

UN chief in Baghdad for talks

AFP, Baghdad

United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon arrived in Baghdad Saturday for talks with senior officials on ways of assisting war-ravaged Iraq, the world body said.

Ban, who had last visited the Iraqi capital in March 2015, was travelling with World Bank chief Jim Yong Kim and Islamic Development Bank head Ahmad al-Madani.

They went straight into talks with Foreign Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari.

Ban flew from Lebanon, where he called for an end to war in the region and visited some of the 1.2 million refugees the country hosts.

A drop in oil prices has had a devastating effect on the economy of Iraq, already strained by the cost of the fight against the Islamic State group.

As areas are gradually retaken from the jihadists in intense battles, Baghdad is left with little to spare on the reconstruction of ravaged cities.

The government has asked for support from its foreign partners.

During a visit to Baghdad on March 16, British Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond said leaders would be urged to help.

"We will work with our partners from the G7 in order to provide direct support to the Iraqi government, and also to put pressure on the international financial institutions to give bigger and quicker loan support to Iraq," he said.

ACC trying

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The commission will do whatever can be done as per law, said Iqbal who was appointed as ACC chairman on March 10.

"There are thousands of cases pending here [at the ACC]. We need time."

Iqbal was talking to the media after inaugurating the Anti-Corruption Week at the commission's office in the capital's Shegunbagicha.

During the week-long event until April 1, the commission will work to raise awareness of corruption among people across the country, he said.

One of the best-run banks until 2009, BASIC Bank was entangled in financial irregularities following Bacchu's appointment as its chairman that year.

Bangladesh Bank in an inspection in 2012-13 found Bacchu's complicity in the embezzlement of Tk 4,500 crore.

After investigations, the ACC in September last year filed cases against several officials of the state-run bank. But it did not bring any charge against Bacchu believed to be at the centre of the scam, nor did it accuse any of the then board members in any of the cases.

No care

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Contacted, Jamir Uddin, senior chemist at the DoE, said the company did not even contact them for the clearance certificate.

The union chairman said he had informed the authorities concerned about the alleged plundering many times in the past but to no avail.

Also, he said some 200 indigenous people in the area were in constant fear of landslides during the rainy season due to the indiscriminate cutting of hillocks.

Officials from the authorities concerned were supposed to monitor the clay extraction which they never did, he alleged.

Anisuzzaman Khan, Dhubaura Upazila Nirbahi Officer, alleged that the company had violated four out of the five terms and conditions mentioned in a previous DO letter.

"I had looked into the matter and submitted a letter to the authorities concerned last year."

Later on, the company had to suspend their work for a few months, he claimed.

The Daily Star could not verify the claim.

"Legal action should be taken against the company immediately, if it is still involved in plundering," the UNO said.

Gazi Mohammad Golam Kibria Tapon, proprietor of the company, could not be reached despite repeated attempts.

Recently, the Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (Bela) filed a writ petition with the High Court, seeking to stop clay extraction without DoE clearance, and destruction of hills and hillocks at Mejpara, Arapara and Pacakahania moutzas in Durgapur upazila in Netrokona.

On March 14 this year, the court issued a ruling asking to know why indiscriminate and unplanned cutting of hills and extraction of clay without the environment clearance should not be declared illegal.

Truly the times

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This was the British superstars' first concert in Cuba. It was the first gig, in fact, by any rock band of such stature, with a production featuring giant video screens and a sound system that got the crowd jumping, arms swaying, to classic after classic, from "Angie" to "Paint it Black."

But the night was about much more than music.

Friday's free concert turned history on its head, in a country where just a few decades ago, all rock music was considered part of an enemy plot against the communist state.

"We know that years ago it was difficult to hear our music in Cuba, but here we are playing," Jagger said in Spanish, prompting huge cheers.

"I think that truly the times are changing," he said. "That's true, isn't it?"

The crowd erupted during songs like "Out of Control" and "Satisfaction," with people of all ages singing along to the choruses and jumping up and down in rhythm to thunderous guitar solos.

"It's so amazing that they came to Cuba and united such a variety of people, young and old," said Andres Enda, 24, a dancer.

"Change is already coming -- the fact they're here shows that."

