

SECTARIAN CHAOS Lebanon seeks all-party talks on govt future

AFP, Beirut

Lebanese President Michel Sleiman has launched a drive for all-party talks to assess his chances of forming a new government after calls for the premier to quit over a deadly bombing, his office said.

Lebanon has been in crisis since Friday, when a car bomb blamed on Syria killed police intelligence chief General Wissam al-Hassan in Beirut.

A high-ranking official in the president's office told

he had accepted Sleiman's request to stay on for the time being in the "national interest."

The United States and the European Union, both anxious to ward off any further Syrian interference in Lebanon, have separately warned against creating a political vacuum.

Since Friday's bombing, at least 11 people have been killed in fighting between pro- and anti-Syrian camps in the northern city of Tripoli.

Mikati said on Saturday

US DRONES IN PAKISTAN

UK support may be war crime: Court

GUARDIAN ONLINE

The British government's support for US drone operations over Pakistan may involve acts of assisting murder or even war crimes, the British high court heard on Tuesday.

In the first serious legal challenge in the English courts to the drones campaign, lawyers for a young Pakistani man whose father was killed by a strike from an unmanned aircraft are seeking to have the sharing of UK locational intelligence declared unlawful.

Noor Khan, 27, is said to live in constant fear of a repeat of the attack in North Waziristan in March last year that killed more than 40 other people, who are said to have gathered to discuss a local mining dispute.

The British government has declined to state

whether or not its signals intelligence agency GCHQ passes information in support of the CIA drone operations over Pakistan, although the court heard that it does.

The case opened as the RAF confirmed that it is to double the number of its own drones flying combat and surveillance operations over Afghanistan.

Martin Chamberlain, counsel for Khan, said that a newspaper article in 2010 had reported that GCHQ was using telephone intercepts to provide the US authorities with locational intelligence on leading militants in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The report suggested that the Cheltenham-based agency was proud of this work, which was said to be "in strict accordance with

the law".

Between June 2004 and September this year, according to research by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, drone strikes killed between 2,562 and 3,325 people in Pakistan, of whom between 474 and 881 were civilians, including 176 children.

With the number of drone strikes increasing sharply under the Obama administration, the London case is one of several being brought by legal activists around the world in an attempt to challenge their legality of the programme.

Khan's claim would have a significant impact on the conduct of the UK's relations with both the US and Pakistan in an acutely contested, sensitive and important area, and also impact on relations between the US and Pakistan.



PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

WAIT GOES ON... A passenger leaving Dhaka for home for eid looks tired and worried at Kalyanpur in the capital after hours of wait for the bus that did not arrive on time due to severe traffic jams on highways.

Home-goers stuck for hrs

FROM PAGE 1

He said they would not go to their home outside the capital to celebrate Eid anymore. The hassle and sufferings were too much.

Stuck in traffic jams with no food or access to toilets were turning their happier time of the year into nightmares, both of them observed.

Large number of vehicles on the narrow highways was the main reason behind the congestion, said Hayatul Islam, assistant superintendent of police of Tangail.

The ASP also blamed drivers for not following traffic rules and causing the jams. The ASP told The Daily Star that it was not possible for the highway and local police alone to control traffic and that people should cooperate with them.

A bus reached Kurigram in the north yesterday evening at 6:15pm having started from Dhaka at 2:00am. The passengers of the bus, who had to endure a 16-hour journey, felt lucky as another bus which started for Kurigram at 8:00am Tuesday took 20 hours to reach the district.

The journey usually takes about seven hours on a regular day and the delay was due to a 50km-long tailback in Tangail, reports our Tangail and Kurigram correspondents.

Several intercity bus service providers said passengers had to wait hours to get on buses. They said buses were turned around hours late.

A manager of an intercity bus service provider said their buses were leaving Dhaka at least five hours behind schedule as the vehicles were late in arriving from the northern districts.

The manager of a bus service provider in Chittagong said their buses were leaving station at least two hours behind schedule as they failed to reach Chittagong on time for their turnaround.

The manager said it was due to gridlocks in Sitakunda, on Meghna and Gumti bridges, and at Kanchpur on Dhaka-Chittagong highway.

There was a 20km-long tailback stretching from Daudkandi to Gumti-Meghna bridge on Dhaka-

Chittagong highway.

Things were not any better for those heading towards the southwest.

Nearly 800 vehicles were stranded at the Mawa ferry terminal and there was a four-km-long queue of vehicles at Paturia ferry terminal in Manikganj waiting to cross the Padma river.

Two additional pontoons at Mawa terminal failed to cope with the pressure of large number of vehicles.

The new pontoons had too narrow approach roads for heavy vehicles and only light vehicles were using them to get on to ferries. Most vehicles using the ferry service there were heavy vehicles.

Sirajul Haque, manager at the Mawa side of the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC), said they were trying to prepare another pontoon, which might be opened for use tomorrow.

The BIWTC had also declared that it would not ferry trucks for a week from yesterday. Trucks carrying perishable goods and sacrificial animals would, however, be allowed to cross.

