

Iraq election in jeopardy as VP vetoes law

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq's general election planned for January, only the second since the fall of Saddam Hussein, was thrown into jeopardy yesterday after Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi vetoed the polling law.

"On November 15, I sent a letter to parliament asking for the law to be amended. Parliament said I could veto the contested first article (of the law), which is what I have done today," Hashemi said.

Parliament must now reopen debate on the proposed law, leading to a likely delay of the mid-January polling date.

The election is viewed as crucial to consolidating Iraq's fledgling democracy ahead of a withdrawal of US combat troops by August and a complete pullout by the end of 2011.



A Pakistani soldier walks on rubble as journalists (background) visit a destroyed Taliban militant training centre in Sararogha town on Tuesday, which was stronghold of Taliban militants in troubled South Waziristan. Pakistan said on Tuesday that troops waging a major ground and air offensive against the Taliban have captured most towns once under rebel control in a key district on the Afghan border.

39 Taliban killed in military operations

Karzai's inauguration for second term today

AFP, Kabul

Afghan authorities said yesterday that local security forces backed by Nato troops killed more than three dozen rebels in a series of military operations across insurgency-hit Afghanistan.

The raids were announced on the eve of President Hamid Karzai's inauguration for a second five-year term.

Karzai is under pressure from Western backers to curb corruption and restore legitimacy after a presidential election marred by fraud as the United States considers sending thousands more troops to quell a Taliban-led insurgency.

Twenty-three Taliban-linked militants

were killed in an operation by Afghan and Western troops in the province of Paktika late Tuesday, Hamidullah Zhwak, a provincial spokesman, said in a statement.

Nato warplanes pounded insurgent positions in support of ground forces in Paktika's Barmal district on the Pakistani border, the spokesman added.

The Nato-led International Security Assistance Force (Isaf) could not immediately comment but was checking the reported air strikes.

About 16 other insurgents were killed in separate operations, involving Afghan and international forces, in several provinces mainly in the south where the insurgency is most intense, the defence ministry said.

Dozens of insurgents were captured during those operations on Tuesday and Wednesday, the ministry said in a statement.

Officials said recently that Afghan security forces, backed by Isaf and a separate US-led coalition, have intensified operations against rebels.

US President Barack Obama is expected to decide shortly whether to order up to 40,000 extra American soldiers to Afghanistan in an effort to turn around the war against the Taliban.

Their insurgency has hit new highs this year, the deadliest for Western and Afghan forces since US-led troops overthrew the Taliban regime in 2001.

Israel okays new east Jerusalem homes

US, Western states rebuke move

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel gave approval on Tuesday for the construction of hundreds of new housing units in annexed Arab east Jerusalem, drawing Western criticism as it drove another stake into troubled Middle East peace efforts.

The interior ministry said it approved the construction of 900 new units in Gilo, one of a dozen Jewish settlements in east Jerusalem, in a move that flew in the face of Palestinian calls -- that had had US backing -- for a complete freeze on new building ahead of fresh peace talks.

The biting response from President Barack Obama's administration came after the Israeli interior ministry gave the green light to new settlements.

Washington was quick to voice its unhappiness with the decision.

"We are dismayed at the Jerusalem planning committee's decision to move forward on the approval process for the expansion of Gilo in Jerusalem," said White House spokesman Robert Gibbs.

"At a time when we are working to relaunch negotiations, these actions make it more difficult for our efforts to

succeed."

Israeli news reports said that hawkish Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had rejected a request from his US ally to halt construction in Gilo. It was not clear whether the request specifically concerned the project okayed on Tuesday.

Calling the settlements illegal, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon appealed to Israel to respect its commitments to cease all settlement activity under the Road Map, a blue print for peace between Israel and the Palestinians under a so-called two-state solution.

Obama meets his half brother in China

AP, Beijing

President Barack Obama said yesterday that he met briefly with a half brother who lives in China and who recently wrote a semi-autobiographical novel about the abusive Kenyan father they share.

