



PHOTO: AFP
Demonstrators protest outside the Ferguson police department on Friday in Ferguson, Missouri. Ferguson has been plagued with protests which have sometimes turned violent since the death of 18-year-old Michael Brown who was shot and killed by Darren Wilson, a Ferguson police officer, on August 9.

Russian rights group calls state legal attack 'insult'

AFP, Moscow

Russia's most prominent human rights group Memorial yesterday called a government legal assault on their organization an "insult."

Senior members of Memorial, which investigates everything from the Stalin-era Gulag to government death squads in Chechnya, said a justice ministry case against the organization's coordinating body could seriously disrupt their work.

The Supreme Court is set to hear the case on November 13 in which the government seeks to liquidate Memorial's umbrella organisation, overseeing dozens of human rights and research groups nationwide.

"The very existence of the case is an insult against people who have for the

past 20 years been doing the work that the state should have done," Yan Rachinsky, a senior Memorial member, told AFP.

If prosecutors succeed, then many individual groups working under the Memorial name would "have to re-register," Rachinsky said.

That would essentially throw separate branches around the country into legal limbo, even if the most famous branch -- the Memorial human rights centre in Moscow -- would apparently escape for now.

Rachinsky's colleague Oleg Orlov called the case "a shot across the bow."

"Further pressure can be expected," Orlov told AFP, adding that authorities could still move against the Moscow rights centre, seen as the group's most prized asset.

Officially registered in 1992, Memorial is one of Russia's oldest and most respected human rights organisations.

It gained prominence for chronicling the victims of communist repression, a painful subject that modern Russia has often been reluctant to address.

The group became an even bigger presence through its investigations of executions, kidnappings and other atrocities committed against civilians during Moscow's wars, starting in the 1990s, to subdue Chechen separatists and Islamist militants.

In 2009, their researcher Natalya Estemirova, a specialist in investigating kidnappings by the security forces, was herself abducted by unidentified gunmen in the Chechen capital Grozny and later found shot dead.

ISIS jihadists execute four women in Iraq

AFP, Baghdad

The Islamic State group has executed at least four women, including two doctors and a politician, in their northern Iraq strongholds this month, relatives and rights activists said yesterday.

In the IS hub of Mosul, the jihadists executed three women on Wednesday including two doctors, Hanaa Edwar, a human rights activist who heads the Al-Amal organisation, said.

A medical source in Mosul confirmed their deaths and named the two doctors as Maha Sabhan and Lamia Ismail. The third woman was a law graduate.

On October 5, Iman Mohammed Yunus, a former Sunni parliamentarian from the Iraq Turkmen Front in the city of Tal Afar, farther west towards the Syrian border, was also executed.

"They took her from her home last month and called her family this week to say that she had been executed," said Ali al-Bayati, who runs a foundation supporting the rights of Iraq's Turkmen minority.

"Then they dumped her body in a water well outside Tal Afar," he said.

According to Edwar, who confirmed Yunus' execution, at least four other women were executed by IS militants in the Mosul area in recent weeks.

Among them were a former candidate for the local council and an academic.

"Women are easy targets for them. Many of the rights activists from Mosul ran away but some of the women among them had to stay with their children," Edwar said.

IS militants have controlled Mosul since June 10, the second day of a major offensive that saw jihadist fighters seize swathes of land in five Iraqi provinces. They have used the city, Iraq's second largest, as a de facto capital for the Iraqi half of the "caliphate" which their leadership proclaimed in June and also includes large parts of Syria.

"After going after the ethnic and religious minorities, they are now hunting down Sunni members of civil society groups and anyone remotely connected with the government," Edwar said.

Kerry to call for Israeli-Palestinian talks

AFP, Washington

US Secretary of State John Kerry will call for a revival of the collapsed Israeli-Palestinian peace process today when he attends an international conference in Cairo on rebuilding Gaza, American officials said.

The top US diplomat and 30 of his counterparts convene in the Egyptian capital alongside UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, who is seeking a record \$1.6 billion in aid to rebuild the battered Gaza Strip.

The Palestinian government last

week unveiled a 76-page reconstruction plan for Gaza, calling for \$4 billion to rebuild the war-battered territory, with the largest amount going to build housing for some 100,000 left homeless.

The Israeli military operation in Gaza killed nearly 2,200 Palestinians, while attacks by Gaza militants killed 73 on the Israeli side.

Kerry will meet with Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas on the sidelines of the conference, having last met at the UN General Assembly in

September, State Department officials said.

"You will hear the secretary reaffirm the commitment of the United States to helping the parties achieve a negotiated two-state solution and our willingness to re-engage in the negotiations and help facilitate successful negotiations," a State Department official said.

"More broadly we are interested in sort of breaking the cycle we have been in for the last six years of war and reconstruction there," the official added.

Latif claims he offered to quit

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derogatory comments about Hajj and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and Tablighi Jamaat in New York on September 28.

