

# Syria regime advances in battle wracked Aleppo

AFP, Aleppo

Regime forces yesterday strafed rebel-held districts in Aleppo with helicopter gun ships and pounded them with shelling on the third day of a pitched battle for Syria's commercial capital.

The fighting has sent some 200,000 civilians fleeing the northern city, according to the UN, which warned of a looming humanitarian catastrophe, while France said it would call an urgent UN Security Council meeting on Syria.

The head of the UN observer mission inside Syria said he was deeply concerned by the violence from both sides in Aleppo. He said he personally had witnessed heavy shelling of Homs, Syria's third largest city, during a field visit Sunday.

The army's offensive in Aleppo was focused on Salaheddin district in the southwest, a stronghold of the rebel Free Syrian Army, made up of deserters and armed civilians, said the Syrian Revolution General Commission.

The army said later that it had overrun Salaheddin, although the rebels denied the claim.

But Colonel Abdel Jabbar al-Oqaidi, head of the Free Syrian Army military council for Aleppo, insisted government troops had "not progressed



Syrian rebel fighters celebrate on top of a tank captured by the Syrian government forces at a checkpoint in Aleppo yesterday.

one metre (yard)," and that the rebels still controlled "between 35 and 40 percent of Aleppo."

Inside the embattled district, whole streets and buildings were damaged, and electricity cables dangled between them, an AFP correspondent reported.

While battles raged nearby, about 200 people waited in a queue to buy their daily bread from a rebel-controlled bakery.

In contested neighbourhoods, rebels

appeared to have taken a defensive position, guarding them against attack by troops.

AFP correspondent said that the rebels captured seven tanks and armoured vehicles, and destroyed an eighth vehicle.

Excluding Aleppo, where casualty figures were difficult to confirm amid the fierce fighting, 39 people were killed in violence on Monday -- 11 civilians, 14 troops and 14 rebels, the Britain-based Observatory said.

UN humanitarian chief Valerie Amos said an estimated 200,000 people had fled from Aleppo in two days and that an unknown number were still trapped in the city.

Meanwhile, Syria's top diplomat in London resigned yesterday in protest against the "violent and oppressive" acts of President Bashar al-Assad's regime, the British Foreign Office said.

The move comes after a series of defections by senior Syrian officials in recent weeks, including diplomats in several countries and top army officers.

The Foreign Office said in a statement that charge d'affaires Khaled al-Ayoubi had informed it that he had "left his post", describing it as a blow to the Syrian government.

# Aleppo assault 'nail in Assad's coffin'

Says Leon Panetta

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH ONLINE

US Defence Secretary Leon Panetta has warned Syrian President Bashar al-Assad that the assault on his own population in Aleppo will be a nail in his coffin.

Fighting raged on the second day of a fierce government offensive, as the United Nations said 200,000 civilians had fled and many were trapped after Assad deployed tanks and attack helicopters to try to dislodge the rebels.

The Syrian opposition says government forces are preparing to carry out "massacres" and is pleading the international community to provide heavy weapons to enable rebels to meet the regime onslaught.

"It's pretty clear that Aleppo is another tragic example of the kind of indiscriminate violence that the Assad regime has committed against its own people," Panetta told reporters on a military plane en route to Tunisia on Sunday.

"And in many ways, if they continue this kind



of tragic attack on their own people in Aleppo, I think ultimately it will be a nail in Assad's coffin," he said.

"He's just assuring that the Assad regime will come to an end by virtue of the kind of violence they're committing against their own people."

According to Panetta, Assad has "lost a legitimacy, and the more violence he engages in the more he makes the case that the regime is coming to an end".

It's no longer a question of whether the regime will fall, it's when, he added.

More than 20,000 people have been killed, including 14,000 civilians, since the uprising against Assad's rule erupted in March 2011, according to the British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

"The United States and the international community have made very clear that this is intolerable, and have brought diplomatic and economic pressure on Syria to stop this kind of violence, to have Assad step down and to transition to a democratic form of government," Panetta said.

# S Korea wins right to mine under Indian Ocean

AFP, Seoul

South Korea yesterday said it has won the exclusive right to exploit a deep-sea mine in the Indian Ocean that could produce more than \$300 million worth of minerals a year.

