

Saboteurs blast Egypt gas pipeline

Supply to Israel, Jordan severed

AFP, Cairo

Saboteurs attacked an Egyptian gas pipeline to Jordan yesterday, forcing authorities to switch off supplies from a twin pipeline to Israel, an official said, as anti-regime protests raged in Cairo.

Attackers used explosives against the pipeline in the town of Lihfen in northern Sinai, near the Gaza Strip, the official told AFP. It was initially thought the pipeline to Israel was targeted.

"The pipeline to Jordan has been attacked and the supply to Israel has been cut off," the official said.

The army has taken precautionary measures to stop the fire from spreading, the official added, as rescue services were putting out the flames.

It was not immediately clear who was responsible, or whether the attack was linked to the deadly protests against President Hosni Mubarak's rule, which entered their 12th day yesterday.

A broad swathe of Egypt's opposition, including the powerful Muslim Brotherhood, as well as public opinion, has

called for Cairo to stop supplying Israel with gas.

Egypt supplies about 40 percent of Israel's natural gas, and in December, four Israeli firms signed 20-year contracts worth up to 10 billion dollars (7.4 billion euros) to import Egyptian gas.

Israel has suspended imports of Egyptian gas "for security reasons," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said in a statement.

The Israeli defence ministry said that it had strengthened security around its gas installations following the attack.

In Jordan, an official told AFP that the cut would cost the country -- the only other Arab nation besides Egypt to have signed a peace treaty with Israel -- 3.5 million dollars a day.

Jordan imports 6.8 million cubic metres of Egyptian gas a day, which, when burnt, accounts for 80 percent of Jordan's electricity needs, the official said, adding that he expected supplies to resume "in three or four days."

Saturday's attack came after Israel expressed concern that its natural gas supplies from Egypt could be threatened if a new regime takes power in Cairo.



PHOTO: AFP

A protestor holds a sign during a demonstration outside the Egyptian Embassy in Beirut yesterday, in support of the 12th day of protests in Egypt calling for the immediate resignation on President Hosni Mubarak following 30 years of his regime.

Mideast transition poses risks

Says Hillary

AFP, Munich, Germany

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said yesterday there are risks with democratic transition in the Middle East, such as of chaos, a return to authoritarianism or the advent of extremism.

"There are risks with the transition to democracy, Clinton told the Munich Security Conference in Germany, adding there can be chaos and short-term instability.

"Even worse, the transition can backslide into just another authoritarian regime," she added.

"Revolutions have overthrown dictators in the name of democracy, only to see the political process hijacked by new autocrats who use violence, deception, and rigged elections to stay in power, or to advance an agenda of extremism," she said.

NEWS IN brief

Iran directors urge reduction of Panahi's sentence

AFP, Tehran

Two top Iranian directors urged the judiciary to reduce the sentence handed down to their fellow filmmaker Jafar Panahi when speaking at a local film festival, a report said yesterday.

Masud Kimiai and Puran Derakhshandeh said Panahi deserved a "revision" of his court sentence as he had earned several awards for Iran, the ILNA news agency reported.

An Iranian court has sentenced Panahi to a six-year jail term and a 20-year ban on filmmaking and travelling for allegedly siding with the opposition movement which contested the official results of a

Iraq to respect Kurd profit-sharing oil deals: Iraqi PM

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq will respect profit-sharing contracts signed by the Kurdistan region with foreign oil firms, ending a long-standing dispute between the two sides, Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki told AFP yesterday.

"The oil ministry accepted these contracts because the nature of the extraction in Kurdistan is different from Basra," he said in an interview, referring to Iraq's oil-rich southern province.

Al-Jazeera says Cairo bureau chief, journalist arrested

AFP, Doha

Egyptian authorities have arrested Al-Jazeera's bureau chief and one of its journalists in Cairo, the Doha-based television channel said yesterday, amid anti-government protests in the capital.

"Egypt's security services have arrested Al-Jazeera bureau chief in Cairo Abdel Fattah Fayed and the journalist Ahmed Yousef," the pan-Arab channel, banned since last Sunday from operating in Egypt, reported on its website.

The arrests came a day after Al-Jazeera said that its offices in the capital had been burned by a "gang of thugs" and its website hacked by "opponents of

China bus accident kills Eleven

AFP, Beijing

Eleven people were killed when a minibus toppled into a reservoir in southeastern China, state media reported yesterday, in the latest fatal crash on the country's notoriously dangerous roads.

