

Obama calls on Myanmar to free Suu Kyi

AFP, Mumbai

US President Barack Obama yesterday called for the release of democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi, criticising the first elections in Myanmar for 20 years as neither free nor fair.

"We renew our calls for the authorities to free Aung San Suu Kyi and all other political prisoners immediately and unconditionally," Obama said in a statement released in the Indian city of Mumbai, which he is visiting.

"The United States will continue to implement a strategy of pressure and engagement in accordance with conditions on the ground in Burma and the actions of the Burmese authorities."

Obama's statement came after he publicly criticised Sunday's vote as "anything but free and fair" at a town hall-style meeting with Indian students on the second day of his maiden visit to the country as US president.

"For too long the people of Burma have been denied the right to determine their own destiny," he added, using the former name of the country.

Complaints of intimidation have added to fears that the poll in Myanmar is a sham intended to create a facade of democracy after decades of harsh military rule.

The British-educated Nobel Peace Prize winner Suu Kyi, who is strongly supported by the United States, led her party to victory in 1990 but the result was never recognised by the ruling generals.

She has been detained for most of the past 20 years and is supporting a boycott of the latest election.

Two pro-military parties are together fielding about two-thirds of the total candidates, leaving the splintered opposition with little chance of success.

Obama's statement set out a list of demands for the Myanmar government, including an end to "systematic violations of human rights" and a call to make those who abused those rights accountable for their actions.

Pro-democracy campaigners and ethnic minority groups should be brought in to a "long overdue dialogue" towards building a better, more representative and fair future for all the country's citizens, he added.



A political activist (R) approaches mock ballot boxes as colleagues dressed as Myanmar soldiers raise their rifles during a mock vote as part of a protest outside the Myanmar embassy in Bangkok yesterday against the election and to demand the release of all political prisoners in Myanmar.

Tensions in ethnic area

AFP, Bangkok

Hundreds of rebel troops were believed to be locked in a tense standoff with government soldiers in eastern Myanmar yesterday in protest at the country's election, activists and ethnic leaders said.

Zipporah Sein, Thailand-based general secretary of the Karen National Union (KNU), said there were up to 300 Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) soldiers in Myawaddy in eastern Karen State and more in surrounding mountains.

"They demonstrated at the military post and at the post office, but they have weapons in their hands so the government has not done anything... there is tension but no fighting yet, I think because today is the election," she said.

She said the rebels were protesting at the election as well as government plans to force ethnic minority troops to join its border guard force -- which would put them under the control of the state.

She said the DKBA troops would not start a fight but if they were attacked they were "ready" to retaliate.

The KNU would join the fight, she said, because it "has the policy that we will protect the Karen people" and fighting could pull in rebels from other ethnic groups that have agreed to act if any one group was attacked.

8 MONTHS AFTER POLLS Iraq rivals 'agree to share power'

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq's political rivals reached a breakthrough power-sharing deal in which Nuri al-Maliki, a Shia, retains the premiership, a spokesman said yesterday, exactly eight months after inconclusive elections.

"An agreement was reached yesterday among the political parties in which Jalal Talabani will continue as head of state, Nuri al-Maliki will stay on as prime minister and Iraqiya will choose its candidate for parliament speaker," government spokesman Ali al-Dabbagh told AFP.

He said the deal was between the National Alliance, which represents the main Shia parties, and the Kurdish coalition, while Iraqiya's support hinged on its agreement over the posts of speaker and president.

"Iraqiya has not agreed for the moment over which side will have the parliament speaker's position and which side will have the presidency," Dabbagh added.

Former premier Iyad Allawi's Sunni-backed Iraqiya bloc, which won the most seats in the March 7 election but fell short of a parliamentary majority, confirmed the deal and said discussions were continuing over those key posts.

"There is a draft agreement with the Iraqiya party, but there are still some problems to resolve," Dabbagh said, adding that parliament would meet on Thursday to choose a speaker, the first step towards forming a new government.

The spokesman added that both Maliki and Allawi would on Monday attend a ceremony in

Arbil, capital of the autonomous Iraqi region of Kurdistan, to announce the agreement formally.

Dabbagh said the meeting would convene at 11:00 am (0800 GMT).