The 10,000-square kilometre site contains hydrothermal vents that could yield metals including gold, silver, copper, zinc and lead, the maritime ministry said in a statement.

The general assembly of the International Seabed Authority last Friday voted to give Seoul the exclusive right to develop the area -- around 2,500 kilometres southwest of Sri Lanka -- from 2013 to 2027, it said.

# Mamun

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the Anti-Corruption Commission adjudging the conviction against him illegal.

The court also acquitted Mamun's wife Shahina Yeasmin, who was sentenced to three years' imprisonment in the same case.

Earlier on March 27, 2008, a special court had sentenced Mamun, a close aide to BNP leader Tarique Rahman, 10 years and his wife to three years of rigorous imprisonment in the case filed on charge of amassing wealth worth Tk 111.3 crore illegally.

The HC bench of Justice A K M Asaduzzaman and Justice Abu Taher Md Saifur Rahman delivered the verdict following two separate appeals filed by Mamun and his wife.

The court acquitted Mamun off the charges, as Delwar Hossain, former secretary of ACC who had issued a notification to Mamun on February 18, 2007, asking for his wealth statement, was not authorised to do so.

The conviction against Mamun was proven illegal as the corruption case filed against him was based on that illegal notice, the court said.

The court also acquitted Shahina Yeasmin on grounds of implicating her in the case without issuing any notification, said Shah Monjurul Hoque, the counsel for Mamun and his wife.

"Mamun, who is currently in jail, can't be released following yesterday's HC verdict, as he is accused in other cases," he said, adding, "Shahina was released on bail."

Mamun filed the appeal against his conviction with the HC in 2008, while Yasmin filed the appeal in 2010.

Barrister Rafique-ul Huq appeared for Mamun and his wife, while Khurshid Alam Khan argued for ACC.

"The ACC would now issue fresh notice to Mamun and his wife, asking them to submit their wealth statements," Khurshid Alam Khan told The Daily Star.

He said they would also move an appeal before the Supreme Court against the HC verdict.

# No hope of early solution NSI official hid

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(ret'd) Nurunnabi Bir Bikram--to the representatives of Buet Teachers Association with a proposal.

According to the proposal, the government is ready to remove the pro-VC and the agitating teachers should withdraw their movement, sources said.

The teachers, however, declined to accept the proposal, saying that the removal of both the VC and pro-VC was the only answer to the crisis, sources added.

Following the filing of a writ petition with the High Court on Sunday afternoon, president and general secretary of Buet Teachers' Association went to Syed Abul Maksud's residence on Sunday midnight and reiterated that they would firmly stick to their demands.

However, the government high-ups are unhappy with the teachers' association's stance as they think the solution to the crisis would have been made earlier had the teachers accepted the govern-

ment's earlier call and withdrew their agitations.

Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid yesterday sat with senior officials of his ministry and the UGC to reach a possible solution to the crisis.

Education Secretary Kamal Abdul Naser Chowdhury, UGC Chairman Prof AK Azad Chowdhury and State Minister for Science and Technology Yeafesh Osman attended the meeting at the ministry's conference room.

Emerging from the meeting, Nahid said, "We have made some decisions at the meeting regarding the Buet crisis but we cannot disclose them as those were internal ones."

The minister also said the highest person of the state was involved with the issue and he would take a decision after consulting with the prime minister.

"We are trying our best to solve the Buet crisis and will talk to the prime minister about the latest situation soon," he said, calling upon the teachers to return to their

academic activities.

Buet Teachers' Association, which is spearheading the movement, at its emergency general meeting yesterday welcomed the government's initiative to resolve the crisis.

"We hope the education ministry will discuss with the premier soon to resolve the crisis through talks," said Prof Mujibur Rahman, the association chief, after the meeting.

He said they will continue their two-hour long sit-in and will hold a meeting again on next Monday. "We will continue our peaceful movement until our demands are met."

Regarding their en masse resignation, he said they had earlier postponed their decision to resign en masse.

"We will cancel our decision to resign en masse if the situation becomes favourable," said Prof Mujibur.

The anti-VC agitation began on July 11 after the authorities shut the institution for 44 days in advance for Ramadan and Eid-ul-Fitr.

