

Russia denies carrying missiles to Iran

AFP, Moscow

Russia yesterday strongly denied that a cargo ship whose supposed seizure by pirates sparked an international mystery was secretly carrying sophisticated anti-aircraft missiles bound for Iran.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov dismissed reports that the Arctic Sea was carrying a batch of the Russian-made S-300 missiles when it was hijacked.

"Regarding the S-300s on board the Arctic Sea, this is absolutely untrue," Lavrov told reporters when asked about the report.

Separately, Russian investigators announced they had inspected the ship and found only its official cargo of timber.

"The cargo aboard the ship, wood and sawn timber, is being thoroughly inspected by investigators, as well as the ship itself," a spokesman for the investigative committee of Russian prosecutors told AFP.

"Nothing besides the stated cargo has yet been found by investigators and forensic experts," he said, adding the ship was still at sea and the investigation would continue several more days.

The Arctic Sea, a Maltese-registered vessel with a Russian crew, was hijacked near Sweden in late July before being recovered by the Russian navy in the Atlantic Ocean several weeks later.

The hijacking in a busy European shipping lane, the huge international effort to recover the ship, and the detention of its crewmen after they returned to Russia have all fuelled speculation about a secret cargo.

Officially the ship was carrying a load of timber worth 1.7 million dollars (1.16 million euros) from Finland to Algeria, but speculation has raged that it was carrying weapons or even nuclear materials.

The ship is due to arrive within days at Russia's Black Sea port of Novorossiisk.

Lavrov said representatives of Malta, the flag government of the Arctic Sea, would be invited to take part in the investigation.

"Everything will be done transparently. I hope everyone will be convinced that the rumours you are referring to are absolutely groundless," Lavrov said in response to a reporter's question.

Meanwhile a Kremlin spokeswoman, Natalya Timakova, told reporters that any theories about what the Arctic Sea was carrying before the investigation was complete were "speculation."

This weekend the Sunday Times of London, citing Russian and Israeli sources, reported that Israel's Mossad intelligence service had learned the ship was carrying S-300s to Iran and worked with Moscow to stop the shipment.

According to the Sunday Times report, Israel learned that the ship had been loaded with weapons in Russia's Baltic Sea port of Kaliningrad by former military officers with links to criminal groups.

CHT land

FROM PAGE 16

strength aiming to resolve land disputes in the hill tracts region.

"During the survey period, we will ask people to submit to the commission the copies of their cases on land dispute," the commission chief said.

Asked about continuous absence of CHT Regional Council Chairman Joytirindra Bodhipriya Larma alias Santu Larma from the commission meeting, justice Chowdhury said, "That doesn't mean he is not cooperative."

Khagrachhari Hill District Council Chairman Ruhya Karbari and Additional Divisional Commissioner of Chittagong Md Nurul Islam attended the meeting.

Bus passengers

FROM PAGE 16

Medical College Hospital.

Sub-inspector Jamal Uddin of Jatribari Police Station said a gang of seven to eight robbers started looting as the bus left Sayedabad bus terminal around 12:00 noon.

The robbers beat passengers up and got down from the bus at Shanir Akhra after looting the belongings worth around Tk 4 lakh, he said.

Promotion

FROM PAGE 1

deputy commissioners, who were deputy secretaries but promoted as joint secretaries, to remain in their previous positions.

Two divisional commissioners of the rank of joint secretaries—MAN Siddiqui of Chittagong division and Md Yusufur Rahman of Khulna division—were also asked to remain in their positions although they were made additional secretaries.

Establishment ministry sources said similar moves would be made to accommodate the huge number of promoted officers.

Meanwhile, the promoted officers already started lobbying with influential quarters to get new offices but many believe that political consideration will be a deciding factor in this regard.

The promotion came in clear violation of the organogram, according to which promotions can only be given if there are vacant positions. The latest promotion move came when there were already excessive officers in almost all layers of the administration.

The promoted officers were happy with their upgraded ranks, but frustration gripped those who were left out.

Around 57 joint secretaries and 526 other officials have not been considered for promotions this time, sources in the establishment ministry said.

Talking to The Daily Star, a secretary said many meritorious officers were denied promotion while many joint secretaries from special BCS batches were promoted as additional secretaries which, he believes, would create problem in the bureaucracy in the future.

