

Yemen forces shell Taz, kill one

AFP, Sanaa

Forces loyal to Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh shelled several neighbourhoods across the flashpoint city of Taz, killing one person, medics and residents said yesterday.

The artillery shelling also destroyed nearly a dozen homes in Taz, Yemen's second-largest city, residents said.

The attacks were mainly concentrated in the area surrounding Al-Huriya Square, the epicentre of anti-regime protests since January.

A security official in Taz said the attacks targeted "militants from Al-Islah (reform opposition) party who have been deployed in residential areas across the city."

Indigenous

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Echoing Larma, General Secretary of Bangladesh Adivasi Forum Sanjeeb Drong said unrest may again flare in the hills if the accord is not implemented immediately. Claiming that the hill people have been deceived, he stressed a dialogue between the government and indigenous leaders to devise a plan for the accord implementation.

Asked whether the hill people will go for another armed revolution if the demands are not met instantly, Larma said it would depend on the future.

In response to another query, he claimed that the United People's Democratic Front was formed under the patronisation of the then government, when the peace accord was signed. The organisation has been opposing the peace treaty from the very beginning, since its inception in 1998.

Columnist Syed Abul Maksud said it is obvious that the government which split the Dhaka City Corporation into two zones ignoring the opinion of 1.5 crore people will overlook the demands of 25-30 lakh people belonging to indigenous communities.

Veteran leftists Pankaj Bhattacharjee and other indigenous leaders were also present at yesterday's press conference.

2 advisers

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The issue of Tipaimukh hydroelectric project may come up in the discussion.

Rizvi, international affairs adviser, and Rahman, economic affairs adviser, are scheduled to meet Indian Power Minister Sushil Kumar Shinde and Water Resources Minister Pawan Kumar Bansal.

Power sector cooperation and sharing of the waters of common rivers like the Teesta and Feni are likely to come up for discussion between the two advisors and the Indian ministers.

The plan for setting up a thermal plant in Khulna and expediting the project for inter-connecting the grids of the two countries to facilitate power supply from India to Bangladesh is also expected to come up during talks between the advisers and Shinde.

Since Shinde was present when the Promoters' Agreement was signed on October 24 between Indian government-owned National Hydro Power Corporation and Manipur state government for the 1,500MW Tipaimukh project, the issue may figure in today's meeting, sources said.

While there has been widespread concern in Bangladesh over the possible effects of Tipaimukh project on the water flow of Barak river on the lower riparian country, India has made it repeatedly clear that nothing would be done which would hurt Dhaka's interests.

New Delhi has time and again assured Dhaka that Tipaimukh is a power-generating project which does not entail diversion of Barak water and so there is no question of reduction in the river water flow downstream.

The two advisers of Hasina will also meet Indian National Security Advisor Shiv Shankar Menon today.

PM defends

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"The people against the division may have other intentions. In my view, they are against it for the sake of opposition, misleading the people and bringing the development activities of the government into question," said Hasina, citing examples of earlier criticism of her government's decision to subsidise quick rental power plants.

Claiming that her government had eradicated militancy and terrorist activities from the country, the premier said, "Maybe one day they [the critics] will ask why they don't hear the sounds of explosions any more or why there is no militancy. In reality, they want to mislead people and create confusion over good government activities."

She reiterated that the idea of Dhaka divided is absolutely wrong. In her assessment, Dhaka has already been divided into many parts as there are cantonment boards and 17 union parishads, which are not under DCC jurisdiction.

She said, "Splitting a city corporation is nothing new." She mentioned instances of two metropolitan corporations in London, four municipalities in Manila and a number of municipalities in Sydney.

Hasina also told parliament about the government's plan to split 19 greater districts of the country into 60, some eight constituencies into 15, and increase the number of police stations in the Dhaka Metropolitan area to 41 against the previous eight.

Referring to the sorry state of roads, drainage and sewerage system and the mosquito menace, the premier said, "No one raised any voice when people died of dengue fever owing to the city corporation's failure in destroying mosquitoes."

