

US concerned over Israel's home knock out plan

BBC ONLINE

The US State Department has expressed concern about an Israeli plan for the demolition of 22 Palestinian homes in occupied East Jerusalem.

Spokesman PJ Crowley said it was the kind of action that undermined trust and increased the risk of violence.

The scheme, part of a redevelopment project in the Silwan neighbourhood, is still in an initial stage.

Israel's Defence Minister has also criticised Jerusalem's municipality for "bad timing" and poor "common sense".

Under the plan approved on Monday, 22 homes would be demolished to make room for an Israeli tourist park. Another 66 other buildings constructed without Israeli permission would be legalised.

It is strongly opposed by the Palestinians, who believe it will tighten Israel's control of the area.

The US, which has previously criticised similar demolition plans as damaging for the Middle East peace process, said it had raised the Silwan plan with the Israeli government.

Bomb hits Istanbul bus, kills four

BBC ONLINE

A remote-controlled bomb that hit a bus carrying Turkish soldiers and civilians has killed four people and left at least 12 injured near Istanbul.

The explosion took place through the Halkali district on the outskirts of the city.

No-one has claimed responsibility, though correspondents say suspicion will fall on the PKK Kurdish rebel group.

The PKK has recently stepped up its attacks on Turkish military targets.

The bus had just left a military residential compound in the Istanbul suburb when a roadside bomb exploded, killing three soldiers and the teenage daughter of an officer, local media reports said.

"This is a terrorist attack and the aim of the attack is clear - to create divisions, tensions and despair," said provincial governor Huseyin Avni Mutlu.



A helicopter flies over a flooded area in Jacuipe, in the northeastern state of Alagoas yesterday. Torrents of flood water devastated towns and villages in northeastern Brazil, killing at least 38 people, media reports said. Days of heavy rain in the states of Alagoas and Pernambuco inundated towns with water, burst a river dam, and left more than 50,000 people without shelter, state officials were quoted by media as saying. PHOTO: REUTERS

Thousand missing in Brazil floods

100,000 flee their homes, 38 confirmed dead

BBC ONLINE

Floods have engulfed two states in north-east Brazil, leaving about 1,000 people missing and forcing at least 100,000 to flee their homes.

At least 38 people are known to have died so far in Alagoas and Pernambuco.

Correspondents say the floods, brought on by nearly a week of rain, have washed away entire villages.

The governor of Alagoas, Teotonio Vilela Filho, said bodies were being washed up on beaches and riverbanks.

"Up until the early afternoon [Monday] we had 26 confirmed dead in Alagoas and more than 1,000 people missing," he said.

"We are praying for the missing to be found alive," he added, before holding talks with Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva on Monday.

Twelve deaths were confirmed in the state of Pernambuco.

More than 58,000 people were forced to leave their homes in Alagoas and more than 42,000 in Pernambuco, Brazil's civil defence agency was quoted as saying by Spain's Efe news agency.

AFP news agency quoted unspecified officials as saying the total number of people displaced was 100,000.

EVERYTHING LOST

The River Mundau burst its banks in the Alagoas town of Uniao dos Palmares, leaving at least 500 people unaccounted for, civil defence officials told AFP.

Aerial footage showed floodwater washing through the town.

The town of Quebrangulo in Alagoas was reportedly 80% submerged, forcing thousands of residents to flee to higher ground.

In Vitoria de Santo Antao, Pernambuco, a bridge was brought down.

A local woman, named only as Severina, told the Associated Press news agency as she stood with her son that she had lost all her possessions.

"There is nothing left, nothing, nothing, nothing," she said.

An unnamed man in the Pernambuco town of Cortes was shovelling mud out of his home on Monday.

"We are here on our feet, praying to God that we will be able to rebuild again and that everything will work out," he said.

Security tight in Red Shirt general's funeral

BBC ONLINE

Thousands of mourners are expected to attend the funeral of renegade Thai general Khattiya Sawasdi, who was shot in May as he backed anti-government protesters in Bangkok.

Up to 1,000 police are being deployed in the capital, although police say they do not expect trouble.

Maj Gen Khattiya, known as Seh Daeng (Commander Red), was shot by an unknown gunman as he spoke to a US journalist.

Ninety people died during the bitter nine-week political protest.

The demonstrators, known as red-shirts, occupied large parts of Bangkok. They demanded early elections, claiming that the current government came to power illegally.

Iraqi minister resigns on power crisis protests

BBC ONLINE

Iraq's electricity minister has offered his resignation after violent protests in several cities over power shortages.

