

Signs of lowering tension in Yemen

Military panel begins lifting barricades

AFP, Sanaa

A Yemeni military commission began returning the capital to normality yesterday, removing checkpoints and barricades erected during months of deadly protests against President Ali Abdullah Saleh.

Bulldozers were seen removing sand berms thrown up by the pro-Saleh Central Security service at the Asser roundabout, under the supervision of members of the joint commission formed by the new opposition-led government, an AFP correspondent reported.

The neighbourhood was scene to frequent clashes between Saleh loyalists and demonstrators marching from the nearby Change Square -- the focal point of anti-Saleh protests, which was protected by the dissident First Armoured Division led by General Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar.

"We have received orders to withdraw from this area following the instructions of the military commission," said an officer of the division at Sitin Street as his troops cleared the area.

The national unity government overseeing the departure from office of long-serving Saleh formed the commission to restore stability under the terms of a transition deal.

The commission is led by Vice President Abdrabuh Mansur Hadi, who has been charged with managing the transfer of power and designated to serve as a consensus president following Saleh's departure, expected in February.

The military commission will also aim to reform the security services, controlled partly by Saleh loyalists, in accordance with the transition deal signed by Saleh in November after more than 10 months of protests against his 33-year rule.

Violence in Yemen has continued since the agreement was inked, notably in Sanaa and in the second city of Ta'ez, where clashes between loyalist troops and dissidents have left dozens dead.

Prime suspect

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known as Welcome Party, Mobin told police during interrogation.

The gang members phone people, claiming to be officials of mobile phone operators. The receivers then are told that they have won a lottery. But to get the prize money, they have to send credits to a certain mobile phone number, police said.

Rubel, 18, Belayet, 23, Kaiyum, 32, Sobhan, 19, and Fayed, 23, were abducted from Maligram Bazar of Bhanga upazila in the district on December 6.

A group of six posing as personnel of Detective Branch picked them up in a white microbus around 2:30pm that day, witnesses said.

Earlier on Thursday, Rafiqul Islam, nephew of Rubel, at a press conference said one Nirob of Agladia village under Nagarkanda upazila called Sobhan over the phone around 2:30pm on December 6 and asked the 19-year-old to go to Maligram Bazar.

As Sobhan along with Rubel, Belayet and Fayed reached there, the gang hustled them in a microbus.

Bijoy Basak, additional police superintendent of the district, told The Daily Star, "We've names of four people, including Nirob, who might be involved in the abduction. We're trying our best to arrest them."

Meanwhile, Faruk Hossain and Kalam Matubbor, arrested in connection with the abduction, have been sent to jail after a two-day remand.

Awlad Ali Fakir, Faridpur police superintendent, told reporters that they were trying to trace the missing persons and the culprits.

Family members of the victims yesterday complained that nobody from the administration or police contacted them and they doubted if there has been any attempt to find the abductees.

BSF kills 4

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Krishna Nanda village in Phulbari upazila of Kurigram and Naharul Islam, 40, of Meherpur Sadar upazila.

The BSF troops at Gobindapur camp opened fire on several Bangladeshi cattle traders at Daudpur of Katla union in Birampur upazila around 4:00am yesterday, reports our Dinajpur correspondent.

Motiar and Tajul died on the spot while the others managed to flee unhurt.

The BSF men took away the bodies, Lt Col Tareq Iftekhar Ahmed, acting commander of Phulbari BGB camp, told The Daily Star.

The Indian soldiers fired four shots during the incident that took place around 170 metres from the zero line on the Indian side of the border, he added.

At a flag meeting between the two border forces in Daudpur area yesterday afternoon, Bangladesh protested the killings and demanded return of the bodies.

The Indian side assured Bangladesh of returning the bodies and stopping recurrence of such incidents.

The Kurigram victim came under BSF attack in Camperchhara area near the zero line at Gorakmondal border in Phulbari upazila.

The BSF men at Narayanganj BOP (border observation post) camp of Cooch Behar district fired shots at Alamgir when he went there around 6:30am yesterday to respond to nature's call, reports our Kurigram correspondent quoting Subedar Emran, Shimulbari company commander of BGB.

