

Taliban negotiate for S Korean hostages

AP, Kabul

Afghan clerics and tribal elders yesterday intensified negotiations for the release of 22 South Koreans kidnapped a week ago by the Taliban, as the latest of several deadlines set by the militants approached.

Talks with the captors went until late Thursday and resumed early Friday morning, said Ali Shah Ahmadzai, police chief of Ghazni province where the hostages were taken. The body of one hostage riddled with bullet holes was found Wednesday.

"Everything is going very well," he said.

But another official involved in the negotiations said talks were difficult because of conflicting demands by the South Koreans' captors.

"There are still a lot of problems among them," police chief Khwaja Mohammad Siddiqi of the Qarabagh district in Ghazni said Friday.

"One says, 'Let's exchange them for my relative,' the others say, 'Let's release the women,' and yet another wants a deal for money," he said earlier.

Ahmadzai said the Taliban had told negotiators the hostages were being given food and water, and that their health was fine.

In Seoul, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said the South Korean government believed there was no serious problem with the hostages' safety, and that it was trying to deliver them medicine and daily necessities. The spokesman, who spoke on condition of anonymity citing protocols, said the government is "maintaining multisided contacts" with the hostage-takers.

The Taliban on Thursday reiterated their demand that jailed militants be freed in exchange for the captives it seized on July 19, and set the latest of several deadlines Friday at noon, local time for the condition to be met or more hostages would be killed.

One of the group of abducted Koreans, 42-year-old pastor Bae Hyung-kyu, was found slain with multiple gunshots on Wednesday in Qarabagh.

Local tribal elders and religious clerics who have respect among the people of Qarabagh have been conducting negotiations by telephone with the captors for several days.

Qari Yousef Ahmadi, who claims to speak for the hard-line Islamist Taliban, said they had been contacted by Afghanistan's deputy interior minister, Maj. Gen. Muhammad Munir Mangal, who said the government would make a decision regarding the militants' demands by noon Friday.

"If Kabul administration does not solve our problem ... then we do not have any option but to kill Korean hostages," Ahmadi said.

"The Taliban are not asking for money. We just want to exchange our prisoners for Korean hostages. ... When they release the Taliban, we will release the hostages," Ahmadi said by phone from an undisclosed

Dhaka, Yangon

FROM PAGE 1 of the communications ministry.

According to the agreement, the Bangladesh government will bear the entire cost primarily estimated to be Tk 141 crore.

The main objective is to get connected with the Asian Highway, Matin told reporters. He described the deal as a milestone step of the present caretaker government that would further strengthen the bilateral relations between the two countries.

He said the previous government had taken the initiative but could not see it through. Without giving a specific time frame, he said the work would begin as soon as possible.

The Planning Commission will approve the construction project at its next meeting and soon an action plan will be prepared to that end, said the communications adviser.

He observed that the road would not only improve transport connectivity but also increase the volume of bilateral trade.

"We will have to continue the project if we are to link ourselves with countries like Thailand and Singapore," Gen Saw Tun told journalists. He said it's a tri-nation (Bangladesh-Myanmar-China) project.

Matin said further discussions are necessary to implement the entire project that also involves China. "We will discuss the matter with China at the next meeting of BCIM in Myanmar," he added.

BCIM (Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar) is an international forum on regional economic cooperation among the four countries.

Matin said Bangladesh, China and Myanmar will carry out feasibility studies on the proposed tri-nation (Bangladesh, India and China) road. A Chinese delegation that visited Dhaka about a month ago too have emphasised the need for having the tri-nation road and developing the seaports.

He said the BCIM car rally that was earlier scheduled for sometime in November, would now be held in March next year.

Flood closes in on Dhaka

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danger levels at Goalundo and Bhagyakul respectively. More areas in the districts of Manikganj, Munshiganj, Faridpur, Rajbari, Madaripur, and Shariatpur, and in Dohar and Nawabganj of Dhaka are likely to get inundated.

Our correspondent from Pabna reported that Nagarbari-Aricha ferry service remained suspended in the last two days. Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) officials said they are shifting Nagarbari ferry terminal 200 metres from Pratappur point.

The intermittent rainfall that continued for the third consecutive day yesterday, caused waterlogging in the low laying areas of the district headquarters.

