

Britain to pull 500 troops from Afghanistan

AFP, London

Britain will withdraw 500 more troops from Afghanistan by the end of next year, taking its contingent there to 9,000 as Afghan forces become increasingly confident, Prime Minister David Cameron said Wednesday.

Cameron said Britain had taken a "huge share of the burden" in Afghanistan, with 375 British soldiers having lost their lives since the US-led invasion following the September 11 attacks ten years ago.

8 dead

More than the usual due to the hartal. According to him, the launch was carrying around 200 passengers.

He said many chose to take the river route since a very few vehicles were plying the roads.

The association of launch owners claimed that there were only 50 people onboard the launch.

Officer-in-Charge of Munshiganj Police Station Shahidul Islam initially said that around 50 people were missing.

Witnesses and survivors, however, claimed the number was four times that.

The sunken launch was detected near Metro cement factory. Salvage vessel of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) MV Rustom reached the spot around 8:30pm and was toeing the launch ashore till filling of the report at 1:20am.

Meanwhile, BIWTA formed a three-member probe committee headed by Chief Engineer of shipping department Shafiqul Islam. The committee was asked to submit a report within three days.

Hit by hartal

Some passengers were found sleeping in airport lobbies failing to find anything.

Patients and people wounded in accidents also had to suffer to get to hospitals.

According to officials of different hospitals in the city, they witnessed much lesser number of outpatients yesterday.

Road crash victim Mohammad Mobarak of Habiganj arrived at Nitor hospital Tuesday around 9:00pm, nine hours before the hartal began, fearing loss of valuable time regarding his treatment.

"I passed the night at the hospital corridor as it was very urgent for me to see the doctors," said Mobarak, who has been suffering from knee injury. He has to remain stuck in the capital till the hartal ends; that is 6:00am on Friday.

With a severe injury in the left foot, Mohammad Khairul, a garment worker of Hamim Group in Ashulia, had to wait for two hours before he found a CNG-run auto rickshaw to get to Nitor hospital amid hartal.

People of low-earning, mainly vendors and day labourers had a tough day too.

Till 3:00pm yesterday, vendor Anwarul Islam could not sell a single garment item as customers are too scarce on hartal days. "On usual days, I sell for around Tk 2,000 by now," he said.

Another vendor Billal Hossain, who runs a family of seven, sold peanuts of only Tk 60 in Banani area till 3:30pm. He would have earned around Tk 400 at the end of the day had there been no hartal.

Plastic factory worker Mohammad Shameem of the city's Kamrangirchar was found waiting at Mohakhali intersection around 4:00pm to get on a vehicle to go to his village home at Sherpur.

"I must go home as my elder brother is in serious condition. I have been waiting here for three hours and found nothing that can take me home," he said.

Mohammad Swapna Mia, employee of an insurance company, said, "I have spent Tk 260 by travelling on rickshaws so far, which on regular day would have cost me only Tk 50 on public transports."

Md Khairul Bashar, an official of Agrabad Accommodation Ltd, had to go to office by different means of transportation and even on foot as his office unlike regular days did not allocate him transportation fearing violence on the street.

Abdin assaulted

Intensive Care Unit of United Hospital in the city last night. Doctors said they cannot comment on his condition within 72 hours.

Acting Secretary General of the party Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir said Abdin needed 11 stitches on his head but it could not be verified from the hospital authorities.

Police said they tried to pick him up when he hit a police official, and that he might suffer injuries during the scuffle to prevent his arrest.

Two police men were also injured during the scuffle, they added.

The law enforcers, however, gave the demonstrators no scope whatsoever to stage agitation during the shutdown called in protest against scrapping of the caretaker government system and "hurting" the religious sentiment of the people through the 15th amendment to the constitution.

More than 456 people, including 62 in the capital, were arrested across the country amid sporadic clashes between the police and hartal supporters in some areas.

The BNP central office at city's Nayapaltan was cordoned off since early morning. The hartal began at 6:00am yesterday and will end at 6:00am tomorrow.

A 12-party alliance led by Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis will enforce a 30-hour shutdown from Sunday morning till 12:00noon of Monday in protest against dropping of the phrase "absolute faith in Allah" from the constitution.

The two-day weekend -- Friday and Saturday -- falls between the two hartals.

Besides deploying a huge number of police and Rab members, the government used mobile courts to try the hartal supporters on the spot. In the capital, at least 21 people were jailed by the mobile courts on different charges including for trying to bring processions, said Masudur Rahman, additional deputy commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police.

