

US envoy meets Suu Kyi

Demands 'immediate steps' by Myanmar on elections

AFP, Yangon

The United States is deeply disappointed by Myanmar's preparations for rare elections and wants "immediate steps" to address fears they will lack legitimacy, a top US diplomat said yesterday.

Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Kurt Campbell issued his strongly-worded statement after meeting government officials and opposition leaders including detained democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi.

"What we have seen to date leads us to believe that these elections will lack international legitimacy," Campbell said of the junta's plans to stage a vote later this year that would be the first in two decades.

"We urge the regime to take immediate steps to open the process in the time remaining before the elections," he said.

US President Barack Obama's administra-

tion launched dialogue with Myanmar's military rulers last year after concluding that Western attempts to isolate the regime had produced little success.

But it has sharply criticised their preparations for the polls planned for later this year which have been condemned by critics as a sham designed to legitimise the military rulers' grip on power.

"Although we are profoundly disappointed by the response of the (Myanmar) leadership, I remain inspired by those outside the government with whom I met," Campbell added.

Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) was forcibly dissolved last week under widely criticised laws governing the elections.

The Nobel Peace laureate, 64, held more than an hour of talks with Campbell after being driven to a state guesthouse in Yangon from the lakeside mansion where she has spent most of the last two decades under house arrest.



This hand out picture released by the US Embassy in Myanmar shows detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi (C) talking with US envoy for East Asia Kurt Campbell (R) at a state guesthouse in Yangon yesterday.

Karzai arrives in US for talks

BBC ONLINE

Afghan President Hamid Karzai arrives in the US for talks yesterday, after recent public spat between the two sides on governance and corruption.

During his four-day visit, he is to meet US President Barack Obama, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Defence Secretary Robert Gates.

The trip comes as Nato prepares for an assault in southern Kandahar province.

In April President Karzai accused the US and other Western powers of being responsible for fraud in the 2009 poll.

Widespread corruption marred presidential and provincial council elections last August, much of it blamed by monitors on Afghan election officials.

And in a recent report released ahead of Mr Karzai's visit, the US defence department said that only a quarter of the population in what it regarded as key regions in Afghanistan supported the Karzai government.

'Nepal PM won't resign unless army integration issue is settled'

ANI, Kathmandu

Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal's political advisor Raghuj Pant has said Nepal will not step down until there is an agreement on the integration of Maoist combatants with the Nepal Army.

According to Nepalnews, Pant said there should be an agreement on the number of Maoist combatants before the Prime Minister could consider resigning.

"The Prime Minister has no compulsion to resign just because of the Unified CPN (Maoist) agitation."

Pant's views come at a time when Nepal is facing increasing pressure from the Maoists, a section of his own party, CPN (UML) and the business community to resign to end the current political standoff.

American and European Union diplomats have also expressed dissatisfaction over government's refusal to break the deadlock.

Pak Taliban behind NY bomb attempt: US

BBC ONLINE, ANI, Karachi

The US has evidence the Pakistani Taliban was behind the attempted car bombing in New York's Times Square, Attorney General Eric Holder says.

Holder said the militants helped to facilitate the plot, and "probably helped finance it".

US officials had previously rejected claims by the group that it was behind the 1 May plot.

Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi has said that Faisal Shahzad, the man accused of plotting the botched Times Square bombing, is not a resident of his country but a 'naturalised American citizen.'

Qureshi, however, said that Pakistan would provide all help to the United States concerning the probe into the failed New York bombing plot.

"I will have to check. I am not aware of that but I am aware that he is a naturalised American citizen, and the Government of Pakistan will cooperate with the United States and help them in whatever way we can," he said while responding to a question on reports regarding the recovery of two Pakistani passports from Shahzad.

A Pakistani-born US citizen has been charged with the attempted bombing in New York's tourist quarter a week ago.

Faisal Shahzad, 30, from Bridgeport, Connecticut, has cooperated with investigators, and admits receiving bomb-making training in the Pakistani region of Waziristan, prosecutors have said.

"We've now developed evidence that shows that the Pakistani Taliban was behind the attack."

INDO-PAK TALKS Krishna, Qureshi likely to talk today

PTI, New Delhi

External Affairs Minister S M Krishna and his Pakistani counterpart Shah Mahmood Qureshi are expected to hold telephonic talk today to discuss ways to reduce trust deficit in pursuance to the decision reached between Prime Ministers of the two countries in Thimphu. Krishna had told Rajya Sabha on last Thursday that he would talk to Qureshi the next day but sources said it could not happen due to scheduling mismatch.

The telephonic talk is now expected tomorrow, the sources said. The two Foreign Ministers are expected to discuss when and where they could meet.

