

Military helicopter crashes in Darfur

Five dead

AFP, Khartoum

A Sudanese army helicopter crashed yesterday at El-Fasher airport in North Darfur, killing all five people on board, the army spokesman said, in the second accident of its kind in less than a week.

"The helicopter trying to land at El-Fasher airport experienced a technical problem and crashed," Sawarmi Khaled Saad told AFP.

"The aircraft was completely destroyed and all five people on board were killed. Three of them were crew and two were passengers. They were all in the army," Sawarmi added.

Gazans fire rocket at Israel

AFP, Jerusalem

A rocket fired from the Gaza Strip hit open ground in southern Israel yesterday, hours before the start of the Jewish Passover holiday, police said.

"A rocket landed in open ground ... No injuries or damage was caused," police spokesman Mickey Rosenfeld told AFP.

It was the second such attack since April 10 when militants in the Hamas-run territory began observing a truce after a brief flare-up in violence.

On Friday, two rockets from Gaza struck near the southern Israeli cities of Ashkelon and Ashdod.

They also caused no injuries but were followed by retaliatory Israeli air strikes against targets in Gaza, likewise without casualties.

AL man killed

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Azam, ex-president of Poura AL, backed the groups.

Witnesses said loyalists of Toyeb hacked Rashid to death with machetes during the clash. Around 25 activists of both the groups were injured.

Police recovered Rashid's body from a lane in the upazila town around 6:30pm and sent it to Shaikupa Health Complex, where doctors declared him dead.

Shaikupa Upazila Nirbahi Officer Azmul Hossain imposed section 144 in the evening.

Earlier in the morning, at least seven AL activists were injured in another clash between the two feuding groups of the ruling party.

Three of them were admitted to the health complex, while the others received primary treatment.

Police fired four rounds of tear gas to avert further clash, added the OC.

The Daily Star tried to reach Toyeb Ali Joarder over the mobile phone for his comment on the incident, but found it switched off.

BSF kills 1

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Basantapur village in Kaliganj upazila while injured Shahadat Hossain, 25, from Maguraila village of the same upazila.

Locals said some traders, including Gazi and Hossain, went to India crossing Bhomra border to buy cattle from a haat on Sunday evening.

As soon as they reached Baliadanga village in India at around 10:30pm, BSF personnel of Kalupota camp opened fire on them.

Bullet-hit Gazi, Hossain and other traders managed to return to Bangladesh in the dead of the night.

Later, Gazi succumbed to his injuries on the way to his home.

Hossain was taken to Sathkira Sadar Hospital in a critical condition and was later shifted to Khulna Medical College Hospital as his condition deteriorated, hospital sources said.

Sub-inspector Shahriar of Sathkira Sadar Police Station confirmed the incident after inspecting the area.

Lt Col Enayet Karim, commanding officer of 41 Border Guard battalion, said they had heard about the incident.

Rajapaksa calls

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meeting when they observed that both the countries can work together at regional and international forums for mutual benefit.

Briefing reporters, PM's Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad said the two leaders have discussed the issue of terrorism and countering terrorism, as well as food security and cooperation in the shipping sector.

Rajapaksa, who arrived in Dhaka yesterday morning on a three-day visit, assured that his country would consider Bangladesh's candidature as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council.

He also stressed strengthening exchange of visits in different fields including by businessmen between the two countries.

Rajapaksa said he is happy to be in Bangladesh as the two countries have good bonds of relations from a longtime.

The cooperation in the shipping sector would help boost the bilateral trade and investment between the two countries, he added.

Hasina emphasised on establishing direct air and maritime links with Sri Lanka to unclog potentiality of the trade between the two friendly countries.

She said trade would be further boosted with the operation of direct shipping services and welcomed the resumption of direct feeder services from Colombo to Chittagong and Mongla.

"Air connectivity and enhanced interaction could also contribute significantly to the increasing trade and investment between the two countries," she said.

The prime minister said both the countries need to reexamine the existing Air Services Agreement to suit the present needs.

In 2009-10 fiscal year, the two-way trade between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka countries totaled \$ 46 million.

Hasina said the amount of the bilateral trade is just a fraction of the potential that the two countries have. Currently, Bangladesh exports to Sri Lanka include chemical products, jute goods and knitwear while it imports animal and vegetable products, plastics and rubber articles.

"But potential is there to export pharmaceuticals, potato and vegetable seeds to your country," she told the president.

The premier sought duty-free access of leather and leather goods, footwear, melamine and plastic products, knitwear, soap and porcelain to increase the volume of trade.

She also said that diversification of export products would give a significant boost to the trade between the two countries.

Hasina put emphasis on encouraging the private sector and apex trade bodies of the two countries to undertake frequent business visits to each other's country.