Karim Waheed said the impatience of Iraqis and a lack of funds for his ministry was to blame for the lack of electricity generation.

Electricity is available for several hours a day and public anger has grown as temperatures have soared to 50C.

Two people were killed in Basra on Saturday when police opened fire on a protest against power shortages.

Mr Waheed had been electricity minister since Nouri Maliki became prime minister in 2006.

"Because Iraqis are not capable of being patient in their suffering, which would be alleviated by the projects I mentioned that will eliminate the shortages of electricity, and as this matter has been politicised on all sides, I am declaring in front of you with courage my resignation," he said in a televised address.

SIMMERING UNREST

Police in Basra had opened fire to disperse protesters on Saturday throwing stones at the provincial government offices.

The demonstrators carried banners reading: "Return electricity to us" and "The people of Basra ask the authorities to provide services and electricity".

Basra's protest was followed by a similar one in the southern city of Nasiriyah on Monday, when stone-throwing demonstrators injured at least 14 policemen.

Iran gives 'personal notice' to IAEA

AFP, Tehran

Iran said yesterday its barring of two nuclear inspectors serves as "notice" to the head of the UN atomic agency but added Tehran was ready for talks with the IAEA as suggested by France.

"This action (banning the inspectors from entering Iran) is in reality a regulatory notice to (Yukiya) Amano to be careful so that the agency's inspectors do not violate the international entity's charter," Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki said, quoted by the official news agency IRNA.

"Amano should manage the agency professionally," he said, referring to the chief of the UN atomic watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

On Monday, Iran announced it was barring two IAEA inspectors from entering the country, accusing them of filing a "false report" and "leaking information" about Tehran's nuclear programme which the West suspects masks a weapons drive.

The Islamic republic says its nuclear programme is purely for peaceful purposes.

Suicide blast kills eight in Iraq

BBC ONLINE

Eight people have been killed, including six policemen, in a suicide bombing at a market in the northern Iraqi town of Shirqat, police say.

Ten people were injured in the attack.

Police said the bomber set off a vest full of explosives among a crowd, which had gathered to inspect the site of a roadside bomb which had gone off minutes earlier. No-one was hurt in the earlier blast.

Twenty-six people were killed on Sunday in Baghdad in a double suicide bombing.

More than 50 others were also hurt when two cars exploded simultaneously outside the Trade Bank of Iraq's headquarters in the Yarmouk district.

There has been increased unrest in Iraq since March's parliamentary election.

The poll produced no outright winner, and a deal between the various parties to form a coalition government has not yet been reached.

New ministry

FROM PAGE 1

The committee at a meeting at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhavan observed the railway is widely neglected, as the communications ministry is overburdened with a huge task.

"Therefore we believe, if a new ministry for railway is set up, the sector will get a new look," Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, chief of the parliamentary body, told The Daily Star after the meeting.

"Through the communications ministry, we made the recommendation to the prime minister for setting up railway ministry."

Mujibur said lax of drivers, masters and other staff worsened the railway situation. The BNP-led government in 1992-93 terminated jobs of 18,000 officials and employees of railway, he said.

Even the country's only railway training institute at Saidpur was shut down during the then BNP government's ruling, added Mujibur.

"Many of the fired officials left the country and took jobs in railway abroad. Now our railway is suffering from manpower shortage," he said adding, the parliamentary body suggested longer service age of drivers.

The parliamentary body also recommended the formation of a highway management committee to reduce road accidents. The committee will be formed with officials from traffic, district administration and Bangladesh Road Transport Authority.

It will work on ways to ensure safe road and quick rescue operation following a road accident, Mujibur said.

Participating in the budget discussion yesterday, Jatiya Party lawmaker AKM Mayeedul Islam urged the communications minister to look at the state of railway for its betterment.

Bush blasts N Korea's Kim for wasting resources

AFP, Seoul

Former US President George W Bush yesterday accused North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il of wasting his country's precious resources on personal luxuries and nuclear weapons programmes.

North Koreans have been suffering since the Korean War ended, Bush told a prayer meeting to mark the 60th anniversary of the war's outbreak.

"While South Korea prospers, the people of North Korea have suffered profoundly," he said, adding communism had resulted in "dire poverty, mass starvation and brutal suppression".

"In recent years the suffering has been compounded by the leader who wasted North Korea's precious few resources on personal luxuries and nuclear weapons programmes."

Organisers said the event at Sangam World Cup Stadium in Seoul drew about 60,000 people. A giant South Korean flag was placed on the ground, with the stage decorated with slogans such as "Over division to peace".

