

Thousands flee to Thailand Myanmar troops mop up Karen villages

BAN SOB MOEI (Thailand). Feb 3: Thousands of Karen villagers have fled to Thailand to escape Myanmar artillery barrages and army squads press-gauging porters, reports Reuters.

As the cramp of shells heralded the dry season offensive, Karens gathered livestock, posts and pans, and blackboards for their schoolchildren and streamed east.

The military has unleashed its offensive against Karen guerrillas in the mountains of eastern Myanmar with extra ferocity this year in a bid to crush the long-running insurgency.

To the west, Bangladesh said more than 70,000 Myanmar people from Muslim-majority Arakan state have arrived after fleeing alleged persecution by Rangoon's army.

More than 1,000 Karen from a dozen villages are now sitting aimlessly in the Ban SOB Moei camp on a sandy hillock just on the Thai side of the frontier, where the Moet river flows into the Salween river.

"They can't do anything here. They want to go back," said Pastor Robert, a Karen

baptist minister helping the meagre relief effort.

The refugees told a reporter they grabbed what they could and ran when government artillery fire landed close to their villages. A number of homes were burned.

They also feared being forced to work as porters carrying ammunition and army supplies through the Malaria-Ridden jungle.

One young man said 100 people in his district were rounded up for forced labour.

Women who managed to escape from other areas to Karen guerrilla camps have told how they were repeatedly raped at night by soldiers after carrying loads all day.

Some of the women had to work while looking after their babies, Pastor Robert said.

The people have built shelters of bamboo and banana leaves. They sit huddled over fires to warm against the morning chill, smoking cheroots as they await their fate.

"They need many items—food, medicine," said Pastor Robert.

Private western relief organisations have supplied rice fish paste and other foodstuffs.

JS debate over border situation

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preparation a sad incident happened, the minister said.

Narrating the moves to ease the tension the minister said following three flag meetings the situation along the border had become peaceful.

Stating that since the last flag meeting on January 28 the influx of refugees has slowed down, the minister said according to figures compiled by the Home Ministry about 42 to 45 thousand refugees have so far entered into Bangladesh.

Camps have been opened, relief operations organized and the process of listing refugees started, the minister added.

The minister informed the House that a list of 4612 refugees was handed over to the ambassador of Myanmar in Dhaka on Sunday and two flag meetings were held yesterday (Monday) in response to request from Myanmar.

Sheikh Hasina

Sheikh Hasina, AL chief and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament, accused the government of failing to deal with the situation arising out of the Myanmar attack on Bangladesh border security forces and influx of Rohingya refugees into the country.

Sheikh Hasina identified two major directions involved in the problem: one is humanitarian while the other is diplomatic. Government has proved to be a total failure in both the cases," she said adding: the Rohingya refugees were reportedly leading an inhuman life with no adequate food and healthcare on the one hand and government is adopting a capitulationist policy on the issue against the Myanmar authorities on the other.

Sheikh Hasina termed the Myanmar attack on the Bangladesh border outpost as a slap on the cheek of the nation and said, "It was very insulting for us that the government let the incident go virtually unchallenged."

She severely criticised the government as a minister facing the incident of killing of two Bangladesh nationals including a BDR man by the Myanmar forces as a minor incident and regretted that a nation that heroically fought a Liberation War only a few years back was now witnessing such a degrading foreign policy.

She questioned the sense of integrity of the concerned minister in this regard.

Sheikh Hasina said it was also very unfortunate that the government had been maintaining a loving relationship with the ruling military junta of Myanmar which shamefully ignored the people's verdict and imprisoned the elected leader of Myanmar people—Aung Sun Suu Kyi.

Sheikh Hasina also accused the government of what she called solving the problems of Chittagong Hill Tracts politically.

Person in charge of the Defence Ministry must inform the House what do the defence forces do in Chittagong Hill Tracts region when the Shanti Bahini frequently kills our citizens," Sheikh Hasina said in an oblique reference to the Prime Minister.

The AL chief also wanted the Foreign Minister to make a clear-cut statement on the Rohingya 'training camps' in the Chittagong zone reportedly run by a particular political party.

The Foreign Minister, however, termed this a rumour and told the House that there was no such training camps in the Bangladesh territory.

Jatiya Party leader Maudud Ahmed said the 'low key' diplomacy carried out by the Foreign Ministry has disheartened the nation. He noted that the nation should be aware that it does not fall into an international 'booby-trap'.

Pointing out that Aung Sun Suu Kyi, the imprisoned Myanmar leader who suffered

similar tragedies as the Leader of the House and the Leader of the Opposition, he called on the government to support the movement to free Suu Kyi.