Alamgir suffered severe injuries but managed to return home near the Gorakmondal border.

He succumbed to his wounds when his relatives had been rushing him to Phulbari Upazila Health Complex, said Mobassher Ali, chairman of Naodanga Union Parishad.

Police sent his body to Kurigram Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsy.

During a flag meeting with BSF in the afternoon in Krishna Nanda area, Lt Col Ziaul Haque Khaled, commanding officer of 45 Border Guard Battalion, strongly protested the shooting incident.

Rajesh Sohan, commander of BSF 46 Battalion, claimed that Indian border troops acted in self-defence as about a dozen Bangladeshis attacked them.

Our Kushtia correspondent adds: BSF troops at Bazrapur camp in Nadia district picked up Naharul and killed him when he went near Shewratata frontier of Gangni upazila in Meherpur around 7:30pm on Friday.

Rezaul Karim, camp commander of 35 Border Guard Battalion, could not

Rights groups criticise Sri Lanka war report

AFP, Washington

International human rights groups criticized a Sri Lankan report Friday on the island's civil war and called for more accountability after the commission cleared the military of key charges.

The Sri Lankan government commission, in a 400-page report, concluded that the military did not deliberately target civilians during the final stages of the conflict as forces wiped out the Tamil Tiger rebel leadership. Human Rights Watch renewed calls for an independent review. Sri Lanka has said that its Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) will suffice and narrowly avoided censure at the UN Human Rights Council in September.

Amnesty International said that the commission acknowledged problems in Sri Lanka but ignored "serious evidence of war crimes, crimes against humanity and other violations of the laws of war."

confirm how Naharul was killed. BSF troops might have strangled him, he suspected.

At a flag meeting yesterday afternoon, BSF promised to return the body by today.

Meanwhile, Indian Home Minister P Chidambaram during his visit to Dhaka in July said New Delhi had ordered BSF not to shoot anyone crossing Indo-Bangladesh border, no matter whatever the circumstances were.

"Let me make it very clear....We have issued strict instructions to our border security forces that under no circumstances should they open fire on anyone trying to cross from either Bangladesh to India or India to Bangladesh. The message has gone down to the last jawan," he said at a joint press conference with his Bangladesh counterpart Shahara Khatun.

At a home secretary-level meeting in Dhaka in January, the issue was raised to draw New Delhi's urgent attention to this matter.

"On behalf of the government of India and myself, I deeply regret the deaths of Bangladeshi nationals," GK Pillai, Indian home secretary, told a joint press briefing.

"Our efforts would be to take all necessary steps so that no death takes place on Indo-Bangla borders and this is our commitment to you," he insisted.

The Bangladesh-India joint statement, made during Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's Dhaka tour in September, also expressed confidence that the Coordinated Border Management Plan would enhance cooperation between the border guards of the two neighbours and stop "loss of lives in the border areas."

Following repeated pleas from Dhaka, New Delhi agreed in March to equip the BSF troops with non-lethal weapons to stop killing of unarmed Bangladeshis.

"The BSF jawans will carry non-lethal arms in addition to the regular ones," BSF Director General Raman Srivastava announced on March 12.

The Daily Star could not reach Home Minister Shahara Khatun over the phone yesterday for her comments.

Contacted, Home Secretary Monzur Hossain only said, "The BGB chief has informed me about the killings."

Asked about Indian promises, a senior home ministry official said, "Bangladesh has been pressing India to stop firing at the borders. Dhaka has raised the issue at almost every bilateral meeting and the Indian side has assured us of taking steps in this regard. But nothing really happens in practice as the killing continues."

Poor porcupine

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Later, they took away the dead porcupine, said Halim, owner of a shop near the CU arts faculty.

Contacted, CU proctor Mohamad Nasim Hasan said he knew nothing about the incident.

Sources in CU said some people grow ginger in the hills of the campus. Porcupines often eat gingers and damage their farmlands and to stop that the farmers make traps to catch the animal.

