

# Myanmar offers amnesty for some political prisoners

## UN demands release of Suu Kyi

AFP, United Nations

Myanmar on Monday offered an amnesty for some political prisoners after UN chief Ban Ki-moon demanded the release of key political detainees, including Aung San Suu Kyi, to ensure "credible and legitimate" polls next year.

Myanmar's UN ambassador Than Swe said his government was preparing an amnesty for political prisoners on humanitarian grounds so they can contest next year's general elections.

"At the request of the (UN) Secretary General, the Myanmar government is processing to grant amnesty to prisoners on humanitarian grounds and with a view to enabling them to participate in the 2010 general elections," he told the Security Council. He gave no further details.

Ban welcomed the statement, telling reporters: "This is encouraging but I have to continue to follow up how they will implement all the issues raised during my visit to Myanmar."

He said that he was "not quite sure who will be included in the amnesty," but added, "I have made it quite clear that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi should be released and free to participate in the elections."

Earlier Ban briefed the 15-member UN Security Council on his visit to military-ruled Myanmar early this month.

"The (Myanmar) government needs to deliver on the promise to make the 2010 elections inclusive, free and fair and to take the necessary steps on my specific proposals in the very near future," the UN boss said.

He made it clear that for the poll to be viewed as fair, political prisoners, including opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi and other detained members of her National League for Democracy (NLD), must be released and allowed to campaign freely.

"The choice for Myanmar's leaders in the coming days and weeks will be between meeting that responsibility in the interest of all concerned, or failing their

own people and each one of you," he said.

"The world is now watching closely whether they will choose to act in the best interest of their country or ignore our concerns and expectations and the needs of their people."

In a conciliatory rejoinder, envoy Than Swe said his government "intends to implement all appropriate recommendations that the secretary general had proposed."

Earlier in his address to the council, Ban described the junta's refusal to allow him to meet with jailed opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi as "a deep disappointment but also a major lost opportunity for Myanmar."

The democracy activist, who faces an internationally condemned trial for violating the terms of her house arrest, has been either jailed or under house arrest for 13 of the last 19 years since the junta refused to recognise her National League for Democracy's victory in Myanmar's last elections, in 1990.



PHOTO: AFP

Foreign affairs ministers and their delegations leave a preparatory session, prior to the 15th Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) summit in the Egyptian resort town of Sharm el-Sheikh on Monday. Developing world leaders head to Egypt for the NAM summit that is set to be overshadowed by talks between nuclear rivals India and Pakistan.



PHOTO: AFP

France's President Nicolas Sarkozy (L) shakes hands with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh upon arrival at the Place de la Concorde in Paris to attend the Bastille Day parade yesterday.

## France honours India in Bastille Day parade

AFP, Paris

A proud detachment of Indian troops yesterday led thousands of French comrades down the Champs Elysees in Paris for the annual military parade to mark the Bastille Day national holiday.

The 400 soldiers filed down the elegant venue under the eyes of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, invited by President Nicolas Sarkozy to mark France's strategic relationship with the world's biggest democracy.

Dressed in ceremonial uniforms of red and black headdress, cummerbunds and white puttees and gloves, the Indians marched from the Arc de Triomphe to the presidential stand at the end of the 1.5-kilometre (one mile) parade.

Drawn from the army, navy and the air force, the contingent paraded to the sound of Indian martial music played by a 90-member band in a ceremony shown live by all Indian television news channels.

French air force jets flew overhead, releasing trails of red, white and blue smoke to represent the colours of the French flag, and the parade came to a close with parachutists floating down on to the Place des Invalides.

Singh and Sarkozy were joined in the presidential stand by the French president's pop star wife Carla Bruni, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, German President Horst Koehler and other dignitaries.

## Indo-Pak talks to steal focus of NAM summit

### FM's hold talks

AFP, PTI, Sharm el-Sheikh

Developing world leaders head to Egypt for a Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) summit today that is set to be overshadowed by talks between nuclear rivals India and Pakistan.

Foreign Ministers of NAM countries, including S M Krishna, yesterday held discussions here to prepare the ground for the summit of their leaders on Wednesday and Thursday with India asking the member countries to "unequivocally" condemn terrorism.

Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez Parrilla, whose country is the current NAM chair, addressed the opening session and briefed the ministers on the steps taken by his country and NAM in the past three years.