She said there is an immense scope for Sri Lankan investment in textile, knitwear, linen, leather, pharmaceuticals, agro-based industries, steel and engineering, IT, education, and health and hospitality.

Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury, Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid, Information Minister Abul Kalam Azad, Commerce Minister Faruk Khan and Foreign Minister Dipu Moni were, among others, present.

5 MoUs signed
Bangladesh and Sri Lanka yesterday signed five deals in the fields of trade, agriculture, fisheries, vocational education, and science and culture in a bid to diversify bilateral cooperation.

The Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) were signed following official talks between Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and visiting Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

The five MoUs are on cooperation between the Export Development Board of Sri Lanka and the Export Promotion Bureau of Bangladesh, cooperation between the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources of Sri Lanka and

the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock of Bangladesh, cooperation in agriculture between Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council and Sri Lanka Council for Agricultural Research Policy, cooperation between Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission of Sri Lanka and the Ministry of Education of Bangladesh, and on Cultural Exchange Programme between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

External Affairs Minister of Sri Lanka Prof G L Peiris signed the deals on behalf of his government while Commerce Minister Faruk Khan, Information and Cultural Affairs Minister Abul Kalam Azad, Fisheries and Livestock Minister Abdul Latif Biswas, Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury and Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid signed the respective MoUs on behalf of Bangladesh government.

Sheikh Hasina and Rajapaksa witnessed the signing.

Earlier, the two leaders had Tete-a-tete followed by delegation level official talks, which covered the entire range of bilateral matters, and regional and international issues of common interest.

According to a press release of the foreign ministry the two sides discussed ways and means to further expand mutually beneficial cooperation in various fields, including trade and commerce, investment, civil aviation, shipping, tourism, people-to-people contacts, culture, education, agriculture, fisheries and livestock, health, defence, youth affairs and disaster management.

Both agreed on the need for making greater use of the available institutional mechanisms. They agreed to explore various means to enhance bilateral trade and to increase people to people contacts.

They agreed to establish linkages between universities, other educational institutions, museums etc, and to exchange cultural delegations and cultural troupes to foster greater understanding between the two peoples.

The two sides also exchanged views on cooperation in other regional and international forums including SAARC, BIMSTEC, IOR-ARC, ACD, UN, NAM, Commonwealth, and agreed to continue working together for mutual benefit.

The Sri Lankan president expressed his warm appreciation for Bangladesh's contribution to the International Buddhist Museum at Dalada Maligawa in Kandy.

Most Japan voters want new PM

Says a survey

REUTERS, Tokyo

Most Japanese want a new prime minister to lead rebuilding after last month's earthquake and tsunami, newspaper polls showed yesterday, as the head of government was again scolded in parliament for his handling of the nuclear crisis that followed.

Nearly 70 per cent of people surveyed by the Nikkei business daily said Prime Minister Naoto Kan should be replaced, and a similar number said the government's response to the nuclear crisis was not acceptable.

Kan was criticised again in parliament yesterday for his response to the nuclear disaster.

An opposition lawmaker suggested he had been ill-prepared from the start, pointing to Kan's admission that he could not recall the details of a drill last year that simulated a Fukushima-type incident.

"Prime Minister Kan is working hard and he must be experiencing difficulties. But many people have questions about Prime Minister Kan's leadership," opposition Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) lawmaker Masashi Waki told the upper house budget committee.

Kan said he and his government were doing their best.

Tk 50,000

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The government is also approaching the employers, so they pay the arrears owed to the returnees, he said.

The minister thanked IOM for playing a crucial role in repatriating Bangladeshis, and for bearing the repatriation cost of a good number of them.

Of the total 35,211 returnees from Libya until April 17, IOM repatriated 27,101. Excluding the cost of repatriating 10,000 being borne by the government, IOM already spent around \$22 million to repatriate the rest out of its own fund.

IOM spent \$1,260 to repatriate each migrant, which is higher than the usual cost because the agency had to charter flights, Mosharraf said.

Biman Bangladesh Airlines, which already flew home 4,265 workers from Egypt and Tunisia, said the cost has been \$800 per person on an average.

"We already sent a bill to the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment asking for more than 31 crore taka," said Biman Managing Director Zakul Islam.

Apart from IOM and Bangladesh Biman, some of the employers also repatriated 3,845 migrants on company cost from Libya via Turkey and Greece, while some others returned on their own.

At the moment, more Bangladeshis are fleeing Libya. On April 16, around 600 Bangladeshis fled Libya and crossed into Egypt, said a foreign ministry press release.

IOM is facing a shortage of fund, said an IOM official.

Against such a backdrop, Asian countries, that send workers abroad, are meeting in Dhaka from today till Thursday, where the Arab world crisis will feature prominently in the agenda.

