

Jordan pledges support for Libya in talks with general

AFP, Amman

King Abdullah II yesterday pledged Jordan's support for efforts by Libya to confront "terrorist organisations", in talks with Libyan army chief Khalifa Haftar.

Abdullah discussed the Libyan conflict with Haftar and ways of addressing "efforts to counter terrorism and terrorist gangs", the palace said in a statement.

The king "stressed Jordan's continued support for Libya in its efforts to restore security and stability in the country and confront terrorist groups that threaten its sovereignty and the unity of its people," it said.

The meeting between Abdullah and Haftar also discussed military cooperation between Jordan and Libya, the statement added without elaborating.

In an interview with AFP in March, Haftar vowed to seize Libya's second city Benghazi from Islamist militias he has been battling since last May and urged international support for his campaign.

Haftar said Islamist militias have flourished in the absence of public institutions in Libya, which has two rival governments and parliaments and where rival factions are fighting for its cities and oil wealth.

Jordan is already part of a US-led coalition battling the jihadist Islamic State group that has seized chunks of Syria

and Iraq, and also joined a Saudi-led coalition against Shiite rebels in Yemen.

Haftar arrived late Sunday in Amman for an official visit expected to last several days, at the invitation of Jordan's chief of staff Meshaal Mohamed al-Zaban, a military source said.

The 72-year-old Haftar was sworn in on March 9 as the new army chief of conflict-ridden Libya and promoted general, a week after his nomination by the elected parliament.

The embattled prime minister of Libya's internationally recognised government, Abdullah al-Thani, paid a visit to Jordan in March during which he urged Arab countries to close ranks against IS.

AL to 'embarrass' Khaleda

FROM PAGE 16

Khaleda is likely to formally introduce party-backed mayor and councillor aspirants tomorrow at a programme in the capital's Institution of Engineers.

The AL thinks the BNP chief's presence in the campaign trail will draw huge public support for the opposition camp. That is why the ruling party intends to put her in an "embarrassing" situation.

"A burn victim may raise voice during her [Khaleda's] campaign. Or leaflets containing pictures of violence and killing during the blockade may be distributed at the campaign venues," said an AL central committee member.

The AL's publicity wing has already made a short film depicting "BNP-Jamaat's anarchy" during the blockade

and the party would show it in all the wards of the capital.

"We have provided [our] MPs with CDs about BNP's negative politics and directed them to show the footage to people in every ward," Hasan Mahmud, AL publicity affairs secretary, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Meanwhile, speaking at a programme at the Jatiya Press Club yesterday, Hasan said, "After all these killings, people will not tolerate Khaleda asking their votes. They will rather confine her."

After almost two years, the BNP chairperson will visit the party's Nayapaltan headquarters to attend a function on Pahela Baishakh around 4:00pm, said Sayrul Kabir Khan, a member of her press wing.

The former PM may launch a campaign for her party candidates through the programme.

Being the prime minister, AL chief Sheikh Hasina cannot take part in campaign, but she will counter Khaleda during her official programmes, AL leaders said.

Party leaders, who are not ministers, will also campaign.

In addition, the AL would use social media to woo young voters.

"We will try our best to persuade young voters using technology and social media," said AL Organising Secretary Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury.

Besides, the party will engage eminent personalities from all sectors in its campaign.

Russia evacuates over 650 from Yemen: officials

AFP, Moscow

Russia on Sunday evacuated more than 650 people of different nationalities from war-torn Yemen by air and sea, officials said.

A Russian navy ship took 308 people earlier Sunday while around 350 people were later able to leave on two Russian planes.

"The two planes took off from Sanaa this afternoon," a spokesman for the Russian embassy in Yemen told the Interfax news agency, without giving details of the evacuees' nationalities.

Earlier, a defence ministry official said that the 308 evacuated by sea were en route to Djibouti and included 45 Russians, 18 Americans, five British nationals, 159 Yemenis and citizens of former Soviet states and the Middle East.

"All evacuated persons are safely on board the Russian ship which will deliver them to Djibouti by morning," ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov told Russian agencies.

Pahela Baishakh

FROM PAGE 1

our revered poets have articulated, Baishakh comes as an undeniable force, under the guise of a storm, as if to shake us all off our deep slumber because another new year is here with all its promises and potentials.

It indeed works wonders, awakening us once again to where we truly belong as a nation. Bringing us all together in a festivity of cultural practices rooted deeply in secular ethos, it propels us to step out on the streets in droves in celebration of that collective spirit which constitutes the most basic pillar of our non-communal culture. Welcoming people from differing creeds, it shows us how to resist those dark, communal forces that have been at work to segregate us along ideological lines.