He underlined the importance of pursuing efforts to prevent conflicts based on the UN charter and international law. Parrilla also called for "rallying efforts of NAM member-states to allow the movement to have a say in international arena and on issues such as food

security and the economic meltdown".

Prime Ministers Yousuf Raza Gilani of Pakistan and Manmohan Singh of India are to meet at the summit venue in the Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh on Thursday, amid hopes of a resumption of peace talks between the arch-enemies, who have fought three wars.

Relations between the two worsened dramatically after last year's bombings in the Indian commercial capital Mumbai, which killed 166 people and were blamed by New Delhi on the banned Pakistani militant group Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT).

Singh has voiced hope that Pakistan will promise action against those behind the attacks when he meets Gilani for the second high-level contact between the two sides since the Mumbai raids in November.

The Mumbai siege left in tatters a fragile peace process launched in 2004 to resolve all outstanding issues of conflict between the neighbours, including a territorial dispute over the divided Himalayan territory of Kashmir.

## Jackson wasn't ready for London comeback

### Says his father

AFP, Los Angeles

The father of Michael Jackson slammed the gruelling 50-date schedule drawn up for his son's comeback on Monday, saying the star was not capable of completing the series of sold-out concerts.

In an interview aired by ABC News, Joe Jackson said he had harbored concerns about his son's schedule, which had been due to get underway in London on July 13 until the tragic King of Pop died on June 25.

Jackson, 79, said his son had initially only wanted to perform in 10 concerts before more dates were added.

"Michael only agreed to 10 shows. Then they went and added all these shows," Joe

Jackson told ABC News.

"I was worried about his health because all the shows I'm seeing, no artist can do all those shows, back-to-back like that. I knew Michael couldn't do all those shows without a rest in between."

Jackson's misgivings were echoed by his son's financial advisor Leonard Rowe, who also told ABC News that the star was in no condition to make a comeback, describing reports that he was in good shape as "totally untrue."

"Michael Jackson was not ready. He was not fit. If you can call weighing about 110 to 115 pounds fit. Besides that MJ told me himself that he never wanted to do 50 shows he only wanted to do 10," Rowe told ABC.