Meanwhile, Fakhru Islam Alamgir demanded resignation of Home Minister Sahara Khatun for the police assault on Farroque.

Sahara regretted the incident and said, "I'm sorry for whatever reason he was injured." She was talking to reporters after visiting the injured police officers at Rajarbagh police lines hospital yesterday evening.

Shamsul Haque Tuku, state minister for home, termed the police action unexpected and cautioned in the future to avoid such incidents.

But he said, "BNP leaders and lawmakers provoked the police to take action against Zainul Abidin Farroque."

Tuku added that action will be taken against the police members if they are found guilty of overacting.

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia in a statement condemned the police assault. BNP will stage a sit-in before the parliament protesting the "brutal and inhumane" torture.

Different political parties and human rights organisations also condemned the attack on the opposition supporters.

"The intolerant attitude of police and truncheon charge on the opposition chief whip and pedestrians will lead the political situation towards further confrontation," rights body Ain o Salish Kendra said.

Awami League Joint Secretary General Mahbubul Alam Hanif, however, said Farroque sustained "minor injuries" in a scuffle with the police.

HOW IT BEGAN Witnesses said a group of opposition lawmakers led by Farroque started a march around 6:00am from Manik Mia Avenue. They tried to stage a sit-in on the street in Farmgate but failed due to police obstruction. Later, they marched towards the parliament. Farroque engaged in an altercation with police men when they reached Manik Mia Avenue for a second time.

Police officials said Farroque threw brickbats to a passenger bus on one stage of their march. Police requested him not to do so but he screamed at them.

According to witness, Farroque hurled abuse to a

police officer who threatened to slap him. Police then beat him and tried to detain him. But Farroque lost his balance and fell on the street.

They said some BNP men took Farroque to the nearby Nam building adjacent to the parliament and made him sit at its entrance. Few minutes later, Farroque and others ran towards to building as they saw some police men approaching. But police caught Farroque in front of an elevator of the Nam building and beat him up again.

Rehana Akhter Ranu, a BNP lawmaker who was present during the incident, told The Daily Star that police attacked Farroque without any provocation.

HARTAL MODE Meanwhile, no long-distance bus left from or arrived in Dhaka. A few passenger buses, mostly of the BRTC, plied the city streets. Commuters had to depend largely on CNG-run auto-rickshaws and rickshaws.

Commuter trains, however, left the Kamalapur Railway Station on time, said officials. But launch services were disrupted.

Shopping malls, stores along the main streets, and educational institutions remained closed.

Government offices and both state-run and private offices opened with many of the staff walking or riding rickshaws to and from work.

Unidentified people burnt at least four buses in New Market, Khilkhet, Gulistan and Savar between 8:00 and 9:00pm, fire service sources said.

ARREST Police picked up eight activists of Jamaat-e-Islami from city's Mirpur.

Kazi Wazed Ali, officer-in-charge (OC) of Mirpur Police Station, said a police team led by Assistant Commissioner of Pallabi Police Station Abdul Latif intercepted a procession brought out by Jamaat at Senpara Parbata.

Resisted, the hartal supporters hurled bricks leaving Siraj and Latif injured. Police later dispersed them and detained the Jamaat men.

In Mohakhali, Noor-e-Ara Safa, a former lawmaker and president of Jatiyatabadi Mohila Dal, and five activists of the party were picked up.

In Chittagong, police detained 12 BNP activists from different parts of the city.

Four of them were arrested with two Molotov cocktails and two containers of petrol from Agrabad of the port city.

Dredger seized

studies at the school but also jarred on the nerves of the locals.

"We sincerely thank the department of environment for removing this torturous business from our doorstep, which really made our life miserable," said a mother of a student and a resident of the area requesting not to be named.

The vacuum dredger pumped sand and water into a nearby ditch for selling the sand to the construction companies in the city. Local people said that nobody in the area dared to confront Abdul Hai on this issue.

Hai was not present during the DoE drive led by its Director (Monitoring and Enforcement) Munir Chowdhury on Tuesday.

He was, however, summoned to the DoE office yesterday where the DoE enforcement director notified him about the fine and imposition of ban on such a noisy operation near a school and in a densely populated residential area.

Hai confessed to his crime and promised to remove the remaining structures from the site by tomorrow.