They are also likely to discuss about the next meeting of the Foreign Secretaries.

Indian minister faces music over China policy

BJP demands action against Ramesh

INDO ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, New Delhi

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh yesterday spoke to Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh and asked him not to comment on the functioning of other ministries, a reference to the minister's critical remarks in Beijing against the home ministry.

Manmohan Singh conveyed his displeasure to Ramesh and told him to avoid commenting on the working of other ministries in public, sources in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) told IANS.

The sources pointed out that the prime minister told Ramesh that there should not be 'any confusion' over India's policies towards China.

Ramesh created a flutter when he criticised the home ministry and the security establishment of India during a trip to Beijing, saying their policies towards China were 'alarmist and paranoid'.

"The suspicious attitude of the security estab-

lishment of India is spoiling the bonhomie between the two Asian neighbours, created as a result of the close collaboration on international negotiations on climate change," Ramesh had said.

The prime minister's rebuke came amid demands by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) that Ramesh should be made to resign for making such remarks, specially in a foreign country.

Ramesh, who was in Beijing to attend an international meeting on climate change, said there was danger that the cooperation with China at the Copenhagen spirit would not last long unless India changes a needlessly restrictive, alarmist approach to Chinese investment in infrastructure.

The Congress leadership too has taken a dim view of Ramesh's remarks about the home ministry's policies towards Chinese companies.

The party, however, officially said that it will react to the issue after the minister's return from Beijing.



India ex-minister arrested over abuse claim

BBC ONLINE

A former minister in the government of India's southern Karnataka state has been arrested after the wife of a friend accused him of sexual assault.

Haratal Halappa, former food and civil supplies minister in the state's BJP government, denies the charge. He says he is being framed by political rivals.

Mr Halappa resigned last week. He surrendered to the police on Sunday.

Correspondents say the incident has embarrassed the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) government.

9 Pak soldiers killed in battle

AFP, Peshawar

Pakistani military officials yesterday said nine soldiers were killed in the deadliest battle to date for security forces in a nearly two-month operation against the Taliban in the tribal belt.

Military officials described the battle near Daburi in Orakzai district as "fierce" and said two officers were among the nine who died. They also told AFP that 37 militants were "reportedly" killed and many injured.

Pak airport detains man with electrical circuits in shoes

AP, Karachi

Pakistani airport authorities detained a passenger after electrical circuits and batteries were found in the soles of his tennis shoes, officials said yesterday.

An initial investigation showed that the devices were used for massaging the feet, but the circuits could have other uses and authorities were continuing to examine them, senior police official Tanvir Aalam Odho said. Similar materials can be used in the construction of bombs.

The man, Faiz Mohammad, was arrested Sunday night at the Karachi airport, said Munir Ahmed, a spokesman for the airport security force. The materials were detected by a scanner.

Delhi HC Okays paternity suit against AP gov

INDO ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, New Delhi

In an apparent setback to former Andhra Pradesh governor ND Tiwari, the Supreme Court yesterday asked the Delhi High Court to go ahead with the paternity suit against him.

The high court was also told to proceed with the framing of issues, including maintainability of suit filed by Rohit Shekhar in terms of its territorial jurisdiction, limitation and accessibility. Shekhar claims that Tiwari is his biological father.



Armed policemen secure the scene of a shootout where a military security escort (R) of congressional candidate Del Abaya lies dead on the pavement following a clash between Abaya's security and police outside the Bacoor police municipal station in Cavite south of Manila yesterday. Ten people were killed in outbreaks of violence as millions of Filipinos went to the polls in nationwide elections, authorities said.

Riverways strike

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Shipping Minister Shahjahan Khan hoped that the movement of vessels on almost all routes would resume by yesterday night.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at a cabinet meeting asked the shipping minister to resolve the ongoing crisis through talks. The minister told her that he would sit with water transport workers if they call off the strike.

The minister also held a meeting with the home minister at the secretariat to discuss the matter.

On the arrest of some labour leaders, the minister said action was taken against those who instigated the violence.

Nineteen of the 37 launches left Sadarghat terminal for their destinations while 19 of 47 launches anchored at the terminal from different districts until

10:00pm, said officials at Sadarghat river deputy director's (traffic) office.

Meanwhile, leaders of Bangladesh Trade Union Federation, Bangladesh Poshak Prostatkarok Sramik Sangha, Bangladesh Trade Union Sangha and Bangladesh Paduka Shilpa Sramik Sangha urged the government to meet the demands of the water transport workers.

They also condemned the arrests of Noujan Sramik Federation leaders and demanded their immediate release.

Our Chittagong correspondent reports: A total of 22 vessels with imported goods remained stranded at the outer anchorage.

