

Obama sets goal of world without nukes

US president brings Afghan plan to Nato allies

AP, Strasbourg, France

Welcomed with thunderous cheers, President Barack Obama told a European audience yesterday that he is setting a dramatic goal of "a world without nuclear weapons."

The new American president opened a town-hall style gathering with the declaration, saying he would outline details in Prague in the coming days.

"Even with the Cold War now over, the spread of nuclear weapons or the theft of nuclear material could lead to the extermination of any city on the planet," Obama said, previewing a planned speech.

Obama took his new strategy for the war in Afghanistan yesterday to Nato leaders reluctant to commit significant new forces.

The 28-nation alliance is more eager to repair relations with a resurgent Russia, whose president cautioned Nato against further eastward expansion in a warning ahead of the alliance's 60th anniversary summit.

Obama who arrived in Strasbourg from London on Friday morning was scheduled to meet with Sarkozy and German Chancellor Angela Merkel before the formal start of the summit at a dinner at the German resort spa of Baden-Baden.

Nato's ability to succeed in a now-deadlocked war in Afghanistan will be seen as a crucial test of the alliance's power and relevance. Although European governments have already made clear they are unwilling to deploy significant new ground forces, they have been more enthusiastic about increasing humanitarian and development assistance to the beleaguered government in Kabul.

He was in the midst of his first European trip as president as he sought to strengthen the United States' standing in the world while working with foreign counterparts to right the troubled global economy.

Obama said the United States shares blame for the crisis, but that "every nation bears responsibility for what lies ahead especially now."

3 bullet-hit, 1 hacked in land dispute

A CORRESPONDENT, Niganj

Four of a family were injured in a clash over a disputed land at Rajbari Mograpara Colony in Fort upazila on Thursday night.

Police said Abdul Matin, 45, his son Rabbi, 15, and Russell, 22, received bullet injury while Matin's younger brother Alauddin was hacked. Rabbi was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital and the rest were being treated at Narayanganj hospital.

A Sub-Inspector at the Port police station said Rabbi alias Rabu Majhi of Rajbari had a land dispute with his two brothers Matin and Alauddin. They met on Thursday to resolve the dispute but the meeting failed. Rabu's son-in-law Sohail along with his aides Mahiuddin, Madan and Arif sprayed bullets on Matin, Rabbi and Russell.

They also stabbed Alauddin, he added.

Malaysian PM

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"I will be true to Malaysia and will defend and uphold the constitution."

A religious official then read several verses from the Koran to pray for a successful leadership.

Opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim said he expected Najib to take a tough stance against critics in a bid to shore up his leadership, after the government last week acted to ban two opposition newspapers.

"We expect Najib to take tough and repressive actions to strengthen his position," he told AFP.

"Najib should free all political detainees held under the tough security laws, allow press freedom, ensure an independent police force and judiciary," he added.

The new premier been forced to reject charges that his administration would adopt headline tactics, including the detention of its opponents, under tough internal security laws.

Amnesty International urged Najib to lift restrictions on the freedom of expression affecting bloggers, opposition politicians and human rights activists in Malaysia.

Najib's accession to the premiership completes a transition triggered by elections last year when the ruling United Malays National Organisation party (UMNO) slumped to its worst ever performance.

Abdullah, who was widely criticised as weak and ineffective, agreed several months ago to step down amid the fallout from those elections, which reshaped Malaysia's political landscape.

Student dies

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falling from the under-construction foot over bridge," said Mohammad Anis, a toy vendor in the area.

The girl came in contact with live electric wire while falling from the foot over-bridge, locals said.

Rezaul Karim, officer-in-charge of Shahbagh police station, said she climbed the under construction foot over bridge ignoring warnings of the construction workers at the basement of the over-bridge near Shishu Park at about 11:30am.

She collapsed on the road falling the foot over-bridge at the corner of Birdem hospital, Karim said.

Dhaka Medical College morgue sources said the face, neck and legs of the girl were burnt.

Khaleda's choice

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leader of the opposition while senior leaders of the party will not accept the matter easily if MK Anwar is picked," a BNP lawmaker yesterday told The Daily Star.

The legislator also said the BNP chairperson, before giving Sircar the party ticket for Bogra-6, hinted that he would be nominated for the deputy leader of the opposition post.

Party leaders believe Sircar would be a good choice for deputy leader of the opposition as he is acceptable to party lawmakers. Sircar also knows very well how the parliamentary system works and its rules and regulations.

A BNP Parliamentary Party meeting, held before the ninth parliament went into session, nominated Khaleda as the leader of the opposition and empowered her to pick any lawmaker as her deputy.

