

ASSAM RIOTS Five killed in fresh violence

PTI, Guwahati

After a calm of ten days fresh violence broke out in parts of lower Assam claiming five lives and pushing the overall toll to 61 yesterday.

Three bodies bearing bullet wounds were found in Chirang and two from Kokrajhar district, where one person is reported missing, police said.

Chirang Superintendent of Police Kumar Sanjiv Krishna said the three - father and his two sons - had left the camp for displaced persons at Kawatika village of Chirang district in the afternoon yesterday and their bodies were found today.

Tension prevails in Chirang districts following recovery of the bodies and there are reports of minority community protesting on the streets against the death of the three men.

All-out assault looms on Aleppo

Syria regime declares Damascus cleansed; Iranian 'pilgrims' taken hostage

AFP, Near Aleppo

The Syrian army pounded rebel positions in second city Aleppo yesterday ahead of a threatened ground assault after boasting its capture of the last rebel-held district of the capital.

More than 20,000 Syrian troops are massed around Aleppo, military sources said, as fighting rages for control of the country's second city.

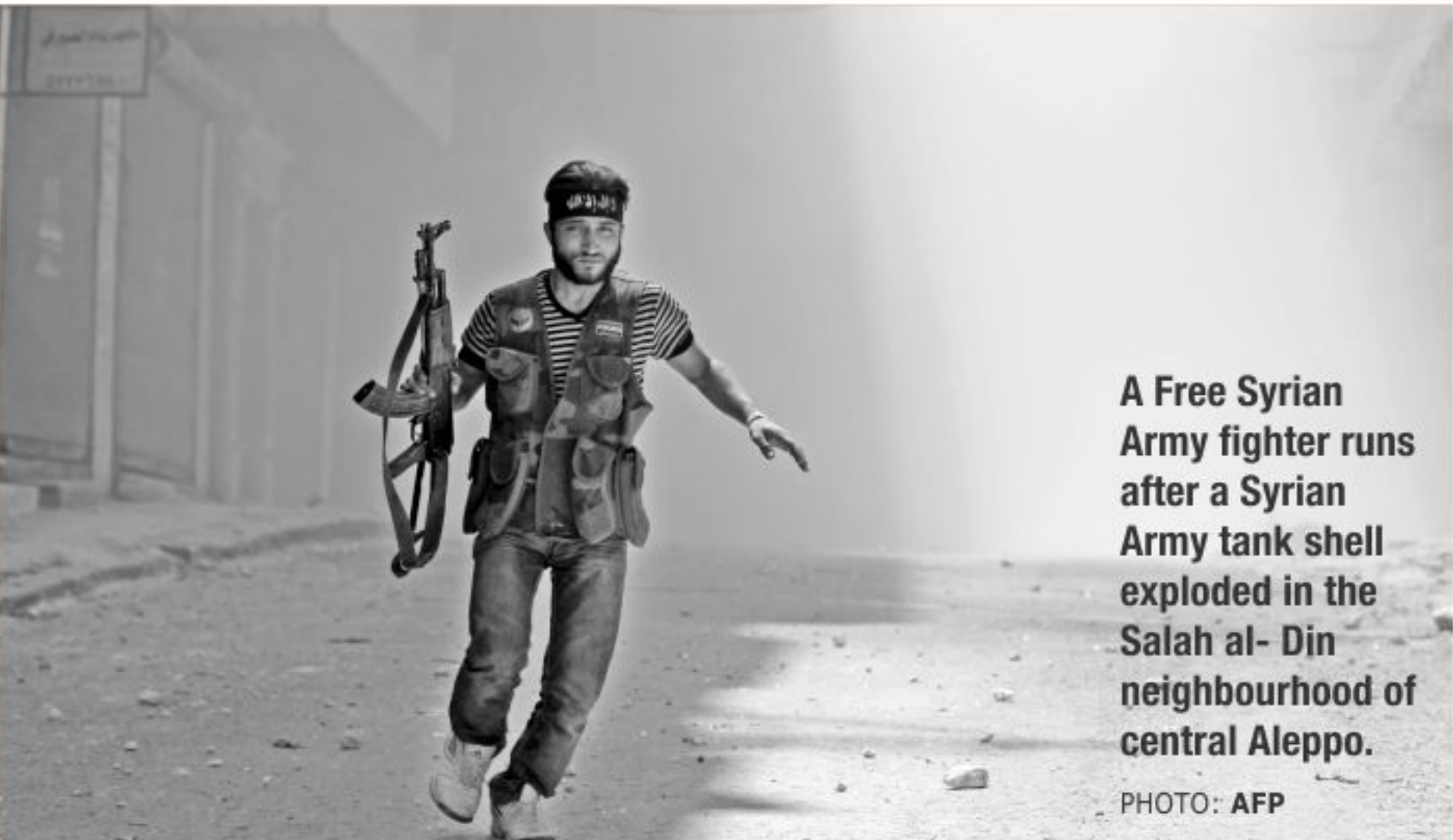
Fighter jets, helicopters and artillery have pounded rebel positions ahead of a feared full-scale assault within days.

