

LIBYA CONFLICT

Truce agreed after 9 months of fighting

AFP, Tripoli

Both sides in Libya's conflict agreed to a ceasefire from yesterday to end nine months of fighting, following weeks of international diplomacy and calls for a truce by power-brokers Russia and Turkey.

The oil-rich North African country has been wracked by bloody turmoil since a 2011 Nato-backed uprising killed long-time dictator Moamer Gaddafi, with multiple foreign powers now involved.

The UN-recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli had been under attack since last April from forces loyal to eastern-based strongman Khalifa Haftar, which on January 6 captured the strategic coastal city of Sirte.

Late on Saturday, Haftar's forces announced a ceasefire starting at midnight (Sunday 00:00 local time, Saturday 2200 GMT) in line with a joint call by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin.

GNA head Fayez al-Sarraj followed suit early yesterday, confirming the ceasefire had taken effect.

The UN mission in Libya welcomed the announcements and called on all parties "to respect the ceasefire" and support efforts to launch an inter-Libyan dialogue.

Likewise, the Arab League urged Libya's factions to "commit to stop the fighting, work on alleviating all forms of escalations and engage in good faith aimed at reaching permanent arrangements for a ceasefire".

Since the start of the offensive against Tripoli, more than 280 civilians and about 2,000 fighters have been killed and 146,000 Libyans displaced, according to the United Nations.

BBPL's last four stage

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big hitter Chris Gayle can prove devastating with the bat. With the ball, Mehedi Hasan Rana and Rubel Hossain have been instrumental for the side.

In the first qualifier, table topper Rajshahi will hope to continue their dominance with Liton Das and the young Afif Hossain having provided solid starts while skipper Andre Russell, Ravi Bopara and Shaobai Malik will add loads of experience to the side.

Kulna, however, will be beaming with confidence following their magnificent record run chase against Dhaka. Najmul Hossain Shanto became the first local player to hit a century in the ongoing BBPL in that match.

Meanwhile, skipper Mushfiqur Rahim, Rilee Rossouw and Robbie Frylinck are also in terrific touch and should offer an exciting game against Rajshahi.

The losing team of the first qualifier will get another opportunity to advance to the final when they face the winner of the eliminator game in second qualifier on January 15.

Pro-BNP aspirants face

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BNP's Dhaka south unit Vice President Sirajul Islam, a candidate in DSCC ward 16, faces the highest number of cases -- 63 -- most of which were filed for holding rallies illegally, inciting violence and preventing government officials from carrying out duties.

Of the cases, 40 were filed between 2017 and 2018, and the rest between 2011 and 2015.

Sirajul, a businessman, contested the 2015 city corporation polls but lost to AL-backed candidate Hossain Haider Hiru.

Another BNP-supported candidate, Harunur Rashid, joint general secretary of the party's Dhaka South unit, is facing around 50 criminal cases filed between 2012 and 2018.

He had been cleared of three other cases, his affidavit shows.

Contacted, Rashid, a businessman, said he had been "implicated in fabricated" cases to keep him away from politics.

"These are political cases. Whenever a party comes to power, it files cases against leaders and activists of rival parties."

He hoped the government would let him contest the polls without any hindrance.

The situation is different for the AL-supported candidates.

AL-backed councillor Abul Kalam, who is contesting the polls from DSCC ward 48, had five cases against him. Those were filed between 2005 and 2008 over trespass on private property, involvement in violence, and possession of explosives and illegal arms.

All the cases were withdrawn under section 494 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), according to his affidavit.

He, however, did not mention when the cases were withdrawn.

Another AL-supported councillor, Mohammad Nasim Mia of DSCC ward 52, had been accused in an arms case in 2003. The case was withdrawn in 2012.

"As per section 494 of the CrPC,

Sarraj stressed the GNA's "legitimate right ... to respond to any attack or aggression" that may come from the other side, while Haftar's forces warned of a "severe" response to any violation by the "opposing camp".

Artillery fire could be heard shortly after midnight in the capital, before quiet settled over the southern Tripoli suburb where pro-GNA forces have been resisting Haftar's offensive.

Contacted by AFP at noon, a spokesman for the pro-GNA forces, Mustafa al-Mejii, reported "a calm situation so far on the frontlines".

The GNA later reported "violations" by "pro-Haftar militias" in the Salaheddine and Wadi al-Rabii areas south of the capital, "minutes after the ceasefire came into effect".

It also reiterated its "immutable position" that "any ceasefire initiative cannot succeed without the withdrawal of the aggressor from where they came", from the country's east and south.

Turkey's defence ministry said: "The belligerents have been trying to respect these truces since they came into force... and the situation has been calm apart from one or two isolated incidents."

