

Haftar forces say they hit pro-govt airbase in Libya

AFP, Tripoli

Forces loyal to Libyan strongman Khalifa Haftar said they launched air strikes early yesterday against an airbase in third city Misrata held by government loyalists.

“Our air force carried out several raids against the Misrata airbase, targeting anti-air defences as well as a Turkish aircraft transporting ammunition, drones and missiles,” Haftar’s self-styled Libyan National Army said in a statement on its Facebook page.

Pro-Haftar television channel Libya Al-Hadath said a Turkish Ilyushin aircraft “was destroyed as it landed at the Misrata base”.

It aired footage, which could not be independently verified, of the alleged strikes.

Forces loyal to the UN-recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) did not immediately confirm or deny the reported attack.

Haftar forces launched an offensive in April to wrest Tripoli from the GNA.

Many of the government’s best equipped and most seasoned fighters come from Misrata, which is east of the Libyan capital.

Turkey and Qatar have been the main supporters of the GNA government, while Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have backed Haftar.

Agonising wait

FROM PAGE 1

with wire attached to those in his backpack.

The plane made an emergency landing at the Chattogram airport after the suspect allegedly had tried to storm the cockpit of the plane. He was killed later in an eight-minute commando operation.

Officials of a number of local private airlines say they have information that the long queues in some cases have been leading to passengers missing their flights since the airport authorities introduced checks at both heavy-luggage and anti-hijacking gates.

Outbound passengers need to pass through the heavy-luggage gates while entering the terminals and anti-hijacking gate before boarding.

Some passengers said they don’t have any objection regarding the security measures. But long waits at the entrances cannot be acceptable, they said.

THE QUEUES

While visiting the outbound terminals of the airport in May, this correspondent found passengers waiting, from 20 minutes to over an hour, at the entrances of Terminal-1 and Terminal-2.

There are six gates -- three each at Terminal 1 and 2 -- at the departure terminals. Two of those were not in operation due to shortage of necessary security equipment during the visit of this correspondent.

Passengers said the authorities should increase the number of entry gates for better management of the entrances.

Group Captain, Abu Sayeed Mehboob Khan, director of the airport admitted that passengers often suffer because of long queues.

“Within the existing structure, we cannot add more gates. But the government has taken an initiative to construct a third terminal,” he told The Daily Star on August 3.

“We have appointed supervisors at different points inside the terminals to make sure passengers face no hassle.”

Talking to The Daily Star on May 18, Iqbal Hossain, who was waiting at the entrance of Terminal-2, said he was not sure whether he would be able to catch his flight.

“Considering the city’s huge traffic jam, I started around 11:00am from my Lalbagh home to catch my 4:00pm flight,” he said.

“I reached the airport at 1:45pm and since then I have been standing in the queue to enter the airport terminal. It’s now 2:30pm -- I am not sure whether I

will be able to catch my flight.”

Several passengers next to Iqbal expressed their frustration.

“We don’t object to the security checking. But this checking shouldn’t be at the cost of our flight,” shouted Nurul Islam, a migrant worker who came from Cumilla.

Several passengers said they were not aware that additional one or two hours will be required only for entering the terminal.

“The airport authorities should run media advertisements about the long queues for security checking,” Abdul Maleq, a Dubai-bound passenger said, asking, “Who will take the responsibility if I miss the flight?”

Some passengers raised a hue and cry while talking to the security staffs.

“For VIP passengers, the situation is different as there is no long queue at the VIP gate. But ordinary passengers are left to fight the chaos at the entrance in the name of security checking,” said Enam Hossain, a Singapore-bound passenger.

This correspondent saw around 70 to 80 passengers standing in queues at each of gate no 1 and 3 around 4:30pm on May 9.

Some security staff of the airport said the number of passengers in queues increases a lot at night when large planes depart one after another.

“Passengers need to wait even more than one and a half hours,” said a security staff of the airport, wishing anonymity.

After entering the terminal through heavy luggage checking, a passenger needs to complete three phases standing in queues -- collecting boarding pass from check-in counter, facing immigration, going through anti-hijacking security gate before boarding the aircraft.

Their sufferings are compounded also due to delays in those formalities.

A passenger travelling to the US in February, said she had to wait at least 45 minutes at the immigration queue before she could board the aircraft.

“When I was standing at the immigration queue, I heard the airlines staff making the last call for passengers,” she said, wishing anonymity.

