

Ambassador in Beirut to face music

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The government would take "administrative steps" after the return of Bangladesh's ambassador to Lebanon AFM Gousal Azam Sarker, said the foreign minister.

Responding to a question at a press briefing, Foreign Minister Mahmood Ali said there had been lack of coordination among the officials at Bangladesh embassy in Beirut leading to the collapse of internal administration.

"There had been no alternative but to call him back. Administrative steps will be taken upon his return," he said, adding that the decision was made to protect Bangladesh's image abroad and national interest apart from restoring discipline in Bangladesh mission in Beirut.

The foreign ministry, in a formal letter to Bangladesh envoy in Beirut on July 17, asked him to return Dhaka and report to the ministry by yesterday.

But official sources said Gousal Azam sought for the six days' grace period and thus he would now return to Dhaka on July 27.

Foreign ministry sources said Gousal Azam yesterday handed over the charge to foreign ministry Director General M Nazrul Islam,

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Cox's BAZAR AIRPORT Runway closed after accident

OUR CORRESPONDENT from Cox's Bazar

The authorities have closed operation of Cox's Bazar Airport for around 19 hours, as an aircraft of United Airways Bangladesh Limited has remained grounded on its runway following a puncture in the nose wheel.

The ATR-72 aircraft got the wheel punctured seconds after it landed at the airport at 5:45pm yesterday.

It had 43 passengers, including two children and five crew members, at that time. They were unhurt.

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Long queues of people waiting for their train tickets home for Eid holidays at Kamalapur Railway Station yesterday. Some spent the night, inset, at the station to keep their place in queue.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN



Hurdles to sweet home

FROM PAGE 1

already rushed to the station by 5:00pm the day before.

As people kept coming, some sharp minds stood up and started writing serial numbers so that no one could break the queues.

Would anyone want to term the wait painful? No way. Visiting Kamalapur, The Daily Star was amazed at people's excitement and desperation to get hold of tickets.

To ensure that no one gets tickets before them, the ones first in the lines sat on the counters. As night fell, they fell asleep there.

Many brought newspapers, spread those on the floor, sat and

slept there.

For those who did not want to do the waiting themselves, there was the proxy service: street children and people who live at and around the station stood in the queues on behalf of ticket seekers.

A police officer paid a man Tk 1,000 for standing in a queue from Saturday evening to 9:00am yesterday. He needed a ticket of an AC compartment to travel to Chittagong, which cost over Tk 600, the youth said.

For 12-year-old street child Emon, it was not a bad deal too. "I earned Tk 2,000 by standing in queues for three men," he said.

He queued for the fourth time for a railway police officer when a Daily Star correspondent met him early yesterday.

An Ansar sepoy waited in a queue for his superior officer while four members of navy were seen gossiping in front of another counter.

To pass the waiting hours, many formed groups and played cards.

While some people replaced their tired family members, many brought sehri from home for their near ones waiting in queues.

Dozens of people kept pouring every minute after the sehri.

As the day broke, some weary ticket seekers became impatient.

"The rail authorities should start distributing tickets from 7:00am since these are special tickets and we are already waiting," said a middle-aged NGO (non-government organisation) officer, who wants to travel to Noakhali, seeking anonymity.

But when the rail authorities opened the ticket counters, the thought of their dear ones at their village homes took all the pains away. Many showed V-sign and shouted hurray on getting tickets.

On their way home, many would definitely say: "The journey home is never too long/ Home hopes to heal the deepest pain."

Death, horror in Gaza

FROM PAGE 16

Shejaiya, with medics seen picking up at least three dead bodies, including that of a man with his intestines hanging out and his head destroyed, an AFP correspondent reported.

Al-Qudra said that of the 425 Palestinians killed since the start of Israel's Operation Protective Edge, 112 were minors, 41 women and 25 elderly people.

Images of the corpses of women and children lying in streets were posted on Facebook as hospitals were overwhelmed with the dead, injured and those seeking sanctuary from the onslaught.

Palestinian human rights organisations also warned that the disproportionate number of civilian deaths could constitute a war crime committed by Israel.

Despite Israel saying it had agreed to a two-hour ceasefire in the middle of the day, requested by the Red Cross to allow for the injured and dead to be evacuated, shelling and gunfire continued. Israel blamed continued Hamas rocket fire for the breakdown of the humanitarian truce.

All morning, terrified people ran from their homes, some barefoot and

nearly all empty-handed. Others crowded on the backs of trucks or rode on the bonnets of cars in a desperate attempt to flee. Sky News reported that some had described a "massacre" in Shejaiya. Witnesses reported hearing small arms fire inside Gaza, suggesting gun battles on the streets. Heavy shelling continued from the air and sea.

Bodies were pulled from rubble amid massive destruction of buildings in the neighbourhood. Masked gunmen were on the streets.

Yesterday evening, Israeli forces had hit eastern areas of Gaza City with the heaviest bombardment yet of the 13-day war. The assault was most intense in the direction of Shejaiya, where an orange glow of flames lit up the sky. At one stage, artillery and mortar rounds were hitting the outskirts of the city every five seconds. Later in the night jets flew low passes over the coast.

