

Rebels kill 19 in Syria

AFP, Beirut

At least 19 people were killed overnight by Syrian rebel fire on government-controlled parts of the northern city of Aleppo, a monitor said yesterday.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the dead included at least five children, three of whom were killed with their mother when a rocket hit the car they were in.

The Britain-based group said at 32 people were wounded in Thursday night's violence in the western part of the city.

Once Syria's economic hub, Aleppo has been ravaged by fighting that began there in mid-2012.

The city is divided with government forces controlling the western part and rebels controlling the east.

However, government forces have advanced steadily around the eastern outskirts of the city, threatening to besiege opposition-held districts.

More than 200,000 people have been killed in Syria since the beginning of the conflict in March 2011, according to the Observatory.

BCL faction

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department, was shot dead in a BCL factional clash on the campus on December 14, barely a month after the prime minister warned the CU BCL unit over frequent infighting.

According to campus sources, the clash broke out after the VEX group hurled abuse and threw brick chips at the activists of another CU BCL faction, Choose Friend with Care.

Two cases were filed in connection with the incident on that day.

One was filed by police against 55 people, including five activists of the VEX group, over recovery of arms from a university dormitory.

The other case was filed by Hafizul Islam, a classmate of Taposh, in which he accused 45 BCL leaders and activists.

The accused in the murder case include cultural secretary of the dissolved committee of CU BCL Ashrafuzzaman Asha, environment secretary of the same committee Enamul Hasan Ovi, VEX group leaders Rubel Dey and Shahrid Shuvo.

20 months past

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the programme.

"After physical torture, workers are now being tormented mentally in the name of compensation," said noted academic Prof Anu Mohammad, pointing out the government's lack of concerted efforts in the compensation process.

"It would take only Tk 500-600 crore to compensate the victims, but no step has been taken. On the other hand, after the incident, the BGMEA has got facilities worth Tk 3,000 crore," he added.

"The cruelty of the state has been exposed," said Professor Emeritus Serajul Islam Choudhury. "We had become the champion of corruption...through the deaths, we've become the champion of killings," he added, expressing his frustration over the delay in trying the people responsible for the collapse.

The book will remind the nation of the horrors of that disaster, the professor said.

Human rights activist Hameeda Hossain said the victims were yet to get proper compensation. "It has been two years. We don't know how are these people leading their lives?" She observed, "The state is trying to create a bunch of beggars."

She also highlighted the book's historical importance in recalling the victims' sufferings.

The 480-page book, divided into nine chapters, documents the stories told by the family members of 21 dead and missing workers, six survivors, and 10 rescue activists.

One chapter contains the reactions of 34 eminent persons on social media, after the disaster.

Coordinator of Bangladesh Garment Sramik Sanghati Taslim Akhtar called the collapse a killing.

The book also contains an investigation into the casualties, showing that 1,175 people were killed and 162 missing. The disaster affected people from 59 out of the country's 64 districts, says the Sanghati.

JP leader

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education from Dhaka Residential Model School and received an LLB degree from Dhaka University.

A senior foreign ministry official said political persons like Moshi could be appointed to some other country since the KSA was diplomatically very important and thus a career diplomat was essentially needed there.

Moshi will replace career diplomat Md Shahidul Islam, who has been transferred to Malaysia recently.

In his long association with the oil and gas industry as well as the telecom sector, he worked as adviser to the British Petroleum, UK; British Gas, UK; TOTAL Oil, France; Hong Kong Telecom; General Atomic, USA, and Asia Satellite Co Ltd, HK.

Moshi is married and is blessed with three daughters.



AIRASIA DISASTER

Indonesian crew members observe the surface of the sea during the search for AirAsia flight QZ8501 on board an aircraft over The Java Sea yesterday. French and Singaporean investigators joined the hunt for the Airbus A320-200, which disappeared from radar during a storm Sunday en route from Indonesia's second city of Surabaya to Singapore with 162 people on board.

PHOTO: AFP

Another drifting migrant ship found in Italy

450 migrants on board rescued

AFP, Brindisi

Italian sailors yesterday managed to take control of a crewless merchant ship as it drifted toward the country's southern shores in rough seas with 450 migrants on board, in the second such incident in two days.

