

UN to threaten sanctions over Central Africa chaos

AFP, United Nations

The UN Security Council will threaten sanctions yesterday against the ringleaders of deadly turmoil in the Central African Republic and give a mandate to EU troops bolstering international forces there.

The French-drafted resolution, expected to be adopted unanimously by the 15-nation council, also steps up pressure on interim President Catherine Samba Panza to restore order.

A rebel alliance overthrew the government in March last year but the chaos that followed has seen the country descend into a spiral of banditry and clashes between rival Christian and Muslim militias in which thousands have died.

The resolution, obtained by AFP, threatens sanctions against individuals and groups that "undermine the peace, stability or security" of the Central African Republic.

Sponsored by France, which already has troops backing an African force in the impoverished nation, the resolution pointedly says this includes acts which "threaten or violate transitional agreements, or that threaten or impede the political transition process, including a transition toward free and fair democratic elections, or that fuel violence."

While it does not name names, the threat could open the way for action by a Security Council sanctions committee against several rebel leaders.

The return of firing squad?

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just that I foresee a problem, and I'm trying to come up with a solution that will be the most humane yet most economical for our state."

Brattin said questions about the injection drugs were sure to end up in court, delaying executions and forcing states to examine alternatives. It was unfair, he said, for relatives of murder victims to wait years, even decades, to see justice served while lawmakers and judges debated execution methods.

Like Brattin, a Wyoming lawmaker this month offered a bill allowing the firing squad. Missouri's attorney general and a state lawmaker have raised the notion of rebuilding the state's gas chamber. And a Virginia lawmaker wants to make electrocution an option if lethal-injection drugs are unavailable.

If adopted, those measures could mark a return to the days of inmates being hanged, electrocuted or shot to death by marksmen.

States began moving to lethal injection in the 1980s in the belief that powerful sedatives and heart-stopping drugs would replace the violent spectacles with a more clinical affair while limiting – if not eliminating – an inmate's pain.

The total number of US executions has declined in recent years from a peak of 98 in 1999 to 39 last year. Some states have turned away from the death penalty entirely; many have cases tied up in court. And those that carry on with executions find them increasingly difficult to conduct because of the scarcity of drugs and doubts about how well they work.

In recent years, European drug-makers have stopped selling the lethal chemicals to prisons because they do not want their products to be used to kill.

Michael Campbell, assistant professor of

The resolution will also give a UN mandate to about 500 soldiers the European Union plans to send to the Central African Republic.

It gives the EU contingent the right to use "all necessary measures" -- force -- to protect civilians that the 1,600 French troops and some 3,500 African troops already have.

Belgium, Estonia, Poland and Spain are being spoken of as possible contributors to the European force.

The African Union's stabilization force, known as MISCA, is expected to be turned into a UN peacekeeping force this year.

But diplomats say African nations want to give MISCA a chance to prove its worth first amid an intense discussion over the mandate of a UN force in a country where there is not yet a peace to keep while political efforts to rebuild it are stumbling.

The council resolution says that national elections must be held as soon as possible and by February 2015 at the latest.

It also calls on UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to "urgently" step up assistance to the UN political mission in the Central African Republic.

The mission, known as BINUCA, will help the government to organize elections but under its new extended mandate will also help it provide basic services.

UN staff will also assist an international committee of inquiry looking into massacres and human rights abuses by the rival militia.

criminal justice at the University of Missouri-St Louis, said some lawmakers simply did not believe convicted murderers deserved any mercy.

"Many of these politicians are trying to tap into a more populist theme, that those who do terrible things deserve to have terrible things happen to them," Campbell said.

Some states already provide alternatives to lethal injection. Condemned prisoners may choose the electric chair in eight states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Kentucky, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia. An inmate named Robert Gleason Jr was the most recent to die by electrocution, in Virginia in January 2013.

Arizona, Missouri and Wyoming allow for gas-chamber executions. Missouri no longer has a gas chamber but its attorney general, Chris Koster, a Democrat, and the Missouri state senator, Kurt Schaefer, a Republican, last year suggested rebuilding one. So far, there is no bill to do so.

Delaware, New Hampshire and Washington state still allow inmates to choose hanging. The last hanging in the US was of Billy Bailey in Delaware in 1996. Two prisoners in Washington state have chosen to be hanged since the 1990s – Westley Allan Dodd in 1993 and Charles Rodman Campbell in 1994.

Firing squads typically consist of five sharpshooters with rifles, one of which is loaded with a blank so the shooters do not know for sure who fired the fatal bullet. They have been used mostly for military executions.

Since the end of the civil war, there have been three civilian executions by firing squad in the US, all in Utah. Gary Gilmore uttered his famous final words – "Let's do it" – on 18 January 1977, before his execution, which ended what amounted to a 17-year national moratorium on the death penalty.