The Guardian saw families squeezing into the back of what few vehicles were available as streets further east were pounded by artillery fire.

Columns of people, many of them too scared, angry and shocked to speak, approached down the main road to the east and from side streets, even as small arms fire was audible in

the distance.

One of those fleeing was Sabreen Hattad, 34, with her three children. "The Israeli shells were hitting the house. We stayed the night because we were so scared but about six in the morning we decided to escape," she said.

"But where are we supposed to go? The ambulances could not enter and so we ran under shell fire."

Three other men pass by in a hurry clutching bedding in their arms. Asked what they had seen they would only answer: "Death and horror."

Many of those escaping Shejaiya made for Gaza's central Shifa hospital, which was engulfed by chaotic scenes and ambulances ferrying the dead came in a steady stream – among them a local TV cameraman, Khaled Hamad, killed during the overnight offensive, wheeled out wrapped in a bloody plastic shroud.

Those who had fled congregated in corridors, on stairs and in the hospital car park. Staff put mattresses on floors to accommodate the injured, while some patients were being evacuated.

Aish Ijla, 38, whose leg was broken by shrapnel, said: "We live very close to the border. When the shells started we couldn't leave the house. It is two stor-

ies. The shells were hitting the upper floor so we all moved downstairs. There were 30 of us in the house. Then the shrapnel started hitting the door.

"It was quiet for a moment and we decided to run. But as we were on the road a shell landed near me, breaking my leg. I told the family to go on without me and carried on going for a little bit and stopping then going on. Eventually an ambulance reached me after two hours."

The UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, said more than 63,000 people had sought sanctuary in 49 shelters it was providing in Gaza, and it expected the numbers to rise. "The number has tripled in the last three days, reflecting the intensity of the conflict and the inordinate threats the fighting is posing to civilians. We call on all sides to exercise maximum restraint and to adhere to obligations under international law to protect civilians and humanitarian workers," said spokesman Chris Gunness.

An Israeli air strike on the house of senior Hamas official Khalil al-Hayya killed his son and daughter-in-law and two children, hospital officials said. Near the southern town of Rafah shelling killed four Palestinians, according

to officials.

Israel sent more troops into Gaza overnight after demolishing more than a dozen Hamas tunnels and intensifying tank fire on border areas. Israel disclosed that at least four soldiers had been killed in its ground offensive, and that more than two dozen wounded soldiers were evacuated to hospitals. There were unconfirmed reports that Israel suffered significant military casualties in a cross-border attack by Hamas militants yesterday morning.

Lieutenant Colonel Peter Lerner of the Israel Defence Forces said additional troops had been sent into Gaza on the orders of the government. "Forces have undergone an intensified training and thorough planning period and are prepared and stand ready for the task at hand," he said.

The Israeli military was setting up a field hospital to treat injured Palestinians at Erez, the northern border crossing between Gaza and Israel.

As fighting raged, the UN secretary general, Ban Ki-moon, headed to Qatar on Sunday as part of renewed ceasefire efforts. He was due to meet Mahmoud Abbas in Doha.

Abbas was also expected to meet

PM's UK visit to cement ties with West

Says foreign minister

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali yesterday said relations between Bangladesh and the western world were moving ahead at a good pace and a visit by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to the UK would take it to a 'new height'.

He said Hasina would hold bilateral talks with British Prime Minister David Cameron on Tuesday on the sidelines of the Girl Summit 2014 to be held in London.

"The Hasina-Cameron talks will be held at 10 Downing Street when the two leaders would discuss matters of mutual interests," Ali said, adding, "The bilateral meeting with the British prime minister is extremely significant as it will be the first such meeting with a head of government of the West since the 10th parliamentary polls."

The foreign minister in his statement claimed that the prime minister would lead a 20-member delegation to London.

But, according to the book containing the programme schedule and entourage list published by the foreign ministry, the number of total delegation member is 57, which includes 14 PMO officials, 17 security personnel, eight foreign ministry officials, 10 member official media team and four eminent media personalities.

The delegation would leave Dhaka for London at 9:00am today to attend the first Girl Summit to be hosted on Tuesday jointly by the UK and Unicef.

Her three-day visit is the first to a European country after the January 5 elections, which the British government strongly opposed.

At a press briefing on the premier's visit, the foreign minister, who would accompany Hasina, however, did not give details about the specific issues the two premiers would focus on.

He however said, "We expect fruitful discussion on all bilateral issues at the meeting."

Asked if politics and the January 5 elections would be there on the agenda, Ali did not answer directly but referred to a resolution adopted by the

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Bodies loaded on train

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believed to be the plane's black boxes.

Jet parts resembling the black boxes were discovered at the crash site," said Alexander Borodai, prime minister of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic, adding that they would be handed over to "international experts if they arrive".

Borodai said the fighters had moved scores of bodies "out of respect for the families" and loaded them on to trains where they would be kept in refrigerated carriages until "the experts arrive".

"We couldn't wait any longer because of the heat and also because there are many dogs and wild animals in the zone."

