

## US to take over main role in southern Afghanistan

AFP, London/Kabul

United States forces are to take over the main role in southern Afghanistan from the British in a shake-up of the region's command structure, a newspaper reported yesterday.

The arrangement for the vast area known as Regional Command South is to change following the arrival of some 21,000 US troops in the area last year, said the Times which cited an unnamed source.

Thousands more American servicemen are due to arrive in the south of the war-torn country in 2010, as part of a buildup in forces to battle a fierce Taliban insurgency.

The command currently switches every year between Britain, the Netherlands and Canada, with a permanent American deputy commander, the paper said.

This structure will be replaced by two division-sized commands of about 30,000 servicemen each in the south-east and southwest, according to the Times.

The new structure will be in place in the second half of this year, the paper said.

Britain's Ministry of Defence is considering whether to push for a rotating command in the southwest section that will include its forces in Helmand province, the report added.

Referring to this, a source

## Jyoti Basu

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that Jyoti Basu's heart and lungs were deteriorating.

Stiffness of 95-year-old Jyoti Basu's lungs was increasing while his sensory apparatus weakened and C-reactive protein in blood reduced, diminishing his resistance mechanism, said critical care specialist Susruth Banerjee.

"These weaknesses are affecting his brain. Fluid is accumulating in his cells and being neutralised with medicine," he said.

Maity said, "Jyoti Basu's condition is critical. He has dysfunction cardiac and renal systems and stiffness of the lungs."

"The stiffness of lungs is usually reversible but with his heart and renal dysfunctions it has become uncertain," said Maity.

The doctors will tomorrow decide whether to perform tracheotomy, a surgical procedure on the neck to open a direct airway through an incision in the windpipe.

Admitted to AMRI Hospital on January 1, Jyoti Basu remained on ventilatory support and his oxygen requirements has increased, said a medical bulletin.

## Arsenic in crop

FROM PAGE 1

A galaxy of leading arsenic researchers from home and abroad studied the impact of irrigation with their findings published in the January issue of the London-based Nature Geoscience.

The researchers include ABM Badruzzaman and M Ashraf Ali, both professor of civil engineering at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology.

Talking to The Daily Star at Buet recently, the two experts said arsenic drawn to the surface by groundwater irrigation is largely removed (up to 62 per cent) in the following monsoon if the lands go under floodwater about one metre in depth.

But paddy fields not experiencing typical monsoon flooding are particularly at risk of arsenic accumulation, posing a potential threat of penetrating into food chain in future, they said.

According to official statistics, only 21 per cent of Bangladesh's total lands are submerged by floodwater around a metre in depth while the rest remains largely vulnerable to arsenic accumulation due to mining of groundwater.

Badruzzaman and Ashraf Ali, having long track records of arsenic research, worked for years along with co-researchers at an experimental site in Mnsiganj. The team included experts from from Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University, USA, and a couple of Swiss and German research centres of excellence.

The current issue of Nature Geoscience that has an editorial titled 'Digging Deeper' focused on arsenic issues and carried their findings based on field studies.

told the paper that "the overall structure... is a work in progress."

In fresh violence four US troops and a French soldier were killed in separate incidents in a spiralling Taliban-led insurgency.

Two US soldiers died in an IED (improvised explosive device) strike in the east of the country. Another died in fighting, also in the east, and a fourth died of wounds suffered in an IED explosion in the south.

The French defence ministry said a non-commissioned officer died on the road between Bagram and Nijrab in the east, the third French soldier to die in as many days.

Meanwhile, four Afghan military engineers and a civilian were killed when a bomb device they were trying to defuse went off in the eastern province of Khost, said Zahir Wardak, a senior military official.

The latest fatalities come a day after seven people died in violence at a protest against an alleged desecration of the Koran by foreign forces, officials said.

## Stop illegal VoIP

FROM PAGE 1

Moni in separate messages expressed deep shock at the devastation caused by the catastrophic earthquake.

The meeting approved the proposal to bring Gopalganj under the National Service.

Youths having secondary and higher-secondary certificates will be provided with temporary employment under this safety net scheme.

The cabinet also approved the extension of retirement age of freedom fighters in public service, Prime Minister's Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad told journalists after the meeting.

He said the extension would be considered effective from December 13, 2009.

The government on October 19 extended the service age of the freedom-fighter officials and employees from 57 to 59 years.

The cabinet approved formulation of new guideline for Internet gateway, Internet gateway Exchange and Internet Gateway Service to make the ICT rules more effective and asked the authorities concerned to formulate a new law.

The cabinet also approved the draft of Bangladesh Tourism Board Bill 2009.

## Sundarbans

FROM PAGE 16

where a captured tigress and a deer were released.