The prime minister also criticised some lawmakers who yesterday expressed discontent at the Speaker's decision to drop other scheduled business of the House on Tuesday, which resulted in the passing of the DCC-split bill in just over four minutes.

Workers Party MP Rashed Khan Menon, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal's Mayeen Uddin Khan Badal and lone independent lawmaker Fazlul Azim were among the legislators who submitted proposals opposing the passage of the bill. They could not participate in the House proceedings, as the bill was passed hurriedly.

Taking the floor on points of order, the three lawmakers raised the issue yesterday and expressed their dissatisfaction over the DCC-division move.

They said they could have joined the House earlier had they known that the other scheduled business of the day would be dropped and the process to pass the bill would start ahead of the assumed time.

In response, Speaker Abdul

Mayor killing

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Rahman Tawab alias Sabuj and Shaheen, who were arrested on November 19, were taken on fresh remands for four-day each.

Earlier on Tuesday, Narsingdi Jubo League president Ashrafur Islam Sarkar, the lone FIR-named accused, confessed to his involvement in the murder on November 1.

Hazi Faruque was arrested from Wari in the capital on November 19, said a reliable source.

A source from the district detective branch of police hinted that important information had been extracted from Faruque. But the source did not divulge details of the information.

Meanwhile, the court police sub-inspector Anwar Hossain in his remand forwarding said Kazi Alam was directly involved in the murder and he disclosed important information regarding the killing.

SI Anwar also said that two other arrestees-- Sabuj and Shaheen-- whose ten-day remand ended yesterday, also disclosed important information which would help to investigate the case.

Anwar sought another five-day remand for the duo.

Law enforcers so far arrested seven suspected killers in the case.

Hamid said he had no other option but to do it.

He said he had decided to suspend the day's business -- scripted question-answer session and disposal of call attention notices -- to allow for more time for discussions on the bill.

"I made such arrangements [started ahead of schedule] because I wanted to allocate you more time," the Speaker claimed.

He defended the decision by saying that he had done so in order to attend a meeting with a German parliamentary delegation and a dinner in honour of the German president hosted by President Zillur Rahman.

"I found none when I started the process to pass the bill. But I had no alternative but to continue. If at least one of you were present at the time, there could have been a discussion."

He also urged the lawmakers to join the House on time.

Later, Hasina also echoed Hamid's view and bitterly criticised Menon, Badal and Azim for their arguments.

"Members of parliament must be present from the beginning of the House proceedings. It's not fair and logical to blame the Speaker for one's failure to attend the House on time and to speak," she said.

She added the rules of procedure allow the Speaker to decide how the session will run.

It is the jurisdiction of the Speaker to decide whether any scheduled business of the day will be suspended, and it is the practice all over the world, she claimed. "It is absolutely unacceptable to raise questions over it."

In her speech, she also condemned the main opposition BNP its chief Khaleda Zia and her two sons for "indulging in corruption and money laundering and for trying to protect the war criminals".

BNP calls

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committee of BNP, with its Chairperson Khaleda Zia in the chair.

The decision of splitting the DCC is autocratic, and it goes against the spirit of constitutional values, Fakhrul said.

He added that the party would hold a protest rally in front of the BNP headquarters at Naya Paltan tomorrow and bring out processions in every ward on Saturday.

BNP leaders RA Gani, Khandakar Mosharaf Hossain, Moudud Ahmed and MK Anwar attended the meeting, among others.

Defying widespread criticism and protests, parliament on Tuesday hurriedly adopted a bill to divide the DCC.

Mirza Fakhrul said the party also decided to support today's hartal in Sylhet city called by local unit of BNP protesting the government's "inaction" to the Indian government's move to construct a dam at Tipaimukh.

Meanwhile, BNP lawmakers yesterday condemned the split of DCC saying it would create severe administrative chaos.

They said disputes and conflicts between the two city corporations may lead to discontent and unrest.

"The government has violated article 59 of the constitution by passing a law to split the Dhaka City Corporation," said a statement read out by BNP lawmaker Moudud Ahmed on behalf of his party lawmakers at a press briefing at the Jatiya Sangsad Media Centre.

