

Iraqi MPs approve payouts for Saddam's US victims

AFP, Baghdad

Iraqi MPs okayed a \$400-million (270 million euro) compensation deal yesterday for Americans who say they were mistreated by executed dictator Saddam Hussein's regime during the 1990-1991 Gulf War.

A total of 226 lawmakers were in the Council of Representatives' main chamber, with a majority approving the agreement, which was originally signed between Baghdad and Washington in September.

MPs loyal to radical anti-US Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr walked out of parliament when the issue was put to a vote, however.

Iraq's August 2, 1990 assault on neighbouring Kuwait was rapidly met with a concerted international military response that pushed Saddam's forces out of the emirate. Hussein's reign was later ended by a US-led coalition in 2003.

Several US citizens were held by Saddam's regime during the war over Kuwait and used as human shields to deter coalition attacks, with some claiming they were mistreated and tortured by Saddam's forces.

The US embassy welcomed the vote, with spokesman David J. Ranz saying: "This decision represents an important step in our bilateral relationship, and in putting the terrible legacy of the Saddam regime in the past."

The compensation deal is part of efforts to end provisions in force as a result of Chapter 7 of the United Nations Charter, which regards Iraq as a threat to international security.

In December, the UN Security Council also ended key international sanctions imposed on Baghdad, halting punishing restrictions to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

US envoy

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with senior government officials, political leaders, civil society and the media, said an American Embassy announcement yesterday.

Rapp visited Dhaka in last January. He then visited International Crimes Tribunal, held meetings with several important leaders, including the law minister, lawyers of the accused already arrested and held a press conference.

Besides meeting several government and political leaders, Ambassador Rapp will also meet with Law Minister Shafique Ahmed, Foreign Secretary Mijarul Quayes and hold a press conference on June 3.

During his last visit, he suggested some changes to the International Crimes Tribunal Act 1973 for ensuring a transparent trial, maintaining international standard.

Prior to his appointment as the Ambassador-at-Large for War Crimes Issues, Rapp served as prosecutor of the Special Court for Sierra Leone beginning in January 2007, leading the prosecutions of former Liberian president Charles Taylor and other persons alleged to bear the greatest responsibility for the atrocities committed during the civil war in Sierra Leone.

During his tenure, his office achieved the first convictions in history for sexual slavery and forced marriage as crimes against humanity, as well as convictions for attacks on peacekeepers and for the recruitment and use of child soldiers as violations of international humanitarian law.

From 2001 to 2007, Rapp served as senior trial attorney and chief of prosecutions at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, personally heading the trial team that achieved convictions of the principals of RTLM radio and Kangura newspaper -- the first in the history for leaders of the mass media -- for the crime of direct and public incitement to commit genocide.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Dispelling unfounded fears over genetically modified foods
- Collaboration among scientists, entrepreneurs and policymakers
- Public access to information on biotechnology and awareness building
- Inclusion of biotechnology in school curriculum
- Autonomous research institution on biotechnology

Biotech holds

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adding there are solutions to these.

It can cause allergic and toxic reactions in human beings. Besides, it can influence loss of biodiversity and resistance to antibiotic and insecticide.

According to him, Bangladesh applies more than 300 insecticides on vegetables and there is no effective check on it.

Lack of research funding is a major limitation to the development of biotechnology, Anwar observed.

"Contrary to popular belief, the Golden Rice will have no extra costs involved and would provide the essential nutrient vitamin A to the masses," said Prof Zeba Islam Seraj of biochemistry department at DU.

Abdul Muktaadir, managing director of Incepta Pharmaceuticals, said his company is set to go for country's first ever commercial production of human vaccines for typhoid, tetanus, rabies and hepatitis-B this month after having undertaken a Tk 2 billion project for three years.

The local production of these vaccines will cut the import costs and bring down the retail prices substantially, noted Muktaadir.

Local production will end dependence on cold chain (refrigeration) for preservation, he mentioned adding, locally produced poultry and livestock vaccines are more effective for local diseases.