"Promoting to the rank of additional secretary is simply a blunder as many of them are from special batches and have little experience," he observed.

Preferring anonymity, he said the latest promotion spree will make the administration unhealthy for bureaucracy.

However, the case of promoting 274 senior assistant secretaries is different as it has created a good number of vacant posts at junior level. Many said deskwork would be hampered by the absence of junior officers. The government can fill the vacancy through recruitment.

2 years on

FROM PAGE 16

Police arrested all six accused following the case. Of them, Mamunur Rashid was later released on bail.

The Criminal Investigation Department in Chittagong is now investigating the case.

Earlier, police and Detective Branch probed the case but could not come to a conclusion for last two years.

"We are passing our time in agony and we are yet to get justice," said Sumaiya Ahmed, Investigation Officer and CID Inspector Abdul Gafur said he had already quizzed Mamunur Rashid on this case and planned to have the other accused on remand.

"I'm hopeful to find a lead to the case soon," Gafur told The Daily Star.

However, the sincerity of police has been questioned by the family.

Swine flu

FROM PAGE 1

said the government officials. The number of swine flu patients has risen to 311 since the first case was detected on June 18, said IEDCR Director Prof Mahmudur Rahman.

He said swine flu has so far been detected in Dhaka and 13 other districts. The surveillance has been increased in the capital.

"The spread of the virus is at its peak now," he said, adding that it might fall sharply in 10 days.

As the government apprehends widespread outbreak of swine flu virus across the country during this Eid season, disseminating awareness messages at the terminals are also under the government's consideration, he said.

"A technical committee meeting will be held at the health ministry today in this regard," he said.

Asked about the swine flu vaccine, the IEDCR director informed that the vaccine would hit the world market in October and may be marketed in the country in January.

Meanwhile, a patient infected with swine flu virus was admitted into Khulna Medical College Hospital on Monday.

He was identified as Abdur Rahman (18), son of retired Ansar and VDP commander Abdul Aziz of Khulna Shipyard Road.

This was the first swine flu case detected in Khulna. Abdur Rahman is a grocer by profession.

Graft court hiring

FROM PAGE 1

proceedings, quoting the deputy secretary.

The official could not say if the Supreme Court had been consulted before appointing the district judges to the special courts.

He however said the law secretary and the then deputy secretary (administration) may give details about the matter.

The Daily Star has obtained a copy of the proceedings that are likely to be approved by the parliamentary body today.

Talking to this correspondent yesterday, jurist Shahdeen Malik said the law ministry was supposed to make the judges' appointments in consultation with the apex court.

Asked about agenda of today's meeting, committee Chairman Suranjit Sengupta yesterday said a number of issues including appointments of the special court judges and lawyers and the forced retirement of two judges will come up for discussion.

Fakhruddin Ahmed-led caretaker administration set up 10 special courts after the launch of the anti-graft drive in February 2007.

As many as 244 cases filed by the Anti-Corruption Commission were sent to the tribunals for trial. Proceedings of 122 cases were completed, but those in most of the rest were stayed—some before and some after charge-framing and others before delivery of verdicts.

The special courts sentenced many political leaders and businessmen in corruption cases.

Graft and extortion cases filed against Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia too were sent to the special courts.

Trial of the two leaders, who were released before the ninth parliamentary election, however was not completed.

The ACC spent Tk 7.74 crore on lawyers hired to stand for it in trial of the corruption cases.

On June 2, the cabinet division in a report to the parliamentary standing committee on public undertakings criticised the anti-graft body's expenditure on lawyers.

It observed the ACC should have had permanent prosecution instead of spending so much public money on hiring expensive lawyers.

Two judges About the much-talked about July 30 order sending two district judges into forced retirement, the deputy secretary said the file was not initiated by the section concerned and so he cannot give details.

He said the law secretary initiated the file illegally.

State Minister for Law Quamrul Islam told the meeting the law secretary moved the file as per a note sent by prime

Tupis rewrites

FROM PAGE 1

even three years back but Awal's venture is a 'strong tool' to fight against the famine-like situation as he has created the source of income for the poor women that has changed the economic scenario in the area silently.

Without help of any NGO or government organisation, Awal who always stays in Oman is running the factory using the workforce of the poor women. He has been earning foreign currencies by exporting home knitted tupis to Oman since 2006.

