

'13 Palestinians flown to Cyprus are free men'

AP, Nicosia

The 13 Palestinian militants flown to Cyprus after a five-week Israeli siege in Bethlehem are free men, not prisoners and not deportees, the European Union's envoy to the Middle East said yesterday.

Miguel Moratinos was speaking to reporters after calling on Cypriot Foreign Minister Yiannakis Cassoulides to thank Cyprus for agreeing to host the 13 Palestinians for a few days while the EU finds countries for them to stay in exile.

The 13 gunmen, whom Israel regards as terrorists, left the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem on the West Bank on Friday. Israeli authorities put them a British military aircraft that flew them to Cyprus.

Twelve of the men are now staying under police guard at a beach front hotel in the southeastern city of Larnaca. The thirteenth is in Larnaca hospital being treated for

a broken leg caused by a bullet wound.

Their deportation was part of a deal worked out with the United States and European Union to end Israel's five-week siege of the church. Under the arrangement, the more than 120 people holed up in the church were allowed to leave, with 26 Palestinians being banished to Gaza and the 13 militants sent into exile, and Israel withdrew its troops from the biblical town, ending a six-week offensive in the West Bank.

"I want to underline this point," Moratinos said. "They are not prisoners. They are not detained people. They have signed on a personal basis an agreement to go to a third country."

"They came here on a voluntary basis. It was not a deportation," Moratinos added.

In Rome on Friday, Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres said

Israel reserved the right to seek the extradition of the 13 Palestinians.

When asked whether Israel would exercise that right, Peres said it would "depend upon the circumstances." He suggested that if the men were set free, Israel might try to bring them back for trial.

The legal status of the Palestinians has not been worked out. It is not clear if the suspected militants will be free or confined in some way after they settle in EU states.

Peres said it was up to the host countries to decide what to do with the men, but that Israel hoped the governments "will do the necessary things so (the Palestinians) will not create some troubles or cause some harm."

The Palestinian representative to Cyprus, Samir Abu Ghazaleh, told reporters it was extremely unlikely that the men would be extradited to Israel.



PHOTO: STAR

A human chain was formed in Chittagong city yesterday demanding arrest and trial of the killers of Buddhist monk Ganojyoti Mohasthobir.

Cops under attack

FROM PAGE 1

the thana led by the OC was on duty in Kamlapur area on Friday night. Seeing two motorbikes coming from AZ Colony at about 4am without headlights, they put up a road barricade to stop those.

But the bikes carrying at least five miscreants crossed the barricade and went through the Shantinagar Road. After a chase, the police car overtook the motorbikes and barricaded those on the road. The gang stopped but started firing.

Police replied with shots, injuring one of the miscreants, Syed Ahmad.

Police arrested three of the miscreants -- Naimuddin, Kader Khan and Riazul Haq Riaz -- and recovered a foreign-made revolver with three bullets and Tk 79,000 from their possession.

Police seized one of the motorbikes. One of the miscreants escaped with the other motorbike.

Syed Ahmad is being treated at Pangu Hospital under police custody.

A case was filed with Motijheel thana in this connection.

Traffic constable Mohammad Rafiqul Islam of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) was shot from a microbus at about 9 pm when he signalled it to stop. Three bullets hit him in the abdomen and in the thigh.

The microbus sped away. Following wireless message,

Demra police stopped it in Jatrabari area, arrested the driver and seized the vehicle. But others in it had escaped earlier.

The driver told police that some youths hired the microbus for mugging but left it soon after firing on the constable.

The constable was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital. He was being operated upon when the report was filed at about 9:30pm.

Julu shot dead

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He was also an accused in the ward commissioner Shahabuddin Murder Case and was released on bail a few days ago.

Julu's younger brother Raju was also gunned down in the same area five months ago.

In another incident, unidentified gunmen shot and killed a rickshaw passenger near Rajarbag Police Lines at about 9pm yesterday.

Sources said three men, possibly muggers, stopped the rickshaw of Abdullah alias Liton, 25, and shot him twice in the neck at point-blank range.

Liton was taken to the DMCH where he succumbed to his injuries at about 9:45pm.

Neither police nor the relatives of the victim could say anything in detail about the killing.