"Our capital has been divided into two through the DCC split. There is no such instance anywhere in the world."

Moudud, also former law minister, said such an important bill had been passed in the House within only four minutes without any discussion or debate.

The government's decision to split the DCC is nothing but a reflection of its autocratic and unrealistic attitude. It is meant for political gains and goes against people's interests, said the statement.

Water, power and gas crises in the city will worsen due to this move, it said.

Some BNP lawmakers sent proposals to the parliament secretariat, protesting the passage of the bill for DCC split. But they could not raise the proposals during the passage of the bill on Tuesday, as the main opposition continues to boycott the House.

Road crash

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Siham, 4, daughter Yamin Akhter, 3, stepson Parvez, 15, and brother-in-law Zamirul Islam, 30. Parvez was Parvin's son from a previous marriage.

The injured are Fiam, 18-month old son of Enamul, Maria, 10, niece of deceased Zamirul, Zaheda Akhtar (mother of Zamirul), 55, and microbus driver Nazmul Islam, 27.

The accident happened when the family was returning to Enamul's Bahadurpur residence in Joydevpur of Gazipur from Sylhet on the hired microbus.

Ali Farid, officer-in-charge of Shayestaganj Highway Police Station, said a microbus was crushed between two oil-carrying lorries in Debpara area around 8:35am, killing five passengers of the microbus on the spot.

Five injured passengers including Parvin and microbus driver Nazmul Islam, 27, were first rushed to Nabiganj Upazila Health Complex and later to Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital.

Parvin succumbed to her injuries on the way to hospital.

Britain faces

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In Salford, northwest England, around 30 refuse collectors manning a picket line outside their depot dismissed claims that their pensions were "gold-plated" compared to those in the private sector.

"The average public sector pension comes in at £3,000 a year. Could you live on £3,000 a year?", a protester asked the AFP reporter.

At Heathrow Airport, passengers arriving on early morning flights from Australia and the United States reported few problems, despite prior warnings that delays of up to three hours were likely.

Elsewhere in England, the light rail train system was closed down by the strike in Newcastle and northeast England.

A giant union rally was to take place in the industrial central city of Birmingham and in Scotland, 300,000 workers were expected to walk out.

Under the government's proposals, public sector workers will be asked to work until they are 66 and increase their pension contribution payments.

Deforestation

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between 1990 and 2000 and 6.4 million between 2000 and 2005.

The figures showed that the world has lost 10 hectares of forest per minute over the 15-year period, mainly because of the conversion of tropical forests to agricultural land in South America and Africa.

The survey however found that the net global loss of forests over the whole period was 72.9 million hectares -- 32 percentage points lower than previously thought -- and that deforestation in Africa was lower than past estimates.

The survey, which used extensive satellite imagery from the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration (Nasa) and the US Geological Survey (Usgs), showed forests currently cover 30.3 percent of the world's land-mass.

Russia, Brazil, Canada, the United States, China, Australia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Indonesia, Peru and India are the most forested countries in descending order, with the first five accounting for over half of the total.

"We found that the highest deforestation rate is occurring in the tropical forests," said Adam Gerrand, Fao forestry officer for remote sensing.

"There is still deforestation occurring in Asia but there are trees being planted and those numbers are larger so there is a net increase," he said.

FAO worked on the report with more than 200 researchers from 102 countries.

Durban set to pick up

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2020. And India, the fourth biggest carbon emitter, has outright rejected any commitment.

But a silver line appeared with China saying it is ready to cap its emission. Chinese press has also slated Canada's decision to leave the protocol.

With such undercurrents flowing high, the climate conference at Durban looks set to pick up more heat in the coming days. The worrying prospect is that if countries fail to commit to the second phase of the Kyoto Protocol, the funding to the poor and developing countries through the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) would be dead as well.

Last year about \$1.2 billion had flown to the developing and poor countries in CDM. The CDM allows emission-reduction projects in developing countries to earn certified emission reduction (CER) credits. These credits can be traded and sold, and used by industrialised countries to a meet a part of their emission reduction targets under the Kyoto Protocol.

