

RUSSIAN AIRPORT BLAST

Russia probes Caucasus link

Medvedev vows to 'liquidate' militants behind blast

AFP, Moscow

President Dmitry Medvedev said yesterday that clear breaches in security had allowed a suspected female suicide bomber linked to Russia's Northern Caucasus to slaughter 35 people at Moscow's main airport.

In comments broadcast on national television, Medvedev demanded answers from Domodedovo airport over how it let the bomber wander into arrivals and set off a charge just as passengers from several international flights were arriving.

The blast represented a major setback for Russia's international image and confidence in its security as it gears up to hold two major sporting events: the Winter Olympics in 2014 and the 2018 World Cup.

Sources told the state-run RIA Novosti news agency that the attack bore all the hallmarks of militants from

the overwhelmingly Muslim Caucasus region who have behind a string of attacks in the Russian capital over the last years.

Medvedev also called terror the most serious threat to Russia and vowed to "liquidate" the militants behind the Moscow airport bomb blast that killed 35 people.

"Terrorism remains the main security threat to our state -- the main threat to Russia and all of our cities," Medvedev said after observing a moment of silence during which he could be seen choking back tears.

"We have to do everything to make sure that the bandits who committed this crime are identified, exposed and brought to court, and the nests of these bandits -- or whatever they may be called -- must be liquidated," said Medvedev in televised remarks.

"The evidence from the scene of the crime tells us that pure anarchy

reigned," he said.

"People were allowed to walk in from anywhere. The entrance restriction were partial at best," he said.

He added that Russia would have to move to a system of "comprehensive checks" being practiced at Israeli and US airports.

Meanwhile, the bombing drew an instant response from global leaders. US President Barack Obama called the attack "outrageous" while German Chancellor Angela Merkel described it as "cowardly".

Chinese President Hu Jintao sent a message to Medvedev saying that his country "condemns terrorist attacks of any kind and resolutely supports Russian measures to fight terror."

The Russian capital has been repeatedly rocked by attacks over the last years blamed on militants from the predominantly Muslim Northern Caucasus.



A man places a candle in an Orthodox Cathedral in Moscow yesterday, the day after the Domodedovo airport blast that killed 35 people. The attack, slammed by the Kremlin as an act of terror, was the deadliest to hit the capital after the metro bombings in March.

PHOTO: AFP

Russia warned of airport attack

AFP, Moscow

Russian security services had received warnings that an attack was planned at a Moscow airport, reports said Monday.

"The special services had received information that an act of terror would be carried out at one of the Moscow airports," a security source told the RIA Novosti news agency.

"Agents were seeking three suspects but they managed to access the territory of the airport, witness the explosion which their accomplice carried out and then leave the airport," the source said.

The suspects most likely brought the suicide bomber to the airport in a car that they parked in the long-term car park, the source said.

TUNISIA UNREST

Major cabinet shake-up as army speaks out

Thousands in front of PM office to quit govt

AFP, Tunis

Tunisia prepared for a major cabinet shake-up on Monday as the head of the army warned thousands of anti-government protesters in the centre of Tunis that a "power vacuum" could lead to a dictatorship.

"Our revolution, your revolution, the revolution of the young, risks being lost ... There are forces that are calling for a void, a power vacuum. The void brings terror, which brings dictatorship," Rachid Ammar told the protesters.

Speaking through a megaphone and surrounded by soldiers, the popular general said the army would act as a "guarantor" for the revolution that ousted president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and would respect the country's constitution.

He appealed to protesters to let "this government or another one" work.

But hundreds of protesters from improv-

erished regions in central Tunisia chanted anti-government slogans in front of Prime Minister Mohammed Ghannouchi's offices for a third day, saying they would not leave until the cabinet resigns.

The new government has announced unprecedented democratic freedoms for Tunisia after the end of Ben Ali's 23-year rule, but many people are angry that figures from the previous regime, like Ghannouchi, remain in the cabinet.

Protesters also want Ben Ali's powerful RCD party to be disbanded.

Taieb Baccouch, a spokesman for the government and the education minister, meanwhile told AFP that a cabinet reshuffle involving at least six ministerial posts was being discussed and could be announced later.

Many Tunisians feel the same and have kept up daily protests, calling also for the destruction of Ben Ali's RCD party.

Others say it is time for calm.

Egypt braces for nationwide protests

AFP, Cairo

Egypt braced for a day of nationwide anti-government protests yesterday, with organisers counting on the Tunisian uprising to inspire crowds to mobilise for political and economic reforms.

Celebrities, football supporters and opposition movements have said they will join the protests, and tens of thousands have said on a Facebook page created to advertise the demonstrations that they will participate.

Protests will kick off at 2:00pm local time at several locations in the capital and across the country, in a day dubbed "the day of revolt against torture, poverty, corruption and unemployment."

The call was first launched by pro-democracy youth group the April 6 movement, to coincide with a national holiday to celebrate Police Day.