Maudud underlined the need for national unity similar to the unity arrived at on many other occasions and urged for the setting up of a all-party parliamentary committee to deal with the problem.

Agriculture Minister Majedul Huq, while refuting the allegation that government was following a subservient foreign policy, said that the people would judge if the correct steps were taken or not.

Referring to the killing of 14 people by the Shantibahini, he noted that not a single note of protest had come on the subject from the opposition.

A large number of MPs from Opposition stood and started shouting to protest.

The BNP leader went on to say that the government had showed earlier in 1978, by sending back all the refugees at that time, how even bigger problems could be solved through diplomacy.

Information Minister Najmul Huda told the House that the intention of the government's foreign policy initiative at the moment was to create a favourable atmosphere to enable the return of the refugees.

Before deciding on any foreign policy options, the national interest needs to be considered carefully he commented.

However, he added that the government was currently following the right option of 'quiet diplomacy' to negotiate and amicably solution bilaterally. The Information Minister pointed out that the existing situation did not demand the use of any other drastic actions.

Leader of the Jamaat-e-Islami Parliamentary Party Matur Rahman Nazim, while pointing out that the nation needs to be careful so that it does not become a victim of a situation created by someone else, said the situation demanded that the people were informed of the issue.

Referring to the refugee problem as an old one which started way back in 1948 and during which time three lakh people were exiled, he said international pressure should be placed on Myanmar to abide by the UN charter of human rights.

Referring the allegations that Jamaat, Rabita-al-Alam-al-Islami and Chhatra Shibir are training the refugees, he said "we do not know if such allegations were designed to divert the attention from the problem. Defending Rabita as an Islam-oriented NGO, he said help from all was needed, to tackle the refugee problem."

AL leader Tofiqul Ahmed accused Rabita of arming the refugees and training them. He also wanted to know as to why the Defence Secretary of Pakistan recently visited the country secretly and why the Pakistani ambassador visited the St. Martin's Island.

National Democratic Party chief Salauddin Kader Choudhury, while lauding the government statement that the refugees would not be sent back without assurances of their safety, requested the government to come up with the list of the actual number of refugees in the country.

Refugee camps need to be set up, international help should be sought and pressure should be created on the Myanmar authorities to abide by the UN charter on human rights, he said.

Jatiya Party leader Mizanur Rahman Choudhury called on the government not to 'feel lonely' in facing the problem. Every member in the House is concerned about the situation, he said assuring the government of support in dealing with it.

Mizan Choudhury urged for internationalising the problem and also called on the government to hold a summit level discussion with India on the Chittagong Hill Tracts problem.

Taking the floor at the end, Deputy Leader of the House Badruddoza Choudhury defended the Foreign Minister by quoting the foreign policy options described in Article 25 of the Constitution.

Taking part in the discussion Rashed Khan Menon of the Workers' Party (WP) demanded a clear-cut statement of the Bangladesh government that it supported the pro-democracy movement in Myanmar and was willing to cooperate with the people struggling for democracy in that country.

Terminating the border crisis as a 'problem of attitude' on the part of our government, Menon said that Bangladesh's strategy to deal with the issue should be based on its stance for democracy and humanity.

The Myanmar government's

attitude to resolve its internal issue bears resemblance with Bangladesh government's attempt to seek military solution to the Chittagong Hill Tracts issue, Menon commented.

Taking the floor, Col (Retd) Akbar Hossain of the ruling party called Myanmar Junta's repression an inhuman act and said it was obviously condemnable.

Regarding opposition members' demand on internationalising the issue by the Bangladesh government, he said that the world community was well informed of the situation prevailing along the Bangladesh-Myanmar border.

Termining Myanmar security forces' attack on the Bangladesh border post Col (Retd) Akbar said such a 'small attack' could never endanger our sovereignty.

The Treasury Bench member appreciated Bangladesh government's diplomatic role regarding the issue.

Sheikh Fazul Karim Selim of the Awami League (AL) said that the Foreign Minister must resign if he fails to resolve the crisis.

Shamsuddoha of the OPB warned the government of the consequences of its silence on 'armed training of Rohingya Muslims by the Rabita-al-Alam-al-Islami in Cox's Bazar.'

Mohammad Nasim of AL accused the government of lacking eligible leadership and principles to deal with the problem and asked the government to admit its 'failures.'

Among others, Education Minister Jamiruddin Sircar, Mushiaq Ahmed Choudhury, Begum Matia Choudhury, Shamsul Haq, Asaduzzaman, Salahuddin Yusuf and Haroon ur Rashid of the AL, Enamul Haque of the Jamaat-e-Islami, Munirul Haq Choudhury of the Jatiya Party, and Shahjahan Choudhury of the BNP took part in the debate.

