

Lady journalist murder case

Mahajan won't quit, BJP terms it conspiracy

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA *New Delhi*

India's ruling BJP yesterday ruled out resignation of its senior leader and a key Federal Minister Pramod Mahajan who finds himself at the centre of a controversial twist to the probe into the murder of a lady journalist more than three years ago.

Giving a sensational turn to the case relating to the murder of leading national newspaper "Indian Express" correspondent Shivani Bhatnagar at her apartment here, Madhu Sharma, the wife of a senior Indian Police Service officer Ravi Kant Sharma, alleged in front of television news channels late Thursday night that Mahajan was "involved" in the murder.

Mahajan, Parliamentary Affairs and Information Technology Minister, stoutly denied Madhu Sharma's charge describing it as "baseless" and said he was ready to face any probe including one by the Central Bureau of Investigation.

Ravi Kant Sharma, an officer of inspector general rank, is the prime suspect in the Shivani murder case and is absconding since August 2 even as Delhi police raided several places in the Indian capital and some neighbouring states to trace him.

Madhu Sharma's allegations

against Mahajan came during her hysterical outburst in front of television cameras at her residence in Panchkula, a township in northern state of Haryana.

She alleged her husband was being framed in the case. She also charged that Mahajan had a relationship with Shivani and was in regular contact with her. Delhi police had been investigating the case for the last three years but had not revealed the names of those politicians with whom Shivani was keeping in touch, Madhu Sharma alleged.

"Why is my husband being singled out?" she said alleging Pramod Mahajan had spoken to Shivani on telephone for 45 minutes on the day of her murder on January 23, 1999 and police should make public details of the calls the Minister had made to the deceased journalist. Mahajan denied he had spoken to Shivani on the day of her murder or even for months prior to that.

Mahajan said he had purely professional relationship with Shivani as she was covering BJP beat. He said the allegations against him were being made by a person whose husband is on the run from police. The Minister said he was at a loss to know why Madhu Sharma

was making such allegations against him.

The Shivani Bhatnagar murder case had remained out of media focus for nearly three years till July this year when it hogged limelight again with the arrest of two persons who are known to Ravi Kant Sharma. One of them is alleged to have confessed to police that he had killed Shivani.

The arrests of the two persons and the non-bailable warrant of arrest against Ravi Kant Sharma has brought the Shivani murder case back into front pages of national dailies. Two courts have rejected anticipatory bail plea of Ravi Kant Sharma.

Indian Deputy Prime Minister L K Advani, who is in charge of Home portfolio, told newsmen yesterday that the allegations against Mahajan are part of a "malicious campaign" by vested interests to "derail" the investigations into the Shivani murder case which was proceeding on right course.

BJP General Secretary and spokesman Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi said there was no question of Mahajan resigning from the ministry because if ministers start quitting following "baseless" charges and "conspiracies" the stability of a government would be threatened.



PHOTO: AFP

The Semper opera building is reflected in the floodwaters in Dresden yesterday. Shortly after midnight of August 15, floodwaters invaded Dresden's famed Theaterplatz where the Semper Opera and the sumptuous Zwinger Palace are located. The waters in Dresden had surged past the 8.77 metre-record set in Dresden in 1845 and were rising nearly four centimetres by the hour.

Laws barring polls participation

Pak govt asked to reply to Benazir's petition

REUTERS, *Karachi*

A Pakistani court instructed the government yesterday to respond to a petition from former prime minister Benazir Bhutto challenging laws barring her from October general elections.

A court official said the provincial high court in Karachi would decide on the admissibility of the complaint after hearing the attorney general's response on August 21.

Yesterday, it heard arguments from Bhutto's lawyers for accepting the petition, which challenges her convictions for failing to appear in court to answer corruption charges and a law barring convicted persons from contesting elections.

"The issue before the court is the revival of democracy in Pakistan," her lawyer Kamal Azfar told the court. "It's the people and not the government who have the right to

decide who is going to represent them."