Our correspondent from Sirajganj reported that around 200 villages in 55 unions of the district are now reeling under water including 10 villages in the municipality area, as 60 metres of a dam at Khokshabari point on the western part of Jamuna got washed away yesterday.

Moreover, eight bridges, including a portion of Nailsapara Bailey Bridge, collapsed disrupting road link between Sirajganj and Kazipur. Agricultural Adviser CS Karim visited the area.

Our correspondent from Chandpur reported that ferry service between Chandpur and Shariatpur have been suspended since Thursday, as Horina ferry terminal got flooded.

A Shariatpur bound ferry with 12 buses, and goods laden trucks on board ran aground at a shoal in mid-Meghna Thursday afternoon, officials said.

Our staff correspondent from Bogra reported that around 50,000 people of Sariakandi and Dhunat upazilas were marooned, most of the seasonal crops in the area were damaged, and fishes in ponds were washed away. Thousands of people in the area took shelter on higher places.

Explosion in an electric transformer a week ago also brought added sufferings for the

Mannan Bhuiyan

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In reply to a question, he said, "We are working hard for holding the council as soon as possible."

In compliance with the party constitution, they will seek permission of the party chairperson for holding the council, Bhuiyan said.

"We will decide later on," he replied when asked what they will do if the chairperson does not give her consent.

Bhuiyan, a former LGRD and cooperatives minister, on June 25 announced draft reform proposals for changes in party constitution to make the party more democratic.

Later, he also announced a comprehensive proposal to make parliament effective, ensure good governance and form a national security council.

According to BNP sources, party leaders are almost divided over the reform issue as Bhuiyan-led group wants to implement reforms by holding council as soon as possible.

But Khaleda Zia has expressed her resentment over the activities of Bhuiyan-led group.

Termining pro-reform leaders betrayers during a teleconference with leaders of Australia chapter of BNP recently, she alleged some of her party leaders are conspiring to split the party in the name of reforms.

The former prime minister said she also wants reforms in the party, and is preparing proposals for this. But those will be finalised at the council to be held after withdrawal of the ban on indoor politics, she added.

Pro-reform leaders however told reporters time and gain that they cannot wait for long and will seek permission from the party chief and the government for holding the council soon.

They are planning to hold the council keeping the party chairperson away if she does not consent to it, party sources pointed out.

Verdict against JMB

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some trust and confidence in the present government, another former RU VC Prof Saidur Rahman Khansaid.

"Other patrons of the militants, especially Jamaat men and administration officials who aided them, should also be punished," he added.

All the patrons of JMB should face justice, said Workers Party politburo member Fazle Hossain Badsha who had received death threat from militants on several occasions.

Expressing his happiness, Abdul Bari, a torture victim who is still residing in Rajshahi city in fear of the militants' aides, said, "Korban [one of the militants jailed with Aminul] used to boastfully say that they would rule as long as Tarique Zia was behind them. I did not anticipate that they would be punished so quickly."

Family members of the victims of torture in Atrai, Raninagar of Naogaon, Bagmara in Rajshahi and Naldanga in Natore have demanded execution of the JMB patrons.

"Yells of my son to save his life still drive me with horror. I want similar death of the JMB patrons," said 65-year-old Khodeza Begum, mother of Golam Rabbani Mukul.

Tortured in public on April 11, 2004, Mukul succumbed to his injuries on April 16.

They made Mukul's crying during the torture heard in the neighbourhood through a loudspeaker.

"I want godfathers of militants to be tried just before us as they tor-

Tk 77 lakh got washed away.

Reports received from Lalmonirhat said over 50,000 people were marooned there by a flood caused by rising water level in the Teesta, which flowed 30cm above the danger level yesterday, while a flood protection embankment of Kalikapur collapsed.

The district administration distributed 20kg of rice each to 1,500 families. The army is assisting the local administration to move the marooned people to higher places.

Around 1,000 people were marooned due to a flood caused by the rising Tangan River, which yesterday flowed above the danger level. Several thousand acres of standing aman also went under water.

The Dharala River at Kurigram was flowing 3cm above the danger level yesterday, while a big part of the 2km WDB embankment at Kajaldanga and Putimari was damaged inundating about 10 villages in Chitalmari. Around 70,000 people in four upazilas were marooned.

