

Nato interim 'spearhead' force ready early 2015

AFP, Brussels

The first troops of a high-speed Nato reaction force designed to meet the sort of crisis highlighted by Russia's Ukraine intervention should be ready early next year, officials said yesterday.

Nato leaders agreed at a summit in September that the 28-member military alliance needed a new "spearhead" force which could be deployed within days to cope with emerging threats.

This "spearhead" force, estimated at around 4,000 troops is meant to be ready by 2016, but with eastern Nato allies nervous at Russian actions in Ukraine and Islamic State controlling large areas of Syria and Iraq, member states want something on the ground a lot faster.

To fill that role, Nato head Jens Stoltenberg said the alliance was working on an "interim high readiness force," with Germany, the Netherlands and his native Norway willing to contribute troops.

This would give Nato "more readiness sooner than expected," he said, adding that the new force "is going to be operational early next year."

Bahrain court sentences key activist to year in jail

AFP, Dubai

A Bahraini court yesterday sentenced in absentia prominent rights activist Maryam al-Khawaja to one year in jail for assaulting police officers, her lawyer said.

Mohammed al-Jishy told AFP the verdict was announced in the absence of Khawaja, who said on Sunday she would not attend the hearing because it was "impossible to have a fair and independent trial" in the Gulf kingdom.

Khawaja, a director of the Beirut-based Gulf Centre for Human Rights, also holds Danish nationality and is a daughter of jailed top Shiite opposition figure Abdulhadi al-Khawaja.

Govt orders

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alleged that it neglected his treatment. The hospital authority, however, claimed they provided the newsman with all available treatment before referring him to another hospital for further care.

AR Sunam, executive director of Mohona Hospital, said he received the government order and will close the hospital by today.

The health ministry has formed a three-member committee to probe the alleged negligence in treatment of the journalist and the operations of the hospital.

3,000 sued over IU violence

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Two cases have been filed over the death of a student of Islamic University (IU), Kushtia in a road accident on Sunday and the consequent violence on the campus.

The university authorities have decided to suspend academic activities for an indefinite period as the aggrieved students went on the rampage on the campus and clashed with police.

Male students were asked to vacate dormitories by 6:30pm on Sunday and females by 8:30am yesterday.

Mahibul Haq, officer-in-charge of IU Police Station, said Sub-inspector Iqbal Hossain yesterday filed a case against around 2,000 to 3,000 unknown people for attacking police, vandalising and torching government properties.

IU Proctor TM Lokman Hakim lodged another case accusing the driver and helper of the bus that had killed the student.

Touhidur Rahman Titu, a third-year student of Biotechnology and Genetic Engineering department of

the university, tried to get on a moving bus near the main entrance of the university around 12:10pm on Sunday, but tripped and fell on the road. Another bus coming from behind ran over him, killing him on the spot.

The agitating students torched 13 buses, vandalised at least another 17, ransacked several university buildings, including the administrative office, and clashed with law enforcers for hours.

Of the damaged buses, 28 were hired by the university authorities for transporting its students.

Leaders of Kushtia Bus Owners' Association withdrew an indefinite transport strike on the Kushtia-Khulna highway yesterday night following a meeting with the university authorities.

They called the strike on Sunday night, protesting attacks on their buses and demanding compensation for the damaged buses.

Meanwhile, a seven-member committee has been formed to estimate loss to the damaged vehicles. The committee has been asked to submit its report to the university authorities within seven days.

Implement land deal

FROM PAGE 1

Congress leader and chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on external affairs ministry, said the committee tabled the "unanimous" report in both houses of parliament on the 119 Amendment Bill.

An amendment of the constitution is required by India as implementation of the deal involves exchange of land.

The committee in its report asked the government to take "urgent steps" for presenting the bill in parliament "without any further delay". The bill has been hanging fire for more than a year.

The report said delays in the passage of the bill have needlessly contributed to the perpetuation of a huge humanitarian crisis.

Congress' support for the bill is expected to ensure smooth passage of it in Rajya Sabha where the ruling BJP lacks a majority. However, BJP has a comfortable majority in Lok Sabha. The bill needs to be passed by a two-thirds majority in both the Houses.

Tharoor said, "There were five meeting sessions with different political parties. There were Congress, BJP and Trinamool Congress members in the committee, who gave their views on the topic. The secretaries of the external affairs and home ministries, and a representative of the West Bengal government also made a presentation on the topic."

He also took a dig at the BJP for opposing the agreement previously as an opposition party.

