

Russia sees 'political will' for Iran deal

AFP, Moscow

Russia yesterday signaled that a deal could be clinched in Iran nuclear negotiations, as there is "political will" and a sense of urgency among participants for an accord before a July 20 deadline.

"One feels political will of the participants, and a certain fear that we may not be quick enough -- that is a good sign in this situation. There is not much time left. But there are chances," Russia's deputy foreign minister Sergei Ryabkov told Kommersant newspaper.

The most recent round of the negotiations is "different from the previous in that there is some static energy being accumulated that will have to be freed and turn into kinetic energy," he added.

The so-called P5+1 talks are now in the decisive final stretch as Iran and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council seek to reach an accord before a July 20 deadline to ease fears of Tehran obtaining nuclear weapons. In exchange, punishing sanctions on Iran would be lifted.

Ryabkov said that Moscow's current standoff with the West over the crisis in Ukraine will not hurt talks over Iran's nuclear programme.

"In my opinion, there is no grounds for worrying that the situation surrounding Ukraine will be the bomb set under the talks over Iran's nuclear programme, that it will prevent them from proceeding effectively," he said.

Adilur gets

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"The people of Bangladesh joined the liberation struggle in 1971 to establish a democratic country, based on equality, human dignity and social justice.

"Their dreams remain unfulfilled, as they now face extra-judicial killings, enforced disappearances and torture and ill treatment in custody. Human rights defenders are persecuted and the freedoms of media and association are curtailed."

Mrs Robert F Kennedy will present the Odhikar secretary with the award in Washington, DC, in a ceremony in November, according to the press release.

The Robert F Kennedy Human Rights Award was established in 1984 to recognise those individuals who stand up to oppression at grave personal risk in the non-violent pursuit of human rights.

Born to be

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father was killed after abduction along with six others, allegedly by Rab men in exchange for money in Narayanganj.

Jahangir Alam, the baby's father, was driving the private car in which Narayanganj City Corporation councillor Nazrul Islam and his three associates were travelling. The five and two others from another private car were kidnapped and killed on April 27.

Three former top Rab officials, who were fired from their job over the killing and abduction, are now in jail, facing trial in a Narayanganj court in this connection. All the three have confessed to the court that they were involved in the gruesome murder.

Jahangir had switched from driving a passenger bus to driving Nazrul's car after his wife's pregnancy entered the eighth month.

"He had been looking for a job better than that of a bus driver," Jahangir's wife Nupur had told The Daily Star after the April 27 incident.

Yesterday, Roja was throwing her tiny hands and legs aimlessly, lying on a bed of a Narayanganj hospital where relatives of most of the seven-murder victims came to share Nupur's joy.

But there was no joy, and Nupur, 17, seemed reluctant to even look at her newborn.

"She [Nupur] refuses to have a look at the baby. She is shivering and is very weak," said Nupur's mother Minara.

The day before he was killed, Jahangir had expressed his wish to quit the job because it involves risks, as his employer was a politician.

"He was driving for the last time that day. That was his last drive," said Asaduzzaman Rony, cousin of another victim, Swapan.

Jahangir's eldest brother Shahabuddin was also present at the hospital.

"What should we tell her when she will ask us about her father? ... I don't think I will have an answer," he said.

Hurricane Arthur weakens, after US East Coast landfall

AFP, Miami

Hurricane Arthur, downgraded to a category one storm, was carrying its still-fierce winds and drenching rains to the US northeast yesterday, after getting the July 4 holiday off to a soggy start for vacationers further south.

By 9:00am, Arthur, which had crashed ashore in North Carolina overnight as a category two storm, had lost a bit of its punch, with maximum sustained winds of 90 miles (150 kilometers) per hour.

Officials from the National Hurricane Center in Miami said the storm was likely to weaken further over the course of the day as it chugged northward on its mission to ruin Independence Day celebrations in the New England region of the US northeast.

The NHC's 1300 GMT advisory said Arthur was located about 205 kilometers east of Norfolk, Virginia, and was heading toward the northeast at 37 kilometers per hour.

