

Egypt rivals meet amid tension

Army says will not meddle in politics

REUTERS, Cairo

Liberal and Islamist political leaders met privately on Saturday to try to ease tensions that have sparked protests in which some 60 Egyptians have died since late January, politicians said. The protests erupted after the second anniversary of the uprising which overthrew Hosni Mubarak and reflected competing visions for Egypt's future. Political turbulence has slowed negotiations for a \$4.8 billion dollar loan from the International Monetary Fund.

Politicians said Mohamed ElBaradei, a prominent liberal activist and leader of the National Salvation Front (NSF), met Saad el-Kattni, head of the Muslim Brotherhood's ruling Freedom and Justice Party (FJP). Another leader of the NSF, Sayed el-Badawi, also took part in the talks.

Previously the NSF had boycotted the idea of talks with President Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood, who has been the target of protester rage in weeks of violent demonstrations.

Meanwhile, Egypt's armed forces, for decades at the centre of power, will avoid involvement in politics but could have a role if things became "complicated", the chief of staff said yesterday.

It also expects rival political groups to solve disputes by dialogue.

Brahimi seeks Syria rivals talks at UN

Rebels launch 'battle of the airport' offensive

AFP, Cairo

UN-Arab League peace envoy Lakhdar Brahimi yesterday urged international backing for a Syrian opposition offer to begin talks with the regime, which he proposed be held in United Nations offices as rebels pressed the "Battle of the airports" in the north.

Brahimi said opposition leader Ahmed Moaz al-Khatib's offer to negotiate with some regime figures "opened the door and challenged the Syrian regime to confirm what it constantly says about being prepared to hold dialogue."

The envoy spoke at a news conference in Cairo after meeting Arab League chief Nabil al-Arabi.

The UN rights chief, meanwhile, urged international action against President



Bashar al-Assad, even to the extent of weighing military intervention.

On the ground, troops parried fierce rebel attacks near Aleppo airport, the adjacent Nayrab military airbase and Kwiyyes airbase east of Aleppo city overnight, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

The insurgents launched their offensive against airports in the north on February 12, and have since seized Al-Jarrah military airport and Base 80, which was tasked with securing Aleppo's civilian airport.

The Observatory, meanwhile, reported that eight foreign fighters in Aleppo were among 36 rebels killed in Syria on Saturday, along with 37 civilians and 31 government troops.

Anger rife over Pak sectarian killings

REUTERS, Quetta

Pakistan's unpopular government, which is gearing up for elections expected within months, faced growing anger yesterday after a sectarian bombing in the city of Quetta killed 81 people.

The nuclear-armed country's leaders have done little to contain hardline Sunni Muslim groups which have stepped up a campaign of bombings and assassinations of minority Shias.

On Saturday, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), seen as the most ruthless Sunni sectarian group, claimed responsibility for the attack in Quetta, which deepened suspicions among Shias that Pakistan's intelligence agencies were turning a blind eye to the bloodshed or even supporting extremists.



Leaders of the ethnic Shia Hazara community called on the government to take decisive action, and Pakistanis warned that sectarian violence was spiraling out of control.

"We are giving the government 48 hours to arrest the culprits involved in the killing of our

people and after that we will launch strong protests," said Aziz Hazara, vice president of the Hazara Democratic Party.

The death toll from Saturday's bombing rose overnight, with most of the casualties in the main bazaar of the town, capital of Baluchistan, near the border with

Obama plans residency to illegal immigrants

REUTERS, Washington

A draft of a White House immigration proposal would allow illegal immigrants to become legal permanent residents within eight years, USA Today reported on Saturday.

The plan, obtained by the newspaper, also would provide for more security funding and require businesses to check the immigration status of new hires within four years. Illegal immigrants could also apply for a newly created "Lawful Prospective Immigrant" visa, under the draft bill, it said.

If approved, they could apply for the same provisional legal status for spouses or children living outside the country, according to the draft.

The White House has emphasized the importance of creating a path to citizenship for the estimated 11 million immigrants who are in the United States illegally.

Latinos favoured President Barack Obama over Republican Mitt Romney in the November 6 election by 71 percent to 27 percent, helping tilt politically divided states to the Democratic incumbent.

Members of Congress also are drafting their own immigration bills. Last month, four Republican senators joined with four Democratic senators to announce their agreement on the general outlines of an immigration plan.

NEWS IN brief

Graft trial of Israel's ex-FM begins

AFP, Jerusalem

The trial of Israel's former foreign minister Avigdor Lieberman on charges of fraud and breach of trust opened at a Jerusalem court yesterday in a case which will decide the former bouncer's political future.