We have not forgotten the celebrations on that fateful Pahela Baishakh 14 years ago when a bombing by those communal forces killed 10 people and injured over 50 in the crowd that gathered around Ramna Batamul to watch Chhayanaut's programme. We did understand a politically sponsored bombing, which was equally abominable and horrendous, but why target

a programme that was seeking to build a bridge between religions and cultures? It couldn't be more obvious: they tried to rob us of our sweetest songs that envision a society where love and peace are the only guiding principles.

But what has happened in the following years? Overcoming all fears, people from all walks of life have continued to congregate around the Ramna Batamul in even greater numbers. What demonstrates the indomitable spirit of Baishakh more than this?

That, however, should not leave us so complacent as not to see the dangers lurking beneath the surface. Those dark forces that had unleashed a genocide campaign in 1971 have grown even deeper roots over the decades. Seeping into different layers of our society, they have organised themselves better.

Faced against such harsh realities, it is only expected that the spirit of Baishakh that lifts us so high would permeate our lives throughout the year, enabling us to fight back whenever they tilt their heads and to figure out newer ways to spread the light that those forces cannot tolerate.

Petrol bomb back again

FROM PAGE 16

highway in Pennai area to take a short break around 3:00am, said helper Munna.

They took tea in a nearby shop, he said, adding that he was on the truck's roof at the time of the attack.

"As he [Reaz] was taking a nap, three youths hurled a petrol bomb inside the truck through the window, setting the vehicle afire," he said. Munna also suffered minor injuries while jumping off the roof.

Hearing screams, locals rescued the driver and took him to a nearby upazila health complex. He was shifted to the DMCH as his condition deteriorated.

Stray incidents of violence also marked the yesterday's countrywide

hartal. Jamaat called the hartal protesting the execution of its assistant secretary general Muhammad Kamaruzzaman for his 1971 war crimes.

In Gazipur, Jamaat activists torched a passenger bus pouring petrol at Shibbari around 6:00am. Five passengers were hurt while getting down from the bus hurriedly, reports our correspondent.

Quoting witnesses, Shaheen Alam, inspector of Joydevpur Fire Service, said the bus of Palash Paribahan started from Gazipur inter-district bus terminal to Nabinagar carrying around 15 passengers.

As it reached Shibbari, the activists hurled brick chunks at the bus and then set it afire pouring petrol, he said.

In Chittagong, pickets torched three vehicles -- a truck, a microbus and a private car -- in Panchlaish area, reports our correspondent.

Quoting locals, police said a group of 15 to 20 youths got down from a city bus near Baby Super Market around 8:30am and poured petrol on three vehicles parked beside a road.

They ran away to different directions after setting those on fire, said Mohiuddin Mahmud, officer-in-charge Panchlaish Police Station.

In Savar, police arrested five Shibir leaders and activists while they were vandalising vehicles after a demonstration in Gazirchat area yesterday morning.

Militants planned to launch

FROM PAGE 16

Panchlaish and Akbar Shah areas of Chittagong and arrested Mozaher Hossain Miah, 35, Sabbir Ahmed Mubib, 23, Kamal Uddin Mustafa, 24, and Ashraf Ali Adnan, 25, said Lt Col Mifta Uddin Ahmed, commanding officer of Rab-7, in a press conference at the Rab-7 Headquarters.

They recovered five AK-22 rifles, five pistols, one smooth bore breech loading rifle, a gun, 10 magazines of AK-22, five magazines of the pistols, and 3,668 bullets at a hotel room and a house in Chittagong, said Lt Col Mifta.

Mozaher is an arms dealer and he used to sell arms to the militants, the Lt Col claimed, adding that the arms and ammunitions were being used for training.

The AK-22 rifles were made in China and the pistols were from India, he said. The arms were smuggled in through Comilla border from India.

During their investigation, the Rab learnt that the arrestees were first trained in classrooms of a madrasa of Hathazari upazila and then they were given militant training in a hilly area of Banshkhali upazila.

On February 19, Rab arrested 12 militants at Al Madrasatul Abu Bakar in Hathazari and recovered laptops, memory cards and other audio-video materials used in training in classes. Gleaning information from the arrestees there, Rab conducted a drive in Lotmoni hilly area of Banshkhali on February 21 and discovered a militant training camp.

They also arrested five militants and recovered arms and ammunition from there.

With information from the arrestees, Rab conducted another drive at a house in Bashundhara Residential Area of the port city and arrested three militants on February 28. They recov-

ered a large amount of bomb-making materials and 76 bombs from there.

Yesterday's drive was a continuation of those drives, said Lt Col Mifta.

Rab arrested 25 members of the group so far. "They were preparing to launch a new militant outfit and before that they were getting theoretical and militant training," said Lt Col Mifta, adding, "They had formed the armed wing in November 2013 in a meeting at a hotel in city's Foy's Lake area."

