

Russia expelling 4 British diplomats

AP, Moscow

Russia said Thursday it will expel four British diplomats and suspend counterterrorism cooperation with London, the latest move in a mounting confrontation over the radiation poisoning death of former KGB officer Alexander Litvinenko.

Britain had announced Monday the expulsion of four Russian diplomats and restrictions on visas issued to Russian government officials after Moscow refused to extradite Andrei Lugovoi, accused of killing Litvinenko in London last November.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Mikhail Kamynin announced the expulsions after summoning British Ambassador Anthony Brenton to the ministry and informing him.

Kamynin described Russia's response as "targeted, balanced and the minimum necessary." He contended that Russia was forced to respond, saying Britain had made a "conscious choice of worsening relations with our country."

Brenton relayed London's "continuing disappointment" with the Russian response.

Kamynin also said Russia would stop issuing visas to British officials and seeking British visas for Russian officials until London provides more information on the restrictions it has imposed.

"Until the new procedure is explained, Russian officials will not request British visas. And analogous requests by British officials will not be considered," he said.

He also said Moscow would suspend cooperation against terror.

"To our regret, cooperation between Russia and Britain on issues of fighting terrorism becomes impossible," Kamynin said.

He did not elaborate, and the extent of current cooperation with ties already damaged by Russian intelligence services' accusations of British spying was unclear.

Natalia Leshchenko, an analyst at the Global Insight think tank, said on BBC TV that Britain and Russia do cooperate against terror, but suggested the suspension was mainly meant to tarnish the new government of Prime Minister Gordon Brown in the eyes of its own people.

"The cooperation itself is there and we can also say it can be exaggerated if needed to show that Gordon Brown acts against the British people. At least

that's what they are saying to the Russian public at the moment," Leshchenko said.

Kamynin said the interests of tourists and businessmen would not be hurt. He said than visa issues Russia would mirror Britain's actions from now on.

Brenton said he met with Kamynin's deputy, Alexander Grushko.

"He has given me certain messages to deliver back to the foreign office, which I will now do," Brenton said. "I have underlined to him our continuing disappointment at Russia's reaction so far to our request for the extradition of Mr. Lugovoi and our continuing hope that Russia will find a way to cooperate."

Litvinenko, a fierce Kremlin critic, died Nov. 23 after ingesting radioactive polonium-210. From his deathbed, he said Russian President Vladimir Putin was behind his poisoning.

Fertiliser, energy

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yesterday placed a fresh proposal for urea price hike while a similar proposal by the ministry on June 26 was sent back by the committee.

The June 26 proposal sought to raise urea price to Tk 7,000 per tonne at factory gate, an increase by 51 percent. The ministry yesterday proposed three alternative prices of urea with one being Tk 7,500 for per tonne. "The new proposal has increased the price more as the government is going to hike natural gas prices," said one source.

On deep-sea port, Mirza Aziz said, "It's a long term project and if work for deep-sea port starts now it will end in 2055... Besides, if we accept Sonadia island as site, we need another Tk 6-7 crore for study on the site."

The committee held back the proposal considering all aspects, he added.

Yesterdays meeting approved a proposal by the civil aviation ministry for leasing airbus with an option to purchase it after a certain period.

The ministry proposed three options for airbus leasing -- the other two only for taking lease.

The finance adviser said it would need \$23 million for lease with purchase option and \$17.5 million for only lease.

"We have approved the option to buy airbus after a period of lease," he said. Though this will involve an additional expenditure of about \$5 million, the committee approved it as the government will own the airbus after 2010.

The advisory body yesterday waived Tk 1.18 crore interest on loans of Modern Karylin Silk Mills Ltd, a privatised silk factory managed by its employees, on condition that the factory owners will pay Tk 2.37 crore outstanding loans in the next three months.

Zillur

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only after release of Sheikh Hasina and lifting of the ban on indoor politics."

Queried about the reported bickering among the senior leaders over intra-party reforms, he said, "All misunderstandings have been cleared after Tofail and Razzaq met me Wednesday."

He said that an eight-member committee headed by Barrister Rafiqul Haque has been formed to fight the charges brought against Hasina.

In a swipe at the military-backed interim administration, he said the way a leader of her stature was taken to jail was very inhuman. He demanded punishment to those responsible for what he said was a degrading treatment to a former prime minister.

Zillur, also ex-general secretary of the AL, said, "Misunderstandings and confusion that have been troubling the party are over now."

"Razzaq and Tofail yesterday told me that they have no resentment," Zillur said.

"Reforms mean nothing to us when our leader is in jail and at the moment, there is no room for division," he said quoting AL presidium members Tofail Ahmed and Abdur Razzaq.

He observed, "We are united in our resolve to free the leader."

About the extortion case against Hasina, Zillur said, "We will go to the High Court for the charges to be quashed."

"It's about eight years ago when there was no emergency in the country, so how come they file the case now under the emergency power rules," he said.

"Hasina's name was not in the first information report (FIR). Besides, it was never stated that she demanded money or was given money," he went on.

About BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's statement calling for release of her arch rival, he said, "She has acted like a true politician."

HASINA RECEIVES ACC NOTICE

The jail authorities yesterday did not allow the close relatives of Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina to meet her at the special jail "on security grounds."

Meanwhile, the AL chief yesterday received the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) notice, asking her to submit her wealth statement.

Some relatives of the former prime minister stayed on the parliament premises for over two hours and then went back since the authorities did not allow them to meet her.

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Reforms required

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out gradually. First, we have to identify which reforms we can carry out and which we cannot," he said, adding that the reforms should be limited to some select fields.

Albar, also a former finance secretary, suggested that the accounts of earnings and expenditures of political parties and donations from businessmen must be published for establishing transparency.