The OSCE observers said they found the corpses packed into refrigerated wagons at a station in the town of Torez, some 15 kilometres (nine miles) from the crash site.

The bodies, some dismembered and charred, had been left rotting in cornfields amid the blackened piles of mangled wreckage of the plane, with debris spread out for kilometres.

Michael Bociurkiw, the spokesman for the mission, added: "Going inside the wagons is impossible without special equipment. The stench is very, very bad."

The OSCE, which has had its access

to the crash site itself limited in recent days, left in a convoy to return to the crash site.

There have been no international investigators at the scene. Ukrainian authorities say they are setting up facilities for relatives to stay and autopsies in the city of Kharkiv, about 200 miles away.

Armed separatists at the scene refused to say how many bodies were in the train carriages or when they would leave. The train driver told the Guardian he had no idea of the train's destination.

The local department of Ukraine's emergencies ministry in the eastern Donetsk region said yesterday that 196 bodies had been found at the site where the Malaysian airliner crashed.

"As of 7am on July 20, in the Shakhtarsky region of the crash site of the Boeing 777, 196 bodies were found," it said in a statement, adding that divers were involved in the search because the area included a reservoir.

It also emerged yesterday that the UN security council was considering a draft resolution to condemn the "shooting down" of a Malaysian passenger plane in Ukraine, demand armed groups grant access to the crash site, and call on states in the region to

cooperate with an international investigation.

Australia – which lost 28 citizens – circulated a draft text, seen by Reuters, to the 15-member security council late on Saturday, and diplomats, speaking on condition of anonymity, said it could be put to a vote as early as today.

The draft resolution "demands that those responsible for this incident be held to account and that all states cooperate fully with efforts to establish accountability".

It "condemns in the strongest terms the shooting down Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 ... resulting in the tragic loss of 298 lives" and "demands that all states and other actors in the region refrain from acts of violence directed against civilian aircraft."

The draft UN resolution "calls on all states and actors in the region to cooperate fully in relation to the international investigation of the incident, including with respect to immediate access to the crash site".

It "demands that the armed groups in control of the crash site and the surrounding area refrain from any actions that may compromise the integrity of the crash site and immediately provide safe, secure, full and unfettered access to the site and surrounding area".

Highways not fit yet

FROM PAGE 16

"Rains will damage the repaired roads and create fresh potholes since these are being done on a temporary basis mainly with bricks, brickbats and sand," said an RHD official.

Though the overall condition of Dhaka-Chittagong and Dhaka-Mymensingh highways improved in the last few days, many potholes were still gaping and workers were found filling it yesterday.

A part of the newly constructed two-lane highway between Dhaka-Chittagong has been opened to public to ease traffic ahead of the Eid.

Visiting the 35km stretch of the road between Chittagong Citygate and Sitakunda yesterday, one of our staff correspondents saw RHD staffs repairing damaged spots in Sitakunda Bypass and Bhatiari areas.

Nevertheless, the ongoing expansion work and the narrowness of the road may cause tailbacks and sufferings of the people once the home rush begins, said RHD officials.

Authorities have a lot to do to make the Dhaka-Mymensingh Road usable ahead of the Eid, which is a little over a week away. Apart from

potholes at various points of the road that has been in a sorry state for years due to expansion work, heaps of mud and construction materials on the roadsides are slowing down traffic movement.

The Dhaka-Sylhet Highway is in a relatively better state, thanks to recent repair work.

However, Dhaka-Bangabandhu Bridge Highway, which connects 26 districts to the capital, is not in a satisfactory condition at all.

Visiting the 65km stretch of the highway between Kaliakoir and Bhupur yesterday, our Tangail correspondent found potholes and large craters at Deohata, Mirzapur, Ashimtola, Natiapara, Korokia, Karatipara of Mirzapur upazila.

RHD people, divided in three teams, were seen feverishly working to repair the highway.

"We have been repairing the potholes over the last three weeks but raining damages the road," said Executive Engineer Ranapriyo Barua of the RHD.

Amirul Islam, driver of Nirala Paribahan that operates on Dhaka-Tangail route, said that the temporary patch up would not bring any respite as rain may wash away all the repair work.

Of the 163km Mawa-Barisal Road, the condition of 48km stretch between Burgata and Barisal is in a bad shape, reported our Barisal correspondent.

Though Executive Engineer Khaled Shahed of the RHD claimed to have completed 75 per cent of the repair work, locals believed it wouldn't be more than 50 per cent.

Potholes were detected yesterday in Mahilara, Batajor, Gournadi and Kashipur areas.

Potholes and craters have been a common sight on Jessore-Khulna Road, especially on the part across Nawapara which has a lot of bends. RHD men were found filling the potholes with sand and brick chunks at some points, reported our Jessore correspondent.

Such frantic effort of the RHD to repair roads is nothing new for the nation. Ahead of every Eid every year, the communications ministry comes up with assurances of "hassle-free" journey home for people and becomes very active in repairing roads and highways, spending crores of taka. However, home-goers still remain stuck for hours in tailbacks as long as 50km or even more and their sufferings make headlines in mass media every year.