Lieberman is accused of having promoted an Israeli ambassador who provided him with confidential information about a police investigation into his affairs. He immediately resigned his cabinet post after the allegation surfaced but retains his status as an MP, expressing confidence



Blasts hit Shias in Iraq; 26 killed

REUTERS, Baghdad

Several car bombs exploded in Shia Muslim neighbourhoods across Iraq's capital Baghdad yesterday morning, killing at least 26 people in blasts that tore into shops, restaurants and busy commercial streets.

No-one claimed responsibility for the attacks but Sunni Muslim insurgents have stepped up their operations since the beginning of the year in a bid to undermine the Shia-led government and

7 foreigners kidnapped in Nigeria

REUTERS, Bauchi, Nigeria

Gunmen kidnapped seven foreigners and killed a security guard when they stormed the compound of Lebanese construction company Setraco in northern Nigeria's Bauchi state early yesterday, police said.

Among those abducted were a Briton, an Italian, a Greek and four Lebanese workers, including two women, local government

Red Cross marks 150th anniversary

BBC ONLINE

As it turns 150, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) yesterday said it faces unprecedented challenges in the complex age of modern warfare.

The movement currently employs 13,000 people working in 92 countries.

The movement was founded by a Geneva businessman, Henri Dunant, in 1863 in response to the suffering of injured soldiers abandoned on

Indonesia floods, landslides kill 13

AFP, Jakarta

At least 13 people were killed over the weekend in Indonesia after heavy rains triggered floods and landslides, officials said yesterday.

Flooding and landslides hit North Sulawesi province's capital city Manado early yesterday, killing 10 people and prompting another 1,200 to be evacuated, national disaster management agency spokesman Sutopo Purwo Nugroho said.

Russia halts search for meteorite

AFP, Chelyabinsk

Russian authorities yesterday halted their search for the meteorite that spectacularly struck the Urals last week, leaving about 1,200 people injured and damaging several thousand buildings.

The 10-tonne space rock streaked over the Chelyabinsk region in central Russia in a blinding fireball on Friday just as the world was braced for a close encounter with a large asteroid.

Despite an intensive search of a frozen lake no

Suspend licence; not GP operation

FROM PAGE 1 financial guarantee under a Memorandum of Understanding, and was also the substantial Bangladeshi party to the licence.

The commission said if the government desires to let GP continue operation it may consider doing so only if Telenor agrees to transfer 16 percent of its shares immediately and unconditionally to either Grameen Telecom or Grameen Bank.

The report said the transfer of shares should be made effective from 2002, when Telenor was supposed to reduce its shares to 35 percent. And all benefits should also be accrued from that date.

The commission estimates that these changes alone should bring at least Tk 6,000 crore for Grameen Bank and its landless and poor mem-

bers, mostly rural women.

Grameen Telecom along with Norway-based Telenor and New York-based Gonophone signed a non-binding Memorandum of Understanding on November 5, 1996.

This group named itself Grameenphone Consortium to bid for a digital mobile telecommunication licence.

The MoU stated that the three groups would be shareholders in the venture with 44.5 percent for Grameen Telecom, 51 percent for Telenor and 4.5 percent for Gonophone.

According to the agreement, after six years of operation, Telenor was supposed to reduce its share to below 35 percent and that Grameen Telecom would have the right of first refusal to these shares.

The licence agreement

between Grameenphone Consortium and the government was signed on November 11, 1996 and the licence was issued against Grameenphone Consortium on November 28, 1996.

There is no reference to Grameenphone Ltd in the licence, said the four-member commission.

Grameenphone Consortium started mobile communication operation on November 26, 1997.

The Grameenphone Consortium agreement with the government was amended on March 8, 1999, through which Grameenphone replaced Grameenphone Consortium.

"It turns out that the government made a serious error in accepting the bid of Grameenphone Consortium for mobile telecommunication licence. The

MoU was non-binding on the parties and had not been registered."

"In fact, it was not a legal entity and therefore Grameenphone Consortium could not have bid and should have had their offer rejected right away," said the commission.

The report said the Grameen Telecom, Telenor and Gonophone have apparently committed a serious crime by "an illegal statement" in the agreement between the government and Grameenphone Consortium dated November 11, 1996.

They stated that Grameenphone Consortium was a registered organisation and a company registered under the Companies Act, when this was not the case, said the commission.

"This makes all three of

the parties to the MoU liable and subject to legal proceedings. They have knowingly induced the government to sign an agreement under patently false pretences," said the report.

The commission said the amendment to the 1999 contract was in violation of the terms of the agreement and seems to have been malafide according to the records.

It said the agreement clearly stipulates that the mobile licence is not transferable and that any change to the terms of the agreement can be made only if it is initiated or requested by the first party (the government) and not by the second party (Grameenphone Consortium).

"The records of the government do not indicate that this request

for a change to the terms of the agreement was made or initiated by any government entity. The change was sought by Grameenphone Ltd which was not even a party to the agreement and should have been rejected outright."