Asian workers in Bahrain are also facing problems like joblessness. A Bangladeshi and a Pakistani were killed there in March, while dozens of other migrant workers were injured.

An official in Bangladesh embassy in Bahrain said around 10,000 undocumented Bangladeshis are facing joblessness in that country, which is currently under a state of emergency due to an acute political crisis.

The embassy requested Bahrain to provide documents for them so they may get jobs.

"Such a crisis is a wake up call for all of us. We, the Asian countries, have to take a stance about what actions we can take in such emergencies," said Mosharraf.

Special body

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initiated the move to hold a three-day talk from April 24 to reach a consensus on amending the constitution.

Officials in the parliament secretariat yesterday sent invitations to the members of the special committee and also tried to communicate with them over the telephone to ensure their presence at today's meeting.

"We will finalise tomorrow [today] the procedure of the talks," a member of the committee yesterday told The Daily Star on condition of anonymity.

On finalising, the committee will send invitations to political leaders and constitutional experts to attend the talks at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban, he added.

The committee's move to forge political consensus, however, might not see the light of day, as the main opposition BNP is unlikely to attend the talks.

Contacted, some senior BNP leaders earlier told The Daily Star they have serious reservations about the process of amending the charter, and they are against sitting with the special committee.

The House formed the committee in July last year for suggesting amendment to the constitution in line with the Supreme Court verdict on the fifth amendment, and also other necessary changes.

Headed by Deputy Leader of the House Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, the JS committee is comprised of only ruling alliance lawmakers, as BNP declined to nominate a representative.

The main opposition has been blasting the government for its "move to amend the constitution unilaterally".

Steps taken not to follow

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the rules while traffic police take little action against the lawbreakers for fear of backlash from influential people or for bribe, point out the experts.

The steps taken to ease traffic gridlock included introducing a three-lane system on the main thoroughfares; managing traffic following electronic signals; taking off the roads buses and minibuses aged over 15 years; enforcing mandatory use of seatbelt and helmet; barring people from using mobile phone while driving; and forcing the pedestrians to take footpath, footbridge and underpass.

In September last year, Dhaka Metropolitan Police launched a drive to enforce the three-lane system. But the move proved counterproductive, as the existing road structure and varying modes of vehicles were not given due consideration.

The three-lane system could not give commuters any relief as the plan was flawed. In fact, it made matters worse, said Shamsul Haque, the immediate past director of Accident Research Institute at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology.

He noted that most of the vehicles approaching intersections change lanes at will and add to congestion.

"If the lanes had been fixed considering the directions,

and not the mode of vehicles, it would have helped ease movement at intersections," he added.

In November last year, the authorities moved to control traffic following electric signals. That too proved futile, and created even longer tailbacks. In a few days, the authorities reverted to the manual system.

Former DMP traffic chief Shafiqur Rahman, who took the initiative, told The Daily Star recently that the move failed as signal lights often remain out of order and synchronisation does not work.

The same month, Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) started a drive to enforce use of seatbelt and helmet by car drivers and motorcyclists, and to stop them talking on the mobile phone while driving. It also aimed to ensure people use footpath, footbridge and underpass.

The nationwide drive conducted in coordination with police, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and district administration, ran out of steam in a few days, and drivers and pedestrians got back to their usual self-driving and moving recklessly.

There is more.

DMP's drive in September 2008 against buses and minibuses in use for more than 15 years is another example of failure.

Fakhruddin

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Menon, chief of the parliamentary sub-committee, said after the meeting.

The committee was dissatisfied with the written replies of Fakhruddin and Moeen, and said their statements are "meaningless" as they did not say anything about the repression and inhuman treatment of teachers and students by law enforcement agencies.

"If they do not respond to the committee's invitation we will decide our next course of action in consultation with Speaker Abdul Hamid," he said.

"Their failure to appear before the committee will be considered as an act of undermining parliament. In that case, contempt of parliament proceedings might be initiated against them," said Menon.

The committee will ask the then DGFI chief Maj Gen Golem Mohammad and Rab-5 director [Rajshahi zone] to appear before it on June 5 to give testimony on their alleged involvement in torture of teachers and students of Dhaka and Rajshahi universities after the DU campus violence.

On the written statements of the two, Menon said the committee went through those but nothing was there except brief descriptions of the first two days' violence.

"Their statements are meaningless as they concealed so many things about the violence, especially torture on teachers and students during and after the campus incident," Menon said.

Referring to the statement of Rajshahi University Vice-Chancellor Prof Abdus Sobhan at yesterday's meeting, Menon said, "We were stunned to learn from Prof Sobhan about the Rab members' inhuman and aggressive behaviour with university teachers."

Prof Sobhan told The Daily Star, "We were kept blindfolded for almost 34 hours. They chained our hands and legs to chairs."