Nearly 60 per cent of the Sundarbans lies in Bangladesh. Its protection is crucial for both the countries to fight climate change.

Of the four civilians, Khan H Abedin serving in Port-au-Prince is known to have suffered minor injuries but he is now out of danger, sources said. However, the condition of the rest is unknown.

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID), which is now carrying out further investigation into the cases, has arrested a number of suspects including one of Huji founders Shaikh Abdus Salam and Abu Yusuf Butt, a leader of Kashmir-based militant organisation Hizbul Mujahideen.

Azizul during interrogation told DB officials he has close relations with Salam and Butt. Moreover, he also admitted he has close relations with many other Huji leaders, investigators say.

Salam on December 3 made a confessional statement before a Dhaka court about the August 21 carnage.

International Affairs Secretary of Bangladesh Khelafat Andolan (BKA) Azizul Hauq also admitted that he had helped Huji leaders break into mainstream politics during the BNP-Jamaat-led four-party alliance rule and the caretaker government regime.

During interrogation he claimed Mufti Hannan and some members of his group were responsible for the bomb and grenade attacks.

He also claimed Sheikh Abdus Salam and other leaders of Huji, which was dissolved in 1998, were not involved in any grenade or bomb attacks.

He told the interrogators Hannan was inducted in Huji from Harkatul Mujahideen, a Pakistan-based militant organisation of Afghan war veterans.

Azizul said he himself wrote IDP's declaration and

MONEY LAUNDERING CASE

## Koko asked to appear in court Feb 15

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday asked Arafat Rahman Koko, the youngest son of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, to appear before it on February 15 in connection with a money laundering case.

Senior Special Judge ANM Bashir Ullah passed the order after Koko's lawyers informed the court that the home ministry extended his parole for two months on December 14 last year.

The court also asked Gulshan police station to submit the execution report of arrest warrant against Ismail Hossain Saimon, son of former Shipping Minister, the late Akbar Hossain, by February 15.

The same court earlier issued an arrest warrant against Saimon and asked police to submit a report by yesterday, but they failed to do so.

The Anti-corruption Commission filed the case against Koko on March 17 last year under the money laundering law for siphoning off Tk 19,70,25,000 to Singapore.

As per the deposition, a portion of the money deposited to Koko's bank account came from an account of China Harbour Engineering Company Ltd opened in the USA.

China Harbour was operating in Bangladesh at the time of the transfer as it was constructing the New Mooring Container Terminal.

The investigation officer of the case included Saimon's name as his involvement with the money laundering was found later.

On November 15 last year, the court accepted the charge sheet against Koko and Saimon after Assistant Director of ACC Mohammad Abu Syed submitted it sheet to Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court in Dhaka on November 12 showing 23 people as prosecution witnesses.

It charged Koko and Saimon with siphoning off Sing\$ 28.84 lakh and US \$9.32 lakh from Bangladesh.

## 6 Bangladeshi

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working for the peacekeeping mission but none of them was posted to the UN headquarters in Haitian capital Port-au-Prince, which collapsed in the 7.0-magnitude earthquake.

Inspectors Khandaker Hossain Ahmed, Mohammad Abu Bakar, Mohammad Shah Kabir and sergeant Mohammad Mabian Mian were posted to Haitian capital Port-au-Prince while Inspector Kaiser Ali and Sub-Inspector Abu SM Quamrul Ahsan were posted to Mirebalais.

As well as the six police officials, four Bangladeshi nationals serve as civil staffs of UN peacekeeping mission in Haiti, according to reports from international media.

Of the four civilians, Khan H Abedin serving in Port-au-Prince is known to have suffered minor injuries but he is now out of danger, sources said. However, the condition of the rest is unknown.

## Bill placed

FROM PAGE 1

"If a lawmaker receives gifts or services worth over Tk 5,000, he or she will have to inform the ethics committee," the bill proposed.

A legislator must not receive any gift if it influences his or her duties as an MP, it said.

On the matter of 'freedom of speech' in parliament, the bill says lawmakers' speech must follow the norms of democracy and tolerance. Their speeches must be objective, thoughtful and logical. They should consciously avoid causing harm to any individual who does not enjoy the same privileges.

The bill requires that the legislators should not knowingly mislead the parliament or the public through the statements they make. The bill also imposes an obligation upon them to correct parliamentary records as soon as possible when incorrect statements are made unintentionally.

Lawmakers must take all reasonable steps to declare any conflict of interest between their private financial interests and decisions in which they participate in the execution of their office, the provisions of the bill said.

## Malaysian firm

FROM PAGE 1

and MRV from April 1 this year to ensure safe and risk-free travel of its citizens.

