

Abbas halts contacts with Israel

Israeli aircraft target Hamas office in Gaza, death toll rises to 70

AFP, AP, Ramallah/Gaza City

Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas formally suspended all contacts with Israel yesterday in protest at the blitz on the Gaza Strip that has killed nearly 70 people, his spokesman said.

Israeli aircraft sent missiles slamming into the office of the prime minister of Hamas-ruled Gaza before dawn yesterday, pressing forward with the offensive.

Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh's office was empty at the time of Sunday's airstrike, but the raid was seen as a tough message to the Hamas leadership, which Israel holds responsible for repeated rocket barrages launched from Gaza.

The negotiations are suspended, as are all contacts on all levels, because in light of the Israeli aggression such communication has no meaning," Abbas spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeina said in a statement.

"The Israeli government has decided to prosecute an unjust war and the open slaughter of our people. It bears sole responsibility for the hindering the peace process and all the effects and consequences of this decision," he said.

He added that Abbas had ordered the negotiating team to suspend all contacts with Israel "until the aggression stops".

Israel described the suspension of the talks as a mistake that would play into the hands of Hamas.

"Suspending peace talks is a mistake and it gives the keys to the

relatives retrieve

FROM PAGE 1

home in Munshiganj. Noor Nabi's body was recovered Thursday night.

The relatives of passenger Rajib continued their frantic search for the 12-year-old till yesterday evening.

MV Sourav-1 sank near Buriganga Bridge at about 3:35pm Thursday after a cargo vessel rammed it from behind. The double-decker set off for Talola of Munshiganj from Sadarghat launch terminal with around 140 passengers on board.

PROBE BODY

Meantime, the five-member probe committee yesterday took depositions of 18 people.

One committee member, preferring anonymity, said the sunken vessel did not have necessary documents. He said the launch had six crew who all survived the accident.

BIWTA officials said they served notices on the owners and crew of the launch and cargo vessel to give their depositions to the probe committee yesterday. None, however, showed up.

They said the owners and crew will be notified again to appear before the committee, adding that legal action will be taken against them for non-compliance.

RELATIVES RETRIEVE

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Jail authorities

FROM PAGE 16

Maj (ret'd) Bazul Huda and Mohammad Shahjahan before the court.

The court fixed March 6 for the next hearing and directed the jail authorities to produce six detainees including Faruk, Huda and Shahjahan on the scheduled date.

Three other arrestees-- George Miah, Golam Sarwar and Freedom Sohul -- were produced before the court during yesterday's hearing. Of the other accused, Mizanur Rahman, Humayun Kabir, Khondaker Amirul Islam and Gazi Imam Hossain were present.

The court had issued arrest warrants against Lt Col (ret'd) Abdur Rashid, Zafar Ahmed, Nazmul Maksud, Humayun Kabir (2) and Rezaul Islam who are on the run.

According to the prosecution, a group of Freedom Party activists blasted bombs and fired shots aiming at the house of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in an attempt to kill Sheikh Hasina who was staying in the house on August 11 night, 1989. Later, they left the scene by two vehicles chanting slogans 'Faruk-Rashid Zindabad'.

Havildar Jahirul Haque filed a general diary with Dhanmondi Police Station. Later, an investigation was conducted in this regard.

Three accused in the case -- Rezaul, Gazi Liakot and Humayun -- had given confessional statements before magistrates disclosing the names of the others involved in the incident. They said they blasted bombs and fired shots to kill Hasina following directives of Faruk, Rashid and Huda.

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) pressed charges against 16 people including Faruk, Huda and Rashid on February 20, 1997. But trial of the case could not begin in the last 11 years due to legal tangles.

The case was transferred to the court on February 17 this year for quick disposal.

Earlier, Huda, Faruk and Rashid were sentenced to death in the Bangabandhu murder case and life term imprisonment in the jail killing case.

None of the other candidates -- Communist Party leader Genendy Zyuganov, populist nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy and the almost unknown Andrei Bogdanov -- presented a serious challenge.

"You know very well that it's all sorted out in advance. It's automatic," said Anna Vasilyevna, 50, as she cast her ballot in central Moscow.

Medvedev's victory was a foregone conclusion following a campaign where Russia's heavily censored television networks rammed home the message that he is heir to Putin, who is expected to become prime minister to keep a key role in the world's leading energy exporter.