Jagger, 72, Keith Richards, 72, Charlie Watts, 74, and Ronnie Wood, 68, flew in late Thursday, just two days after US President Barack Obama ended his historic visit aimed at over-

coming more than a half-century of US-Cuban hostility.

The twin events added up to a tumultuous week for Cuba, run by Fidel Castro and now his brother Raul ever since their guerrilla army deposed a hated, US-backed regime in 1959.

Although Jagger's comment about changing times was his only overtly political statement, the whole concert seemed like a massive declaration by Cubans that they want to join the world.

Flags from many countries floated above the crowd, Cubans young and old sang along in English, and the adoration for the aging rockers seemed to be about more than just the enjoyable good music.

Between the 1960s and 1990s, rock 'n roll was discouraged to varying degrees in Cuba, leading during the most repressive years to clandestine listening sessions and an underground trade in smuggled recordings.

Those restrictions have gone, but the ban on political and media freedoms has not, while the ramshackle communist economy and decades-old US economic embargo have forced many into lives of stiflingly few opportunities.

The Stones' show was among the most ambitious ever staged in Cuba, requiring 61 sea containers and a packed Boeing 747 filled with gear and equipment.

It was not clear whether many more big bands would be coming soon, however.

Rab, detectives quiz

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commander of Rab-11 in Comilla, also confirmed this.

Again in the afternoon, detectives took the family members from the Cantonment house to Kotwali Police Station for interrogation, said police.

Tonu, an undergraduate history student of Comilla Victoria College and a theatre activist, was found dead in Moinamoti area on the night of March 20. She was laid to rest in Mirzapur village the next day.

Comilla Superintendent of Police Shah Abid Hossain said investigators believe Tonu was killed following an attempted rape. But they would confirm it after getting the autopsy report.

However, her friends and fellow theatre activists allege that she was raped before being murdered. They also accuse the local administration of playing a "dubious role" regarding the incident.

Tonu's father Yaar Hossain, an office assistant of Comilla Cantonment Board, filed a murder case with Comilla Kotwali Model Police Station on March 21. But police have yet to arrest anyone.

Yesterday, several thousand people, including students of Victoria College, staged a protest rally in the city's Kandirpar area, demanding immediate arrest of the culprits.

They condemned law enforcers for their failure to nab a single suspect.

"It has been six days and not a single suspect has been detained. We will continue our protests till the culprits are arrested and their exemplary punishment is ensured," said Rashedul Islam, president of Victoria College Theatre.

People from all walks of life attended the rally, which continued for several hours till evening, blocking a busy road at the heart of Comilla city.

SP Shah Abid Hossain told BBC Bangla last night that they are facing "some limitations" while probing the murder, as the crime scene is in a restricted area like cantonment.

"The place is a restricted area. We cannot go there at ease to look for suspects. Those who are there have to provide us information."

On quizzing the family members, the SP said, "They were interrogated as they are the plaintiffs in the case and dear ones of the victim. We could not talk with them earlier because of their mental state."

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan

Kamal yesterday said they will be able to unearth the mystery behind the killing.

"Police and intelligence officials are working. They have started their work from the place where the killing took place ...," he said at an Independence Day programme at Rajarbagh Police Lines.

The minister did not make any comment on the progress in the investigation.

Addressing an event at the Rab headquarters in the capital, Rab Director General Benazir Ahmed said they too were working to solve the murder mystery.

"Hopefully, we will be able to give you good news soon," he said.

Meanwhile, the case was handed over to the Detective Branch (DB) of Police yesterday, said police sources.

On Friday night, the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) said the army authorities are providing full support to the police in investigating the murder of Tonu.

In a press release, it said "the unconscious body" of the 19-year-old college student was found in the bordering area of the cantonment by her father around 11:00pm on March 20. He had informed the military police about it.

Right away, Tonu was taken to the Combined Military Hospital there and the doctor on duty declared her dead, read the release.

ROAD MARCH

A faction of Gonojagoron Mancha held a rally joined by hundreds of people at the capital's Shabbagh yesterday, demanding justice for Tonu.

Its spokesperson Imran H Sarker said no measures had yet been taken though about a week had gone by. "We suspect a powerful group was involved in the incident as it took place in the cantonment area."