A new tension is also folding regarding the CDM between the poor countries and the developing countries like India, Brazil and China. The major part of the CDM fund has flown to India and China because of their solar and wind power projects. The LDCs now want that CDM should be specifically focused on the poor countries and not the developing countries.

Meantime, as the debates continue, Rajendra Kumar Pachauri, chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), yesterday said scientific evidence is clear about weather extremities because of climate change. He also said different parts of the world are witnessing different outcomes and the problems of the flood deltas (Bangladesh is one of them) are witnessing heightened crises.

He mentioned the latest IPCC special report on risks from extreme events as evidence of his claims.

The report has said since 1950 extreme weather conditions are witnessed and heavy rainfall will increase in the

21st century. Frequency of warm and cold spells will also increase and it is likely that the average maximum wind speed of tropical cyclones like typhoons and hurricanes will increase throughout the coming century.

Droughts will intensify over the coming century in southern Europe and the Mediterranean region, central Europe, central North America, Central America and Mexico, northeast Brazil, and southern Africa.

At the same time it is very likely that average sea level rise will contribute to upward trends in extreme sea levels in extreme coastal high water levels.

So when such signs and warnings are visible, Pachauri said time is ticking by to fight such a grim future.

His warning coincides with the UN's weather agency World Meteorological Organisation's report that 2011 was tied as the 10th hottest year since records began in 1850. Arctic sea ice, a barometer for the entire planet, had shrunk to a record low volume.

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The greatest light show

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The researchers at the world's largest land-based rocket range hope to learn more about these storms and their impact on lives in the northern hemisphere.

The luminous sheets of light might look spectacular, but they are also visual indicators of geomagnetic storms in space that can interfere with satellites, power grids, navigation and communication systems. They can even corrode oil pipelines.

It is this disruption that the researchers are trying to help mitigate.

The Poker Flat Research Range's location in central Alaska makes it the perfect place to study, and film, the Aurora Borealis.

They worked with a team from the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) Geophysical Institute -- the only academic institution in the world with its own scientific rocket-launching facility.

Since 1969, hundreds of rockets have been launched from the base in an attempt

to gain new perspectives on the interaction between the Earth's atmosphere and the space environment.

For almost 10 years, aurora expert Prof Dirk Lummerzheim's project has studied the Northern Lights.

"We wanted to study how the upper atmosphere gets set in motion by the aurora," he explains. "This is important because the wind at auroral altitude might affect satellite velocity."

"Moving the atmosphere around also changes its electrical properties, which would affect GPS and satellite communication, as well as short-wave long-distance radio communication."

On winter nights illuminated by green waves, the team fire "sounding rockets" 60 miles straight up into the light displays.

Taking their name from the nautical term "to sound", meaning to take measurements, these rockets do not blast into orbit but simply roar upwards before falling back down to Earth.

As the rockets arc through

the atmosphere, they release a plume of smoke which scientists on the ground can track using sophisticated filming equipment.

Studying the footage and using the stars as known points of reference, researchers can track how the smoke plumes descend, and use these patterns to calculate wind speeds in the upper atmosphere.

Hartal in Sylhet

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units of BNP earlier announced the programme on November 22.

Senior party leaders of the district at a rally at city's Court Point yesterday called upon all to make the hartal successful and raise their voices against the Tipaimukh project.

The district BNP chief M Ilyas Ali, former lawmaker Dilder Hossain Selim, city unit BNP chief MA Haque, among others, addressed the rally.

The week-long agitation programme included mass rally in Court point area on November 24, procession and rally at upazila level on November 26, procession by the JCD in the city on November 27.

Mega ICT

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number of international seminars and course exhibitions, focusing on themes like e-Gov, telecentre, digital learning, eHealth, etc. The main objectives of the sessions are to reinforce technology and enhance knowledge-centric growth.

In addition to regular sessions, an award category has been introduced this time to recognise the e-initiatives, programmes that contributed significantly to making people aware of the world around the world aware of the benefit of ICT.

The event is organised by Bangladesh Computer Council and ICT Division of the science and ICT ministry along with India's Centre for Science, Development and Media Studies (CSDMS). It is co-organised by Access to Information Programme at Prime Minister's Office.