Meanwhile, Iran is seeking the release of 48 Iranians kidnapped on Saturday.

Iranian diplomats and Syrian state television blamed the abduction, which took place near the shrine of Sayyida Zainab in a suburb of Damascus, on "armed groups".

Iran has now asked Turkey and Qatar, both of whom have good relations with the Syrian opposition, to help win the release of the Iranians who it says are pilgrims.

Rebels yesterday claimed that some of those taken were members of Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards, according to al-



A Free Syrian Army fighter runs after a Syrian Army tank shell exploded in the Salah al-Din neighbourhood of central Aleppo.

PHOTO: AFP

Arabiya television.

Tehran, Damascus's key regional ally, has repeatedly denied it has sent any military units to Syria.

A high-level security source said the army yesterday completed its deployment of

reinforcements to Aleppo, ready for a decisive showdown.

"All the reinforcements have arrived and they are surrounding the city," he said. "The army is ready to launch its offensive, but is awaiting orders."

VIOLENCE IN MYANMAR UN envoy calls for truth commission

AFP, Yangon

A United Nations envoy called Saturday for the establishment of a "truth commission" into decades of human rights abuses in Myanmar to augment its ongoing transition to democracy.

A nationwide probe led by parliament into allegations of the abuse of dissidents and ethnic groups locked in conflict with the state is key to healing long-standing rifts, UN Special Rapporteur Tomas Ojea Quintana said.

Speaking at the end of visit to the former army-ruled state, Quintana urged Myanmar's quasi-civilian government to heal festering wounds as the country steps out of the shadow of five

PALESTINE STATEHOOD BID

Israel bars envoys, Nam meet cancelled

STAR REPORT

A key meeting of Non-Aligned Movement (Nam) ministers which was to have taken place in the West Bank yesterday was cancelled after Israel denied several of them entry, officials said.

The ministers were to have attended a two-day meeting of the movement's Palestine Committee in Ramallah at which they were poised to sign a declaration in support of a fresh Palestinian bid for upgraded UN membership.

The cancellation came shortly after Israel barred ministers from Malaysia, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Cuba and Algeria from travelling to Ramallah.

A senior Israeli official said the ban targeted five countries which have no diplomatic relations with the Jewish state, reports AFP.

"A decision has been taken to bar the

diplomatic representatives of several countries which do not recognise Israel from crossing the Israeli borders," he told AFP on condition of anonymity.

Foreign ministers from the 13 countries on Nam's Palestine Committee were to have signed the so-called "Ramallah Declaration" supporting a Palestinian bid to upgrade their UN status from observer to non-member state.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh foreign ministry officials expressed their surprise over the news item as Foreign Minister Dipu Moni had no programme in any foreign country, reports our diplomatic correspondent.

Dipu Moni had attended the International Conference on People's Empowerment and Development in Dhaka yesterday, a close aide to the foreign minister told The Daily Star.

'Qaeda' blast kills 45 in Yemen

AFP, Aden

A suicide bombing in south Yemen blamed on al-Qaeda killed 45 people, local officials said yesterday, as residents voiced fears that a lack of security personnel on the ground will allow the jihadists to return.

In the east of the country, meanwhile, a suspected US drone strike late on Saturday killed five al-Qaeda militants, a local official said.

The bomber struck on Saturday in Jaar, one of a string of towns in Abyan province that were retaken by government troops in June after being held by al-Qaeda loyalists for more than a year.