Opinion polls predicted 42-year-old Medvedev, currently first deputy premier and head of gas monopoly Gazprom, would win at least 60 percent of the vote.

Large numbers of Russians voted yesterday in a presidential election slammed by foreign and domestic critics as rigged in favour of Vladimir Putin's chosen successor, Dmitry Medvedev.

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Contempt of court

FROM PAGE 1

to comment and publish "normal" court proceedings and functions of seek disciplinary proceedings against any judge as long as it is done in "good faith" and through "restrained language".

A judge's alleged corruption or incompetence and their extrajudicial activities outside their judicial functions can also be reported, according to the ordinance.

A judgement can also be criticised as long as it is "constructive".

The BNP-led coalition government had placed the Contempt of Court bill before the parliament in May, 2006, which was not passed by the House.

The Anti-Money Laundering Ordinance would enable the government to simplify the process to confiscate and recover assets funnelled out of the country.

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Under the rule, the state or the central bank could seek help from countries or agencies to investigate and recover assets through memorandums of understanding (MoU), contracts and conventions with governments or organisations.

This would ensure Bangladesh court orders to attach or freeze assets would be carried out by the corresponding countries and vice versa. "As a result, recovering smuggled money will become much easier," the ordinance read.

According to intelligence agency sources, massive amounts of money have been siphoned off overseas which the caretaker government has been trying to recover since it took over last year.

In the absence of an anti-money laundering act, the government could not sign deals to start recovering assets from other countries.

The ordinance allows the Bangladesh Bank to fine courier services, microcredit institutions, NGOs, and share and security brokers, if they violate 17 "predicate offences" comprising the ordinance rules.

"The company in violation, its owners, directors, manager, secre-

ary or other officials and employees will be considered violators of the ordinance," the draft ordinance reads.

The list of predicate offences in the ordinance includes corruption and bribery, forgery of currencies and documents, extortion, cheating, dealing in illegal arms and drugs, smuggling, abduction for ransom, murder, sexual harassment, smuggling of local and foreign currencies and human trafficking.

Meanwhile, the council has ordered the law and establishment ministries to report back with a final draft of the ordinance to turn BTTB into a private company.

In the ordinance called Bangladesh Telecom Company Limited, 2008, all BTTB assets would be turned over to the new company but the government has not yet decided how many of the staffers would be transferred.

The government is yet to decide on the future of Teletak and the submarine cable company that work under the supervision of BTTB.

Proteas pace

FROM PAGE 16

Aftab Ahmed is highly unlikely to take the field after he had to be hospitalised after being hit by a Jacques Kallis bouncer, suffering a cut just under his right eye in the process, in the first innings. The batsman was getting treatment at the Chittagong CMH and the doctors advised him to take 24 hours' rest.

A total of eleven wickets tumbled after the Tigers resumed their first innings on 60 for three yesterday morning.

Left-handed batsman Shahriar Nafees made some resistance in the face of unlimited short balls from the Proteas pace battery, especially from quickie Dale Steyn, but his 69 and a chancy 40 by Shakib Al Hasan were not good enough to avoid the follow on.

Overnight partners Nafees and Abdur Razzak started the day brightly and added a further 58 runs, but the hosts' first innings still folded for 259 in reply to the visitors' mammoth 583-7 declared.

It was, however, after seven Tests that the Tigers managed to cross the 200-run mark in the first innings.

Left-arm spinner Robin Peterson opened the gate by removing an aggressive Razzak for 33 and after Steyn got rid of Nafees after lunch, it was Mahyaha Ntini who mopped up the tail in the first innings by taking four wickets in five overs.

In the way, he also became the second highest South African wicket-taker in Tests with 334 scalps behind Shaun Pollock (421). Ntini had overtaken Allan Donald (330) on Saturday.

The story of Bangladesh's first innings, which ended just 15 minutes after tea, was all about poor shot selection and technique. Despite the fact the South Africans dropped as many as four easy catches, Shakib and horrible Tigers wicketkeeper Mushfiqur Rahim failed to make most of them.

Trailing by 324 runs, Bangladesh batting was more pathetic in the second innings as they had no answers to the fierce Steyn, who added three wickets to his four in the first innings, including Mohammad Ashraful.

