

South Africa revives talks with miners after bloodshed

AFP, Johannesburg

South Africa yesterday revived mediation efforts in its platinum belt, aiming to contain labour discontent among mineworkers following the nation's deadliest police action since apartheid.

Labour Minister Mildred Oliphant met with union representatives in Rustenburg, the main city in the mining area in the north of the country where 44 died last week in clashes at Lonmin's Marikana mine.

They discussed ways to "stabilise the situation and find an amicable solution to the labour dispute", the government said in a statement, without elaborating.

Meanwhile operations restarted at other platinum mines in the region -- but not at Marikana -- while managers and workers' representatives hammered out wage agreements.

Fitch rating agency underscored concerns around the industry, saying that nagging social problems could cripple the country's investment climate if not addressed.

"The protests highlight broader structural problems that have long weighed on South Africa's rating," the agency said in a statement.

Lonmin, the world's third-biggest platinum producer, said only about 24 percent of its 28,000 work force at Marikana signed in yesterday, forcing it to suspend mining yet another day.

UAE slaps

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function after Eid-ul-Fitr. The UAE, which now hosts about 10 lakh Bangladeshi workers, the second highest number after Saudi Arabia, has been a sustained labour market for the last couple of years despite the global economic recession.

Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (Baira) said it also received complaints that the UAE authorities were not renewing visas of the Bangladeshis working under Emirates companies.

However, visa renewal is on for the workers in foreign companies there.

"But issuing of new visas for Bangladeshis is also slow," Baira executive member Hasan Ahamed Chowdhury told The Daily Star, adding that it would take a few more days to know what was actually happening.

According to him, the Bangladesh government needs to act promptly to figure out why such restrictions have been imposed on the workers. "This is urgent because the UAE is now recruiting the highest number of workers."

Labour and Employment Minister Khondaker Mosharraf Hossain yesterday said in many cases the employers hired more workers than were needed, eventually leading to loss of jobs or underemployment.

In each of the last eight months, some 25-30 thousand Bangladeshi workers left for the UAE, he added.

The minister, however, said the UAE government was yet to inform Bangladesh about the restrictions. Dhaka will send a team to the UAE to look into the matter.

An official at the Bangladesh consulate general in Dubai said in many cases workers do not get salaries they were promised. Under such situations many workers change jobs and become irregular.

"Such irregularities might be the reasons behind the restrictions," he told The Daily Star, requesting anonymity.

About 90 lakh Bangladeshis work abroad and send home about \$12 billion per year.

In 2008, Saudi Arabia went slow on recruiting workers from Bangladesh, saying too many Bangladeshis were there.

Rajuk to raze

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A land survey commissioned to Dutex by the Rajuk itself says 42.46 percent of the area is covered by forest, 39.47 percent by cultivable land and 9.75 percent by homesteads. The rest consists of water body, road, playground, commercial area, graveyard and canal.

Talking to this correspondent, some villagers of Barakau, Bashabasi, Parabartha and Kalikut said they were under pressure to move as Rajuk was rushing to implement the project.

They alleged the Rajuk was offering some influential land owners extra compensation for the acquisition to breach the unity among villagers.

Zainal Mian, a farmer of Bashabashi, said the only work he does for a living is growing vegetables and rice on his one-bigha land. "I don't know what to do if I have to give away my land."

Apart from sal trees, fruit orchards, bamboo groves, sandal and rain trees, mahoganies and also different medicinal plants are found in the villages on the eastern bank of the river Balu.

Kamrul Ahsan Suman, one of the locals, said sal trees grow on their own in the area adjacent to Bhawal Garh. "The villagers have been preserving the sal forest for years."

The people say they are very much dependent on the forest that has at least 24 varieties of medicinal plants. They collect fodder, edible green leaf and tubers from the woods.

Also, those living in a cluster village work as day labourers in farmland. Poor people of the five villages would lose their livelihood if the government goes ahead with the project, villagers said.

Asked about the housing scheme, Chief Conservator of Forest Yunus Ali said, he doesn't know of any such move by Rajuk. "If Rajuk really takes such an initiative, we will look into the matter."