The deputy head of Jaar's municipal authority held the government at least partially responsible for the attack because of its slowness in deploying police to the town after its recapture by the army.

The United States has recently stepped up its strikes on al-Qaeda targets in the south and east of Yemen.

US worried at govt action

FROM PAGE 1

for the bank.

"The United States is deeply concerned about recent actions the Government of Bangladesh has taken to give the government-appointed chairman of the Grameen Bank Board control over the selection of the bank's new managing director," Patrick Ventrell, acting deputy spokesperson, Office of Press Relations of US Department of State, said in a statement.

This move would diminish the role the largely female borrower-shareholders play in shaping the direction of an institution that has made a difference to millions of impoverished women in Bangladesh, and indeed around the world, read the statement issued in Washington DC.

During her May visit to Dhaka, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton urged Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Foreign Minister Dipu Moni to take no actions that would undermine Grameen Bank, it said.

"We are concerned that the latest actions by the government could threaten the future of the bank, which

was founded by Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus.

"We call on the Government of Bangladesh to respect the integrity, effectiveness, and independence of Grameen Bank. We urge the Bangladeshi Government to ensure transparency in the selection of a new managing director who has unquestioned integrity, competence, and dedication to preserving Grameen Bank, its unique governance structure, and its effectiveness in bringing development and hope to 8.3 million of Bangladesh's most vulnerable citizens, mostly women."

The cabinet in a meeting on Thursday approved a proposal for amending an ordinance to give more powers to the Grameen Bank chairman to choose the managing director of the microlender.

STOP INTERFERING IN GB, URGES SENATOR BOXER

US Senator Barbara Boxer has called on the Bangladesh government to stop interfering in the management of Grameen Bank.

"I am deeply disappointed in the Bangladesh government's efforts to exert control over Grameen Bank," she said in a statement issued in

Washington DC on Friday.

"This move threatens the ability of millions of Bangladeshi women to find a path out of poverty. Critical decisions regarding the Grameen Bank's leadership should be left to the Board of Directors so that the bank can continue its vital work helping Bangladeshis start businesses and provide for their families."

Grameen Bank is an important institution that provides loans and other assistance to 8.3 million borrowers, mostly women, said Senator Boxer.

She asked the government to stop interfering, so the borrowers can gain financial independence and help support their families.

The US senator argued that the Bank's Board of Directors, which includes nine women elected by the Bank's shareholders, should be empowered to appoint a permanent individual to the position of managing director.

On June 27, Boxer led the 17 women of the US senate in writing to Hasina, urging her to allow the Bank's Board of Directors to appoint the chief executive.

Faulty, old launches

FROM PAGE 20

MV Sussor-2 were among the 15 that received notices.

"These launches have faults either in their engines, bodies or hulls. Without repairs, we will not renew their fitness certificates. In many cases, minor faults can also cause major accidents. No launch will be allowed to ply without fitness certificate," said Shahdat.

Aiming to cash in on the Eid rush, these launches are getting repairs done hastily, with the possibility of errors and weakness remaining, viewed some workers of the docks.

Visiting several docks in Keraniganj, it was noticed that several hundred workers were busy repairing and repainting vessels in a hurry as the owners directed them

to complete the job within the shortest possible time.

"We are burdened with huge workload. We will have to complete the job within the next one week..." said Monir Hossain, a welder who was working on MV Shahidut that plies between Dhaka and Hularhat.

"We are trying our best but there may be mistakes or errors due to the rush because I am a human being," said Monir.

Department of Shipping Director General Commodore Jobair Ahmad said, "I know that before Eid some launches, whose fitness certificates have expired or those that have faults, start hectic repairs to get their fitness certificates because of the demand for vessels.

"But I have directed surveyors and inspectors to inspect vessels properly and not give fitness certificates until a launch is 100 percent okay," said the director general.

Many launch staff claimed that they repair and refurbish their launches before Eid as part of their regular maintenance activities, to renew their fitness certificates and to attract passengers during the Eid rush.

Hara Kumar Das, manager of MV Lali, said, "Before every Eid we repair our vessel. We have already applied for fitness certificate. We hope to get it after repairs."

