

Iran blocks US 'virtual embassy'

AFP, Tehran

Iran yesterday blocked an Internet website the United States was touting as a "virtual embassy," and which senior MPs slammed as an attempt to deceive the Iranian people and divide them from the government.

The address, <http://iran.usembassy.gov/>, was inaccessible inside Iran, instead showing a message in Farsi saying: "In accordance with computer crime laws, access to this website is not possible."

Other websites Iran's authorities find objectionable have also long been blocked, including Facebook, non-English Google sites and many foreign media pages.

Alaeddin Borujerdi, the head of the Iranian parliamentary national security and foreign policy commission, said the new US website was a misguided attempt to make the Iranian people believe Washington wanted to communicate with them.

"The opening of the virtual embassy by the US is a new deception by the Great Satan," he said, according to the parliamentary news agency.

"The Iranian nation will not be fooled by this deception," he said.

Talks restart

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"I did have an introductory meeting with the new minister for communications. We did have some preliminary discussions, but there is nothing new to report right now," Goldstein told journalists after the meeting.

"It was an introductory meeting to begin exchanging views as part of the ongoing dialogue. The discussion will continue further after I return from my upcoming trip to my headquarters at Washington DC," she told The Daily Star.

Goldstein is flying to Washington tomorrow. There she will discuss with the bank's high officials the latest government move, among other things, a WB official in Dhaka told this correspondent on condition of anonymity.

The trip to Washington is part of the regular schedule, Goldstein said, adding, "When I get back, we hope we'll have further dialogue on the Padma bridge."

Shafiqul Islam, project director of the Padma Multipurpose Bridge, Khandaker Anwarul Islam, secretary of the Bridge Division and Abdul Wadud, chief engineer of the Bridge Division, were present at the meeting.

Khandaker Anwarul, quoting Goldstein, said all the four donors -- WB, ADB, IDB and Jica -- were working to resolve the current crisis over the funding.

After the meeting with the communications minister, Goldstein also had a one-to-one meeting with Finance Minister AMA Muhith at Hotel Sonargaon where they both went to attend a programme of the ADB.

In September, the WB temporarily suspended its \$1.2 billion fund for the \$2.9b project. In the same month the bank handed over a letter to Muhith raising allegations of corruption against Abdul and his family firm Sahoo in the bridge's tender process.

Government officials had earlier said the WB "unofficially signaled" to the government that it would not fund the project if Abdul Hossain remained in the communications ministry.

Abul had all along maintained his innocence, saying on one occasion that he was a "proven honest man".

Following the suspension, the date for WB's loan activation was extended till the end of January next year.

Finance ministry officials said yesterday the government was trying to solve the "complexity" over the funding by the deadline.

Also yesterday, Muhith at a programme at the Bangabandhu International Conference Centre said he hoped that the "complication regarding the Padma bridge funding will be over soon".

World warned

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treaty for curbing dangerous greenhouse gases.

Meanwhile, Canadian Environment Minister Peter Kent yesterday urged the international community to turn the page on the Kyoto Protocol and to build a global climate solution around a series of agreements reached last year in Cancun.

Plunging into the debate, Ban called for Kyoto to be kept alive and scheduled meetings yesterday with the big players. "While Kyoto alone will not solve today's climate problems, it is a foundation to build on with important institutions. It provides the framework that markets sorely need. ... It is important that we do not create a vacuum."

Kyoto's death would leave a toxic legacy among developing countries, which see the treaty as a totem of solidarity between rich and poor, and leave the UNFCCC with only a voluntary approach for taming carbon emissions.

Kyoto's first round of emissions pledges expires next year. But these promises apply only to rich countries, not developing ones, nor do they concern the United States, which boycotted Kyoto in 2001.

Rich Kyoto countries are refusing to sign on for fresh commitments, saying this would be unfair if far bigger emitters, accounting for more than half of all carbon pollution, get off the hook.

Chances of a deal lie in a proposal made by the European Union, which has offered to sign up for a second round of commitments in return for a "roadmap" to a new, legally binding pact encompassing the big carbon polluters, notably China and the United States.