Naiyyum Choudhury, coordinator of biotechnology department at Brac University, said genetic engineering can help treatment of AIDS.

"Biotechnology increases agricultural and pharmaceutical production, reduces hunger and improves health care," added Naiyyum.

In his opening remark Editor of The Daily Star Mahfuz Anam said the technology offers an immense

Govt to recast SEC

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government said it will conduct a further investigation and take action through the SEC against people involved in serial trading and manipulation.

Muhtith said the government delayed the report's publication for its evaluation and exchanging views with experts. Khaled, also chairman of Bangladesh Krishi Bank, submitted the report to the finance ministry on April 7.

The government will replace Ziaul Haque Khondaker, whom the report blamed for market volatility, within a few days.

The two SEC members will leave "in due time", he said.

"People have no faith in the SEC. So we need to restructure the whole board," said Muhtith.

The government will form a taskforce to supervise implementation of the probe committee's recommendations.

"The taskforce will oversee implementation of the recommendations and also evaluate the reform activities," he said.

The terms of reference and composition will be announced soon, the minister said.

The public statement said the committee has identified criminal offences against Syed Siraj Uddowla, Abu Sadat Md Sayem and Abdul Mobin Molla.

The government will file criminal cases against them, said Muhtith.

It will ask the ACC to investigate further the alle-

opportunity in food production, environment conservation and combating climate change impacts.

Mohammed Solaiman Haider, deputy director of Department of Environment, spoke on biodiversity guidelines and safety regulations.

SM Imamul Huq, chariman of Bangladesh Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, Prof Sharif Akhteruzzaman of DU, Dr Mahboob Hossain of Brac University, Dr Shamima Begum of Jagannath University and Md Imam Hossain of Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University spoke, among others.

May Day

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unions and professional groups have drawn up programmes to observe the day to press for improving the working conditions with better wages for the workers.

President Zillur Rahman and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina gave separate messages greeting the people on the occasion.

The president in his message greeted all working people saying that working people contribute the most to building a strong national economy in any country.

"I welcome all initiatives to honour the working people by observing May Day," Zillur said.

The prime minister in her message paid high tribute to those workers who sacrificed their lives to uphold rights of the workers.

She also expressed solidarity with the workers in the country and elsewhere in the world.

Hasina will address a discussion on the day at 3:00 pm at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in the city and open an exhibition there marking the day.

Opposition Leader Khaleda Zia would also address a public rally in Gazipur on the occasion of May Day.

Govt to recast SEC

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gations of market manipulation against SEC Executive Director Anwarul Kabir Bhuiyan and House Building Finance Corporation General Manager Kafil Uddin Ahmad Chowdhury.

The new SEC chairman has already been selected but Muhtith declined to disclose the person's name saying no agreement has been signed yet.

The statement said the assets of some companies including Shinepukur Ceramics, BD Thai Aluminium will be examined and they will face action if any irregularity is found.

The Criminal Investigation Department will probe the assets of BD Thai Aluminium and Gem Global.

The report has mentioned some names for their involvement in market manipulation and made recommendations against them on the basis of perception. But charges cannot be brought against anyone on the basis of such recommendations, the statement said.

"It requires further investigation. It is undesirable to malign someone on the basis of perception. At the same time, the government does not want any market manipulator to slip through any loopholes in the law," Muhtith said.

"The government does not accept the committee's opinion that the SEC has completely failed to regulate the stockmarket. The government thinks that the other stakeholders did not take steps on time."

Uganda's Museveni vows to defeat protests

REUTERS, Nairobi

Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni vowed yesterday to 'defeat' a wave of deadly protests triggered by rising food and fuel prices.

Museveni was fielding questions from members of a Kenyan business club after giving a speech that was briefly interrupted by a man in the audience objecting to this week's violent crackdown on protestors in Uganda.

Two people were killed and at least 90 injured in the Ugandan capital Kampala Friday after police fired bullets and teargas at crowds protesting against the arrest of an opposition leader.

