

Russian, US jets had near miss over Syria: officials

AFP, Aboard A US Military Aircraft

A Russian fighter flew dangerously close to a US warplane over eastern Syria, US defence officials said Friday, highlighting the risks of a serious mishap in the increasingly crowded airspace. The "near miss" occurred late on October 17, when a Russian jet that was escorting a larger spy plane manoeuvred near an American warplane, Air Force Lieutenant General Jeff Harrigan said. The Russian jet came to "inside of half a mile" of the US jet, he added. Another US military official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the American pilot was buffeted by the turbulence from the Russian jet's engines. "It was close enough you could feel

the jet wash of the plane passing by," the official said. It appeared the Russian pilot had simply not seen the US jet -- either on radar or visually. It was dark and the planes were flying without lights. "I would attribute it to not having the necessary situational awareness given all those (planes) operating together," Harrigan said. The incident raises serious questions about the extent to which pilots can track the complex airspace they operate in. **HOTLINE TO RUSSIA** Fearing a mishap, the US-led coalition last year set up a hotline with Russian counterparts to discuss the approximate locations and missions of planes. In this case, the American pilot tried unsuccessfully to reach the Russian jet

via an emergency radio channel. The next day, US officers used the hotline to ask Russia what had happened, and they said "the pilot didn't see" the American plane, the official said. The rate of close calls has increased over the past six weeks, Harrigan said, with Russian jets intentionally flying close to a coalition plane every 10 days or so. "An intercept would be when an aircraft rolls in behind one of our aircraft. Could be a tanker, could be a B-52" bomber, Harrigan said. US officers typically contact the Russians afterward. We'll "make sure they know we are concerned about that and try to get an understanding of why they felt the need to do it," Harrigan said.

Pressure mounts

FROM PAGE 16 and dozens arrested, according to official reports.

Stories of grave abuse by security officers -- including sexual violence, summary executions and the torching of villages -- have spiralled on social media but are difficult to verify with the army barring rights groups and journalists from the remote region bordering Bangladesh. On Friday, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch joined calls for an impartial investigation into the allegations, which the UN has called "alarming and unacceptable". "If Myanmar's security forces are not involved in any human rights violations as the authorities claim, then they should have no trouble granting independent observers access," said Rafendi Djamin, Amnesty's Southeast Asia and Pacific director. The same day, the US State Department said that it had voiced concern to Myanmar's foreign ministry about the reported rape of Rohingya Muslim women by soldiers during a recent upsurge in violence against the persecuted minority. State Department spokesman Mark Toner told a briefing that the United

States wanted Myanmar to investigate the reported rapes and hold those responsible accountable. Toner said earlier that the United States had raised the issue with the Myanmar foreign minister, but the State Department later issued a transcript of the briefing saying it had brought the issue up with "the foreign ministry," not the foreign minister. Eight Rohingya women, all from U Shey Kya village in Rakhine State, described how soldiers last week raided their homes, looted property and raped them at gun point. Reuters interviewed three of the women in person and five by telephone, and spoke with human rights groups and community leaders. Not all the claims could be independently verified, including a total number of women assaulted. Zaw Htay, a spokesman for Myanmar President Htin Kyaw, denied the allegations. The military did not respond to an emailed request for comment about the accusations. Writing on Facebook, Zaw Htay dismissed an article in the Myanmar Times that described reports of a "mass rape" in a Rohingya village on October 19. "There was information that some attackers were kept in that village. So

pressure was taken very seriously and (the search team) was very careful about being safe and would not think to rape up to 5 women," he wrote. The government says the October 9 border raids were carried out by hundreds of Rohingya fighters linked to Taliban-trained Islamists. If true, it would mark a troubling development in a religiously-split region where the stateless Rohingya have languished under years of repression but so far shown little interest in jihadist ideology. Rakhine has sizzled with tension ever since waves of communal violence in 2012 killed more than 100 and pushed tens of thousands of people, mostly Rohingya, into destitute displacement camps. Many in Buddhist-majority Myanmar insist the Rohingya are illegal immigrants from Bangladesh and viscerally oppose any moves to grant them citizenship. The recent upsurge in violence deepens and complicates a conflict that already posed a top challenge to a new civilian government led by Aung San Suu Kyi, who has disappointed rights groups by not coming out in stronger support of the Rohingya.

