

NEWS IN brief

Obama Israel visit on March 20'

AFP, Jerusalem

US President Barack Obama is expected to arrive in Jerusalem on March 20 for a three-day trip which will also take him to the West Bank city of Ramallah, media reports and a Palestinian official said.

He was expected to land at Ben Gurion airport near Tel Aviv then hold talks with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu later in the day. The next day, he would spend the morning holding talks with Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas at his West Bank headquarters in Ramallah.

Fourth day of curfew in Kashmir

IANS, Srinagar

Uninterrupted curfew restrictions continued for the fourth day yesterday in Kashmir Valley to prevent violence in the wake of Afzal Guru's hanging in New Delhi's Tihar jail.

Three people have died so far during protests in the Kashmir Valley after news of December 2001 Parliament attack plotter's hanging spread

S Lanka drops IMF loan over Row

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka yesterday dropped plans for a fresh \$1.0-billion loan from the International Monetary Fund following disagreements over how the money should be spent, the central bank said.

Treasury chief Punchi Banda Jayasundera had said he wanted the new IMF loan to spend on infrastructure while the US-based lender was only willing to hand over money to bolster the

Kyrgyzstan sentences ex-president

AFP, Bishkek

A Kyrgyz military court yesterday sentenced in absentia former president Kurmanbek Bakiyev to 24 years in prison and his brother Janysh to life over a murder of a powerful top official in 2009.

Kurmanbek Bakiyev, who was toppled in a bloody 2010 uprising fuelled by his family's rampant corruption during a half decade in power, was convicted of abuse of power by the

N Korea defies world with nuke test

AFP, Seoul

A defiant North Korea yesterday staged its most powerful nuclear test yet and warned of "stronger" action to follow if the ensuing wave of global condemnation translated into tougher sanctions.

Global powers, including Pyongyang's sole major ally China, denounced the test which the North said was of a "miniaturised" device -- a claim that will fuel concerns it has moved closer to fitting a warhead on a ballistic missile.

The isolated state said its third test, after previous detonations in 2006 and 2009 that triggered a raft of UN sanctions, was a direct riposte to US "hostility".

UN Council says 'strongly condemn' North Korea nuclear test. It vowed to start on new N

Korea 'measures' immediately. In what amounted to a pre-emptive warning, North Korea's foreign ministry said yesterday's test was only a "first" step and that any tightening of sanctions would trigger "even stronger second or third rounds of action".

South Korea's spy agency predicted the

North might carry out another nuclear test or ballistic missile launch in coming days or weeks.

Confirmation of the test from the North's state media came nearly three hours after seismic monitors detected an unusual tremor at 0257 GMT in the area of the Punggye-ri nuclear test site in the northeast.

Obama denounced the test and called for a "swift" and "credible" international response as the Security Council readied to meet in emergency session.

China, whose trade and aid are a life-support to impoverished North Korea, expressed "firm opposition" to the nuclear test but stopped short of threatening any punitive action.

Neighbours Japan and South Korea stressed the threat to their own national security, while Russia, Nato and the European Union all condemned the test as illegal and a flagrant violation of UN resolutions.

It was the North's first nuclear test since its new, youthful leader Kim Jong-Un took over from his late father Kim Jong-Il.

Laden killer breaks silence

AFP, Washington

The Navy SEAL who killed Osama bin Laden broke his silence Monday, recounting the night he shot the al-Qaeda leader three times and the financial anxiety he now faces as an unemployed civilian.

The commando kept his identity secret in the Esquire magazine interview, but revealed his role in the daring May 2011 raid for the first time, as well as the worries he has for his family's security.

"He looked confused. And way taller than I was expecting," the SEAL said of bin Laden.

When the commandos came upon bin Laden in the dark on the third floor of his hideout in the town of Abbottabad in Pakistan, the al-Qaeda mastermind had

his hands on his youngest wife's shoulders, "pushing her ahead" and there was an AK-47 assault rifle nearby.

The Esquire article, which referred to the unnamed commando as "the Shooter," focused on the Navy SEAL's plight as an anonymous hero without a pension, health insurance or extra security for his family, with the title: "The Man Who Killed Osama bin Laden... is Screwed."

After the raid, back at a base in Jalalabad, Afghanistan, the shooter brought over a female CIA officer -- now made famous by the Hollywood film "Zero Dark Thirty" -- to see bin Laden's corpse.

"We looked down and I asked, 'Is that your guy?' She was crying," he said.



PHOTO: AFP

Revelers of Grande Rio samba school perform during the second night of Carnival parade at the Sambadrome in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil yesterday. Four people died after a Carnival float in the Brazilian port city of Santos caught fire early yesterday, striking a sombre tone for the final day of exuberant Carnival celebrations throughout Brazil, police said.

Witness testifies on abduction

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Hajari Lane. He said they used to receive training to fight from one Siddique Rahman.

They spied on Pakistani forces too.

