

France to begin Afghan pullout next month

AFP, Kabul

President Francois Hollande said Saturday France will begin its Afghanistan pullout next month and complete it by year-end, after four French troops were killed in a Taliban attack.

Hollande said France would pay a "national homage" to the men killed in a suicide bombing and that five wounded soldiers would be repatriated rapidly.

France's defence minister arrived in Afghanistan yesterday.

Shortly after touching down, Defence Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian attended a ceremony to honour the dead soldiers, whose coffins -- draped in flags -- were at Kabul's heavily fortified military airport.

Details of Le Drian's full programme in Afghanistan have not been released but he is expected to address French troops and meet Afghan government officials.

Saturday's attack by a burqa-clad Taliban suicide bomber was the first fatal strike against the French since Francois

Hollande took office as president last month.

Hollande said the withdrawal of French troops from Afghanistan, one of his presidential campaign pledges, "will begin in the month of July, will be carried out and be completed at the end of 2012."

"In the meantime, everything must be done for our troops to meet their obligations but with the highest level of security and with the greatest vigilance for the lives of the soldiers.

"I am making this engagement here and I will be the guarantor for this operation," Hollande said in the central town of Tulle, where he was to attend a commemoration of the massacre of civilians by the Nazis on June 9, 1944.

He added that the attack "does not change anything, it neither accelerates nor delays" withdrawal plans.

Some 3,500 French soldiers are deployed in Afghanistan, mainly in Kabul and in Kapisa, the fifth largest contingent in Nato's 130,000-strong US-led force.



Ethnic Rakhine demonstrators and Buddhist monks hold signs as they gather at the Shwedagon pagoda after unrest flared in the western Myanmar state and at least seven people were killed, in Yangon yesterday. Myanmar on June 10 imposed a curfew in the Rakhine state capital Sittwe, state media reported, amid fears of further unrest following deadly sectarian rioting between Buddhists and Muslims.

PHOTO: AFP

My life is under threat: Fonseka

IANS, Colombo

Former Sri Lankan army chief Sarath Fonseka, who was recently released from prison, yesterday said his life is under threat and he needs to be provided with tighter security.

The country's first four-star general said he has been provided with a security contingent by the government but it was not enough, Xinhua reported.

Police said the former army chief has been provided with 15 officers from the Ministerial Security Division following a request by Fonseka's associates.

However, Fonseka said he was not satisfied with the security, and he needs more based on threats he faces.

Fonseka led the army against the Tamil Tigers during the final years of the three-decade-long civil war that resulted in the defeat of the rebels in May 2009.

Congress ship is sinking

Says Modi

PTI, Rajkot

Sharpening his attack on the UPA government, Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi yesterday said it has disappointed people as a result of scams, corruption and rising prices and taunted it for not realising that the "Congress ship is sinking".

Modi also expressed confidence that the BJP will retain power and emerge triumphant in the Assembly elections in Gujarat due in the end of the year.

Modi also accused Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of misguiding the people of the country by claiming to have achieved 7 per cent GDP growth, which has come down to 5 per cent this quarter.

The government in Delhi does not know that there was a "hole in the ship", he said, adding the "Congress ship is sinking" as it has hurt and miscalculated human power.

"There is no chance for Congress to survive," Modi said and asked how the party which is struggling can give stability to the nation.

Saudi Prince keen

FROM PAGE 20

The Prince has big investments in energy, tourism and infrastructure development sectors in different countries and "we sought similar investment in Bangladesh," she added.

Elaborating on the offers made to Prince Talal, she said, among other areas "we have offered to establish a complete special tourist zone, which would have shopping malls and all other facilities, and requested him to invest in tourism sector."

A team from Dhaka will soon visit Riyadh. "We will properly follow up the investment projects with the Saudi Prince aiming to attract the investment opportunities in Bangladesh," the foreign minister said.

While briefing newsmen, Prime Minister's Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad said the premier has invited investment from Saudi Arabia, and this

could happen under government-to-government, public-private partnership or joint ventures.