"Various influential groups are causing obstructions to the mass protests in Comilla. We will march towards Comilla to support the locals."

Imran threatened to block the Shabbagh intersection for an indefinite period if the killers of Tonu are not brought to book soon.

The Gonojagoron Mancha faction from a demonstration on Friday announced a plan for a "road march" to Comilla.

[A Comilla correspondent contributed to this report]

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Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan

'Cops missed chance to press Abdeslam on Brussels attack'

REUTERS, Paris

Three days before this week's Brussels attacks, police showed photos of the suicide bombers to Salah Abdeslam, whom they had just arrested for his part in the November Paris killings, and failed to challenge his claim not to know them, a report said on Friday.

French newspaper Le Monde said it had based its report on the minutes of two hours of interrogation on March 19, the only questioning Abdeslam faced between his arrest a day earlier and the attacks three days later.

News channel BFM TV also cited from the minutes of the questioning of Abdeslam, which took place at the federal police headquarters in Brussels. Reuters did not see the minutes and could not independently confirm either report.

Belgian police and Abdeslam's lawyer did not immediately respond to phone calls requesting comment.

Le Monde said the interviewers focused heavily on the events of Nov 13 in Paris in which 130 people died, rather than on future plans.

Police arrested Abdeslam after they found his fingerprints in an apartment they raided in Brussels' Forest district on March 15 that had been rented by one of the Bakraoui brothers under a false name.

Turkey's president this week criticised Belgium for failing to track the brothers -- Brahim, a convicted Belgian armed robber whom it deported last year and who blew himself up at the airport on Tuesday, and Khalid, who set off his suicide vest at a metro station in the city centre an hour later.

Belgium's prime minister on Thursday rejected resignations by the interior and justice ministers over the failures.

Abdeslam is also believed to have driven the car that brought the third Brussels suicide bomber, Najim Laachraoui, to Austria from Hungary in September last year.

Suicide blast kills 3 soldiers in Iraq

AFP, Baghdad

A group of suicide bombers from the Islamic State group killed three Iraqi soldiers yesterday in an attack on a military base hosting hundreds of coalition advisers, officers said.

"Four suicide bombers this morning infiltrated the military base of Al-Asad on its northern edge," said Major General Ali Ibrahim Daboun, head of the Al-Jazeera Operations Command.

"The bombers were of various nationalities, they were killed by Iraqi security forces," he told AFP, without specifying any casualties among army ranks.

Al-Asad air base, located about 180 kilometres (110 miles) northwest of Baghdad in Anbar province, is one of the largest military installations in the country.

It is home to Iraqi federal forces and tribal fighters currently engaged in operations to retake the nearby town of Hit from IS, as well as to a large contingent of foreign military advisers.

Colonel Steve Warren, the spokesman for the US-led coalition fighting IS in Iraq and Syria, said no foreigners were involved in the incident.

Another Iraqi security source said the number of bombers was higher than four and said one of them managed to detonate his suicide vest, killing three Iraqi soldiers and wounding four.

Child's body

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rickshaw puller of Junail village, admitted to police that he had killed the child, a law enforcer claimed.

As Kashem was an addict and paid little attention to his family, his wife Parvin had left him a few weeks ago and went to Dhaka with her daughter, Officer-in-Charge Hasan Al Mamun of Pakundia Police Station told The Daily Star.

Imran then began to live at his maternal grandparents' house in a nearby village.

Kashem on Thursday picked him up from his in-laws' house claiming that he would take the child to his mother in Dhaka.

Hearing that the child was not taken to his mother, Sultan began to look for him yesterday morning and spotted the plugged hole where Imran was buried.

He then called in the police who recovered the body.

OC Hasan Al Mamun said Kashem admitted slitting the throat of his son with a scythe. And later he threw the murder weapon into a nearby pond.

He added that motive behind the homicide was not known.

Police sent the body to Kishoreganj General Hospital morgue for an autopsy.

Reliance, Adani

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will think about allowing their further investment to set up more projects," said the official who is involved in the investment entertaining process.