Yeafesh Osman, ICT state minister, said yesterday at the venue that there would be 30 seminars and workshops in the event. There are country pavilions of Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Japan, the Netherlands in the exhibition along with Bangladesh.

It is expected that some 2,000 foreign and local representatives would participate in the event, Yeafesh said. The entrance fee is Tk 10 per person but students with identity cards are allowed to enter the venue without any ticket.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is expected to inaugurate the 5th annual eAsia event while President Zillur Rahman is expected to be present at the closing ceremony.

Japan's participation: In a statement Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) said five big companies or institutions from Japan will be participating in the event. They are NTT Communication, N-Wave with SONY, Kyushu University and NEC Corporation.

Electricity

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on November 24 increased the bulk price of electricity for the third time this year by 33.57 percent to relieve distributors of financial losses. The price hike will take effect in two phases.

Different political parties, including components of the ruling Awami League-led grand alliance, and business organisations expressed deep concern over the price hike. According to them, public sufferings and cost of production would increase manifold due to the power price hike.

Describing her government's success in the power sector, Hasina, also leader of the House, yesterday said it had provided 4.4 lakh new power connections in the last two years and 10 months.

The government has also taken steps to give power connections to another 4 lakh consumers very soon, she added.

On reducing people's sufferings caused by the price hike of power, Hasina said, "We have planned to fix the power price on the basis of the amount of power a consumer uses."

A lower price rate will be applicable to consumers using less amount of power, while a consumer of large volume of power will be subjected to a higher rate of power price, she explained.

She blamed the last BNP-Jamaat and caretaker governments for the prevailing gas crisis in the country.

BB receives

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include requirement of an initial capital of Tk 400 crore that has to be deposited from the money shown in the applicant's income tax return.

Many had tried to get the conditions relaxed but the BB board rejected the appeal in October.

At present, the number of local and foreign banks in the country is 47, the highest in the sub-continent.

Of the applicants, Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, Awami League presidium member and chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on public accounts, proposed to set up Farmers' Bank Ltd.

Another application was submitted for Modhumati Bank Ltd and its proposed chairman is Humayun Kabir. Awami League lawmaker Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh is involved with this initiative.

The other proposed banks are City Financial Bank (proposed chairman Mohammad Hasan), Bank of Trade and Investment Ltd (Momtazul Haque), Union Bank (Shahidul Alam), Greenland Bank (Morshed Alam), The People's Bank (Mirza Azam), Destiny Bank (Harun-Ar-Rashid), Southern Bank (Majedul Haq), Prime Asia Bank (Sreemant Kumar Saha), Western Bank (Golam Mostafa Kamal), Midland Bank (Moniruzzaman Khan Khandker), Far East Islami Bank (Fazlul Haque), Millennium Islami Bank (Ziaul Hasan), TMSS Khudra Punji Bank (Hosne Ara), Bank of Credit, Commerce and Industry Ltd (Almas Uddin Ahmed), Citizens' Bank (Ariful Haq), Al Hera Bank (Mahmudul Haque Kutub), Self Employment Bank (Mahbuba Kabir), Chartered Bank (Enamul Haque Chowdhury), Meghna Bank (HM Ashikur Rahman), Bengal Bank (Khondker Mohiuddin), Katak Bangla Bank (Abdul Matlub Ahmed), Rural Investment Bank (Mujibur Rahman), People's Islami Bank (Abul Kashem), Federal Bank (MA Hashem), South Bangla Agriculture and Commerce Bank (SM Amjad Hossain), People's Bank Ltd (Khandker Asaduzzaman), Infrastructure Development Bank (Motiul Islam), Federal Bank (Shahriar Alam), Modern Islami Bank (advocate Sheikh Abdullah), Global Bank (Kutubuddin), Western Bank (Aysha Hasan), Universal Bank (Ruma Parveen), Metro Bank (Solaiman Rubel), Gulf Bangla Bank (Syed Ahmed Faruque) and Korea-Bangla Bank (Engineer Enamul Haque).