AL keeping party

FROM PAGE 1 decision in this regard," AL Presidium Member Mohammed Nasim told The Daily Star yesterday.

No minister was given secretarial posts in the new committee in line with the decision, added Nasim, also the health minister. About picking some ministers as presidium members, he said the presidium is the party's policymaking body and its members do not need to work full-time for the AL, unlike its secretaries. Talking to journalists on Friday, AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader said three vacant posts of the presidium would be filled after a cabinet reshuffle. Speaking at the first meeting of the new presidium on Friday night, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, also the AL president, called upon the party men to go door to door to convince people about the government's successes and win their support for the party. "She is very serious about the next national election and asked us to prepare for it. She also told us to learn from city corporation elections where our candidates were defeated despite the government's massive development work," a presidium member told this newspaper after the meeting. **MORE NAMES ANNOUNCED** The AL announced all but seven names for its central working committee until yesterday, six days after the party's 20th national council. It is yet to name three presidium members and international affairs, science and technology affairs and youth and sports affairs secretaries, and deputy office secretary. Religious Affairs Minister Motiur Rahman, Planning Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal, Cultural Affairs Minister Asaduzzaman Noor and Science and Technology Minister

Yeafesh Osman have been dropped from the committee. Motiur was a member, Mustafa Kamal was the finance and planning secretary, Noor the cultural affairs secretary and Yeafesh the science and technology affairs secretary of the immediate past committee. Besides, State Minister for Finance and Planning MA Mannan, State Minister for Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs Bir Bahadur U Shei Ching, State Minister for Energy Nasrul Hamid, State Minister for Land Saifuzzaman Chowdhury, State Minister for ICT Division Zunaid Ahmed Palak and Deputy Speaker Fazle Rabbi Miah have been left out of the committee. Mannan, Fazle Rabbi, Nasrul, Saifuzzaman and Palak were members and Bir Bahadur was an organising secretary in the previous committee. Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury, Health Minister Mohammed Nasim, Housing and Public Works Minister Mosharrar Hossain and Public Administration Minister Syed Ashrafur Islam have retained their posts as presidium members while Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid has been inducted into it. Previously, he was the party's education affairs secretary. Disaster Management and Relief Minister Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya and State Minister for Textiles and Jute Mirza Azam continue to be central committee members. Food Minister Qamrul Islam has been included as a committee member. Although there were speculations that the 81-strong central committee would have young leaders, most of the leaders of the previous committee have been retained. However, a good number of new faces have been included in the committee as members.

ADVISORY COUNCIL The AL yesterday also announced the names for its 38-member advisory council, the party's think-tank. Amir Hossain Amu, Tofail Ahmed and Suranjit Sengupta were again made advisory council members. The three were dropped from the party's presidium in its 2009 national council allegedly due to their controversial roles during the political changeover in 2007. On the last day of the AL's national council on Sunday, Hasina and Quader were elected party president and general secretary. The PM on that day announced the names of 21 party office bearers, including 14 presidium members, four joint general secretaries and a treasurer. On Tuesday, Quader named 22 more office bearers. The previous committee's relief and social welfare secretary Faridunahar Layli has been made agricultural affairs secretary, while Aminul Islam Amin, member of the previous committee, has been named deputy publicity secretary. Besides, former Chhatra League leader Delowar Hossain has been made forest and environmental affairs secretary. The 28 members of the new central committee are Abul Hasnat Abdullah, Momtaj Uddin, Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya, Qamrul Islam, Nurul Majid Humayun, Khairuzzaman Liton, Simin Hossain Rimi, Monnujan Sufian, Nurul Islam Thandu, Obaidul Muktadir Chowdhury, Dipankar Talukder, Badruddin Ahmed Kamran, Aktaruzzaman, SM Kamal Hossain, Mirza Azam, Nazibullah Hiru, Amirul Islam Milon, Rafiqul Islam, Golam Kabir Rabbni Chinu, Reazul Kabir Kawsar, Parvin Jaman Kalpona, Anwar Hossain, Iqbal Hossain Apu, Marina Jahan, Sammi Ahmed, Marufa Akter Popy, Biplob Barua and Ramand Arang. Most of them are former BCL leaders.