When she asked an immigration official why there was such a long queue, he said there are five to six large aircraft that will depart within a short time of each other.

“Besides, the immigration officials are mostly new at their job. Often, whenever an official gets trained, he or she is transferred to another department,” he said.

For whose welfare?

FROM PAGE 1

the destination countries concerned. Then they apply to the BMET for immigration certificates by paying a certain amount of fees.

Upon scrutiny, the BMET issues immigration certificates and smart cards for the aspirant migrants.

“If any worker faces any problems after going abroad, recruiting agents address those as per the instructions of the Bangladesh mission concerned, the ministry and the BMET,” read the letter.

The minister further said migrants make complaints -- “true or false” -- to police stations or other agencies and the complaints are recorded under the anti-trafficking act, instead of the migration act.

Because of this, the recruiting agents regularly face harassments, searches, passport seizures and detentions, and remain fearful of law enforcement agencies, he said.

“It has a serious negative impact on the overseas jobs sector. Overseas employments are going down. There are fears that remittance inflow will come down and it will affect the overall economy of the country,” the letter read.

Under the anti-trafficking act, the highest punishment is death penalty while under the Overseas Employment and Migration Act, a criminal faces maximum ten years of rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Tk 5 lakh.

“The overseas employment act is much softer than that of the anti-trafficking law. So, not allowing the victims to file case under this law means allowing the human traffickers to get off scot-free,” added Prof Mizan.

Talking to The Daily Star, Prof Mizanur Rahman said police certainly assess the merit of any complaint and a case is filed accordingly.

“So, if the case has merit, why shouldn’t police accept it? Why should a minister make such a suggestion to the home ministry?” said Prof Mizan, who also teaches at Dhaka University law department.

“If this instruction is to be followed, the victims would be doubly victimised -- once abroad and then at home,” he added.

“This is totally a wrong strategy,” he added.

Shakirul Islam, executive director of Oivbashi Karmi Unnayan Program, observed that agents are luring many jobseekers into going abroad after painting a rosy picture of destination countries though the reality is very different.

“The purpose of this is to squeeze money out of jobseekers. This is a clear element of human trafficking,” he said.

Mohammad Harun Al Rashid, a migrant rights researcher and activist living in Malaysia, said a worker can surely file a case under the anti-trafficking act if he or she has to pay higher cost than legal fees for recruitment, does not get a job or salary as per the contract or faces confinement or forced labour by the employer.

Explaining his research in 2007-08 in Malaysia, he said he interviewed several hundred Bangladeshis, who had all the legal documents. But still they did not have jobs as some of the companies were dodgy and had secured the papers through corruption.

“In such cases, the officials who issued documents or those who attested those also can be sued under the anti-trafficking law,” he said.

According to the Police Headquarters, since enactment of the act, a total of 4,668 cases were filed, but only 245 were settled.

The number of cases filed under the anti-trafficking act is tip of the iceberg, Harun Al Rashid said, explaining that there are thousands of incidents having elements of trafficking.

If the recruiting agents, Bangladesh missions, the ministry or BMET could address the migrants’ problems, hardly any complainants would have gone to the court, he said.



The mangled remains of a microbus that collided head-on with a bus in Boalia area of Gaibandha's Gobindaganj upazila around noon yesterday. The accident left two people dead and five others injured. Story on page 5. PHOTO: STAR

Victim’s family being followed, threatened

FROM PAGE 1

there several times since Saturday.

“They are looking for the male members of our family. They are not saying why they are doing this.”

Meanwhile, the Police Headquarters yesterday formed a separate three-member probe committee, headed by Shehela Parvin, superintendent of Railway Police, to investigate the incident.

The body was asked to submit its report within seven working days, said Assistant Inspector General (media) Md Sohul Rana.

Earlier on Monday, the Railway Police had formed another three-member committee, headed by Firoz Ahmed, assistant superintendent of police (ASP) of Kushia Railway Circle. It would also file its report within seven days.

Talking to The Daily Star, the mother of the woman said, “Yesterday, three men appeared here and asked about my son. He is now hiding to avoid harassment. I along with my grandchildren is passing days in fear.”

The victim, a 30-year-old widow, has a son aged 10 and two daughters aged 2 and 4.

Talking to the newspaper, a cousin of the woman, who is running a legal battle on her behalf, said, “During the last two days, some 10 to 12 people came to my home and interrogated me about different issues. I can’t move freely.”