Bush described North Korea as part of an "axis of evil" in his 2002 State of the Union address and suspended negotiations with it.

He re-engaged with the North during his second term in office and approved a six-nation agreement under which Pyongyang would give up nuclear weapons in return for diplomatic and security incentives, but the accord has since broken down.

Bush, a devout Christian, described the 1950-53 conflict as an unforgotten war, saying "an act of unprovoked aggression" had led to an unnatural division in Northeast Asia.

"It will never be forgotten by those who served and by those who were saved, and it must not be forgotten by the world," he said.

The presence of US troops in South Korea showed Washington's strong commitment to defending its ally, he said, adding the South's prosperity is "a shining example of the power of freedom and faith".

But some local Christian organisations, including the Christian Alliance for Church Reform, criticised Bush's presence at a time when cross-border tensions are high.

Sircar, Delwar

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from Jatiya Sangsad funds.

The notice, issued against them on June 8, asked for their statements in five days. Jamiruddin Sircar asked for six weeks' time while Khandaker Delwar Hossain a month's time.

They asked for time extension and the commission will give its decision, said a member of the four-member ACC enquiry team headed by its Deputy Director Moniruzzaman Khan.

The anti-graft body could not avail of the current address of former deputy speaker Akhtar Hamid Siddiqui, thus could not issue the notice upon him in connection with the same graft. Hamid was not found at the address the ACC has of him.

A parliamentary probe last year found that the three BNP leaders were involved in misappropriation of the Jatiya Sangsad funds.

The Awami League-led grand alliance government formed the probe committee headed by ruling party lawmaker Fazle Rabbi Mia on March 19 last year to investigate the alleged corruption between November 2001 and January 25, 2009 at the Parliament Secretariat.

On February 7, ACC began enquiry into the alleged misappropriation of Tk 2.5 crore after receiving the investigation report from the parliamentary probe committee.

The ACC enquiry team completed examination of the 784-page parliamentary report forwarded to the body and awaits statements of the accused.

The ACC notices upon the three has questioned regarding medical bills, unauthorised use of public vehicles, taking additional fuel allowances, corruption in procurement, beautification and arboriculture, recruitment, entertainment bills, allocation of residence for officials and receiving money from the Parliament Members' Club.

According to the law, ACC files cases if its enquiry finds enough evidence and once a case is filed, the ACC goes for fully-fledged investigations.

BP boss pulls out of London summit

AFP, London

BP chief executive Tony Hayward pulled out of a London conference which he was due to speak, with the firm saying he would instead be concentrating on the Gulf of Mexico cleanup operation.

Hayward had been due to speak at the World National Oil Companies Congress in London alongside other leading oil bosses.

But a BP spokesman told AFP that he had

withdrawn from the event due to "his really busy schedule to commitments to the Gulf of Mexico."

He will be replaced at the oil conference by his group chief of staff, Steve Westwell, the spokesman said.

Hayward has faced heavy criticism in the United States for PR blunders in the wake of the catastrophic Gulf of Mexico oil spill, such as attending a yacht race Saturday.



Afghan National Police (ANP) members and US soldiers lie ready to shoot during a firing practice in a field outside their base of Gorgan yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

50 dead as train derails in Congo Republic

BBC ONLINE

At least 50 people have been killed in a train crash in the south of Congo-Brazzaville, officials have said.

The head of the rail operator, Chemin de Fer Congo-Ocean (CFCO), said it occurred on Monday night about 60km (37 miles) from the city of Pointe-Noire.

The train is believed to have derailed as it went round a corner in a remote area between Bilanga and Tchitondi, throwing four carriages into a ravine.

The dead and wounded have been taken to hospitals and morgues in Pointe-Noire.

"There was a grave train accident during the night," CFCO director-general Sauveur Joseph El Bez told the AFP news agency. "There are dozens of victims and injured."

"The material damage was also very severe," he added. "All steps have been taken to organise relief."

A special adviser to the ministry of trans-

port, Alphonse Pepa, confirmed there had been a "serious train accident, but we do not yet have an assessment".

An official, who did not want to be named, told BBC Afrique that 51 people had been killed.

The BBC's Will Ross says the 500km (310 miles) railway line was built during the 1920s and 1930s using forced labour, when France was the colonial power. Thousands died during the project.

It has since been poorly maintained, our correspondent says.

The whole line between the capital Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire was closed down in the late 1990s during the country's civil war. There have been at least two serious accidents since it re-opened.

This is the second accident in the country in recent days. A plane carrying mostly Australian mining executives crashed over the weekend, killing all 11 passengers on board.