Interestingly, when the drive to stop the noise was continuing, two men from a nearby dental clinic casually walked to the river bank with two sacks in their hands.

When they were unloading two piles of clinical wastes on the riverbank under the very nose of the DoE, the team leader immediately ordered their arrest.

Both the perpetrators were taken into custody and later released on a fine of Tk 10,000 and a cautionary note.

The Rab-2 personnel assisted the DoE team during the drive.

Govt staff

Chittagong Port Radio Control, a team of officials from Chittagong Customs and Department of Explosives went to inspect MT Mar Princess in the morning.

When the team members were boarding the ship from an oil tanker using a makeshift ladder, Nuruzzaman suddenly fell into the sea at about 10:40pm, staffs of the control room said.

Khorshed Ali, manager (operation) of the ship's local agent JAR World Shipping Lines, said they hired the oil tanker OT Baro Aulia to make the journey to MT Mar Princess for the officials.

Nuruzzaman might have lost balance while climbing the ladder, he said adding that the officials went for the pre-scrapping inspection.

Confirming the incident, Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) Deputy Conservator Captain Nazmul Alam said two tug boats--Kandary-7 and Dishari-2--rushed to the spot immediately after the incident and started searching for the missing person.

Separate teams of Bangladesh Navy and Coast Guard also joined the rescue operation that continued till filing this report last night.

The Panama-flagged vessel was anchored at the B-anchorage on Tuesday night, said Khorshed.

Lafarge

The limestone is transported to the Chhatak plant in Bangladesh by a 17-kilometre-long conveyor belt from Meghalaya. Local people and a non-governmental organisation opposed mining in the area arguing it will lead to ecological degradation.

The Indian government sought permission from the court to start mining after Lafarge agreed to pay part of its sale proceeds to the Meghalaya government for development in the region, news agency Bloomberg reported.

"We are satisfied with the MOEF [Ministry of Environment and Forest] as it has taken a due diligence exercise," the Supreme Court said.

Lafarge has said it is bringing "advanced technologies for scientific mining and sustainable development" to the poverty-hit region that will minimise any impact on the environment, according to an AFP report.

The Bangladesh government had been pushing India to allow resumption of the limestone mining for the Chhatak plant which holds close to a 10 percent share of Bangladesh's cement market.

The court decision comes as India has been seeking to boost ties with Bangladesh with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh slated to visit Dhaka in September.

The Indian government initially cleared the export of limestone from Meghalaya to Bangladesh in 2000.

Eyes of 7 pirates

Ghat on Meghna estuary.

The pirates later claiming themselves members of Rana Bahini gave a cellphone number to the abductees' families to negotiate ransom.

To rescue the abducted fishermen and their trawlers, law enforcers from Char Aicha Police Post and Char Fashion Police Station started an operation and as a part of the initiative they chased several pirate trawlers yesterday to find a lead to catch the abductors.

One of the pirate trawlers had to land in Char Kukrimukri as its engine broke down amid heavy downpour. The pirates then took shelter in Uttar Muslimpara Primary School in the area.

Locals said when they heard about the men, they thronged and besieged the school and informed police about it around 11:00am.

Police reached the spot around 1:30pm and rescued the pirates from the mob. They also recovered two pistols, a pipe gun, 22 bullets, a detached gun barrel and some sharp weapons from the pirates, said Sub-Inspector Alamgir of Char Fashion Police Station.



Chittagong police yesterday arrested three Islami Chhatra Shibir cadres and seized ammunition, guns and a Kalashnikov assault rifle (AK-47) from Chalitalata of the port city.

Cops nab 'Shibir men'

Commissioner Abdul Mannan early yesterday raided Singer Beel of Brahmanbaria and arrested Maxon.

Upon information extracted from Maxon, the team conducted another drive at Chalitalata under Bayezid Police Station in the port city and held the two others.

Five firearms-- an AK-47 rifle, an automatic pistol, a one-shooter gun, a locally-made rifle and a light gun-- were recovered from the two, said police.

AC Abdul Mannan told The Daily Star that the arrestees work for fugitive Islami Chhatra Shibir cadre Sazzad Khan who was

given a death sentence by a Chittagong court in a sensational eight-murder case.

The trio used to threaten local businessmen and realise extortion from them in the name of Sazzad Khan, he said. They also asked an official of CMP over the cell-phone to leave Chittagong and told him that he will be killed otherwise.