Iraqiya MP Jamal al-Butikh said earlier his bloc had agreed to the power-sharing deal after it was assured that "no political decision would be made without its agreement."

"Iraqiya will go to Arbil under Allawi's leadership and because the party has been given reassurance in real power-sharing," he told AFP.

Butikh said it was unclear if the bloc would be offered the speaker's position or the presidency, although some Iraqiya members declared a preference for the latter now held by Talabani, leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).

Iraqiya MP Alia Nusayef said Moqtada al-Sadr, a radical Shia leader who has 40 seats in parliament, had also been invited to the Arbil meeting "because he brings equilibrium."

Sadr had first held discussions with Allawi, but then went into a Shia alliance with Maliki. Sunday's announcement came after Iraqi Kurdistan's regional president, Massud Barzani, said he had invited all political groups to meet on Monday in the Kurdish capital to resolve the crisis.

Earlier on Sunday in Arbil, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu called for a meeting of Iraqi parties on forming a government.

"I'm in Arbil to discuss and possibly give advice to Baghdad and Arbil on the issue of forming a government, which we hope will happen soon," he said.

Scientists turn skin into blood

AFP, Washington

Stem cell researchers have found a way to turn a person's skin into blood, a process that could be used to treat cancer and other ailments, according to a Canadian study published yesterday.

The method uses cells from a patch of a person's skin and transforms it into blood that is a genetic match, without using human embryonic stem cells, said the study in the journal Nature.

By avoiding the controversial and more complicated processes involved with using human embryonic stem cells to create blood, this approach simplifies the process, researchers said.

"What we believe we can do in the future is generate blood in a much more efficient manner," said study author Mick Bhatia of the McMaster's Stem Cell and Cancer Research Institute in the Michael G DeGroot School of Medicine.

With the ability to create blood for transfusion from a person's own skin, the advance means someday patients needing blood for surgery or to treat anaemia could bypass the blood bank and derive the necessary supply from themselves.

The breakthrough could also see future uses such as allowing patients undergoing chemotherapy to endure a longer regime of treatment without the breaks currently needed to rejuvenate the body.

Researchers have been able to perform the skin-to-blood transformation in the past, but while using human pluripotent stem cells, widely known as embryonic stem cells.

Stem cells that are derived from human embryos hold significant promise for medical breakthroughs but also carry risks, such as the potential to create tumours.

But researchers say their new method can create enough blood for a transfusion from a four by three centimetre (1.6 by 1.2 inch) patch of adult human skin, and can avoid those potential hurdles.

"So we don't need to take skin cells and put it into a pluripotent stem cell. That is inefficient in terms of time," Bhatia told AFP.

"There are also concerns that they might form a tumour, and the fact that we bypass that makes it more feasible for transplants."

Those needing bone marrow transplants could be particularly aided by the breakthrough, according to John Kelton, dean of health sciences for McMaster University.

Qaeda targets Christmas, plans to make toy bomb

IANS, London

al-Qaeda's bomb makers are believed to be planning explosives in Christmas toys bound for Europe and the US that would be timed to explode once they are in stores, a media report said yesterday.

British intelligence agencies believe al-Qaeda's warlords, including its chief bomb maker Ibrahim Hassan al-Asiri in Yemen, plan to smuggle in their deadly cargo aboard freight ships after airport security was tightened following the failed ink cartridge bomb attacks 10 days ago, the Daily Express reported.

Al-Asiri is the main suspect in a plot to get parcel bomb packages onto US-bound cargo planes.

British surveillance experts in Afghanistan and their American colleagues uncovered the latest threat last week.

They intercepted conversations between

terrorists from al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), the group responsible for the ink bombs, revealing they were planning a spectacular hit for the festive season.

AQAP leader, American-born cleric Anwar al-Awlaki, and his right-hand man al-Asiri are aiming to use sea ports because they believe security there is more relaxed, the report said.

With so much Christmas stock arriving in Britain, they are confident their toy bombs can remain undetected.

A British intelligence officer told the Sunday Express: "al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula see the festive season as their ideal time to strike because of its importance in the Christian calendar."

"The bombs found at East Midlands airport and Dubai escaped scrutiny until the last moment. It would be much easier to plant a similar bomb inside a Christmas toy."