According to villagers, the Gazipur district administration first acquired the land in 1994.

However, following appeals from locals, the then prime minister Sheikh Hasina cancelled the acquisition order in March 2000 through a gazette notification.

Again, the BNP-led alliance government served

notices upon the villagers in 2002 informing them of a plan to acquire the land.

Finally, the district administration issued a notice in 2009 saying the land was being reacquired, and asked villagers to receive Tk 1 lakh per bigha in compensation.

Around 6,000 acres of land -- some 1,600 acres in Gazipur and the rest in Narayanganj -- has been acquired for the Purbachal New Town Project of Rajuk.

Asked about the environment clearance, a top official of Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk) preferring anonymity told The Daily Star that they would build the residential area in an "environment friendly" way.

"It was the government that acquired land for the project, not Rajuk. We have to expand the city anyhow. Where would the additional people live?" he said.

"We would preserve some sal forest and also dig a lake there."

Contacted, Anawar Hossain, the project director, said the deadline to complete the work was June next year. "But it won't be finished on time because of the opposition from locals."

Khaleda

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India on the Indian government's invitation. They, however, would not comment on the outcome of the discussions.

Asked about the India trip, which may come before the one to China, BNP Vice-chairman Shamsur Mobin Chowdhury on Thursday said, "If there is any development, you will be informed."

Jatiya Party chairman and former president HM Ershad recently visited India. During his visit, the former military ruler met Indian President Pranab Mukherjee and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

Ershad, an ally of the Awami League-led government, also met India's National Security Adviser Shivshankar Menon and Foreign Secretary Ranjan Mathai.

On May 6, during his Dhaka visit as finance minister, Pranab paid a courtesy call on Khaleda at the latter's Gulshan office.

He had then said the Indian government was interested to establish ties with all the political parties, and not with any specific one, in Bangladesh.

Doctor's killers

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The NIDCH compound at Mohakhali in the capital early Thursday.

The 47-year-old physician was also an executive councillor of Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA) and a central committee member of Swadhinata Chikitshak Parishad.

Bhuiyan Mahub Hossain, officer-in-charge of the police station, told The Daily Star that the case was handed over to the Detective Branch (DB) of Police for investigation yesterday.

Before the handover, Imdadul Islam, sub-inspector of Banani Police Station and the first investigation officer of the case, told The Daily Star that they were sure that Nitai was a victim of robbery.

Lucky Datta, wife of Nitai, however expressed doubts to The Daily Star.

"I asked my husband several times to take a transfer from NIDCH to another hospital and leave the doctors' quarters as criminals had been threatening him over recruitments at NIDCH," she added.

Bashir Ahmed, medical superintendent of NIDCH, said 55 class-III and class-IV employees had been appointed to the hospital recently.

Nitai's younger brother Goutam Datta and Goutam's wife Kona Datta got appointment as class-IV employees.

2 killed

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Johnson, 53, and his victim was aged 41, Kelly said. Kelly said the man used a .45 caliber handgun with a magazine capacity of eight rounds and shot his former colleague at Hazan Imports in the head, "striking him three times."

The shooter put his gun in a bag and tried to flee but was confronted by two police officers who had been alerted by a nearby construction worker, Mayor Michael Bloomberg told the news conference.

"The perpetrator clearly turned his gun on the police and tried to shoot them," Bloomberg said. "The cops returned fire, killing him."

It was unclear whether the gunman had time to fire at the police and some of the gunshot wounds may have been caused by stray police bullets, the mayor said. "Some may have been shot accidentally."

State Senator Malcolm Smith told local television that the mayor had told him that Johnson had shot his former manager.

Streets around one of the Big Apple's biggest attractions were closed as police flooded the area. Television helicopters hovered overhead, filming the aftermath, including the body of the suspect covered in a white sheet.

Police had no shortage of witnesses in the bustling neighborhood, where tourists and office workers were massing for the start of the day.

"I was scared, in shock, literally shaking. It was just by chance I missed it," witness Rebecca Fox said. "I saw a woman covered with blood. Another woman was being taken to an ambulance."