HRW calls for free probe

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continue arresting opposition supporters, some of whom are accused of being involved in violent protests before and during the January 5 polls, which were boycotted by the opposition parties.

The HRW said death after arrest occurred in "crossfire" was a common euphemism used by the security forces.

"We are seeing a frightening pattern of supposed 'crossfire' killings of opposition members in Bangladesh," said Brad Adams, executive director of HRW Asia Division, adding, "The Bangladeshi government needs to ensure proper control of the security forces and order an independent and credible investigation into these deaths."

Earlier on January 21, State Minister for Home Affairs Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal said the joint forces were engaged in an operation against "terrorists" and that none of those involved in violence before the elections "would be spared".

More than 150 people died before the polls, the bloodiest in Bangladesh's history. Many were

ordinary citizens whose vehicles were set on fire by opposition supporters.

The HRW said their interviews suggested how extrajudicial killings were committed by the security forces.

The rights body called on the government to publicly order the security forces to follow the UN's basic principles on the use of force and firearms by law-enforcement officials, which state that security forces will "apply non-violent means before resorting to the use of force and firearms".

"The situation in Bangladesh is spiralling into a human rights crisis, with the possible return of suspicious killings by security forces, which we haven't seen in recent years," Adams said.

"The governing Awami League complained bitterly about crossfire killings while in opposition, but it doesn't seem to be doing anything to stop them now that it's in power. It's time for the prime minister to make a public statement condemning killings and torture, and hold the security forces accountable."

Two more killed

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spate of extrajudicial killings, Human Rights Watch called for an independent investigation into the incidents.

Yesterday, Touhidul Islam Sabuj, 28, the second-in-command of PBCP, was killed in an exchange of shots between his party members and police in Phultala upazila of Khulna, according to police.

Sabuj and his associates were holding a meeting at Chatiantola in the upazila around 3:30am. On a tip-off, a police team led by the officer-in-charge of Phultala Police Station went to raid the area. A "gunfight" ensued as they fired at the law enforcers, said the OC, Mohammad Elias Fakir.

After the firing that lasted for nearly an hour, police found Sabuj lying in a pool of blood while his associates managed to flee.

He was taken to Phultala Upazila Health Complex where he succumbed to his injuries nearly eight hours after the incident, the OC added.

However, Monjur Morshed, upazila health and family planning officer, said he had heard from the doctor, who was on duty at the hospital at the time, that Sabuj was brought in dead.

Sabuj was accused in nine murder cases and three others filed under the Arms Act.

Police said they had recovered two firearms, 19 bullets, six handmade bombs and two

machetes from the spot.

In Abhaynagar upazila of Jessore, Rabiul Islam, 28, a member of a local gang, Mesbah Bahini, was killed in a "gunfight" with the joint force, police sources said.

This is the gang that had hacked and then burnt alive Chaitanya Kumar Mondol, 48, the youth and sports secretary of Magura ward Awami League, on Sunday night.

Police arrested Rabiul yesterday in connection with a mugging case.

Acting on the information extracted from him, a team of the joint force conducted a drive at Ziadanga village in the upazila around 2:00am to recover arms, Syed Mostafa Kamal, assistant superintendent of police in Jessore, told The Daily Star.

As the law enforcers reached near a bamboo cluster of the village, cohorts of Mesbah-ur-Rahman, leader of the gang, opened fire on them, the ASP said. The joint force members fired back.

During the "gunfight" Rabiul tried to run away and got injured in the firing. He was rushed to Abhaynagar Upazila Health Complex where doctors declared him dead.

Rabiul was accused in several cases, including murder and mugging charges.

Three police personnel also sustained minor injuries during the firing.

A pistol and two bullets were recovered from

BNP denied

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procession across the country", BNP spokesperson Asaduzzaman Ripon told reporters at a press conference at the party's Naya Paltan office yesterday.

On January 15, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia announced the alliance decision to hold the black flag procession programme in protest at the holding of the January 5 "farical" election and convening of the "illegal parliament".

Talking to The Daily Star last night, Masudur Rahman, deputy commissioner (media) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, said, "The DMP could not give permission to the BNP on security grounds."

He, however, did not elaborate on the matter. Earlier, the BNP sought permission from DMP to hold the black flag procession on city streets.

On January 20, the BNP held a rally in the capital in a bid to thank people for "rejecting" the January 5 election.

At the rally, the BNP had invited all components in the BNP-led 18-party combines except Jamaat and three other Islamic parties amid

Youth shot dead

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The victim, Sazzad Hossain Swopan, 25, son of Sultan Mia of Sonargaon in Narayanganj,

had been living with his family in an abandoned staff quarter of the National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases.