By early today the storm was supposed to arrive in Nova Scotia, Canada, after first passing east of New England.

As dawn broke on a disrupted July 4 holiday for tens of thousands of vacationers, television footage showed fierce winds and horizontal rain in the resort region of the Outer Banks of North Carolina, the long and thin series of barrier islands where the

storm made landfall late Thursday.

Trees bent wildly in the gusting rain as gushing streams of water flowed in streets.

The NHC said the first hurricane of the Atlantic season carried damaging waves and powerful tidal surges, and left behind up to a half-foot (15 centimeters) in rainfall.

Some evacuations had been ordered as the hurricane approached. It finally came ashore as a category two hurricane, on a scale in which five is the highest.

The hurricane will weaken over the next two days into a post-tropical depression Friday night or Saturday, the Miami-based hurricane center said.

Thousands of people lost power in North Carolina, news reports said, and there was localized flooding in areas including the coastal city of Wilmington.

Emergency declarations were issued by several counties in the southern state, which opened emergency shelters and ordered evacuations in low-lying areas.

The storm threatened to scuttle traditional Independence Day weekend picnics, parades and fireworks displays for millions of Americans all along the East Coast, as far north as New England.

The Atlantic hurricane season began June 1 and runs through November 30.

War-torn S Sudan faces famine 'within weeks'

Warns aid agencies

AFP, Juba

Famine will break out in war-torn South Sudan within weeks unless there is massive funding for food aid, relief agencies warned on Thursday.

"If the conflict in South Sudan continues, and more aid cannot be delivered, then by August it is likely that some areas of South Sudan will slip into famine," warned Britain's Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC), a coalition of 13 major aid agencies.

Thousands have been killed in the conflict in the world's youngest country, while more than 1.5 million have been forced to flee since the war broke out in mid-December. Peace talks are currently stalled.

The United Nations has around 40 percent of the cash it needs, with a shortfall of over a billion dollars (760 million euros), with almost four million people in need of aid.

"There is a very real risk of famine in some areas," DEC chief Saleh Saeed said, warning that "millions of people are facing an extreme food crisis".

Famine implies that at least 20 percent of households face extreme food shortages, there is acute malnutrition in over 30 percent of people, and two deaths per 10,000 people every day, according to the UN's definition.

Rains this year are hoped to be around average or slightly below, according to UN experts, with hunger being caused by fighting not extreme climatic conditions.

The DEC coalition, which includes agencies such as Oxfam, Tearfund and Save the Children "have less than half the money they need to help prevent the growing food crisis in South Sudan turning into a catastrophe," Saeed added.

Fighting between forces of President Salva Kiir and troops loyal to rebel chief Riek Machar has been marked by widespread atrocities.

Kiir and Machar committed themselves last month to a third ceasefire deal, and agreed to forge a transitional government within 60 days, but fighting continues.

"Although humanitarian agencies are making every effort to increase aid deliveries, access has been limited by fighting and the start of the rainy season, which has turned many unpaved roads into rivers of mud," the aid agencies added.

On Monday, Doctors Without Borders (MSF), which has earned a reputation for working in some of the toughest warzone conditions across the world, said the situation was the worst it had seen in years, even during the two decades of war that paved the way for South Sudan's independence three years ago.

Some 100,000 civilians are crammed inside squalid camps inside UN bases across the country.

"There are so many diseases because we are living on the ground, and there is rain," said Abraham Tut Mayak, who like thousands of others lives in a makeshift plastic shelter in the UN base in Juba.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which has begun its first air drops of food for two decades, said there are already "alarming signs" of malnutrition, its country chief Franz Rauchenstein said.

The UN mission in South Sudan opened the gates to its peacekeeping bases to civilians when heavy fighting broke out in mid-December, expecting to offer temporary shelter, but many of those inside the camps say they are too frightened to leave, fearing revenge attacks.