Fox said she had also seen the gunman, who she said appeared to be of middle age and was lying on the ground.

"There was blood on the ground," she said.

Police secured the area almost immediately and it was quickly apparent that only one shooter was involved.

The FBI also said shortly afterwards that there was "no nexus to terrorism."

Footage from news helicopters showed police inspecting the shooter's body almost immediately under the north side of the Empire State Building.

Officers also were seen marking about dozen spots with evidence markers, many of them probably ammunition casings.

The tower is one of the city's icons on a par with the Statue of Liberty and the Brooklyn Bridge.

In 1997, six people were wounded and one killed in a shooting rampage on the skyscraper's observation deck before the gunman turned the gun on himself.

Taliban kill three Afghan soldiers: police

AFP, Asadabad

Taliban insurgents gunned down three Afghan army soldiers after kidnapping them in eastern Afghanistan, local officials said yesterday.

"Taliban insurgents stopped a vehicle of Afghan army soldiers while they were on their way to Ahmad Khil district of Paktia province and later they were shot dead," Mohammad Zaman, Paktia's criminal investigation director told AFP.

The bodies of the soldiers, who were off duty and on their way to visit their families on Thursday, were found lying on the road overnight, he said.

Deputy provincial governor Abdul Rahman Mangal confirmed the incident, blaming Taliban insurgents.

The death toll among Afghan troops and police force has risen this year as they take increasing responsibility for security from US-led NATO troops who are due to pull out by the end of 2014.

A total of 853 Afghan soldiers and police were killed in the first four months of this year, the latest official figures show.

MRP for thousands

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days for the police verification reports.

And if by that time the reports were not filed, the authorities would just deliver the passport to the individuals.

In the cases for regular machine readable passports, the authorities would wait 30 days for the verification report.

Brig Gen Refayet said if police submitted a bad report on a person, his or her passport would be cancelled even if it had been delivered.

However, according to the Department of Immigration and Passport office's rules, a person seeking a passport on emergency basis would get the travel document within seven days. The regular passport seekers would get them within 15 days.

Special Branch (SB) of Police said it was not the SB but the passport authorities who were to blame for the delays.

Special Superintendent Nazrul Islam of SB (passport verification section) said

passport authorities waste two to three days just to send the documents to police and then another two to three days to process the police report.

Referring to a case study prepared by the SB in September, 2011, he said the SB spent 8.59 days on average to prepare a report of an individual seeking a passport on emergency basis, for regulars it was 9.93 days on average.

Several high officials of SB, requesting anonymity, expressed concern over the decision to deliver passports without police verification reports.

They said in 2007 the then government issued several thousand passports without police reports. Later it was discovered that 2,772 people used fake addresses to get the passports and had left the country.

Many of them were non-Bangladeshi Rohingya refugees.

Brig Gen Refayet said the passport authorities would now be waiting longer for

the police reports allowing the law enforcers to complete their job.

It takes twice as long to print a machine readable passport now.

After installing all three passport printing machines at Agargaon, the government asked the authorities to add some additional information on page-3 and -48 of travel documents.

The existing machines cannot print the information offhand; so a passport has to be printed twice for page-3 and -48 changes, consuming double the time it would have required, home ministry sources said.

Brig Gen Refayet said they introduced double shifts over the last one and a half months to reduce the backlog of printing.

A director of the passport office in Agargaon said their printing capacity is 7,000 passports a day while they need 13,000 passports to be printed a day. He said with the two shifts, the backlog should be clear in the next few months.

BNP, Jubo League

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In Rajbari, police arrested Arif Biswas, an activist of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), a pro-BNP student body, for his alleged involvement in the killing.

Sahab Uddin Khalifa, officer-in-charge (OC) of Kushtia Sadar Police Station, said some criminals opened fire on Bablu in Binodpur area of the town around 1:30am when he was returning home from Rajbari Bazar.

The incident took place just 200 yards away from the Binodpur Police Camp.

The OC said a team from the camp rushed to the spot hearing the shots and took Bablu to Rajbari Sadar Hospital where the doctors on duty declared him dead around 2:15am.