"It won't escalate. We are going to defeat it," Museveni said, accusing organizers of the protests of plotting to destabilize his government through looting.

"Their plans were to loot. To cause people to loot people's shops so that they undermine our program of recovery and development," he said.

The government will investigate the deaths that occurred during the protests and will arrest police officers found to have acted unlawfully, he added.

Friday's events followed weeks of protests, which have the potential to unsettle investors in east Africa's third largest economy, aimed at forcing the government to rein in soaring prices of food and fuel.

At least seven people have been killed during the weeks of protests which have been led by Kizza Besigye, who was defeated by Museveni in a February presidential election.

I killed

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Bangladesh (BGB).

Villagers found the body later that morning and informed the police, who sent it to Sakhira Sadar Hospital for autopsy.

BGB sent a letter to BSF protesting the incident following which a company commander level flag meeting was held at Ghona-Baikari border yesterday afternoon.

In the meeting BGB officials protested the incident of attacking civilians. However, the BSF denied the allegation saying the Bangladesh cattle traders attacked the BSF men who opened fire to defend themselves.

Company commander Monsur Helal led the BGB while Company commander Ranjit Kumar led the BSF.

Chopper

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Khandu, was flying from Tawang, a key town of the state, to state capital Itanagar.

The others on board, along with Dorjee, included crew members Captain JS Babbar and Captain KS Malick, Dorjee's security officer Yeshi Choddak and Yeshi Lamu and sister of Tawang lawmaker Tsewang Dhondup.

Last time the copter was in communication with the base was while flying over Sela Pass, 20 minutes after take-off at 9:56am.

"The helicopter is missing and the search operation is still on," Indian Home Secretary Gopal K Pillai said Friday night.

Arunachal Pradesh government said it was yet to ascertain the whereabouts of the helicopter.

Arunachal Pradesh Deputy Inspector General of Police Robin Hibu said, "Joint search operation for the missing copter will be conducted by Army, Air Force and state police from today by air and on the ground".

Defence spokesman Wing Commander Ranjeev Sahoo said in Shillong that two IAF Cheetah helicopters conducted search operations along the route from Tawang to Itanagar for two hours.

However, the search had to be cut short due to inclement weather, Sahoo told PTL.

Action plan

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a shareholder-owned exchange, by switching from private to public ownership.

The statement charts three types of measures--immediate, short-term and mid-term--to make the stockmarket effective and investor-friendly.

At least 11 steps will be taken immediately and 17 within a month. Seven more steps will be taken within four months after restructuring the Securities and Exchange Commission.

The task force will be formed with representatives from the SEC, Bangladesh Bank, stock exchanges and Intelligence agencies.

IMMEDIATE STEPS
As part of the immediate measures, the government has already drawn up a policy under which same criteria will be applied to reevaluate assets and liabilities of the state-run companies.

The other steps to be taken include institutional arrangements to coordinate actions of the bourses, SEC and Bangladesh Bank, and filing of departmental cases against top SEC officials for their reported involvement in manipulation.

In the statement, the government said measures will be taken for dismissal of RY Shamsheer as chief executive officer of AB Investment Ltd on charges of unethical involvement in placement shares.

The probe team's suggestion on revaluation of assets and liabilities of the private companies will also be considered, it added.

Departmental cases will be filed against two executive directors of the SEC as per service rules. Besides, there will be a detailed probe into the affairs of former SEC member Mansur Alam and top executives.

Referring to the probe team's recommendation for prohibiting share trading by public servants, the government said it has already taken steps in this regard.

SHORT-TERM STEPS
As part of the short-term action plan, the government will look into the probe committee's recommendations on omnibus accounts, serial trading and manipulation, suspected transactions of top players, shadow

Displaced forever

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all belongings, livestock and poultry, and displaced families from their locality.

Cyclone Aila, though, did not claim more than 190 lives because of precautionary measures. But it caused a huge loss to property killing 150,000 livestock and ruining crops on about 3.23 lakh acres of land, according to the food and disaster management ministry.