Obama, who spent three days in China during his first official tour of Asia, acknowledged the meeting in an interview with CNN. He offered no details. An aide said later that the meeting took place Monday night after Obama arrived in Beijing, the Chinese capital.

The White House had declined to say whether the president and Mark Ndesandjo would meet. And no White House official mentioned the visit until Obama did when asked about it.



US President Barack Obama tours the Great Wall of China in Badaling, outside of Beijing on Wednesday with the Chinese Ambassador to the US Zhou Wenzhong (L) and US Ambassador to China Jon Huntsman (R).

Iran will consider uranium swap, not transfer abroad

AFP, Tehran/Washington

Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki said yesterday Tehran had ruled out sending any low-enriched uranium abroad but would consider a simultaneous fuel swap inside the country, a report said.

ISNA news agency quoted Mottaki as saying that a UN-backed proposal which would have seen Tehran's stocks of low-enriched uranium sent out the country for further enrichment was not feasible.

"We reviewed it ... from an economic and technical aspect. We will definitely not send out our 3.5 percent enriched uranium," Mottaki said.

"It means that we will (instead) consider swapping the

(nuclear) fuel simultaneously in Iran," he added.

Under the UN-backed deal, Iran would have relied on Russia and France to process low-enriched uranium to fuel a Tehran reactor that makes medical isotopes.

Earlier US officials Tuesday appeared pessimistic about the chances of Iran responding to a UN-backed deal to ship its low-enriched uranium stock out of the country.

"We hope that they will provide a formal response, but the failure to provide a response to this and its overall noncompliance, as laid out in the IAEA agreement, frankly, doesn't give us a whole lot of confidence that they will respond formally," State Department spokesman Ian Kelly said.

Zardari ready to surrender important powers: Gilani

ANI, Islamabad

Pakistan Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani has said that President Asif Ali Zardari is ready to surrender the powers to appoint services chiefs and dissolve parliament.

Talking to media persons in Dera Ismail Khan, where he met internally displaced persons (IDPs) from South Waziristan, Gilani stressed that while Zardari is ready to relinquish his powers, he does not want to acquire the authority of appointing the services chiefs.

"The president is already willing to give up these powers," The Daily Times quoted Gilani, as saying.

"I am not interested in acquiring these powers. What

would I do when I have the authority under Article 58(2b) ... I am not here to dissolve the assemblies," he added.

Responding to a question Gilani ruled out any change in the North West Frontier Province's (NWFP) Governor office, saying: "You cannot change your general in the middle of war."

Gilani did not rule out expansion of military offensive against the Taliban and al-Qaeda is other parts of the country, but declined to divulge details regarding future action.

Earlier, addressing a gathering of elders from the Mehsud tribe, the Prime Minister expressed satisfaction over the on going military operations against the militants and said that the "objectives were being achieved ahead of time."

US, China willing to build in-depth partnership

Obama wraps up trip visiting Great Wall

AFP, Beijing

US President Barack Obama wrapped up his first trip to China on Wednesday by meeting Premier Wen Jiabao, who said the two nations were better off as partners not rivals, and visiting the Great Wall.

The US president left Beijing for South Korea, where he was due to meet President Lee Myung-Bak on Thursday for talks on North Korea's nuclear weapons programme and a stalled bilateral free trade pact.

Obama and Wen hailed their countries' willingness to build a new, in-depth partnership as they sat down for discussions and a working lunch in Beijing, echoing comments made Tuesday by the US leader and Chinese President Hu Jintao.

"Dialogue is better than confrontation and partnership is better than rivalry," Wen said in his opening remarks.

"I sincerely hope that by making this visit to China, Mr President, we will be able to take the comprehensive,

cooperative relationship between the two countries to a new level."

Obama noted that the Sino-US relationship was "now expanding to deal with a whole host of global issues in which US-China cooperation is critical."