In his letter, he said if the Awami League President Sheikh Hasina removes him from the party presidium, the highest policy-making body of the party, he would not feel bad.

"My regret is I could not live up to the expectation of my leader. Rather, I embarrassed her [Sheikh Hasina]."

In his letter, he apologised to the people, who believe in the country's Liberation War, and also to the pious Muslims, who are upset and disturbed "by the smear campaign run by people who manipulate religion to cash in on his inconsiderate behaviour".

However, in an interview with the BBC Bangla on September 30, Latif had said he stood by his remarks, but would withdraw those only if the PM asked him to do so. "There is no question of my resigning under pressure," he had said.

In the email, he said, "At the same time I state my desire to resign from the cabinet and I seek your [Prime Minister's] permission.

"I will not feel bad if you remove me from the party presidium. Rather, I think it would be appropriate," he said.

Latif said he wants to prove that the party was above any individual.

The minister, however, said he remains in the party as Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Sheikh Hasina are like his lighthouse.

KADER'S BRIEFING

Krishak Sramik Janata League president Abdul Kader Siddique, the brother of Latif, yesterday asked Latif to apologise.

"The nation is shocked by Latif's speech, which hurt the nation's Imaan. As a Muslim I am protesting his comments," he said addressing a press conference at the Jatiya Press Club.

"May Latif have the guidance of Almighty Allah."

Kader, however, apologised on behalf of his brother.

"Minister as well as Awami League leader Latif Siddique is nobody to me, but the person Latif Siddique is my brother," said the noted freedom fighter.

However, Latif over the phone told The Daily Star last night that, "Kader Siddique is nobody to me ... he is not my brother ... he is my political opponent.

"He has no right to talk about me as a brother," he said adding that Kader made the comments to belittle Awami League and Sheikh Hasina.

At the press conference, Kader's Krishak Sramik Janata League viewed that what Latif had said was not only his own remark, rather it was the remark of the Awami League and the incumbent unelected government as well.

The party demanded immediate inclusive national election after consultation with all political parties and social organisations.

GOVERNMENT PREPARES

The cabinet division has completed all procedures for issuing gazette notification regarding the removal of Latif from the cabinet.

It would issue the notification after getting approval from President Abdul Hamid, who returned home Friday night from Saudi Arabia after performing hajj.

Cabinet Secretary M Musharraf Hossain Bhuiyan, while talking to reporters at the Secretariat, said, "We are prepared to issue the gazette and now waiting for the president's signature."

He said the PMO would send a file regarding the removal of Latif to them and they would make a summary and send the file to the President's Office for approval.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, while addressing a press conference on October 3, said Latif would be removed from the cabinet and the file for his removal would be sent to the president once his office opens after Eid holidays.

The Awami League Central Working Committee, the highest decision-making body of the party, would today decide the fate of Latif in the party.

The meeting is scheduled for 6:30pm at Gono Bhaban.

Party sources said the AL at the meeting would serve a show-cause notice upon Latif, an AL presidium member, asking him to explain his position on the derogatory remarks he had made about Hajj and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and Tablighi Jamaat.

According to the constitution, if Latif is expelled from the Awami League, he will retain his parliamentary membership. However, his membership in parliament would be cancelled if he resigns from the party.

Boko Haram releases 27 Chinese, local hostages in Cameroon

AFP, Yaounde

Ten Chinese and 17 local hostages have been released in Cameroon, where they were kidnapped earlier this year in raids blamed on the Nigerian Islamist group Boko Haram, Cameroon's president said yesterday.

"The 27 hostages abducted on May 16 in Waza and July 27 in Kolofata were released to the Cameroonian authorities this night," President Paul Biya said in a statement on national radio.

The 10 Chinese citizens and other hostages, who also included the wife of Cameroon's deputy prime minister, were all "safe and sound," he said.

The Chinese were brought to Yaounde airport by military plane, an AFP correspondent said. As was the case in past kidnappings of foreigners blamed on Boko Haram, no details were given on how the hostages were freed.

In June, authorities said six people had been arrested over the kidnappings of the Chinese. They were seized in May from a construction

camp in Waza near the border with Nigeria in an attack that left one Cameroonian soldier dead.

The July kidnappings were carried out during two simultaneous assaults, also blamed on Boko Haram, in which at least 15 people died.

Cameroon shares a border of more than 2,000 kilometres (1,200 miles) with Nigeria, where Boko Haram has been waging a bloody insurgency since 2009.

The group did not claim responsibility for the kidnappings, but has been involved in other abductions, including of 200 schoolgirls in a case that sparked international outrage.

Boko Haram has stepped up incursions into Cameroon, prompting the government to send military reinforcements, including combat planes to the north of the country. On October 7, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria agreed on the deployment of 700 soldiers to target the group.

Some 10,000 people have died since Boko Haram launched its insurgency in Nigeria five years ago.