The Bangladesh captain fell for another duck when he glowed a well directed bouncer to wicketkeeper Mark Boucher, who has taken as many as seven catches so far.

The most frustrating fact was that Bangladesh took two second innings wickets -- Tamim Iqbal and Shahriar Nafees -- to moderate left-arm spinner Peterson.

Nafees again top scored in the second innings with 31.

Padma Bridge

FROM PAGE 16

the invitation of Japanese Foreign Minister Masahiko Koumura.

During the visit, Iftekhar held formal talks with his Japanese counterpart and signed notes for loan agreement to the tune of US\$ 60 million for "Emergency Disaster Rehabilitation Project".

He said the Japanese showed great interest in investing in different projects in Bangladesh, and also in cooperating on nuclear energy.

Iftekhar also met Japanese Parliament Speaker Kono Yohei, and senior minister Nobutaka Machimura. Besides, he held talks with a number of government and opposition lawmakers, including former foreign minister Taro Aso, who is also chair of Japan-Bangladesh Parliamentary League.

The adviser also held discussions with the governor of Japan Bank for International Cooperation and the senior vice president of Japan International Cooperation Agency. He also had a session with Toshio Takaino, president of Japan International Treasury Corporation.

Iftekhar said most of the people he met praised the stability and peaceful nature of the socio-political development in Bangladesh in an otherwise turbulent region and expressed their interest in the country's economic progress.

The adviser urged them to ensure for Bangladesh manufacturers greater market access. He stressed that Bangladesh would like to see Japan succeed as chairman of the next G-8 Summit.

Polis in 90 days

FROM PAGE 16

October 2006 shall not be declared unlawful.

The EC, secretary to the EC Secretariat, the chief adviser and the law ministry represented by the law secretary were respondents to the rule.

The petitioner said the EC could not hold the parliamentary election within the time stipulated by the constitution.

According to article 123 of the constitution, a general election shall be held within 90 days after the parliament is dissolved.

The petition read, "The reconstituted Election Commission has violated the constitution by failing to hold the election within 90 days from taking office."

"It has no legal authority to extend the period beyond 90 days for any reason...where there is a clear and direct constitutional obligation which must be followed by the Election Commission and the commissioners who owe their very existence to the constitutional provisions," added the petition.

Gen Moeen

FROM PAGE 1

wants to strengthen its ties with all countries of this region.

Referring to Bangladesh's foreign policy, the adviser said Dhaka wants to move forward with SAARC, ASEAN, China and Japan and attain economic progress. He said Bangladesh has great potentials having a growth of six percent.

Asked about discussion between Gen Moeen and the Indian leaders on bilateral issues, which the Foreign Ministry is supposed to do, Iftekhar said, "these are traditional visits by our army chiefs...but this visit was very important as we are trying to ease our bilateral relations through every step."

Swindler NGO men

FROM PAGE 1

Encouraged at Freedom's 'success', 57 similar NGOs, 37 registered, sprang out in Naldanga and surrounding villages over the last one and a half years. These NGOs are still active under the shed of local administration and influential people, said Sajjad Hossain Mukul, chairman of Shilmaria Union Parishad, Puthia.

"These NGOs have no other income than enlisting members, they don't deal money through banks, and offer 4-6 times higher in return... still Natore district administration was allowing their activities," Mukul complained.

He mentioned the names of some NGOs including Swadesh Unnayan Sangstha, Swadhin Unnayan Sangstha, Diamond, Janaseba, Nabajagoron, Daridra, Suryamukhi, Nakshi Bangla, Samaj, Asar Alo, Alor Dishari, Gram Jagoron, and Shekor Unnayan.

Nurul Islam, a businessman from Natore, said: "We drew the administration's attention when we saw NGO men carrying people's money in jute-sacks to unknown destination, but there was no-one to hear."

Mahfuz Alam Moony, a senior journalist, alleged local media repeatedly asked the deputy commissioner of Natore to take action as the NGOs were "illegally" cashing on government registration for social welfare.

"The DC without stopping the NGO activities for reasons unknown approved them ignoring

majority opinion at a meeting at his office," he said, adding, "Some NGOs are still active."

Deputy Commissioner SM Ehsan Kabir denied receiving any complaint in this connection. He pinned the blame on police for not being watchful.