Both the bodies were sent to the hospital morgue for autopsy.

Khaleda, Deuba talk bilateral trade, commerce

UNB, New York

Nepalese Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba called on Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at her hotel suite here yesterday and discussed bilateral issues, particularly trade and commerce.

She invited Deuba, who is the current chairman of SAARC, to visit Bangladesh.

Khaleda said a trade delegation from Bangladesh would visit Nepal soon to explore the possibilities of expanding trade between the two SAARC members.

The Nepalese Prime Minister hoped that the special advantage his land-locked Himalayan country is getting at present from Bangladesh would continue in future.

Khaleda assured that "Bangladesh is always ready to extend all possible cooperation to Nepal, particularly in the field of trade."

Minister for Women and Children Affairs Khurshid Jahan Haq, Prime Minister's Advisor for Mass and Primary Education Prof Jahan Ara Begum, Rajshahi Mayor Mizanur Rahman Minu, Shahidul Haq Jamal MP, PM's Principal Secretary Dr Kamal Siddiqui and Foreign Secretary Shamsheer Mobin Chowdhury were present during the meeting.

Mainul advisor to UNDP's CHT mission

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has appointed Major General (Rtd) Mainul Hossain Chowdhury as senior advisor to its Donor Review Mission for the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT).

The mission will prepare a report after reviewing the law and order and security situation in the CHT and make recommendations regarding restoration of development activities of the donors in the area.

The local donor coordination group for the development of CHT suspended their activities in February last year following the abduction of three foreign engineers in Rangamati.

The Review Mission comprising representatives of 15 donor countries and agencies is headed by the UNDP. Bangladesh Government's ministry concerned will have a representative in the mission.

Mainul Hossain Chowdhury was the country's ambassador in different countries including Australia for 16 years.

He was advisor for industry, commerce and post and telecommunication in the last caretaker government.

Road accident

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Baliadangi upazila of Thakurgaon. Zinat Ali succumbed to his injuries at Sherpur Health Complex.

Twenty of the injured were admitted to Sherpur Hospital while 14 others to Bogra Mohammad Ali hospital.

Police rushed to the spot and seized the two passenger buses. The truck driver managed to flee the scene along with his vehicle soon after the accident.

Launch capsized

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Most passengers swam ashore while others were rescued by local people. The dead bodies of two victims -- Pronob Saha, 26, a university student hailing from Chitalmari upazila of Bagerhat, and Zahid, a three-year old boy -- were recovered.

Local people were trying to salvage the partially sunken vessel. Hundreds of thatched houses were razed to the ground and many trees uprooted by the storm, said the deputy commissioner.

Visa: Foreign visitors

FROM PAGE 1

should procure visa in advance and will not be entitled to on-arrival visas. But the foreign ministry has also not provided a list of these countries to the immigration officials. And so, they have to make several phone calls to ensure visa status of foreigners.

Although several people do arrive without any visa, they ultimately manage to secure entry after pleading with immigration officials and lengthy efforts to convince higher officials of their bonafide reasons for coming to Bangladesh.

In several cases, the incoming foreigners have to seek intervention of their embassies.

The lucky ones are those who arrive during office hours. But those who arrive at odd hours or during holidays find themselves in real mess as they have to either depart or wait till they get some help from higher authorities.

An ambassador of a western country said, "Your government has the right to frame its own immigration rules. But how can a foreign national know in advance that the rules have been changed? You implemented the new immigration rules, restricting on-arrival visas the very day a circular was issued here. What you should have done is to inform it to your missions at least three months in advance and to put the new rules on the web site. The government web sites do not contain any updated immigration information."

The government has also

decided not to extend visa to those who are granted landing permit on arrival. The new rules permit a maximum of 30-day entry as against the previous of 90 days'.

Investors coming with their families are also facing problems. Although the rules provide for issuance of on-arrival visa to a businessman, nothing has been mentioned about his spouse or children, if they accompanied them. So, in such cases the local embassies or the government has to intervene. And if such efforts do not succeed, the families have to go back by the next available flight.

"The new immigration rules are too cumbersome and leave scopes for discretion," commented another foreigner.