About the Adani Group's proposed investment, the official said after examining different primary feasibilities, the Indian giant has now decided to set up a 3000MW capacity power plant in a suitable location in India and sell the generated electricity to Bangladesh.

"Adani is now thinking about selling 3000MW power to Bangladesh from India, not setting up any plant in Bangladesh," he added.

According to officials at the power and energy ministry, representatives of both the Reliance and Adani groups have met Bangladesh officials on different occasions following the memorandums of understanding (MoU) signed in June last year during Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Dhaka visit.

The combined value of the two deals is \$5.5 billion, with the Reliance Group's \$3 billion investment expected to become the largest one-off foreign direct investment in Bangladesh.

The officials said as a follow-up to the MoU, both the Indian conglomerates came up with their proposals and discussed with different bodies in the Bangladesh government, including top officials of the power and energy ministry.

"After a number of bilateral discussions between Bangladesh and Indian sides, both the firms have agreed on certain issues to proceed on with their investment proposals," said Power Cell Director General Mohammad Hossain.

He also said the government has been working actively to facilitate the foreign direct investment (FDI).

Belgium charges

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Aberamane A, for an extra 24 hours. He was detained following a series of raids after this week's bomb blasts at Brussels airport and on a rush hour train.

Brussels airport said it will not reopen before Tuesday at the earliest as it implements new security measures and repairs the departure hall wrecked by the bombers, believed to be from the Islamic State group.

Belgians in mourning will gather today for a rally in a central Brussels square now carpeted with flowers and tributes to the 31 killed and 300 injured in the March 22 metro and airport bombs, with a national solidarity march also planned.

The Belgian government faces a torrent of criticism at home and abroad, with key ministers on the back foot saying they had done everything possible to prevent Tuesday's attacks and track a network also linked to November's Paris attacks.

Many believe it failed to stop young Belgian fighters going to Syria to join Islamic State (IS) -- which claimed the attacks -- and then returning home battle-hardened and more extremist than before.

"It is an endless nightmare for a country turned upside down," said Le Soir daily in a front-page editorial.

Heavily armed soldiers and police remained on patrol in the capital and Zaventem airport.

In an indication the city is still on edge, a bomb disposal squad carried out a controlled detonation on a southern Brussels street to destroy a suspect backpack.

Prosecutors said Faycal C was one of three people arrested outside the Belgian federal prosecutor's office in Brussels on Thursday night as part of a huge sweep of detentions across Belgium and Europe.

"He has been charged with taking part in a terrorist group, terrorist murder and attempted terrorist murder," the prosecutor said.

Asked by AFP if Faycal C. was the suspected third bomber dubbed the "man in the hat", a source close to the inquiry told AFP: "That is a hypothesis the investigators are working on."

Local media named the suspect as Faycal Cheffou, a freelance journalist.

He is the first person charged with terror offences over the Brussels attacks, the worst in the history of a country that is home to the European Union and the Nato military alliance.

Belgium's ageing nuclear power plants have also come under scrutiny as a possible terror risk, with the EU's anti-terror chief Gilles de Kerchove telling La Libre Belgique newspaper they face the threat of a terrorist cyber-attack over the next five years.

According to reports, a security guard at a Belgian nuclear power plant was murdered Thursday and his access badge stolen. Prosecutors denied any terror link, Belga news agency reported, and said that in fact the man worked at a medical research facility that used radioactive isotopes.

These reports follow the discovery by investigators last year of surveillance footage of a nuclear plant official in the flat of a suspect linked to the Brussels and Paris attacks.

European authorities are under huge pressure to better coordinate the tracking of homegrown extremists and fighters returning from Syria.

The Belgian government has admitted "errors" and two ministers offered to resign after Turkey said it had arrested and deported Ibrahim El Bakraoui, who blew himself up in the airport attack.

Ibrahim and his brother Khalid, the suicide bomber in the metro attack, were also on a US counter-terrorism watch list, CNN reported.

Belgian prosecutors have said that the DNA of second airport bomber Najim Laachraoui was found on a suicide vest and a piece of cloth at the Bataclan concert hall where 90 people were killed during November's Paris attacks, and on a bomb at the Stade de France stadium.

