

Indonesia smoke blankets region

AGENCIES, Indonesia

Large parts of Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore have been hit by smog from illegal bush fires burning on the islands of Sumatra and Borneo.

Visibility in parts of Borneo was reduced to 50m while Singapore recorded its worst pollution levels since 1997.

Flights were cancelled, cars put their headlights on in the middle of the day, and Singapore warned citizens against taking exercise outdoors.

Indonesians use the fires for land clearance despite a government ban.

Visibility was down to 50m in Central Kalimantan, on Indonesia's part of Borneo island.

Environmental agencies reported from 500 to 2,000 fires burning in the flammable peat soils of the region.

"The worst situation is in Central Kalimantan now. Most areas in the province contain peat," Malaysian forest fire chief Purwasto told Reuters news agency.

"We cannot estimate the extent of the fires now."

Singapore's environment agency issued a health advisory yesterday as a thick haze from illegal fires in Indonesia choked the city-state and surrounding region.

Singapore's pollution index at 0800 GMT was 128, compared with 80 on Friday. A reading above 101 is considered unhealthy.

"Persons with existing heart or respiratory ailments should reduce physical exertion and outdoor activity. The general population should reduce vigorous outdoor activity," the National Environment Agency advised.

In neighbouring Malaysia, pollution also worsened as readings from the department of environment showed air quality at unhealthy levels in 20 areas of the country, up from 12 on Friday.

"The smoke haze situation has deteriorated overnight. The prevailing winds have remained southerly to southwesterly overnight and they have brought smoke haze from southern Sumatra to Singapore," a statement from the city-state's environment agency said.

At 0600 GMT yesterday, Indonesia's ministry of forestry reported 2,000 hotspots in Kalimantan, mostly in Central Kalimantan province on Borneo island. On Sumatra island only 291 hotspots were burning, the ministry said.

Poor visibility of 50 to 100 metres (yards) in Palangkaraya, capital of Central Kalimantan province, stopped all flights in the morning, said Hidayat, an official from the local meteorological office.

A spokesman for Singapore's Changi Airport on Saturday said the haze had not affected operations at the regional aviation hub.

Biman purchase

FROM PAGE 1
The repaired INS went out of order just a day after being installed, he added.

Biman Managing Director MA Momen admitted that there is corruption in Biman. He claimed that he is trying to reduce it.

"I agree that there is corruption in Biman and it is largely in the store, purchase, marketing and sales departments," Momen told The Daily Star, adding that he found a purchase department bill of \$650 while that particular purchase really costs only \$150.

Another Biman source pointed to the wrong policies of the airlines' top management in operating domestic flights.

Flights on routes like Dhaka-Barisal and Dhaka-Syedpur are being operated only for political considerations, he said, adding, "Government high-ups including ministers forced the Biman to continue these flights despite huge losses per trip."

A Biman pilot told The Daily Star on condition of anonymity, "I never saw more than 10 passengers on a Barisal-Dhaka flight. I have even flown to Dhaka with only one passenger against the plane's total capacity of 85."

Describing his bitter experience, the pilot said, "I once made a suggestion to one of my bosses to stop the route, but the official rebuked me saying it was not my headache."

"I was threatened with losing my job if I make suggestions like this in future," he said.

As per Biman estimation, every domestic trip costs Tk 5 lakh on an average while it earns only Tk 1.7 lakh even if the flight is fully loaded.

"This is because of Biman's wrong policy. For the domestic flights, Biman involves big aircraft like Airbus and DC-10 instead of the small ones," a Biman official said. "This is not possible to make these routes profitable with the existing policy," he added.

"Every professional airline has a master plan for at least five years,"

On Friday flights were disrupted in Malaysia's Sarawak province on Borneo island.

In Indonesian Borneo, hundreds of firefighters, aided by police and volunteers, have been trying to douse the illegal forest fires.

Residents in the southern Thailand provinces of Narathiwat and Yala, which border Malaysia, reported clear skies and fine visibility on Saturday.

Malaysia's meteorological department said it expected conditions to improve over the weekend in Sarawak as well as Sabah state and the country's north.