Among demands are the ouster of Interior Minister Habib al-Adly, whose police and security forces have been accused of heavy-handedness; the removal of the decades-old emergency law and a rise in minimum wages.

The controversial law, which gives police wide powers was renewed in 2010 for a further two years.

The interior ministry has warned that it would deal "firmly" with all those who behave illegally.

Tunisian grievances have been echoed throughout the Arab world, whose mainly autocratic leaders were unnerved by events in Tunisia.

LATEST LEAKS

Israel's Livni proposed transfer of Arabs

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli negotiators proposed the transfer of a number of Arab Israelis into a Palestinian state, a suggestion firmly rejected by Palestinian officials, leaked documents showed yesterday.

The topic was repeatedly raised at meetings in 2008 between former Palestinian premier Ahmed Qorei, who was chief negotiator at the time, and then Israeli foreign minister Tzipi Livni, who suggested some Arab Israelis should be moved into a new Palestinian state.

The discussions are contained in over 1,600 files detailing over a decade of peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians that Al-Jazeera television began leaking on Sunday night.

The documents have already show the Palestinians offered huge concessions to Israel on the issues of refugees

and Jerusalem, but new files show they stood firm on the transfer of Arab Israelis.

"The basis for the creation of the state of Israel is that it was created for the Jewish people. Your state will be the answer to all Palestinians including refugees," Livni told Qorei in January 2008.

Qorei firmly rejected the suggestion, which would affect residents of Arab villages which straddle the Green Line dividing Israel from the occupied West Bank.

Residents on the Israel side of the villages hold Israeli passports, pay taxes and generally consider themselves to be full citizens of the Jewish state.

Though they are citizens, they often face discrimination, and have endured periodic calls for their forcible transfer to a future Palestinian nation to protect Israel's character as a Jewish state.

Israel condemns 'long-standing bias' of Ireland

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel yesterday condemned Ireland's "long-standing biased policy on the Middle East," after Dublin upgraded the status of the Palestinian diplomatic delegation to a mission.

"We regret this Irish decision, though it comes as no surprise in view of Ireland's long-standing biased policy on the Middle East," foreign ministry spokesman Yigal Palmor told AFP.

"This will only strengthen the Palestinians' rejection of any return to direct dialogue and peace negotiations," he said.

Ireland's move puts it line with similar decisions announced by fellow EU members France, Portugal and Spain.

Extra-judicial killings

FROM PAGE 20

strong suspicions that the detentions are politically motivated, noted the report.

It also found the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act of 1973 well short of international standards.

The 649-page report, the organisation's 21st annual review of human rights practices, summarises major human rights trends in more than 90 nations and territories worldwide.

The HRW report also pointed at the abuses by Indian Border Security Force (BSF) as they killed many Bangladeshis for crossing the border in search of job or getting engaged in trade.

The Bangladesh government should be more vocal and determined in pressing the Indian government to restrain BSF and put an end to the killings, the report said.

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) force carries out the

extra-judicial killings, frequently termed "crossfire killings," and after the fact, the government has justified each killing as legitimate, it added.

Bangladesh should immediately end systematic human rights abuses, including stopping extra-judicial executions and torture by its security forces and allow the media, political opponents and labour rights activists to exercise their rights to freedom of expression and association fully, commented the report.

"The government should not just keep turning a blind eye to all these killings because they are not fooling anyone with their excuses," said Phil Robertson, deputy Asia director of HRW.

The government regularly harassed, repressed, and retaliated against its political opponents and labour union activists during 2010.

AL faces strong challenge

FROM PAGE 20

Mushfik Hussain Chowdhury is endorsed by AL, the main opposition BNP nominated Sheikh Sujat Mia and Mohammad Abdul Mamin Chowdhury is from Jatiya Party.

Manmohan Debnath from Krishak Sramik Janata League, Abdul Malik Chowdhury from Jamiate Ulama-e-Islam and Abdul Kaium from Khelafat Majlis are also in the race.

Local voters in the area are speculating that the JP candidate might cut some votes of both AL and BNP.

Jahangir Alam, a banker, said, Jatiya Party has a vote bank in the area and it would expand as HM Ershad himself had campaigned for his candidate.

BNP lawmaker Nurul Islam Manju who is campaigning for Sheikh Sujat Mia for the past three days told The Daily Star that the candidate will be in a comfortable position as Jatiya Party will cut votes of Awami League.

"A faction of Awami League is not supporting their candidate as Dewan Shahnewaz Gazi, son of Dewan Farid Gazi, and Reza Kibria, son of former finance minister Shah AMS Kibria, wanted nomination," he said.

However, local AL leaders said though Shahnewaz and Reza wanted nomination but part chief Sheikh Hasina had instructed them to work for the party candidate.

Jatiya Party will not affect votes of Awami League as it has a very low number of voters, they added.

Jatiya Party Habiganj district unit general secretary said they have a good chance of winning.

Meanwhile, central leaders of Awami League, BNP and Jatiya Party flocked to Nabiganj and Bahubal and campaigned for party candidates yesterday.