Four-km-long queues at Paturia and Daulatdia on the Padma caused untold sufferings to thousands of passengers yesterday.

Many just left their vehicles, crossed the river on small motor launches and caught alternative transports to get home.

Motiur Rahman started for Kushtia from Dhaka at 5:00am in his car.

"I first got stuck in Savar for two hours and then in Manikganj for another couple. Finding no way, I left my car with the driver in Manikganj and got on a rickshawvan to reach Paturia," he told The Daily Star.

Motiur said he went to Daulatdia by a launch.

Ashrafullah Khan, manager of Paturia side of BIWTC, claimed that the route was completely jam-free in the morning and the congestion began around noon with the increase in the vehicles.

He said a total of nine roll-in-and-roll-out and five K-type ferries were transporting vehicles.

Former BBC head denies burying Savile probe

AFP, New York

The former head of the BBC yesterday denied any role in shelving an investigation into allegations of widespread abuse of underage girls by the late British TV star Jimmy Savile.

Mark Thompson, who is set to become CEO of the New York Times next month, told the newspaper he had heard about the probe from a reporter at a holiday party last December and followed up with two BBC News officials.

"I talked to senior management in BBC News and reported the conversation I had at the party and asked was there a problem," he said, adding that he was told the story would not be published

"for journalistic reasons."

Thompson, who headed the British Broadcasting Corporation from 2004 to September 2012, said: "There is nothing to suggest that I acted inappropriately in the handling of this matter."

"I did not impede or stop the 'Newsnight' investigation, nor have I done anything else that could be construed as untoward or unreasonable."

Thompson said he was never told about the nature of the allegations against Savile, nor did he ask, during his talks with the reporter and the officials.

"Had I known about the nature of the allegations and the credible allegations that these horrific crimes had

taken place during his time at the BBC and in the building at the BBC, I of course would have considered them very grave and would have acted very differently," he was quoted as saying.

George Entwistle, the current director general of the BBC, defended on Tuesday the broadcaster's response to allegations of sex abuse by Savile before British lawmakers, but admitted its reputation had taken a hit.

He said the world's biggest public broadcaster regretted dropping the "Newsnight" probe, but denied that pressure from BBC top brass had forced the flagship current affairs television show to shelve its investigation.

HRW asks

FROM PAGE 20

"violate basic fair trial standards".

On October 22, a military court convicted 723 of the 735 accused in the Sadar Battalion of the BDR after a mass trial, which did not meet fair trial standards, the rights watchdog claimed.

"The atrocities that took place during the mutiny need to be investigated and prosecuted, but the authorities have allowed expediency to trump justice," said Brad Adams, Asia director at Human Rights Watch, in a report on its website.

On February 25-26, 2009, some members of the BDR, which was later renamed as Border Guard Bangladesh, staged a mutiny against their commanding officers at its Pikhana headquarters. They killed 74, including 57 army officers deputed to the BDR.

The authorities responded with mass arrests afterwards. Members of each battalion were tried together.

"Each accused has the right to a fair trial, meaning there must be specific evidence against him, a lawyer with sufficient time and access to represent him, and an impartial court. None of these basic principles have been met," said Adams.

"It is likely that many of those convicted had nothing to do with the mutiny, causing them and their families massive and unnecessary hardship."

"The prosecution must really think hard about the implications of mass convictions for those facing the death penalty when the trial process has been so deeply flawed," said Adams.

"Mass unfair trials like these make a mockery of Bangladesh's judicial process, and are simply an expedient means for political gain, not for justice."

Doing business

FROM PAGE 1

affecting 10 areas in the lifecycle of a business: starting a business, dealing with construction permits, getting electricity, registering property, getting credit, protecting investors, paying taxes, trading across borders, enforcing contracts and resolving insolvency.

The survey report, released on Tuesday, places Singapore at the top for the seventh year in a row.

Sri Lanka is the only South Asian country whose ranking has improved -- going up to 81 from 89 last year. India's ranking remained unchanged at 132.

However, other countries in the region saw their positions fall. The Maldives was ranked at 95, Pakistan 107, Nepal 108 and Bhutan

148.

Bangladesh, whose ranking dropped four notches last year, scored poorer this year in six parameters while four parameters remained unchanged.

The country suffered a nine-point fall in the category of starting a business, as it did not bring about any reform in line with the Doing Business standards for an easy start of an enterprise.

According to the survey report, starting a business in Bangladesh requires following seven steps, takes 19 days and costs 25.1 per cent of income per capita, which are much higher compared to the global standards.

REACTION
Khondaker Golam Moazzem, senior research

fellow of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said the ranking reflects the business climate of the country.

"It shows there is nothing for the country's businesses to be enthusiastic. Making investment in the country is still not that encouraging," he told The Daily Star.

He said the poor ranking in the sub-indexes showed Bangladesh has problems in key areas such as infrastructure and credit facility.

Investment fell in the last fiscal year compared with the previous fiscal year and bank interest rates remained very high, he added.

"The government should strive to find ways to encourage investment, particularly from the private sector."