But light showers expected in the Kuala Lumpur area and the country's south would offer little respite there.

"It won't help very much," a department spokesman told AFP.

Indonesia's annual burn-off causes a haze that typically smother parts of Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand as well as Indonesia itself.

The Indonesian government has outlawed land-clearing by fire but weak enforcement means the ban is largely ignored.

"The fires are seasonal and very predictable, but the government never implements effective measures to prevent and manage them," said Nordin, of the Palangkaraya-based environmental group Save Our Borneo.

Hasina

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who is supposed to take over the charge of the next caretaker government later this month, the Awami League chief said he was a founder member and international affairs secretary of the BNP.

She further alleged that the alliance government has extended the service age of the Supreme Court judges only to make Justice Hasan chief of the caretaker government to manipulate the election results.

"They know they have no alternative to stealing vote for retaining power because people will not vote for them. So, they want to make their party man chief of the caretaker government," Hasina said at the outset of the meeting with her party's policymakers.

The AL hierarchy sat for the meeting when a highly important secretary-level dialogue over the electoral reforms had passed off two days and the third round will begin this evening.

Demanding implementation of reform proposals, the AL chief said, "We want fair polls and an atmosphere wherein people can cast their votes independently." She renewed her caution against any political game with the current dialogue.

Hasina, who plans to go the USA shortly to meet her grandchildren, extended her Eid greetings to the people.

said SM Nasimul Haque, former president of Bangladesh Airline Pilots' Association (BAPA). "But we [Biman] do not have any plan at all. What the [aviation] minister says on the day is our plan," he said.

Sitting BAPA President SM Helal said leasing aircraft for the Biman fleet is another wrong policy of the Biman management as it is possible to buy a new aircraft with the huge amount spent for leasing an aircraft for five years.

Biman goes for leases instead of buying new aircraft because some unscrupulous officials and top ruling party men want to make brisk money by taking commissions, BAPA leaders said.

Leaders of Flight Engineers and Navigators Association (FENA) said seven engines of Biman aircraft failed in the last eight months and there is no parallel of this rate of engine failure in the aviation history of any country.

"Engine failure means ways to make money. Biman history says some officials even drew money for repairing an engine abroad without sending the engine for repairing at all," said a FENA leader.

"Only papers showed that the engine was repaired abroad. However, when the engine was installed on the aircraft it was found out of order and the engine was sent for repairing abroad again—this time genuinely," he said.

The leader said an Airbus 310-300 aircraft has been bought for Biman at a cost of \$75 million while the Emirates and Kuwait Airlines bought the same aircraft at the cost of \$49 million and \$43 million.

"Another \$25 million has been spent to customise the aircraft," he said.

"Biman is inching towards death," said SM Helal, also convener of the Biman Sammilito Sangram Parishad, demanding for a Biman management free from corruption.

Hasan issue first

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The ALCWC meeting also discussed the opposition combine's street agitation that has been continuing since July last year to press for the reforms in the caretaker government and electoral systems.

Hasina, also the AL president, directed her party leaders to get the activists ready for vigorous movement ahead. For this, she asked them to form action committees across the country.

"The party chief told us that the dialogue may not produce a positive result. In that case, we'll have to realise our demands through agitation," a senior AL leader told The Daily Star yesterday.

The ALCWC noted that the fate of the dialogue will be determined in the next couple of days when the BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan will clarify the government's stance on Justice Hasan, added the meeting sources.

"We are afraid that the BNP-Jamaat government might hand over power to Hasan, forcing us to go for street agitations again," said another senior AL leader.

According to the constitution, Justice Hasan is supposed to be the chief adviser of the next caretaker government. But the AL and its allies have already declared that they resist Hasan taking over the running of the interim government. They will also not allow any election under his government.

"The dialogue and the reforms movement will continue simultaneously," Jaill said.

The AL led 14-party combine is scheduled to stage countrywide demonstrations for electoral reforms today while Jaill will meet his ruling party counterpart in the third round of the negotiations that kicked off Thursday at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban.

At the one-to-one discussions, the AL general secretary has already called for the issue of Justice KM Hasan to be resolved first before going to other topics.