Emirates, Etihad airlines halt Yemen cargo

THE INDIAN EXPRESS ONLINE

Airlines in the United Arab Emirates say they have stopped carrying cargo from Yemen as a precaution following the discovery of two mail bombs shipped as air freight.

The Middle East's biggest airline Emirates, which operates out of Dubai, and Abu Dhabi-based Etihad Airways each confirmed the cargo embargoes in response to questions yesterday. Discount carrier Air Arabia, based in the emirate of Sharjah, also said it had stopped accepting freight originating in Yemen.

It is unclear when exactly the bans were implemented, but they have been in place

since at least last week, spokesmen for two of the carriers said.

Etihad also said it has stopped carrying goods from Somalia, which sits just across the Gulf of Aden from Yemen and maintains longstanding trade ties with its Arabian neighbour.

It said in a brief statement the bans will hold "until directives from governments around the world permit carriage of goods from these ports."

The UAE late last week announced it was tightening security at the country's airports to more closely monitor goods from certain unnamed countries. It did not provide details or name the countries in question.

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Courses mentioned above are suitable for Managers / Executives of public and private sector organizations NGOs and individuals. The course is also suitable for the people not yet in service. Interested person/organization may apply. For details visit our website.

DIRECTOR GENERAL
BIM, Dhaka.

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Ref.: DACDK/65(a)/2010/251 Date: 07-11-2010

Request for Expression of Interest (EOI) for Developing/ Formulating proper Financial Analysis and Quick Accounting Information System for Biman Bangladesh Airlines Limited

Biman came into existence as Air Bangladesh International on 04 January 1972 and then it was transformed into Bangladesh Biman Corporation in 1977. In order to build up Biman as an efficient, dynamic and successful commercial organization for its survival in the competitive aviation business, Biman Bangladesh Airlines Limited was incorporated as a Public Limited Company on 23 July 2007. Then the Company has taken over and acquired (w.e.f. 23.07.2007) entire undertaking of Bangladesh Biman Corporation, as a going concern.

Presently Biman operates its activities through the Head Office (comprised of the Office of MD & CEO, 07 Directorates, Company Secretariat, 23 Divisions and 32 Departments) and 21 Foreign Stations, 3 Domestic Stations and 30 Sales Offices throughout the world. Near about five thousand employees possessing different professions and groups are serving Biman.

Now Biman wants to have initiate and operate within a shortest possible time an efficient and proper financial analysis and quick accounting information system.

Biman invites Expression of Interest (EOI) from the Consultancy Firms (both Local and Foreign) for this assignment.

✓ Qualification of the Consultancy Firm:

- (i) The Firm must have 10 years of experience in the field of Professional Accounting/ Cost & Management Accounting/ Information Technology.
- (ii) The Key Person must be FCA/ FCMA/ MBA (MIS/AIS)/ PGD (MIS/AIS)/ BSc (IT/CS/CSE)/ Corporate Affairs Specialist.
- (iii) The Key Person must have 10 years of experience in the relevant field.
- (iv) The Firm must have capability (logistics/resources) to complete the assignment.
- (v) The Firm or the Key Person must have experience of at least one similar assignment. [Experience with any airlines in similar assignment will add advantage in selection process.]

✓ Detail of Terms & Conditions and Scope of the Assignment would be available on the Web site: www.biman-airlines.com and in the Company Secretariat.

✓ The interested Consultancy Firms must submit (i) Preliminary (Single Page) EOI on Letter Head Pad to csbiman@bdbiman.com or to the following address by (within 21 days); and (ii) Final EOI to the following address by (within 42 days) in two sealed envelopes as follows:

Envelope-I: Financial Offer (Total Consultancy Fee)
Envelope-II: Documents and Information other than Financial Offer.

✓ A Pre-bid Meeting will be held on (a Saturday immediately after closing of preliminary EOI) at 1100 hrs at the following address. Only the Firm(s) submitting Preliminary EOI(s) will be eligible for attending the Pre-bid Meeting and for submitting final EOI(s).

✓ No TA/DA will be allowed for submitting EOI or having meeting with Biman.

✓ Biman reserves the right to accept or reject any or all of the EOIs.

Company Secretary
Biman Bangladesh Airlines Limited
Balaka, Kurmitola, Dhaka-1229, Bangladesh