

Clashes kill 2 near Egypt-Libya border

Two people were killed during clashes between residents of an Egyptian town close to the Libyan border and security forces, security officials told AFP yesterday.

Residents of Sallum in western Egypt on Tuesday night blocked the main motorway heading to Libya to protest security restrictions on cross-border traffic and increased tariffs for lorries.

The move prompted security forces to intervene, leading to clashes that left two dead and four people injured, officials said.

By yesterday morning, dozens of Sallum residents again blocked the motorway to Libya, allowing access only to Libyan families returning home, the official said.

Relief after

quake of 8.2 magnitude happened just over two hours later.

There had been no immediate reports of damage or casualties.

However, meteorology experts, after analysing the data, ruled out any possibility of tsunami in Bangladesh before the international agencies formally withdrew it.

According to the warning of PTWC and JMA, the coastal areas of Chittagong could have experienced a tsunami wave at 10:51 last night on the aftermath of the quakes.

Immediately after the declaration of the alert, panic gripped the people of char areas in Cox's Bazar and they started to leave their houses.

The Civil Aviation Authorities suspended flight operations and all other activities at Shah Amanat International Airport in Chittagong while the Chittagong Port Authority asked to keep all the vessels anchored.

The flight operations resumed at the airport after 8:00pm last night soon after the tsunami alert was withdrawn.

"According to the PTWC and Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Service (INCOIS) there is no tsunami threat for Bangladesh coast," a statement of the met office said.

The earthquakes that occurred beneath the sea were dead, experts said.

Prof Syed Humayun Akhter said, "There is no chance of tsunami this time as the displacement in the sea floor was horizontal, and it did not affect the water column in the sea."

Prof Humayun, director of the Earthquake Observatory Centre of Dhaka University and a teacher of geology department, said it was a preliminary alert.

Sensing the quake, many people in the capital left their offices and homes in panic and ran into the streets.

B a n g l a d e s h Meteorological Department asked all related agencies especially government officials of the coastal districts and upazila headquarters to be watchful from 3:00 pm to last midnight for the sake of safety of the coastal people.

According to the PTWC, the earthquakes of this size had the potential to generate a widespread destructive tsunami that can affect coastlines across the entire Indian Ocean basin.

The level of ground shaking of the earthquake was 324 on Modified Mercalli Intensity (MMI) scale in Bangladesh, said Prof Humayun, reports UNB.

"The tsunami route is east-west. Bangladesh is situated in the north of Indonesia. So, Bangladesh will remain safe from tsunami," he said.

Our correspondents in Cox's Bazar, Chittagong, Gopalganj, Barisal districts report of chaotic scenes as panic-stricken people rushed to the streets soon after they felt the quakes.

The Armed Forces Division said army, navy and air force installations particularly in Chittagong and Cox's Bazar were asked to get prepared to launch rescue campaigns in line with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's directives, reports BSS.

The control room of the disaster management ministry in a release yesterday said they were monitoring the situation in every hour.

We were on way

FROM PAGE 1
told The Daily Star yesterday.

The minister, however, refuted the claim.

Railway's Dhaka division Security Commandant Enamul Huq, one of the four persons who were detained by the Border Guard Bangladesh personnel at Pilkhana with the money, claimed yesterday he did not know that railway General Manager (East) Yusuf Ali Mridha and railway minister's APS Omar Faruq Talukder were going to Suranjit's house with the money.

"I came to know about the money when microbus driver Ali Azam drove into the Pilkhana headquarters around 11:30pm, screaming that there was illegal money in the vehicle," he told The Daily Star at his office yesterday.

Sources say the driver might have created the scene as he was refused Tk 5 lakh as a share of the amount.

After the scandal came to light on Tuesday, Suranjit told reporters he was unaware of the movement of the four, saying he was not supposed to know their whereabouts after office hours.

The Daily Star tried to talk to the four persons, but could reach only Enamul Huq at his Kamalapur Railway Station office.

Yusuf Ali Mridha was neither found at his Railway Officers' Staff Quarters residence nor did he receive calls despite repeated attempts.

The cell phones of the minister's APS and his driver were found switched off.

Maj Gen Anwar Hossain, BGB director general, on Tuesday told The Daily Star that his force had freed all the four detainees.

But Enamul yesterday said the BGB men still had Ali Azam, the driver, in their custody.