Saiful Islam, younger brother of Awal, said, "The poor women are now earning money besides their household works and even female students do not think to stop their education for financial hardship as they earn money by knitting tupis."

Awal collects order for tupi from businessmen of Oman. His sons—Sohag Mondal and Saiful Islam Mondal—are in charge of production of the factory at Sabhaz village. They are producing tupis through the female workers and sending its consignment to Awal in Oman.

Sohag said his father was the imam of Kurigram Textile Mill Jame mosque. When the textile mill was laid off during nineties, he came back home in Kaunia and began to think about alternative occupation. Then he went to Feni. There he joined a private farm that exported tupis to Oman. He worked there for about three years.

After returning from Feni, he (Awal) set up a small factory with twelve workers and began to knit tupis there. He used to supply tupis to the farm in Feni since 2006, he added.

From January 2006 Awal himself started to export tupis to Oman. Day by day he has increased his production and engaged more female workers in knitting tupis.

When contacted over phone Awal from Oman said, now he is able to send two consignments of 900 pieces of tupi a week to Oman through

minister's Adviser HT Imam through the establishment secretary, read the proceedings.

On submission of the law ministry official, the parliamentary body decided to investigate the role of HT Imam and the law and establishment secretaries.

Upon discussion today, the standing committee may, if necessary, ask the prime minister's adviser and the establishment secretary to appear before it and explain their actions regarding the forced retirement decision.

In a surprise move on July 30, the government sent the two judges into retirement for involvement in Bangladesh Judicial Service Association's demonstrations at the secretariat on July 27.

Greeted with strong criticism, it reinstated the judges after two days.

Abdul Gafur, district and sessions judge in Dhaka, and Shahjahan, women and children repression prevention tribunal judge in Gazipur, were the two on the receiving end.

They are president and general secretary of the judicial service association.

4 US, 10 Afghan soldiers killed in fighting

AFP, Kabul

Four American and 10 Afghan soldiers were killed yesterday in a clash in the eastern Afghan province of Kunar, local authorities and the US military said.

"Fighting is continuing" in the district of Sirkanaj, the head district official, Hamisha Gulab Shinwari, told AFP.

"The Afghan and international forces confronted the Taliban.... In the clash, 10 Afghan soldiers and four American soldiers were killed and 10 other soldiers were injured," he said.

"The frontier police, who took part in the fighting, lost one man and five police were injured," he added.

The loss of the four American soldiers was confirmed by a US army spokesman in Kunar, but he declined to confirm the number of Afghan soldiers killed.

Located on the border with Pakistan's tribal areas, the mountainous province of Kunar has been the most prone to insurgent attacks among Afghanistan's eastern provinces.

The death of the four Americans brings to 329 the number of foreign soldiers killed in Afghanistan this year. Of that number, 190 were American.

Highway crimes

FROM PAGE 16

AIG Mahmud said, "We intercept at least seven to ten trucks at the place before any crime-prone spot at dead of night and then ask them to move together so that any highway gang dare not to commit robberies. The technique proves a success."

Some traders at Karwan Bazar said on the nights of Ramadan trucks carrying agricultural products are not intercepted by police on the highways.

But, in the early morning, highway police personnel at some points intercept trucks and take bribes, they said adding bribery by traffic sergeants across the country is rampant during day times.

Truck drivers have to bribe traffic police at least Tk 200 while highway police patrolling on the highways take Tk 100 to 500 in different areas across the country during the day, they said.

Truck driver Mohammad Saiful who reached Karwan Bazar Tuesday evening with his truck loaded with papayas from Binodpur at Matihar of Rajshahi said he had to pay Tk 1100 as bribe to traffic police personnel at seven points on his way.

He said he had to pay Tk 100 at Motihar of Rajshahi, Tk 200 at the entrance of Natore town, Tk 100 at Gunpara near Sirajganj, Tk 100 at Kadda of Sirajganj, Tk 200 at Mirzapur of Tangail, Tk 200 at Gazipur Chowrasta (crossing) and Tk 200 at Azampur in the capital. He was even given a slip numbered 142 against Tk 200 at Gazipur Chowrasta.

The fare of the truck was fixed at Tk 11000 to carry the papayas but now it will cost the trader Tk 12100 as the bribed money adds to the cost.