"Local miscreant Anik and others had been issuing death threat to my brother as he protested their illegal drug trading in the quarter. Anik along with other local goons came to his residence around 8:00am. Anik fired shots at his head leaving him dead instantly," alleged deceased sister Aklima Akter Swopna quoting his another brother, who witnessed the incident.

Earlier on November 24 last year, deceased's wife Bipasha Akhter lodged a general diary with Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Police Station accusing that Anik, Monir, Jhumu, Faruque, Chan and Komol threatened to kill her husband.

But sub-inspector Shamsur Rahman of the police station who prepared the inquest report told The Daily Star that Swopan was a drug peddler. The police official suspects that the victim's accomplices killed him over financial transaction.

The body was sent to Dhaka Medical College Morgue for an autopsy. A murder case was filed

Three Musketeers

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relating to the future structure, governance and financial models of the ICC." It also added that a follow-up meeting will be held to discuss the proposals again next month.

The ICC board unanimously supported a few principles including two pertinent issues relating to Bangladesh.

The first one is that 'there will be an opportunity for all members to play all formats of cricket on merit, with participation based on meritocracy; no immunity to any country, and no change to membership status'. And the second one is that 'mutually agreed bi-lateral FTP agreements will be legally binding for the same period as the ICC commercial rights cycle (2015-2023)'.

If these two principles are agreed upon then Bangladesh's status as a Test nation will not only remain intact but will also guarantee their participation in Test matches till 2023.

Tajul made

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decision at a meeting at the parliament building, Kazi Feroz Rashid, party presidium member and a lawmaker, told The Daily Star.

Tajul had been elected from Kurigram-2 constituency. He will replace Zainul Abdin Farroque, a former MP of the BNP, who was the opposition chief whip in the ninth parliament.

The meeting was presided over by JP presidium member and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Raushan Ershad. Water Resources Minister Anisul Islam Mahmud and Deputy Minister for Youth and Sports Mujibul Haque Chhunu, among others, were present in the half-an-hour-long meeting that started at 11:30am.

The meeting also discussed in brief JP's strategy in parliament which will go into the first session this afternoon.

"We will criticize the government constructively and thus play our role in parliament as the main opposition," Feroz Rashid said.

Sorry

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The photographs of him taking a drag on his cigarette in front of children had caused a huge uproar. The minister was attending a programme at Sylhet BGB Public School and College to felicitate the students who have scored GPA-5 in Junior School Certificate and Primary School Certificate exams.

Mohsin said his habit of smoking deteriorated after his return from the captivity of the Pakistani occupation forces in 1971.

In the Facebook status posted around 11:00am yesterday, he said the photographs published in

Not safe even

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around 54 percent of the urban men think it a woman's fault if she gets raped. The survey was done on 2,000 men in 2011.

Ruma, an official in a private company in the capital, said she nearly broke down in tears on a bus recently because when she tried to get a seat reserved for women from a man occupying it, he flung degrading comments at her.

"He declared to everyone that I was probably a sex worker because I was wearing jeans and I dared to talk back," she said.

When university student Adity Shayanatny reprimanded a man groping her, he hurled abuses at her, saying that she was making false accusations.

"This happened during a religious festival. I was only in eighth grade then," she said.

Anamika Alam of Barabkunda village of Sitakunda in Chittagong told The Daily Star that the situation was just the same in the villages.

"I was stalked for days on end," she said. However, that did not stop her from going to school or university.

Living in the port city now, Anamika feels that villages are better compared to the scale of sexual violence she faces on the city streets.

"At least everyone knows me there and would not dare to do anything more extreme than stalking. I have no support networks to fall back on in the city," she said.

Cuba hosts LatAm leaders against crisis backdrop

AFP, Havana

Leaders from across Latin America put aside domestic financial stability concerns Monday to converge on Cuba for the summit of a major group set up to counter US influence.

The CELAC bloc of 33 Latin American and Caribbean nations was founded by Venezuela's late anti-Western leader Hugo Chavez, and specifically excludes the United States and Canada.

Its second summit is hosted by Chavez's closest ally, communist Cuba, a major diplomatic coup for a country Washington has tried to isolate through a five-decade-old trade embargo.

"We're building on the harsh reality, laboriously, the ideal of a diverse but unified Latin America and the Caribbean," Cuban President Raul Castro, 82, said ahead of the meeting.

Castro was joined by several regional leaders in the town of Mariel to mark the opening of a major container port, partly funded by Brazil and a major outlet for an

island nation excluded from US trade.

"Brazil wants to be a first-order economic ally to Cuba," Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff declared at Monday's ceremony, which precedes a three-day summit ending tomorrow.

The region of 600 million people is seeing economic growth, with 3.2 percent predicted for 2014, up from 2.6 percent this year, according to UN figures.

But the recovery cannot mask signs of underlying instability in the region's major economic powers, problems that will only worsen as the United States tapers its own economic stimulus.