CID to quiz

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their statements, if necessary, to gather information. "It is no secret that they talked to the minuters—they were quoted in newspapers and shown on television channels," said Akand, the investigation officer of the mutiny case.

Sources said examining call lists of mobile phone operators the CID has already identified a number of BDR jawans who talked to the ministers, lawmakers and a few influential persons.

Earlier, the CID summoned Jamaat-e-Islami leader Abdur Razaq to the CID headquarters and quizzed him for over three hours.

It could not be learnt if the ministers and lawmakers will be summoned too. But CID sources said the investigators have prepared a list of politicians and other influential persons for summoning them for hearing.

The CID sources said they had been carrying out investigation in coordination with the two committees formed by the government and Bangladesh Army to probe the BDR carnage.

Talking to The Daily Star, ASP Akand said they yesterday interrogated 13 accused BDR jawans and produced eight more jawans arrested by the Rab on Thursday from the BDR headquarters before the

court. The court sent them on three-day remand.

Commerce Minister Faruk Khan yesterday said the investigators are gathering information about the involvement of more people. "Fresh evidence and clues are coming out, but those cannot be disclosed now. We hope that the investigation will end very soon," he said while addressing a reception accorded to the successful students of a coaching centre in the city.

The eight BDR members arrested Thursday were taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital early yesterday for treatment. But the cause of their injuries could not be known.

Sources said Lalbagh police took the arrestees to the hospital at about 12:30am and took them back around 3:00am.

Our Rangpur correspondent reports: Rab members arrested retired BDR sepoy Mamunur Rashid at his house in north Munshipara in the town yesterday in connection with the Pikhana carnage. They recovered a bullet and a set of BDR uniform from him.

Mamunur Rashid was terminated from job last November for violating discipline, Rab sources said.

Oxygen shortage

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Wards sources said critical patients prescribed oxygen support for several hours uninterruptedly are given in turn putting their lives at risk. A patient needing oxygen for 10 hours at a stretch receives it only for 2-3 hours.

Victims' relatives alleged it takes a day or sometimes even more to have signatures of officials concerned including doctors on prescribed forms of the hospital to have an oxygen cylinder.

Surya Banu, 65, admitted on March 1 at bed-18 under Ward-21 (medicine ward for women) died on March 11 afternoon. Her son said his mother had been suffering from breathing problem for three days before she died.

He requested doctors and nurses at the ward to give his mother oxygen but they were helpless as there was no oxygen cylinder.

However, her mother had been given oxygen support for an hour only two days before her death, he said adding that doctors sent him to emergency block to have oxygen just three hours before her death.

As he was asked to collect signatures of on-duty nurse of the ward and doctor and the emergency medical officer he

had to rush to the persons concerned for several times for signatures and by the time his mother had passed away.

Another patient Khodeza Begum, 60, admitted to ward-19 of the hospital on March 3, left it on that very day after observing the miserable conditions of other patients there.

Her son Alfaz said he would better borrow money for his mother's treatment at a private clinic instead of DMCH where patients die without oxygen. Khodeza was also admitted with breathing problem.

Doctor Murad Hossain, assistant registrar of wards-2 and 21, told this correspondent over phone that Surya Banu might have died due to lack of oxygen support but he was not sure of it.

It seems inhuman since they are compelled to remove oxygen support from a patient to give it to another worse one but they have to do this, he added.

Director of DMCH Brig Gen Abdus Shaheed Khan told The Daily Star on March 17 that he had informed the ministry concerned of the inadequate supply of oxygen and the ministry had pledged sufficient allocation to ease the problem very soon.

Road digging

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Locals of Satish Sarkar Road, DIT plot of Gendaria, are also facing difficulties as digging work has been going on in almost all the entrances and exits of the area.

Badsha, a local, said, "We know the work is going on to improve our lives but the ways are not good. They dig up a really long stretch of road at once putting us in difficulty."

Deputy Managing Director (Research Planning and Development) of Wasa Liakat Ali said they were digging the roads near Asad Gate and Gendaria to set up sewerage lines.

Around 16km of sewerage lines will be set up or reinstated in the areas, including Japan Garden City and Asad Gate via Iqbal Road, Taj Mahal Road and Dhupkhola to Loharpool via Sadhana and Satis Sarkar Road.

The work is being done under a Tk 18.47 crore Interim Emergency Construction and Rehabilitation of Sewerage Line project that started last year, he said.