"As the driver was not released, another person called by the minister's APS drove us out of the border guard headquarters," he said.

This paper has made repeated attempts to contact a number of BGB officials to verify Enamul's statement but none of the border officials took any call.

Reports suggest that Suranjit had asked the BGB authorities over the phone to release the four detainees.

Asked, the minister told

Fake DB police

FROM PAGE 20
him in a microbus under the Khilgaon flyover at about 11:30pm on Tuesday. They said they were Detective Branch of police and accused him of peddling cannabis (ganja), local people quoted Nannu as saying.

Holding him hostage at gunpoint, the criminals took away Tk 80,000 and his mobile phone. They then tied his hands and legs and gagged him. After driving around the area for some time, they pushed him off the vehicle around 12:30am at Khilgaon C Block.

Iqbal Ahmed Sohel, one of the rescuers, who works in an insurance company and lives near the C block, told The Daily Star that he had been at a family function. After the function, he along with some 10 others was bidding farewell to the guests when they heard someone groaning.

Searching for the source of the sound, they saw Nannu who could hardly breathe as his face was covered with tape. They shouted for help and many people rushed to the spot in response.

They removed the scotch tape and freed his hands and legs. Nannu then gave the mobile phone numbers of his wife and his colleagues.

Nannu, who sells products of Indian company Dabur, said he had collected the money from different shops at Khilgaon Talota Market and had been looking for a rickshaw to go home when purported DB policemen picked him up.

Officer-in-Charge of Khilgaon Police Station Sirajul Islam said nobody had informed them of such incident and no case had been filed.

Putin served the last four years as prime minister after emerging as Russia's undisputed number one in his 2000-2008 two terms as president, after which he temporarily handed the Kremlin to his protégé Dmitry Medvedev.

Putin earmarked Russia's number one priority as reversing its post-Soviet population decline which has created worries about its ability to keep sustainable populations in its far-flung Siberia and Far East regions.

journalists after a meeting at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban yesterday that the newsmen were making it up.

ENAMULHUQ'S VERSION: According to Enamul, he got involved in the incident as Yusuf Ali Mridha asked him to go to the minister's house that night.

"First, we reached a house at Dhanmondi-3 by the car of the general manager [Yusuf Ali]. I waited in the car as the GM entered the house. About an hour later, the GM and the APS [Omar Faruq] came down and asked me to leave the car and get into the microbus of the APS," said Enamul.

"We arrived near Pilkhana around 11:30pm, and the driver drove the vehicle into the BGB headquarters through gate No 4."

"At one stage, the driver asked the BGB men to detain the GM and the APS, as he screamed there was illegal money in the vehicle," Enamul said.

"At this, Omar Faruq told the driver and the BGB men that there was no illegal money and that it was his money. He [Faruq] said his relatives gave him the money for business and for his sister's marriage," Enamul added.

Following arguments for around 40 minutes, some BGB personnel approached the microbus and took the keys.

"The BGB men kept us in a room in Pilkhana [on Monday night] and on Tuesday they freed three of us after verifying our identities but kept the driver detained," he said.

Replying to a query, Enamul said none intercepted them to know their identities when the driver drove the microbus into Pilkhana.

It may be mentioned that the BGB headquarters is heavily guarded and it is quite impossible for outsiders to enter it without the BGB members checking their identities.

Putin calls for unity to build strong Russia

AFP, Moscow
President-elect Vladimir Putin yesterday called on Russians to unite to build a strong Russia with a booming population and economy after overcoming economic crisis and a tense election period.

After winning the March presidential election despite an outburst of protests against his rule, Putin in a speech to parliament outlined his vision for Russia's future as he prepares to return to the Kremlin for a six-year mandate.

Putin told the State Duma lower house of parliament that the 2008-2009 economic crisis was so serious it could have endangered Russia's sovereignty but boasted that the country had now fully recovered under his rule.

He said that not only had Russia now "made a serious, significant, notable step forward. We became stronger than we were before."

But he said it was now time for all forces to work together after the turbulence of the election period that saw the opposition hold up to 100,000-strong rallies in protest at what they said were rigged poll.

"We only have one Russia, and her modern development must be the goal that unites all the political forces of the country who want to work on this aim," he said.