The Campaign for Sustainable and Rural Livelihood (CSRLL) programme of Oxfam which has been working in the Aila-hit areas since the disaster occurred said, as many as 77,531 families were affected.

Citing a recent survey, Ziaul Haq Mukta, member secretary of CSRLL, said 54,530 individuals from 10,906 families could not return to their own places and are still living on the embankment in certain areas.

During a recent visit to many affected areas, it was seen that the villagers who took shelter on the embankment are still marooned even after two years as saline water permanently inundated their homestead, cropland and ponds.

The normal village life that they had only two years ago seems to be lost forever as these people have no alternative means to earn a living.

Allegations are rife that the authorities concerned are not repairing the damaged embankments that once protected the villages from the waters of the Kabodak and Kholpetua rivers. Besides, there are allegations of misappropriation and inadequate supply of relief materials.

Thirty-year-old Habibullah Gazi who lives on the embankment, which is also

accounts of individuals and institutions that trade under omnibus accounts and the players who sold out their shares in December and January.

Submission of a TIN (tax identification number) will be made mandatory for opening a BO account.

The government has already started working on five recommendations of the probe committee. These are preparing guidelines for issuing preferential share; making rules and regulations for pre-IPO and IPO process; bringing transparency in the book-building method; changing the regulations for right share issuance and ensuring uniform face value of shares.

Actions will be taken on top 30 placement shareholders after consultation with the civil society, public representatives, researchers etc. A committee will be formed to determine the share price on a fixed price method.

Further enquiry will be carried out on the secondary market's contribution to price spiral, block placement and 50 over-valued stocks in 2009 and 2010.

MID-TERM STEPS
This category includes amendment of the banking companies laws with regard to investment in the stockmarket.

The government suggests that Bangladesh Bank take actions against the banks that were overexposed.

A five-member chartered accountants committee will be formed to re-examine the cases of the companies that have allegedly overvalued their shares by revaluation of assets. Conversion and transfer of right shares will take at least three years.

An action committee will be formed to look into the case studies--BD Thai, Gem Global and KPCL--identified by the probe committee.

Share business of one Abdus Salam will be investigated in detail after restructuring of the SEC.

The SEC and Bangladesh Bank can investigate the share business of Shamima Sharif.

Public Issue Rules 2006 will be changed as section 8B (1)(da) goes against the objectives of the SEC.

Morocco blast was remote-controlled bomb: France

REUTERS, Paris

An explosion that killed 15 people in Marrakesh was triggered by a remote controlled device, not a suicide bomber as previous reports suggested, France's interior minister said in an interview published yesterday.

The blast on Thursday ripped through a popular cafe overlooking Marrakesh's Jamaa el-Fnaa square at lunchtime on Thursday. Western security analysts attributed the attack to Islamist militants bent on ruining Morocco's tourism industry.

Two residents at the scene said they saw a suicide bomber. An Arabic news web site said the attack was committed by a suicide bomber who had recently got out of prison. But Moroccan officials have not said who was responsible.

"Contrary to what was being said earlier, there was no suicide bomber," Claude Gueant told weekly newspaper Le Journal du Dimanche. "Somebody dropped a bag on the ground and the bomb was detonated remotely."

The bomb contained nails, ammonium nitrate and a high explosive called TATP that was also used in a series of bombings on the Paris underground system in 1995, he said.

The attack increased the challenges facing Morocco's King Mohammed at a time when he is trying to prevent uprisings elsewhere in the Arab world from reaching his country, which is usually seen as a haven of stability in a volatile region.

Gueant said seven of the 15 dead were French nationals but that the attack was not aimed at France.

Moroccan officials said on Friday that they had identified seven foreigners among the dead including two French nationals, two Canadians, a Dutch national and two Moroccans.

"I have spoken to my Moroccan counterpart who explained that identification was difficult because some of the bodies were very badly damaged," he said.

Displaced forever

eroding and may collapse anytime due to the pressure of water from both sides.