Dhaka attack

FROM PAGE 16 and Kohat. The community is believed to regularly help the Taliban in duplicating modern weapons.

"We aren't sure yet but the language they mentioned is spoken in and around the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan where the village is located," a senior NIA officer said. Bangladesh has already alleged that the weapons used in the Holy Artisan bakery attack were sourced from across the border. The country's counterterrorism and trans-national crime chief, Monirul Islam, had categorically mentioned Munger in this connection. Thereafter, Bihar police had launched an investigation into the matter. "The Bihar police in a communique to Bengal police has confirmed that the

arms manufacturers and smugglers had set up units in Malda and other places in Bengal," an STF officer said. The NIA believes the consignment of AK-22 rifles and pistols reached the terrorists in Dhaka a month before the Gulshan terror strike. But what has intrigued the NIA officers is the duplication of AK-22 rifles instead of the AK-47, which is more popular among both terrorists and security agencies. A semi-automatic rifle originally manufactured in Romania, AK-22 is uncommon in India, and hence, difficult to duplicate. "The uncomplicated AK-22 is a low-range weapon, easy to use by even greenhorns and has a short range. It was the perfect weapon for the youngsters who carried out the terror attack in the Dhaka bakery," an NIA officer said.

If expert gunsmiths did come from Darra Adam Khel to train men in Malda, investigation agencies have reasons to worry. For, these Pakistani tribals can copy nearly any weapon, from pen pistols and hand-grenades to automatic rifles and anti-aircraft guns. Darra gunsmiths are said to have the ability to duplicate any new rifle within 10 days. **Boat race** FROM PAGE 5 Committee; Maruf Rashid, NSSK president; Md Maniruzzaman Rahim, general secretary; Sheikh Ashrafuzzaman, chief advisor; Mohammad Mollah Nafiz Intiaz, Grameenphone Khulna circle head; and AM Sazzad Hossain, Khulna regional head; were present.

Five killed

FROM PAGE 16 The robbers put up barricades and fired at the vehicle, said Chandan Debnath, assistant director of Rab-7. The Rab personnel retaliated. Minutes later when the gunfight stopped, three of the attackers were found bullet-hit, Chandan said. The injured were taken to Mirsarai Health Complex where doctors declared them dead. Miftah Uddin Ahmed, commanding officer of Rab-7, said three foreign pistols and two shooter guns were recovered from the scene along with ornaments, vanity bags and cash. Two Rab members were also injured when robbers threw an iron pipe targeting the microbus, he said, adding that the injured law enforcers took primary treatment at a local hospital. The bodies were kept at Mirsarai Police Station. No one claimed the bodies until the filing of the report around 8:00pm, said Sub-inspector Taufiqul Islam. In Kushtia, police having been tipped-off conducted a drive at Gobindgunia on the Kushtia-Pabna highway. A gang of 8-10 men were preparing to commit a robbery around 1:00am, said Kazi Jalal Uddin, officer-in-charge of Mirpur Police Station. Seeing law enforcers, they opened fire and threw several crude bombs. Police fired back triggering a gunfight, the OC said. The incident left two robbers dead on the spot while their associates fled, reports our Kushtia correspondent quoting police. Police recovered a pistol, two bombs, two swords, one saw and 2 bullets from the scene, police sources said. The bodies were sent to Kushtia General Hospital for autopsy. Kamrul Hasan, assistant superintendent of police in Kushtia, said police were trying to find out the identities of the deceased. OC Jalal and a constable were hurt in the incident, he claimed. According to rights body Ain O Salish Kendra, as many as 107 people were killed in "crossfire" between January and September this year.