The AL working committee meeting said it will try its best to make the ongoing dialogue a success, but in no way will it let the talks drag.

Recruitment

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The agitating staff also locked the main entrance of the administrative building in the morning and held a sit-in demonstration for about an hour in front of the building demanding regularisation of their jobs.

A rally was also held which was addressed by the 546 Unity Council convener Rafiqul Islam Sadar, joint convener Zahurul Haque and Farman Ali among others.

In the rally, the speakers threatened to paralyse the university if their jobs were not regularised within the tenure of the current government. "Until our jobs are regularised, we will resist the process of any other recruitment in the university," the council convener said.

The university authorities recruited these employees, mostly BNP and Jamaat supporters, under political considerations violating university rules and without publishing any newspaper advertisements that gave rise to widespread controversy.

Eminent citizens

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Nabi, Dr Shawkat Ali, Dr Hayat Mamud, Maj Gen Amin Ahmed Chowdhury (Rtd), Dr Badiul Alam Mojumder, Selina Hossain, Khushi Kabir, Sultana Kamal, Prof Muhammad Jafar Iqbal, Dr Yasmin Haq, Dr Abul Barkat, Zia Uddin, Tareq Ali, Mousiuddin Saker and Tobarek Hossain signed the statement.

They said that reconstruction of the Election Commission (EC) is necessary, as according to the local and foreign observers, the present EC has lost its credibility for conducting a free and fair election. The EC must also work free from any influence of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), they further said.

They also said that the control of the army should be handed over to the caretaker government for the sake of a free and neutral election, adding that the army should be placed under civil authority in every step of election process and should not be given any magistracy power.

With this ongoing dialogue process, the road to form an acceptable caretaker government will be easy, the eminent citizens expressed hope.

Arms licences

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Included firearms licences of Amir Hossain Amu, former MP and minister and central Awami League (AL) leader, advocate Talukdar Md Yunus, president of district bar association and district AL publicity secretary, and a few AL, Chhatra League and Jubo League leaders, sources said.

Besides, firearms licences of three lieutenant colonels, four majors, a navy ship commanding officer, 10 captains, a flight lieutenant, and an additional chief engineer were also cancelled.

Amir Hossain Amu and Talukdar Md Yunus said they were not given any notice before the cancellation.

Caretaker chief

FROM PAGE 1
Hasan after October 27 despite the opposition's threat to make Hasan-led administration unable to function.

BNP sources said the party high command do not want AL to be in the driving seat by conceding their demands at the ongoing dialogue. So, they want to drag out the dialogue till the last day of their tenure to keep things under their control.

Jamaat Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mujahid at the meeting said any decision at the talks between the BNP and AL will have to be conforming to the current provisions of the constitution.

Meeting sources said Mannan Bhuiyan updated the secretaries general of four parties on the developments in the crucial talks over the reform issue.

He told the coalition leaders that the AL general secretary wants the issue of Justice KM Hasan and MA Aziz to be settled first. Now they [BNP] are reviewing if the demand is constitutionally viable, he added.

During the meeting, Bhuiyan talked to the prime minister over telephone.

Rejecting the AL's demand concerning the chief adviser and CEC, Jamaat said there is no scope to do anything outside the constitution.

"Most of the reform proposals have been taken care of by the constitution and the electoral laws and the crisis too should be resolved in line with the constitution," Mujahid told journalists after the one-and-a-half-hour meeting.

Favoured Orion fails

FROM PAGE 1
"This is yet another proof that favouritism and corruption fail to deliver anything good for the nation, let alone a power plant," quips a PDB official.

Orion never actually gave the bid that was selected for this power project and it actually submitted its name as one of the two partners of a Japanese bidder Nisso Eiji, which has the experience to qualify for the power plant project. However, Nisso disappeared from the scene in 2004 and Orion brought in another German company Steag showing it as the lead bidder. The government initially rejected such a gross anomaly, but then with pressure from the 'alternative powerhouse' -- the source of power of Orion --the government accepted and approved the bid in August last year.

This followed negotiations and signing of a set of agreements for gas, power pricing, land lease and project implementation with various government agencies between December and January last.