Putin served the last four years as prime minister after emerging as Russia's undisputed number one in his 2000-2008 two terms as president, after which he temporarily handed the Kremlin to his protégé Dmitry Medvedev.

Putin earmarked Russia's number one priority as reversing its post-Soviet population decline which has created worries about its ability to keep sustainable populations in its far-flung Siberia and Far East regions.

Tsunami

FROM PAGE 1
The alerts caused panic as people fled buildings and made for high ground. There have been no immediate reports of damage or casualties.

India, Thailand and Sri Lanka have also lifted their own tsunami warnings.

The US Geological Survey (USGS), which documents quakes worldwide, said the first Aceh quake was centred at a depth of 33km, about 495km from Banda Aceh, the provincial capital.

It was initially reported as 8.9 magnitude but was later revised down to 8.6 by the USGS. Quake officials said a tsunami had been generated and was heading for the coast of Aceh.

The BBC's Karishma Vaswani in Jakarta says there were reports of the ground shaking for up to five minutes.

A PTWC alert said that sea level readings indicated a tsunami was generated and that it "may already have been destructive along some coasts," without specifying where.

A Thai disaster official said a 10cm wave had been recorded on Koh Miang island, off Phang Nga.

Earlier, Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono said the authorities were remaining "vigilant", despite the lack of tsunami reports.

"Our warning system is working well, and I have ordered the national relief team to fly immediately to Aceh to ensure the situation is under control and to take any necessary action," he said.

A few hours later, the PTWC renewed its warning after a major aftershock measuring 8.2 struck 16km beneath the ocean floor and 615km from Banda Aceh.

An AFP correspondent in Banda Aceh said the second aftershock lasted four minutes.

The PTWC issues advisory alerts across the region, which state authorities can use to issue their own emergency procedures. Indonesia straddles the Pacific Ring of Fire, a zone of major seismic activity.

Sutopo, a spokesman for Indonesia's disaster mitigation agency, said electricity had been cut in Aceh and there were traffic jams to access higher ground.

"Sirens and Koran recitals from mosques are everywhere," he told Reuters.

Tremors were felt as far away as Singapore, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Bangladesh and India. The French island of Reunion was also on alert.

Along the eastern coast of Africa, Kenya and Tanzania issued their own tsunami warnings.

"There was a tremor felt by all of us working in the building," a man called Vincent in Calcutta, India, told the BBC.

"All just ran out of the building and people were asked not to use the elevator. There was a minute of chaos where all started ringing up to their family and asking about their well-being."

The AFP correspondent said he saw the water recede around 10 metres (33 feet) -- a strong sign that a tsunami is approaching -- and that residents were relieved when a one-metre wave came and went, causing little bother.

Tsunami warning sirens, set up in many vulnerable areas after the 2004 disaster, were heard in Phuket, Thailand, where correspondents said people were calmly following evacuation routes to safe zones.

Roger Musson, a seismologist from the British Geological Survey, said the quakes were unlike those seen off Indonesia in recent years, where ground had been pushed under the continental plate, "flipping up" the seabed.

"It seems to be a large earthquake within the Indian Plate and the plate has broken in a sort of lateral way," he said.

"It's a sort of tearing earthquake, and this is much less likely to cause a tsunami because it's not displacing large volumes of water."

The region is regularly hit by earthquakes. The Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 killed 170,000 people in Aceh alone and some 250,000 around the region.



Rab arrested two train-drivers, yesterday afternoon, for stealing fuel and selling them on the black market, near Amnura Railway Station in Chapainawabganj. PHOTO: STAR

Suranjit comes under fire

FROM PAGE 1
for the prime minister to return from Turkey and tell them what to do about the scandal.

Meanwhile, the opposition BNP demanded the minister's resignation while the parliamentary body launched a probe into the ministry's handling of tenders over the last three years.

However, the money found in the car is believed to be bribes from railway job seekers.

With Suranjit's assistant personal secretary Omar Faruq Talukder, Railway's General Manager (East) Yusuf Ali Mridha and Divisional Commandant Enamul Huq on board, driver Ali Azam of Faruq's car drove the vehicle into the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) headquarters in the capital around 11:30pm Monday and stopped.

When guards at the gate rushed towards the vehicle as it had entered the BGB headquarters without authorisation, the driver told them there was bribe money stashed in the car. The guards discovered Tk 70 lakh in the car and they detained the four.