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never saw him again for next five years.

Helal also said he arrested five people at the jetty of Chittagong Urea Fertiliser Ltd where the arms and ammo were being offloaded and sent them to Bandar police outpost.

He later came to know the arrestees were released at the dictat of the then state minister for home Lutfozzaman Babar.

"The then deputy commissioner [DC] of port zone Abdullah Hel Baki, after a discussion with the Chittagong Metropolitan Police commissioner following former state minister Babar's order, released the five," he said.

Judge SM Mujibur Rahman of Metropolitan Special Tribunal-1, Chittagong started recording Helal's deposition at 12:15pm and completed it at 3:15pm with a

one-hour break.

Helal told the court he along with Sergeant Alauddin after they were arrested in a case were brought to Chittagong central jail from Noakhali jail in May 2006 for submitting deposition as witnesses in the cases.

His legs, one was broken, were chained all through the way to Chittagong. Both the colleagues were taken to a Chittagong court on the same vehicle along with the accused in the cases. They made their deposition before the court on May 22-23, 2005.

Helal said he was on duty at Koiler Depot police outpost on April 2, 2004. He got an instruction from the then DC Baki through walkie-talkie at 12:10am to go to the CUFL jetty and assist Sergeant Alauddin there. On his arrival at the jetty he saw

cartons were being offloaded from two trawlers berthed at the jetty to trucks by a crane.

He met Alauddin who informed him that the goods were arms and ammunition. They looked for the owners of the goods and suddenly two persons turned up introducing themselves as Hafizur Rahman and Ulfa leader Abul Hossain.

"I had already arrested five people as suspected smugglers and sent them to Bandar police outpost with the help of Havildar Golam Rasul," said Helal.

DC Baki arrived at the outpost at 2:30am when Helal and Alauddin took Abul Hossain there, he added.

He said Abul Hossain and the DC had a brief conversation and it seemed Abul Hossain was putting pressure on the DC to release the arms.

"Noticing Abul Hossain's gestures and behaviour I thought he was not an ordi-

nary person. I realised he was member of any government agency," Helal said.

"After the conversation DC Baki came to me and asked me whether anyone was arrested or not. I informed him about the five arrestees," said the witness.

Helal said he did not see Abul Hossain at the spot any more following the conversation.

He added he and Alauddin on June 24, 2009 finally identified Abul Hossain as Maj Liakat among 15 to 20 accused during a TI (Test Identification) parade inside Chittagong jail in presence of Metropolitan Magistrate Mahbubur Rahman.

Advocate Mohammad Ahasan, lawyer of Maj (ret'd) Liakat, started cross-examining the witness at 3:20pm but the court was adjourned ten minutes later.

The cross-examination is set to resume today.

# Blackout hits

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The cut severely disrupted transport networks as around 300 passenger trains ground to a halt, requiring the deployment of diesel engines to pull them to safety, railways officials said.

In New Delhi, metro services started up an hour late and were operating at only 25 percent capacity for most of the morning, while traffic lights also went down causing snarls and lengthy tailbacks in the early rush hour.

Major hospitals and airports in the region were able to function normally on emergency back-up power, officials said.

"As soon as there was a disruption, all our essential services like flight arrivals and departures, and check-in were shifted to our back-

up system," a spokesman at New Delhi's international airport said.

The Delhi water board said the capital's seven water treatment plants were shut down by the blackout, but five were back in operation by mid-morning.

The northern grid covers a vast region that is home to 28 percent of India's 1.2 billion population, and includes the states of Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.

"It is an accident, a failure," Shinde, the federal power minister, told reporters, adding that a special committee was being set up to probe the precise trigger for the blackout.

The Press Trust of India said initial suspicions had

focused on problems at a sub-station in the Taj Mahal city of Agra that might have tripped the rest of the grid.

But Delhi Power Minister Haroon Yusuf blamed neighbouring states for over-drawing electricity.

According to the Power System Operation Corp. (PSOC), which manages the northern grid, 100 percent power had been restored to New Delhi as of 1:00 pm and 70 percent to the rest of the affected region.

The grid would be back at full capacity by the evening, said PSOC spokesman SK Soonee.