Their lawyer, advocate Faruq Ahmed, said they would file a case over the rape

once the medical report was available.

Contacted, Khulna Medical College Hospital’s forensic department chief Dr Shafiuzzaman said it might take around a week to prepare the medical report.

He, however, said they found no injury marks.

But when the victim was taken to a court on Saturday, she seemed ill. At this, some court staffers suggested the Railway Police to take her to a hospital. She was then taken to Khulna Sadar Hospital and prescribed some medicines, said court sources.

The Daily Star has obtained a copy of the prescription from the sources.

Meanwhile, the probe body, formed by the Railway Police, visited several areas yesterday of the city as part of its investigation.

The correspondent went to Khulna Railway Police twice yesterday, first at around 11:00am and then around 3:00pm, but none of the accused was found there.

Contacted, the district’s superintendent of police, M Safiullah, suggested this correspondent to talk to the Railway Police.

When this correspondent called Mohammad Nazrul Islam, SP of Pakshi Railway Police, on his mobile phone, he said he would talk later.

On Friday evening, the woman came to Khulna from Jashore by train to visit her mother, who was undergoing treatment at Khulna Medical College Hospital (KMCH).

The woman was detained inside the

Govt focuses on hospitals outside Dhaka

FROM PAGE 1

ahead of Eid and the situation might worsen during that time. Not a single patient in the countryside will remain without treatment,” Abul Kalam Azad, director general of Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), told The Daily Star yesterday.

He added that special instructions were given to prioritise dengue patients in hospitals.

The DGHS has already asked government and private hospitals to open up help desks to provide service during Eid vacation.

The number of dengue patients outside Dhaka is increasing every day and it would worsen further when so many people will rush towards their respective districts around the country for the holidays, health officials said.

According to DGHS, at least 2,348 patients -- 1,278 in Dhaka city and 1,064 in other divisions -- were diagnosed with dengue in last 24 hours.

With that, the number of cases jumped to 29,912, a record in

Bangladesh, with 23 deaths.

However, the unofficial number of deaths to dengue is higher.

The number of patients diagnosed with dengue in one day, outside of Dhaka, yesterday crossed a thousand for the first time.

On July 30, a total of 536 patients had been admitted in hospital outside Dhaka with dengue fever.

Yesterday, the number of admitted patients was 1064.

The increase in number of patients outside of Dhaka was higher than in the capital.

B N Nagpal, senior entomologist of WHO Southeast Asia region now visiting Dhaka, said Aedes aegypti is the main vector for dengue.

“Mainly Aedes albopictus is common in rural settings. It is less virulent when it comes to spreading dengue. It is not a strong vector. Only few cases can be generated by the albopictus,” he said.

NO KIT CRISIS

The Directorate General of Drug Administration (DGDA) said there was

no more a crisis of kits in the country, as various steps were taken to solve it.

According to the DGDA, a total of 4,43,700 dengue-test kits were imported into the country till yesterday.

Ruhul Amin, director of DGDA, said around 1.5 lakh kits will be imported every day in the country.

A hotline number -- 01708506047 -- was also launched to learn about the updates regarding the kits.

Anyone can be updated on the storage of kit. They can also know the names of the kit importers and their contact numbers.

The government has already exempted import duty, VAT, advance tax and advance income tax from the dengue-detection kits. The exemption is applicable for the kits, dengue reagents, and platelet and plasma kits.

Sadar hospitals were given Tk 10 lakh and Upazila hospitals Tk 2 lakh to buy dengue-detection kits and all necessary medicines, the DGHS DG said.

they were kept in the dark about the move and feared a wider crackdown in the next few days. Three leaders Reuters met on Monday at their homes in Srinagar had little knowledge of the situation outside.

“This will be difficult - difficult for people, difficult for political parties,” said Rafi Ahmed Mir, spokesman of the People’s Democratic Party, which was part of the BJP coalition that ruled the state until last year.

TIGHT SECURITY

Armed police patrolled every few hundred metres in the city, where a ban on public gatherings of more than four people stayed in force yesterday. Educational institutions and most shops in residential neighbourhoods were shut.

Security forces fired tear gas and pellets in response to sporadic protests on Monday in Kashmir’s main city of Srinagar, said one police official who declined to be identified.

“There was stone-pelting in some parts of the city,” he added.