He added thugs couldn't extort money on the highways as none but the law enforcers can intercept the trucks.

PM okays

FROM PAGE 1

had taken into cognisance 16 technical questions raised by a GTCL consultant.

The chairman's a smoky response two weeks ago explaining the Chevron deal, and seeking the prime minister's permission for awarding the job to Chevron under the PSC. Under the PSC, Chevron would operate and maintain the compressor and after cost recovery hand it over to Petrobangla, and the GTCL would then operate it on behalf of Petrobangla.

Petrobangla's move to award the deal to Chevron raises serious questions because the GTCL board headed by the Petrobangla chairman in May had cancelled the GTCL tender to award contract to Korean company Hyundai to install three compressors under the ADB funding. The GTCL's tender was opened in February, but the Petrobangla chairman had asked Chevron for this job in December last year.

The chairman claims that the GTCL tender was cancelled because Hyundai had given a dozen clarifications on its bid, which were not acceptable. And it had sought extra cost against some machinery, which was also not acceptable as per the tender document. Besides, the Hyundai bid offer was 152 percent higher than the allocated budget.

Though the opposition lawmakers were not present in the House, they submitted notices on issues like traffic congestion, deaths of children caused by fake medicine, extortion by Chhakra League men, flood situation, attack on the leaders and activists of opposition party, torture by Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), skyrocketing prices of essentials and sugar market manipulation.

But the speaker accepted none of the notices. In defence of rejecting the notices, he said contents of some notices are not based on facts and some of them are not specific and based on guess.

Referring to the notices on law and order situation, extortion and criminal activities, the speaker said it is possible to solve the problems under the existing laws.

"I am really sorry for my inability to accept any of the notices," the speaker said.

Of the 29 notices from BNP lawmakers, Jafrul Islam Chowdhury sent 19 notices and Nazimuddin Ahmed sent 10 notices. Fazlul Azim sent 6 notices.

British airline

FROM PAGE 16

planes. The jury could not reach a verdict on an eighth man.

"In terms of al-Qaeda involvement, there is a large part of this plot that has been thought through or invented in Pakistan," one senior counter-terrorism source said after the trial.

The jury were shown intercepted emails in which Abdulla Ahmed Ali, 28, Tanvir Hussain, 28, and Assad Sarwar, 29, asked Pakistani contacts for advice on building bombs in drinks bottles to detonate on flights over the Atlantic.

Prosecutors believe the absence of evidence establishing these links had led to a jury in the men's first trial in 2008 failing to reach a verdict that they had plotted to blow up the planes, forcing a second trial to be held.

Ken MacDonald, the former head of the Crown Prosecution Service and Director of Public Prosecutions, said: "We felt that this was a strong case from the start, unfortunately the jury in the first trial could not agree."

"The additional evidence that we had (in the second trial) were the emails," he told BBC radio.

The emails were obtained by a court order in California requiring Yahoo! to disclose them.

Reports said the men's main point of contact was Rashid Rauf, a British-born Muslim who fled to the tribal areas of Pakistan in 2002 after the murder of his uncle and developed strong links with al-Qaeda.

Intelligence services also reportedly believe he was a key contact of the gang in the 2005 bombings of the London transport system, which killed 52 people.

The trial heard that Ali had already been identified as a dangerous radical when he was stopped at London's Heathrow Airport in June 2006 on his return from a trip to Pakistan.

Customs officials found a large quantity of batteries and

Load-shedding

FROM PAGE 16

projects and public-private partnership projects.

Enamul also said the companies setting up coal-based power plants will themselves import "quality coal" from Indonesia, Australia and other coal extracting countries.

"The process under the new plan is going on to set up coal-based plants in Khulna to produce 500MW electricity, liquid fuel-based 100MW power plant in Bheramara, another 100MW plant in Jessore and a 50MW plant in Barisal," the state minister told the House.

In reply to a question of lawmaker Salma Islam, Enamul said the government has decided in principle not to bring new areas under gas supply network until gas production increases to 2,200 million cubic feet per day.

He informed the House that the government lost about Tk 450 crore in 2008-09 fiscal year because of systems loss in the power sector.

Fitra for other parts of the country should be given taking into account of the price of rice or flour in respective areas, it said.

Fitra is Wajib (mandatory) and should be paid to the needy for all members of the family before the prayers of Eid-ul-Fitr, the release added.

