

Pentagon rejects request to drop 9/11 charge

AFP, Washington

The official tasked with running the Guantanamo military tribunals has rejected a prosecution recommendation to drop one of the counts faced by several detainees charged in the September 11, 2001 attacks, the Pentagon said Friday.

Brigadier General Mark Martins had asked the Pentagon authority overseeing the trial to drop the charge of conspiracy, while keeping intact other counts against the defendants accused in the murders of nearly 3,000 people in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania.

But the request was rejected by the Convening Authority tasked with oversight of the US military prison based in Cuba.

"In declining to withdraw the conspiracy charge, the Convening Authority noted that dismissal at this time would be premature, as the viability of conspiracy as a chargeable offense in trials by military commission is still pending appellate review," a Pentagon statement said.

Algeria crisis

FROM PAGE 20

There have been holding seven hostages. They had given a breakdown of three Belgians, two Americans, one Japanese and a Briton, although Brussels said there was no indication any of its nationals were being held.

Security officials had put the remaining number of foreign hostages at 10.

After the assault, APS said 25-26 Algerian and foreign workers have been killed during the four-day crisis.

The final death tolls, of both foreign and Algerian hostages and of gunmen, were not yet known.

UK Defence Secretary Philip Hammond confirmed the crisis was over and that lives had been lost.

At a joint news conference with his US counterpart Leon Panetta, Hammond said the loss of life was "appalling and unacceptable and we must be clear that it is the terrorists who bear sole responsibility for it".

The hostage-taking was the largest since the 2008 Mumbai attack, and the biggest by jihadists since hundreds were killed in a Moscow theatre in 2002 and at a school in the Russian town of Beslan in 2004, according to monitoring group IntelCenter.

Foreign Secretary William Hague said Britain must prepare itself for "bad news," and that "the large majority" of Britons originally caught up in the crisis were safe, with "fewer than 10" at risk or unaccounted for.

France said that no more of its citizens were being held.

Amid what had been a virtual news blackout in Algeria, harshly criticised by local media, world leaders had taken a tough stand on the fate of the remaining hostages.

But Panetta refused to criticise Algeria.

"They are in the region, they understand the threat from terrorism... I think it's important that we continue to work with (Algeria) to develop a regional approach."

At least one American had already been confirmed dead before the final assault.

"Signatories in Blood," led by Algerian Mokhtar Belmokhtar, a former senior al-Qaeda commander in north Africa, were demanding an end to French intervention against Islamists in neighbouring Mali, ANI reported earlier.

Belmokhtar also wanted to exchange American hostages for the blind Egyptian sheikh Omar Abdul Rahman and Pakistani Aafia Siddiqui, jailed in the United States on charges of terrorist links.

Jute act largely not enforced

FROM PAGE 20

environment-friendly jute goods instead of polythene or polypropylene bags. The law provides that initially products such as rice, paddy, wheat, sugar, seeds, fertiliser and saplings are to come under its purview and gradually other manufacturers are supposed to use packaging materials made of at least 75 percent jute fibre.

Presently, Bangladesh exports around 20 lakh bales of raw jute a year while it produces over 80 lakh bales. Local mills use 40 lakh bales to make yarn and jute goods, more than 80 percent of which is exported.

A number of growers from the jute-rich greater Faridpur region, who attended the workshop, identified volatility of jute price, dearth of quality jute seeds and problem of jute retting due to diminishing water bodies as the main

impediments to further flourishing of the jute sector.

Traidcraft Exchange, a British development charity, along with local NGO Tarango organised the workshop to disseminate some policy research findings on jute, presented by Prof Dr M Harun-Ar-Rashid of Bangladesh Agriculture University. Traidcraft country director Kazi Shahed H Ferdous made the welcome address with Shamim Akhter, a member of the Planning Commission, chairing the session.

In the policy recommendations, the organisers urged the government to accommodate certain suggestions in the draft jute policy now lying with the cabinet division. The suggestions include fixation of minimum and maximum prices of raw jute, policy support for jute and diversified jute products and re-

excavation of silted rivers, ponds and canals so that jute growers can ret jute properly.

Farmers attending the workshop said they suffer most for not getting adequate seeds in time from Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation, and have to depend mostly on imported Indian jute seeds.

Dr Md Abul Kashem, a director of Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council, stressed the need for strong farmers' organisations so that their voices reach the policy planners. Citing an example, Kashem said immediately after the recent hike in fuel prices, the government started negotiations with transport owners on hiking transport fare but there is no such initiative for farmers whose production costs would go up due to the hike in diesel price.

Committee abolished

FROM PAGE 1

Chhatra League unit have been carrying out unruly activities on the campus for the last two years allegedly to keep earning from bribes over promises of jobs at the university.

They have allegedly taken money from as many as 212 teachers and other staffs, who had been recruited during the time.