"We started work at a time in different areas as we have to complete the work by June 2009, the scheduled time for the project to end," he said, adding, "The permission of road digging from Dhaka City Corporation does not allow us to work after May."

A Wasa official said Wasa is now setting up around six-km-long storm sewerage lines in different areas of Uttara which is part of a 25-km-long storm sewerage line. It would take around a month more to complete.

Water-logging is a major problem in Uttara during the rainy season and after the entire drainage system is completed, the water-logging problem will be solved, he

23 stranded

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Tenaganita, a migrants' rights body in Malaysia, lodged a complaint with Malaysian human rights commission Suhakam on April 1, seeking justice for the stranded workers, reports Malaysian online newspaper Malaysiakini.

In the complaint, Tenaganita Director Irene Fernandez said, "The workers are unlawfully detained. It is the failure of the employing company in fulfilling the agreement. Why has the Immigration Department failed in their responsibility? The department has violated the rights of the workers."

According to the complaint, Malaysian home ministry approved Network Esquire's application for hiring 1,100 workers from Bangladesh although it has no physical infrastructure to employ them.

"What investigations and what type of verifications were done by the Home Ministry when Network Esquire only has an office and address in Kuala Lumpur without any plantation [where it pledged to employ the workers]?" said Fernandez.

Network Esquire applied to hire workers "to make profit, not to provide jobs", she said, blaming the Immigration Department for not taking any action against the employing company.

Zahir Hussein, a representative of Fahmi International, who was present at Suhakam when Tenaganita lodged the complaint, said a Network Esquire official named Nazri confirmed on February 1 that they would receive the workers but they did not do so as of now.

"We want compensation from Network Esquire and Malaysia government for the sufferings of the workers and their family members in Bangladesh," said Zahir.

ACC probe

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He urged BCL leaders to stop the factional fighting, shun extortion, and manipulation of tenders and join hands with the government to work for the development of the country.

Son kills father

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father on the head with a stick, leaving him critically injured.

Badsha was rushed to Peerganj Upazila Health Complex and then shifted to Rangpur Medical College Hospital (RMCH). He succumbed to his injury at the RMCH at 4:00 am yesterday.

JU: 15 hurt

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academic activities on the campus for several days.

The dormitory, since then, had been under the control of Pritom-Sabbir faction.

The Jihan-Palash group looted at least 70 to 80 cell phones, 2 LCD monitors and cash from the hall during the rampage.

The attackers, however, fled after being chased by their rival faction. Police picked up five BCL men after the clash.

During the clash, Belal, a fourth year student of anthropology department, was stabbed.

The other injured students include Tammo, a 3rd year student of Bangla, Roni, a 2nd year student of economics, Shubroto, a 3rd year student of economics, Joy, a post-graduate student of economics, Liton, a 2nd year student of economics, Mamun, a post-graduate student of economics, and his guest Sayem.

Belal was referred to the Central Hospital after his condition worsened while others were referred to the Dhaka Medical College and Hospital and Enam Medical College and Hospital.

General secretary of recently dissolved BCL JU unit Mahmud Naser Joni said the attackers were not BCL men.

Police raided Meer Mosharraf Hossain Hall at 6:45am and arrested Sajib, Toifa, Saer, Shawan and one unidentified person.

The law enforcers also recovered three sharp weapons from the dormitory. Additional police forces have been deployed on the campus to avert further trouble.

Proctor of JU Arju Miah told the Daily Star they would form a committee to look into the matter and gave assurance that authorities would take stern actions against those responsible for the attack and looting.

No case had been filed till filing of the report at 5:00 pm yesterday. Officer-in-charge of Savar Police Station Shaiful Islam said.

The BCL university committee was dissolved on February 17 following a series of clashes over establishing supremacy at residential halls.

BCL men pocketed

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Awami League (AL), of Dhaka College unit persuaded the college authorities to take at least 400 "poorly qualified" freshmen in.

The same thing is going on in many government colleges in the capital as well as in different districts of the country.

Eden College, Govt Kabi Nazrul College, Govt Bangla College in Mirpur, Govt Titumir College, Badrunnesa College, Teachers' Training College and Govt Shaheed Suhrawardy College are all in the grip of Chhatra League leaders, sources said.

During the last BNP-Jamaat alliance rule, leaders of their student wing—Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal and Islami Chhatra Shibir—were also involved in similar practices.

In Dhaka College, Chhatra League leaders halted the admission process a few weeks ago as the college authorities started admission independent of the Chhatra League leaders' so-called business. The college authorities had to negotiate with the student leaders and reach a consensus to restart admission process, sources said.