A number of foreign citizens, who visited Bangladesh earlier, have become victims of the new procedures as they are not aware of the change in immigration rules.

David Preston, high commissioner of Canada, while commenting on the new procedures said, "If Bangladesh really wants to encourage foreign investment, it should simplify the immigration rules. A liberal visa regime should be good for you."

Charge de Affaires of Germany Hermann Nicolai said a lot of prospective investors visit Bangladesh just to explore possibilities while flying to neighbouring countries. So, it is always wise to keep Bangladesh's door open."

21 new goals

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action," she said. "If we've learned anything it's that there has to be follow-up."

Bellamy said the three-day session achieved much because it included about 300 child delegates, including two girls who made history on Wednesday when they became the first people under the age of 18 to address the UN General Assembly.

The children "made an enormous impact on everyone who met with them, from heads of government on down," she said.

"They presented a very clear and united view of their aspirations and their expectations. I can't imagine ever going back to summits on children's issues without young people there to represent their own experiences, views, and outlook."

During the conference, Microsoft chief Bill Gates pledged 50 million dollars to a five-year scheme to improve the health of children in poor countries by fortifying basic foods with vitamins and minerals.

Peruvian President Alejandro Toledo told the Assembly that money saved from a 20 per cent cut in military spending would be invested in nutrition, health, education and justice for people living in poverty.

Main points of action plan

1. Reduce infant and under-five mortality rate by at least one third, in pursuit of the goal of reducing it by two-thirds by 2015;
2. Reduce maternal mortality ratio by at least one third, in pursuit of the goal of reducing it by three-quarters by 2015;
3. Reduce malnutrition among children under five years of age by at least one third, with special attention to children under two years of age, and reduce rate of low birth weight by at least one third of the current rate;
4. Reduce proportion of households without access to hygienic sanitation facilities and affordable and safe drinking water by at least one third;
5. Develop and implement national early childhood development policies and programmes;
6. Develop and implement national health policies and programmes for adolescents;
7. Access through the primary health-care system to reproductive health for all individuals of appropriate ages as soon as possible and no later than 2015.

Depression

FROM PAGE 1

Maritime ports of Chittagong, Cox's Bazar and Mongla have been advised to hoist distant cautionary signal number 1.

All fishing boats and trawlers over North Bay and deep sea have been advised to come close to the coast and proceed with caution.

Teenaged girl

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Neighbours came in and caught one of the youths -- Babul -- and took her to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where doctors declared her dead. Her body was sent to the morgue for autopsy. The victim was the daughter of one Abu Bakar.

Babul was handed over to Badda police.

A case was filed with Badda police in this connection.

Special friend

FROM PAGE 1

BNP government when Hillary visited Bangladesh as the US first lady.

The Bangladesh prime minister commended Hillary's achievements in US politics and termed it a significant transformation of the career of the former first lady.

Welcoming Khaleda Zia to her state Hillary Clinton said she was delighted to receive the prime minister in her constituency.

The senator said Bangladesh is "very close to my heart" and assured Khaleda Zia that she would extend her support for the welfare and ensuring facilities for Bangladeshis.

She particularly assured of helping an increase in trade through enhancing Bangladesh exports to the US market.

The PM apprised Senator Hillary of the programmes undertaken by her present government, including development of education, particularly women's education. She mentioned free female education up to class twelve and introduction of stipend for them.

As Hillary wanted to know about the beneficiaries of the "Food for Education" programme, Khaleda Zia informed that her government remodeled the scheme providing cash incentives for the poor and disadvantaged schoolchildren at primary levels.

Hillary highly praised Bangladesh Khaleda Zia mentioned the participation of Bangladeshi troops in various peacekeeping missions as single-largest contributor to UN peace-keeping efforts worldwide.

The prime minister also raised the problem of US visa for Bangladeshis, particularly for the divided families, following the September 11 attacks on New York and the Pentagon.

Hillary Clinton said she would discuss the issue with the US administration so that Bangladeshis do not face any problem in obtaining US visas.

The prime minister invited Hillary to visit Bangladesh. Hillary said she feels at home over in Bangladesh and would be visiting Dhaka soon.

Crime: Newton's death

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The sources said professional killers belonging to Kala Jahangir were assigned to carry out the plan. Accordingly, some killers came down from Kolkata in India, gunned Newton down and then slipped back across the border.