Military President Pervez Musharraf, who ousted Nawaz Sharif, Bhutto's successor as prime minister, in a bloodless coup in October 1999, has decreed that premiers who have served twice before cannot run for a third term.

The move effectively excludes both Sharif and Bhutto from running in the October 10 polls and both are also disqualified under a law banning people convicted of crimes.

Bhutto has been living in self-imposed exile in London, while Sharif and his family are in exile in Saudi Arabia.

Azfar, a former governor of Bhutto's native Sindh province, later told reporters the petition marked the start of the legal process for bringing Bhutto back to Pakistan.

Bhutto told Reuters earlier this

month she would defy the ban on her participation in the polls and contest them from a prison cell if necessary.

In a fallback tactic against the ban, Bhutto, leader of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), has created a new party called the PPP-Parliamentarians and appointed her deputy to head it to contest the elections.

Sharif, in turn, has appointed a new president of his Pakistan Muslim League.

On Thursday, Bhutto gave the go-ahead for the PPP to cooperate with Sharif's league against Musharraf in the elections, even though the parties and the former prime ministers were bitter rivals in the past.

On Monday, six parties backing Musharraf formed a poll alliance and said more might join them.

Local traders, influentials

FROM PAGE 1

According to some sources in the area, T&T authorities acquired the land in the 80s. After a long legal battle between T&T and Fazar Ali, a court order early of this month finally went in favour of T&T.

On Monday, the T&T authorities evicted about a dozen families who lived around the mosque for long. A section of the local people supported the eviction. They had also joined in raising the boundary wall at the entrance to the mosque.

Due to the eviction, some shop owners lost their shops. A garage of a garment factory was also evicted.

Following the eviction, Emdad and some local businessmen ganged up. They instigated madrasah students in Malibagh, Malibagh Chowdhury Para and Rampura areas. The students organised a rally on the road in front of the mosque after Asr prayer on Thursday and went to the spot with other devotees. About an hour into the rally, the participants started pelting brick bats at the people who assembled there from the colony to resist them, the local people said.

As clashes started between the

two groups, Ansar personnel deployed there earlier opened fire to resist the students and devotees from entering the mosque by breaking the wall. Some local gangsters also fired shots by taking firearms from the Ansars, they said.

Sources in the Ansar said they fired 65 rounds of bullets to quell the violence.

Meanwhile bodies of the three madrasah students killed during Thursday's clashes were handed over to fellow students at about 7:30 am yesterday from Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) morgue amid tight security.

Sub-inspector Mohammad Abdul Karim received the bodies along with the students. The bodies were of Yahiyia, 22, son of Maulana Sarfuddin of Baroikandi under Fulpur thana in Mymensingh; Rezaul Karim Dhali, 20, son Abdul Awal Dhali of Srinagar under Gojaria thana in Munshiganj and Abul Bashar, 18, son of Hafez Abdus Sattar of Khalishakhali under Pajpur Sadar thana.

The fellow students and relatives of the victims took the bodies

for burial at their respective villages after nazam-e-janaza yesterday morning at the madrasahs.

The body of Jainal Abedin, a pedestrian killed in the shooting, was handed over to his relatives who took it to his village home in Feni.

Associate Professor Dr Mijanur Rahman and Lecturer Noor Hossain of DMC did autopsy of the bodies. One bullet each was recovered from two of the bodies, sources at the DMC morgue said. Additional police force were kept deployed at the DMCH morgue till yesterday afternoon.

Hafez Maulana Abbas Sattar, cashier of Baitul Azim mosque, yesterday filed a case with Ramna police station accusing T&T Director (North) Mohammad Tawfiq for the incident. The government suspended Tawfiq on Thursday for alleged negligence of duty, which caused the incident.

The 19 Ansar personnel who were "closed" at the Ansar headquarters were being questioned by higher officials yesterday, sources said.

VC on DU reopening

FROM PAGE 1
The university would be reopened this month.