Compromise

FROM PAGE 16 The said open space has been officially known as Shaheed Matiur Park and formerly known as Gulistan Park. Nearly a decade ago, this very city corporation prepared an architectural layout design with Buet experts for development of the park with a suggestion that the existing road across the park would be closed and a new road would be built around the park. They wrote a letter to the president in late April, 2006, seeking his permission to open the road to the west of the Bangabhaban. The city corporation, responsible for maintenance of the park, constructed an auditorium "Mahanagar Natyamancha" on a large portion of the 3.5-acre park. Later on, Sergeant Ahad Police Box and a mosque were constructed shrinking the park even further. On Thursday, a clash broke out between hawkers and DSCC eviction team, as the latter embarked on a drive to remove illegal makeshift shops from pavements and the underpass market at Gulistan to make way for pedestrians. The mobile court with which the city corporation went for eviction was not backed by police force. Some ruling party affiliate Chhatra League leaders as back up of DSCC officials opened fire to drive the hawkers away. As to why and how it happened, Khokon said, "It was an expression of emotion and excessive zeal. But we cannot endorse it. Police in their usual course should look into the incident."

Communist

FROM PAGE 5 fight against neo-liberalism and religious fundamentalism. Nilotpal Basu, another Indian leftist leader, underlined the need for a greater cooperation among the communist parties of the region, particularly South Asia, to face the challenges of capitalism. Questioning why the communist parties' influence, Sunrendra Prasad Pendey, former finance minister of Nepal and standing committee member of Communist Party of Nepal, said, "In the past we were taught that production means land, labour and capital. But this idea has now changed." "Now the Western and European education have taught us that knowledge means production," he said, adding, "We will have to transform ourselves with the changing concept of the developed world." Participants from Sri Lanka and Pakistan stressed the need for a common platform comprising the region's communist parties. Alexander Potapov of Communist Party of the Russian Federation, Prof John Foster of British Communist Party and Thomas Beisenkamp of German Communist Party also addressed the seminar.

US top court to decide 'battle of the toilets'

AFP, Washington

The US Supreme Court said Friday that it will decide which bathrooms should be used by transgender people, a highly sensitive question with national political resonance. The case involves 17-year-old Gavin Grimm, who was born a female but identifies as a male. Grimm filed suit to be allowed to use the boys' bathroom at his high school in Gloucester County, Virginia. Arguments in the politically charged question will be heard between now and late June, making it easily one of the highest-profile cases set for the court's current term. The Obama administration has said public schools should grant access to toilets and locker rooms based on the gender with which a student identifies, not the birth gender. Federal authorities, seeking to fight discrimination, have threatened school systems with a loss of federal funds if they fail to comply. But more than a dozen Republican-controlled states, bitterly opposed to that approach, are challenging the federal government in court.

Some conservatives see the directive from Washington as improper interference in local school affairs and an abuse of executive power. The defenders of this position point both to their religious values and questions of security and privacy. "No men in women's bathrooms" is the slogan they repeat on social networks and in rallies. Leading the opposition, North Carolina adopted a law requiring that transgender people use toilets corresponding to the gender on their birth certificates. That law, affecting a tiny minority of the population -- less than 1 percent, according to some studies -- has been condemned as discriminatory by leading figures from civil society, from the business and sports worlds, and from the Democratic Party. Since the death in February of Justice Antonin Scalia, the Supreme Court has been operating with eight justices instead of the normal nine. With four conservative and four liberal justices, the chances of tie votes -- and thus of weakly-worded decisions -- become greater, especially on such ideologically charged topics as this.

Uproot Yaba factories

FROM PAGE 16 to counter drugs trafficking at the Sri Lankan capital of Colombo.

He said drug traffickers were smuggling Yaba, a contraband pill, to Bangladesh through the rugged frontiers of Chittagong region, close to Myanmar. The minister, however, told the conference that Bangladesh adopted "zero tolerance policy" against drug smuggling and abuse. "Our government is committed to control narcotic drugs in line with the United Nations Convention and the conventions of Saarc (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation and BIMSTEC [Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation]," he said. He urged all member states of the Indian Ocean region to counter drug trafficking and its abuse by taking coordinated efforts. Yaba, which in Thai means "crazy medicine", is also called as horse drug. It is given to horses when pulling carts up steep hills and during other strenuous work. According to experts it is made of methamphetamine and caffeine.