The Congress-led UPA-II government in last December had managed to introduce a constitutional amendment bill to facilitate the swap of land enclaves with Bangladesh, amid din

and high drama which saw members of Trinamool Congress and Asom Gana Parishad trying to snatch copies of the proposed legislation from the then external affairs minister Salman Khurshid. It was later referred to the standing committee.

The bill proposes to amend the first schedule of the Indian constitution to give effect to the LBA on acquiring and transfer of territories between the two countries. The first schedule defines the area of each state and union territory which together constitute India.

The bill is aimed at ratifying the LBA between India and Bangladesh under the Indira-Mujib pact of 1974 to exchange areas and people on either side of the border.

Under the LBA, India will give 111 enclaves covering 17,160 acres to Bangladesh and receive 51 enclaves covering 7,110 acres. Around 51,000 people reside in these enclaves.

The territories involved in the exchange are in the Indian states of Assam, West Bengal, Meghalaya and Tripura.

The report by the standing committee said it expected a "modest demographic change in both countries to take place after the agreement [LBA] comes into force and that it would necessitate some Indian citizens returning to the mainland from the previously-held enclaves and a number of currently Bangladeshi nationals being given Indian citizenship after the area is ceded to India."

It asked the Indian government to take measures to check the identities of Bangladeshi residents "who will be given Indian citizenship upon incorporation of the territory."

CHT land rights still not settled

FROM PAGE 1

purposefully dilly-dallying over resolving the matter," said Mangal Kumar Chakma, publication secretary of the Parbitya Chattagram Jana Sanghaty Samity (PCJSS), which signed the peace accord with the government.

Instead of settling the issue, different government agencies have also continued to occupy their land, he alleged.

In 2011 alone, at least 7,118 acres of land belonging to indigenous people were grabbed by Bangalee settlers in the three hill districts, according to a 2012 report of Bangladesh Legal Aid Services Trust (BLAST).

The ruling Awami League was in power when the deal was signed. Since then, the party has formed two more governments in 2008 and in January this year. But it has done little so far to amend the CHT Land Commission Amendment Bill 2001.

Once passed, the law will solve the issues of land ownership and land management. But the government has shelved the bill for all these years, said Mangal Chakma.

Moreover, the government is now set to pass some laws that will go against the spirit of the peace accord itself, alleged other indigenous leaders.

Asked about the status of the amendment bill, chief of the House body on the land ministry Rezaul

Karim Hira said he was not aware of it. The previous parliament had sent the bill to the relevant committee for scrutiny.

Under the rules, the House cannot pass any bill placed in the previous parliament. This means, the bill will have to be brought before parliament afresh.

Against this backdrop, PCJSS President Santu Larma has said they would start a non-cooperation movement from May 1 next year if the treaty is not implemented by then.

STATUS OF CHT LAND

According to the Land Revenue Administration Report of 1965-66, there were 32,59,520 acres of land in the CHT. Fifty-one percent of them were declared reserve forest.

Of the rest 49 percent, only 1,30,000 acres were cropland, of which 54,000 acres (40 percent) were submerged due to the Kaptai dam, constructed for hydropower project in the 1960s in Rangamati.

The project displaced about a third of the indigenous population in the district, which was the key reason for the armed conflicts in the hills.

As the indigenous people started to target the security forces in the late 1970s, the government took up a programme to drastically increase Bangalee settlements there in efforts to weaken insurgency.

From 1979 to 1985, some 80,000 families from the plains were brought

to the hills. Each of these families was given about 10 acres of croplands and hilly lands, indigenous leaders claim.

Most of these lands belonged to the indigenous people, suggest different studies.

'GOVT WORKING'

The government claims it has implemented at least 48 of the 72 peace pact provisions fully and 15 partially while implementation of nine other provisions are underway.

"I would say 95 percent provisions of the peace accord have been implemented. The government is working to implement the rest within the shortest possible time," said Obaidul Muktaadir Chowdhury, chief of Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs Ministry.

Contacted, Naba Bikram Tripura, secretary of the ministry, said implementation of the treaty was an ongoing process.

He said the ministry held a meeting yesterday on the amendment bill.

CHT Minister Bir Bahadur Ushwe Sing, Santu Larma, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's Adviser Gowher Rizvi and the secretary, among others, attended the meeting.

The CHT Land Dispute Resolution Commission Act was passed in 2001. So far, six such commissions have been formed, but none has been functional due to legal tangles.

