

Iran FM regrets storming of British embassy

AFP, Tehran

Iran's foreign minister, Ali Akbar Salehi, yesterday reiterated that he regretted last month's storming of the British embassy in Tehran, but asserted that the incident was "not foreseeable."

"The incursion into the embassy was not foreseeable. The protest had the necessary permission and was supposed to be held within the law," he said, according to the Mehr news agency.

"However, we regret what happened, which in my view was not called for," he was quoted as saying.

Britain closed its embassy in Tehran the day after the November 29 assault on the mission by Iranian pro-regime protesters, saying that they could have only acted with the consent of the Iranian authorities.

It also ordered Iran's embassy in London closed, and reduced diplomatic ties to the minimum.

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and other top leaders have stayed silent on the attack.

Salehi implied that British officials had overreacted by withdrawing its diplomats from Tehran, accusing them of "becoming more Catholic than the Pope," according to Mehr.

Palestinians mourn protester killed at demo

AFP, Nabi Saleh

Thousands of Palestinians gathered in the West Bank village of Nabi Saleh yesterday to mourn a man who died after being hit in the head by an Israeli tear gas canister.

Mustafa Abdelrazek al-Tamimi's body was taken from the city of Ramallah in a funeral procession to the central Manara Square before being driven by ambulance to his home village of Nabi Saleh.

Tamimi was critically wounded in the village on Friday by an Israeli tear gas canister that hit him in the head after being fired at close range. He was evacuated to an Israeli hospital but died on Saturday of his wounds.

Bangladesh

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while Laos is one notch ahead of Bangladesh with 163 kilograms per person.

Two South Asian nations - Sri Lanka and Nepal -- are behind Bangladesh in per-capita rice consumption.

Higher rates of rice consumption are seen in much of South and Southeast Asia, West Africa, Madagascar, and Guyana. Some of these countries have consumption rates of over 100 kilograms per person a year.

Asia, the world's most populous continent, has high rates of rice consumption. China and India alone account for more than 50 percent of the world's rice consumption but they are far behind other Asian countries in per-capita rice consumption, says a report of the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI).

The FAO statistics show that each person in Bangladesh consumes 160 kilograms of rice a year, which is more than three times higher than the average global consumption rate of 50 kilograms.

Myanmar and Cambodia are behind Bangladesh with annual consumption of 157 and 152 kilograms.

India, Pakistan and Bhutan are not on the top 20 list while Sri Lanka and Nepal hold the 11th and 16th positions.

Thailand, a major rice-producer, is in the 9th position with an annual per-capita consumption of 103 kilograms, while China stands 18th with 77 kilograms. South Korea is at the bottom of the top 20 list with each person taking 76 kilograms of rice a year.

Although per-capita consumption has always been high in Asia, it has more than doubled in the rest of the world over the last 50 years, says IRRI.

UN charts

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In Durban will play a central role in saving tomorrow, today," declared South African Foreign Minister Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, who chaired the talks.

Approval came after two and a half days of round-the-clock wrangling among 194 nations, reports AFP.

Even by UNFCCC standards, the meeting broke the record for going into overtime.

The talks should have ended on Friday but wrapped up in the dawn light yesterday amid scenes of exhaustion and shredded nerves, with many delegates saying the host government lacked urgency and strategy.

Nevertheless, there was applause in the main conference hall when Maite Nkoana-Mashabane brought down the long-awaited final gavel.

"We came here with plan A, and we have concluded this meeting with plan A to save our planet for the future of our children and our grandchildren to come," she said.

"We have made history. The often-stormy exchanges reflected concerns among many countries over the cost of making energy efficiencies and switching to clean renewable sources at a time of belt-tightening.

UNFCCC chief Christiana Figueres was exultant.

Citing the words of Nelson Mandela, she said on Twitter: "In honour of Mandela: It always seems impossible until it is done. And it is done!"

"I think in the end it ended up quite well," said US chief negotiator Todd Stern.

"The first time you will see developing countries agreeing, essentially, to be bound by a legal agreement."

The European Union hailed the outcome as a "historic breakthrough."

"Where the [1997] Kyoto [protocol] divides the world into two categories, we will now get a system that reflects the reality of today's mutually interdependent world," Connie Hedegaard, the EU commissioner for climate action, said in the statement.

Greenpeace, however, lamented the deal as a victory for polluters over people.

The grim news is that the blockers led by the US have succeeded in inserting a vital get-out clause that could easily prevent the next big climate deal being legally binding. If that loophole is exploited it could be a disaster," said Greenpeace director Kumi Naidoo.