Prestige battle for AL, BNP

FROM PAGE 20

On the other hand, BNP has taken the issue of continuous price hike of essentials that has put a significant impact on people.

Both the parties yesterday conducted their last spell of campaign, as all sorts of electioneering were scheduled to conclude at 12:00 last night.

The AL-led grand alliance yesterday held a rally in presence of its central leaders.

Speaking as the chief guest, Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad featured success of the government and vowed to solve all sorts of problems within next three years.

Ershad said the government gives farmers subsidy and agricultural tools for better production. "The country has achieved self-

sufficiency in food. No-one is starving now," he added.

AL leader Tofail Ahmed said even if the BNP-nominated candidate won, he would not be able to do any development activities as BNP does not go to parliament.

He categorically said the government would solve power crisis across the country within this year.

Grand alliance candidate RAM Ubaidul Muktaadir Chowdhury vowed to make the district free from corruption, terrorism and communalism.

AL district unit acting president Syed AKM Emdadul Bari chaired the rally, while JP Secretary General Ruhul Amin Hawlader, Bangladesh Chhatra League President Mahmud Hasan Ripon and Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal Joint

General Secretary Shirin Akhter, among others, were present.

Meanwhile, BNP at a press conference termed 52 polling centres vulnerable and 21 of them most vulnerable and demanded army deployment during voting.

The BNP leaders alleged ruling AL is hatching conspiracy for vote rigging through state mechanism and muscle power to steal victory.

"The ruling party has become desperate to hatch conspiracy sensing inevitable defeat. The Election Commission has withdrawn army to facilitate their conspiracy," said Harun-Al-Rashid, president of BNP district unit and vice-chairman of BNP central committee.

He claimed the ruling

party men attacked different electoral campaigning centres immediately after army withdrawal.

BNP-nominated candidate Khaled Hossain Mahub Shamol said they along with people would counter any attempt to rig the polls.

BNP central leaders Barrister Rafiqul Islam Miah, Nazrul Islam Khan, Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, Osman Faruk, Amanullah Aman, Dr Mosharraf Hossain, Shaheed Uddin Chowdhury Anee, Fazlul Haque Milton, Juba Dal president Moazzem Hossain, Chhatra Dal president Sultan Salahuddin Tuku, among others, were present.

Around 3.1 lakh voters would exercise their franchise at 226 polling centres tomorrow.

NEWS IN brief

Peru recognises Palestine as "free and sovereign" state

AFP, Lima

Peru recognised a "free and sovereign" Palestinian state, joining a recent wave of Latin American countries.

"Today the government communicated to the ambassador of Palestine in Lima recognition of the Palestinian state as free and sovereign," said Peruvian Foreign Minister Jose Antonio Belaunde on Monday.

Brazil led the move to recognise Palestine late last year, and has since been joined by Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Guyana and Uruguay.

An Israeli official earlier this month dismissed recognition of a Palestinian state by the Latin American nations as "a useless and empty gesture because it will not change anything."

France signs deal to sell four warships to Russia

AFP, France, Saint-nazaire, France

France has signed a deal to sell four Mistral warships to Russia, including two to be built in Russia, President Nicolas Sarkozy's office said yesterday.

"The governments of the two countries agree to give their full support to the construction of two (warships) in France and two in Russia," said a joint French-Russian release by the Elysee.

The statement came as Sarkozy was visiting the naval shipyards in the western port of Saint-Nazaire where the warships will be built.

France has been negotiating with Russia since 2009 on the deal to sell Moscow the Mistral, a powerful warship capable of carrying helicopters and tanks, costing around 500 million euros.

UN study proposes Somalia pirate court

AFP, United Nations

Somali pirates are expanding their attacks and costing the world more than \$7 billion a year, according to a UN study released Monday that calls for stepped up security and a pirate court.

The report by former French minister Jack Lang suggests establishing a court under Somali jurisdiction but based in a foreign country in order to address the phenomenon, which has grown in recent years.

It said the international naval force in the Indian Ocean should patrol closer to the pirates' coastal hideouts and that economic incentives should be offered to Somali youth to dissuade them from joining the buccaneers.

US backs Ivorian cocoa, coffee embargo

AFP, Washington

The United States threw its support Monday behind a ban on Ivorian cocoa and coffee exports ordered by the internationally-recognized winner of Ivory Coast's election, Alassane Ouattara.

Ouattara ordered the one-month halt to cocoa and coffee exports in a bid to financially strangle his rival Laurent Gbagbo, the incumbent president who has refused to cede power since November elections.

"We do support President Ouattara's call for a month-long ban on cocoa exports," State Department spokesman Philip Crowley told reporters.

Bolivians protesting high prices turn to looting

AFP, La Paz

Demonstrations over high food prices took a violent turn as protestors started looting in a southwestern Bolivia town, according to police and media reports.

The price of some foods has spiked since the government's decision in late December to halt fuel subsidies, which sent gasoline and diesel prices soaring and sparked violent protests across South America's poorest country on Monday.

The government has since backed away from the decision, but prices have been slow to fall.