Earlier, the acting VC told a group of journalists that he would shortly announce a date for reopening the university.

The traditional wedding dress for men has also undergone a change. The sherwani and tight pajama can no longer be seen. Nowadays, the "prince coat" is more popular, because the groom can continue to wear it on formal occasions after the wedding is over, unlike the sherwani, which practically falls into disuse after the wedding day.

The formal suit and tie are not suitable for our hot and humid weather, yet bankers, bureaucrats and executives of multinational companies wear them to maintain a formal decorum in dress. The younger generation, however, prefer casual wear like jeans and sports shirts. Jeans sold under different brand names like Levy's and Wrangler's fascinate them very much and such trousers are generally in great demand. The fascination with brand names goes to such extent that unscrupulous businessmen produce almost exact replicas of such imported clothes as well as their labels, and sell them as original with a big profit margin.

Such sartorial changes, as noted above, are the result of the fast changing outlook in a developing country like ours and help the consumer market to grow fast, which is good for a free market economy.

investigation into the incident.

It is learnt that many eye witnesses were willing to give statements before the probe commission. But it was not being possible as they left Dhaka due to closure of the DU as well as the residential halls.

The probe body is scheduled to submit its report by tomorrow. Prof Haider took over as acting VC on August 1 following the exit of vice chancellor Prof Anwarullah Chowdhury in the wake of students' movement against him. He (Haider) told newsmen several times that the university would be reopened very soon.

General Secretary of the Dhaka University Teachers Association (DUTA) Sharifullah Bhuiyan said, "We told the authorities to reopen the university shortly." The atmosphere on the campus is favourable for this, he told this correspondent.

The unscheduled closure has affected about 30,000 students of the DU. Classes and examinations have to be rescheduled after reopening of the university and this would lead to session jam and consequent accommodation problem at the halls, sources pointed out.

The university was closed on July 28 for an indefinite period in a tense situation following the July 24 incident.

Last year, academic activities at

the DU were affected from July to October due to strikes called by the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal, demanding resignation of the then vice-chancellor.

31 hurt in Manikganj road accident

UNB, *Manikganj*

At least 31 people were injured, 16 of them seriously, in a road accident at Uchutia in Sadar upazila on Dhaka-Aricha highway yesterday morning.

Police and witnesses said the accident took place at about 8:30am when a minibus of "Jatriseba Paribahan" plunged into a roadside ditch after its driver lost control over the steering.

Nineteen of the injured were identified as Shahjahan, Sargesh Ali, Abdul Mannan, Sona Mia, Zahurul Haque, Sahabuddin, Helauddin, Lalan Molla, Rahizzuddin, Fazal, Rafique, Kashem, Juboraj, Shibnath, Shah Alam, Mojibur Rahman, Abdul Jabbar, Osman Ghani and Babbina.

They were admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital and Pangu Hospital.

Acase was filed.

Death toll in German floods rises to 14

AFP, *Dresden, Germany*

The death toll in record flooding in Germany has risen to 14, the interior ministry in the eastern state of Saxony said yesterday.

The latest victim drowned in the Wild Au river near Dresden, the baroque state capital that has seen the level of the river Elbe rise to more than four times its normal level.

Other casualties resulted when residents attempted to save their property from the surging water, during emergency evacuations and in road accidents.

Meanwhile, tens of thousands of people living in and around Dresden were being evacuated early today as the Elbe and Danube rivers surged toward record levels, with central Europe's worst floods in memory creating chaos and causing billions of euros (dollars) in damage.

South of this historic east German city, in Pirna and Heidenau, 30,000 people were ordered out of the Elbe's way as the river neared levels not seen since 1845, while in Slovakia the Danube was approaching 50-year highs.

Around 90 people have died since the weekend as the worst floods in more than a century cascaded across central Europe. The latest was a Czech man killed Thursday in the northern town of Decin.