They have no land to cultivate now, while cultivation may not be possible in near future due to salinity in the soil. There is no big or small fish in the river near their villages, and it takes a day to bring drinking water from the distant villages.

The only source of income for these victims is shrimp fry. All the men, some women and even children catch shrimp fry and sell it in the market across the river.

With the little money they get from shrimp fry sale, they buy rice, vegetables and potato. At times, vegetables turn too expensive and they are forced to eat only rice and potato.

Asked about protein in their menu, the villagers said it is now just a dream for them.

"We cannot even think about it in this present situation," said Sahara.

Md Abdus Samad, deputy commissioner of Sakhira, told The Daily Star that rehabilitation programmes undertaken for the victims include repair and reconstruction of embankments, food aid, money-for-work, house construction and support in agricultural activities, among others.

Most of the people in this region are farmers who cannot grow rice or any other crop as salinity in the soil remains unnaturally high since the Aila swept across the land, he said.

"So we are looking into shrimp farming as an alternative for crop," he added.

"But if you talk about giving them back their normal life, it will take a long time," the DC said.

Yunus petitions

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of the petitions with the SC on April 5 for the withdrawal of its order that dismissed his leave-to-appeal petition against the High Court verdict upholding the Bangladesh Bank's order to remove him from the post.

In the petition, Yunus also prayed for a rehearing on his leave-to-appeal petition against the HC verdict.

The other petition was filed on April 3 by nine Grameen Bank directors against the HC verdict.

A seven-member bench of the Appellate Division headed by Chief Justice ABM Khairul Haque on April 6 adjourned the hearing on the petitions until first week of May.

The apex court has recently fixed May 2 (tomorrow) for hearing the petitions.

In March, the central bank in a letter ordered to remove 71-year-old microcredit pioneer from the post, saying he violated the bank's retirement regulation that requires an official to step down at 60.

The HC on March 8 summarily rejected two writ petitions challenging the legality of the central bank's directive.

Rickshaw-puller

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on April 22.

Mobarak was not a drug addict although his death certificate says the prisoner died due to "drug dependency with withdrawal syndrome", they added.

The victim's family could not be contacted immediately while the CMCH authorities declined to say anything on the issue.

Rafiqul Kader, Chittagong Central Jail warden, told The Daily Star that the jail authority arranged Mobarak's treatment at jail hospital following a court order.

However, he admitted that they could not provide sufficient healthcare and other services to the prisoner due to lack of physicians and skilled manpower. Mobarak was sent to CMCH on Friday night.

Contacted, Excise Department Deputy Director Ali Aslam said he has to check records to say whether Mobarak's body was carrying any injury sign. He declined to comment any further.

Meanwhile, the body has been sent to CMCH morgue for an autopsy, prison sources said.

Amini

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They asked him to return to his office, said Moulaana Abdullah Wasel, publicity secretary of the IOJ faction.

Azizul Haque, officer-in-charge of Lalbagh Police Station, said, "We have asked him to stay at office for his own security, as instructed by the higher authorities."

As Amini returned to his office in Lalbagh, police threw a cordon around the building.

Meanwhile, Dhaka Metropolitan Police yesterday imposed a ban on holding rallies and carrying weapons, explosives and firearms in the city's Paltan, Motijheel, Baitul Mukarram, Ramna and adjacent areas.

The ban will take effect from 6:00am tomorrow and continue till further notice.

In a press release, DMP Commissioner Benazir Ahmed said the ban has been imposed as several organisations have called programmes at Muktagong at the same time.

Islamic Andolon Bangladesh (IAB), Shariah Ain Bastobayon Committee, Sarbadaliya Islami Oikya Parishad and Islamic Front announced the programmes at Muktagong for May 2 and 3 to protest against the High Court's anti-fatwa verdict, women policy, education policy and secularism in the constitution.

IAB has also threatened to forge a countrywide movement if they were barred.

Presidium member Mosaddiq Billah of IAB at a press conference at its Purana Paltan office said they would arrange a gathering at Muktagong. If obstructed, they would wage a countrywide movement.