They shot Newton as he came out of a barbershop at Road No. 8 near Orchid Plaza at Dhanmondi in the city on Friday.

Rabeya Begum, mother of the slain ward commissioner, filed a murder case with the Dhanmondi Police Station yesterday, accusing 12 persons for the killing. She named Piyal, Paltu, Sagar, Biplab, Dilip Babu, Farook, Aga Khan, Rahat Khan and Bipul in the case. Sources said most of the accused are relatives of jailed ward commissioner candidate Ripon.

The case was handed over to the Detective Branch (DB) of police. DB Inspector Munshi Ruhul Kuddus is the investigating officer (IO) in the case.

Meantime, family of Newton said unidentified callers have been threatening to kill another member of the family if they exceed limits and press for the arrest of the killers. "We are now in a state of insecurity," said a family member.

A tense situation has been

prevailing in Mirpur area since the killing. Sources said accomplices of Newton have already gone into hiding.

BNP leaders and workers brought out a mourning procession in Mirpur yesterday, demanding immediate arrest of and punishment to the killers. Later, at a rally in front of Mirpur-1 BNP office, they strongly condemned the killing of Newton.

The JCD will bring out a mourning procession on the Dhaka University campus today in protest of the killing.

Police yesterday arrested eight persons in their hunt for the killers. They are Shamim Khan, Abdur Razzak, Shamim, Tuhin, Shakil, Mahbub, Ripon and Kazi Ripon. None of them have been named in the murder case filed by Newton's mother. They will be produced before the CMM's Court, Dhaka today with a prayer for remand.

The DCC announced a full-day holiday today in 'respect' of the slain commissioner. Outgoing DCC Major Mohammad Hanif has condemned the killing and expressed 'deep shock' at the death of the newly elected ward commissioner.

Hanif demanded arrest and punishment of the killers.

Death doesn't wake them up Altaf faces flak

FROM PAGE 1

Talking to newsmen about the death later on, he said the baby was not the target. "Bullets were fired (by the muggers) from the other side of the street. None thought the bullet would hit (the baby) in such way."

Briefing his party colleagues who met him at his office and residence about the PM's instruction, the BNP secretary general said the prime minister had asked the authorities concerned to be tougher and unsparing while dealing with crime.

Later in the evening, he also had a meeting with top police officials including the IPG, and senior BNP leaders.

The home minister's comments on such a delicate issue reportedly embarrassed and even angered most of the ministers and other BNP leaders. At the Bangladesh Secretariat, ministers and top

officials termed the home minister's remarks not only untimely but also damaging to the government.

About a dozen ministers and BNP MPs met the party secretary general yesterday to vent their anger at the home minister's remarks and his performance.

Since taking office seven months ago, Altaf Hossain Chowdhury made many controversial remarks about the country's ever deteriorating law and order. "Crimes have decreased though murders have increased in the country", is one of his infamous comments.

The home minister was widely criticised when he completely denied press reports on violence against the minority Hindus soon after the BNP-led coalition government took office, terming those exaggerations.

It was not clear when the BIWTA and the Department of Shipping would submit the proposal. But meanwhile the BIWTA has got included in the next budget its proposal to buy two large 800-ton salvage units costing about Tk 150 crore. The government is now trying to procure a loan to buy the salvage units.

Commenting on the faulty designs and structures of passenger vessels, BIWTA officials yesterday said their responsibility ends with approval of design of a vessel. The moment the approval procedure is completed, it is up to the surveyors of the Department of Shipping to issue fitness certificates and make random checking of vessels plying on different routes.

BIWTA officials said the government infrastructure to check and control the water transport sector is itself based on a faulty setup. They said responsibilities to check overloading, faulty structure and various other irregularities causing passenger safety must lie with one agency -- not multiple agencies.

When contacted last night, the BIWTA chairman said the govern-

ment is seriously considering reallocating responsibilities in the water transport sector. He said BIWTA is now preparing its own proposal and will submit it to the ministry soon.