The US president -- accompanied by his secretaries of state, commerce and energy and the country's trade representative -- had been expected to raise economic issues such as the yuan, which Washington sees as undervalued.

Vehicle requisition

FROM PAGE 16

which was promptly taken up by most other owners and drivers of the 100 vehicles kept at Agargaon.

Rafiq went to the deputy commissioner's (traffic) office in Mohammadpur and managed a chit in exchange for a bribe of Tk 2,500. By the time he returned to Agargaon, instructions to release his microbus had already reached there and he got his car back.

The case of Rafiq is not a one-off incident. A large number of traffic personnel are harassing motorists on city streets and taking bribes by threatening to requisition their vehicles.

A good number of CNG run auto rickshaw owners alleged that since November 16 traffic police personnel across the city have been intercepting their vehicles and releasing them after realising bribe of Tk 200 to Tk 500 from each.

They said although they have all the necessary documents, traffic police personnel harass the auto rickshaw drivers for not having doors in the passenger cabin.

"Though the authorities concerned circulated no notice for introducing doors in the passenger cabin, we are harassed on the streets every day by the law enforcers," they said.

Joint Commissioner (traffic) Mohammad Shafiqur Rahman told The Daily Star that he held a meeting with the leaders of three auto rickshaw owners' associations and it was decided that within a month (which expired on November 15) the owners would install doors in the passenger cabin.

He added as most of the auto rickshaw owners failed to keep their pledge, the DMP authorities yesterday extended the deadline till

November 30.

Many auto rickshaw owners, however, do not belong to any auto rickshaw owners' association.

Vehicle owners allege that unscrupulous traffic personnel realise Tk 2,500 to 4,000 from a microbus, Tk 1,500 to 2,000 from a taxicab, around Tk 1,000 from a pick-up van as bribe for sparing them.

Sources in different bus service operators said a bus service operator has to pay Tk 30,000 to 50,000 a month to avoid requisition of their vehicles.

A number of rental car providers, bus drivers and pick-up van owners in the city alleged that traffic sergeants stop 15 to 20 vehicles even though they have a slip to requisition only one vehicle. At the end they requisition one vehicle but realise Tk 2,000-4,000 bribe from each of the other vehicles.

The money is then shared among top to low-level traffic police officials.

Aggrieved vehicle owners said two traffic police personnel at deputy commissioner's (motor transport) office collect the bribe and arrange sharing of the money.

"A traffic sergeant and a constable at DC Motor Transport office in Rajarbagh run the underhand dealings in the name of requisition," an office bearer of a pick-up van owners' association said wishing anonymity.

Former joint commissioner (traffic) Manjur Kader Khan, who was recently transferred from the post, denied the allegation of taking bribes by traffic police personnel and said "As we have started combing operation against vehicles which do not have route permits or have other faults, the drivers and vehicle owners concerned are

bringing such false allegations against traffic police."

During the last caretaker government, bribe taking in the name of requisition was almost nil as different vehicle owners' associations supplied required vehicles to police on regular basis under an agreement between them and top police officials.

Besides, the authorities would deploy plain-clothes policemen to watch whether on-duty traffic sergeants were unnecessarily stopping vehicles, harassing drivers or collecting bribe.

"Though we are providing microbuses to police as per the agreement, traffic sergeants requisition our vehicles at least twice a month if we do not pay bribe regularly," said a rental car business owner at Paribagh seeking anonymity.

An office bearer of a city pick-up van owners' association also made similar allegation. "Two city police stations are using four of our pick-up vans on condition that they will not requisition the association's vehicles. But traffic police personnel frequently requisition our vehicles and we have to get them back paying bribes."

Joint commissioner (traffic) office sources said usually they have to requisition around 250 vehicles on an average day and generally they do not requisition a vehicle that has been requisitioned within the last three months.