"Right now the global climate regime amounts to nothing more than a voluntary deal that's put off for a decade.

In the run-up to the conference, scientists pounded out loud warnings, saying future generations would pay the bill for foot-dragging.

Current measures to tackle carbon emissions will make it harder to keep the average rise to within 2 degrees Celsius over the next century.

According to research presented by German scientists, the world is on track for a 3.5 C (6.3 F) rise, spelling worsening droughts, floods, storms and rising sea levels for tens of millions of people.

The European Union led the charge in Durban, pushing for the "roadmap" in exchange for renewing its pledges to the Kyoto Protocol, a treaty deemed iconic by developing countries but increasingly dismissed by rich ones as out of date.

Kyoto's first roster of legally-binding carbon curbs expires at the end of 2012.

The EU will sign up for fresh commitments taking effect from 2013, although this will be little more than symbolic, translating into the UN framework its existing plan for reducing European greenhouse-gas emissions by 20 percent by 2020 over 1990 levels.

New Zealand, Norway and Switzerland and others are joining it, said European diplomats. The duration of the post-2013 commitments will be either five or eight years. Negotiations on this will take place next year.

The EU made the pledge to help assemble a coalition of developing and small island states -- together accounting for nearly two-thirds of the world's nations -- that lobbied China, the United States and India to support the quest.

China and India have

become huge emitters of carbon over the last half-dozen years but do not have Kyoto constraints as they are developing countries.

The United States, the world's no 2 source of man-made carbon, also has no legal curbs as it refused in 2001 to ratify Kyoto.

The key to the Durban deal lay in overcoming the opposition of the Big Three by crafting vague text about what the pact will be -- essentially reassuring them that the price will not be unaffordable.

The final text said parties would "develop a protocol, another legal instrument or an agreed outcome with legal force".

That compromise averted the use of "legally binding", likely to trigger a backlash among the conservative right in the United States during a presidential election year.

"The Durban deal is a solid step in the right direction. It preserves Kyoto for now, but more importantly, lays a path toward a more balanced agreement," said Elliot Diring of the Center for Climate and Energy Solutions, a US think tank.

Australia, one of the world's worst per capita polluters, hailed the deal as a "significant breakthrough."

Observers say the talks for the 2015 pact will be arduous.

The thorny issues include determining the agreement's exact legal status and apportioning carbon constraints among rich and poor countries.

LEAST-BAD OPTION

Under the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act, 1973, such offences carry a maximum sentence of death.

The tribunal earlier framed charges against Jamaat leader Delawar Hossain Sayedee and took charges against BNP leader Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury into cognisance.

At present, five Jamaat and two BNP leaders including Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury face war crimes charges.

While Salahuddin is in jail, the other BNP leader Abdul Aleem is on bail due to illness.

In October, investigators had submitted a 411-page probe report on Nizami, 366 pages on Mojaheed, 327 pages on Kamaruzzaman and a 385-page report on Quader Molla.

During the country's nine-month Liberation War, Jamaat had collaborated with the Pakistani forces.

About 30 million Bangladeshes were killed and about 2 million Bangalee women were violated by the Pakistani forces and their collaborators.

Cracks

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the work will cut short the lifespan of the 4.8 kilometre structure that connects the capital with the northern districts.

Visiting the bridge on Friday, The Daily Star found a large number of workers displacing concrete medians.

"It's not a huge job, but it has become a challenge for us since we are doing it for the first time in Bangladesh. We have to maintain the standard of repair work," Deng Xigui, an official of CCCC and the project manager, told The Daily Star.

He said 70 Chinese, 30 of them engineers, and 80 Bangladeshi workers are working in the project.

Sophisticated methods and materials are being used to fix the defects. Epoxy, a type of glue, will be injected inside the cracks while a kind of spray will be applied to make those waterproofed.

"Carbon fibre reinforced polymer [CFRP] will be pasted to make sure no crack develops further. Finally, the entire deck of the bridge will be carpeted with mastic asphalt," said Deng.

Under the project, the existing expansion joints, which are in bad shape, will be replaced with new ones. The repairing will conclude with road marking and installing traffic signals, he added.

Mapping and measuring of the cracks have already been completed.

Wu Guangsheng, general manager of CCCC, said the bridge will gain its full strength once the work is done. He put emphasis on regular monitoring and maintenance of the bridge.

South Korean Hyundai Engineering and Construction Co Ltd constructed the railroad bridge at a cost of Tk 4,000 crore. It was opened to public in 1998.