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Bomb explodes outside Afghan ministry

AFP, *Kabul*

A bomb exploded outside the communications ministry in Kabul overnight but it caused no casualties, a spokesman for International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) said yesterday.

"At 10:40 pm local time, an explosion occurred outside the Ministry for Communications," Major Steve Odell said. "We believe that the device may have been thrown from a passing car. There were no casualties," he said.

The blast caused limited damage to the front of the building, he said. Investigations revealed the bomb contained explosives equal in power to about one kilogram of TNT, Odell said.

Reuters from Washington adds: Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and US commander for Afghanistan Gen. Tommy Franks acknowledged on Thursday that American troops could be in Afghanistan for years to keep it from reverting to "a terrorist training camp."

"We are engaged in military-to-military relationships in a great many countries around the world so it does not surprise me that someone would say," "Oh gosh, the military's going to be in Afghanistan for a long, long, time," Franks told reporters at the Pentagon. "Sure we will be."

3 criminals

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from the city's Jamboree Field area yesterday.

Police said Jasim was sentenced to 21-year rigorous imprisonment in absentia by a court here for snatching a revolver from a police sergeant few years back.

They said he was also involved in a number of crimes, including snatching of Taka 33 lakh from a garment owner last year.

Militants kill 26 in Algeria

AFP, *Algiers*

Suspected Islamic extremists killed 26 people in the early hours of yesterday in the Algerian province of Chief, 200 km west of the capital, Algiers, the security forces said.

The victims, from three families who lived in the isolated village of Bokaat Laakakcha, had their throats slit by the extremists, inhabitants of the region said.

The attack is the most deadly to target Algerian civilians since 38 people were killed in a bomb blast on July 5 - Algeria's independence day - at the busy marketplace in Larbaa, 20 km south of the capital.

Poisonous gas

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Rajwara Begum, three sons Zahid Hasan Jewel, Babu and Bappi, and daughter Rumi Begum died in sleep at their Aminpur house on the night of August 8.

Police at first lodged a UD case but Ramzan Mia, younger brother of Abbas Ali, filed a murder case accusing 12 people including Humayun Kabir, a quack of the village.

Police arrested Humayun Kabir and interrogated him but failed to find out any clue. A court sent him to jail hajat Wednesday. Police are on the hunt for other accused.

JU irregularities

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At Wednesday's meeting, the Syndicate member alleged misappropriation of Tk one crore in construction of the new arts faculty building. Tk 1083.00 was spent for one square feet against a government provision of Tk 783.00. Besides, sub-standard construction materials were used in the work, he alleged.

He also alleged misappropriation of Tk three lakh from funds for publication of university diary, answer scripts for admission test and other works.

The Syndicate asked the two bodies to start investigation soon, but did not fix the time limit for submitting their reports.

Another victim

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Uddin, rushed to the spot, hearing the incident and requested the policemen to release him.

Instead of releasing, the policemen bundled him into a police van and drove the van to the nearby Mukti Private Clinic on an instruction by the sub-inspector who led the police team.

The on-duty doctor at the clinic suggested an immediate transfer to the DMCH upon arrival. The policemen rushed him to the DMCH at 11:55pm and left the hospital in a hurry.

Pappu died at the intensive care unit at 1:00am yesterday.

The duty officer of the Motijheel Police Station said a general diary was filed in this regard. The officer refuted the allegation and said the police took him to the hospital.

Four persons were tortured to death by police in May this year -- Mohammad Sohail, a fish trader, and Mohammad Alam, a rickshaw-puller, in the capital; and Mohammad Badal, a butcher, and Fazul Haq Bhuiyan, an Awami League leader of Rupganj, in Narayanganj.

2 JCD activists

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ensued when the Mizan Group swooped on its rival Shahin Group to strengthen its position.

With the recent clash, the rivalry between the factions of ruling party's student front in Sylhet has resurfaced, although the activities of Sylhet district JCD have been under suspension for the past few months.