The existing hand-written passports will not be valid for travelling and renewal after that deadline. Hand-written passports can be issued after April 1 only on emergency basis, said the minister.

Failing to meet the deadline may put the country's manpower business at risk, he said.

Brig Gen Md Refayet Ullah, director of the Tk 526 crore project for MRP and MRV, said he would ensure that everything goes fast so that Bangladesh can start issuing MRP and MRV in the quickest possible time.

He said IRIS Corporation Berhad will produce passports for three years and Bangladesh will take over the charge of the project in the third year.

He said he had already urged the home ministry to send two experts teams—one to Poland and another to France—for finalising passport booklets and lamination foil to save time, Refayet said. His next most important task is to sign a contract with the Malaysian company, he added.

IRIS won the tender with a quotation of Tk 267 crore, beating Flora Telecom that quoted Tk 347 crore. Although there were a few loopholes in the tender documents of IRIS, the government chose the firm considering its proposed budget.

As per the conditions, IRIS will produce 2.2 million passports each year.

The evaluation committee member said MRP and MRV could have been introduced easily before the deadline had the government chosen a firm shortly after the evaluation report of the responsive companies was submitted on November 23.

"We repeatedly requested the government high-ups to finalise the firm without further delay. But it took about two months to make the decision," he said, wishing not to be named.

A summary of the home ministry suggesting that the project be awarded to IRIS was sent to the cabinet committee on government purchase on December 27, but it took over two weeks to get approved.

Earlier, the seven-member evaluation committee changed its decision a couple of times in

## Land grabbers

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The Jatiya Party lawmaker also appreciated the state minister for housing's recent bold remarks about land grabbers.

In response, the state minister for law said it would not be appropriate for him to give out the specific names of the newspapers, their owners, and the journalists, adding, "But we all know who they are."

## IDP leader Azizul

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to interrogate him further," said a CID investigator asking not to be identified.

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less than a month because of alleged lobbying and counter-lobbying by influential politicians and businessmen.

Sensing the urgency, soon after assuming office the present Awami League government moved to expedite the project. The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecnc) approved Tk 283 crore for the project on March 19 last year.

The government also involved the Armed Forces Division to expedite finalisation of the project and introducing MRP and MRV before the deadline.

The AL government of 1996-2001 had first taken the initiative to introduce MRP following the ICAO's instructions to all its 181 member countries.

However, the following BNP-Jamaat government scrapped the move after assuming office in 2001.

Since the project was initiated, influential politicians and businessmen have been in a race to get the financial benefit out of the multi-million-dollar project, virtually delaying introduction of MRP and MRV.

## PM okays

FROM PAGE 1

the ground that none of these bidders had prior experience regarding rental power projects.

The projects include Barisal 50 MW heavy fuel oil (HFO)-fired plant, contract for which was awarded to Coastal Saba, Noapara 100 MW HFO-fired plant and Bheramara 100 MW diesel-fired plant with the contracts awarded to Otobi, and Jamalpur 30 MW HFO-based plant and Thakurgaon 50 MW diesel-based plant with Rahim Afrooz getting the deals.

The diesel-fired plants will have to be installed within 120 days of signing contracts with the PDB and HFO-fired plants within 270 days. The HFO-based plants will enjoy a rental contract for five years and diesel-based ones for three years.

The cost of power from diesel-based plant will be around Tk 14 per kilowatt hour and from HFO-fired plant around Tk 7. The PDB will it at around Tk 2.6 per kilowatt hour. This huge loss will have to be subsidised by the government.

Previously the caretaker government had given rental power contracts to companies like Energy Prima, Venture Energy and Precision Energy to generate power within May 2008. All these companies failed to set up the power plants in time, and a couple of these rental contractors have not produced power till now.

The caretaker government's last rental power contract was awarded to Asian Entech to install a 55 MW plant in Sikalaha for three years. This project was supposed to be launched in July last year but it is yet to begin commercial operation.

## 20 killed

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Meanwhile, four Afghan military engineers and a civilian were killed when a bomb device they were trying to defuse went off in the eastern province of Khost, said Zahir Wardak, a senior military official.

The latest fatalities come a day after seven people died in violence at a protest against an alleged desecration of the Koran by foreign forces, officials said.

"Two Isaf (International Security Assistance Force) service members from the United States were killed today as a result of an IED (improvised explosive device) strike in eastern Afghanistan," the force said in a statement.

A later Isaf statement said: "An Isaf service member from the United States was killed today during an engagement with insurgents in eastern Afghanistan. In a separate engagement another Isaf service member from the United States died of his wounds today as a result of an IED strike in southern Afghanistan."