Killing wild animals in CU is very frequent, which is posing a threat to the biodiversity of the campus, said Prof Benojir Ahmed, chairman of zoology department of CU. Nothing but raising awareness among people can stop the wanton hunting of wild animals, he added.

Sources say that because of its natural environment, the university campus is home to many animals of different species, including deer, monkey, wild hog, porcupine, rabbit, squirrel and birds.

The university is situated on 1753.88 acres of land. A combination of various kinds of trees, wildlife and insects has given the university a unique characteristic.

PCB's choice

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But the legality of the press release has been called into question since the PCB has surprisingly named AHM Mustafa Kamal as the candidate.

"We also today reaffirmed our support for nomination of Mr. Mustafa Kamal for ICC's Presidency," said PCB President Zaka Ashraf while speaking in the press meet.

The PCB is not the authority to name Kamal but can endorse only a candidate from Bangladesh.

The PCB has gone out of its way to name someone from Bangladesh, which it cannot do since the BCB is a sovereign organisation.

More importantly, Kamal's name has to be approved by the BCB first and that name will represent PCB and BCB. Since it hasn't been done yet, the incumbent must check his celebrations though he has already claimed victory.

"It is a matter of pride and a privilege to receive PCB's support on my nomination. I will try to live up to the expectations of not only the people of Bangladesh but for Pakistan as well and also the entire cricketing fraternity," were Kamal's words in the joint statement.

It was also informed in the press meet that Kamal's name had been decided in October this year though it was learned that both Kamal and Ashraf were called up by the ICC in November during which they were asked to reach a consensus on a name. If it was decided in October, then how come the ICC asked for the November discussions?

Another important point was the use of both boards' logos. Since the BCB hasn't approved Kamal as its choice, the legality of the press release can also be called into question.

It may also be mentioned here that there hasn't been any government-level discussions on the selection for the ICC role and with two names being talked about, the other being former BCB president Saber Hossain Chowdhury, it was a sly tactic used by a vested quarter.

Interestingly, the press meet was closed off after just two questions and none of them were concerning the way PCB just announced Kamal's name.

The onus is now on the BCB directors to make their selection.

Suspect Delwar

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Awami League.

After his arrest, Delwar was placed on 10 days' remand in connection with the killing and four more days for interrogation about the illegal arms. However, before his 10-day remand had finished Delwar gave his confessional statement.

Police claimed that during interrogation the suspect confessed to his involvement in the murder and alleged that town unit AL Treasurer Mobarak Hossain before leaving for Malaysia gave him the revolver recovered and 30 bullets, and a motorcycle for the murder.

According to sources, Nazmul Hasan Sharif, the alleged killer of Lokman, gave Delwar the revolver to hold onto it.

Armed criminals gunned down Lokman at the district AL office on November 1.

McKinsey sees

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formula. It predicts that the country's apparel exports will double by 2015 and nearly triple in 10 years. The future growth of RMG exports will require an additional 3.5 million workers by 2020. The report, prepared in collaboration with the Bangladesh German Chamber of Commerce and Industry and made available exclusively to The Daily Star, explores what it takes to be the next big destination for global buyers. The report also flags some challenges to the apparel industry. Bangladesh may miss the opportunity without overcoming those challenges. Watch out for the full report tomorrow.

Philippines Storm

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Cagayan de Oro city reported 215 dead, and nearby Iligan city lost 144 residents, Philippine National Red Cross secretary-general Gwen Pang told AFP.

Iligan mayor Lawrence Cruz described rampaging floodwaters from swollen rivers that swamped up to a quarter of the land area of the city of 100,000.

"It's the worst flood in the history of our city," Cruz told GMA television. "It happened so fast, at a time when people were fast asleep."

The station showed dramatic pictures of a family escaping out of the window of their home in the town as the floods rose, and rescue workers in orange vests shepherding survivors to safety above chest-deep waters.

"Most of them were asleep as floodwaters rushed down at 2:30am (1830 GMT Friday)," Benito Ramos, head of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council told

reporters in Manila, referring to the victims.

"They were warned (about the approaching storm), but they did not go into pre-emptive evacuation."