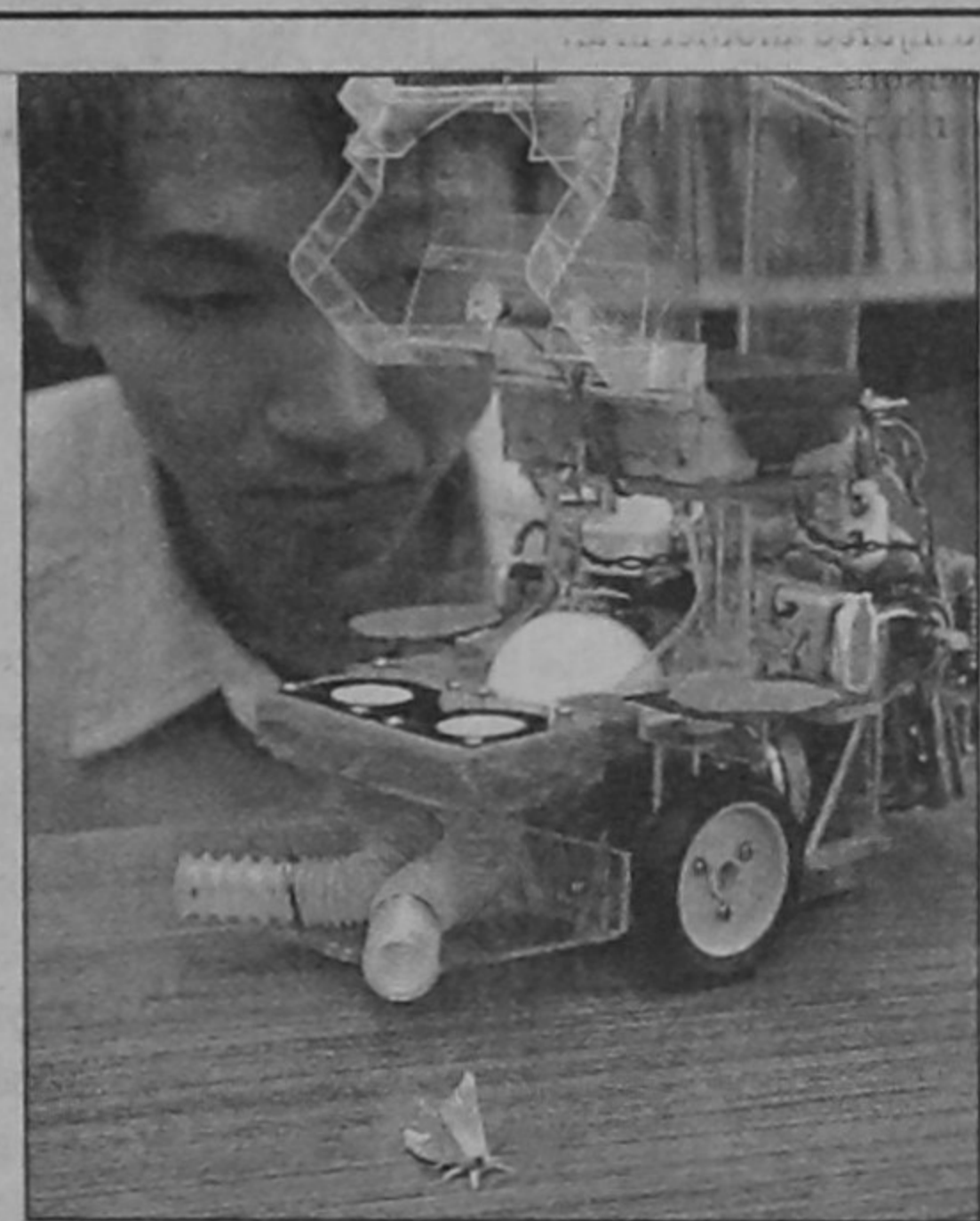


PHOTO: AFP

A picture taken on June 9, shows Japan's Tokyo University Assistant Professor Noriyasu Ando looking at a live male silkworm strapped a vehicle so that its legs can move across a free-spinning ball during an experiment into insect-machine hybrids in Tokyo.

## Scientists aim to create robot-insects

AFP, Tokyo

Police release a swarm of robot-moths to sniff out a distant drug stash. Rescue robot-bees dodge through earthquake rubble to find survivors.

These may sound like science-fiction scenarios, but they are the visions of Japanese scientists who hope to understand and then rebuild the brains of insects and programme them for specific tasks.

Ryohei Kanzaki, a professor at Tokyo University's Research Centre for Advanced Science and Technology, has studied insect brains for three decades and become a pioneer in the field of insect-machine hybrids.

His original and ultimate goal is to understand human brains and restore connections damaged by diseases and accidents -- but to get there he has taken a very close look at insects' "micro-brains".

The human brain has about 100

billion neurons, or nerve cells, that transmit signals and prompt the body to react to stimuli. Insects have far fewer, about 100,000 inside the two-millimetre-wide (0.08 inch) brain of a silkworm.

But size isn't everything, as Kanzaki points out.

Insects' tiny brains can control complex aerobatics such as catching another bug while flying, proof that they are "an excellent bundle of software" finely honed by hundreds of millions of years of evolution, he said.

For example, male silkworms can track down females from more than a kilometre (half a mile) away by sensing their odour, or pheromone.

Kanzaki hopes to artificially recreate insect brains.

"Supposing a brain is a jigsaw puzzle picture, we would be able to reproduce the whole picture if we knew how each piece is shaped and where it should go," he told AFP.

## Cuba, US to resume immigration talks

AFP, Washington

Talks between Cuba and the United States on the thorny issue of immigration, suspended since 2003, are set to resume Tuesday at the UN headquarters in New York.

A US official, speaking on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter, confirmed the talks would resume, adding that they would take place at the United Nations building in Manhattan.

The move to thaw relations follows President Barack Obama's decision in April to authorise travel and money transfers to the island by US nationals of Cuban descent.

In early June, the White House welcomed Havana's agreement to resume talks on migration issues, but the US official did not confirm whether the negotiations would address establishing direct mail service between the two countries -- current policy requires mail to go through third countries.

"Obviously, it's in the interest of both governments," said White House spokesman Robert Gibbs last month.