Six coastguard officers were lowered from a helicopter onto the deck of the Ezadeen as it floated some 40 kilometres off Crotona on Italy's heel, the navy said.

It marked the second such drama in days for Italy, which is struggling with a record wave of migrants making the perilous journey across the Mediterranean, after the navy on Wednesday stopped another crewless "ghost" ship with hundreds of migrants on board.

A shipping website, however, said the Sierra Leone-registered vessel had begun its voyage in the Syrian port of Tartus. Thousands of the refugees who have ended up in Italy this year had fled the war-torn country, but most have come via North Africa.

Prior to apparently running out of fuel, the almost 50-year-old ship had been moving at a brisk seven knots and had been spotted by a coastguard plane 80 miles offshore shortly after nightfall.

A woman refugee on board was able to operate the ship's radio and told the coastguard that the crew had fled, Italian navy spokesman Captain Filippo Marini said.

"We are alone, they is no one, help us!" she cried, he said.

On Wednesday Italian sailors intercepted a freighter carrying nearly 770 migrants which had been drifting towards the rocks off Italy's south-eastern shore on autopilot, abandoned by the people smugglers who had steered it from Turkey via Greek waters.

More than 170,000 people have been rescued by Italy in the last 14 months and hundreds, possibly thousands, have perished trying to make the crossing.

Search teams close in on crash site

30 bodies recovered so far

AFP, Pangkalan Bun

Indonesian recovery teams narrowed the search area for AirAsia Flight 8501 yesterday, hopeful they were closing in on the plane's crash site, with a total of 30 bodies and more debris recovered from the sea.

French and Singaporean investigators joined the hunt for the Airbus A320-200, which disappeared from radar during a storm Sunday en route from Indonesia's second largest city of Surabaya to Singapore with 162 people on board.

The search teams have deployed side-scan sonar equipment to survey the seabed and ping locator to fine-tune their search for the plane's black boxes, crucial to determining why the plane crashed into the Java Sea off Borneo.

Rough weather has in recent days hampered the search for the plane's fuselage, which is believed to be in relatively shallow water of around 25-32 metres.

Search and rescue agency chief Bambang Soelistyo said yesterday's operation was focused on an area of 1,575 square nautical miles -- a tenth of the size of Thursday's search -- with 29 ships and 17 aircraft engaged in the operation.

"There are two main tasks in this priority sector: first, to locate the biggest part of the plane's body," he told a press conference.

"The second task is to find the position of the black boxes, or flight recorders, which will be carried out by the KNKT (National Transportation Safety Committee) which start working today."

"Divers are already on standby at the navy ship Banda Aceh to dive on that priority area to locate the body of the plane," he said, voicing hope for a "significant result".

KNKT chief Tatang Kurniadi told AFP that 40 divers, including 20 deep sea experts, arrived yesterday from Russia to help, along with two planes, one amphibious.

EXTREME WEATHER

The search is now focused on an area of 45 by 35 nautical miles centred about 75 nautical miles southwest of Pangkalan Bun, a town in Central Kalimantan on Borneo.

With the search area narrowing, Indonesian official S B Supriyadi said they were pressing on despite rough conditions, with high winds and 3-4 metre waves.

"The search is still proceeding in systematic way, despite the extreme weather," he told a press conference.

He said ships equipped with sonar may search through the night, but high waves were hampering the use of equipment to find the black boxes.

Two South Korean Orion surveillance planes yesterday spotted six bodies, Indonesian air force spokesman Hadi Tjahjanto said in a press release.

"After sweeping the area for more than two hours, at 11:58 the (Orions) found three bodies sitting in one row,"

he said, and another three just minutes later.

They informed warships by radio and fired flares to indicate the location for retrieval, he said.

MORE VICTIMS IDENTIFIED

Relatives were preparing to hold funerals after three more victims were identified, including flight attendant Khairunisa Haidar Fauzi, who had recently posted an Instagram picture with the message "I love you from 38,000 ft" for her boyfriend.