Hopes of movement were

raised on Sunday when China signalled willingness - linked with conditions -- to embrace a future binding accord after 2020.

But on Tuesday, optimism faded.

Canada has been publicly and privately criticised by other countries at the conference for refusing to support extending the Kyoto agreement beyond 2013 by accepting a new round of commitments.

"We must be fair if we are to be effective," Montreal Gazette quoted Environment Minister Kent as saying. "That is why for Canada, the Kyoto Protocol is not where the solution lies -- it is an agreement that covers fewer than 30 percent of global emissions. Kyoto, for Canada, is in the past."

He noted that the Cancun Agreements cover three quarters of global emissions, twice as much as those with targets under Kyoto. Kyoto agreement is not effective or as comprehensive as all of the Cancun agreements which established a new framework for preventing dangerous human interference with the atmosphere.

Delegates have also been angered by rumours, neither confirmed nor denied by Kent, that the federal government plans to formally withdraw from the treaty after the conference, the Canadian website added.

The speech was momentarily disrupted when a small group of Canadian youth at the conference stood up and turned their backs to Kent from the rear of the room. Wearing white T-shirts with the words "people before polluters," and "turn your back on Canada," they were escorted out by security to applause as Kent continued his address.

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BDR chief

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first day of the February 25-26 mutiny.

Most of the 57 senior and mid-rank army officers, including Shakil, were killed in and around the Darbar hall hours after the mutiny broke out. The rebels also killed Shakil's wife and 16 others in Pilkhana.

Lt Col Maksudul Haque, commanding officer of 7 Battalion of Border Guard Bangladesh, yesterday gave a deposition at Dhaka Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court as the ninth witness in the BDR carnage case.

The officer told the court that he was a major at BDR Comilla Sector at that time, and went to Pilkhana to receive a medal for his role in combating border smuggling.

He said there was chaos inside the Darbar Hall, as some jawans shouted "Jago" in the hall after a gunshot outside.

The DG ordered all to sit down. But the jawans started to move out of the hall, breaking its windowpanes as they did so. Maksudul then heard more gunshots, and gradually the sound of gunfire got louder.

When bullets were sprayed into the hall, the DG and other officers took cover behind the podium.

"I hid behind the drapes next to the podium in the Darbar Hall, and watched what was happening," said the witness.

Ten to 15 jawans suddenly entered the hall and started firing indiscriminately. They asked the officers to come out of cover with their hands up.

"As 10 to 15 officers came out of cover following their call, the jawans took them out of the Darbar hall at gunpoint, and soon I heard repeated gunshots outside."

Moments later Sepoy Selim Reza entered the hall with a firearm and a mega phone. He asked the remaining officers to come out of cover. When he threatened to kill them unless they followed his order, the BDR director general, deputy director general and nearly 10 other officers came out of cover.

"As the officers walked down the podium, Selim Reza used abusive language at them, and asked all to go one by one. The officers walked towards the west of the hall in a line," he said.

"The moment the director general stepped out of the hall, the rebels fired shots at the officers indiscriminately."

The witness said he saw sepoys Selim Reza, Atowar, Ibrahim, Obaidul, and Rafiqul of 44 Rifle Battalion, Sepoy Sazzad of 13 Rifle Battalion and Lance Nayek Ekramul of 24 Rifle Battalion spraying the officers with bullets.

At one point, he ran to the boundary wall next to the family quarters near the hall and escaped by jumping over the wall.

However, a defence counsel told the court that the prosecution witness had come up with a false statement against his client.

The lawyer said it was not possible for the witness to see what was happening in front of the four-feet-high podium, as he had admitted during cross-examination that he hid behind it for an hour.

The witness, however, refuted the lawyer's claim.

The court adjourned proceedings till today.

Earlier, defence counsels completed cross-examination of the eighth witness in the case.

BNP asked

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discuss matters related to EVMs or any other election issues.

Earlier, the BNP in a letter requested the election commission to give it an EVM for examination.

But the EC said it could not give the device to a political party.

The commission, however, said the BNP could go to the EC with its technical specialists to do the examination.

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