## BSF tortures Bangladeshi trader to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sathkira

Police recovered the body of a Bangladeshi cattle trader, allegedly beaten to death by Indian Border Security Force, from Ichhamati river near the village Uksha at Kaliganj upazila of the district yesterday afternoon.

The victim was identified as Shafiqul Islam Khan, 35, son of Nur Uddin Khan of village Shitalur of the upazila.

Quoting locals police said Shafiqul along with others started for India to buy cattle on January 9. As soon as they reached the Indian territory, BSF men of Bolkata border outpost intercepted them.

BSF men tortured Shafiqul to death and threw his body into the river, they said.

Locals found the body floating in the river and informed police.

Alamgir Hossain, officer in charge of Kaliganj Police Station, confirmed the incident and said that the body bore several marks of injury.

## Chaos at DMCH

FROM PAGE 16

transparent recruitment process.

The class IV employees also demanded dismissal of the doctors interfering in recruiting. Some other employees also demanded removal of doctors Moni Lal and Abu Yusuf Faqir.

However, Moni Lal and Abu Yusuf denied the allegations of taking bribe for recruitment. They rather alleged the DMCH Director and Employees' Union president Khaleq for the irregularities and corruption.

General Secretary of Class IV Employees' Union Shamsul Alam told The Daily Star, "Though the director had assured us of recruiting 51 person on our recommendation, he did not keep his word. Besides, some doctors, ministers, lawmakers and other influential persons have been partially controlling the recruitment process."

During a press conference held at Dhaka Reporters' Unity last evening, the doctors alleged that the recruitment process lacked transparency and they had nothing to do with it.

## Headmaster

FROM PAGE 1

The successful candidate will now have to face viva voce. The schedule of viva voce will be displayed at notice boards of District Primary Education offices.

Candidates can also log on to www.dpe.gov.bd for schedules.

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## Frantic search

FROM PAGE 1

With every hour crucial, international rescue teams began arriving with heavy lifting gear, sniffer dogs and desperately-needed medicines, food and water.

"The priority is to find survivors," said Elisabeth Byrs, a spokeswoman for the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

"We are working against the clock."

Casualty figures were impossible to calculate, but Prime Minister Jean-Max Bellerive said the final death toll from the magnitude 7.0 quake could be "well over 100,000."

President Rene Preval, whose home and official palace were destroyed, said 50,000 could be dead.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who cancelled an Asia trip and returned to Washington, said the death toll would reach "tens of thousands" and warned of an unimaginable disaster in a country which is already the poorest in the Western hemisphere.

Teams of civilian and military experts arrived the airport, which was operating even though the control tower collapsed.

Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Russia and Spain all offered teams. Australia, Britain and Japan were among the countries that made multi-million dollar aid pledges.

Other rescuers headed to the impoverished nation by sea.

The USS Carl Vinson aircraft carrier was to arrive Thursday with destroyers and more Coast Guard ships en route and 5,000 troops on stand-by.

"I have directed my administration to respond with a swift, coordinated and aggressive effort to save lives," US President Barack Obama said.

The Red Cross launched a 10-million-dollar appeal, the World Food Programme offered 15,000 tonnes of food and the World Bank said it would provide an extra 100 million dollars in aid.

In Tokyo, Haiti's charge d'affaires Jean-Claude Bordes mourned for a city he learned had been "totally destroyed".

"The conversations, I had (by phone), were not too long. I just heard screams. Our country

## Taliban leader

FROM PAGE 16

Hakimullah Mehsud, who has led the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan since August, had been in the lawless tribal area bordering Afghanistan where the missiles hit but he left before the attack, a TTP spokesman told AFP.

"Hakimullah Mehsud was present at the same place in Shaktol where the drone attack took place," the spokesman Azam Tariq said from an undisclosed location.

"But he had left the area already when the drone attack took place. He is alive and completely safe."

His comments came after local television stations carried unconfirmed reports that Mehsud may have been killed in the strike on the border of North and South Waziristan, the seventh on Pakistan's lawless northwest tribal belt this month.

"We are receiving reports about his death but we are not 100 per cent sure," a senior security official told AFP, requesting anonymity.

Tariq did not say when Mehsud left the area, which Pakistan security officials described as "very remote".

Hakimullah Mehsud assumed leadership of the group blamed for the deaths of thousands of people in attacks in Pakistan after his predecessor Baitullah Mehsud was killed in a US drone strike on August 5.

The TTP denied Baitullah Mehsud's death for weeks, apparently amid fierce infighting over his succession.

On January 9, Hakimullah Mehsud appeared in video clip alongside a Jordanian who blew himself up on a US military base in Afghanistan last month, killing seven CIA agents and his Jordanian handler