Manjur Kader Khan said he had received some written complaints about irregularities in requisitioning vehicles but the complainants did not mention their names and addresses and this is why it is impossible to take actions against the "accused" traffic personnel.

Police ride

FROM PAGE 16

He said the DMP authorities never pay them anything and on the contrary they have to pay bribes to get their other vehicles released when policemen stop them to requisition them.

According to vehicle requisition and compensation rules, 2006 of DMP, the DMP commissioner will form a committee including joint commissioner of traffic and an officer not below the rank of assistant director of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority. This Compensation Fixation Committee will determine the amount of money the owners of requisitioned vehicles would get after considering seat capacity of the vehicle, type of the vehicle and other things. The committee is also assigned to fix the amounts to be paid to the driver and the helper of a requisitioned vehicle.

However, the compensation fixation committee in its meeting on July 2, 2008 fixed daily Tk 1,000 compensation for a bus, Tk 700 for a minibus or a truck with five tonne capacity, Tk 600 for a microbus and small truck and Tk 400 for a small vehicle (human haulier) or a taxi. Tk 50 was fixed for each driver and helper of the vehicles, DMP sources said.

The DMP authorities, however, do not pay the owners, let alone the drivers and helpers, vehicle owners claimed.

Deputy Commissioner Motor Transport office sources said due to fund constraints they cannot compensate the vehicle owners concerned but they are paying the drivers and helpers.

I just want justice

FROM PAGE 1

Italian capital Rome Tuesday night.

Hasina is scheduled to return to Dhaka at about 9:00am today ahead of the apex court judgment on Bangabandhu killing.

Referring to the BDR mutiny on February 25-26, she said the government has already started trial process of the killers of the patriotic army officers who were brutally killed in the mutiny.

She said 33 of the officers slain in a planned way during the mutiny belonged to pro-Awami League families and it happened at the time when her government was making a move to bring them back to the army and Special Security Force (SSF) for their good professional records.

Hasina, one of the two surviving daughters of Bangabandhu, said the anti-liberation war forces are still trying to protect the killers of the father of the nation.

"But the killers will have no place on the soil of Bangladesh," she asserted.

The premier also vowed to hold trial of the killers of four national leaders assassinated on November 3, 1975. Hasina, reiterating her pledge to try the war criminals as per the election manifesto of Awami League, said, "We will fulfil our election commitments."

"There will be no room for the terrorists and militants in the country," said the premier amid huge applause by several thousand party men gathered at the community hall in the Italian capital.

She said a number of steps are being taken by the gov-

ernment to change the fate of country's poor people by ensuring food security and protecting them from the risk of climate change.

As some expatriate AL leaders drew the attention of the premier by raising a number of problems they are facing abroad Hasina said her government would look into the problems and solve it for the welfare of the expatriate Bangladeshis who have huge contributions to country's economy.

The prime minister asked the Bangladesh ambassador in Italy to buy lands for setting up a consulate office in Milan where a large number of Bangladeshi people live.

She also said an expatriate bank would be set up in the country soon. She also said a branch of Bangladesh Bank would also be set up in Italy for safe and quick transaction of remittance to the country.

The premier said the government had already decided to set up schools in Italy and other countries where a large number of Bangladeshi citizens work, to ensure their children's education.

Regarding the voting rights of the expatriate Bangladeshis, Hasina said her government would take all necessary measures in this regard.

Among others, Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury, Food and Disaster Management Minister Abdur Razzaque and Foreign Minister Dipu Moni spoke at the function chaired by Mahtab Hossain, president of Italy AL.

Insects with tiny brains may be as intelligent as much bigger animals

ANI, Washington

Bigger is not necessarily better, at least when it comes to brains, says a new study, which found that tiny insects could be as intelligent as much bigger animals, despite only having a brain the size of a pinhead.

"Animals with bigger brains are not necessarily more intelligent," says Lars Chittka from Queen Mary, University of London.

Research repeatedly shows how insects are capable of some intelligent behaviours scientists previously thought was unique to larger animals.