"I'm arriving in Surabaya to take Nisa (Fauzi) home to Palembang. I cannot describe how I feel. There are no words," AirAsia chief Tony Fernandes tweeted.

Also named was Grayson Herbert Linaksita, 11, who was travelling with his parents and 12-year-old sister for a holiday.

His great-uncle Bagyono Linaksita, 73, told AFP was dreading breaking the news to the children's grandmother, who was on holiday in the Czech Republic.

Gunmen kill Sunni clerics in Iraq

AFP, Basra

Gunmen shot dead three Sunni clerics in the Shia-majority southern province of Basra, Iraqi officials said yesterday, an attack likely to increase already-significant sectarian tensions in the country.

Raikan Mahdi, the head of the security committee for Al-Zubair district in Basra province, said "unknown gunmen" killed the clerics and wounded two more.

Mahdi said the attack took place as the clerics headed from provincial capital Basra to Al-Zubair on Thursday night, after attending a meeting on preparations to celebrate the Prophet Mohammed's birthday.

It is still unclear who carried out the killings, which come at a time of heightened tensions between Iraq's Shia Muslim majority and the Sunni Muslim minority who mark the prophet's birthday on Saturday.

Sunni jihadists from the Islamic State (ISIS) group spearheaded a sweeping offensive that overran major parts of Iraq and have repeatedly attacked Shiites, whom the consider to be apostates.

Baghdad turned to Shia militias for support against IS, and while they have played a key role in the fighting, they have also carried out kidnappings and extrajudicial killings targeting Sunnis.

Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, a

Shiite, condemned the Basra killings, saying they were carried out by "terrorist gangs" who must be brought to justice.

Interior Minister Mohammed Ghabban -- a member of the Badr bloc, which is affiliated with one of the country's most powerful Shia militias -- ordered an investigation into the attack, the ministry said, blaming it on "forces serving the (IS) project."

But Basra is far from IS strongholds, which are located north and west of Baghdad, and parliament speaker Salim al-Juburi, a Sunni, implied that Shia militiamen were behind the attack.

"We will not allow the replacement of the civil state that we seek to build with a group of warlords and militia leaders," Juburi said in remarks on the killings, according to a statement released by his office.

And the Iraqi Islamic Party, a main Sunni political party of which Juburi is a member, also said the attack was carried out by "criminal militias."

Baghdad's reliance on Shia militias has helped push back IS but also increased their power to the point that controlling them will be a major challenge for the government.

But the Iraqi government's first priority is the fight against IS, and while pro-government forces have regained some ground, large areas are still outside Baghdad's control.

State loses

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imbued with the core principles of Bangladesh constitution and to form a humanitarian and pro-people parliament to establish people's power.

Chaired by BHRMC President Mohammad Nurul Huda Milu, the discussion was also addressed by Nagarik Oikya Convener Mahmudur Rahman Manna, former MP Golam Mawla Rony and Communist Party of Bangladesh Vice President Haider Akbar Khan Rono.

India thwarts

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of January 1," said the statement.

It said the crew were planning "some illicit transaction" and that the boat was carrying explosives.

The Indian Defence Ministry also released pictures of the burning vessel and the plumes of red smoke billowing after the explosion.

The incident has evoked memories of the deadly November 26, 2008 Mumbai terror attacks when Pakistani militants sneaked into India's financial capital by sea and then began a 60-hour rampage that left 166 people dead.

Al-Jazeera journo face more jail time, deportation

AFP, Cairo

Three Al-Jazeera journalists yesterday faced the prospect of at least several more weeks in prison after Egypt's top court granted them a retrial in a case that sparked international uproar.

Australian Peter Greste, Egyptian-Canadian Mohamed Fahmy and Egyptian Baher Mohamed were detained in December 2013 for spreading false information and accused of aiding the blacklisted Muslim Brotherhood.

Greste's lawyer said he had submitted a request to have his client deported from Egypt under a new law signed by President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

A similar demand has been made to deport Fahmy to Canada, according to his fiancée Marwa Omara.

In the first trial, Greste and Fahmy each got seven years, and Mohamed was jailed for 10.