A couple of weeks ago, Eden College unit Chhatra League leaders had kept their principal confined to the college office for about three hours to force the authorities take in 50 students on the waiting list under "political admission".

Sources said students who failed to qualify in the freshmen admission test or are way down the waiting list can easily get enrolled in colleges

paying the Chhatra League leaders.

Moreover, students who qualified for a department but want to move to a better one can also pay the leaders and move up the list.

Talking to The Daily Star a number of Chhatra League leaders said they are engaged in this to oblige senior leaders and influential persons, including members of parliament, with their requests.

"We are political workers and we have to carry out their requests," said a Dhaka College unit Chhatra League leader preferring not to be named. He, however, did not answer when asked if the senior leaders asked them to take money from the admission seekers.

In Dhaka, Kabi Nazrul and Eden colleges, the top two Chhatra League posts holders are doing this "business of political admission" while a general secretary and a president of Chhatra League units of Shaheed Suhrawardi College and Badrunnesa College are also doing.

Lawmaker Fazole Noor Tapash told The Daily Star, "I take stern actions against them [Chhatra League leaders] if proof is found of their involvement in such practices."

Chhatra League General Secretary Mahfuzul Haider Chowdhury Roton told The Daily Star that they have not received any allegation from any quarters regarding this. "If we receive such information, we will launch an investigation and take action accordingly," he added.

Acute gas crisis

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means the actual situation would be even worse.

Gas production in 2008-09 has been shown to be 2,042 mcmcf against the demand for 2,014 mcmcf. But in reality, the country is producing around 1,800 mcmcf gas from 17 gas fields—half of it by the international oil companies. Of this gas, power sector—including industrial captive power generators—is consuming 900 mcmcf, fertiliser factories 290 mcmcf and 580 to 600 mcmcf are being consumed by industrial, commercial and domestic and CNG users, and tea estates. In addition, the gas fields are producing 6,700 barrels of condensate.

In scenario-2, where international oil companies would discover new gas fields under production sharing contracts (PSCs) signed through the 1998 second round block bidding, the situation would be slightly better in 2011 as it offers 58 mcmcf gas supply surplus. But by 2014-15, this surplus turns into a deficit of 112 mcmcf gas. The deficit rises to 666 mcmcf in 2017 and 1,314 mcmcf in 2019-20.

In scenario-3, where oil companies having off-shore block bidding contracts may strike gas, the situation is even better. But even then, the supply crunch starts in 2017 with 166 mcmcf deficit, rapidly rising to 814 mcmcf in 2019-20.

PETROBANGLA'S RECOMMENDATIONS

In a brief to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Petrobangla pinpointed various issues of the country's oil and gas sector, and said as per the Gas Sector Master Plan 2006, gas demand may be met till 2019 using the existing gas reserves and probable and possible reserves.

"But if we fail to find the probable and possible gas reserves, the crisis would emerge much before that time limit. In such a situation, it has become very urgent to expedite onshore and offshore oil and gas exploration," said the brief.

Petrobangla emphasised fixing the maritime boundary. Priority should be given to supplying gas to fertiliser factories, cottage industries and foreign currency-earning industries than supplying to consumers who can use alternative energy resources, it said.

As this sector is capital dependent, Petrobangla urged the prime minister fix gas prices commercially.

Coal exploration and development activities should be geared up for growth of power sector, it stressed.

RESISTANCE & INSTITUTIONAL SHORTCOMINGS

The While fund crisis and institutional shortcomings coupled with inaction of the past four-party alliance government had almost halted development of the energy sector,

different groups had been resisting new energy exploration and development activities by foreign companies.

Following the Magurchhara blowout of 1997, Jamaat-e-Islami-leaning retired secretary Shah Abdul Hannan turned to the court in late nineties and during the four-party rule, the High Court imposed a stay order on bidding in on-shore blocks. Till now the government did not contest the court order while the stay order contributed to the existing problem, Petrobangla sources said.

Towards the flag end of the alliance era, when Petrobangla tried to float an on-shore and off-shore block bidding by challenging the court order, the then legal adviser to Petrobangla, belonging to pro-Jamaat camp of lawyers, suggested limiting the bid to off-shore blocks. Accordingly, Petrobangla prepared for the off-shore bid that was floated in early 2008.

Again, following the Tengraita blowout in 2005, environment group Bangladesh Environment Lawyers Association (Bela) filed a lawsuit against the gas field's operator Canadian company Niko, which led to suspension of payment to Niko and its Bangladeshi partner Bapex. The case is now in its final stage of disposal.