Some shopkeepers said they were running out of stock after days of panic buying.

“No provisions are left in my shop, and no fresh supplies are coming,” said grocery store owner Jehangir Ahmad.

India and Pakistan have fought two of their three wars over Kashmir, where tens of thousands of people have been killed in a nearly 30-year-long armed revolt that India has sent hundreds of thousands of troops to quell, reported AFP.

India blames the rebellion on Pakistan, saying Islamabad provides money, training and weapons to Islamist militants who either live in Indian-controlled Kashmir or enter it from the Pakistani side.

We don’t support

FROM PAGE 1

Manoshi’s question was Bangladesh had a long history of custodial torture and it did not take place during any specific government and what steps the incumbent government took to come out of it.

Hasina said there are some international rules to interrogate presumed and suspected criminals and her government is providing law enforcement agency personnel with training in this regard, sending them in countries like the US and the UK.

“Information is gleaned from criminals using methods practised by other countries and nothing is done beyond it.”

The PM said now incidents of custodial deaths appear rarely while torture in custody also largely disappeared.

Hasina, however, reminded the BBC journalist that the past regimes virtually developed a culture of impunity and she herself was a victim of that situation after losing her parents, brothers and other near and dear ones in 1975.

“The killers were provided indemnity instead of exposing them to trial . . . that meant you [actually] entertained the culprits,” the PM said, adding that it could be very difficult to check crimes in a country where a social system is built by recognising the crimes.

Hasina said she had to wait 35 years to get justice.

Again asked what initiatives her government took to stop such culture, Hasina said all “appropriate measures in this regard” had been taken.

Hasina said Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was assassinated within three and a half years of independence and this culture continued for many years when military dictators ruled the country directly and often in the guise of politicians.

“This culture continued for year after year and it was a difficult task to bring back the country to a healthy trend . . . we performed that difficult task.”

The PM said there is a class or section of society which is spearheading a propaganda on the rights situation while democratic system runs the country.

“They always desperately try to find out our faults . . . as their status become elevated when an unconstitutional or abnormal government or martial law rules the country.”

The PM said she knew that the question was raised in Geneva where Bangladesh law minister and other representatives were present.

“The law minister and others gave reply properly in this regard.”

On a question whether the people are getting the benefits of economic growth, Hasina said the people are certainly getting the benefits.

“Think a little that the country’s poverty rate was over 41 percent in 2005-2006 and the rate has been brought down to 21.04 percent . . . we could attain this success within 10 years.”

The PM said the country’s per capita income surged to about \$2,000 from \$400/500 and the country achieved 8.1 percent GDP in the last fiscal year.

“When higher growth is achieved, the inflation increases naturally. But we didn’t allow raising inflation and we maintained it at 5.5 or 6 percent,” she said.

About migration of the people, Hasina said there is a tendency of the people since the ancient period that they will have to build their fate by moving to other places.

“You cannot lock the issue with poverty and it’s a tendency of the people,” she said, mentioning that her government is giving loans without security to the youths who want to work.

When the interviewer questioned about the “vulnerable situation” in banking sector and loan default culture, the PM said the matter is not to that extent as publicised.

She said the culture of not repaying bank loans was initiated during the rule of military dictators. “Whenever we came to power, we tried to realise the loans,” she said, adding that if action is not taken always, it will not yield any results.

Hasina said special incentives were given in this year’s budget. “Those intending to take loan have been asked to repay within the timeframe; otherwise they won’t be given credit,” she said.

About the press freedom, Hasina said there was a television channel (Bangladesh Television), one radio centre and a few newspapers in the country until 1996.

But after coming to power in 1996, she said the Awami League government made open all things in the private sector.

“There are 44 television channels in the country,” she said, adding that her intention was to generate employment.

She said there is full freedom of mass media. “If it doesn’t exist how is a propaganda mixing truth with falsehood being carried out against me and my government?” she asked.

The PM asked whether anybody enjoyed such freedom during the rules of military dictators. “Even it was absent during the regime of Khaleda Zia,” she said.

Hasina said many people are saying that there is no freedom of the media. “But how do they speak if freedom of speech doesn’t exist?”

The PM said her government is making strides to maintain a peaceful atmosphere in the country. “If anybody gives any provocative speech, will others remain idle? . . . No, they cannot do it,” she said.

“Security will have to be given to the people first and we’ll have to do whatever necessary for their security.”