JP demands mid-term election

By Staff Correspondent

Acting Chairman of the Jatiya Party (JP) Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury Monday demanded a mid-term election saying that this government had no right to rule the country without taking a fresh mandate of the people.

"People voted in favour of presidential rule but the majority party reverted to the parliamentary form of government with the help of the Jamaat, without the peoples' verdict," Chowdhury said while addressing the biennial conference of the Dhaka City JP at Bangladesh Diploma Engineers Institute.

Several thousand participants at the conference started shouting against the government when Shah Moazzem Hossain told them that deposed President H M Ershad had just been sentenced to a three years jail in the wealth amassing case. "We shall break the jail and get Ershad out," party workers chanted slogans.

Dhaka City JP will hold a grand rally in the capital February 29 to demand the release of its chairman Ershad, the JP Secretary General announced.

The conference announced a new incomplete committee of the city unit for a two-year term with Col (Retd) M A Malek as president and Abdus Salam as General Secretary.

Biman, BAPA talks fruitless

By Staff Correspondent

The meeting between the Biman management and the Bangladesh Airlines Pilots' Association (BAPA) ended Monday without any tangible results, BAPA sources said.

The authorities offered a 10 per cent pay hike to resolve the months long crisis while the pilots demanded a 30 per cent raise.

Flag meeting

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However, official sources said that the meetings were held in a "very cordial atmosphere."

Meanwhile, Foreign Minister ASM Mostafizur Rahman told the Jatiya Sangsad that the two neighbours held simultaneous flag meetings Monday at Lembuchhari and at Gundum following request made by Myanmar to hold regular talks during the third round of border talks on January 28.

He was making a statement during the nearly five-hour general discussion on Myanmar issue at the Monday session of the Jatiya Sangsad.

The first flag meeting between the border guard commanders of the two countries took place on December 31 while the second one on January 4.

Manpower

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to the foreign firms because if the manpower they demand cannot be found in the country they nominate, arrangements have to be made to rearrange papers for another country.

Sources say such an arrangement is discouraging to foreign firms recruiting manpower from Bangladesh.

They say that this system will not affect the flow of unskilled manpower but add that export of highly skilled and technical manpower will be affected. The foreign firms do not know if skilled manpower, according to their demands, can be available in Bangladesh and, therefore, if they issue visas and demands to Bangladesh and if these cannot be utilised, the concerned firms face management problems due to shortage of manpower. Preparation of new papers take at least some months for which the firms cannot wait indefinitely, they said.

Sources view that the foreign firms would be attracted to other Third World countries where regulations do not complicate recruitment.

Recruiting agencies feel that the government could arrange advertisement for skilled manpower before issuance of demands to avoid any fraud by unscrupulous agencies.

Bangladesh at present earns about Taka 2300 crore annually as remittances from people working abroad. Manpower agencies view that the remittances could be raised more if proper steps are taken to export skilled manpower.

When contacted, Manpower Ministry sources said that the Ordinance on manpower recruitment formulated in 1982 had been made stricter because of complaints from different countries that a high percentage of manpower had been exported without any valid papers.

They said the issue of illegal workers was also raised in the recently held Bangladesh-UAE joint commission meeting. They said the regulation was necessary as Bangladesh is now exporting nurses and housemaids who can easily be deceived by unscrupulous manpower agents.

Shaheed Day

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Urdu, not anything else, would be the state language of Pakistan.

He quoted Jinnah, and said that Pakistan could not survive as a unified country with two state languages.

He also declared, while East Pakistan chief minister Nurul Amin sat looking bewildered, that experiments were being carried out to abolish the Bengali alphabet and replace it with Arabic characters.

With that bombshell of a speech, Nazimuddin managed to bring back to life an issue that seemed to have dozed off in the intervening four years. He was quoting directly from Jinnah's speech delivered in Dhaka on March 21, 1948, but nobody was fooled.

It was clear that the rulers of Pakistan, whose political, economic and cultural interests were rooted firmly in Karachi and Rawalpindi, were preparing to impose Urdu on the Bengalee people once again.

Events began to pick up momentum soon after that. On January 31, an all-party meeting took place at the Bar Council Library at the call of the East Pakistan Muslim Chhatra League (EPMCL) which was the student front of the Awami Muslim League (AML).

