

NUCLEAR TALKS Iran, EU inch towards putting deal into action

AFP, Geneva

Iran and EU representatives met for a second day yesterday to discuss how to implement a landmark deal on containing Tehran's nuclear programme, which they aim to put into action within 10 days.

Negotiators have said they want to implement the deal, which aims to rein in Tehran's nuclear programme in exchange for some sanctions relief, by January 20.

The diplomats were painstakingly poring over three outstanding issues in a bid to put the groundbreaking November 24 deal into action, Iran's deputy chief nuclear negotiator Abbas Araqchi said.

"We still have disagreement on three points... If we solve these issues then the Geneva deal will be executable," Araqchi told Iranian state-run TV.

He was meeting for a second and final day yesterday in Geneva with Helga Schmid, deputy to EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton, whose office represents the so-called P5+1 group of world powers -- Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States plus Germany.

On Thursday, the two had "reviewed one or two of the remaining points and discrepancies and exchanged opinions," he said, adding that they had agreed to take a break to allow Schmid to consult with the P5+1.

"Ms. Schmid has a heavy responsibility because on every single issue she has to consult with each of the six countries," he said.

During the first day of talks, the pair also met with top US nuclear negotiator Wendy Sherman, who provided "views and information that was useful to discussions to address any remaining issues to the agreement to the joint plan of action," the State Department said late Thursday.

Sherman, who travelled on to Moscow yesterday, also held a brief meeting with Iran.

Western powers and Israel fear Iran is seeking to develop the atomic bomb under the guise of a civilian nuclear programme, but

Tehran has always denied this.

Under the November deal, Iran agreed to curb parts of its nuclear drive for six months in exchange for receiving modest relief from international sanctions and a promise by Western powers not to impose new measures against its hard-hit economy.

Technical experts from both sides have since November held several sessions in Geneva aimed at fine tuning the deal.

But when experts held four days of talks last month in Vienna -- home of the International Atomic Energy Agency -- the Iranians walked out after Washington expanded its sanctions blacklist against Tehran.

And the latest round of talks in Geneva comes as Iranian leaders increasingly voice concern and frustration at the slow pace of implementation.

Iran's President Hassan Rouhani warned in a phone conversation with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin Thursday against "seeking excuses that would create problems in the negotiation process," Iran's ISNA news agency reported.

He also called on "certain countries ... to respect their own commitments (under the Geneva deal) and avoid new strictures that would shadow their goodwill."

Some observers have also warned a new generation of nuclear centrifuges, which could potentially enable Iran to rapidly purify uranium to a weapons-grade level, might become a sticking point in the talks.

Two weeks ago, Iran's atomic energy chief Ali Akbar Salehi said Tehran was "testing third and fourth generations of its centrifuges," which were almost five times more effective than the current ones.

A Vienna-based diplomat told AFP the problem was that the November plan "wasn't that specific" on the issue, meaning it is "open to interpretation by both sides".

The interim deal is meant to buy time for diplomacy to clinch a lasting agreement that would allay Western suspicions that Iran is covertly developing nuclear weapons.

Govt moves to try Jamaat

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submitting it to the tribunal, Tureen Afroz said, adding they have already made a draft of the petition.

Recent violent activities of Jamaat might be mentioned in the petition seeking necessary directives from the tribunal, she said. More prayers would be made before the tribunal if it accepts the case.

Delivering a verdict in the war crimes case against former Jamaat ameer Ghulam Azam, International Crimes Tribunal-1 on July 15 termed Jamaat-e-Islami "a criminal organisation" for its role during the Liberation War.

It suggested the government bar anti-liberation people from holding key positions in any government, non-government and socio-political organisations.

The tribunal judges said, "In the interest of establishing a democratic as well as non-communal Bangladesh, we observe that no such anti-liberation people should be allowed to sit at the helm of executives of the government, social or political parties, including government and non-government organisations.

"We are of the opinion that the government may take necessary steps to that end for debaring those anti-liberation persons from holding the said superior posts in order to establish a democratic and non-communal country for which millions of people sacrificed their lives during the War of Liberation," the tribunal judges said.

Sentencing Al-Badr leaders Chowdhury Mueen Uddin and Ashrafuzzaman Khan to death for abducting and killing 18 intellectuals

and professionals towards the end of the Liberation War, the International Crimes Tribunal-2 on November 3 said it was Jamaat-e-Islami and its creations, fanatic groups like Al-Badr, Razakar, Al-Shams, and the Peace Committee, who took a stance to "save Pakistan and Islam" even if it required the annihilation of pro-liberation Bangalee nation.