He said the two major political parties formed grand alliances only to go to power and this practice must be stopped as this has made politics a game. The electoral system will have to be changed and a national integrity system has to be developed for this, he added.

Jatiya Party (JP) President Member GM Quader said the JP gave its chairman absolute power after the 2001 election when there was conspiracy against the party. "If we all want a leader, it is democracy. Why will someone force to change the leadership?" Quader said.

Criticising the constitution of the BNP, he said it must be changed to have democracy in the party.

The Election Commission and the government will have to take strict measures to stop use of black money and criminals in the elections, he added.

Ad firm filling

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The workers said two months ago they got the work of a 30 feet by 15 feet billboard. One of them said the firm obtained permission from the DCC at a rent of Tk 100 for per square foot a month.

Earlier, a part of the Lake was filled up by dumping rubbish on that point for the construction.

Asked, Nazmul Haq, marketing and sales in charge of Neptune, claimed they have permission in this connection.

"Now no firm can establish a billboard without permission. After assessing papers and sites, the authorities allow or reject the firm's applications," said Haq. Admitting that they had earlier some illegal billboards, he said they have knocked those down.

For a billboard of 30 feet by 15 feet (450 square feet) they usually get Tk 4-5 lakh a year, he added.

However, DCC Chief Conservancy Officer Commander MR Chowdhury, who is in charge of advertisement section, said they are not allowing anyone to set up new billboards.

"I didn't permit any firm to erect the billboard there," he told The Daily Star over phone.

Expressing his gratitude for noticing him the matter, he said they will look into it.

The DCC had earlier taken steps to bulldoze illegal billboards. The move came in the wake of newspaper reports that a firm of Arafat Rahman, son of former prime minister Khaleda Zia, set up unplanned billboards in connivance with the Corporation.

Arafat's advertising firm Advance AD allegedly wiped out its competitors from the market. It has had the control of the most lucrative advertisement spots in the capital during the era of BNP-Jamaat alliance government.

"If reforms are not planned to be carried out honestly and candidly, the initiatives will prove to be farces and means to avoid arrest," said Mofazzel Karim, adviser to the BNP chairperson, said if the targets of the current reform initiatives are not transparent, then the situation before the declaration of the state of emergency will come back.

BNP Presidium Member Ziauddin Bablu suggested bringing changes in the mindset of politicians alongside the political reforms, otherwise nothing will work properly even after the reforms. He criticised dynasty politics and said it must be stopped to have a meaningful democracy within the party and the government.

The pro-reforms BNP leader said

Right history

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Bangabandhu on March 27, 1971. With the change of governments in the past, the school textbooks were changed to rewrite the history of the country's struggle for liberation and independence war.

The successive governments, especially after the early 1990s, started distorting the history of the War of Liberation in the textbooks for primary and secondary levels. The BNP-Jamaat alliance government started effecting major changes in 19 textbooks after November 2001.

An organisation under the education ministry, NCTB looks after the renewal or modification and development of curricula, and the production and distribution of primary, secondary and higher secondary textbooks.

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First ODI today

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against the World Cup runners-up who are strong enough despite the fact that they will miss the services of spin wizard Muttiah Muralidaran and paceman Chaminda Vaas, the attack pair who share 690 wickets between them in the one-day game.

The statistics will also hardly speak in favour of the Tigers when the match starts at 10:30am Bangladesh time with Ten Sports and BTV beaming the match live from Sri Lanka's oldest Test venue.

The two teams earlier met 19 times in the abridged version of the game with the Tigers managing a solitary victory -- a four-wicket success at Bogra in February 2006 -- but most of the times they surrendered.

Even in the World Cup, where Bangladesh were the most talked about side following victories against India and South Africa, the Tigers suffered a humiliating 198-run defeat courtesy to a hundred from dashing Sanath Jayasuriya, who returns to the side after being rested for the Tests.

Bangladesh team management retained the side that won the lone warm-up match on Wednesday, leaving out uncapped all-rounder Mahmudullah Riyad as 12th man.

The rain can be a threat in the series as heavy shower started yesterday afternoon but the encouraging news is that there are reserve days for every game.

TEAMS

Bangladesh: Shahriar Nafees, Tamim Iqbal, Tushar Imran, Mohammad Ashraful (captain), Shakib Al Hassan, Aftab Ahmed, Mashfiqur Rahim, Forhad Reza, Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Syed Rasel and Abdur Razzak.

Sri Lanka (from): Sanath Jayasuriya, Upul Tharanga, Kumar Sangakkara, Mahela Jayawardene (captain), Chamara Silva, Tillakaratne Dilshan, Chamara Kapugedera, Jehan Mubarak, Farveez Maharoof, Dilhara Fernando, Lasith Malinga, Malinga Bandara, Nuwan Kulasekera and Upul Chandana.

The NBR asks

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Javed Omar, Mehrab Hossain and Shahadat Hossain were the other players to be left out.

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three years," a JCE member said yesterday.

The JCE is assigned to review the flows of seven major common rivers, including the Monu, Dhola, Khawai, Dudhukumar, Feni, Matamuhuri and Dhara out of the 52 flowing through both the countries. The committee also has to make recommendations for sharing of waters of those rivers.

The bill has specified the duties of public organisations to respect and protect citizens' right to information.

The duties include categorising and updating information from time to time, making it public, making the public access to information simple and easy, making all activities open and transparent, managing training to the employees.

Under the provision of updating various information, the bill has mentioned that the public organisations should update the information dating back to at least 20 years.

The bill should also prepare a list of 11 types of information related to their works and services. Such information should be made public within three months after the act is implemented and such information should be updated every three months.