He said the militants were trained on operating firearms, on how to make explosives and use them, and on how to evade detection.

"They were preparing physically and mentally to conduct militant activities in the country and abroad," Mifta said, adding, "They have not yet disclosed the names of their top leaders during primary interrogation."

Land minister meets Mamata

Discusses enclave exchange issue

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Land Minister Shamsur Rahman Sharif has expressed hope that the long-pending issue of exchange of enclaves between India and Bangladesh would be resolved soon.

He came up with the view after meeting West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in Kolkata yesterday.

Following the meeting that lasted for nearly an hour, the minister said although there was no particular agenda for discussion, the enclave exchange issue came up.

He said he "discussed various issues of common interest. The honourable CM also spoke on many of them."

"We discussed the issue. Problems are there. They must be resolved," Sharif said, adding that the Teesta water-sharing deal did not come up in the meeting.

The meeting came on a day when The Economic Times daily published a report saying the ruling BJP's electoral ambitions in northeastern state of Assam might force a major change in the stance on the LBA with Bangladesh.

Replying to a question on the growing threat of terrorism and militancy in Bangladesh, Sharif said, "The Bangladesh government is always against terrorism and militant activities. The Sheikh Hasina government has initiated various steps to curb it and the situation is now totally under control."

"India and Bangladesh are two neighbouring countries. Many people live along the border between the two countries. Some of them try to foment trouble. Our government is active against this. The government of India as well as the state government [West Bengal] is also very much cordial in resolving this problem," he said.

Asked about the recent incidents of killing of bloggers in Bangladesh, Sharif said, "Steps are being taken. The killers must be arrested and punished."

Iraq PM retires over 300 army officers

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq's prime minister retired more than 300 officers as part of efforts to restructure the army after multiple divisions collapsed during a jihadist offensive last year, his office said yesterday.

Haider al-Abadi "sent more than 300 officers at the defence ministry into retirement as part of a plan to reorganise the army and make it more effective and efficient," it said.

The one-sentence statement did not provide details on the ranks and positions of the officers, or specifics on why they were removed from Iraq's massive officer corps.

7 ex-officials

FROM PAGE 16

The officials are former deputy general manager Imamul Haque, former senior vice president Shah Mohammad Harun, senior assistant Abul Kashem Mahmudullah, assistant vice president Fazlur Rahman, executive officer and vice president Tariqul Alam, senior executive vice president Mahmud Hossain and executive vice president Qamrul Islam.

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) filed the case against them on December 29, 2006 with Motijheel Police Station.

Qamrul Ahmed, introducing himself the owner of M/S Tanveer Agency, opened an account at the bank's headquarter on July 27, 2005. On the same day, he applied for Tk 1 crore loan, which was granted that very day. Without any delay, Ahmed encashed the money.

The ACC pressed charges against the seven officials on March 9, 2013. The court framed charges against them on June 29, 2014.

Bangladesh Bank dissolved Oriental Bank's Board of Directors in 2006 after detecting massive corruption, and converted it to ICB Islamic Bank.

To safeguard the interest of the depositors, the central bank took over the management and appointed a BB executive director as the bank's administrator.

Pak cricket team

FROM PAGE 16

Mirpur, where the two other limited-overs matches will also take place on April 19 and 22.

Pakistan will travel to Khulna after playing the lone T20 International on April 24, also in Mirpur, to play the first Test, starting from April 28, of the two-match series.

The second and final Test will also be held at Mirpur from May 6.

Confusion

FROM PAGE 16

"I just said there was no strike in the country now. We are contesting the polls to three city corporations and bar councils. The party is now concentrating on these elections," he added.

Sircar along with some other BNP leaders called on Khaleda Zia at her residence. From around 11:15pm onwards, a section of the media quoting Sircar reported that there was no blockade in the country.

But the BNP leader complained that some pro-Awami League journalists twisted his comment.

The blockade, which enters its 99th day today, has fizzled out off late, but the 20-party alliance is yet to put an end to it.

Khaleda on January 5 had announced the blockade after police barred her from coming out of her Gulshan office to attend a rally in front of the Nayapaltan central office of BNP.

The combine also enforced hartals

for all working days since February 1 to press home its demands, including holding a midterm election under a non-partisan administration.

The Election Commission on March 18 announced the schedule for Dhaka north, south and Chittagong city corporation polls. The alliance withdrew its hartal programme on April 1, but kept mum on the blockade.

CAMPAIGN DUTY
BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia last night assigned party national standing committee members Moudud Ahmed and Hannan Shah the duty of the chief coordinator in the campaigns for the party-backed candidates in Dhaka north and south city corporations, BNP insiders said.

Khaleda conveyed the decision to some party leaders when they called on her at her Gulshan residence.