"Rab members talked to us in a very disgraceful manner. They hung slips of paper around our neck with only first parts of our names and treated us as if we were terrorists," he said.

The committee chief said on May 19 they will talk to the students who were oppressed by the law enforcement agencies during the campus violence.

The parliamentary standing committee on education ministry in August last year formed a four-member sub-committee to probe law enforcement agencies' atrocities against DU students and teachers during the student unrest in August 2007.

OMS rice

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Controller Abdul Aziz Molla. The probe body has been asked to submit its report by three working days.

The committee has already started its work, said a food ministry's press release.

Meanwhile, the authorities concerned have also been asked to suspend the driver, who was carrying the rice-laden vehicle and arrested by Rapid Action Battalion members during the drive on Sunday.

Chinese

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and arrested Samir Chandra Nath from the spot who took the contract of supplying earth to the Cino Hydro Company.

The company is constructing the four-lane Dhaka-Chittagong Highway. The team witnessed during the drive that some workers fell down some trees while cutting the hill and as a result an electric tower of 2.30 lakh volt is under threat of falling down.

The company failed to show any document of approval from DoE for cutting hill.

The enforcement team also found that the company has dug deep the nearby arable land to pile-up earth.

Examining the papers seized from Samir, the DoE team found that he signed a contract of Tk 18 lakh with the Chinese company for selling earth to it.

The officials of Cino Hydro Company were noticed to appear at the DoE by 10:00am today.

Victims wait for relief

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Commissioner Anisul Haque Bhuiyan formed a three-member committee headed by Additional Deputy Commissioner (General) Mohammad Salahuddin to probe the incident.

Other members of the committee are Additional Superintendent of Police in Khagrachhari Delwar Hossain Sayeede and Ramgarh Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Gopal Chandra Das. The committee has been asked to submit its report within two working days.

To defuse the tension, MP Jatindra Lal and Md Nawsher Ali, deputy inspector general of police, Chittagong range, along with officials of the local administration yesterday morning visited Shankhola Para where Sunday's first clash between the two groups occurred.

Urging locals to maintain peace in the area, the lawmaker promised to bring the culprits to book.

The compensation will be distributed after the local administration assesses the loss, the UNO told The Daily Star.

Maj General Ashab Uddin, general officer commanding of 24 infantry division, distrib-

uted Tk 25,000 each among families of the dead and Tk 5,000 each among other victims, said a press release of Inter-Services Public Relations.

In the afternoon, the lawmaker and officials held a public meeting at Jaliapara Government Primary School attended by some 200 Bangalee settlers and a few Marmaleaders.

Asking the authorities to solve the long-standing issues in the hill tracts, the participants said such violence would repeat otherwise.

District Superintendent of Police Abu Kalam Siddique, Maj Gen Ashab Uddin, local leader Congeri Marma, Ramgarh upazila chairman Belayed Hossain Bhuiyan and other officials of the district administration also attended the meeting.

Section-144, imposed after the violence at 7:30pm in both Ramgarh and Manikchhari upazilas, is still in force.

Some Adivasis yesterday filed a case with Manikchhari Police Station on charges of arson and looting against some unidentified Bangalees.

Visiting the areas, this correspondent found the victims were eagerly waiting

EC wary of politics

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Participating in a panel discussion at yesterday's programme at BICC, former CEC Abu Hena spoke about the culture of not strengthening the EC.

"Political parties create the main obstacles to strengthening of Election Commission. But the parties should know that a strong and independent election commission is necessary in their own interest," the former CEC observed.

Hena, who was appointed as CEC during the caretaker government in 1996, said the present EC has brought some changes in the electoral culture and everyone must move on with the positive changes.

Prof Muzaffer Ahmad said confrontation politics is harmful for democracy. "We need to bring change in our political culture otherwise no reforms would bring good to the democratic practice in the country," he observed, adding that the political parties are not practising democracy within.

Nuh-ul-Alam Lenin, publicity affairs secretary of AL, said if there is a strong EC, the country would need no caretaker government.

Hossain Zillur Rahman, former adviser to a care-

taker government, stressed deployment of law enforcers for a longer period as post-polls violence has increased to a great extent.

The discussants also underscored the need for making the appointments of CEC and other election commissioners impartial and above all controversy by ending the culture of picking those loyal to the government.

CEC Huda said the constitution has a provision about how to appoint election commissioners above controversy but no government in the last 40 years has done that.

The EC in its five-year strategic plan mentioned that use of muscle and money during elections destroys the peaceful atmosphere for candidates and that political parties do not accept poll results when they lose.

However, the EC has achieved some improvements in the election culture, said the CEC, adding the electoral code of conduct is by and large obeyed by the candidates and political parties. Whenever a minister or an MP wants to visit any election area s/he contacts the EC so that the election rules are not violated, he said.