Hasina asked the Saudi Prince to recruit more Bangladeshi doctors, engineers, paramedics, nurses, IT specialists, accountants, skilled and semi-skilled workers in its new projects.

She also urged him to remove restrictions on recruitment of certain categories of workers.

In response, the Saudi Prince lauded the role of Bangladeshi workers engaged in different sectors in Saudi Arabia, saying that his country might consider recruitment of more workers in near future.

Dipu Moni also told reporters that the Saudi Prince credited Bangladeshi workers for being hard-working and also for their high level of integrity and honesty.

On a question, the foreign minister said the Saudi Prince did not make any concrete promise of investment in any specific sector, but nodded to make investments in the prospective sectors such as tourism and infrastructure.

The Saudi Prince, who arrived here on a four-hour visit, highly appreciated Bangladesh's steady economic growth despite global economic meltdown.

Hasina also highlighted her government's successes in the fields of education, agriculture, health, women empowerment and social safety net during the meeting.

Ambassador-at-Large Mohammad Ziauddin, Foreign Secretary Mijarul Quayes, Bangladesh Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Md Shahidul Islam, among others, were present at the meeting.

Later, the Saudi Prince paid a courtesy call on

Sangsad regrets

FROM PAGE 1

misleading news items in some newspapers and some unparliamentary words were used [by some MPs in the discussion]. I sincerely regret it on behalf of the Jatiya Sangsad."

Treasury bench lawmakers welcomed the ruling by thumping desks.

The Speaker urged legislators, intellectuals, civil society members and the general people regardless of their political affiliation to uphold the dignity of the House.

"Everyone should refrain from publishing such news and making such comments which undermine the dignity of parliament," he said, adding, "There may be good and bad people in every profession. So it is not appropriate to make sweeping remarks."

On June 3, a number of ruling alliance MPs in parliament launched a blistering attack on Prof Sayeed for his reported remarks about MPs and ministers. Independent MP Fazlul Azim piloted the attack in which Awami League MP Sheikh Fazlul

Karim Selim and Jatiya Party lawmaker Mujib ul-Haque Chunnu also joined.

Citing news reports, they alleged that Prof Sayeed had told a programme of Transparency International Bangladesh on June 2 that lawmakers and ministers act like "thieves and robbers". They also demanded that the House take action against Prof Sayeed.

Ali Ashraf, who was presiding over the sitting then in absence of the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker, even demanded that Sayeed apologise to the House.

The attack on Prof Sayeed sparked uproars and drew huge criticism.

Later, The Daily Star and some other newspapers published in details what the noted litterateur had actually said.

Prof Sayeed, founder of Biswa Sahitya Kendra, had said it was not corruption when a thief stole. But when a man, who pledged to follow ethics and rule of law, indulges in stealing it is corruption.

As an example, he said

when a minister or a lawmaker who took an oath to act in a fair and ethical manner failed to do so, it "is corruption".

In his ruling, the Speaker said TIB's Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman on June 4 sent the transcript of Prof Sayeed's speech in the programme and a compact audio disk of the programme.

"I read the transcript and listened to the CD," the Speaker said, adding, "It seems to me that there is no consistency between the reports published in [some] newspapers and his actual speech. He did not make any remarks that ministers and MPs do not have ethics."

The Speaker said the reports were baseless. The readers were misled by the baseless reports and the matter was discussed in the House.

"Those newspapers published the reports without checking the authenticity, and it has demonstrated lack of responsibility. I hope those newspapers will act responsibly in future and publish news after checking

the authenticity of the news."

Hamid, however, defended the MPs who criticised Prof Sayeed and said the lawmakers spoke on the basis of newspaper reports.

"As elected public representatives it is the moral duty of the MPs to protect and maintain the dignity of the House. I think they spoke from this sense of responsibility and proposed taking steps to avert recurrence of such incidents in future," Hamid, a seasoned MP, said.

He said democracy and the media complement each other. Media flourishes if democracy remains functional. Therefore, the media people are to work with responsibility for democracy to flourish and for the welfare of the people and the country.