After receiving treatment for the gunshot wound, he filed a case against some unidentified muggers with Jatrabari police.

War crimes

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crimes committed in greater Faridpur, headed.

Kamaruzzaman, who is the assistant secretary general of Jamaat, faces charges of crimes against humanity. His areas of operation were Mymensingh, Jamalpur, Tangail and Sherpur, Malum said.

"Kamaruzzaman was the chief coordinator of Al Badr [an auxiliary force of the Pakistani occupational army] during the war," he told The Daily Star.

Prosecutors, however, would not elaborate the charges brought against the Jamaat trio, who are now behind bars on charges of war crimes.

The three-member tribunal fixed December 18 for taking the charges into cognisance.

It also directed the prosecution to submit formal charges against Abdul Quader Molla, assistant secretary general of Jamaat, before it on the same day.

The four Jamaat leaders were present during the proceedings.

Earlier, investigators in their report submitted to the prosecutors brought 20 specific charges against Nizami, 12 charges against Mojaheed and eight charges against Kamaruzzaman.

The charges included crimes against humanity, genocide and attempt, abetment and attempt or conspiracy to commit any such crimes and complicity in or failure to prevent commission of any such crimes.

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Biman boss, three others

FROM PAGE 1

clashed together in a posture of begging mercy, on charge of disrespecting the Supreme Court. The Biman MD was however not put in the dock, although he was also present at the court.

The bench ordered the Biman MD to immediately publish advertisements on the front pages of seven national dailies including The Daily Star, explaining what happened between the Biman crew and Justice Shamsuddin Chowdhury Manik, a judge of the HC, on that day.

The six other dailies where the advertisement has to be published are the Prothom Alo, the Ittefaq, the Janakantha, the Shamokal, the Bhorer Kagoj, and the Amader Shomoy.

The Daily Star on October 29 published a report with the headline "Biman's flight delayed for altercation on plane".

The HC bench yesterday ordered the Biman MD to find out the persons at the airline who were involved in supplying wrong information to the media about the incident, and to take action against them.

It ordered that pending inquiry air hostess Shabnam must be kept grounded. The three contemnors who were in the dock must bear the cost of running the advertisements, the court said.

On December 5 the bench first issued contempt of court rule against the Biman MD and Captain Enamul following a relevant petition filed by Riaz Uddin Khan, a lawyer of the SC.

Yesterday the bench issued the same rule against Captain Abed and Shabnam as well.

All four contemnors were ordered to explain by January 8 why contempt proceedings should not be brought against them and why they should not be punished.

Riaz moved the petition following reports recently published in some newspapers including the daily Ittefaq and the daily Janakantha which claimed that the judge was in no fault, and he was a victim of Biman crew's indecent behaviour.

Petitioner's counsel Barrister Rokanuddin Mahmud said it was a conspiracy hatched by the two pilots and the air hostess along with others who had been appointed to Biman by a particular past government, as Justice Manik had passed some important judgments about which the people of that past government are not happy.

He said an extensive investigation should be carried out to unearth the conspiracy. He said under the Biman rules, VIPs are always escorted onboard an aircraft by protocol officers of the airline, and they also arrange VIP seating for such passengers.

Biman's documents show that the airline's VIP handling officer, Ruhul Amin, escorted Justice Manik on to the aircraft and seated him in a VIP seat, he said.

The justice himself did not choose the seat, he added. Yet, after a few minutes, Captain Enam, at the instigation of air hostess Shabnam and co-pilot Captain Abed, sent people to the justice to tell him in front of many other passengers to vacate the VIP seat and go to the economy class.

Rokanuddin added saying that the pilot also declared that he would not take the aircraft off the ground until the judge went to the economy class.

This was highly humiliating and undermining of the justice and the judiciary, Rokanuddin argued.

He said the justice asked the crew of the plane to contact the Biman MD. They contacted the station manager who rushed to the aircraft and apologised to the justice and said the problem occurred because he himself was not present on the plane during the justice's boarding.

Rokanuddin said the station manager also confirmed that the justice was sitting at the right place because as a VIP he was entitled to the VIP seat. The station manager also confirmed that they got instruction from the Biman head office the previous day for taking special care of the justice during the flight, Rokanuddin claimed.

He made the disclosure based on documents procured from Biman records, which are in the case file.

It is clear from the Biman documents that the news was false and fabricated, he said adding that he had never appeared in a contempt case before, but he appeared in this one only because he feels that the judiciary's image has been devastatingly damaged by The Daily Star news, and the facts should be restored.