There are allegations that the Chhatra League unit continued its misdeeds on the campus with the blessings from recently-removed vice-chancellor M Alauddin and pro vice-chancellor Kamal Uddin.

The recent attacks on teachers stemmed from their abstention from classes following the recruitment of 132 teachers and staffs in September 2012.

Now, while the teachers are vocal against the Chhatra League attacks, the activists of Chhatra League

are blaming teachers for not holding classes for no good reason.

The IU unit of Chhatra League was formed on February 4, 2010. Mahbubul Alam Hanif, joint general secretary of ruling Awami League, had then declared Jahangir Hossain as the unit president and Shamsuzzaman Tuhin its general secretary.

On January 30, 2012, almost two years after the council, a 100-member fully-fledged committee was announced.

On dissolving the IU unit committee, Shamsuzzaman Tuhin said he had heard about the news but was yet to receive any letter from the central committee in this regard.

JCD CALLS STRIKE
The IU unit of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal, pro-BNP student body, yesterday called an indefinite strike from Monday (January 21) at the

university demanding removal of the proctor and the student adviser, and release of its nine leaders and activists arrested on Thursday.

Secretary General of IU unit JCD Rashidul Islam Rashed made the announcement at a press conference in Kushtia district BNP office in the afternoon.

He said no transport of the university would be available from Monday.

Rashed alleged that Chhatra League activists on Thursday attacked a peaceful procession of JCD that was demanding arrest and punishment of those who had attacked the teachers. At least 15 JCD activists were injured in the incident.

"The Chhatra League opened fire on us snatching a shotgun from police, but none has been arrested in this connection," said Rashed.



PHOTO: STAR

Students try to douse a fire at Isha Khan Hall (Extension) of Bangladesh Agricultural University in Mymensingh yesterday. Villagers, angry at a boy's killing during a BCL factional feud, set the dormitory afire.

Boy killed in BCL gunfight

FROM PAGE 1

The deceased boy, Rabbi, hailed from nearby Boira village. Enraged at his death, some 500 villagers attacked five residential halls. They set fire to at least 30 rooms and ransacked many, said BAU Proctor Sazzad Hossain.

Four students were arrested for suspected involvement in the shoot-out, said Mymensingh Superintendent of Police Golam Kibria. He, however, declined to give their names.

Hours after the violence, the central committee of Bangladesh Chhatra League dissolved its BAU

unit.

Students and witnesses said two groups -- one led by Al Azad, president of the university unit of BCL, and another by general secretary Rafiquzzaman Emon, got locked into a fierce clash around 1:00pm near the rail crossing on the campus over establishing domination at BAU.

Hearing the news of the clash, Rabbi, a madrasa student, went to bring back his grandmother who had gone to the campus to graze cattle.

But as he got caught in the line of fire, a bullet hit him in the forehead.

Around 2:00pm, a shopkeeper named Ananda took Rabbi to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital where the boy died around 3:45pm, said Prof Shah Alam, head of the hospital's pediatric surgery department.

Fazlul Karim, officer-in-charge of Mymensingh Kotwali Police Station, said the boy was aged around 10.

Additional police forces were deployed to fend off any further trouble.

Earlier on Friday, the groups fought on the campus, leaving 15 BCL men injured.

Govt wants one-sided elections

FROM PAGE 1

corporation and upazila polls now to "confuse" people, he said.

"But we will never let the government materialise such conspiracy," Tariqul, also a BNP standing committee member, added.

He made the remarks after placing wreaths at the grave of BNP founder and former president Ziaur Rahman at Chandrima Udyan to mark his 77th birth anniversary.

Asked about the

Chittagong-12 by-election, Tariqul told reporters that people did not go to the centres to cast their votes.

But the election commission showed false vote casting, and thus the Awami League-backed candidate won the by-poll, he added.

Replying to a query, he said they are not considering taking part in the city corporation and upazila polls right now.

"Our main target is now to wage tougher movement

against the government so that it is compelled to meet our demand for restoring the caretaker government system," Tariqul added.

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia flanked by the party's other senior leaders including Moudud Ahmed went to the Udayan in the capital around 12:00 noon to pay homage to Ziaur Rahman.

She offered fateha and took part in a special doa mahfil there.



PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

A poster of Petrol Pump and Tank-Lorry Owners-Workers Unity calls for an indefinite strike from today to press for, among other issues, an end to suing drivers under section 302 of the penal code.

Long queues at pumps

FROM PAGE 1

with octane. Usually, it takes five to six minutes," said Farhadul Islam, an electric goods trader in the city's Nawabpur area.

He is hoping the fuel lasts him for the few days.

The petrol pump and tank-lorry owners enforce the countrywide strike starting today to press home their nine-point demand, which includes a hike in commission rates on fuel sales.