Using political pressure, Orion also made these agencies include undue concessions in these agreements undermining national interest. These concessions would be worth no less than \$70 to 80 million, according to experts who dissected the Power Purchase Agreement for The Daily Star. A number of these concessions will monetarily deprive the PDB.

But at the same time, Orion failed to find any financier to fund the project. As a result, it has been avoiding the signing of the LLA -- which is the final agreement required to start the project. Once Orion has signed the LLA, it is bound by all other agreements it has already signed with the government agencies.

Fed up with Orion's avoidance, the PDB wrote to the BON Consortium at Orion House, Tejgaon on October 1 reminding that the consortium was given letters on the same issue on March 12 and May 23. These letters requested it to confirm the date for signing the LLA.

"Since then about seven months have already elapsed but you [BON Consortium] did not take any initiative to sign the LLA. Under this circumstances we would like to sign LLA on October 03, 2006," it said. "You are requested to attend signing of the said agreement accordingly, failing which appropriate measures will be taken," it added.

But the letter did not stir Orion, which has bagged a host of deals under the current regime.

Orion was trying to bag another power project for a long time. But that project is tangled in a deep legal mess.

In case of the Meghnaghat-2 project, Orion has been turned down by a number of financiers since cabinet purchase committee in August last year okayed its flawed bid.

Following the purchase committee meeting, Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman told the press in August 2005, "We have approved a power tariff of 2.78 cents for the Meghnaghat-2 power project. This project will be completed in 24 months."

But in March 2005, the same purchase committee headed by Saifur rejected the bid. Saifur said they could not approve a bid that was originally submitted by another company.

When asked what will be Jamaat's position, if the secretaries general of the ruling and opposition parties reach a consensus at the dialogue, the Jamaat leader said, "As the prime minister has already said, no decision will be taken without consulting the coalition partners."

WALKOUT
Abdur Rouf Yousufi, secretary general of a faction of IOJ led by Azizul Haque, walked out of the meeting of the four-party secretaries general, protesting participation of Ahmed Abdul Quader, secretary general of another IOJ faction.

Emerging from the meeting, Rouf told reporters, "I attended the meeting upon invitation from the BNP secretary general but Ahmed Abdul Quader, secretary general of the Oikya Jote led by Emdadul Haque Araihajid, also attended the meeting. So, I have boycotted the meeting."

"If a single leader of that faction takes part in the meeting of the four-party alliance leaders, we will continue to boycott it," he said.

Presided over by Mannan Bhuiyan, Jamaat-e-Islami Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mujahid, BJP Secretary General Saifur Rahman, ABM Golam Mostafa, secretary general of BJP faction led by MA Matin, and secretary general of IOJ (Amini) faction Abdul Latif Nezami also attended the meeting.

Tigers

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despite Mohammad Ashraful opened the innings with left-handed Shahriar Nafees, who was surprisingly very submissive during his 8.3 over stay at the wicket. He put on 22 runs with Ashraful before departing to a faberulous diving catch by wicketkeeper Kumara Sangakara.

Ashraful was unlucky to be caught down the leg side after scoring a patient 18. It was only Aftab Ahmed who faced the fire with fire before his cameo 31-ball 33 that featured five fours and massive six against Dilhara Fernando came to an abrupt end.

Bangladesh's hopes of getting close to the Sri Lankan summit were effectively dashed when skipper Habibul Bashar, playing his first Champions Trophy match, was out for a duck. Bashar edged the second ball he faced from Farveez Mahroof straight to his Lankan counterpart Mahela Jayawardane in the second slip.

Bangladesh were looking down the barrel at 4-78 before young guns Shaquibul Hasan and Forhad Reza produced 63 runs for the fifth wicket. Reza dominated what was Bangladesh's highest stand with an attacking 34 off 31 balls that contained five fours and a six. But the efforts of Reza and the rest only delayed the inevitable in a match where the Tigers showed their uncanny habit of being extremely attacking or extremely defensive.

Earlier, the Lankans proved Bashar's decision to field first wrong with their vaunted top-order Sanath Jayasirna (31), Jayawardane (35), Sangakara (22) and back-in-business Marvan Atapattu (40) playing the supporting role of their young talent Tharanga.

