

Wave of attacks rock Afghanistan

Taliban's spring offensive on Kabul diplomatic zone forces lockdown

AFP, Kabul

Explosions and gunfire rocked the Afghan capital Kabul yesterday as suicide bombers struck across Afghanistan in coordinated attacks claimed by Taliban insurgents as the start of a spring offensive.

The German and Japanese embassy compounds were reported hit as militants attacked the city's diplomatic enclave and tried to storm parliament -- sparking a gunbattle in which lawmakers and bodyguards fired back from the rooftop.

MP Mohammad Naeem Lalai told AFP lawmakers joined the security forces in firing on militants as they tried to storm the parliament, which was in session.

The presidential palace went into lockdown and President Hamid Karzai was moved to a safe area, an aide said.

The embassies of the United States and Britain were also targeted, the spokesman for Nato's International Security Assistance Force, General Carsten Jacobson, said.



Afghan police run towards the scene of attacks in Kabul yesterday.

Outside the capital, militants attacked government buildings in Logar province, the airport in Jalalabad, and a police facility in the town of Gardez in Paktya province.

The attacks will raise fears over the precarious security situation in Afghanistan as Nato prepares to withdraw combat troops by the end

of 2014. At least three attackers were killed in Kabul, and three others died when they detonated their car-bomb in Jalalabad -- injuring several people -- officials and police said, as fighting continued.

Militants were still launching rocket propelled grenades and exchanging fire

with security forces as evening fell, an AFP reporter at the scene in Kabul's embassy enclaves said.

"The Kabul administration and the invading forces had said some time ago that the Taliban will not be able to launch a spring offensive. Today's attacks were the start of our spring offensive," said Zabihullah Mujahid, the Taliban spokesman.

A spokesman for Nato's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) told AFP that Afghan forces, whose ability to withstand the Taliban after 2014 has been questioned, were taking the lead in countering the assaults on Kabul.

But the latest in a series of spectacular attacks shows militants still have the ability to strike at the heart of the capital.

In September last year Taliban attacks targeting locations including the US embassy and headquarters of foreign troops in Kabul killed at least 14 during a 19-hour siege. And in August, nine people were killed when suicide bombers attacked the British Council cultural centre.

IRAN NUKE TALKS Constructive discussions held in Turkey

BBC ONLINE

The first discussions between Iran and six world powers on Tehran's nuclear programme ended on a positive note, Western officials said yesterday.

But some diplomats said there was still a long way to go, and specific actions were needed from Iran.

The talks in Istanbul on Saturday were the first for 15 months. The next round will take place in Baghdad on 23 May.

The European Union's foreign policy chief, Catherine Ashton, described the talks as "constructive and useful".

Speaking at the end of the talks between the six countries -- the US, UK, France, China, Russia and Germany -- and Iran, Baroness Ashton said that future discussions would be guided by the "principle of a step-by-step approach and reciprocity".

UN approves Syria monitor mission

AFP, Damascus

The UN Security Council on Saturday unanimously approved sending a 30-person advance mission of unarmed military observers to monitor the ceasefire established Thursday.

A UN peacekeeping spokesman said the first five or six UN ceasefire monitors were expected in Syria yesterday. The remaining 25 will arrive in the coming days, he added.

The Security Council approved the advance party but must agree on a new resolution to send the full monitoring mission, which would include at least 200 monitors under plans set out by UN-Arab League envoy Kofi Annan.

China and Russia, which raised earlier reservations over the Western-drafted text, both backed the vote, ensuring passage of the first Security Council resolution on Syria since the uprising erupted in March 2011.

Meanwhile, testing a shaky UN-backed ceasefire, Syrian forces yesterday reportedly killed four civilians in shelling of rebel areas and clashes with gunmen.

Forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad subjected the Khaldiyeh and Bayada neighbourhoods of the flashpoint central city of Homs killing one civilian.

Another was killed in shelling of the Jobar neighbourhood, and a third was shot dead by a sniper in Qsour.

With clashes warming up and both sides blaming each other for the violence, shabiha pro-regime militiamen also shot dead a civilian in the town of Aqgrab, in the central province of Hama. Clashes were also in Aleppo, Idlib.

Thirty-two people have been killed since the ceasefire brokered by UN-Arab League peace envoy Kofi Annan took effect, most of them civilians, the Observatory said.