"At the January 27 meeting, we allowed the NGOs after asking police to be vigilant in the villages so that no NGO can go away with people's money. Social Welfare office was to look into the matter, but no-one worked."

"It's simply impossible for police to be vigilant round the clock over so many NGOs in the remote villages. Regulating the NGOs is an administrative job," said Shah Golam Mahmud, superintendent of police in Natore.

SHOCKED MEMBERS' DEATH

A member of Freedom Unnayan Sangstha committed suicide yesterday and three others died of heart attack since the news broke on Friday.

Jotsna Begum, 29, wife of Mozammel Haque of Lepara, Sadhanpur, Puthia in Rajshahi headed herself yesterday morning as she lost Tk 26,000.

Azimuddin, 56, of Chowbaria in Durgapur upazila who deposited Tk 1.7 lakh died of heart attack on Friday.

Abul Hasen, 35, of Bangal Khalsi village who deposited Tk 12,800 and Baby Begum, 35, wife of Abul Kashem of Chhatrabhag in Natore, who deposited Tk 6,400 died of heart attack on Saturday.

Rental power plant

FROM PAGE 16

offered 5.45 cents.

The government is willing to pay a higher price for rental power than power from conventional power plants to ensure that these start operation from April.

Chaired by finance adviser Mirza Azizul Islam, the committee yesterday also approved purchase of 6600 power distribution transformers for the Rural Electrification Board (REB) under the ninth REB distribution line expansion project.

Under a grant from the DFID, the US\$ 3.96m contract was awarded to Technoventure Ltd. The tender was floated in September last year in which four contractors participated.

The committee was supposed to consider the approval of a 150 MW combined cycle power project in Sylhet. The power ministry sought approval to award the contract to Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd (BHEL) of India at a price of US\$ 68m, but withdrew the proposal at the last moment for more clarifications.

The committee has approved a health ministry proposal to appoint a consultant for smooth implementation of the Health, Nutrition and Population Support Programme (HNPPS). EPOS Health Consultant, a German consultant, has been assigned the job at a cost of around Tk 7 crore.

The committee also approved a Tk 14 crore land-filling project under the home ministry. This project is being implemented in Keraniganj to construct a new jail complex.

Talks with BNP

FROM PAGE 16

committee meeting on October 29 is illegal, where the committee declared M Saifur Rahman and Maj (ret'd) Hafiz as acting chairperson and acting secretary general of the party.

The EC on October 5 invited Hafiz to hold dialogue with it on electoral reforms on November 22 last year. Later, the EC cancelled its letter as the HC stayed operation of the EC's letter after a writ was filed by former premier Khaleda Zia challenging the legality of the letter.

After partial hearing by Khaleda's counsel advocate TH Khan and EC's counsel Dr Kamal Hossain on the ruling on February 27 the HC bench adjourned hearing.

Charge-framing

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deferred the charge-framing hearing four times, due to time petitions from the defence and the prosecution and Hasina's illness.

The other accused in the case are former energy secretary Dr Toufiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury, former Power Development Board (PDB) chairman Noor Uddin Mahmud Kamal, Aziz Khan, managing director of Summit Industries and Mercantile Corporation Private Ltd, its director Farid Khan, United Group chairman Hasan Mahmud Raja and director Abul Kalam Azad.

The curator of Bangabandhu Memorial Trust, Sayed Siddiqur Rahman, was indicted in the charge sheet, submitted to court on January 10.

Deputy Director Sabir Hasan of the Anti-Corruption Commission filed the case with Tejgaon Police Station on September 2, complaining that Hasina and the six others used their influence to help Wartsila Power Development Ltd Consortium and its local partners -- Summit Group and United Group -- win a deal for setting up 100MW barge-mount power plants in Haripur, Khulna and Shikabaha, depriving the lowest bidder.

The case statement said Hasina, then prime minister, received kickbacks to the tune of Tk 3 crore from the three firms from October 24, 1996 to November 24, 1997. The money was used for buying a house for Bangabandhu Memorial Trust, controlled by Hasina, in the city's Dhanmondi neighbourhood.

The case was brought under the Emergency Power Rules on September 20 last year.

40 killed

FROM PAGE 16

"It was a huge explosion and left body parts and blood scattered on the ground," said Ramin Khan, whose left leg and face were wounded.