Ahsanul Haq Chowdhury, chairman of Bangladesh Shipping Agents' Association, said each vessel has to incur on average a

loss of \$15,000 for overstay at the Chittagong port every day.

Fertilizer was unloaded from a vessel at the outer anchorage and brought to the jetty with the help of police on Sunday night.

Our Barisal correspondent adds: Seven launches left Barisal terminal for Bhola and Patarhat. Two launches were scheduled to leave for Dhaka.

Administrative officials yesterday sat with launch owners and assured them of all kinds of assistance.

The federation called the strike from Friday night rejecting the new wage structure that raised wages of water transport workers by 50 to 100 percent.

The minimum salary of a worker is Tk 2,850, according to the new structure announced by the government on Friday.



Obama picks Elena Kagan for US SC

BBC ONLINE

US President Barack Obama has nominated Solicitor-General Elena Kagan as the 112th justice to the Supreme Court.

Ms Kagan, a 50-year-old former Harvard Law School dean, was at Obama's side at the White House when he announced, as expected, that she was his pick.

Filipinos vote amid violence, computer glitches

AFP, Manila

Ten people were killed as bouts of violence marred the Philippine elections while problems with vote-counting machines frustrated voters in the country's first automated ballot.

More than 40 million Filipinos were expected to turn up at polling stations across the archipelago to elect a successor to President Gloria Arroyo, whose near decade-long rule has been tarnished by allegations of corruption.

Noynoy Aquino, a 50-year-old bachelor, is the favourite to win the presidency after riding a wave of popular sentiment for his democracy-hero parents.

But violence that always plagues Philippine politics, as well as problems with the nation's first effort at using computers to count votes, fuelled longstanding concerns about whether the election would be credible.

Two of the fatalities occurred as gun battles raged in the flashpoint southern province of Maguindanao, where 57 people died in a grisly election-linked massacre late last year.

The army, which deployed thousands of troops to Maguindanao to minimise the violence there, said soldiers engaged in a series of fire fights with unknown assailants who fired rocket-propelled grenades near polling stations.

Ten people were killed across the Philippines on polling day, bringing the death toll from election-related violence over the

past four months to at least 40, according to police statistics.

Voters fled polling booths to escape the violence, while the military reported the two people who died were killed in clashes elsewhere between the private armies of rival politicians.

"Many people are voting and there are many complaints," election commissioner Rene Sarmiento told reporters, although he insisted the vote would eventually be a success.

More than 17,000 positions are at stake -- from president down to municipal council seats -- and local politicians are infamous for using their own "private armies" to eliminate rivals or intimidate voters.

Technological problems emerged immediately after polls opened with some machines breaking down, and the election commission was forced to extend the voting period by one hour.

Long queues formed at polling stations with the election commission estimating 85 percent of eligible voters would turn out.

Most embarrassingly for election organisers, Aquino was forced to wait five hours to vote in his northern home province of Tarlac because the original ballot-counting machine broke down.

"This should not have happened and it would not have happened if Comelec had done its job," said Aquino, referring to the election commission.

No graft

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conducting a preliminary probe into two allegations against former prime minister Khaleda Zia.

ACC Deputy Director Harunur Rashid, questioned the former minister at his Gulshan house for around 90 minutes.

Bhuiyan was a member of the cabinet committee on purchase in the BNP-led Khaleda Zia government that approved construction of Bhairab Bridge allegedly causing a loss of Tk 100 crore to the state exchequer.

Seeking anonymity, a member of the probe team said Mannan Bhuiyan told them that the purchase committee discussed in detail recommendations made by the ministry concerned

regarding tender and construction of the bridge.

The former minister further said those were also approved by the then prime minister, and proper procedure was followed in constructing the bridge, the probe body member told this correspondent.

The ACC team went to Bhuiyan's house for questioning since he was unable to appear before the commission due to illness. The team recorded what he said and also took a written statement from him.

Earlier, former communications minister Nazmul Huda had given a statement before the commission in connection with the allegations against Khaleda Zia.

statements on the issues. The other ministers sought time on various grounds.

The allegations against Khaleda are that when she was prime minister, about Tk 7.5 crore of public money was laundered in the name of land purchase for Zia Charitable Trust, and Tk 100 crore was misappropriated from the funds for construction of Bhairab Bridge.

The money-laundering probe also involves Khaleda's sons Tarique Rahman, senior vice-chairman of BNP, and Arafat Rahman Koko, as they are trustees of the charitable trust.

As per the ACC code of practice, once its inquiry finds sufficient information about an allegation, it goes for filing a case and carrying out a full-fledged investigation.