One of the demands -- legal coverage for drivers -- drew controversy.

Waiting in the queue at Shabbagh's Mukti Filling Station around 2:00pm, Anwar Hossain, a motorcycle rider, said: "I have rarely seen such a long queue here."

"Although I can ride for another day with the fuel I

have in the tank, I need to refill because of the strike."

Nazmul Haque, convener of the Petrol Pump and Tank Lorry Owners-Workers Unity, said, "We want implementation of the commission rate recommended by the government committee in September 2011."

The commission rate recommended by the committee was 3.4 percent on per litre of diesel sales and 4 percent on per litre of petrol and octane sales, he said.

Presently, the petrol pump owners get 2.4 percent in commission on diesel sales and 3.1 percent on petrol and octane sales.

Another demand is that their workers and leaders are not sued under section 302 of the penal code.

Legal experts find the

demand illogical.

Borhan Uddin, a lawyer, said, "If anyone is proved guilty, he or she must be punished. But no-one can demand that drivers should not be sued under a certain section of the law."

He also pointed out that there is a lack of clarity in the demand.

"Usually, transport-related or accident-related cases are filed under section 304 (B) of Bangladesh Penal Code, not under section 302."

The petrol pump and tank lorry owners' other demands include renewal of driving licence on the basis of necessary examination and publication of a gazette notification after an amendment to the petrol pump installation policy.

So close yet so far

FROM PAGE 1

bridge to joggle up public memory as to how vital the bridge is to Bangladesh economy and future development.

In a nutshell, from the first day of its operation, 21,300 vehicles are supposed to use the bridge every day and the number was expected to reach 41,600 by 2025. It is expected to boost the nation's GDP growth by 1.2 percentage points and regional GDP by 3.5 percentage points.

The bridge would create 7,43,000 new jobs too.

These figures are important for various reasons. First, we are striving to become a middle-income country by 2021 and such growth propulsions would have helped us reach the target which now looks not achievable.

Secondly, the southwestern region that the bridge would have served suffers from inequality in terms of growth. Poverty is high there and opportunities low. The 3.5 percentage point additional growth would have yanked that region up the development slope.

It has an Economic Internal Rate of Return of 21 percent, well in excess of economic opportunity cost of capital of 12 percent.

The bridge would save vehicle operation costs and travel time costs.

It would in fact be the last remaining major bridge necessary to provide comprehensive connectivity between all the major regions of the country.

Jica in its assessment of the bridge said: "The provision of a bridge across the Padma river is also important for intermodal connection as it will immediately provide better road access to Mongla Port. The bridge will also provide the potential for a rail link to the port if a road-cum-rail bridge option is found feasible. From the sub-regional perspective, it can provide a second access for transit of goods between the South Asian Sub-regional Economic Cooperation (SASEC) countries."

Now, have we shown justice and attached sufficient importance to such a vital project? The track record says "No".

As the tendering process started for the project, a group of very influential people, the former communications minister Syed Abul Hossain included, allegedly started a scheme to make money. They had allegedly proposed a Canadian company, SNC-

Lavalin, that it would get a contract provided it paid them money.

The World Bank, the lead financier of the bridge, first broke the news. In Canada, it caused a huge uproar. Two Lavalin officials were arrested and put on trial for the Padma graft. Their hearing would start in April.

But in Bangladesh, the government's response was always a denial. First, it said since there was no contract signed, there cannot be any graft. Then it said "conspiracy for corruption" is not a crime in Bangladesh.

As the relationship with the World Bank soured beyond limits, and the funding of the bank became uncertain, the government started touting ideas that there are so many funders ready to invest. There were Malaysian funders, Chinese funders and so on. Even if these funds would ever materialise, it would come at a very high interest rate.

Then there were talks that we would do it with internal resources. Even an account was opened where various groups started depositing crumbs of money. As if a \$2.8 billion project could be done with donations of takas and anas from this or that group including from school children.

In fact all these were just idiosyncrasies that experts pointed out were eye-wateringly infantile approaches to a serious matter. None of them was achievable.

As negotiations with the World Bank was almost falling apart, the government agreed to investigate the corruption allegations. The ACC was engaged.

Unfortunately, the ACC sat on the matter for one year and did not find enough proof to scale the issue from enquiry to investigation level.

And when it did after much insistence of the World Bank, it did a pathetic job. As the World Bank panel's latest letter reveals, the ACC had enough evidence that former communications minister Syed Abul Hossain had meetings with Lavalin officials and that he was allegedly to get a 4 percent cut of the deal. Yet, the ACC left him out when it filed a case. Why? Because the ACC felt that implicating Abul would release a lot of political hot air. So the decision to leave Abul out was a political consideration.