Dr. Hamid Afridy, the area's chief medical officer, said he counted 40 bodies, some with severed limbs and mutilated faces, at the site.

"We have dispatched more than 100 injured to .. hospitals" in Peshawar and Kohat town, he told The Associated Press. He said he feared the death toll could rise because many of the injured were in critical condition.

Pakistan Television said the suspected bomber's severed head was found.

Television footage showed blood, shoes and caps littering the bombing site a tree-lined ground amid wheat fields that is only a few yards away from brick homes.

Local resident Siraj Mohammed said that some clan leaders were among the dead, adding that the jirga had been highly publicised, and local shops closed by tribal leaders for the occasion.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack.

Pakistani security officials say the lawless town of Darra Adam Khel had recently become a stronghold of the banned Sunni Muslim extremist group Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, which is said to have links to al-Qaeda.

In January, Pakistani forces mounted a major offensive to clear Islamic insurgents from a major road tunnel in the area. At least 13 soldiers and 50 militants were killed in the heavy fighting.

That unrest started after militants seized four military trucks loaded with ammunition near Darra Adam Khel, which is known for its weapons bazaar and illegal arms manufacturing factories.

Sunday's blast was the third attack in as many days.

On Friday, a suicide bomber killed at least 44 people and injured up to 90 others during a funeral for a slain police officer in the town of Mingora in the northwestern Swat valley, a hotbed of religious militancy.

On Saturday, a suicide bomber rammed his car into a security vehicle in lawless Bajaur tribal district, killing a civilian, a security official and injuring 21 others, local officials told AFP.

War criminals

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introduced in the curriculum of universities.

The Liberation War Museum organised the two-day conference at the city's Brac Inn to learn from other countries' attempts to try war criminals.

"We should learn from the experience of other countries' war-crimes trials and at the same time we need cooperation of other countries to try our war criminals," said Dr Sarwar Ali, a trustee of the Liberation War Museum.

The world is yet to recognise the genocide that took place during the Liberation War in 1971, he said adding that the world should know that Bangladesh achieved independence through immense sacrifice.

The conference will help attain global support to try the war criminals, he added.

The speakers at the conference said national unity is required to achieve the objective of trying the war criminals. Presenting a paper on Trauma and Tribulation of Victims, MA Hasan, convener of War Crimes Facts Finding Committee, Bangladesh, pointed out the issues of societal trauma, impact of impunity, justice, perpetrators and statistics of victims.

"Unfortunately, the perpetrators of these gruesome war crimes, genocide and crime against humanity have not been brought to book. Our governments have failed to address this issue and the international community did not have any interest. It has caused a trauma in our hearts," he said.

"Moreover, trauma and tribulation of war victims were surmounting the perilous strife of the society in post-liberation Bangladesh," he added.

It is not only the failure of independent Bangladesh after 1971 but also the international community in the form of United Nations which could not secure the trial of the perpetrators of those crimes, said Shah Alam, professor at the law faculty of Chittagong University, presenting his paper.

"International and regional politics, national politics after the tragic killings of 1975 proved to be the impediments to trial. However, prosecution of crimes is never time barred. Ongoing trials in Cambodia, Chile, and trials of World War II war criminals long after their commission are glaring examples," he said.

Justice Muhammad Habibur Rahman, National Prof Kabir Chowdhury, Prof Anisuzzaman, Prof Ahmed Kamal, barrister Sara Hossain, Syed Anwar Hossain, Syed Shamsul Huq, Anwar Syed Huq, Prof Sonia Nishat Amin, Ashis Nandy from India, Sara Zaker and Hamida Hossain also took part at the roundtable discussion.

A declaration was adopted at the concluding ceremony of the conference to set further programmes to bring the war criminals to book.

DU teachers

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war heroes -- Col Taher and Maj Gen Khaled Mosbarraf.

He [Ziaur Rahman] cannot avoid the responsibility for killing two sector commanders of the Liberation War as they were killed during his tenure," said the deputy chief of the Liberation War.

The war heroes' call to boycott the anti-Liberation War elements socially was greeted with thunderous applause from the audience.

The country has turned into a failed state as it failed to bring the war criminals to justice, the war veterans also said.

Special guest Justice Ghulam Rabbani said the entire nation is united in demanding trial of the war criminals. "The trial of war criminals is a must for ensuring justice in the society