Curtain falls on classical music

FROM PAGE 16

Brac Founder and Chairperson Sir Fazle Hasan Abed inaugurated the closing day's performances as the chief guest. He congratulated Bengal Foundation for its efforts in the development and progress of the arts in the subcontinent.

"I'm hopeful that Bengal Foundation's efforts will have a positive impact on future generations," he said.

Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, said the festival should bring about a positive change in people's taste.

"The excellence of classical music should affect us all by bringing beauty, peace and harmony in all aspects of

our lives," he said.

Thanking his colleagues for making this festival happen, Bengal Foundation Chairman Abul Khair said the real credit for the success should go to the audience. He also heartily accepted the Prothom Alo editor's proposal to dedicate next year's festival to Qayyum Chowdhury, and promised that Bengal Foundation and Bengal Parampara School would continue their efforts to nurture the classical maestros of tomorrow.

The most anticipated performances of the night were given by sarod maestro Ustad Amjad Ali Khan and celebrated vocalist Vidushi Kishori Amonkar.

A number of eminent Bangladeshi artistes including Farida Parveen, Khairul Anam Shakil and Kiran Chandra Roy rendered three songs in chorus to set off the closing day's performances. Kathak prodigy Vishal Krishna came next, enthralling the audience in a scintillating display of fluidity, speed and grace as he performed Shiv Bandana and various other compositions.

Bengal Foundation organised the festival while Square Group presented it.

The Daily Star was a strategic partner to the event, alongside the Daily Prothom Alo. Brac Bank supported the initiative as well.

Fighting back

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when no-one else on the bus came forward to help them.

One of the women told the BBC: "After a heated exchange, one of the boys called his friends asking him to beat us up. One of them beat my sister while two others caught hold of me."

The sisters responded by repeatedly beating the men with belts.

They said the bus eventually came to a halt and one of the men pushed them out of it and attacked them again. This time, they retaliated by throwing a brick and the men fled.

A female passenger recorded the incident on her mobile phone.

"We fought the assaulters all alone. No one came forward to help us as the youth hit us and even pushed us out of the moving bus," they were quoted by the Times of India as saying.

"Passengers in the bus stopped us from calling the police. We were thrown out of moving bus and then conductor told us to file police complaint, but by that time they had all escaped."

Both women say they called the police who initially failed to respond

to the incident. "The helpline attendant told us that they will call up in two minutes. But we got no call and no help," one of the girls said.

Police say three men were arrested on Sunday evening.

A senior police official said they were considering action against the bus driver for not driving to the nearest police station.

"The driver was supposed to take the bus to the nearest police station. But he did not do so. The conductor also did not intervene. We are considering legal action against them," he told The Hindu newspaper.



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Make me a Bond

FROM PAGE 16

The idea of Prof Hawking on the big screen is not so fanciful. He has already been immortalised in The Simpsons and made a cameo appearance as himself in an episode of Star Trek, playing poker with Data, Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein. He also signed up to appear in the recent Monty Python reunion shows.

Now he is the subject of a film, The Theory of Everything. The onset of his motor neurone disease, diagnosed at 21 while he was an undergraduate at Cambridge, is documented in the film, which sees him played by Eddie Redmayne.

In an interview with Wired magazine, Prof Hawking, 72, said he loves to communicate with the world.

"I was able to speak with a speech synthesiser, though it gave me an American accent. I have kept that voice, because it's now my trademark," he said.

"Before I lost my voice, it was slurred, so only those close to me could understand, but with the computer voice, I found I could give popular lectures.

"I enjoy communicating science. It is important that

the public understands basic science, if they are not to leave vital decisions to others."

The full interview is in the January issue of Wired magazine, out on Thursday.

Delhi ready

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massive rally on the occasion there, Modi said if Bangladesh wanted to buy power from India, India was willing, according to an official statement issued here.

He said Tripura was the area which had stood shoulder to shoulder with the people of Bangladesh during the Liberation War 1971.

He thanked Hasina for facilitating the movement of machinery for the Palatana project, which helped to build the plant.

Modi said such cooperation between India and Bangladesh "is a message for the entire Saarc region."

He said all globally-accepted norms of green energy were being followed in Palatana power plant which represented one of the biggest investments in the north-east region.

PM orders

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mugging, illegal VoIP (voice over internet protocol) business, gold and dollar smuggling and drug trading.

According to the home

ministry, 549 foreigners of 12 countries are languishing in different jails now. Of them, 76 are serving different jail terms while the trial of 393 others is underway.



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