The OC suspected that Bablu was the victim of a conflict between Ali Newaz Mohammad Khayyam, the former lawmaker of Rajbari-1 and also the president of Rajbari district unit Jubo Dal, and Harunur Rashid, general secretary of the same unit.

Bablu belonged to Khayyam group.

The victim had a rivalry with a group of JCD and Jubo Dal men of the district led by Mir Enam Ali Bachchu, a Jubo Dal leader and an incumbent councillor of Rajbari municipality, over establishment of supremacy in the area, the OC said.

Rajbari Superintendent of Police Rezaul Haque said, "We are looking into whether those leaders had any link with the killing."

The killing was planned and the killers were waiting there for the victim, he added.

The hartal was declared

at a press conference at the home of Khayyam in the town. Khayyam claimed that "opponents" carried out the murder and demanded immediate arrest of the killers.

On March 2, unidentified criminals opened fire on Bablu's younger brother Shahidul Islam Shimul in the town. Shimul, however, narrowly escaped.

The family of Bablu claims that councillor Enam was behind the attempt to kill Shimul.

Following the incident, Bablu filed an attempted murder case accusing Enam.

UNB adds: BNP acting secretary general Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir yesterday strongly condemned and protested the killing of Bablu.

In a statement, Fakhru blamed the present "fascist Awami League government-backed terrorists" for the killing and said: "The killing of Shamsul Alam Bablu has manifested the terrorist character of the Awami League."

TWO KILLED IN JESSORE Jubo League activist Jamal Hossain, 30, was gunned down around 8:30pm.

The other victim, venter Billal Hossain, 22, was stabbed to death around 6:30pm, reports our Jessore correspondent.

Witnesses said several unidentified criminals riding on a microbus shot Jamal at point black while he was standing in front of Weiss Restaurant in Puratan Kasba area. They also stabbed his chest and left the spot exploding 2-3 bombs.

Locals rushed Jamal to Jessore Medical College Hospital (JMCH) where doctors declared him dead.

France backs no-fly

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Turkey and the United States had agreed to deliberate further moves.

Syrian ally Russia has rejected the proposal.

Meanwhile, the UN yesterday said the number of refugees fleeing civil war in Syria has surged to over 200,000, as fighter jets and tanks reportedly unleashed deadly new raids in hotspots across the country.

Warplanes and artillery again pounded the northern hub of Aleppo and at least 21 civilians were killed in an air strike and shelling in the eastern town of Mayadin, a watchdog said.

Lakhdar Brahimi, the new envoy on the conflict, was due to meet UN chief Ban Ki-moon later on Friday, with the world powers still deeply divided over how to end a conflict that is also heightening tensions in neighbouring countries.

Lebanon was rattled again by new fighting between rival pro- and anti-Assad communities in the northern city of Tripoli yesterday, with 14 people killed since Monday, adding to fears of a spillover of the Syria conflict.

A sniper killed Sunni cleric Sheikh Khaled al-

Baradei, 28, at dawn, sparking the flare-up between fighters from the pro-Syrian Alawite district of Jabal Mohsen and neighbouring anti-Damascus Sunni districts, an AFP correspondent reported.

The militiamen exchanged rocket-propelled grenade as well as small arms fire in the two neighbourhoods in the east of the city, Lebanon's second largest, sparking several large blazes, the correspondent reported.

The fighting continued until around 8:30am when militiamen on both sides pulled back from the frontline and a fragile calm returned.

Earlier this week, hundreds of soldiers with tanks and military vehicles deployed on the aptly named Syria Street -- which acts both as a dividing line between the rival neighbourhoods and as the frontline when fighting erupts.

A wave of kidnappings preceded the latest round of violence and rattled the already fragile security situation in Lebanon, which lived under three decades of Syrian domination.

The Syrian Observatory

in another incident, Billal was stabbed indiscriminately by criminals while he was passing Ghope-Dhanpatti area of Jessore town.

Billal was rushed to JMCH where doctors declared him dead, locals said.

Assistant Sub-Inspector Delwar Hossain of Jessore Kotwali Police Station could not say anything about the motive of the killings. "Police will investigate into the killings," he said.