The US-based Fund for Peace think-tank last month ranked South Sudan as bottom of its fragile states index, surpassing anarchic Somalia as the worst in the world. It warned that neither the rebels nor the government appear to realise "that it is 'losing' and could be compelled to put down arms".

Mother stabs French teacher to death in class

AFP, Albi

A primary school in southern France was in shock yesterday after a female teacher was stabbed to death in front of her pupils by a student's mother, who was quickly detained.

The attack on the 34-year-old teacher took place around 9:00 am (0700 GMT) as morning classes began at Albi's Edouard Herriot primary school, which is attended by 284 students aged from three to 11.

"This morning, a mother showed up with a knife and stabbed a 34-year-old teacher in front of her students, for reasons that will be determined by the investigation," Albi prosecutor Claude Derens told AFP.

"When I arrived at the scene they were trying to revive her. She was in cardiac arrest in her classroom," he said.

The victim, a mother of two small children, taught in the school's kindergarten.

Brazil set semi date

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Rodriguez, the outstanding player of the tournament so far, scored a penalty to make it 2-1 after Brazilian goalkeeper Julio Cesar brought down Carlos Bacca.

But Colombia were unable to find the equaliser to force extra-time as Brazil advanced to the last four.

Brazil's semi-final will see them

play Germany in a repeat of the 2002 World Cup final won 2-0 by the South Americans.

It will be only the second time Brazil has met Germany at a World Cup.

The quarter-final drama continues today when the Netherlands play Costa Rica and Belgium take on Argentina.

EC sues Ershad

FROM PAGE 1

Rahman, officer-in-charge of the police station, told The Daily Star yesterday.

But he did not mention any specific timeframe for submission of the report.

As per electoral law, all contesting candidates have to submit their electoral expenditure statements to the respective returning officers within 30 days of the publication of the election results in the official gazette.

If any candidate violates the law, he/she will face punishment of two to seven years' imprisonment and financial penalties.

Ershad was defeated in the Lalmonirhat-1 constituency by the ruling party candidate Motaahar Hossain.

The Jatiya Party chairman had announced that he would boycott the polls just after filing nominations for three constituencies -- Dhaka-17, Lalmonirhat-1, and Rangpur-3.

Then he was hospitalised in a dramatic development.

The EC rejected his application for withdrawal of nominations. It only cancelled his candidature for the Dhaka-17 seat. Ershad won from the Rangpur-3 constituency.

Md Habibur Rahman, who is also the deputy commissioner of Rangpur, filed a similar case against Sadeque Islam, a Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal candidate in the polls, for not submitting the expense report of his campaign in the same constituency.

155 victim shop

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He noted that he was the only bread earner for the family and it was tough to run a five-member family with the limited income.

Firoz, another shop owner, said, "No organisation has come forward for our rehabilitation. We observed hunger strike thrice. We were supposed to stage a demonstration on the first anniversary, but didn't do as the local MP assured us of looking into the matter, but he did nothing for us."

Shah Alam, who had invested Tk 75 lakh in his two shops in Rana Plaza, said, "Many had bank loans. But no bank exempted the loan for the incident. And the wholesalers are putting pressures on us to pay the dues. In a word we are in horrible situation."

Nadim Mobarak, who had an IT (information technology) business in Rana Plaza, said, "We have tried hard to receive compensation. But no one paid heed to our appeals at all. We're really in a very bad state... no one else other than us can understand this misery."

Shipon invested all his efforts and assets in his three shops in Rana Plaza. He has been unemployed over the last 14 months and has no other way to earn the living.

"I had invested Tk 95 lakh. Now I have lost everything... I'm unemployed now. Now I'm trying to go abroad but yet to get any scope."

General Secretary of the Rana Plaza Bebsayee Kalyan Samity Nuruzzaman said, "We approached every relevant ministry for compensation. But we are given only assurances."

"If the prime minister wants, she can compensate us as there is a Tk 100 crore fund for the compensation at the PMO."