100 YEARS AFTER TRAGEDY World remembers Titanic victims

AFP, Belfast

Wreaths were cast at sea and a memorial garden was unveiled yesterday in events worldwide to remember the more than 1,500 people who died in the sinking of the Titanic ocean liner exactly a century ago.

In Belfast, the city that built the Titanic, a memorial garden containing the first-ever monument to contain all the victims' names was unveiled during a commemorative service attended by about 300 members of the public.

It is the first time the names of everyone who died has been recorded on one monument. Many existing memorials failed to include the Titanic crew or its musicians.

There is no distinction between first-class passengers and others, with names simply listed in alphabetical order.

Earlier, wreaths were thrown into the Atlantic at the site of the wreck from MS Balmoral, a cruise ship that has traced the doomed liner's route across the ocean, while people also held a minute's silence.

The Titanic went down after hitting an iceberg about 800 kilometers southeast of Halifax.



A girl pays tribute to the victims who died in the Titanic tragedy before a memorial monument in Belfast, Ireland.

Ocampo pulls out from WB race

AFP, Washington

Colombia's Jose Antonio Ocampo withdrew Friday from the race to lead the World Bank, endorsing Nigerian Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala's challenge against the favoured US candidate, Colombian media reported.

But that likely did little to influence the probable choice next week of US health expert Jim Yong Kim to be the powerful development bank's next president, especially after Russia broke ranks with other emerging economies to endorse Kim.

In a statement published by Colombian media, Ocampo, a former Colombian finance minister, blasted the selection process as a "political exercise" unrelated to candidate merits.

He said he would give his support to Nigerian finance minister and Bank veteran Okonjo-Iweala "to facilitate the desired unity of the emerging and developing economies around one candidate."

Egypt bars candidates from presidential vote

AFP, Cairo

Egypt's election commission said on Saturday that ex-spy chief Omar Suleiman, Muslim Brotherhood candidate Khairat al-Shater and Salafist politician Hazem Abu Ismail are among 10 candidates barred from running for president.

Commission official Tarek Abul Atta told AFP that Suleiman had been disqualified because he failed to get endorsements from 15 provinces as per law.

Although the decision was expected by some it threatens to create an upheaval on the political scene, less than six weeks from the election, which is due to, take place May 23 and 24.

The Muslim Brotherhood -- which last week announced a second candidate, Mohammed Morsi, in case the first one was disqualified, said it too will appeal the commission's decision, state-run MENA news agency reported.

3 cases may go

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against Jamaat-e-Islami leaders Abdul Quader Mollah, Muhammad Kamaruzzaman and former BNP lawmaker Abdul Alim to Tribunal-2.

The three are facing charges of crimes against humanity committed during the Liberation War of 1971.

Tribunal-1, however, fixed today for hearing the petitions.

Tribunal-2 was set up last month to speed up disposal of cases filed in connection with war crimes and on April 11 an amendment to International Crimes (Tribunals) Act 1973 was made through an ordinance so that cases could be transferred from one tribunal to another.

Tribunal-1, formed on March 25, 2010, was dealing with eight cases against six Jamaat-e-Islami and two BNP leaders. Tribunal-2 was dealing with just one case filed against Maulana Abul Kalam Azad.

Chief Prosecutor Tipoo yesterday told the media that the petitions were filed to expedite the ongoing trials

against the accused.

If a case is transferred, the tribunal receiving the case would resume trial from where the other tribunal left off, he said.

Hearing on charge framing against Quader Mollah and Kamaruzzaman was pending with Tribunal-1.

The prosecution had submitted its argument supporting the formal charges against the two Jamaat assistant secretaries general. The defence was supposed to place its arguments today.

The prosecution submitted seven counts of crimes against humanity against Quader Mollah and eight counts against Kamaruzzaman.

Tribunal-1 has taken into cognisance the war crimes charges brought against former BNP lawmaker Abdul Alim on March 27 and directed the prosecution to place the charges against him on April 24. He is facing 74 counts of crimes against humanity committed during the Liberation War.

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Southeast University is one of the fastest growing private universities in Bangladesh with current enrollment of over 12,000 students. The University invites applications for the following full-time faculty positions from eligible candidates:

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Assistant Professor	Ph.D with excellent academic background Or Master's Degree with 4 years of university teaching experience and at least 4 publications in reputed journals.
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