Pak schoolchildren

FROM PAGE 1

attackers were Taliban."

Residents said the dead students were all younger than 16, but were not able to give the exact ages of the victims.

"I heard gunfire and came out of my home," local resident Samiullah Khan told AFP by telephone. "I saw people armed with Kalashnikov rifles fleeing in two jeeps, while several students were bleeding."

Earlier at least 15 more Taliban extremists were killed in Pakistan military's counter insurgency operation and a drone attack in the Khyber and North Waziristan areas.

While 10 militants were killed in the Tirah valley during anti-militancy offensive, a US drone targeted an alleged militant hideout and a madrasa in Machikhel village in North Waziristan killing five persons on the spot besides injuring six others, The Daily Times reports.

"The strike targeted a madrasa and an adjoining house in Machikhel village in North Waziristan. At least five people were killed and six others injured," a senior security official said.

Local tribesmen have cordoned off area and are searching for bodies, sources said.

People have started leaving their homes amid the fresh military operation against the extremists in the region.

According to an estimate 30,000 people have left Khyber

a high-sugar powdered drink in his luggage. Both are ingredients for homemade bombs.

He was not arrested, but police broke into his flat one night and installed hidden cameras and microphones.

Over the next few months, they watched as Ali and his colleagues experimented with injecting drinks bottles with a mixture of the explosive liquid hydrogen peroxide, which they planned to carry on to flights and detonate with a bulb filament.

But the biggest counter-terrorism operation ever mounted in Britain, costing 35 million pounds (57 million dollars, 40 million euros), was reportedly almost thrown into jeopardy by US intervention.

Fearful that the gang were close to carrying out the plane bombings, the US authorities put pressure on Pakistan to arrest Rauf in 2006.

Andy Hayman, a senior police commander who worked on the case, said in the Times newspaper that his detention "hampered our evidence-gathering and placed us in Britain under intolerable pressure."

British police were confident that they had the gang completely under surveillance, but Rauf's arrest forced them to bring forward the arrests in Britain when they would have preferred to wait longer.

Rauf escaped from police custody in Pakistan in mysterious circumstances in 2007.

US officials said they believed they killed him in an attack with an unmanned drone but his death has never been confirmed.

The discovery of the plot in 2006 sparked chaos at airports, as authorities worldwide immediately introduced draconian regulations limiting the amount of liquids that passengers can carry on to flights.

Many of the rules remain in place.

Moeen

FROM PAGE 1

general of making derogatory remarks that damaged his (Tuku) reputation.

Moeen's counsel, advocate Humayun Kabir filed the petition with the Third Joint District Judges Court, Dhaka.

Judge SM Saiful Islam fixed the hearing on September 13.

On March 27, 2007 Gen Moeen said at a tea party at the National-Parade Square that corrupt politicians had siphoned at least Tk 20,000 crore from the energy sector during the tenure of four-party government, reads the complaint.

The party was held in the honour of freedom fighters.

Fitra fixed

FROM PAGE 1

Fitra for other parts of the country should be given taking into account of the price of rice or flour in respective areas, it said.

Fitra is Wajib (mandatory) and should be paid to the needy for all members of the family before the prayers of Eid-ul-Fitr, the release added.

Agency for safer places since Sunday.

"Thousands have fled the military operation in Khyber. Around 30,000 people have arrived in Peshawar," said Sahibzada Mohammad Anis, administrative chief in Peshawar.

Orakzai borders Khyber district, where the military launched a fresh offensive against Islamist extremists about a week ago, sending thousands of residents fleeing and killing more than 130 rebels, according to army figures.

Pakistan's semi-autonomous northwest tribal belt has become a stronghold for hundreds of Taliban, al-Qaeda and other extremists who fled Afghanistan after the US-led invasion toppled the Taliban regime in late 2001.

Taliban fighters frequently attack and burn schools in the northwest, while tensions are also rife in the area between the majority Sunnis and the Shias.

Pakistan in late April launched an offensive against Taliban in the northwest, targeting rebels in Swat valley and the nearby districts of Buner and Lower Dir after the insurgents advanced close to the capital Islamabad.

The military in July claimed to have cleared the area of the Taliban threat, and has now turned its attention to the tribal belt bordering Afghanistan.