graffiti on vehicles, buildings, walls, bridges, road dividers or any other establishments, erecting archways and gates, illuminating structures and using helicopters in election campaigns too have been banned.

Only the party chiefs will be allowed to use choppers as means of travelling. But they will not be permitted to distribute leaflets, posters and drape banners from helicopters.

According to the code of conduct, portraits of party chiefs and candidates, and election symbols could be printed on posters, but no pictures of processions or programmes.

It means Awami League and BNP will not be able to use portraits of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Ziaur Rahman in electoral campaigns.

Melamine mix

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of chemistry of Dhaka University (DU) and a private organisation have been trying to develop the method of melamine testing in powdered milk.

The DU chemistry department, however, said the department was yet to develop the system of melamine testing.

While talking to The Daily Star Prof Tasmeri SA Islam, chair of the department, said, "We are very close to finding out a new method and to this effect almost 75 percent work has already been done in the lab."

"We will hand it over by October 7 or 8 as the university will remain closed till November 5," Prof Tasmeri added.

Chaired by BSTI Council President Mahbub Jamil, the BSTI yesterday held a meeting with chief adviser's special assistant for industries at the BSTI Tejgaon office.

The meeting decided to strengthen its campaign for raising awareness about the use of banned powdered milk.

"As soon as the presence of deadly melamine in imported milk is detected, we will ban them in Bangladesh," Mahbub Jamil told journalists.

Panic gripped people in Bangladesh as children in thousands fell sick in China soon after they consumed powdered milk. People got more terrified after Chinese officials said the powdered milk was exported to different countries including Bangladesh.

However, the government of Bangladesh took actions, including banning brands of Chinese milk products, and made a vigorous campaign against the consumption of Chinese powdered milk.

The code also prohibits electioneering at mosques, temples or any place of worship.

The EC has all along been arguing that a stricter code of conduct will help reduce election expenditures and thus encourage honest and competent candidates in national polls.

UNB adds: Schedules for the upazila and parliamentary elections will be announced simultaneously in the first week of November.

Election Commissioner Brig Gen (ret'd) M Sakawat Hossain announced the plans to reporters at his office yesterday.

He said the last dates for submitting nomination papers for both the elections would be the same.

He said the commission has plans to increase the number of polling centres for the parliamentary election. "There are 35,000 polling centres now and 10 percent will be increased for the parliamentary polls."

Sakawat said the EC is considering increasing the number of polling centres as long queues of voters were found during the elections to four city corporations and nine municipalities held on August 4.

Replying to a query, he said the final voter list for all areas will reach the EC between October 12 and 16.

He declined to answer whether the upcoming local polls would be partisan.

He added that the voting centres for both the parliamentary and upazila elections would be the same.

Sakawat said transparent ballot boxes will be used in the parliamentary elections while non-transparent (steel) boxes during the upazila elections. "There are over 3 lakh steel ballot boxes in the country," he said.

He said the EC is going to introduce postal ballots, especially for those like polling and presiding officers. "There'll be arrangements for up to 3.5 lakh postal ballots at the commission."

Indo-Pak leaders agree to start peace talks

AFP, New York

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari agreed here Wednesday to kickstart an