

Syria regime is collapsing

Says ex-PM; China hosts key Assad aide; OIC mulls to expel Syria

BBC ONLINE

Former Syrian PM Riad Hijab, who defected to Jordan last week, yesterday said the Syrian regime is collapsing "morally, financially and militarily".

Speaking in the Jordanian capital, Amman, he said the regime did not control more than 30% of the territory.

He called on the opposition abroad to unite and on the Syrian army to stand alongside its people.

UN humanitarian chief Valerie Amos is in Syria to assess ways to increase the flow of emergency aid there.

Hijab added he was joining the rebel side and urged other political and military leaders to break away from President Bashar al-Assad's regime.

This is the first time Hijab has spoken publicly since fleeing to Jordan with his family last week. He is the highest-ranking political fig-

ure to defect from the Assad regime.

Meanwhile, an aide to President Assad has flown to Beijing for talks on the crisis with Chinese officials.

A Chinese foreign ministry spokesman said it was also considering an invitation to members of the Syrian opposition.

Beijing has opposed recent UN resolutions on Syria, but backs a ceasefire between the warring parties as well as political dialogue.

On Monday, the secretary general of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) said foreign ministers preparing for a summit in Mecca had agreed to recommend the suspension of Syria.

However, Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi insisted his



Riad Hijab

country was opposed to such a step, saying: "We have to look for other ways, means and mechanisms for resolving conflicts and crises."

Baroness Amos, the UN under-secretary general and emergency relief co-ordinator, arrived in Damascus on Tuesday in a land

convoy from Lebanon, a spokesman said.

She is expected to ask for more foreign aid workers to be given visas, as the Syrian Arab Red Crescent struggles to distribute food to those who need it.

The UN said she was expected to discuss ways of "urgently scaling up relief efforts and reducing the suffering of civilians caught up in the fighting", which has intensified in

recent weeks and spread to the two biggest cities, Damascus and Aleppo.

Two million people are now estimated to have been affected by the crisis and over one million have been internally displaced. More than 140,000 people have fled the violence and crossed into Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq.

On Tuesday, fresh fighting was reported by activists in Aleppo, Syria's second city, with the army shelling several rebel-held areas including Saif al-Dawla and Salah al-Din.

In Damascus, people were reportedly fleeing the central district of Qabun, fearing a military offensive as security forces raided two other districts.

Syrian human rights and opposition activists say at least 21,000 people have been killed since pro-democracy protests erupted in Syria in March 2011.

Ramdev ends anti-graft fast

Calls for defeat of Congress

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

India's yoga guru Baba Ramdev yesterday ended his six-day hunger strike against corruption and black money with a searing attack on ruling Congress and asking the people to defeat the party in next parliamentary elections.

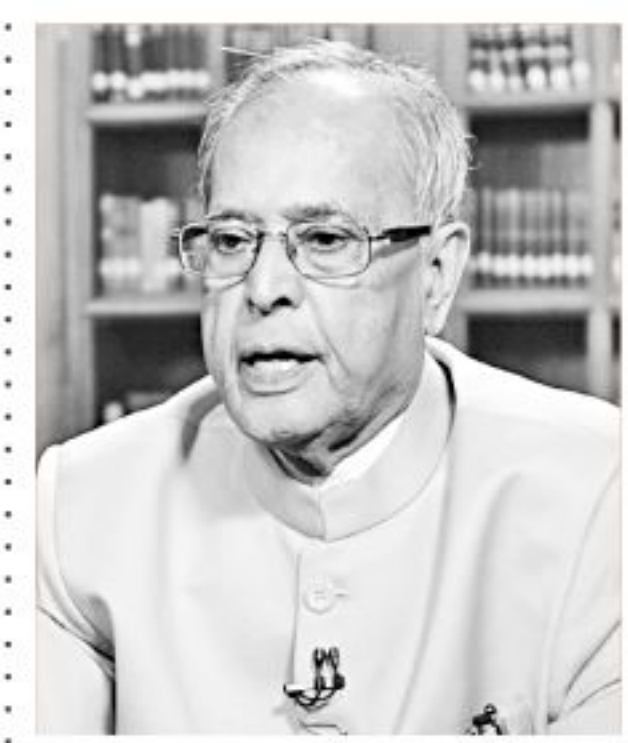
"Congress hatao, desh bachao (Remove Congress, save the country)," Ramdev said in his speech lasting an hour and added that except Congress all parties are together on the issue of black money.