Tharanga's fifth hundred in 30 ODIs not only spoke of his class but also put him ahead of Indian great Sachin Tendulkar in terms of scoring centuries per match. Tendulkar with highest 40 one-day hundred holds an average of scoring a century in nine games.

Tharanga struck 11 fours and a six in his 129-ball 105. Bangladesh expected a lot from their new-ball pair of Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and Syed Rassel but apart from one confident appeal against Jaysuriya early in the Lankan innings, they could hardly make any impression on a wicket touted as a bowler-friendly one.

Rassel took two wickets giving away 56 runs in his 10 overs while left-arm spinner Abdur Razzak claimed 2-49. Veteran left-arm spinner Mohammad Rafique was most economical with 1-37 in 10 overs.

Bangladesh play their next match against the West Indies at Jaipur on October 11.

Assault

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A worker, Abul Kalam Azad, said the workers became infuriated after the staff beat up six of the agitating workers mercilessly as they tried to go to the sixth floor of the factory to place their demands to the authorities.

The injured workers are Rakib, Noor Islam, Shahidul, Babu, Sajid and Rafiq, the workers said.

Following the incident, the workers vandalised the factory. They also attacked Civic Fashion Limited -- another factory under Alana Group.

The workers later brought out a procession on the road near Purabi Cinema and vandalised vehicles passing by as well as two parked pick-up vans at a stand nearby prompting transport workers and locals to chase them away.

Workers of a third factory under Alana Group, AQM Apparels, vandalised the factory after receiving the news of attack on workers at TunicApparels.

The workers said as per the new wage board, the owners have to increase the salary by 25 percent and their owner has already announced a 10 percent increase. They alleged that some of the officials and staff were disbursing only 5 percent increased salary to the workers.

General Manager (Administration) of Tunic Apparels Maj (ret'd) Sheikh Liaqat Hossain denied assault on any worker and said his factory has increased 10 percent salary to the workers who have been employed there for a long period of time as their owner had committed.

"We did not increase salary of those who joined only one or two months back," he said, adding that a few troublemakers vandalised the factories.

President of Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association SM Fazlul Hoque said it is not mandatory for the owners to pay salary as per the new wage board for garments workers as it still needs to complete some more procedures and formalities.

PM asks people

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after inaugurating and laying foundation stones of different establishments under a number of development projects in the two districts yesterday.

Independent MP MM Shahin of Kulaura rejoined BNP at a public meeting at Kulaura NC High School ground while former district judge Rezaul Karim Chunnun and retired engineer Golam Mohammad joined the party at a rally in Kishoreganj.

Khaleda, also the chairperson of the ruling BNP, said when her party carries out development, the opposition resorts to destructive politics.

"The opposition doesn't want country's development, peace and prosperity. Rather it is out to unleash terrorism and chaos," the prime minister told her audience.

She struck a note of optimism that the country will become self-reliant in all sectors in the next five years if the BNP-led alliance returns to power.

Chaired by M Naser Rahman MP, the rally at Kulaura was also addressed, among others, by Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman, Communications Minister Nazmul Huda, Prime Minister's Political Secretary Harris Chowdhury and State Minister for Youth and Sports Fazlur Rahman.

Earlier, the prime minister inaugurated a 50-bed upazila health complex, newly constructed Kulaura railway bhaban and upazila auditorium.

From Kulaura, the prime minister flew to Kishoreganj and inaugurated the newly constructed Kishoreganj stadium and laid the foundation of 250-bed Kishoreganj Hospital and Nursing Training Institute.

Extortionists

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The Rab member was admitted to Chest Diseases Hospital in Mohakhali while the other two were under treatment at the Orthopaedic Hospital in Sher-e-Bangla Nagar.

Rab and local sources said the two extortionists went to Farzana Builders and Construction at Shyamoli Ring Road where they shot Nurunnabi and Aziz. Both of them received bullets in their right hands.