172 aspirants face cases

FROM PAGE 16

Shujan Secretary Badiul Alam Majumdar said many candidates in the educational qualification column of their nomination forms wrote that it was not applicable. The Election Commission could have cancelled their nominations only for concealing information, he added.

Speakers at the press conference said the report was prepared so that voters can pick the suitable candidates easily.

"It's a voter's right to get information about a candidate beforehand as the elected persons monitor the total development activities in the city," said Badiul.

It's a good sign that a lot of candidates are young, but no woman is running for mayor, said the civil society platform.

On the large number of new candidates, Shujan Executive Member Syeda Rizwana Hasan said political parties have realised that it is not possible for them to win the polls by backing same old faces.

Some mayor hopefuls have declared that their yearly income is around Tk 2 crore, but they have bank loans of around Tk 10 crore. "Then how would it be possible for them to

bear the campaign costs?" she questioned.

Shujan Executive Member Hameeda Hossain and central coordinator Dilip Kumar Sarkar also spoke at the programme.

DHAKA NORTH CITY CORPORATION	
Total wards:	36
Mayor candidates:	16
1 faces case	
General councillor aspirants:	275
65 face cases	
DHAKA SOUTH CITY CORPORATION	
Total wards:	57
Mayor candidates:	20
3 face cases	
General councillor aspirants:	373
90 face cases	

SOURCE: SHUJAN

French 'Spiderman'

FROM PAGE 16

organisers' requirements, it took him just over six hours to scale the 2,717-foot (828 metre) tall Burj Khalifa.

But this time he scaled Cayan Tower, the tallest twisted tower in the world, without the protection of a safety harness, reports Abu Dhabi-based daily The National.

Starting his ascent at 8.25pm, he made steady progress to the top of the building at about 9.30pm.

Speaking to The National just a couple of hours before his ascent, he admitted he was nervous.

"Usually I do the climbs during the day so this has been a lot of waiting around and I'm eager to get started," he said.

"This is going to be a tiring climb and the foot spaces are quite small, so I'll have to be careful about my route."

"The Burj Khalifa climb was a little different because I had a safety harness but this time it will just be me on my own ... Apart from a bit of tape on my hands I won't have any other equipment to get to the top."

"The great thing about this climb is that it's the world's tallest twisted tower and the nature of the building means it has its challenges.

"I'm not as young as I used to be so this climb will be more difficult than some of the others, but I'm looking forward to it."

He took regular short breaks as he made his way up.

As the evening progressed, crowds gathered at the base of the tower, and many of those living and working in the tower took the opportunity to peer out from their balconies.

Preparations for the climb took more than a year.

The Frenchman has become famous for scaling some of the world's most iconic buildings without a safety harness, including the Eiffel Tower, Empire State Building, Sydney Opera House and the Petronas Twin Towers in Kuala Lumpur.

"I think he's mad," said Rachel Moore, who watched the climb near to Grosvenor House.

"I can't imagine how it would be possible to climb such a tall building unaided, but he's making good progress. It's amazing to see someone do something like this."

Sirajganj Shibir man killed

FROM PAGE 16

College and an activist of the student body of Jamaat-e-Islami in the district, sources said.

Following information from Anis, police raided a student mess at Dhanbandhi around 9:30pm, detained five Shibir men and seized three crude bombs, the OC said.

Later, police conducted another drive in Hard Point area taking Anis along with them around 12:30am yesterday, reports our Pabna correspondent.

Sensing the presence of law enforcers, some Shibir activists opened fire on them, forcing the policemen to retaliate that triggered a 15-minute "gunfight", police said.

At one stage, the attackers fled and police found the bullet-hit body of Anis lying on the spot, the OC said.

The law enforcers rushed him to Sirajganj General Hospital where he died around 6:00am, he added.

In Rajshahi city, police recovered the bullet-riddled body of Shahidul from a field, around 50 yards off Kharkhari bypass road, in Kistoganj area around 7:00am.

Shahidul was a Shibir activist and

younger brother of Rajshahi city unit Shibir president Jasim Uddin, said Mizanur Rahman, OC of Shah Makhdam Police Station.

The body bore five bullet wounds in the chest, and was sent to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital morgue for an autopsy, he said.

Shahidul's cousin Abdullah Jubayer told The Daily Star Shahidul had no connection with Shibir after he joined Islami Bank Hospital in Nawdapara area as a night guard two and a half years back.

DB police arrested him from the hospital on Saturday night, Jubayer, also the general secretary of Rajshahi city unit Shibir, said.

He added that Shibir in a press release on Sunday expressed concern over the fate of Shahidul as police did not produce him before a court and denied his arrest.

Contacted, Iftekhar Alam, assistant commissioner (DB) of Rajshahi Metropolitan Police, said he had no official information on Shahidul's arrest.