Attended by nearly 40 different groups including the Jubo League, Tamuddun Majlis, Islami Bhatree Sangha etc., and chaired by AML president Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, the meeting elected a 40-member All-Party State Language Action Committee (APSLAC) with Kazi Golam Mahub as convener to conduct the movement to make Bengali one of Pakistan's state languages.

The meeting, according to Badruddin Umar's three-volume "East Bengal's Language Movement," took the following decisions:

1) The meeting condemned, and demanded the withdrawal of Nazimuddin's undemocratic and undesirable declaration. 2) It condemned the conspiracy to destroy the Bengali language by replacing the alphabet with Arabic characters. 3) It gave full support to the strike call at all educational institutions in Dhaka on Feb 4. 4) The meeting proposed that Bengali should be the state language of the majority people of Pakistan, with Urdu being an option for the non-Bengalis. 5) It demanded the immediate release of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and other leaders arrested under the Public Security Act, as well as the repeal of the Act itself.

Erratum

Due to a typographical error, the date of Jinnah's speech in Dhaka was printed as March 11, 1948, in yesterday's Countdown. It should have read March 21. Error is regretted — Editor.

The Midnight File

NAM for dialogue, not confrontation with the rich

LARNACA (Cyprus), Feb 3: Non-Aligned Foreign Ministers said today their movement was vital to the interests of its members despite the end of the cold war. They said dialogue, not confrontation, with the world's rich nations was the only way to achieve a "new world order". Twenty foreign ministers were among delegations from 54 nations joining the two-day meeting to chart the movement's role in a world with just one superpower, the United States, reports Reuters.

Boycott doesn't mean lack of commitment: Ashrawi

JERUSALEM, Feb 3: Palestinian peace negotiators said Monday their boycott of the multilateral talks in Moscow should not be interpreted as a lack of commitment to the peace process. "Our exclusion from the conference doesn't, in any way, mean that the Palestinians either boycott or accept our exclusion from the peace process as a whole," said spokeswoman Hanan Ashrawi, reports AP.

French Red Cross chief forced to resign

PARIS, Feb 3: French Red Cross president Georgina Dufoux was forced to announce her resignation Monday for her role in permitting Palestinian extremist George Habash into the country for medical treatment. "They told me to leave," Dufoux said after a meeting of the Red Cross executive committee, reports AFP.

5 killed, 41 hurt in road accidents

By Staff Correspondent

At least five persons were killed and 41 others injured in four accidents in Dhaka and Pabna Monday.

A 11-year-old girl, Nazma Khatun, died on the spot when she was crushed under the wheels of a double decker BRTC bus (Dhaka ja-5618) near the Met office at Agargaon at about 9 am.

Nazma was a resident of Talota, Agargaon. Her body was sent to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital morgue.

Mohammadpur police seized the bus but its driver managed to escape.

A pedestrian, Laila Banu, 40, was killed as an auto-rickshaw (Mishuk) knocked her down at about 8:40 am at College Gate in the city.

Laila Banu succumbed to her injuries after she was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

Mohammadpur police could not seize the Mishuk or arrest its driver.

One person was killed and another one was injured when a bus hit a motor-bike at Khilkhet area last night.

Our Pabna correspondent reports: At least two persons were killed and 40 others injured when a passenger-bus rammed a grocery shop at Bera bus stand of Nagarbari at about 12 noon.

Of the victims, Mansur Ali, 65, died on the spot while a 8-year-old boy Lijon succumbed to his injury on way to hospital.

The injured persons were admitted to Pabna Sadar Hospital and Bera Hospital. Many of them were said to be in critical condition.

DU: shots

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by the GCO to demand the arrest and trial of Golam Azam.

The GCO also demanded the withdrawal of the 'false cases' against the student leaders of the Rajshahi and the Chittagong universities.

However, all the classrooms including the registrar building of the DU were under lock and key.

A large number of the students were found in the DU campus but they passed their time gossiping during the strike hours.

Meanwhile, the Jatiyabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) leaders of the Dhaka University unit accused the Bangladesh Chhatra League (S-A), the student wing of the Awami League, for the shots fired during the strike on the DU campus.

Habib-un-Nabi Sohel, president of the JCD, DU unit and Ali Akkas Nadim, General Secretary of the same unit in a statement said that the BCL(S-A) tried to disrupt the peaceful academic atmosphere in the campus without any cause.

The JCD held a protest rally in front of the DUCSU Bhaban yesterday following the firing incident.

The rally was addressed by the DUCSU General Secretary Khairul Kabir Khokon, and the JCD leaders Habibul Islam Habib, Habib-un-Nabi Sohel and Ali Akkas Nadim.

UP polls

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ruly mob attacked a police station at Ghabli and destroyed office furniture.