After spending last night with hundreds of his supporters at the Ambedkar Stadium in central Delhi even after their release by the police, Ramdev broke his fast by sipping a glass of juice offered by a boy and a girl.

The yoga guru and his supporters were detained by police when they attempted to march to Parliament on Monday to press their demand for bringing back black money stashed away in banks abroad.

"The result of any protest is not determined by the government but by the people. I am happy that over 400 MPs in Parliament supported our demands. This government has cheated the people and Parliament," Ramdev alleged.

Charging the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government with failing to bring back black money, he claimed the government would have lost if there was any voting on the issue in Parliament.



Assault on democracy not acceptable

Pranab tells in his first speech

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Indian President Pranab Mukherjee yesterday said, "anger against bitter pandemic of corruption is legitimate" but it cannot be an "excuse" to assault democratic institutions.

In his first address to the nation as the country's president, Mukherjee said, "anger against the bitter pandemic, as is the protest against this plague that is eroding the capability and potential of our nation."

"There are times when people lose their patience but it cannot become an excuse for an assault on our democratic institutions," he said without referring to either anti-corruption agitation of social activist Anna Hazare or yoga guru Ramdev.

"When protest becomes endemic, we are flirting with chaos," Mukherjee, who was elected president last month, warned.

Mukherjee's remarks came on a day when Ramdev broke his six-day hunger strike demanding the government repatriate billions of dollars of "black" money stashed by Indians in foreign accounts.

The president, a veteran parliamentarian, said the institutions were the visible pillars of the Constitution and if they crack, then the idealism of the Constitution cannot hold.

US not surprised by Egypt army reshuffle

BBC ONLINE

The US had expected Egypt to reshuffle the military, the Pentagon said on Monday, a day after President Mohammed Morsi dismissed the head of the army.

Field Marshal Mohammed Hussein Tantawi, who had worked closely the US army chiefs for decades, was ordered to go into retirement on Sunday.

The move came after weeks of tension between Morsi and the military.

The Pentagon, a large aid donor to Egypt's army, said it expected to maintain close ties with the military.

"We had expected President Morsi at some point to coordinate changes in the military leadership, to name a new team," Pentagon spokesman George Little told reporters.

"The United States and the Department of Defence in particular look forward to continuing a very close relationship with the Scaf (Supreme Council of the Armed Forces)."

The new Egyptian defence team is made of up officials who have trained in the US and are known to the Pentagon, our correspondent adds.

Field Marshal Tantawi has been replaced as both armed forces chief and defence minister by head of military intelligence Abdul Fattah al-Sisi.

US state department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland also said it was important that Egypt's civilian leadership and the military worked together "to advance the goals of the democratic transition in Egypt".

Morsi rewrites balance of power in Egypt

AGENCIES

NEWS ANALYSIS

The announcement that Egypt's armed forces chief Field Marshal Mohammed Hussein Tantawi and his number two, Gen Sami Annan, were being forced to retire caught the nation by surprise.

In total, seven members of the military's top brass were removed from their posts.

At a late afternoon news conference shown on state television, the presidential spokesman also stated that a controversial constitutional declaration issued in June had been cancelled.

It was an attempt by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (Scaf), when it was still ruling the country, to limit the president's powers.

"This move will enter history as a significant shift in the civil-military balance of power towards the civilian side," says Omar Ashour, a Middle East expert at the Brookings

Doha Centre and Exeter University.

"This is the first time in Egypt's political history that an elected civilian politician overrules the decisions of the heads of the military establishment."

The Egyptian president appeared to have strengthened his position on Monday as the military and senior political figures in the country signalled their acceptance of his dramatic weekend.

Egypt's official news agency quoted an unnamed military official as saying there had been no "negative reaction" from within the military. A day after the orders, no unusual military movements were detected across the nation.



Mohammed Hussein Tantawi and Mohamed Morsi

the former head of military intelligence.

Questions have been asked about Morsi's constitutional powers to act. But a retired brigadier general, Ayman Salama, who is also an expert on international law says he went about things correctly.