Law and order deteriorated in the area as at least 40 people were killed in the last three months in different incidents, locals said.

Talking to The Daily Star, local Awami League MP Khaledur Rahman Tito said black money and illegal drug business were the main reasons behind the killing incidents in his constituency, Jessore-3.

"A section of ruling party men and some dishonest men in the law enforcement agencies are patronising the black money holders and local drug peddlers," he alleged.

Revoke

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power to the poor women by cancelling the ordinance.

Also a former law minister, Moudud said the government wanted to establish its control on the Grameen Bank.

The move would deprive the majority women board members of their rights to take decision on the bank's development, he observed.

Jatiyatabadi Sangskritik Dal, a pro-BNP cultural body, organised the discussion at the National Press Club.

113 arrested in Chile student protests

AFP, Santiago

113 students were arrested in Santiago Thursday in clashes between police and demonstrators demanding better public education, after the occupation of several schools.

Some 4,500 students, mostly from high schools and universities, took to the streets to demand improvements in Chile's public education system, said to be among the most expensive and unequal in the world.

One week ago, police arrested 139 people when they stormed three Santiago high schools that had been taken over by students demanding educational reforms.

Rab to collect

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that there were many other evidence from which a few more persons' DNA profile might be detected.

The common sources of DNA profiling are a person's biospecimens, such as hair, saliva, blood, semen, sweat, nail and skin.

Rab officials said they had sent the knife found stuck in the body of Runi, its broken handle, socks of Sagar, a blanket, dresses the victims were wearing during the murder and the clothes used to tie up their hands and legs.

Commander M Shoail, director of Rab's legal and media wing, told The Daily Star, "We are hopeful of receiving the forensic reports within a couple of weeks and will start collecting DNA samples of the suspects from the middle of next month."

On Thursday, Lt Col Ziaul Hasan, director of Rab's intelligence wing, told The Daily Star that the DNA profile found could be of any of the killers. "The person is not yet been identified as more tests are still pending," he added.

Another Rab official, however, said it was not certain that the DNA profile found was one of the killers because many relatives and colleagues of the victims had thronged the crime scene after the news of the killing spread.

Commander Sohail said, "If we can retrieve DNA profiles from the evidence collected from the victims' bodies and the crime scene, a scope will be created for cross-matching the profiles with the suspects' and there will be no chance of any mistake."

After the sensational murder of Sagar and Runi, the Detective Branch (DB) of police was given the charge to investigate. They detained four suspects and interrogated around 40 people.

But on April 18, the High Court frustrated with DB's performance handed over the case to Rab, which has also interrogated around 100 people.

Two Thai lese majeste convicts given royal pardon

AFP, Bangkok

Two men were released from jail yesterday after receiving pardons for insulting Thailand's revered monarchy, according to the kingdom's prison authorities.

Warawut Thanangorn, 54, a mid-ranking activist for the "Red Shirt" movement loyal to former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra, was freed after serving around a third of an initial six-year term for committing lese majeste in 2010.

He was prosecuted for criticising Thailand's queen in a speech to Red Shirts in 2010, but his sentence was later halved after he pleaded guilty to the offence.

A shoe repair man, Suriyan Kokpoei, 30, was also freed following his 2010 jailing for a bomb hoax to a Bangkok hospital caring for the nation's sailing King.

"They were released this morning," Sorasit Chongjaroen, superintendent of Bangkok Remand Prison said.

They were among 300 inmates pardoned across Thailand on Friday, according to Sophon Thitithammapruet, deputy director general of Corrections Department, adding the pair were freed because their "sentences are light."

The royal family is an extremely sensitive subject in politically turbulent Thailand. The king, who is revered as a demi-god by many Thais, has been hospitalised since September 2009.

Under the legislation, anyone convicted of insulting the Thai king, queen, heir or regent faces up to 15 years in prison on each count.

Observers say lese majeste prosecutions have surged following a coup by royalist generals that removed fugitive former premier Thaksin Shinawatra in 2006. Thaksin's sister Yingluck now leads the government, but the trend is seen as likely to continue.