He said Mindanao was rarely visited by storms, although about 20 major storms strike the Philippines annually, with most hitting Luzon, the largest and most populous island in the Southeast Asian archipelago.

"We expect huge damage, especially on agriculture," Ramos said.

Iligan tourism officer Pat Noel told AFP waters began rising shortly before midnight (1600 GMT Friday) as people slept, sweeping houses made of light materials and their inhabitants along the riverbanks.

"Many of them told me they sought refuge on their rooftops," he said after joining the first wave of rescuers at daybreak.

Two of the three rivers that flow into the port of

Retirement age

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limit, clarifying when it would take effect, and whether those already gone into leave preparatory to retirement would get the benefit.

Experts and economists, however, have given mixed reaction to the government move.

Many experts said it is a good initiative if retirement age in other countries, and average life expectancy and work capability of Bangladeshis are taken into consideration. But some problems may arise in the first two years of its enforcement.

Retirement age of public servants was fixed at 57 after the country's independence when average life expectancy was 46 years. Civil servants have long been demanding extension of their retirement age as the average life expectancy has gone up to 67 years. However, the retirement age of judges is 67 years, while it is 65 years for teachers.

The retirement age of public servants is 62 years in India, Pakistan and the USA, and it is 65 years in the UK.

Cold wave

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The ferry service on Mawa-Kawrakandi route was suspended for six hours, leaving some 150 vehicles stranded in the middle of the Padma, while the ferry service between Paturia and Daulatdia was suspended for around 11 hours.

The weather has made it really tough for the homeless. In Dhaka they were seen searching for warm clothes and a warm place to kip for the night.

Many city dwellers stayed indoors for most part of the weekend.

Price of warm clothes in different city markets and roadside shops has shot up.

The Met office said a mild to moderate cold wave was sweeping over the country and that would continue today with the likelihood of easing off tomorrow.

The lowest temperature was recorded in Jessore, 6.0 degree Celsius, and the highest was in Cox's Bazar, 26.7 degree Celsius.

Dhaka's lowest temperature was 12.0 degree Celsius while the highest 19.3 degree Celsius, said an official of the Met office.

Many district administrations have arranged warm clothes and accommodation for the poor, while many districts sought financial help from the higher authorities.

Our Lalmonirhat correspondent reports: The cold weather claimed two elderly men in the district, one died yesterday and the other on Friday. The deceased were Rahim Uddin, 75, and Saber Ali, 82.

A total of 107 people with cold-related diseases have been admitted to different government hospitals in the district.

Akbar Ali Khan, former finance adviser to a caretaker government, said there are good and bad sides of extending the retirement age of public servants.

It is a good move considering the improvement in people's average life expectancy and health status.

However, it will squeeze scope for new recruitment and promotion in public services, he said.

M Hafizuddin Khan, another former adviser to a caretaker government, welcomed the move and said, "When we were in the caretaker government, we took such initiative but that could not be materialised."

It would benefit the state that would get more service from its experienced employees, he said.

The former adviser said it will not create obstacle to fresh recruitments in public services as the size of the administrative machinery has got bigger with the rise in population.

Zaid Bakht of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies said he sees no reason why retirement age of public servants cannot be

extended considering that judges and teachers already saw an increase in their retirement age.

He said some problems may arise in the first couple of years in case of fresh recruitment, but those would go away. The extension of retirement age could put a little pressure on the revenue budget for increase of salaries of employees at the higher echelon.

A high official of the public administration ministry said the number of government employees is more than 10 lakh. Nearly 50,000 to 60,000 government staff go into retirement every year, while about 45,000 fresh recruitments are made a year.

About one lakh appointments, including 38,000 primary school teachers, have been made this year. The number of recruitments may be less next year, added the official.

The government has long been considering extension of retirement age of public servants, and there have been strong lobbies for and against the move.

Illegal housing

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Star on December 15 that he would instruct Rajuk to immediately stop showcasing of unauthorised projects in the fair.