For example, honeybees can count, categorise similar objects like dogs or human faces, understand 'same' and 'different', and differentiate between shapes that are symmetrical and asymmetrical.

"We know that body size is the single best way to predict an animal's brain size. However, contrary to popular belief, we can't say that brain size predicts their capacity for intelligent behaviour," says Chittka.

Differences in brain size between animals is extreme: a whale's brain can weigh up to 9 kg (with over 200 billion nerve cells), and human brains vary between 1.25 kg and 1.45 kg (with an estimated 85 billion nerve cells). A honeybee's brain weighs only 1 milligram and contains fewer than a million nerve cells.



Michael Jackson's white jewel glove is on display at an auction preview in New York on Tuesday.

Jackson's 'Moonwalk' glove set to sparkle at auction

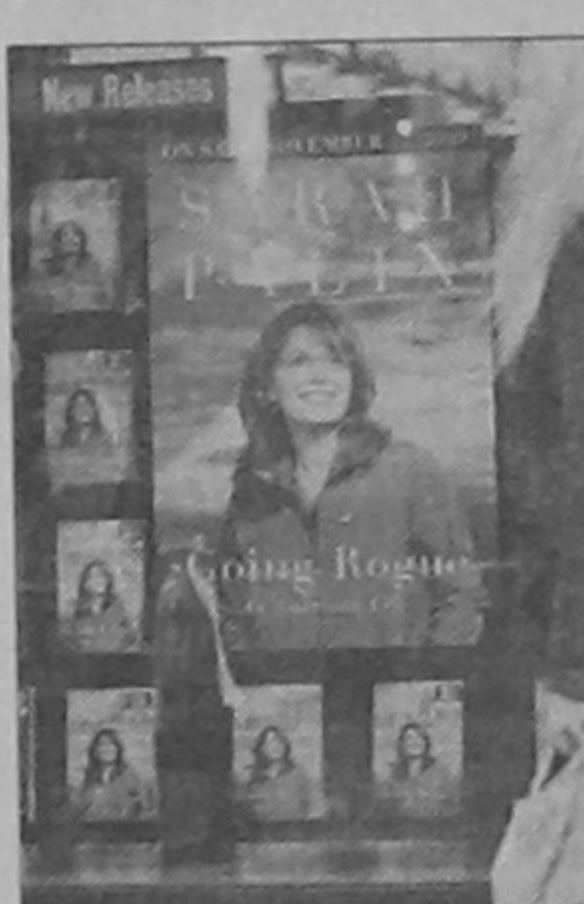
AFP, New York

A rhinestone-studded leather glove worn by pop icon Michael Jackson on his maiden Moonwalk in 1983, was on display Tuesday in New York before it rocks on to the auction block.

The sparkling bit of pop history was among 350 lots in the catalogue at the sale set to take place Saturday at the Hard Rock Cafe in New York's Times Square.

For fans of the late King of Pop, about 80 items are up for grabs, from the singer's public and private sides.

Among the Jackson belongings: a pair of sparkle-encrusted shoes, portraits of Charlie Chaplin drawn by Jackson when he was just nine years old, a black shirt signed by the star, hats, a 1985 Mercedes, handwritten letters, and assorted travel souvenirs.



People walk by a window display of "Going Rogue: an American Life", a book from former Republican vice-president candidate Sarah Palin, as it hit stores in the US, on Tuesday in New York.

Palin drops strong White House hint

AFP, New York

Sarah Palin dropped a heavy hint Tuesday that she might seek to run for the White House in 2012 as champion of America's Republican right.

Speaking to ABC television's Barbara Walters, the former running mate in John McCain's failed 2008 presidential bid gave every appearance of releasing a trial balloon.

"That certainly isn't on my radar screen right now, but when you consider some of the ordinary-turning-into-extraordinary events that have happened in my life, I am not one to predict what will happen in a few years," she said.