"Obviously, I think direct mail would increase the ability for the president's initiative to be able to reach out directly to the Cuban people."

Discussions on immigration issues have been held every two years until they were suspended in 2003 by Obama's predecessor, George W. Bush.

## Farm loan target raised by 23pc

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bank has asked banks to hold the moral obligation of keeping interest rates for the loans below 13 percent.

He however said they would put emphasis more on access to the loan than the interest rates so that farmers could avail the agro-loans easily and without any complications.

According to BB statistics, last fiscal year agriculture loan disbursement target was fixed at Tk 9,379 crore, while the amount of disbursement was Tk 9,300 crore.

The central bank has set the target for the eight government-owned banks and financial institutions at Tk 8,453 crore, which is 15.3 percent higher than Tk 7,331 crore of the previous fiscal year.

On the other hand, target for the 30 private commercial banks was made 39.71 percent higher at Tk 2,594 crore. This target in the previous fiscal year was Tk 2,594 crore, according to the statistics.

Similarly, eight foreign commercial banks will have to disburse Tk 465 crore which is 143 percent higher than the previous years' Tk 191 crore.

The Standard Chartered Bank and the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC) could not disburse farm loans in last fiscal year for recession. But they have set a target of Tk 150 crore and Tk 50 crore respectively for the running FY, said

the governor.

The Citibank NA would also disburse a handsome amount of Tk 150 crore this fiscal year, he added.

Generally, money flows from villages to urban areas while this initiative would facilitate monetary flow to rural areas from the cities, which would help increase income of rural people and create demand, said the BB boss.

Local demand creation will also increase the output of domestic industries, he added.

The agriculture credit policy emphasises more on disbursement of increased amount of farm loans in the less developed areas and to small and contract farmers in the current fiscal year, the governor said.

The central bank will also consider refinancing the banks if they disburse farm credit in undeveloped localities such as chars, marshlands and coastal areas, he said.

Initiatives will also be taken to disburse loans openly at union levels to ensure that real farmers get farm credit, the governor said.

The policy suggests disbursing credit loans to small and contract farmers in presence of local government representatives, agriculture officers, teachers and media persons to ensure transparency.

People will also be made aware of the disbursement

through drum beating for transparency.

The BB will also encourage the banks if they initiate disbursements using mobile phones and other modes of information technology, said the governor.

To bring the marginal and contract farmers under loan facility, the policy suggests the banks concerned accept certificates by landowners or local influential people for disbursing loans.

"If it is not possible, banks can disburse loans to the contract and marginal farmers on the basis of the certificates issued by the farmers' neighbours," the governor added.

Measures will be taken to disburse adequate amount of farm loans among successful farmers so that other farmers feel encouraged, according to the policy.

In this regard, BB has made a fund of Tk 200 crore to disburse adequate loans among the successful farmers, whose lists are prepared regularly by the Department of Agricultural Extension.

The governor said, "A part of the targeted amount of loans of Bangladesh Krishi Bank and Rajshahi Krishi Unnayan Bank would be disbursed through NGO linkages."

In the policy, the ceiling of agro loans has been increased from 5-10 percent keeping pace with the increasing production costs.

## Strong monitoring

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Community clinics could be effective if peoples' ownership and participation are ensured, he said, adding that committees involving the local MPs and ministers have already been formed to make hospitals accountable, he said.

Dr Ruhul Haque said he had already held meeting with the local government ministry to integrate the health and local government institutions at local level to strengthen family planning services.

In his keynote presentation, Dhaka University Professor Barkat-e-Khuda said the allocation to health sector this fiscal year is insufficient where nutrition had received the lowest priority followed by family planning.

"Family planning needs a big thrust in Sylhet and Chittagong divisions as well as in urban slums and among the vulnerable population groups," he said, adding that the government has not fixed any target for the fiscal year.

"So, how are we going to assess the performance?" he posed a question. He suggested starting social auditing of the hospitals and clinics on pilot basis and a private regulatory body for the private healthcare institutions.

Health 21 Chairman Major General (ret'd) Dr Shahjahan said doctors appointed in the rural areas do not want to work there because of lack of

facilities.

"Not that all doctors hanker after only money; some want to excel in their professional knowledge that prompt them to stay in the cities," he said.