Rival supporters of elected and failed candidates had engaged in the clash Sunday when several houses were damaged and two people including a policeman were injured in cocktail blast.

At least 15 people were injured in a clash between rival supporters at a centre in Rupabati union of Shahjapur upazila during election, according to a reports from Sirajganj.

A group of youngsters who came in a private car blasted several cocktails at Makurkula Free Primary School centre at about 3 pm. The blast left at least 15 people injured.

The Deputy Commissioner and the Police Super of Sirajganj were visiting the centre at the time.

Police arrested six people, including the car riders, from the spot and seized the vehicle (Dhaka Metro Cha-8809). Voting, however, was not postponed.

Elections were held in 309 unions of 40 upazilas in 34 districts on Monday.

With this, election to 3,183 Union Parishads out of 3,899 have been held since the polls started on January 22.

Elections will be held today in 160 unions of 20 upazilas in 18 districts. Election Commission said.

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Biman

From Page 1 Col 5

four months of the current financial year. But the organization has to pay Taka 40 crore per annum as interest on loans borrowed from different agencies to buy aircraft.

The national airlines now has four 274-seater DC-10 aircraft, two 84-seater F-28 and two 64-seater ATPs which operate in 26 routes round the globe.

Meanwhile, the Biman issue was discussed Monday in Parliament where State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Abdul Mannan replying to a question of Prof Rafiqul Islam (Jessore-2) said that the national flag carrier incurred losses for 11 years out of the 20 years since independence and made profits in nine years.

Replying to another question from Matin Khasru (Comilla-5) the Minister said that 2,454 flights had been cancelled in last five years since 1987 because of bad weather, mechanical problems on the aircraft, passenger shortages, hartals, internal chaos and the Gulf War.

Answering another question he said that flight punctuality was declining. In 1987 it was 78.5 per cent, in 1988, 76.3 per cent, in 1989, 61.9 per cent and in 1991, 56.4 per cent.

Islamic bomb

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Nuclear Arms Control in Washington.

Reaver said Iran sees itself as the leader of the Muslim countries of the Middle East and is determined to have the nuclear weapons it feels befit a regional power.

Tehran insists its objective is developing nuclear energy, not weapons. It has a small US built nuclear research reactor, a small Chinese reactor said to be for medical diagnosis and nuclear physics research, and is trying to buy a 10-megawatt nuclear reactor from India.

Iran's main opposition group, the Mujahedeen Khalq, claimed in July the government had spent more than \$200 million on developing nuclear weapons.

The current issue of Jane's Defense Weekly quotes the Mujahedeen Khalq as saying Iran has nuclear facility at Moalem Kelayeh near Qazvin, 95 miles (150 kilometers) northwest of Tehran, and is building a uranium enrichment plant near Darkhovin, 400 miles (640 kilometers) southwest of the capital.

Libya also has the motive and money to acquire nuclear weapons. Milhollin said, "but they are not as far advanced and I think Moammar Gadhafi is not as capable as the Iranian leadership."

Ershad jailed

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wealth of Tk 2.94,86,765 including a cash of Tk 1,90,81,565 found at his official residence Senabhaban, beyond known sources of his life-long income which was estimated at Tk 73,21,527 only.

The accused totally failed to satisfactorily account for the money (Tk 1,90,81,565) disproportionate to his known sources of income," the judgement said.

The money and a Land Cruiser jeep seized from Senabhaban were ordered confiscated to the State.

In a petition to the court defence counsel Yusuf Hossain Humayun prayed that the conviction be made concurrent with that of the sentence of 10 years already given him in June last year for keeping illegal arms.

The counsel also told reporters that they will move the higher court against the judgement.

The Attorney General pleaded for prosecution of Tajul Islam MP on charges of giving false evidence in the case.

The learned judge however kept the matter aside saying that this can be taken up sometime later.

Tajul, the number one defence witness, had told the court the money found in Ershad's official residence was Jatiya Party's money deposited by him to his party chairman for ready payment for the party's Dhanmondi house.

The judgement said, "It is difficult to accept the contention of the defence that the seized money recovered from the possession of the accused in Senabhaban was really the money claimed by the Jatiya party."

Before the judgement, Jatiya Party leader Moudud Ahmed and Ershad's co-accused in a corruption case met him (Ershad) in his court rest room. They were alone for some time when Moudud is believed to have tried to keep up the morale of his party chairman in the face of odds.

Ershad entered the court room with broad smiles which, his critics say, is his usual art of hiding himself.

But soon he turned gloomy and pale. He listened to the judgement with rapt attention till the judge finished.

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