"The businessmen of Baitul Mukarram were given Tk 50,000 as compensation just a day after Hefajat's mayhem. Here, many (Rana Plaza) became penniless, but no one come forward with Tk 10," he added.

Swapan informed that in a letter to the PMO they demanded Tk 45 crore as compensation for the 155 shops.

Contacted, local MP Enamur Rahman told the news agency, "I'm trying so that the shop owners can get compensation. I have contacted the people concerned in this regard."

Dream shattered

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"They used to send the greater portions of their incomes home. They always used to think of us and assure us of good days ahead," said the shell-shocked father of seven.

Swapan and Milon went abroad to turn the wheel of the family's fortune a few years ago.

They used to work at a water filtering factory in Benghazi with 30 other Bangladeshis. The two brothers were killed when a missile hit the labour camp in their sleep.

Kuddus demanded compensation from his sons' employer and the government.

"If we get financial assistance from my sons' employer and our government, my two younger sons can continue their study," he said.

Swapan got married three years ago before going to Egypt from where he had entered into Libya to join his bother, who had already been there.

Swapan also left a son aged two and a half years. Milon was unmarried.

They were buried at their village home at Goshairhat upazila of Shariatpur yesterday.

Wage Earners Welfare Board of the expatriates' welfare and the overseas employment ministry gave Tk 70,000 for the burial cost.

UN raises salaries

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long been lobbying a pay hike, but the wealthy and developed nations wanted a smaller increase.

The new rate was approved after contentious negotiations pitting wealthy countries against developing nations, according to a UN report.

The dispute left missions in legal limbo for three days since June 30.

It was over the amount of money that countries supplying troops to UN missions should receive per soldier for extra expenses needed for their deployment, including training, vaccinations, overseas allowances, uniforms and additional equipment.

The overall budget for the fiscal year July 1, 2014-June 30, 2015 is estimated at \$8.6 billion, an increase from the \$7.83 billion budget that expired on June 30.

Susana Malcorra, the chief of staff to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, told the budget committee it was crucial that it maintained its principle of adopting the budget by consensus rather than resorting to a vote for the first time.

But she expressed concern that

the three-day delay "may send an unprecedented signal of uncertainty" about the financing of peace-keeping missions.

"I think there are no winners and losers here today [Thursday]," said US Minister-Counselor Stephen Lieberman, echoing the importance of consensus. "We walked to the edge of the precipice but we didn't fall over the abyss."

The committee passed an annual budget for 16 peacekeeping operations and one special political mission in Afghanistan, supported by the Department of Peacekeeping, of some \$7 billion.

UN peacekeeping is paid for by assessed contributions, with the United States the top provider - paying 28 percent of the budget - followed by Japan, France, Germany and Britain.

Bangladesh emerged first for contributing the highest number of troops to the UN peacekeeping missions across the globe.

The other top contributors of troops to peacekeeping missions are Pakistan, India, Ethiopia and Rwanda.

Sharp decline of visitors

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One of the tigers died of intestine cancer in 2012 while the other died of natural causes.

Two new members, turkeys, got the tiger's cage but they are too small to attract the visitors from inside the large cage.

One of the lionesses was sent to Comilla Zoo in 2005 while another died in 2008. But before leaving the zoo, they gifted it two female cubs in 2008 which are now living in their father's cage as the king of animals was sent to Rajshahi Zoo in 2007.

But one important thing that the correspondent noticed is none of the cages of the tiger and lionesses has any grassy space inside for the animals to stroll on.

The lionesses, a black bear and a Para deer have been living in their cages without any mate. Besides, the birds are kept only in four cages. As a result, the birds and animals do not have proper facilities for reproduction.

Palash Dey, an animal lover who was visiting the zoo, scornfully said it seems that the animals are serving prison sentence in the small cages for the crime of being attractive.

Railings of some of the cages are broken while the others became fragile which is very dangerous, said the visitors.

Twenty deer of four species, 26 crocodiles, 33 monkeys of three species, and 10 pythons of two species are the other notable animals that turn the park into a zoo.