"The change itself amounted to a transfer to another entity, which is also a violation of the agreement of November 11, 1996," said the commission.

Grameenphone's comments on the matter were not available.

In May last year, the government formed the commission to review the activities of Grameen Bank and the 54 legally independent organisations bearing Grameen names, and make recommendations on how to run the organisations.

No presidential clemency too

FROM PAGE 20 Those, who had been involved in the attempt to foil the birth of Bangladesh, can be tried under the amended law, he said, adding that Mollah is one of them.

Shahriar Kabir termed the amendment a result of the movement of Shaheed Janani Jahanara Imam, Shahbagh demonstrations and Ekattorer Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee, and also a victory of the nation.

Congratulating the government for bringing the amendment, he said all the war criminals could be tried and punished now.

Kabir, acting president of Ekattorer Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee, however, said the government should amend the constitution to cancel the provision of presidential mercy

to the convicts in the crimes against humanity cases.

He also demanded that the government incorporate rules in the act to make the ICTs permanent and give protection to the witnesses in the cases.

MAHASAN War Crimes Facts Finding Committee Convener Dr MA Hasan expressed satisfaction with the government move to amend the law.

He however said a provision must be incorporated in the amended law to empower the tribunals to direct the government to ban the politics of Jamaat-e-Islami as a war criminal organisation. Besides, Jamaat leaders and activists, who were involved in the crimes against humanity in 1971, should be pro-

hibited from running any other political parties in the country, he added.

The amendment will help uphold human dignity and justice through banning the philosophy of Jamaat, he said, adding that the political parties and their leaders who are creating obstructions to the trial of the war criminals have to be tried and punished.

MR Hasan said Jamaat and its student front Islami Chhatra Sangha, Nejami Islami, Jamaat-e-Olama and Muslim League had been involved in the atrocities including genocides, killings, rapes and arsons as auxiliary forces of Pakistani occupying army.

Almost all the leaders and activists of those parties had joined Jamaat after the independence of

Bangladesh, he added.

Hasan said the political parties, including the Nazi Party, which had committed war crimes, had been tried and punished in the Nuremberg trial.

PROF MIZANUR RAHMAN National Human Rights Commission Chairman Prof Mizanur Rahman said the House has discharged its "actual duty" by amending the law for trying the Jamaat as an organisation for its role in 1971.

"It was very much necessary to try Jamaat-e-Islami for its role during the Liberation War. It [Jamaat] has taken decisions, executed their plans to commit crimes against humanity and other crimes in 1971," Prof Mizan told The Daily Star last night.

He said the recent verdict of the International Crimes Tribunal-2 mentioned Jamaat's role in 1971.

"I am very much happy. The House has discharged its stipulated duty," he added.

In its verdict in Abul Kalam Azad's case, the tribunal-2 said Jamaat significantly contributed to the creation of auxiliary forces during the Liberation War for combating unarmed Bangalee civilians in the name of protecting Pakistan.

People of the then East Pakistan wholeheartedly supported the war and took part in the call to free Bangladesh, said the verdict. But a small number of Bangalees, Biharis, other pro-Pakistanis, as well as members of a number of

different religion-based political parties, particularly Jamaat and its student wing Islami Chhatra Sangha, joined and/or collaborated with the Pakistani military to actively oppose the creation of independent Bangladesh, the verdict added.

"And most of them committed and facilitated the commission of atrocities in violation of customary international law in the territory of Bangladesh," it read.

NASIRUDDIN YUSUF BACHCHU Valiant freedom fighter Nasiruddin Yusuf Bachchu expressed the hope that Jamaat would be banned through the trial, as the House has paved the way for trying the political party.

Anti-liberation forces such as Peace Committee, Razakar, Al-Badr and Al-Shams were formed under the leadership of Jamaat during the Liberation War, he observed.

Along with the Pakistani army, Jamaat and its organisations fought against the freedom fighters and committed numerous crimes during the nine-month-long war, he said, adding, "So it [Jamaat] should be banned."

He also congratulated the members of parliament for bringing the amendment.

SHANTANU MAJUMDER Dr Shantanu Majumder of political science at Dhaka University told The Daily Star it was mandatory to try the organisation, which had committed crimes

during the war, to ensuring "total justice."

If the trial is held only for persons, many leaders might escape punishment, as they might not have had physical participation in crimes but masterminded those.

MOFIDUL HAQUE Mofidul Haque, one of the trustees of the Liberation War Museum, said the role and brutality of Jamaat during the Liberation War were proved through two verdicts of the International Crimes Tribunal-2.

"For this reason, people have been demanding banning Jamaat and the House has taken a positive decision, as the matter will be settled through judicial process now," he added.