Therefore, authorities should plan orientation and facilities for doctors so that they are interested in working in rural areas too, he noted.

Dr Sarwar Ali, former secretary general of Bangladesh Medical Association, said, "The government must bring back peoples' confidence in hospitals. The target should be none would die without treatment."

Health 21 Executive Director Dr Rubaiul Murshed said private sector is coming up on a large scale in health sector, but it needs strong monitoring.

"There could be private accreditation body like JCI (Joint Commission International) for all the hospitals," he said.

The Daily Star Editor and Publisher Mahfuz Anam said as health is an issue of high importance, the newspaper will have space to place the debate in public domain.

"If we can publish follow-up story continuously, there will surely be positive changes," he added.

Dr Rumana Dowla of BIHS Hospital, Dr Zeba Mahmud of Micronutrient Initiative, Jalaluddin Ahmed of Brac, Dr Sikder M Zakir of Telemedicine Ref Center Ltd, Shuvashish P Barua of

Grameen Phone, Mohammad Zobaer Hossain of Development Organization of the Rural Poor, KM Tarek of Family Planning Association of Bangladesh, Dr Ubaidur Rob of Population Council, Prof AKM Nurunnabi of Dhaka University, Runa Khan of Friendship, journalist Dr Moral Nazrul Islam and Dr Abu Jamil Faisal of Engender Health also spoke at the roundtable.

## War crimes case built on lies, says Taylor

AP, The Hague

Former Liberian President Charles Taylor took the stand in his own defence at his war crimes trial Tuesday and told judges the case against him was built on lies and misinformation.

Taylor is charged with 11 counts of murder, torture, rape, sexual slavery, using child soldiers and spreading terror during Sierra Leone's 1991-2002 civil war. He is the first African leader to stand trial for war crimes.

It is "very, very, very unfortunate that the prosecution because of disinformation, misinformation, lies, rumours would associate me with such titles or descriptions," Taylor said, asked by his attorney what he thought of the charges.

## 21 cases against

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the highest number of appeals filed by an individual.

His counsel Pran Nath told The Daily Star the AL leader faces 120 cases, while another 17 were disposed of through "mutual understanding" between the plaintiffs and the defendant.

The charges Selim is facing include murder, attempt to murder, extortion, theft, holding unlawful assembly and obstructing law-enforcers from discharging duties.

The cases were filed during the rules of BNP-led four-party and the last interim governments.

Selim, who was elected an MP on AL ticket in the 1996 elections from Lalbagh constituency, allegedly patronised building up of a cadre group.

Locals fear if he is acquitted of the large number of charges, his activities would exceed the previous records.

Former BNP lawmaker from Lalbagh constituency Nasir Uddin Ahmed Pintu, political rival of Selim, also enjoyed similar privilege during the BNP-led alliance rule.

Pintu was given acquittal in 76 lawsuits, say sources at the metropolitan public prosecutor's office.

Selim, also joint general secretary of Dhaka city unit AL, was sent to jail on May 27 on his surrender before a Dhaka court in connection with a corruption case. He was sentenced in absentia to 13 years' imprisonment in that case but was released on bail later.

Selim was once a ward commissioner of Lalbagh from BNP but he left the party after being

deprived of nomination and joined the AL prior to the 1996 elections.

He lost the October 2001 parliamentary elections to Pintu.

Terming the cases "fake" in his petitions filed with the Dhaka district magistrate, Selim said the cases were filed against him and his political colleagues with "political motives to harass them".

Earlier on different dates, the MPP had recommended withdrawal of over 335 cases against Prime Minister and AL chief Sheikh Hasina and others including Deputy Leader of the House Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury and Home Minister Sahara Khatun.

On receipt of recommendations from the MPP the district committee headed by the district magistrate reviewed the case documents and sent those to the home ministry for its decision.

The ministry decided to withdraw over 174 cases against Hasina and other leaders. But it rejected the petitions for withdrawal of 25 cases as those were filed on charges of theft, robbery, murder and rape.

Meanwhile, the government has yet to decide withdrawal of any cases filed against Leader of the Opposition and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and her family members.

They had earlier submitted petitions for withdrawal of 20 cases.

Hasina, Khaleda and many other political leaders had petitioned for withdrawal of 2,781 cases filed against them.