"He went about this in a constitutional way by cancelling the constitutional declaration in order to make these decisions," he told the BBC.

The new measures take effect just as Egypt's armed forces are involved in their biggest deployment in the Sinai region for decades.

They were unprepared for an attack there last week that saw 16 Egyptian border guards killed by militants.

Morsi appears to be seizing on that failure - which shocked the public - to take his decisive political action.

Speaking at an event for the Islamic holy month of Ramadan he insisted that he was not targeting "certain individuals" but was looking out for "the country's best interests", leaving the military to concentrate on its job of protecting the country.

NEWS IN brief

Decision on Assange soon: Ecuador

AFP, Quito

Ecuadoran President Rafael Correa has said he expects to respond to WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange's application for political asylum some time this week.

Assange, 41, took refuge at Ecuador's embassy in London on June 19 to avoid extradition to Sweden, where he is accused of sexual assault.

The WikiLeaks founder fears that from Sweden, he could subsequently be re-extradited to the United States to stand trial for espionage, after a trove of leaked US diplomatic cables and military logs were published on his website.



Thousands start leaving Dhaka city

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"My bus is at 4:00pm. So I had to leave office at 1:00pm to make sure I reach the bus station on time," said a Bogra-bound passenger Paritosh Roy.

Many people were looking for tickets as almost all the tickets of the renowned bus operators were sold out earlier.

Visiting Kamalapur Railway Station yesterday morning, Communications Minister Obaidul Quader requested the passengers to remain alert while travelling and be patient in case the trains are behind schedule.

Private launch operators did not operate any special trips yesterday due to a lack of passengers.

"The Eid vacation this year is longer than previous years. That is why the number of passengers is not so large today [yesterday]," said Shahabuddin Milon, senior vice-president of Bangladesh Inland Waterways Association.

Most buses left around 15-30 minutes behind schedule, while six trains out of 26 were 10-40 minutes late till 6:00pm.

Although it was a regular working day yesterday, many government and private officials and employees left their offices earlier to catch transport.

Afghan suicide attacks kill 36

AFP, Herat

A group of suicide bombers killed at least 36 people in the capital of Afghanistan's southwestern Nimroz province on the border with Iran, the provincial governor said yesterday.

The attack on Zaranj city is the biggest in recent memory in the relatively peaceful province that avoids most of the bloodshed of Afghanistan's decade-long insurgency by Taliban Islamists.

Three suicide attackers out of an original group of 11 blew themselves up in separate areas of the city, one outside a hospital, police said.

"This was a group of 11 attackers who wanted to conduct simultaneous attacks across the city," deputy provincial police chief Mujibullah Latifi told AFP.

"Security forces killed two of the suicide attackers last night and detained three others this morning. Three managed to detonate themselves while three others were gunned down."

"We have confirmation that 21 civilians and 15 members of the security forces have been killed in these attacks and more than 66 others injured," provincial governor Abdul Karim Brahawi told AFP.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility, but similar attacks are usually blamed on Taliban insurgents fighting to overthrow the Western-backed government of President Hamid Karzai.

20 witnesses to defend

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leader Delawar Hossain Sayedee.

The chairman of the three-member tribunal, Justice Md Nizamul Huq, in his order also set August 28 for the recording of the deposition and cross-examination of the defence witnesses to begin.

Sayedee's counsel earlier submitted a list of 48 defence witnesses to the tribunal.

Justice Huq said the prosecution had produced 28 witnesses against Sayedee. Of them, seven were from the seizure lists, and the investigation officer was also one of the witnesses.

That means only 20 persons gave depositions against Sayedee, who is facing charges on 20 specific counts for crimes (against

humanity during the Liberation War in 1971), he said.

For the sake of justice, the tribunal observed that twenty defence witnesses for Sayedee were enough, he added.

Justice Huq also asked Sayedee's counsel to submit the list of defence witnesses by August 23.

The tribunal passed the order yesterday as part of the trial proceedings after completion of the cross-examination of the investigation officer by Sayedee's counsel on Monday.

Opposing the order, Tajul Islam, counsel for Sayedee, told the tribunal that the defence had submitted a list of 48 witnesses.

"How can we prove him [Sayedee] innocent with

only 20 persons? If the order is given, it will be the most unfair incident in the world", he said.