"On July 5, 1971, we lost contact with our trainer Siddique. At about 7:30pm, we heard the noise of an approaching car... A few minutes later three-four army men with some locals entered our room and ordered 'hands up'," he said. "They tied our hands and blindfolded us," Alam said.

The witness said they were taken to Goods Hill on a red jeep. "We were taken to the drawing room of Goods Hill. We saw Fazlul Quader Chowdhury sitting. Seeing us, he [Fazlul Quader] stood up and hurled abusive words. Those who took us there

began beating us up," said Alam.

SQ Chowdhury was present at that time.

Alam lost his teeth in the torture. "Blood poured out from my mouth and I felt severe pain," said Alam.

Moments later, his fellow fighters were taken to the torture cell and SQ Chowdhury followed them.

"I was spared since I was already hurt a lot," he said, adding, "I heard their screaming sitting in the drawing room."

Military intelligence of the Pakistani army quizzed the three at Goods Hill, said the witness.

They were left dangling from the ceiling for 24 hours so that they could not sleep.

On the night of July 6, they were handed over to the Pakistani army who

took them to Chittagong Stadium and tortured them there too.

They were kept at the stadium from July 7 to July 13, 1971, along with 30-35 other detainees.

On July 13, an army major of Baluchistan origin interrogated him. Learning that Alam's surname was Syed, the major let him go instead of sending him to the cantonment.

The name Syed is usually associated with people of Arab descent.

His two fellows were taken to the cantonment where they were tortured. They were later sent to jail.

Nizamuddin in his October 23, 2012, deposition said he remained behind bars until November 18, 1971.

Charge-17 framed against SQ Chowdhury says

that he committed offence of abduction, confinement and torture, which are crimes against humanity under section 3 (2) (a) of the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act, 1973.

Defence yesterday completed cross-examining of Alam. During cross-examination yesterday, SQ Chowdhury asked several questions on the topography of Chittagong.

The war crimes accused suggested that Alam was not at all abducted and taken to his father's bungalow.

The witness said it was not true.

In reply to a question, Alam said he did not see SQ Chowdhury before the Liberation War.

The proceedings of the case was adjourned until February 14.

Iran says it is converting uranium, easing fears

REUTERS, Dubai

Iran yesterday acknowledged that it was converting some of its higher-grade enriched uranium into reactor fuel, a move that could help to prevent a dispute with the West over its nuclear programme hitting a crisis in mid-2013.

Conversion is one way for Iran to slow the growth in its stockpile of material that could be used to make a bomb. That stockpile is currently projected to reach a level intolerable to Israel in mid-year, just as Iran's room for negotiation is being limited by a presidential election in June.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast was asked at a weekly news conference about a Reuters report that Iran has converted small amounts of its 20-percent enriched uranium into reactor fuel.

"This work is being done and all its reports have been sent to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in a complete manner," he was quoted as saying by the state news agency IRNA.

It was Iran's first acknowledgment that it had apparently resumed converting into fuel small amounts of uranium enriched to a concentration of 20 percent fissile material.

Iran's production of that higher-grade uranium worries the major powers because it is only a short technical step away from the 90-percent purity needed for a weapon.

Iran denies that it is seeking a weapon and says its nuclear programme serves only peaceful purposes such as electricity and the production of medical isotopes.

Poll violence kills 12 in Assam

AFP, Guwahati

Twelve people have been killed, most of them in firing by security forces, after riots erupted in India's restive northeast against local elections an official said yesterday.

Soldiers have been deployed in an attempt to subdue the violence that broke out in Goalpara, some 120 kilometres (75 miles) from Assam state's main city of Guwahati, Bhupen Bora, an Assam state home ministry official, told AFP.

"Army soldiers have been deployed in the troubled areas to stop the violence from spreading," Bora told AFP. Security forces opened fire when two tribes opposing the elections began setting fire to villages and attacking government officials with spears and machetes, Bora said.

Television channels showed images of men and women torching houses and engaging in widespread arson. "The situation is very critical and volatile," said Bora.



Suu Kyi offers to mediate peace talks

GUARDIAN ONLINE

Burma's opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi has said she is willing to mediate an end to violence between the government and ethnic minority groups, a move that could lead to a formal invitation from the government to take part in negotiations.

The Nobel laureate made the announcement on Union Day, which celebrates the day in 1947 when her father, the late General Aung San, signed an agreement with leaders of Burma's ethnic minorities to wrest independence from British colonial rule.

Aung San Suu Kyi has until now drawn fierce criticism from rights groups over her silence on ethnic issues, notably communal violence in Rahkine and the conflict in Kachin state. Her critics say she has failed to use her international stature to raise awareness and put an end to the violence.

Aung San Suu Kyi said she preferred not to take sides but would gladly get involved if formally invited by the government. It is unclear whether the government, which has floated suggestions in the media that Aung San Suu Kyi should get involved on her own initiative, will directly invite her.