Pro-govt group threaten to surround HK protest sites

AFP, Hong Kong

A Hong Kong pro-government group yesterday said demonstrators occupying main roads to protest for full democracy would find themselves surrounded if the city's administration failed to clear the barricades.

The Blue Ribbon Movement said the authorities should dismantle three sites the protesters have closed to traffic by Tuesday night or they would encircle them, as the city's political deadlock enters its third week.

"If the HK government will not do that, we're planning to surround those people who occupy Mong Kok, Causeway Bay and Admiralty," Tsoi Hak-kin, vice chairman of the pro-government movement told AFP.

"Hong Kong people have suffered too much," Tsoi said, without giving further details of how or when the

group would surround sites that have attracted tens of thousands in the past two weeks, far outnumbering the turnout of counter-protesters.

In August a network of pro-Beijing groups organised an anti-Occupy protest march that drew tens of thousands -- although there were allegations that some protesters were paid or bussed in from the mainland.

Crunch negotiations between protesters and Beijing-backed city officials were scheduled for Friday but fell apart Thursday after the government pulled out, blaming protesters for threatening to expand their campaign.

"The meeting and the dialogue should be based on the decision made by the National People's Congress Standing Committee on August 31," chief secretary Carrie Lam told reporters in Guangzhou where she is attending a trade forum.

New York's JFK airport rolls out Ebola screenings

AFP, New York

New York's JFK airport yesterday rolls out strict new health screenings for travelers arriving from Ebola-hit West African nations, amid growing US fears about importing over the deadly virus.

John F. Kennedy International Airport will be the first of five airports to introduce the toughened measures, meant to provide a layer of protection in a nation jittery over importing fresh cases of the illness after the first patient diagnosed on US soil with Ebola died earlier this week.

Four other airports -- Newark, just outside New York City, Chicago's O'Hare, Washington's Dulles and Atlanta International Airport in Georgia -- are to start the checks next week.

Passengers arriving to any of the five airports from Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea will have their temperatures taken, be assessed for signs of illness and

answer questions about their health and exposure history, US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) said.

Some could be barred from traveling further or referred to nearby hospitals if necessary.

"If the traveler has a fever or other symptoms or has been exposed to Ebola, Customs and Border Protection will refer that traveler to the Centers for Disease Control for a public health assessment," CBP chief Gil Kerlikowske told reporters yesterday at the airport, one of the busiest in the United States.

He said passengers suspected of serious illness could be issued "Do Not Board" notifications.

The travel ban could be applied to "individuals considered infected with a highly contagious disease...and (who) should be prevented from traveling on international aircraft," he said.

Tailbacks delay

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Abdul Mannan, another garment employee, said it took him seven hours to travel a one-hour distance from Tangail to Chandra of Gazipur as buses moved as slowly as rickshaws due to long tailbacks on the highway.

"It is unbearable to remain trapped in a bus, along with my wife and child, for so long for such a short distance," he said.

Abul Kalam, president of Mohakhali Bus Terminal Sharak Poribahan Owners Association, said that sufferings of women and children during such tailbacks know no bound as the highways lack basic facilities like a toilet or a washroom.

The 45-km stretch from Konabari to Elenga has been in a dilapidated state for several years while the condition of the 100-km Dhaka-Mymensingh highway has been awful with an ongoing road widening project for the past six years, he said.

Vehicles from 26 northern and western districts and the greater Mymensingh had to move at a snail's pace due to rain and a large number of buses along the 65-km highway from Mirzapur to Bangabandhu Bridge, reports our Tangail correspondent.

Several road accidents caused a 25-km tailback on the narrow Dhaka-Tangail highway.

Jubaidul Alam, officer-in-charge of Gorai Highway Police Station, said

there was no prolonged traffic gridlock but vehicles moved slowly owing to the heavy rush.

Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC) transferred over 500 vehicles from Kawrakandi terminal to Mawa with 17 ferries till midday yesterday, reports our Munshiganj correspondent quoting Sirajul Islam, a manager of BIWTC.

Hundreds of passengers got on board the BIWTC ferries as the authorities suspended operation of launch and speedboats plying between Mawa and Kawrakandi on account of inclement weather.

But over three hundred vehicles were waiting in a one-km queue at Kawrakandi terminal to cross the mighty Padma, said BIWTC Kawrakandi terminal manager.

Unscrupulous speedboat operators at Mawa and transport operators on the Dhaka-Mawa highway exacted much higher fares than usual taking advantage of passengers' onrush.

Our Manikganj correspondent reports that bus conductors on the Dhaka-Aricha highway charged Tk 200 to 300 against the usual fare of Tk 65.

Hundreds of passengers could not get aboard Dhaka-bound launches from Barisal and Chandpur as the authorities made the overcrowded vessels leave the river ports ahead of schedule, report our Barisal and Chandpur correspondents.