The truce comes after a diplomatic offensive, led by Ankara and Moscow, which have established themselves as key players in Libya.

Ankara dispatched military support to the GNA in January.

And Russia has been accused of backing pro-Haftar forces, which are also supported by the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, all regional rivals of Turkey.

Erdogan and Putin called for a truce at a meeting last Wednesday in Istanbul, and Turkey later asked Russia to convince Haftar, who had initially vowed to fight on, to respect it.



The Chattogram City Corporation installing escalators on a footbridge on Zakir Hossain road adjacent to Chattogram Diabetic General Hospital in Khulshi yesterday afternoon. This would be the first electric pedestrian escalator in the port city.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

Who needs prescription?

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companies, and the study report was released on November 27 last year.

Earlier on April 25, the High Court ordered the DGDA to take steps to stop the over-the-counter sale of antibiotics.

The ruling came after a writ petition was filed by Advocate Sayedul Haque Suman over the matter. The writ was spurred by a report in UK's The Telegraph, which cited a report this newspaper ran under the headline "A big cause for health concern" in April last year.

High-ups of the DGDA -- the apex regulatory body for pharmaceuticals -- claimed they had done their best. But in reality, they only issued a notice in May to all district commissioners and civil surgeons, asking them to take steps in line with the court directive.

The notice was followed-up by a reminder a month later. That was the extent to which the DGDA acted.

DGDA Director Ruhul Amin told The Daily Star, "Our drug inspectors are regularly advocating this issue at meetings with stakeholders."

Queried further, he again mentioned that "awareness was all important" in this regard.

People concerned, however, said the DGDA's action was "just to save its skin".

Meanwhile, a laboratory analysis by the Department of Microbiology and Immunology (DMI) of BSMMU, conducted from 2010 to 2018, has found a sharp rise in the number of superbugs in the country.

In 2010, superbugs and multi-drug resistant (MDR) bacteria were detected in 6.5 percent cases of all patients seen. But it increased to 11-14 percent in 2018, according to the study.

Experts said it is the inappropriate and overuse of antibiotics which leads to the rise of antimicrobial-resistant bacteria or superbugs.

The AMR infections have become a global threat, with 10 million deaths predicted to be caused by it by 2050 if things go unchecked, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO).

But the country's authorities concerned seem to be taking the matter lightly.

GROUND REALITY: PROFIT OVER PRESCRIPTION

Recently, The Daily Star correspondents have visited drug stores in Farmgate, in front of Dhaka

Medical College Hospital (DMCH) and Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital in the capital. They have also been to pharmaceutical stores in both urban and rural areas in Savar, Rangpur, Khulna, Sylhet, Chattogram, Mymensingh and Rajshahi.

The scenario was similar everywhere.

At half a dozen drug stores at a rural market in Rangpur's Pirogacha upazila, this correspondent last month found antibiotics being sold either without prescriptions or as suggested by medicine sellers.

"As antibiotics work better and are more profitable, we sometimes do suggest it. People usually don't buy full dose of antibiotics. Besides, they are also reluctant to visit doctors because it would cost them additional money," a medicine shop owner in the village market told The Daily Star.

Visiting at least 25 stores in Khulna's Hazrat Market, Moilapota intersection, Natun Rasta intersection and in front of Khulna Medical College Hospital, The Daily Star correspondents found customers buying antibiotic drugs without any prescription.

Jalal Ahmed, owner of Afroz Medical Hall at Moilapota intersection, said he was not aware of any formal instruction from the authorities on not selling the drugs without prescription.

There are more than a hundred pharmaceutical stores on the Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital Road. A medicine seller there said they make a huge profit from antibiotics sale.

"We have not got any direction in this regard," he said.

The Daily Star correspondents witnessed the same situation in Chowhatta and Amberkhana areas in the city.

Our Mymensingh correspondent and Rajshahi University correspondents also found antibiotics being sold over the counter in the two districts.

Usually people suffering from dysentery, diarrhoea, food poisoning, common cold, cough, fever, toothache, and ear and throat pain use self-prescribed antibiotic, shows a 2014 study conducted in Rajshahi and published in the journal of the National Centre for Biotechnology Information.

According to the DGDA website,

there are 118,901 licensed retail drug shops across the country.

A 2015 study by the System for Improved Access to Pharmaceuticals and Services, however, revealed the existence of approximately an equal number of unlicensed retail drug stores in the country, shows WHO website.

A majority (68 percent) of the clients visiting these drug shops came by self-referral and without a prescription, the study showed.

For another study, the Institute of Epidemiology, Diseases Control and Research (IEDCR) analysed some 14,669 samples collected from nine public hospitals across the country from 2017 and 2019.