In recent years Bangladesh became a destination for Yaba, mainly smuggled from Myanmar, for being popular among youths. Long-term use of it causes decline in cognitive functions, according to experts. Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) and police identified that Bangladesh's southeastern Teknaf border with Myanmar was the main route for Yaba smuggling. In recent years, due to the increase in Yaba smuggling on Bangladesh-Myanmar borders, paramilitary border forces of the two countries mobilised extra troops on the frontiers. BGB officials said the smugglers now preferred sea routes in view of intensified vigil on the Bangladesh-Myanmar frontier. With the assistance of the United Nations Office for Narcotics and Crime, Colombo hosts the conference with participation of home ministers of Bangladesh, Comoros, India, Iran, Madagascar, Mozambique, Seyshells and Tanzania.

Release all the information

FROM PAGE 16 when the Federal Bureau of Investigation had recommended that no charges be filed against Clinton, although it found her to have been "extremely careless" in her use of a private server.

But FBI Director James Comey's letter to US lawmakers announcing that inquiries had been renewed shocked the campaign and rocked world markets. Clinton cried foul, demanding that Comey reveal more information about the probe, and declared herself "confident" that voters, and the FBI, would conclude that she had done nothing wrong. "The American people deserve to get the full and complete facts immediately," she said. "We don't know the facts, which is why we are calling on the FBI to release all the information that it has." Clinton's defiant words came after Trump -- himself dogged by scandal over alleged sexual misconduct -- declared her unfit for office as a jubilant crowd of supporters in New Hampshire chanted: "Lock her up!" Concern that the renewed probe would damage Clinton's formerly impressive momentum spooked the markets, with US stocks, the dollar and oil prices tumbling lower on the prospect of a close vote. Comey dropped his bombshell in a letter to lawmakers, revealing that "in connection with an unrelated case, the FBI has learned of the existence of emails that appear to be pertinent to the investigation," and would take "appropriate investigative steps." Clinton's campaign was outraged and implied that Comey's intervention could be politically-tinged because, in Clinton's words, the letter was only sent to "Republican members of the House." "I'm confident, whatever they are, they will not change the conclusion reached in July," she added. According to the New York Times, the newly discovered mails emerged after agents seized electronic devices used by Clinton's closest aide, Huma Abedin, and her husband, Anthony Weiner. Weiner, a Democratic former congressman who resigned in 2011 after he was exposed for sending explicit online messages, is under investigation over allegations he sent sexual messages to a 15-year-old girl. NBC News said the newly discovered emails were sent by Abedin to Clinton from a laptop used by Weiner, whose bid to become mayor of New York foundered over similar "sexting" claims in 2013. Meanwhile, Trump, trailing in polls both nationally and in the swing states he must win to secure the White House, seized triumphantly on the news. "We must not let her take her criminal scheme into the Oval Office," the 70-year-old billionaire told cheering crowds at a campaign rally in Manchester, New Hampshire. "I have great respect for the fact that the FBI and the Department of Justice are now willing to have the courage to right the horrible mistake that they made," he headed. Trump, who has previously stated that if he wins the election he will jail her for the alleged mishandling of secure communications while serving under President Barack Obama -- called the newly found emails "bigger than Watergate" on Friday. Republicans on Capitol Hill also seemed jubilant over Clinton's latest travails. "Everything that has happened... is the natural, probable consequence of deciding you're going to have a rogue email system," Trey Gowdy, chairman of the congressional committee that first uncovered the existence of Clinton's private server, told Fox News late Friday. Several leading newspapers on Saturday faulted Comey for being overzealous in announcing that the FBI will be scouring the newly-discovered emails. "By revealing it, he inevitably creates a cloud of suspicion over Clinton that, if the case's history is any guide, is unwarranted," The Washington Post wrote on its editorial page yesterday. News of the probe took the shine off what should have been a good day for Clinton on Friday, with the Obama administration announcing stronger than expected economic growth numbers. Clinton was due to campaign in Miami on Saturday in the most important potential swing state in terms of electoral votes, Florida. Trump was due to make stops in Colorado and Arizona before heading to Nevada for a Sunday rally in Las Vegas. Next week, both candidates will continue to barnstorm battleground states. Trump's campaign was rocked this month by the release of 2005 footage showing him bragging about his groping women, followed by a string of accusations of sexual misconduct -- which he denies. As he faltered, Trump piled on the defiant rhetoric, claiming the allegations were part of a plot to rig the election, and threatening not to recognize the outcome if he loses.