Assistant Superintendent of Rab-2, Kazi Ashraful Aziz told The Daily Star that two plain-clothes Rab men, who were patrolling the area, went to the spot after hearing the shots. He said one of the criminals shot Alamgir in the chest and both of them escaped riding their motor-bike.

The injured contractor and local sources said extortionists demanded Tk 6 lakh from three contractors of the firm. One Azam, claiming to be the brother of a former ward commissioner, called them over telephone on Wednesday demanding the amount. The caller also threatened to kill them if they failed to deliver the money.

Korean border

FROM PAGE 16
South Korea's Foreign Ministry issued a statement Saturday saying it supported the appeal and also urging its isolated, communist neighbour to resume the long-stalled six-nation talks.

"North Korea must clearly recognize that a nuclear test would not help the North itself in any way," South Korea said. "North Korea should be held responsible for any consequences that could be caused by a test."

Stepping up shuttle diplomacy, South Korea's nuclear envoy said he will visit Beijing on Monday for two days of talks with Chinese officials about the nuclear test.

Separately, Japan's Foreign Ministry said it sees a nuclear test by North Korea as "a grave threat to the peace and security of northeast Asia and the world" and welcomed the Security Council statement.

"If North Korea conducts a nuclear weapons test despite the concerns expressed by international society, the Security Council must adopt a resolution outlining severely punitive measures," the ministry said in a statement.

The statement adopted unanimously on Friday expresses "deep concern" over North Korea's announcement Tuesday that it planned a test, a move that would confirm strong suspicions it is a nuclear power.

The warning was read at a formal meeting by the council president, Ambassador Kenzo Oshima of Japan, who indicated that the North could face sanctions or possible military action if it detonates a nuclear device.

The council acted amid speculation that a nuclear test could come on Sunday, the anniversary of North Korean leader Kim Jong Il's appointment as head of the Korean Workers' Party in 1997. Japanese Vice Foreign Minister Shotaoro Yachi, currently in Washington, told Japan's TV Asahi, "Based on the development so far, it would be best to view that a test is possible this weekend."

With tensions rising, Kim met hundreds of top North Korean top military commanders and urged them to bolster the nation's defences, as officers cheered, "Fight at the cost of our lives!" the North's official Korean Central News Agency reported Friday.

A North Korea expert in China, the North's closest ally, said only the removal of American economic sanctions against Pyongyang could dissuade the country from carrying out a nuclear test.

"North Korea has already made a decision to carry out a test," said Li Dunqiu, of China's State Council Development Research Centre, a Cabinet-level think tank. But "if the U.S. removes sanctions ... then tensions can be eased. Otherwise launching a nuclear test is unavoidable for North Korea."

The United States imposed economic restrictions on North Korea last year to punish it for alleged counterfeiting and money

US terror watch lists

FROM PAGE 16
When questions arose about tens of thousands of names between December 2003 and January 2006, the names were sent back to the agencies that put them on the lists, the GAO said. Half of those were found to be misidentified, the report found.

In December 2003, disparate agencies with counterterrorism responsibilities consolidated dozens of watch lists of known or suspected terrorists into the new Terrorist Screening Centre run by the FBI.

People are considered "misidentified" if they are matched to the database and then, upon further examination, are found not to match. They are usually misidentified because they have the same name as someone in the database.

People are considered "mistakenly listed" if they were put on the list in error or if they should no longer be included on the list because of subsequent events, the report said.

Problems developed with terrorist watch lists after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

Maher Arar, a Canadian software engineer, was detained at New York's Kennedy Airport in 2002 because Canadian officials had asked that he be placed on a watch list. The US transferred him without court approval to Syria where he was tortured and imprisoned for a year. A Canadian inquiry found that Arar should not have been on the list because he didn't do anything wrong.

The no-fly list given to airlines to make sure terrorists don't board airplanes grew exponentially after the attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon. The no-fly list is part of the Terrorist Screening Centre database.

Young children and well-known Americans like Sen Edward M Kennedy, D-Massachusetts, were stopped at airports because their names were the same as those on the no-fly list.

The list has contained the names of Bolivia's President Evo Morales and Nabih Berr, Lebanon's parliamentary speaker, according to a report by CBS' "60