Govt now mulls

FROM PAGE 1

law allows us to appoint such administrators. If not, we will amend the law in such a way so that the companies are not harmed," Hussain told The Daily Star by phone.

He said the government would soon introduce multi-level marketing law for companies like Destiny Group.

Hussain also called upon the businesspeople not to panic, saying the government was looking for an alternative and had decided to withdraw the provision of giving administrators the "indemnity power" from the proposed act.

Meanwhile, two jurists -- Rafique-ul-Huq and M Zahir -- advised him not to go for amending the law, as options are there in the current law.

"Even if the law is amended, the ministry will insert a 'safeguard clause' in the act so that it cannot be misused for political purposes," Hussain said.

The commerce secretary said he would talk to two more lawyers today to know whether the administrators could be appointed under

the existing law.

"We will also seek opinions from lawyers, businesspeople, experts and researchers at a meeting on October 30. I hope all the misunderstandings will end after the meeting," the secretary said.

Earlier, businesspeople, economists and lawyers opposed the proposed amendment to the act, when the cabinet approved it on Monday.

Dr Kamal Hossain, president of Gonoforum, in a statement yesterday also protested the proposed amendment on the grounds that it would be detrimental to citizen's rights and a violation of the constitution.

The indemnity for administrators suggests that anyone harmed by the officials' actions would not have the right to seek justice, he said.

Dr Kamal termed the cabinet's approval to the proposed amendment by bypassing the House and without discussing it in parliament unexpected and against the norms. This act would be exposed to political misuse, he added.

He urged the government

not to bypass the stakeholders in the decision-making process.

Asked, jurist Rafique-ul-Huq said it was possible to appoint administrators for the Destiny Group under the existing law, although the process was a bit lengthy.

"It's not right to amend a law only for a single company," Huq said.

Another jurist M Zahir is also against the proposed amendment.

"The government's intervention in any company is not expected," he said, adding that the proposed amendment would encourage negative activities by the government.

Tanjib-ul Alam, a Supreme Court advocate, said appointing administrators in any private company by amending the companies law is anti-constitutional.

Echoing the views of both Huq and Zahir, he said the existing law permitted the appointment of administrators in any troubled company.

"I have a meeting with the commerce secretary tomorrow [today] as I was invited to give my opinions in this regard," he said.

Prothom Alo reports irk Faridpur AL

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Faridpur district Awami League yesterday condemned Bangla daily Prothom Alo for running a series of reports on the district, and termed the news items baseless and fabricated.

The reaction came at a media briefing held in Faridpur Press Club where Joint Convener Animesh Roy of district Swachhshahab League read out a statement condemning the Bangla daily. The statement was signed by district AL vice-president Subal Saha.

On Tuesday, speakers at a meeting in deputy commissioner's office expressed grievances over the reports to Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment Minister Khondaker Mosharraf Hossain.

Prothom Alo had recently run three reports on the political activities of Minister Mosharraf's brother Khondaker Mohetesham Hossain and the controversial role of the district administration.

Mohetesham, among others, was also present in yesterday's press conference. He too termed the reports false and fabricated.

ACC quizzes 3 Destiny officials

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Commission yesterday grilled three top officials of the controversial Destiny Group in two money laundering cases.

They are Rafiqul Amin, managing director of Destiny Group; Mohammad Hossain, chairman of Destiny 2000 Ltd, a sister concern of the group, and L Col (ret'd) Didarul Alam, a director of the group, said Tawfiqul Islam, ACC assistant director.

Rafiqul, who is shown as chairman in the company's documents, and Hossain were placed on an 18-day remand in the cases on October 17 by a Dhaka court. Didarul Alam was placed on an eight-day remand on October 21 in one of the two cases.

Earlier on July 31, the ACC filed the cases with Kalabagan Police Station against Destiny Group's 22 top officials, including the three, on charges of laundering Tk 3,285.26 crore by cheating investors and transferring company funds to their personal accounts.

The anomalies first came under spotlight after a Bangladesh Bank probe in March found Destiny had engaged in illegal banking.

Cop closed

FROM PAGE 20

a gun-toting leader of the pro-Awami League Bangladesh Chhatra League to a police station.

Harun-or-Rashid of Rajpara Police Station on Tuesday night was also asked to explain within seven days as to why he allowed SM Towhid Al Hossain Tuhin, former organising secretary of Rajshahi University unit of BCL, into the Boalia Police Station on October 22.

The Daily Star on October 23 published a photograph of Tuhin, who brandished firearms during a clash between BCL and Islami Chhatra Shibir activists on the campus on October 2, coming out of Boalia police station.

"Our primary investigation found him [Harun] responsible for Tuhin's visit to the police station. What he did has tarnished the image of the police and so he must undergo punitive action," Abdul Mannan, deputy commissioner (west) of RMP, told The Daily Star.

Harun could not be reached for his comment.

However, the RMP DC said Harun had verbally explained to higher officials that he had gone to Boalia Police Station to see his senior officer and that he unknowingly asked Tuhin to see him at the police station when the latter called him.