About the acrid odour, Deputy Curator Manjur Morshed Chowdhury said the cages are adjacent to one another without any space between them due to lack of land, which hinders the air flow and causes the odour.

Another visitor, Awlad Hossain, said, "Environment inside the zoo is unsafe and unhygienic. Stray dogs are roaming here freely and street urchins, beggars and hawkers often irritate the visitors by begging or

nagging them to buy their products." The urchins also hurl stones at the animals.

It is very difficult for only one guard assigned for daytime while two others, designated for nighttime to keep eyes on all the beggars and urchins who also enter the zoo by climbing the walls, said the curator.

Besides the deputy curator, a veterinary surgeon, an accounts officer and a store officer are working. The 15-staff team includes six animal caretakers, two ticket counter staff, two ticket checkers, an MLSS and a gardener.

At least two more caretakers, two guards, one office helper and a cleaner are needed, said zoo sources.

Moreover, the rear end of the zoo is completely unprotected with a small barbed wire fence covering that part. None was found guarding it when this correspondent visited it.

"The zoo's expansion is a must for improving its environment. There are 10 to 15 acres of Khas land behind the zoo. However, this land is illegally occupied by slums. That's why, we cannot seal the rear side by building walls," said Manjur.

Regarding the Khas land, Abdul Kader, additional deputy commissioner (revenue) of Chittagong district and also newly-appointed vice president of the zoo managing committee, said he would look into the matter.

The ticket price has increased to Tk 20 from Tk 10 in last ten years but no special attraction has been added to the zoo.

The zoo runs all its expenses by selling tickets which makes a monthly income of around Tk 7 lakh. There is no yearly allocation for animals, said the zoo authority.

The authorities have sent four letters to the fisheries and livestock ministry in the last two years, asking for 10 animals, including a lion, two tigers, a bear, a peahen, and Sambar deer. But they are yet to get any response.

Grabbers feast on forest

FROM PAGE 16

Land grabbers in Bodarkhali were so desperate that they poured petrol to burn down part of the forest to capture 315 acres for shrimp farming, said sources.

The forest department owns 2,737 acres in Sonadia island, out of which local influential people have already grabbed 640 acres.

Forest officials said they lacked staff and firearms to guard the area. Around 105 forest staff have only sticks to face the land grabbers, while the staff in Sonadia and Ghotibhanga upazilas have seven old guns.

The district administration leases out part of the mangrove forest to influential quarters on long-term basis without any assessment of forest conservation, complained forest officials.

They added: Land grabbers encroach upon the forest in connivance with corrupt officials in the district revenue and land offices.

SM Monirul Islam, divisional forest officer in Coastal Forest Department, said they will not be able to protect the forest if leasing out of forest land to influential people goes on.

The department has so far filed 111 cases against about 1,500 people in Gorokghata, Moheshkhali, Teknaf, Chorondhwa, Kutubdia and Sonua for grabbing land, he added.

Jafar Alam, additional deputy commissioner (revenue) in the district, however, refuted the allegations

made by the forest department.

"Field visits are conducted before any coastal land is leased out for shrimp farming. The field visits look into the present condition of the land, its real owners, the applicants seeking to take lease and whether the land is suitable for farming," he said.

"We send the lease proposals to higher authorities for approval only after completing all procedures," he said.

Following a writ petition, the High Court in 2000 had ordered the land ministry not to lease out any coastal land in Cox's Bazar.

In response to another writ petition filed by Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association, the HC in June 2012 ordered the ministry not to lease out 2.25 lakh acres of coastal land.

Responding to another writ petition by barrister Tania Amir, the court in the following month asked the government to declare the coastal mangrove forest as a protected forest.

Environmentalists said the authorities concerned are not taking any initiative to protect the forest. Rather, they are playing blame-game.

Fazlul Kader Chowdhury, president of the Cox's Bazar chapter of leading green platform Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon, blamed both the district administration and the forest department for destroying the forest.

"They are blaming each other to shirk their responsibilities," he mentioned.