Meanwhile, CMP yesterday noon organised a press conference at its headquarters at Laldighir Par where the arrestees were present.

The arrestees admitted to owning the firearms and told journalists that Shibir cadre Sazzad Khan gave

them the firearms before he fled the country.

Sarwar and Maxon said they have recently taken shelter at the house of a local Awami League leader in Feni to escape frequent police drives in Chittagong.

Additional Commissioner Shafiqur Rahman at the press conference said police will look into the allegation against the AL leader.

"We have information that the arrestees possess another AK-47 rifle," he said adding that they will be produced before a Chittagong court with a 10-day remand prayer for each.

Deals await final touch

focused interaction with the leadership here on bilateral relations between our two countries. India wants a broader cooperation framework, which will significantly improve the livelihood of the people of India and Bangladesh."

Bangladesh Foreign Minister Dipu Moni received her Indian counterpart at the airport in the afternoon.

Talking to The Daily Star, a high official of the Bangladesh foreign ministry said a draft document on water sharing of Teesta and Feni rivers has been prepared. However, the countries still differ on the proportion of Teesta water to be shared.

Both countries had been asking for 55 percent Teesta water during the lean period (October-May). Bangladesh finally asked for a 50 percent share, said an official of the Bangladesh water resources ministry.

Before sharing, 20 percent of the total quantity of the water in lean period will be left for the river, and the two countries will then share the remaining 80 percent.

But the issue will be finally resolved at the prime ministerial summit in September.

Beside Teesta, water sharing of Feni, Manu, Muhuri, Khawai, Gumti, Dharla and Dudhkumar rivers will also be discussed by the two foreign ministers.

About Feni river, the water resources ministry sources said India proposed withdrawal of a little amount of water from the river for its drinking water treatment project opposite Bangladesh's Feni and Ramgarh areas.

On Transit, India sought 15 road and railway routes connecting Chittagong and Mongla seaports. Side by side, India wants transit through Ashuganj to Agartala and from Ramgarh (Khagrachari) to Sabroom (Tripura) by road, as well as through Akhaura to Agartala by rail.

Sources said at today's official meeting, the two sides will discuss the principles for determining admissible fees, modalities, routes, and other aspects of transit.

Bangladesh Tariff Commission in its report said Bangladesh should charge between US\$4 and US\$5 for a tonne of goods in

transit fees depending on routes chosen by the user. The rate of charge may be equally applicable to India, Nepal and Bhutan.

After a meeting between Bangladesh Finance Minister AMA Muhith and Krishna yesterday, the Bangladesh finance minister said both countries agreed on transit for India, Nepal, and Bhutan.

But, Bangladesh also wants to allow transit and transshipment facilities to Myanmar, Thailand, and China with a view to turning the country as a regional economic hub, Muhith said.

The foreign ministry sources said Bangladesh agreed to allow Nepal and Bhutan to use Chittagong and Mongla seaports.

They said today's meeting will also discuss Bangladesh's demand for duty-free access of 61 items to India.

Earlier, Krishna told the media at the airport that India has always sought a deeper and stronger partnership with Bangladesh and believes that a prosperous, stable and democratic Bangladesh is in the interest of both countries and the entire region.

"We are at a historic juncture," he said adding that through a forward-looking, progressive and pragmatic approach based on understanding and cooperation, the two countries "can achieve a mutually rewarding relationship that brings a brighter future, prosperity, and development to the people of both countries."

Krishna said India remains committed to a partnership in the development and prosperity of the people of Bangladesh. Both countries remain steadfast in their efforts to combat the scourge of terrorism.

"We are determined to continue to build upon the stronger bonds of cooperation and trust based on the strong foundations of shared history and culture," he said adding that India is impressed with the tremendous growth and development in Bangladesh.

Turning to development in Indo-Bangladesh relations in recent years, the Indian external affairs minister said both countries have made considerable progress in the implementation of the 2010 Joint Communiqué and projects under the US\$1 billion line of credit.

Welcoming SM Krishna, Foreign Minister Dipu Moni said she is looking forward to having fruitful and substantive discussions with him on the entire range of relations with India in the bilateral, regional, and sub-regional context.

She said Krishna's visit is significant also because it will give the two countries opportunity to prepare the ground for the expected visit of the prime minister of India to Bangladesh in September.

The visiting Indian minister is scheduled to call on President Zillur Rahman and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, and to visit Bangabandhu Museum today. He is also scheduled to meet Leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia tomorrow.