It said Jamaat indulged in indiscriminate massacre of their political opponents belonging to the Bangalee nation in the name of eliminating "miscreants" and "infiltrators".

The tribunal had made similar observations in the verdicts in the war crimes cases against other Jamaat leaders Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed and Muhammad Kamaruzzaman.

Soon after the independence, the government in its first decision banned five communal outfits, including Jamaat, which not only opposed the nation's independence but also actively helped Pakistani occupation forces commit genocide and other war crimes.

The banned parties, including Jamaat, were given the green light to do politics during the rule of Ziaur Rahman after the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975.

In August this year, the High Court has declared Jamaat's registration with the Election Commission as a political party illegal. An appeal filed by Jamaat against the HC verdict is now pending with the SC.

Controversial Islamist thinker Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdudi formed Jamaat in undivided India under British colonial rule in 1941.

Two housewives raped for voting

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television channel said the men broke into her house and tied up her husband, father, mother, and in-laws and children and then one of them raped her.

She said she was raped around 2:30am on Wednesday.

In the morning, the entire family of a victim left the area in fear.

Local union parishad member Afzal Hossain told journalists about the incident and that he had visited the homes the next day and talked to a victim. The woman had told Afzal that the rapist whilst violating her asked her why she had voted in the election.

Joydev Bhadra, superintendent of police of Jessore, said, "When we heard it from a journalist, police went to the village and found the two victims. They are now at Monirampur Police Station. We are going to bring them to Jessore Medical College Hospital for tests."

The district administration has sent a 10-members police team to the village. Since the incident, the villagers had set up neighbourhood watch during the night. The Hindus, especially the women, have been living in fear.

Atrocities on the Hindus, however, are still going on.

Allegedly BNP-Jamaat men set fire to a Hindu house at Leelarhat village in Thakurgaon Thursday night and hay heaps belonging to Hindus in Bashiadevi village.

The Hindus have set up neighbourhood watches in around 15 villages in Thakurgaon and women of the community are spending the nights huddled together at one place for better security.

Meanwhile, burglars broke into two temples at Satdoha of Magura early Friday and stole gold and silver ornaments and money.

Quoting Santosh Dutta, president of Satdoha Mandir Committee, BSS reported that

Standoff over major Iraq cities enters second week

AFP, Fallujah

A deadly standoff between Iraqi authorities and gunmen holding key territory on Baghdad's doorstep entered its second week yesterday, ahead of prayers where militants previously declared an Islamic state.

Gunmen seized all of the city of Fallujah, located just 60 kilometres (37 miles) from Baghdad, and parts of Anbar provincial capital Ramadi last week, a standoff that a senior US official has warned could take weeks to resolve.

It is the first time militants have exercised such open control in major cities since the insurgency that followed the 2003 US-led invasion.

The United Nations and non-governmental organisations have warned civilians lack access to

People bear jams

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Thousands of travellers there had to suffer from the winter chill and lack of food, drinking water and toilet facilities for about 16 hours from 3:00am yesterday.

Ferry service in Mawa-Kewrakandi terminal remained suspended for around 12 hours from 11:00pm Thursday due to fog. This left about 5,000 vehicles stuck on both sides, in Munshiganj and Madaripur.

A total of 11 ferries were anchored in the middle of the Padma river due to poor visibility, reports our Munshiganj correspondent.

Sirajul Haque, manager of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC) at Mawa, told The Daily Star that the ferries were asked to stay put in mid-river for safety.

The ferry service resumed after the fog cleared a little.

At least 10 kilometres of tailback was seen from Kewrakandi ferry terminal to Shariatullah bridge in Madaripur, reports our correspondent.

Bus passenger Haider Hossain had reached the terminal around 10:00am yesterday but could not board a ferry before 11:00pm. He was going to Gopalganj.

Dense fog also halted ferry movement in Paturia-Daulatdia terminal in Manikganj for 11 hours, until 9:30am yesterday, said BIWTC Manager (commerce) Mohiuddin Russell.

More than 1,000 vehicles including at least 500 buses had to wait in queues on both sides of the terminal without proper food, drinking water and sanitation facilities amid severe cold, reports our Manikganj correspondent.

The dense fog also delayed departure of launches across the country by two to three hours yesterday.

EC fails

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the administration in providing the voters security, the turnout was lower than the previous elections.

"Observing 16 constituencies on a sample basis, we have found that the voter turnout was around 37 percent. But this is not the average turnout of the whole country," said Sharmeen.