"Media people have to be more cautious in publishing reports. They should keep in mind that publishing baseless, imaginary and motivated news reports may mislead people and may bring misfortune to the country and the people," he

Fahmeed in grand finale

FROM PAGE 20

very shy person, Fahmeed had to overcome his stage fright as well as topper nearly one lakh spellers to make it to the top six.

"I was always confident that I'd go far in the competition but now that I've made it to the top six, it feels like an achievement. It feels good to be counted," he says.

But he knows that the competition is far from over.

"I've family and friends always cheering me on. My ten-year-old sister always tells me I'll win it, so that means a lot," he adds.

"My father would come back from work and ask me how many new words I've learnt and my mother would always encourage me to read books, which I actually love doing and also to practise the Spellato," Fahmeed says. He had always been a

strong contestant in the competition thus far passing the first round and the Divisional Round with flying colours. But his highlight of the competition came in the Quarter Finals where he scored highest with 140.

"I think that was the best part of the competition for me so far. No one came close to my score in the Quarter Finals, so that certainly felt good," he says.

Even though Fahmeed has reached the top six without breaking a sweat, he adds that there is an element of luck involved in the

process. "Some of the words that I got during the Quarter Finals were words that I knew. But in my opinion, others had to spell some comparatively difficult ones. It's just my luck I guess," he admits.

Fahmeed was in general very complimentary of the TV crew as well as the pronouncer Imtiaz Nawsher. "I think in general he's a very good pronouncer and he's also very friendly and supportive off screen. However I do think he gets some of the pronunciations slightly wrong at times, but it's

almost like the way he says the words, he makes it easier to spell," Fahmeed adds.

When compared to the Spelling Bees held elsewhere, he rated the Bangladeshi version of the Spelling Bee a seven out of ten. "It's just the very first time [of the Spelling Bee] and it'll certainly get better in the next years. It's still a great start, in my opinion," he adds.

Fahmeed's consistently impressive performances in the tournament so far make him a favourite in the Grand Finale.

No hope of top

FROM PAGE 1

Their counsels yesterday filed petitions seeking withdrawal of the production warrants. The court set June 14 for hearing the petitions.

In the petitions, a counsel for the accused, Taherul Islam Towhid said his clients had already been bailed in the case filed for two bomb explosions at Bangladesh Secretariat but that would not be effective until the production warrants were withdrawn.

Meanwhile, Jatiyatabadi Ainjibi Forum has announced demonstration programmes for June 13 in protest at the production warrants for the opposition leaders. On that day black flags will be hoisted at all the Bar Association buildings across the country.

The opposition leaders accused in the blast case secured anticipatory bails on May 14 from the High Court.

According to the law, the bails will be effective until the court accepts the charge sheet against the accused.

The production warrants, asking the jail authorities to produce them before it on July 26 when the court will decide whether to accept the charge sheet.

The case was filed with Shahbagh Police Station against 28 leaders of the 18-party alliance in connection with the bomb explosions during hartal hours on April 29.

The 29 charge sheeted accused in the blast case also obtained bail on June 7 in another case filed for torching of a vehicle near the Prime Minister's Office on the hartal day.

CONFERENCE Pro-BNP lawyers yesterday at a press conference at South Hall of the Supreme Court Bar Association demanded that the production warrants be withdrawn so the opposition leaders get released from jail.

Rafiqul Islam Miah, president of Jatiyatabadi Ainjibi Forum, a body of pro-BNP lawyers, said at the programme that the court had issued the production warrants to nullify the bail order.

The production warrants were illegal, unprecedented, unexpected and unjust, he added.

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We are looking for: qualified and experienced teachers of English. Preferably with the CELTA qualification who have some previous teacher training experience - however, this is not essential as an understanding of how to motivate and manage learners is more important. You should also be able to demonstrate an awareness of the challenges facing teachers in Bangladesh and have some ideas how to help them.

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An orientation event is planned for early July; training will take place throughout July & August. **Dead line 30 June 2012**