In previous years, it was noticed that unfit, unregistered and overloaded vessels operated on the country's rivers

and accidents happened.

MV Koko-4 on November 27, 2009, sank in Bhola due to overloading that took the lives of 77 and over 100 went missing. Unfit launch ML Raipura sank on May 17, 2005, in the Jamuna near Aricha killing 100 people.

According to statistics of Green Club of Bangladesh, a non-government organisation, at least 2,404 passengers were killed and 703 still remain missing in 411 accidents between 2002 and 2011.

However, the government statistics claimed that 1,544 were killed and 211 remain missing in 265 accidents during the same period.

Around 8 lakh people leave the capital in the last 7 days of Ramadan through Sadarghat Launch Terminal,

POWER STRUGGLE IN EGYPT

Morsi plays down row, defends army

AP, Cairo

Egypt's President Mohammed Morsi on Saturday gave a lengthy speech to the army in praise of its role during the run-up to his election, proclaiming that he, his government and the powerful generals will cooperate for the future.

Speaking with the head of the armed forces, Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi by his side, and hundreds of troops including generals in the audience, Morsi stressed his legitimacy as Egypt's first popularly elected president, but also acknowledged that his ascension to the office would have been impossible without the military's support.

The words signaled an understanding between him and the army, after initial tensions during Egypt's transition period since the ouster of Hosni Mubarak, himself a former air force commander who led the country for three decades.

Just days before Morsi was declared president, the military council, headed by Tantawi, stripped him of significant powers and declared themselves as the country's legislative authority after dissolving a parliament dominated by Morsi's Islamist Muslim Brotherhood movement.

The military, which took the reins of power after Mubarak was deposed in a popular uprising in early 2011, also has control over the process of drafting Egypt's new constitution.

But Morsi largely avoided those issues in the Saturday speech, focusing on the military's support for the election of a civilian president.

"The will of the people will never be against the armed forces," he said, in a thinly veiled reference to his own office. "It is with the armed forces' help, after God, that we will protect Egypt's interest internally and internationally."

He also said the armed forces remain a "cornerstone" in Egypt's relations with the international community, and a factor for the country's political and economic stability.

"This president is the supreme head of the armed forces because of the will of the people. I will not allow anyone to offend the armed forces or this nation, or try to obstruct this

Kurd rebels kill 22 in Turkey attack

AFP, Ankara

Kurdish rebels stormed a Turkish army post on the Iraq border yesterday, triggering fighting that killed 22 people in the latest clash since Ankara launched a major offensive against the outlawed PKK.

Six soldiers, two village guards and 14 Kurdish rebels were killed following the assault on an army post in a village in the southeastern province of Hakkari, the local governor told the Anatolia news agency.

Three of the slain rebels were women, said governor Orhan Alimoglu.

It was the deadliest clash since June when fighting between Turkish soldiers and Kurdish rebels left 28 people dead following a similar attack on an army post in the same region.

NEWS IN brief

Trinamool to attend UPA lunch

IANS, Kolkata

In a bid to repair the strained ties with Congress, the Trinamool Congress leadership has asked its MPs to attend the lunch hosted by UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi today.

"Yes we have been instructed by our party leadership to attend the lunch. Trinamool MPs, who are in Delhi right now can attend the lunch program," said party MP and Minister of State for Tourism Sultan Ahmed.

Muslim summit: Saudi invites Iran

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi King Abdullah invited Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad for an extraordinary summit of Muslim leaders to be held this month in the holy city of Mecca, state news agency SPA reported yesterday.

The Saudi monarch "sent a written letter to President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad inviting him to attend the extraordinary Islamic solidarity meeting which will be held in Mecca" in mid-August, SPA reported.

Tensions have been running high between the Sunni-dominated kingdom and Shia Iran as both regional powers had taken opposite stances on the uprisings in Bahrain and Syria.

India floods toll rises to 34

AFP, Dehradun

Flash floods in mountainous northern Indian have killed at least 34 people and left hundreds of Hindu pilgrims stranded, officials said yesterday.

Twenty-three workers at a hydroelectric power plant in Uttarakhand state died after water gushed into the facility on Saturday, state disaster management minister Yashpal Arya said.

Arya said three fire department personnel died in a riverside village in the state, which is in the Himalayan foothills.

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