Limited power outages are extremely common across India, which runs a peak-hour power deficit of around 12 percent, leading to constant load-shedding.

# Crime goes unchecked

FROM PAGE 1

Gulshan to Pallabi via Mahakhali.

The aggressive youths on standby on the street, none of them beyond the ages of sixteen to eighteen, dragged one of the passengers out of the vehicle and on to the pavement. The passenger was soon being beaten with a thick steel pipe. As if that were not enough, he was also pounded with bricks. But that was not all. Unable to pull out another passenger from the hauler, two angry youths pounced on him mercilessly inside the vehicle.

As the beating went on, in all the manifestations of medieval barbarity, the goons loudly abused the victims, calling them thieves, obviously to deflect attention from the truth. The two young victims, badly injured on their hands, legs, backs, heads and shoulders, were left in this shabby state. Of course, some of the passengers on the human hauler

and passers-by tried resisting the attackers, but it did not amount to much.

Leaving all the passengers behind, the driver of the human hauler (Dhaka Metro 11-1888) sped away with the vehicle towards Pallabi.

One of the victims could not talk at all as he was in severe pain. The other said that they had had a quarrel earlier with the conductor of the hauler. Though the vehicle was supposed to ply non-stop, the conductor kept calling for passengers at the Mahakhali bus stoppage. The two men protested and engaged in a serious altercation with the driver and the conductor.

"So they called their friends over phone to beat us up," he said, and alleged that in the course of the beating the goons also robbed them of their cell phones and money.

A Rab-4 petrol car stopped nearby, took a look at the crowd and slowly drove away. Later this correspon-

dent talked with Rab officials and informed them of the incident.

But the senior officer in the Rab vehicle said it was not their business to wade into such an incident. It was rather a matter for the traffic sergeant to deal with. He advised this correspondent to pass on the information to the traffic sergeant on duty.

The correspondent spotted the traffic sergeant talking to the hauler driver and then, to his amazement, simply let him go.

When asked over telephone later, he lamely explained that he had not been informed of the beating incident. However, said sergeant Al Mamun, he had stopped that hauler and lodged a case against it as it was driving in a rough manner and creating traffic congestion!

"I would have apprehended the vehicle if I had known about the beating," he said.

# DCC official

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Administrator Jillar Rahman and Communications Minister Obaidul Quader.

As the bus driver made attempts to drive the bus out of the ditch, people and transport workers gathered around the two and vented their anger at Jillar. Utility service providers have been digging trenches along the two sides of the roads from Gulistan to Jatrabari for over two months to relocate the utility lines. The relocation has been done on some portions of the roads, but the city corporation is yet to take any step to make the repairs.

Jillar had not made any effort to fill the ditches with sand, leaders of transport workers said, yelling at him. The DSCC

administrator then left the place, saying nothing in his defence.

Quader, after visiting the roads between Jatrabari and Kanchpur, said commuters in the areas had been suffering a lot because of the ditches dug by four utility service providers. He hoped the DSCC would repair the roads before the Eid vacation.

He also said the DSCC administrator had informed him that all the utility service providers-- Titas gas transmission and distribution company, Dhaka water supply and sewerage authority, Dhaka power distribution company and Bangladesh Telecommunications Company Ltd-- would complete their tasks by today.

The roads at Jatrabari had also been damaged

due to the ongoing construction of the Jatrabari-Gulistan flyover, the minister said, adding, however, that the area was not under the communication ministry.

Chief Engineer of DSCC Jahangir Alam said there was no way to drain water from the road near a fish wholesale market in Jatrabari and that was why the authorities could not start the repair work. Water remained stagnant as a market was being constructed, filling in a portion of Kutubkhali canal nearby, he added.

As a temporary solution, the roads would be repaired with brick chips within three to four days to reduce the sufferings of commuters, Jahangir said.

The condition of roads

under the communication ministry is much better now than it was earlier, Quader noted. Road conditions would be improved and people will not face much difficulty in their journey to their village homes before Eid, he said, adding mobile units of the Roads and Highways Department had been working round the clock to repair ditches and potholes on highways across the country.

Acknowledging his failure to reduce traffic congestion and road accidents, the minister said coordination among the communication ministry, police, district administrations, local governments and highway police was needed to find a way out of the problem.

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