Egypt's top court on Thursday ordered a retrial, but kept the journalists in custody pending a new hearing.

A decree signed in November by Sisi allows him to deport foreigners sentenced to prison or on trial.

"We presented this week a request to the prosecutor to expel Greste in accordance with the presidential decree," Greste's lawyer Mostapha Nagi told AFP yesterday.

It is unclear how long the process will take, but Greste's family said they would apply for bail if it failed.

"The procedure is drawn out," Nagi said. "After the request is made at the

prosecutor's office, it must be submitted to the council of ministers (cabinet) to be approved and then to the president of the republic to consider his expulsion."

Greste's family said they had been advised that a retrial could start within 45 days, meaning the three could potentially spend at least several more weeks in custody.

Speaking to reporters in Brisbane yesterday, Greste's brothers Mike and Andrew said that deportation was "the best option to get Peter home".

One Egyptian senior official told AFP that were Greste's application to succeed, "it would be the first such case" under the new law.

In a short hearing on Thursday, the Court of Cassation accepted request by both the prosecution and defence for a retrial for the three jailed journalists.

Greste's parents told Australia's ABC News they were "shocked" by the decision.

"This was always on the cards but even though we have learnt not to expect anything, or (to) expect the unexpected, we did expect a little bit better than this," his father Juris Greste was quoted as saying.

Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop was more upbeat.

"He is now back in the position of an accused person awaiting a trial," she told Australia's Nine Network in comments reported by the AAP news agency.

"So that opens up a whole raft of new options for Peter and his family."

Brazilian president vows to tackle graft

AFP, Brasilia

Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff kicked off a second term Thursday, vowing to tackle corruption and revamp the economy as her government reels from a series of setbacks.

Brazil's economy, once booming, has barely grown during Rousseff's time in office, and her administration is embroiled in a multimillion-dollar graft scandal at state-owned oil giant Petrobras.

But the former guerrilla promised to face the scandal head on, vowing to punish anyone found guilty of illicit dealings.

"We are going to rigorously investigate everything that has happened," the leftist Rousseff said, speaking at the ceremony attended by the US and Chinese vice presidents as well as 13 heads of state, most from Latin America.

"We must investigate and punish, but without weakening Petrobras or diminishing its importance," she added, drawing warm applause at the ceremony at Brazil's Congress.

Rousseff won October's hard-fought election thanks to voters reliant on the extensive social welfare programs put in place a decade ago by her Workers Party predecessor Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

The Petrobras scandal and the ongoing police investigation -- dubbed "Operation Car Wash" -- erupted just a few months before the election.

So far suspicion has fallen on 39 people, including former Petrobras directors and executives from construction firms, a network that allegedly laundered around \$3.8 billion creamed off from inflated contracts to give kickbacks to mainly pro-government politicians.

2 robbers

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around half a kilometre off the spot while trying to flee after being chased by the locals, the police official said.

On information, police went to the spot and recovered the bodies.

According to the OC, Majnu stood accused in two criminal cases, including one for robbery and another for murder.

The bodies were sent to Sirajganj Sadar Hospital for autopsies.

Vessel workers

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Importers, carrier owners and workers are the worst victims of financial loss as the ships cannot unload cargoes and goods at the Mongla port on time, he said.

Acting BLVWF president Md Shah Alam said around 100 lighter vessels ply the Shela everyday. He added that at least 5,000 workers became unemployed following the ban.

Meanwhile, the United Nations team that visited affected areas in the world's largest mangrove forest to assess the impact of the oil slick and advise the government on how to reduce risks of a similar disaster, strongly recommended restriction on the plying of lighter vessels through

the Shela.

The team is expected to submit its report to the government in the second week of this month.

Chowdhury Ashiqul told the meeting at Mongla that Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority had been using the Shela for the last three years after the Mongla-Ghashiyakhali channel lost its navigability.

"A devastating impact will be left on the national economy too if the ban is not revoked immediately," he said.

The leader also threatened to enforce a non-stop, countrywide strike from January 6 if their demands were not met by January 5.

The leaders said they would hold a similar meeting in Khulna today.