Appointment of 2 prosecutors

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office issued another order suspending the appointments around 2:00pm.

Insiders say the government wanted to be sure about political affinity, if any, of Manzur's father Abul Hossain, who is a serving district judge. Doubts in this regard were almost over, they add.

Law Minister Shafique Ahmed said his ministry would give effectiveness to the appointments today.

Talking to The Daily Star, the minister said the government would appoint three to five prosecutors to the Supreme Court within a week to deal with the war crimes cases.

The new prosecutors

will be selected from senior lawyers, who are enrolled at the Appellate Division, to move the appeals against the tribunal verdicts in the crimes against humanity cases, he added. He however did not mention the names of the senior lawyers.

The minister said the government would appoint the new prosecutors as part of reshuffle in the existing prosecution team functioning at the ICTs.

In reply to a question, he said it was necessary to appoint new judges to the Appellate Division for hearing and disposing of the appeals in the war crimes cases, as there were some vacant posts of judges.

The law ministry will initiate the appointment process if the chief justice sends their names to the ministry, Shafique added.

The chief justice has not yet sent names for the appointment, he said.

Controversy and criticism have been raised against the exiting 21-member prosecution team at the ICTs due to their poor performance in dealing with the cases on behalf of the state.

Speaking anonymously, an SC lawyer, who observes the prosecution team's functions at the tribunals, said most of the prosecutors excepting three or four were not sincere to their duties.

The lawyer said a senior prosecutor having the status equivalent to the attorney general attended the tribunals once in three months on average. A government policymaker had earlier asked another senior prosecutor to quit for his inefficiency in vain, he added.

The ICT-2 has awarded inadequate sentence to Jamaat-e Islami leader Abdul Quader Mollah, as the prosecution could not place the case and argument against him properly, the lawyer observed.

He believes some competent, efficient and experienced prosecutors have to be appointed to ensure punishment of the war crimes suspects.

Jamaat a party of war criminals

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Jamaat Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed.

The three-member tribunal led by Justice Obaidul Hassan with members Justice Md Mozibur Rahman and Judge M Shahinur Islam completed recording the cross-examination of Shahriar, also the first prosecution witness in the case.

Earlier on August 26 last year, Shahriar gave testimony for two hours and 40 minutes, while the defence cross-examined him for 14 hours and 45 minutes in seven days. But his cross-examination remained incomplete for his foreign tour.

In his testimony, Shahriar appealed to the tribunal to try Jamaat and its associate bodies alongside its top leaders for "committing" crimes against humanity during the Liberation War.

After Shahriar, 11 more prosecution witnesses have so far given testimonies in the case against the Jamaat leader, who was indicted with seven charges in connection with murder, genocide and hatching conspir-

acy to kill the country's intellectuals.

During his one-hour-and-20-minute cross-examination, Shahriar, also executive president of Ekattorer Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee, answered 23 questions asked by defence counsel Mizanul Islam.

The defence asked him whether Mojaheed's name was in the first report of the People's Inquiry Commission.

On March 26, 1993, a People's Inquiry Commission was formed to investigate the activities of alleged war criminals and collaborators in two phases. The commission had prepared two reports on 16 war crimes suspects.

Shahriar said Mojaheed's name was not in the first report.

"As we had lack of resources, we decided to conduct inquiry into the misdeeds of eight accused every year. Mojaheed was included in the second report of the People's Inquiry Commission published on March 26, 1995,"

said the veteran journalist.

In reply to questions, he said the central researchers and investigators of the commission used to collect information from every district.

At one stage of the cross-examination, Mizanul said, "You [witness], are in principle an anti-Jamaat person. For this reason you have been carrying out falsehood against the Jamaat leaders for long and giving statements and writing books in this regard."

Shahriar responded, "I think Jamaat-e-Islami, as a party, is an organisation of war criminals, mass murderers and people who committed crimes against humanity. I write against Jamaat because they have legalised killings and rapes in the name of religion. I didn't carry out falsehood against the Jamaat leaders."

"Are you against religion-based politics?" asked Mizanul. "I am against politics in the name of religion. I think religion is a holy matter. Religion shouldn't be brought in politics," Shahriar added.

"You have given false testimony against Jamaat, its founder Moulana Maududi and its leaders," Mizanul suggested.

Shahriar rejected the defence's claim saying, "It is not true. Hundreds of pieces of evidence are available in my writings and documentaries."

"What you have said before the tribunal about Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed is totally false," suggested Mizanul.

"It's not true. I have said the truth," said Shahriar.

Meanwhile, the tribunal recorded cross-examination of Abdur Razzaque Khan, 18th prosecution witness and investigation officer of the case against Muhammad Kamaruzzaman.

Defence counsel Kafil Uddin Chowdhury cross-examined Razzaque for one and a quarter hours and asked him around 15 questions, mostly on prosecution documents.

The tribunal adjourned the case proceeding until today when Razzaque is set to face further cross-examination.