The accident happened Friday afternoon near Shaowu city in Fujian province when the driver of the minibus with 21 people on board apparently swerved to avoid a motorbike, the official Xinhua news agency said, citing local authorities.

The bus rolled over and fell into the Qianling hydropower station reservoir, Xinhua said. A child

Fight between trader and Philippine rebels kills six

AFP, Manila

Six people died when a Philippine businessman and his son shot it out with communist guerrillas trying to extort hundreds of dollars from them, the military said yesterday.

Coconut meat trader Federico Bico, 56, a son and two bodyguards were killed after engaging seven New People's Army (NPA) gunmen who arrived on their farm demanding money, local military spokesman Major Harold Cabunoc said.

The bloody incident happened on Friday night near the town of Libmanan, 250 kilometres south-

US slams Iran on Egypt comments

AFP, Washington

The White House Friday slammed Iran for intervening in the Egypt crisis, saying Tehran was in no position to make such "remarkable" comments after crushing its own uprising last year.

Earlier, Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei had intervened in Friday prayers, styling the Egypt protests as an uprising against President Hosni Mubarak, a "'servant" of Israel and the United States.

"It is remarkable that Iran would make a statement given their actions when it came to their people exercising the same rights that people are exercising now in Cairo," Gibbs said.

Rebels kill 20 in South Sudan

AFP, Juba, Sudan

A rebellion by former pro-Khartoum militiamen in south Sudan against giving up their heavy weapons sparked two days of clashes which killed 20 people in one of the region's three main towns, a military spokesman said yesterday.

At least 24 people were wounded in the fighting in Malakal, capital of sensitive Upper Nile state close to the border with the north, said Philip Aguer, spokesman for the former rebel Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA).

"There was heavy fighting with mortars fired by both sides, but the clashes have now been brought under control," Aguer said.

"Our forces in the SPLA, along with the United Nations peacekeepers, have succeeded in creating a buffer zone between the two sides and to bring the situation to an end."

The fighting around Malakal airport was sparked on Thursday when loyalists of Gabriel Tang, who commanded a pro-Khartoum militia during the 1983-2005 civil war between north and south, objected to surrendering their heavy weaponry.

The former militiamen are deployed alongside regular northern troops in so-called Joint Integrated Units with southern forces that patrol the town under the peace agreement that ended the civil war.

Executive power

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But the LGRD ministry in the bill placed in parliament on December 6 last year, proposed to vest the executive power in the chairman.

Citing the proposal made by the LGRD ministry in the bill, the parliamentary body said members of the committee disagreed with it.

"They [committee members] think functions of the parishad will be people-oriented if the executive power is vested upon it instead of its chairman. If it is so, the parishad will be able to take sustainable decisions based on opinions of all its members," the committee said in its report.

The Daily Star has obtained a copy of the report.

The report prepared by scrutinising the bill is likely to be placed in parliament in a couple of days with recommendation for passage of the bill, officials in the Parliament Secretariat say.

The committee has also brought some other changes in the bill. It proposed to increase the number of standing commit-

tees of the upazila parishads to 18 from 14. The committees must be formed within 90 days since constitution of a parishad. The tenure of each of the committees will be two and a half years, says the parliamentary body.

During scrutiny of the bill, the LGRD ministry proposed to create two new posts of secretary and accounts officer at each parishad. The committee agreed with the proposal and incorporated it in its report.

According to the proposal, the government would appoint both the officers.

The current provision of the Upazila Parishad Act says the upazila executive officer will act as the secretary of the parishad. But the amendment to the bill proposed to make the upazila executive officer as the principal executive officer of the parishad. The principal executive officers would execute the parishad's decision and maintain financial disciplines.

"It will be possible to run the parishad effectively if the bill is passed as recommended by the committee," the committee observed in its report.

State multiculturalism has failed: David Cameron

AFP, Munich, Germany

Prime Minister David Cameron condemned Britain's long-standing policy of multiculturalism as a failure yesterday, calling for better integration of young Muslims to combat home-grown extremism.

In a speech to the Munich Security Conference, Cameron signaled a marked change in policy towards Britain's ethnic and religious minorities, saying the "hands-off tolerance" of those who reject Western values has failed.