The BGB personnel wanted to hand them over to police but police refused to receive them, saying there was no case filed against them. Faruq, Yusuf and Enamul were eventually released but the driver is said to be still in BGB custody.

The Daily Star failed to reach the driver for comments despite repeated attempts on his two mobile phones.

Meanwhile, BNP acting secretary general Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir during a demonstration in the capital against price hike of essentials called for Suranjit's resignation. He said the minister should shoulder the responsibilities of what has happened, reported UNB.

Suranjit, clearly on the back foot, told the press at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban yesterday that he had asked Faruq and Yusuf not to come to work until further notice.

"This was unwarranted," Suranjit said, adding, "In a country like ours, this kind of incidents has happened before. This incident has created problems for me. I will face it."

When the press asked if he had suspended them, he was rather vague and said, "You can think like that if you want."

However, after the seizure of the money the minister had told a press briefing at Rail Bhaban that Faruq and Yusuf would continue work since they had not been proved guilty of any wrongdoing. He even denied that Enamul was in the car.

Late last night, Suranjit's personal secretary sent a letter to the secretary of the ministry informing him of Faruq's suspension from yesterday morning.

The Daily Star could not reach Suranjit for comments.

Sources in the railway said Rail Sramik League, ministers, lawmakers, ruling party leaders and a section of corrupt railway officials were taking bribes from job seekers. The railway ministry recently started recruitment of 7,500 people.

A senior railway official on condition of anonymity said, "Tk 2 lakh to 5 lakh is being taken from each candidate."

During the meeting of the parliamentary body on the

railway ministry at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban yesterday, a number of lawmakers came down heavily on the minister over the issue. They even questioned how an APS has a lawmaker's sticker on his personal car.

The parliamentary body yesterday formed a five-member sub-committee headed by lawmaker Shah Alam to probe alleged irregularities in awarding contracts under the ministry's various projects in the last three years.

BNP MP Rehana Akhter Ranu, a member of the parliamentary body, demanded that the government form a judicial probe committee to investigate the source and destination of the money found. She said Suranjit must resign for the sake of impartial investigation.

Rehana said, "We believe the minister's APS and a general manager of railway were taking the money to him [Suranjit], which was bribe in exchange for jobs in the ministry."

Other members, including a ruling party lawmaker, of the standing committee asked the minister about the alleged corruption in recruiting employees in the ministry.

Suranjit, also a member of the parliamentary body, said such incident was unexpected and he would place the enquiry reports of the two probe committees before the parliamentary body and take actions as per the parliamentary committee's directives.

Suranjit refused Rehana's demand for a judicial probe.

Talking to The Daily Star, several railway officials and employees said the three--Faruq, Mirdha and Enamul--should have been suspended immediately and an independent investigation body should have been formed.

Joint secretary (administration) of the railway ministry Shashi Bhushan Singha was assigned to investigate the involvement of Mirdha while minister's Personal Secretary Akhtaruzzaman was probing the involvement of Faruq.

"How can the minister's PS be assigned to investigate such an incident since the two work together?" an official told The Daily Star at Railway Bhaban yesterday. The officer said an official of the ministry could not probe irregularities of another official of the same ministry.

Yet another official suspected that proper investigation would not be possible by the probe committees. "Officials of other ministries could have easily been engaged in the probe," the official said, requesting anonymity.

Another official said, "There are allegations that many of us are chor [thieves]. This is the proof of that."

The official said if Railway's General Manager (East) Yusuf Ali Mridha was properly quizzed, everything would be revealed since he knows everything.

Meanwhile, the Railway Bhaban yesterday looked almost no senior officials came to work.

gation against ministers in the past, but now the graft watchdog will probe," he said, addressing the concluding ceremony of a training programme for newly-appointed 28 ACC assistant directors, reports UNB.

The ACC chairman also said the commission would also conduct an investigation into the allegations of corruption in the Padma bridge project and against Destiny-2000 Ltd.

GOVT, ALEM BARRASSED
The government and the ruling Awami League were embarrassed by the incident, The Daily Star found out after talking to several leaders and ministers.

However, none agreed to go on the record.

"It is really embarrassing for the government and the party at this time [at the fag end of the government's tenure]," said a minister requesting not to be named. "It is a very sensitive matter..."