It was evident that the ACC was not acting independently as it was supposed to. The question comes why the ACC

was trying to save this one man? And why the prime minister was just watching the show while making the Padma bridge dream become ever so distant? Why does she not intervene? What message should we get from her inaction?

In spite of everything, Padma bridge is still in the realm of possibility, and realising that dream would brighten the face of the nation. The ruling party which has an election coming just next year would also do itself a lot of good by being serious about the investigation.

Let's not forget that the bridge is the World Bank's largest ever infrastructure project and there is no instance that the bank had revived a project once it had cancelled it as has been in this case. This shows the World Bank has walked a long distance to make it happen.

Similarly, the government has also walked a long distance, from outright refusal to file a corruption case. So the distance between the World Bank and the government is literally an inch or an individual, Syed Abul Hossain.

It would be an unprecedented betrayal to the nation if this last block cannot be removed and let the bridge run over the Padma.

Gbagbo's ally extradited to Ivory Coast

AFP, Abidjan

Charles Ble Goude, the righthand man to ex-Ivorian leader Laurent Gbagbo, was extradited to Ivory Coast Friday after his arrest in Ghana a day earlier, Abidjan said.

"After a police operation jointly carried out by Ivory Coast and Ghana, Charles Ble Goude was arrested on Thursday in Ghana. He is currently being held in Ivory Coast as part of legal proceedings involving him that are already under way in Ivory Coast," said a joint statement from the Ivory Coast justice and interior ministries.

A former youth minister and powerful orator known for galvanising popular support for Gbagbo, Goude was the subject of an Ivorian arrest warrant for his role in Ivory Coast's December 2010-April 2011 post-election crisis that left at least 3,000 people dead after Gbagbo refused to accept defeat in a presidential election.

Blast kills two soldiers in Nigeria

AFP, Lagos

Two soldiers were killed and five others injured yesterday in an explosion in Okene city in Nigeria's central Kogi state, an army spokesman said, adding that they were part of the contingent set to be deployed to Mali.

"We lost two soldiers while five others were wounded when the IED (improvised explosive device) planted on their route went off and hit their convoy," Major General Bola Koleoso told AFP.

Koleoso said that the soldiers were among the troops being prepared for deployment in Mali as part of an African force to help the country retake its Islamist-controlled north.

He did not say if the attack, which he said was the handiwork of suspected Boko Haram Islamists, targeted specifically the troops being prepared for the Mali mission.

In prison

FROM PAGE 20

Tito, son of a Chittagong businessman, was convicted of involvement in the killing of Indian citizen Jibran Tayebi in Agrabad of the port city over a triangular love affair, said jail sources.

Son of former director general of West Bengal police TA Khan, Jibran Tayebi was killed by miscreants in front of a Chinese restaurant on June 9, 1999 in Chittagong.

The High Court sentenced Tito to life in absentia on March 28, 2007. He had already gone into hiding after the murder but surrendered before a Chittagong court on October 10, 2011.

On the same day, the court sent him to jail, where he was admitted to the jail hospital, said the sources. Two days later, he was transferred to the CMCH due to his back pain complaint.

"The CMCH authorities tried to send him back to jail," said the jail super. "But according to a Chittagong court order on April 3 last year, he was sent to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University [in the capital]."

Tito was admitted back to the CMCH in May last year and had been receiving treatment as a general patient, the jail super added.

21 move

FROM PAGE 20

Cruze (class-IX), Habiba Tasnia (class-VIII) and Kazi Tushita Tahsin (class-X) of Holy Cross School; Md Alif Ali and Md Shahin (class-X) and Md Moniul Islam (class-IX) of Lalmatia Housing Society; and Umme Ruman Islam, Shougata Talukder and Tofayel Ahmed Topu, all class-X students, of Shahid Police Smriti School and College.

From Rajshahi, the qualifiers are: Md Abir Hossain, Nafur Rahman and Sajid Sarwar -- all class-VIII students -- of Rajshahi Model School and College; and Farina Shahrin (class-VII), Tanvir Ahmed Un Nayem (class-VIII) and Md Rezaul Karim Ovi (class-X) of Rajshahi Shikha Board Laboratory School.

From Barisal, Shanta Jahan (class-IX) and Tawneza Mrinal and Nafisa Abedin of class-VIII of Barisal Government Girls High School; and Trisha Karmaker and Aysha Siddika of class-X and Ritu Karmaker of class-IX qualified for the Divisional Round.

On important facet to be noted about the Online Round is that students from class VI -X can visit champs21.com and play the Spelling Bee to vie for a chance at qualifying through to the Divisional Round. Students are encouraged to play the game as many times as they like, as only their best score will be recorded. The Online Round goes on until February 28. For further information, log on to champs21.com.

59 Rohingyas

FROM PAGE 20

Bangladeshi territory in one month was 970 in June last year, when sectarian violence broke out in the Rakhine state of Myanmar.