He urged a "more active, muscular liberalism" where equal rights, the rule of law, freedom of speech and democracy are actively promoted to create a stronger national identity.

"If we are to defeat this threat, I believe it's time to turn the page on the failed policies of the past," he told the conference during a panel discussion attended by German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

His speech echoed controversial remarks made by Merkel last year, when she also called multiculturalism a failure.

It was Cameron's first major speech on Islamist extremism, an issue of major concern for British governments ever since four



David Cameron

home-grown suicide bombers attacked the London transport system in 2005, killing 52 people.

"Under the doctrine of state multiculturalism, we have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and the mainstream", he said.

He said this had resulted in a lack of national identity in Britain which had made some young Muslims turn to extremist ideology.

"Frankly, we need a lot less of the passive tolerance of recent years and much more active, muscular liberalism," Cameron said.

"A genuinely liberal country does much more. It believes in certain values and actively promotes them.... It says to its citizens: this is what defines us as a society."

Building a stronger sense of national and local identity holds "the key to achieving true cohesion" by allowing people to say "I am a Muslim, I am a Hindu, I am a Christian, but I am a Londoner... too", he said.

Cameron clearly distinguished between Islam the religion and the political ideology of Islamist extremism, saying they "are not the same thing".

Egypt ruling party executive committee resigns

AFP, Cairo

The top executive committee of Egypt's ruling National Democratic Party (NDP), which includes strongman Hosni Mubarak's son Gamal, resigned en masse yesterday, state television reported.

"The members of the executive committee resigned from their posts. It was decided to name Hossam Badrawi secretary general of the party," the regime's channel announced amid ongoing opposition street protests.

Badrawi replaces Gamal Mubarak as head of the party's political bureau, the station said.

Nigeria in final push to register millions of voters

AFP, Lagos

Nigeria wrapped up a huge effort to register voters in Africa's most populous nation yesterday ahead of April elections after a process that was sometimes chaotic and violent -- but better than past years.

The aim was to provide what many say the country has never had: a credible voters register to form a basis for presidential, legislative and state elections being called among the most important in Nigeria's history.

Nigeria's electoral commission, headed by a respected academic appointed only months ago, deployed computers to take prints from each finger of every voter during the registration process that began on January 15.

At a polling station at a school yesterday in the sprawling economic capital Lagos, which rivals Cairo as Africa's largest city, two queues with some 20 people each formed, the process hobbled by an erratic power supply.

Someone showed up with a small generator and an idea for a business, offering to laminate registrants' voter cards for 50 naira (.33 US cents, .25 euro cents) since electoral commission workers had run out of plastic sleeves to put them in.

Govt looks to AL left-outs

FROM PAGE 1

could be named as a minister this time.

One or two of them will possibly be included in the advisory body of the prime minister while certain current advisers will be brought in the cabinet, either forming new ministry or splitting some of the large ministries like LGRD and cooperatives, information and cultural affairs, labour and manpower, food and disaster management.

Some other ministries including home, commerce, communications, water resources, industries, civil aviation and tourism ministries might also undergo rearrangement.

However, some sources said the premier does not want to pick the aggrieved leaders for the council of ministers. On the other hand, some of them are not interested to take over the minister's job anymore as two years of the term have passed already.

"The prime minister is seriously planning to reshuffle the cabinet," an official at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) told The Daily Star.

Hasina, also the ruling party chief, reviewing the performance of her team

expressed dissatisfaction, said sources close to the PM.

Performance of some cabinet members drew severe criticism within central AL leaders as well as parliamentary standing committees on different ministries.

Some AL leaders observed that Hasina should bring changes in the cabinet to speed up development.

Hasina, who was sworn in as prime minister on January 6, 2009, included 31 members -- 23 ministers, eight state ministers -- into her council.

Later on January 24 the same year, she appointed six new faces as state ministers. Finally, she expanded her council by adding a minister and five state ministers, and reshuffling 10 portfolios on July 31, 2009.

Asked about the possible cabinet reshuffle, a senior minister who maintains close relations with the premier said, "She [Hasina] can bring changes in the cabinet anytime she wishes. It's her jurisdiction."

On performance of the present cabinet, AL Presidium Member Obaidul Quader said, "No comment."

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