It found Ceftriaxone, a watch group drug, to be the most used antibiotics, and that the drug's effectiveness has gone down by 10 to 92 percent in killing several bacteria.

According to the WHO, antibiotics are classified into three groups -- "access group" used for a wide range of primary level infection, "watch group" used against higher resistance bacteria, and "reserve group" only to be used when all alternatives fail.

Imipenam, another watch group drug, has been found to be 10 to 76 percent ineffective. If these don't work, it only leaves to a few other antibiotics.

"It indicates we are rapidly going to exhaust rest of the available antibiotics in our hand," said Dr Zakir Hossain Habib, principal scientific officer at the IEDCR, who led the study.

DGDA INITIATIVES -- NOT ENOUGH?

On the DGDA directive on stopping the sale of antibiotics without prescriptions, several deputy commissioners said the DGDA initiative had a very little to no impact on creating awareness on the matter.

"We have held a meeting with all stakeholders. However, we haven't conducted any mobile court drive yet," Md Asib Ahsan, DC of Rangpur, told The Daily Star, adding that they were focusing on raising awareness first.

He also said the issue deserves more campaigning and the DGDA needs to do more planning.

Asked, DGDA Director Ruhul Amin couldn't even say whether the sale and consumption of antibiotics without prescription was a punishable offence.

A DGDA official, however, said any

EC waiting for HC ruling on deferral plea

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Students' Union, and Jagannath and Bijoy Ekattor halls unions in separate statements demanded changing the voting date.

On January 6, Supreme Court lawyer Ashoke Kumar Ghosh filed the writ petition.

The HC is expected to hear the petition in a day or two.

A top EC official yesterday said they were in discussion to find a solution.

The official said the commission might defer the election date to February 1. "If we decide to hold the polls on February 1, it will coincide with the first day of SSC examinations. So, we will need to request the government to change the SCC exams date."

"But everything depends on the commission decision," the official added.

Chief of Inter-Education Board Coordination Sub-committee Ziaul Haque said they would prioritise the Election Commission's instruction. "Elections are always their top priority," said Ziaul, also Dhaka Education Board chairman.

DEMAND GETTING LOUDER

Bangladesh Chhatra Oikya Parishad yesterday formed a human chain at the Raju Memorial Sculpture on

the DU campus to press home their demand.

It is a matter of sorrow that the Hindu community would have to go to polling centres on the day of worshipping their goddess Saraswati, said Saddam Hussain, DUCSU assistant general secretary.

Jagannath Hall union Vice-President Utpal Biswas said holding election on the day of puja would create various problems, including movement of worshippers.

On Friday, Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) Returning Officer Abdul Baten forwarded to the EC a Jagannath Hall provost's letter requesting change of voting date.

In the letter, Baten opined that many Hindus live in DSCC area. Jagannath Hall and Ramakrishna Math and Mission are situated there.

Several polling stations will be set up at educational institutions where Hindus offer Saraswati Puja. "Old Dhaka is a densely populated area, it will be difficult for Hindus to offer their puja ...," he added.

On January 7, in separate letters to Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda, Bangladesh Hindu-Buddha-Christian-Oikya Parishad and Bangladesh Puja Uddipan Parishad demanded change of the

election date.

"Earlier, we urged the EC to reschedule Rangpur-3 by-polls, held on October 5, which was the second day of Durga Puja, but the commission did not pay heed to our demands," the Oikya Parishad letter mentioned.

In its letter, the Oikya Parishad leaders warned that they would not take any responsibility if any kind of untoward incident happened on the day centring Saraswati Puja.

Cold wave

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according to the Met office. However, no rain has been forecast during the cold spell.

Md Abul Kalam Mollic, a meteorologist of the BMD, said wind from the foot of the Himalayas which entered into the country, dense fog even during the day, and small difference between day and night temperature was making the cold wave feel worse.

He said now night temperatures are between 9.5 degrees and 15 degrees Celsius while day temperatures are between 16 degrees and 23 degrees Celsius.

He advised vehicles as well as vessels to ply carefully in the fog.

11 migrants die after boat sinks off Turkey

AFP, Istanbul

Eleven migrants died on Saturday, including eight children, when their vessel sank in the Aegean Sea off the coast of Turkey, state news agency Anadolu reported.

The boat sank off Cesme, a popular tourist resort in western Turkey opposite the Greek island of Chios, Anadolu said, adding that eight others were rescued.

The nationality of the victims was not yet known.

The sinking comes just hours after another boat sank in the Aegean near the Greek island of Paxi leaving at least 12 dead.

Turkey has taken in around four million migrants and refugees, the majority of