Other BIWTA officials said, with the present resources, it is not possible to check overloading. Once vessels leave Sadarghat or Barisal ports, those are virtually under no control whatsoever. Officials can force a launch to leave one of these large terminals with capacity passengers but the greedy staff can stop it at a small station and take as many passengers as they like because BIWTA does not have any office there to check.

Most people feel that following the May 3 disaster, the government should have taken some immediate steps. But there is hardly any concern among the authorities to bring changes by taking immediate measures. The business of carrying thousands of passengers on these badly built vessels continues as usual despite risks of major disasters anytime anywhere.

Submarine cable project

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international phone calls as well as high-speed Internet access from Bangladesh at a lower cost.

Altogether 29 officials representing 12 national telecom bodies and two private carriers from Asia-Pacific, Middle East and West Europe met in Cairo to discuss the planning issues of rolling out the 12,000 kilometres long SEA-ME-WE 4 cable.

BTBT's member (Maintenance and Operations) and general manager along with the first secretary of Bangladesh embassy in Cairo attended the two-day meeting. The BTBT delegates also visited the Telecom Egypt's cable landing stations at Alexandria and Port Said.

A proposal containing 11 points of "Key Principles" regarding this multi-country submarine cable consortium was adopted at the end of the meeting. The SEA-ME-WE 4 consortium has aimed to provide cost effective capacity among its members.

Without directly referring to the recent bankruptcies of private submarine cable networks, the meeting cautioned about the over-

supply of bandwidth due to the unrealistic projection of voice and data traffic growth.

Contractor to build the SEA-ME-WE 4 would be selected through competitive bidding. Decisions would be made in this consortium through a minimum of 75 per cent vote of the members.

The parties would analyse these points and meet for the second time in Dubai during the first week of July to sign the memorandum of understanding (MoU) of the SEA-ME-WE 4 consortium.

The meeting also set aside \$1 million to meet incidental expenses until all members of this consortium sign the final agreement. Then all the parties would equally share this cost.

The SEA-ME-WE 4 would be the fourth submarine cable venture of this consortium. All except the BTBT are members of the immediate past SEA-ME-WE 3 consortium submarine cable.

Their experience in operating SEA-ME-WE 3 was found advantageous in the Cairo meeting on SEA-ME-WE 4. The attendees were precise in discussion and referred to the business issues of SEA-ME-

WE 3 while planning the SEA-ME-WE 4.

The members decided to develop the construction and maintenance agreement (C&MA) of SEA-ME-WE 4 on the C&MA principles of SEA-ME-WE 3. It would save substantial time to complete the proposed submarine cable project.

Unlike the SEA-ME-WE 3, the business model of SEA-ME-WE 4 would be highly private sector-friendly. Subject to the local telecom law, there will be no restrictions on the usage of the SEA-ME-WE 4 capacity.

The BTBT's joining this consortium now hinges on the government. The previous BNP government failed to connect the country to SEA-ME-WE 3 in the 1990s. Bureaucratic bottleneck, political indecision and a lack of vision on the part of the BTBT were also to be blamed.

Since then, Bangladesh has been the only sea-accessing country in the Asia-Pacific region with no access to the high-speed submarine cable network.

often need urgent passports because employers give us a time frame for sending people," Enam Ahmed said.

Qumrul Islam however said issuance of passports in any category was not stopped but those were being given on a 'rational' basis.

Only a small number of workers need urgent passports and the others do not because they get enough time for this, he said.

An expert said, "We have already lost various overseas employment opportunities and the existing passport crisis would further decrease the labour markets abroad."

Dr Tasnim Arefa Siddiqui of Dhaka University, who was involved in a number of studies on migration of Bangladeshi workers and overseas employment situation, further said, a downward trend in workers' migration from the country has been observed since last year. Previously, 2.50 lakh people on an average went abroad a year for jobs. But the number declined to 1.60 lakh last year.

Failure to meet the changing global requirement of manpower was a major cause of the decline in manpower export, she noted.

According to available statistics, remittance earning stood at 1.81 billion dollars in the first seven months (July to January) of the current fiscal year. The amount was around 33 per cent higher than that in the corresponding period of the previous fiscal year.

Since 1976, a total of 32.93 lakh Bangladeshis went abroad for jobs and the remittance from them totalled Tk 83,762 crore.