Meanwhile, Rajuk officials identified as many as 36 unauthorised housing projects of 30 companies being showcased in the fair that opened on December 15. They filed a complaint with Rehab seeking necessary actions.

Sheikh Abdul Mannan, a Rajuk official, said they could not go for a mobile court against the illegal projects, as the HC on December 5 issued a stay on mobile court.

Syeda Rizwana Hasan, executive director of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers' Association, however, said Rajuk could have easily prevented illegal projects from taking part in the fair without a mobile court under the Private Land Development and Management Law, 2004.

She said Rajuk could have served a general notification regarding illegal housing prior to the fair and asked Rehab to get the list of participants checked and endorsed.

Of the unapproved projects, two are owned by Nasrul Hamid Bipu, a ruling party lawmaker and also president of Rehab.

Pria Prangan, one of the two projects, had been declared illegal by the HC but put on display in the fair.

The lawmaker could not be contacted for his version, as his mobile phone was switched off.

The HC in its judgment banned advertisements of unauthorised housing projects in the print and electronic media and ordered the government to take stern legal action against publicity, earth filling and any activities under such projects.

3 Pakistani soldiers killed in explosion

AFP, Peshawar

Three Pakistani soldiers were killed yesterday after a bomb planted on a roadside exploded in a northwestern tribal area, security officials said.

The blast took place at Katsarai village in restive Kurram tribal district bordering Afghanistan where Pakistani army and paramilitary forces have launched an operation against Taliban militants.

Local intelligence officials suspect the involvement of Taliban militants in the attack.

Pakistan has for years battled homegrown insurgents in the tribal belt that borders Afghanistan. More than 3,000 soldiers have died but Pakistan has resisted US pressure to do more to eliminate havens used by Afghan insurgents.

Muggers kill

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To mourn the deaths, the university authorities suspended all classes and examination till Monday, Deputy Registrar Fazlur Rahman told The Daily Star.

At an emergency meeting in the evening with Vice Chancellor Dr Saleh Uddin, the university syndicate declared a 3-day mourning programme from yesterday which includes a procession on the campus at 11:00am today and a condolence meeting at the mini auditorium at 11:30am.

However, the admission process for first year honours classes from the waiting list and other administrative activities will remain open, the official added.

Earlier, students in protest demonstrated on Sylhet-Sunamganj road and kept vehicular movement suspended from 11:30am to 6:30pm. They also set fire to a bus and vandalised two CNG-run auto-rickshaws, police said.

Officer-in-Charge of Jalalabad Police Station Selim Hossain said a group of eight students went on a journey by an engine boat to Chenger Khal, a branch of river Surma, Friday afternoon. On way back, some alleged muggers got into their boat from another boat in Noakandi area.

As the muggers asked them to hand over their belongings, some of the students gave their mobile phones and money, but the others attempted to resist.

Three students jumped into the river to avoid attack. Of them, one managed to swim ashore while Khairul and Dipankar failed, the police officer added.

At one stage, the attackers left the scene when the rest of the students went back to campus and informed the authorities about the matter. On information, local police and firefighters conducted a search in the area around 11:00pm on Friday but failed to find them due to prevailing darkness.

Local fishermen found the body of Dipankar around 7:30am yesterday in Chenger Khal. Khairul's body was found three and a half hours later at the same place, said Selim.

Police arrested two locals including boatman Gulzar Miah and its owner Atique Miah, said the officer.

Prof Akhtarul Islam Chowdhury, head of chemical engineering and polymer science department, said the group had seven students and a cousin of Dipankar.

To look into the matter, the authorities formed a three-member committee with Prof Zafar Iqbal as its chief and gave it two days to submit report, the vice chancellor announced in the afternoon when the students were demonstrating at the university's main gate.

The other members of the probe committee are Prof Hasanuzzaman Shyamal and Sayon Chakravarty of economics department.

Sylhet city Mayor Badar Uddin Ahmed Kamran, lawmaker Shafiqur Rahman Chowdhury and Deputy Commissioner of Sylhet Metropolitan Police Ejaz Ahmed also addressed the agitating students and assured them of trying their best to nab the killers.