The tribunal then said this system was being followed throughout the world.

Tajul also said that after completion of the cross-examination, an accused explains his position.

Mentioning that such a process is being followed in the Criminal Procedure Code, Justice Huq said it was not applicable for the tribunal.

The accused will explain his position at the end, he added.

Tajul then said, "It is something like pushing him [accused] to the guillotine and burying justice."

Justice Huq asked the defence counsel whether the tribunal had to accept 10,000 defence witnesses

Pak army chief urges unity against terrorism

Offensive against militants kills 25

BBC ONLINE

Pakistani army chief Gen Ashfaq Parvez Kayani yesterday called for national unity "in the battle against terrorism".

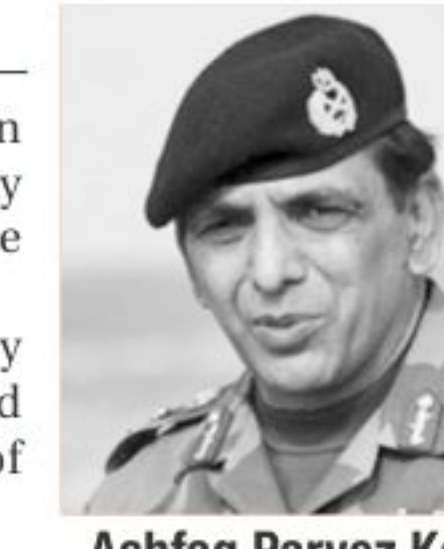
In an Independence Day speech, he said no state could afford a parallel system of government.

On Monday, US Defence Secretary Leon Panetta said that Pakistan had assured US officials that it would attack militants in North Waziristan.

There have been long-standing US demands for a Pakistani ground offensive in the area.

The frontier tribal region - close to the Afghan border - is considered a hub of Taliban and al-Qaeda activity and has long been a source of tension between the two countries.

"We realise that the most difficult task for any army is to fight against its own people.



Ashfaq Parvez Kayani

But this happens as a last resort. Our real objective is to restore peace in these areas so that people can lead normal lives," Gen Kayani said.

"No state can afford a parallel system or a militant force."

"The fight against extremism and terrorism is our own war and we are right in fighting it. Let there be no doubt about it, otherwise we'll be divided and taken towards civil war."

Meanwhile, at least 20 militants and five soldiers were killed when Pakistani forces and a group of militants clashed in north-western Pakistan yesterday, military officials said.

The skirmish, which took place in the Ghaljo area of the north-western Orakzai tribal region, began when militants ambushed a Pakistani military patrol.

ACC sues

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around Tk 1.04 crore illegally while Mridha for around Tk 40.10 lakh. The ACC found the proof of the duo's illegal earning after months of enquiry. On Sunday it decided to file the cases.

The enquiry against the two was launched after the ACC had found dissimilarity between their wealth statements submitted to the commission and the findings of the ACC, said officials.

On April 9, border guards arrested Faruq and Mridha at Pikhana along with railway Dhaka Divisional Security Commandant Enamul Huq and Ali Azam, driver of the microbus that was reportedly carrying Tk 70 lakh to Suranjit's Dhanmondi residence in the capital.

Since the incident, Ali Azam has remained missing. He had driven the microbus into the border guard headquarters and alarmed the personnel inside that there was illegal money in the vehicle.

Faruq was sacked and Mridha suspended following the recovery.

ACC Secretary Faizur Rahman Chowdhury at a press briefing yesterday morning officially announced their decision to file the cases at its Segunbagicha office.

Replying to queries on the missing driver, he said, "Azam is still traceless, but the investigation cannot wait for that. Many things will come into light if and when he is found."

The ACC secretary further said the commission had also approved filing of a case against Prodig Kumar Das, bench officer of the High Court Division of the Supreme Court, for amassing wealth worth Tk 19.65 lakh through illegal means and another case against Ranu Biswas, wife of Khushi Mohon Biswas, an additional director of the Department of Narcotic Control, for amassing illegally wealth and property worth Tk 40 lakh.

The defence, however, did not submit any certificate as proof of his ailment.

Justice Huq then asked the defence to submit the certificate after Eid vacation. The tribunal will pass an order on August 26.