Earlier, on his arrival yesterday the Indian Minister paid tribute to the martyrs of the War of Liberation by placing a wreath at the National Memorial in Savar. He also had interactions with editors and senior journalist in the evening.

Culprit caught

house and produced before the media during a press briefing at the DB office on Minto Road.

Facing a volley of questions from newsmen, the Bangla department teacher of Bashundhara branch kept mum. The school's governing body fired him on Tuesday.

According to Mujibur, the victim first shared the matter with her friends. They decided not to tell her parents because of their weak physical condition.

They informed Lutfur Rahman about the incident and he shared it with the principal.

After 59 students submitted a written statement to the branch chief on June 28, the principal threatened the victim's family not to disclose the incident, claimed Mujibur.

He also alleged police were pressing them for a statement of the victim, who is not in a state to talk to anybody.

The Daily Star tried to reach Principal Husne Ara Begum over the phone for her comments, but failed despite repeated attempts.

The school authorities have postponed the supplementary classes for Saturday.

6 polluting

20,00,000 cubic feet of soil and 60,000 gallons of water as raw material, which are extracted from nearby river banks and agricultural land.

Despite repeated notifications by the DoE, the brick kilns owners did not replace the system with modern chimneys which reduces the emission of carbon.

Around 50 such traditional brick kilns are located in this area.

Thieves snap

Gas Transmission Company Limited (GTCL) later sealed two of its valve stations as huge condensate spilled through a point near a hillock at Lakshmanaband.

The national oil company Petrobangla has a 178-kilometre pipeline for transporting condensate from the Kailashtila Gas field of Sylhet to Ashuganj. The condensate is a by-product of the gas field.

Visiting the spot, Deputy Manager of GTCL (Sylhet) Abdul Ahad said some unscrupulous people might have attempted to steal the condensate from the pipeline by perforating it and caused the spilling.

Enthusiastic locals of neighbouring villages rushed to the area and started collecting raw fuel in containers, noted witnesses.

The condensate leaked through the pipe since early yesterday, Nosirul Haque Shahin, chairman of Lakshmanaband Union Parishad told The Daily Star.

He could not stop the villagers from collecting the oil, mentioned Nosirul adding, he sent a team with loudspeakers to warn people about the huge risk of collecting this way.

According to him, the condensate has already spread over a hundred acres of paddy fields.

Several organised gangs used to steal condensate from the pipeline at different points in the hills of Habiganj, Moulvibazar and in Ashuganj in the past. But this happened for the first time in Golapganj, pointed out Abdul Ahad.

A technical team will visit the spot to take further protective measures, he added.

Speaker

when an 18-member delegation of the BNP-led opposition called on him at his parliament office.

Led by BNP Joint Secretary General AM Mahbubuddin Khokon, the parliamentary delegation also submitted a memorandum to Abdul Hamid demanding punishment of two police officials -- Harun and Biplob Sarker. The BNP lawmakers alleged these two police officials were responsible for conducting an attack on the opposition chief whip.

Talking to reporters, the Speaker said he expressed his sympathy and regret for his unwanted incident.

Emerging from the Speaker's room at 7:20pm, BNP lawmaker AKM Hafizur Rahman told reporters the Speaker extended his sympathy to the BNP-led opposition lawmakers for the "unwanted incident" and regretted for it.

"Speaker Abdul Hamid has also assured us that he will write to the home ministry to enquire into the incident," Hafizur Rahman added.

Earlier, the BNP-led opposition lawmakers at a press conference at the Jatiya Sangsad Media Centre announced to form a human chain in front of the parliament premises today in protest against the attack on Farroque.

Meanwhile, a number of ruling alliance MPs also talked in parliament on the assault of the opposition chief whip.

Taking floor on a point of order, ruling Awami League MP Suranjit Sengupta condemned the incident.

"Such incident is certainly unwanted and we do not appreciate this," Suranjit said in parliament.

He however alleged the main opposition was engaged in creating "artificial crisis" in the country centring the caretaker government issue.

"This [caretaker government] is a parliament related issue, but they [opposition] are creating crisis outside parliament," he headed.

AL lawmaker Abdul Mannan blamed Farroque saying he "misbehaved" with law enforcers that cannot be expected from the opposition chief whip.

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal MP Mayeen Uddin Khan Badal also condemned the attack on the opposition chief whip.