Earlier, the Election Working Group, another local body composed of 29 NGOs that observed the elections in 75 seats, claimed that the voter turnout had been 30 percent on average, whereas the EC claimed it to be more than 40 percent.

Presenting a brief report on their observation during the pre and post-election periods, Sharmeen said her organisation had recorded numerous incidents of violence centring on the polls.

The report says at least 21 persons were killed on the election day while nine more in post-election violence.

Since the election schedule was declared on November 25, at least 180 people had been killed and more than 587 others were injured in violence, the report adds.

The 10th parliamentary polls witnessed massive violence in at least 445 centres of 32 districts, said Sharmeen, alleging that the BNP-led 18-party had carried out the mayhem to foil the elections.

The Brotee chief also claimed that a large number of people belonging to minority communities could not cast their votes fearing violence afterwards.

She said that for better turnout and a fair election there was no alternative to giving the voters proper security.

She also observed that any election without the participation of the main opposition cannot be acceptable.

Need critical

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democratic institutions in the country, according to a report of Russian news agency ITAR-TASS on Thursday.

In Washington, the US Senate urged the Bangladesh leaders to take immediate steps to rein in and condemn violence as well as to provide space for peaceful political protests.

It also said the government should ensure judicial independence, end harassment of human rights activists and restore the independence of Grameen Bank.

The Senate supported the UN efforts to foster political dialogue between the parties.

Senators Richard Durbin, Michael B Enzi and Christopher S Murphy submitted the resolution in the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations on December 11.

Another burn victim

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He was admitted to Satkhira Sadar Hospital where doctors said his condition was critical.

"Azibor has been out of work for so long, we are absolutely penniless. I do not know how I will pay for his treatment," said his wife Rashida Khatun.

Army to stay

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but the voting in 392 polling stations was suspended due to widespread violence.

The armed forces personnel were deployed across the country for 15 days from January 26 to ensure peaceful conduct of 10th parliamentary elections.

German FM due in Mideast to 'encourage' peace talks

AFP, Berlin

German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier will travel to Israel and the Palestinian territories next week to lend backing to nascent peace efforts, a spokesman said yesterday.

Ahead of a planned trip to Israel by German Chancellor Angela Merkel in late February, Steinmeier will visit Jerusalem Sunday and Monday for talks with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, President Shimon Peres and Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, ministry spokesman Sebastian Fischer told reporters.

Steinmeier will also see Justice Minister Tzipi Livni, Israel's chief peace negotiator, and opposition leader Isaac Herzog before meeting Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas in Ramallah, Fischer added.

"The peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians are in an important phase and in this context, the visit is intended as a sign of encouragement and support," he said.

"The foreign minister wants to get his own sense of the situation."

Merkel is to travel to Israel next month at

Malaysia, Turkey aim to conclude free-trade deal

AFP, Putrajaya

Malaysia and Turkey yesterday pledged to wrap up a free-trade deal this year as embattled Turkish leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan prepared to return home to a political crisis.

Erdogan met with his host, Malaysian premier Najib Razak, on the final day of a week-long trip that earlier took him to Japan and Singapore.

During his Asia visit, Erdogan has avoided comment on the Turkish political maelstrom that first erupted in December when dozens of leading businessmen and political figures were detained in a corruption probe whose targets include key Erdogan allies.

Erdogan's government has responded to the widening investigation by moving to root out political foes in the police and judiciary in a purge that has seen hundreds of police personnel fired.

Erdogan did not take questions during a press briefing with Najib that focused on a joint pledge to finalise a free-trade deal by April and lift trade between the two majority-Muslim countries to \$5 billion in five years.

"There are countless opportunities we can

All-party; team of around 50

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joining the cabinet is unprecedented in the country.

Also, there is no provision in the constitution allowing the opposition to join the cabinet, barrister Rafique-Ul Huq told The Daily Star.

He added if JP lawmakers wanted to do so, they must first resign from the opposition.

Eminent jurist Shahdeen Malik said, "If the opposition lawmakers accept ministerial posts, then they are no longer in the opposition; they are coalition partners of the government."

And if an all-party cabinet is indeed formed, it will be like the one in the Soviet Union in the 1970s when there was no opposition in parliament, he said, adding that the government seemed to have adopted that model.

Asked if it was against the constitution and the House rules of procedure, he irritatingly said: "Who cares about the constitution?"

According to government sources, Hasina's first challenge is to get international support. Considering this, she will appoint an experienced lawmaker as foreign minister to deal with the international community that is highly disappointed with the government for

Netanyahu's invitation for annual talks between their two governments.