Argentina has jettisoned currency controls in the face of a plummeting peso in recent days, Venezuela has tightened its own controls and powerhouse Brazil has sluggish growth and a falling real.

Emerging economies worldwide have been hit by the global financial tightening led by the US Fed signaling an end to the stimulus measures put in place after the 2008 crisis.

Israel barrier threatens to split West Bank villages

AFP, Battir

Israel's separation barrier could soon destroy the livelihoods and redraw the demographics of two Palestinian villages south of Jerusalem, locals say, should an imminent court ruling approve its planned route.

The barrier -- in parts an eight-metre-high (25-foot) concrete wall -- would cut through ancient irrigation systems relied upon by the West Bank village of Battir, separate residents of nearby Beit Jala from their olive groves and divide a local Christian community.

The Supreme Court will rule today whether to approve the defence ministry's planned route, after a flurry of petitions by locals and activists pleading to redirect it.

The ministry insists the barrier, whose

construction began in 2002 during the bloody second Palestinian intifada (uprising) and which now snakes some 440 kilometres through the West Bank, is essential for Israeli security.

But in Battir, which straddles the 1949 armistice line south of Jerusalem, the barrier threatens the livelihoods of a 5,000-strong Palestinian community that depends on a Roman-era irrigation system, residents say.

The ancient system channels water from natural springs down stone terraces and through sluice gates to water villagers' orchards and gardens.

"The building of the wall will destroy parts of the water system that has been here for 2,500 years, including the stone channels that lead to the village," said Akram Badr, head of Battir village council.

Friendly JS starts rolling today

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questions as to whether they will be able to play their roles as opposition MPs.

Two minor political parties, BNF and Tarikat Federation, were left solely on the opposition benches.

Of them, two Tarikat MPs won with AL support and also by using the AL electoral symbol of the boat. As for the newly floated BNF, its chief got elected by chance, after JP chief HM Ershad withdrew his candidacy from a Dhaka constituency in his efforts to "quit" the polls race.

Against such a fractured opposition bench, more than 250 MPs will sit on the treasury benches led by Hasina, also leader of the House, to defend her government's policies.

The treasury bench consisting of MPs belonging to the AL, Workers Party, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, Jatiya Party-Manju and three lawmakers of the JP-led by Raushan will face little opposition.

The treasury bench will get even bigger when more than 40 out of the 50 would be MPs of reserved seats join it.

The nature of the three past parliaments - first, fourth and sixth -- may be mentioned here.

The first parliament constituted through the 1973 general election had no recognised opposition leader as only seven MPs were on the opposition benches. But none of them sat on the treasury benches.

The fourth parliament was formed through the 1988 general election held amid a boycott by the AL, BNP and other political parties. Blessed by the then Ershad regime, JSD leader ASM Rab was recognised as the opposition leader. But none of the opposition MPs joined the cabinet then either as the JP has done this time.

The sixth parliament formed through the February 15, 1996 one-sided election amid a boycott by the AL, JP and other parties had a very short life of 11 days. Its only function was to amend the constitution to introduce the caretaker government system in the wake of political unrest. Only 11 MPs, including 10 independent lawmakers, were

on the opposition benches. But none was recognised as the opposition leader.

This time the situation is different, though. Ministers of the AL-led government formed through the January 5 election held amid a boycott by the BNP-led alliance have been saying that the government will remain in office for five years.

For the first time in two decades, the BNP is now out of parliament. The party may not be able to wage any strong street protests anytime soon, after failing to "resist" the election.

Since 1991 when parliamentary democracy was restored, BNP chief Khaleda Zia was elected either the PM or the opposition leader. But this time, her party having boycotted the election, she will enjoy neither status.

At the inaugural of the 10th parliament this evening, President Abdul Hamid is scheduled to address the House.

The parliament, which was constituted on January 9 amid controversy that its lawmakers took the oath of office while the ninth parliament was still in existence, will elect the new Speaker and the Deputy Speaker today. They will be sworn in immediately after being elected.

The session will begin with outgoing Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, who is likely to get re-elected, in the chair.

ALPP CONFIRMS SHIRIN AS SPEAKER

The Awami League Parliamentary Party (ALPP) at a meeting yesterday nominated Shirin as the Speaker of the new parliament.

Chaired by party chief Hasina, the meeting also picked Fazle Rabbi for the post of Deputy Speaker, said meeting sources.


Earlier, Shirin was elected unopposed as a lawmaker from Rangpur-6.

The Election Commission issued a gazette notification in this regard yesterday, hours after the returning officer of Rangpur scrutinised the nomination paper and declared her elected uncontested.

The Jatiya Sangsad seat fell vacant after Hasina, who was also elected from Gopalganj-3, relinquished her membership of the constituency on January 8, three days after the national polls.

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