On the other hand, the national committee for protecting oil, gas and coal resources launched a campaign against the proposed open-pit mining in Phulbari by British company Asia Energy, which led to death of several protesters in police firing in 2006. The campaign gained ground as the then government left the matter of resettlement and compensation to Asia Energy which is perceived as an "inexperienced" and "insensitive" company.

Following the "success" in Phulbari, the committee has continued campaigning against any open-pit coal mining.

The campaign has also gained popularity among people around Barapukuria underground mine, who recently attempted to get the lone coal mine's new production suspended.

Due to the "nationalistic" peer pressure caused by such campaigns, the government has been unable to take any decision in the last two years concerning vital issues including the country's first coal policy.

Meanwhile, the lone Barapukuria coal mine is producing nearly 9,000 tonnes of coal a year, and a few other coal zones now await government decision. The country is officially and unofficially importing more than 3 million tonnes of low quality and environmentally hazardous coal from India worth around Tk 2,500 crore a year.

Khaleda's cantt house

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cantment.

Ashraf's statement came to refute BNP leader Prof Abdul Mannan's remarks on Thursday about the prime minister's statement in parliament on Opposition Leader Khaleda's cantment house. Ashraf termed Mannan's remark "indecorous" and "audacious" and said it was "distortion of fact and ill motivated."

Ashraf, also LGRD and cooperatives minister, urged Khaleda and her party to rise above greed and hand over the cantment house to the government responding positively to the proposal for construction of apartments for the families of the army officers killed in Pikhana carnage.

He also urged BNP leaders to refrain from spreading "false propaganda and misleading information" on the humanitarian proposal.

Referring to the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his family and four national leaders, the AL spokesperson said none of the post-1976 governments gave the families of these heroic sons and martyrs even an inch of land free of cost.

"But after the killing of Ziaur Rahman, the then BNP government and army chief HM Ershad gave Khaleda Zia 10 bighas of land with a house

on Mainul Road in Dhaka Cantonment and another house at Gulshan free of cost," he said.

Zia's bank account and land at Savar and Joarsahara in Khaleda's name were "completely concealed under the fable of Zia's broken suitcase and torn vest to grab government property". The state provided Khaleda and her two sons with all their livelihood expenses, cars, houses and education, he added.

Bangabandhu's daughters Hasina and Sheikh Rehana sacrificed their ownership of their father's house on Dhanmondi road 32 for the Bangabandhu Memorial Trust. In 2001, the then AL government allocated a house on one bigha land in Dhanmondi for Rehana but assuming power in late 2001 the BNP-led alliance government took back the house, Ashraf added.

He said it is well known to the people that Khaleda and her sons have mysteriously amassed huge money and property in the past three decades. Khaleda whitened a large amount of money during the rule of the last caretaker government. Her two sons also siphoned off crores of taka.

"Khaleda Zia should return state properties including the cantment house to the people," Ashraf said in the statement.

OMS shops

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and Nazirshail (low quality) are being sold at Tk 24-30 per kg in the markets.

Fine rice, including Miniket and Nazirshail (better quality), is selling between Tk 32 and 35 per kg in the city markets.

The OMS shops had experienced a huge rush of customers last year when rice prices went up its highest. A kg of rice had been sold at Tk 30 in the OMS and BDR outlets in the capital and elsewhere in the country while the price of same quality rice was Tk 34-36 in the kitchen markets.

Meantime, sale of coarse variety of rice has fallen sharply in the city markets for the past few weeks despite a significant drop in its price for over a month.

Visiting different OMS shop, in the capital, The Daily Star correspondents found the OMS dealers were sitting idle in their shops in absence of customers.

A dealer can sell 1,000 kgs of rice in a day, six days a week, while one can buy highest five kgs of rice from the OMS shops.

Wajed Ali, an OMS dealer of Palashi Bazar, told The Daily Star that he purchased 2,000 kg rice for his shop on Wednesday morning but he could sell only 100 kg on Wednesday and Thursday.

"This is totally unexpected. Last year we became tired within an hour of opening sale every day. But we do not see any rush of customers," he said.

Small difference between prices of rice at OMS shops and kitchen markets and choice for finer varieties are the main reasons behind the poor sale here, he added.

Pias Costa, director general of Food Directorate, told The Daily Star yesterday that the sale of rice at OMS shops is low but it is satisfactory outside the capital.

"We are trying to find out the reason behind the poor sale in the capital," he said.

Meantime, the wholesales said the sale of fine and medium variety rice rose while consumption of coarse rice fell in