The minister said they would discuss the matter with the prime minister upon her return from Turkey on Saturday.

Highly placed government sources said that before her departure for Turkey, the prime minister had asked Suranjit to suspend his APS immediately.

Awami League Deputy Office Secretary Mrinal Kanti Das, however, said there might be a conspiracy behind the incident. It could have been staged to disgrace the government.

US sues Apple, others in e-book antitrust suit

AFP, Washington
The US Justice Department is filing an antitrust suit against Apple and publishers alleging they conspired to curb competition over e-book pricing, the Wall Street Journal reported yesterday.

The Justice Department scheduled an announcement for noon (1600 GMT) on a "significant antitrust matter," according to a statement, which had no details.

According to the report, the lawsuit alleges Apple and the major book publishers reached an agreement where retail price competition would cease, retail e-book prices would increase significantly and Apple would be guaranteed a 30 percent commission on each e-book sold.

The daily said a settlement involving some of the publishers is expected to be filed, according to a person familiar with the matter.

Prior to the introduction of Apple's iPad in April 2010, online retail giant Amazon, maker of the Kindle e-book reader, sold electronic versions of many new best sellers for \$9.99.

But Apple forced a change in pricing for e-books when the iPad emerged as a rival e-book reading platform, moving publishers to a so-called "agency model" which calls for them to set book prices and for Apple to take a 30 percent cut.

European antitrust officials announced in December they were conducting a probe into Apple and the five publishers to determine whether they had struck illegal deals to fix the prices of e-books in Europe.

2 drivers

FROM PAGE 20
barrels of diesel to smugglers. The Rab team caught the duo red handed and seized 200 litres of diesel, said Rab sources.

The arrestees are driver Shahnoor Alam, 65, and assistant driver Abdur Rakib, 45.

Rab sources said, acting on secret information that a gang of unscrupulous railway employees was stealing fuel to sell on the black market, they launched a drive and arrested the offenders. However, the smugglers managed to flee.

Law amended

FROM PAGE 20
to another tribunal, whenever it considers such transfer is just and convenient for proper dispensation of justice and expeditious disposal."

After a case is transferred, the tribunal which tries the case will proceed from the point at which it was transferred, according to the press release.

Two tribunals have been formed so far under the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act 1973 for disposal of the cases relating to crimes against humanity committed during the Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971.

The first tribunal which was formed on March 25, 2010 is currently dealing with eight cases while the second tribunal was formed on March 22 this year to expedite the war crimes trial.

The government has moved to amend the act, since it had no provision earlier for cases to be transferred from one tribunal to another.

Rights boss

FROM PAGE 1
"The persons under vigilance can flee the country only with your [law enforcers] assistance. It has been told that he fled away. But he did not. Rather he was sent abroad with proper care," Prof Mizanur Rahman said at a seminar in the city.

"It is our apprehension that he could not cross the country's border without someone's help," said the NHRC chief while addressing the discussion on rights of Dalit communities at Cirdap auditorium.

On Monday, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) officials said Bachchu Rajakar slipped into India through Dinajpur border on April 2. He left Dhaka on March 30.

The prosecution of the International Crimes Tribunal-1 dealing with the war crimes committed during the Liberation War in 1971 sought an arrest warrant against Azad on March 25 following which Bachchu Razakar was under watch of the law enforcement personnel.

The tribunal issued the warrant on April 3.

Talking to reporters after the seminar, the rights body chief said, "Since the members of our law enforcement agencies know all information in detail, it was expected that strict vigilance would be there. But, he ran away dodging everyone!"

"How can a person escape when he remains under such vigilance?" Prof Mizanur wondered.

"It is possible only in Bangladesh. Here murders are taking place frequently, and later those are labelled as suicides," he said.

Regarding the home minister's remark that assistance of the Interpol would be sought to bring Bachchu Razakar back, the NHRC chief said, "Interpol can only locate a person, but it cannot send the absconding person back. It needs bilateral relations [with the corresponding country] to bring someone back from abroad."

About the NHRC's investigation over the killings of six alleged muggers in Narsingdi by Rab, Prof Mizanur said a full-commission meeting will be held on April 18 to decide on the matter.

Talking about the delay in investigation of the murder of journalist couple, he said, "We hope there has been positive progress [in the investigation]."