Steinmeier served as Germany's top diplomat from 2005-2009. It will be his first trip to the region since taking office again last month as part of Merkel's "grand coalition" government.

Germany is widely seen as Israel's closest ally in Europe.

Its support of Israel has been a constant since World War II, although Berlin has upped pressure recently on Netanyahu to show greater restraint in building settlements in the Palestinian territories.

However Israel unveiled plans yesterday to construct more than 1,800 new settler homes, watchdog said, in the face of fresh US efforts to push faltering peace talks forward.

Before heading to the Middle East, Steinmeier will join fellow ministers from the "Friends of Syria" grouping in Paris Sunday for talks with leaders of the mainstream opposition to President Bashar al-Assad to prepare for peace talks in Switzerland later this month, Fischer confirmed.

seize," Erdogan said, listing cooperation in energy, the automotive sector and infrastructure as possibilities.

Bilateral trade was \$918 million in January-October 2013, Najib said.

Malaysia and Turkey first began discussing a free-trade deal in 2009, according to Malaysia's government, but previous targeted completion dates have been missed.

The political crisis in Turkey is the biggest threat to occur in Erdogan's 11 years in power.

He calls the investigation a plot to topple his Islamic-rooted government.

But critics have labelled his response a desperate attempt to protect cronies caught up in the probe of alleged bribery in construction projects and illicit money transfers by a state-owned bank to sanctions-hit Iran.

The situation also has raised questions over Turkey's aspirations to join the European Union, which requires member countries to bring their legislation in line with EU norms and safeguard the rule of law.

After their press conference, Erdogan and Najib were to attend Friday prayers together.

Erdogan was scheduled to depart Malaysia for the trip home late yesterday.

holding a one-sided election that saw a very low turnout.

AL General Secretary Syed Ashraful Islam and PM's International Affairs Adviser Gowher Rizvi are the top candidates for the post. But incumbent Foreign Minister AH Mahmud Ali may continue if the two refuse to take the job, AL insiders said.

Incumbent Finance Minister AMA Mubith is also likely to continue for a few months. Tofail Ahmed may get the commerce ministry.

As maintaining law and order is a major challenge for the government, the prime minister is looking for an experienced lawmaker from her party for the home ministry.

Experienced ministers like Matia Chowdhury, Obaidul Quader, Nurul Islam Nahid, Abdur Razzaque, Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, among others, will continue in the new cabinet that may see more than 10 new faces, the sources said.

They may include engineer Mosharraf Hossain, Saber Hossain Chowdhury, Asaduzzaman Noor, Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury, Nasrul Hamid Bipu and Anisul Huq.

Changes are also likely in the positions of the PM's advisers.

Sri Lanka protests US war crimes remarks

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka yesterday said it would protest to the United States over its allegations that army shelling killed hundreds of families during the final days of the island's ethnic civil war.

A senior foreign ministry official said the allegation, made in a US embassy tweet Thursday, would be discussed with visiting Ambassador for Global Criminal Justice Stephen Rapp.

"Our minister (G. L. Peiris) will take it up face-to-face with ambassador Rapp," the official told AFP, asking not to be named.

"It is a baseless allegation. It is uncalled for," he said.

Rapp arrived in Sri Lanka Monday on a five-day visit to meet officials and politicians to discuss Sri Lanka's rights record and attempts at reconciliation five years after the end of war.

The US embassy posted on Twitter a photo of Rapp and its ambassador Michele Sison from the island's former battle zone with the caption: "St Anthony's Ground - site of Jan 2009 killing of hundreds of families by army shelling."

US diplomats in Colombo told AFP the tweet reflected

Washington's toughening human rights policy towards Sri Lanka.

"This tweet reflects official government stance," an embassy official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Sri Lanka has denied charges that up to 40,000 ethnic Tamil civilians were killed by the army during the final push that crushed Tamil rebels fighting for a separate homeland.

Sri Lanka maintains that not a single civilian was killed by troops and in November ordered a census of war casualties.

The country's main Tamil political party has rejected the count as a sham and says it will collate its own figures.

The UN estimates that the conflict for a separate homeland for ethnic Tamils in the Sinhalese-majority nation cost at least 100,000

FREELANCE SPEAKER



Badruddin Ahmed, a senior Banker and Trainer served as **Chief of Training** in four Banks. Only recently, he completed last assignment as **Training Counselor of Bank Asia Institute for Training and Development**. His appetite for training is insatiable. Therefore, he will continue to remain in the domain of training as **Freelance Speaker**.
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