Harrowing stories continued to emerge from survivors of the attacks, in which people of around 40 nationalities were killed or wounded.

Briton David Dixon, 51, who lived in Brussels, texted his aunt after the airport blasts to say he was safe, but happened to be on the metro system and died when a suicide bomber blew himself up at the Maalbeek station near Brussels' EU quarter, British media said.

Thank you, Bangladesh

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have moved away.

Asked if the ULFA may return to Bangladesh, Saikia referred to the 10-truck arms haul in Chittagong in 2004, and said: "If the non-Awami League parties who were in power back then, were to return, it would form kind of a conducive atmosphere for the ULFA and such other groups to return here."

"But the ULFA has run out of steam in such a way that they won't think of coming back to Bangladesh."

Saikia, who has authored or edited at least 10 books on regional security and terrorism, thinks the middle-east terror group Islamic State now poses the gravest threat to Bangladesh.

Though the ISIS initially had focused on the Iraq and Syria region, "they now are slowly changing their tactics," he said.

"To upset the counter attacks it is experiencing by the allied forces and others, they are now concentrating on the far enemy ... Homegrown Islamist or fundamentalist groups such as JMB, JMJB or Huji are now trying to piggy-back on to the ISIS.

"They are trying to make themselves franchisees of the ISIS. The Islamic

State is probably in cahoots with this aspect."

Otherwise they would have denied the reported claims of responsibilities for the recent murders of people, including online writers, Saikia continued.

"The Burdwan Blast in India's West Bengal in 2014 by Jama'at Mujahideen Bangladesh and the arrest of JMB cadres in Barpeta district are important pointers that the JMB operatives have gone across borders.

He stressed the need for formulating a "comprehensive and well-calibrated policy" to combat militancy of this nature.

"You cannot actually confine terrorism of this kind to a particular geographical area, especially in the Bangladesh-Northeast (India)-Rohingya (Myanmar) belt.

"It is very important at this point of time to understand that all the [terror] groups being in one region is a big disadvantage for us ... Bangladesh, India and Myanmar should together sit down and have a conclave to come up with a comprehensive and well-calibrated counterterrorism policy," he added.

Independent bids

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transition...as an example for other newspapers around the world to follow."

In its final front-page exclusive, the "Indie" reported that British-based dissident Mohammed al-Massari was being pursued through the courts over a plot ordered by former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi to assassinate Saudi King Abdullah.

Journalists earlier posted footage online of the team "banging ourselves out" -- an old tradition of banging the desks to mark the departure of a colleague.

"Today the presses have stopped, the ink is dry and the paper will soon crinkle no more," it said.

"But as one chapter closes, another opens, and the spirit of The Independent will flourish still."

Saturday's edition contained four souvenir supplements along with an interview with old adversary Alastair Campbell, the spin doctor of former prime minister Tony Blair with whom the publication clashed over its opposition to the 2003 Iraq invasion.

"I think it's really sad," said Campbell of the paper's demise. "What concerns me is that the Independent is going, and there are job cuts at the Guardian, but the wretched Daily Mail is rampant."

The Independent's Russian-born British owner, Evgeny Lebedev, who announced the closure of the print edition last month, wrote that journalism had "changed beyond recogni-

tion" and the newspaper "must change too".

The Independent was set up by three former journalists in 1986 and became known for its eye-catching, campaigning front pages and emphasis on photos.

At the peak of its popularity, it had a circulation of more than 420,000, but this slumped to 40,000.

In an editorial, The Guardian paid tribute to a "really rather wonderful newspaper" that had suffered from dramatic changes to the advertising market, notably the shift in revenues to sites such as Facebook.

"Great newspapers which have survived for centuries find their business models challenged as never before. So no one will celebrate the end of the Independent in print," it said.

Like The Guardian, The Independent was politically left of centre, and campaigned strongly against Britain's involvement in the US-led war in Iraq in 2003.

It becomes the first daily national to close in Britain since 1995, when Today folded.

The weekly News of the World owned by US media tycoon Rupert Murdoch closed in 2011 after a series of phone hacking scandals, but was replaced by the Sun on Sunday, which is owned by the same group.

Independent.co.uk currently has nearly 70 million monthly global unique users.