He also submitted that all contemnors except the Biman MD should be sentenced to prison terms.

Rokanuddin said almost everyday even underserving pilots and Biman officials are upgraded to business class. Yet, the pilot on that day could not tolerate the presence of a VIP in a VIP seat. He also said as per the Biman resolution and practices, tickets of VIPs above the rank of a parliament member are almost always upgraded.

He said exemplary punishment should be meted out to the contemnors to restore the dignity of the SC.

Advocate Manzil Murshid, another counsel for the petitioner, said unless heavy punishment is meted out, Biman crew will carry on with their heavy-handed behaviour.

He also said Biman pilots and crew do not treat ordinary passengers like human

beings. If they can treat an HC judge so roughly, it is quite imaginable how they treat ordinary passengers. The contemnors do not deserve any compassion or mercy, he argued.

Parliament members Advocate Fazle Rabbi Miah and Advocate Nurul Islam Sujon, and Awami League Presidium Member Advocate Yousuf Hossain Humayun, who were present at the hearing, also condemned the impudence of the contemnors.

Advocate Anisul Huq, counsel for Captain Enam, said he did not see the prosecution documents beforehand and had seen those earlier he would not have taken up this case, because it is obvious from the Biman records that his client was at fault.

It should be investigated who supplied the false and fabricated information to the media, he added saying the court however should show magnanimity and pardon the contemnors.

He also said there could be a possibility that Captain Enam was used as a pawn by some quarters. But he agreed with the contention that the contemnors severely damaged the SC's dignity.

During the proceedings, Captain Enam, Captain Abed and air hostess Shabnam contradicted each other as to who asked the justice to vacate the VIP seat. Enam and Abed said they directed Shabnam to take special care of the justice as per Biman's rules, but Shabnam did not carry out their instructions. Shabnam, however, denied the allegation and said she took special care of the justice.

Advocate Tawfiq Nawaz, appearing as an amicus curiae or a friend of the court, told the bench that the news published in The Daily Star did not only devastate the credibility and besmirched the image of an individual judge but also dented the credibility of the entire judiciary and the nation as a whole, because the newspaper is widely read by people abroad.

Referring to the Biman MD's statement, he said The Daily Star story had no relationship with truth, and an order should be passed on the newspaper requiring it to supply the identity of the persons who had supplied false and fabricated information to it.

He said if a false report could be written about an HC judge then such reports can be written about anybody.

OUR CLARIFICATION

The Daily Star ran a news story on the above incident on October 29 this year. In view of yesterday's proceedings we have re-examined our story and have come to the conclusion that our story did not cover versions of all the parties involved in the incident. So, we stand corrected.

who sacrificed their lives for the independence of the country, the prime minister said now Bangladesh is a country of possibilities.

"If the present government gets another chance to serve the nation, we will ensure overall development of the country," she added.

She said Bangladesh would be known as a developed and prosperous country in 2021 when it would be digitally prosperous and most peaceful nation in the South Asia.

Hasina sought people's blessings so she can discharge her responsibilities properly as a prime minister.

She pledged, among many other things, that Natore would get gas supply.

Hasina prayed for the salvation of the departed soul of Hanif Ali Sheikh and urged people to pray for him.

Earlier, Hasina laid the foundation stone for a joint venture power plant at Barovita in Natore. The power plant will be installed with the help of a Sri Lankan power company.

Awami League General Secretary Syed Ashrafur Islam, former home minister Mohammad Nasim also spoke at the rally.

Paying rich tributes to Bangabandhu, four national leaders and freedom fighters

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Strong earthquake rattles Mexico, killing two

REUTERS, Mexico City

A powerful 6.5 magnitude earthquake shook Mexico yesterday, killing at least two people, knocking out lights in parts of the capital and sending people rushing into the streets.

There were no immediate reports of severe damage or injuries in Mexico City but emergency services said 18-year-old man was killed when a roof collapsed in Iguala, a small city between the capital and the tourist resort of Acapulco.

A 25-year-old man was killed when a rock fell on a small van on the Mexico City-Acapulco highway, a spokesman for emergency services in southwestern Guerrero state said.

All cases

FROM PAGE 1

On the trial of war criminals, the BNP chief said they did not take any side in the trial. "We also want trial of war criminals. But it must be fair and has to maintain international standard. The judges must be neutral, but there are controversies regarding them. The recommendations made by Stephen Rapp [US ambassador-at-large] should be implemented. Why those (war criminals) who are in Awami League have not been arrested yet?"