Our correspondent from Nilphamari reported that more than 10,000 people were marooned in the district by a flood caused by the rising Teesta, and due to an onrush of water from India as it kept all the gates of its Gojal Doba Barrage opened.

Most of the houses of those villages are under two to three feet of water. The people of those villages are suffering from want of food, drinking water, and fodder for animals.

Upazila administration sources said they allotted 6 metric tons of rice and 30 cartons of biscuits for 2,175 flood affected families of five unions.

Mawa ferry points

FROM PAGE 16 investigation they found out that the police, BIWTC and BIWTA officials had a solid understanding with the local hoodlums to extort huge amounts of money every day. We knew it would be difficult to crack the nut," said an official requesting anonymity.

"Every body knew it. Even the youths we arrested confessed sharing the money but there was no evidence left behind these deals that had been in practice for years," he added.

Other sources said these gangs also subject hundreds of makeshift shops on both sides of the ghats to regular tolls.

"The ferry users on their way to different destinations are yet to grow a confidence in the law and order and the criminal opportunists take full advantage of this lacking," said the official of the joint forces.

The BIWTC officials said ferry services at Mawa and Char Zanazat are not satisfactory since they lack proper communication devices.

"All the 10 walkie-talkies are out of order for the last one year. Despite repeated reminders we have not received the repaired sets yet," said an official.

Verdict against JMB

FROM PAGE 16 tured and killed people in open torture cells," said Ismail Hossain, father of Yasin Ali who was beaten to death after the militants hung him upside down from a tree in front of Kodapara Madrasa on June 29, 2004.

"Militants dragged me out of classroom. I could count 30 hits of iron rod until I lost consciousness. My father sold lands to bear my treatment cost. I am yet to know what my faults were," said Abdul Malek, a class nine student of Hamirkutsa High School demanding hanging of JMB patrons.

The JMB militants started the so-called 'outlaw cleansing operation' through open murder of Wasim Osman Babu on April 1, 2004 and they killed over 25 persons and maimed some 500 people in only four months.

Jute worker dies

FROM PAGE 16 privatisation policy.

In a bid to get his job back, he had filed a case with the Khulna Labour Court against the dismissal order from the jute mill management. The court delivered a judgment Thursday noon upholding his dismissal order. He suffered a heart attack four hours later.

He fell unconscious around 8:00pm while under treatment at the Khulna Surgical Clinic. He died at 4:30am yesterday. His body was taken to his village home at Jamira under Phultala upazila of Khulna for burial.

NPP launches unit in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

The newly floated National People's Party (NPP) launched its Chittagong unit yesterday.

Following the unit's inauguration ceremony, a views-exchange meeting was held at the organisation's new Chittagong office on Ashraf Ali Road at Patharghata. The party was floated earlier this month.

NPP Convener Shawkat Hossain Nilu at the meeting observed that the state of emergency should continue until the next parliamentary elections are held. The ban on indoor politics could be lifted before the elections, he added.

When asked about the NPP's activities during a time when there is a ban on political activities, Nilu quoted Law Adviser Mainul Hossain that there was no bar to doing something good.

Hailing the caretaker government for allowing this sort of activities, he said he was doing the same as BNP Secretary General Mannan Bhuiyan and LDP chief Badruddoza Chowdhury are doing.

Shawkat Hossain Nilu who started his political career with BNP, formed PNP in 1984. He joined Jatiya Party afterwards and disengaged later on to form his own Jatiya Party (Nilu).

When asked why float a new party as he failed repeatedly in the past, Nilu said he hoped to succeed in doing something good this time as there is a congenial atmosphere which did not prevail earlier.

NPP Chittagong Convener Engineer Enamul Haq Enam and central leaders Baharul Alam and SM Abdul Bashir were present at the meeting. The meeting, however, saw poor turnout and participation.

One killed

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while the rest given first aid at different hospitals and clinics.

In Barisal, at least eight people were injured and over 200 thatched houses damaged as a tornado struck three villages in Muladi upazila yesterday morning.

Nazrul Islam, chairman of Charkalekha Union Parishad, told our correspondent that the storm hit Baliakandi, Laxmipur and Jalalabad villages of the union at about 5:00am and lasted only three to four minutes.

The injured were admitted to Muladi Upazila Health Complex. Of them, the condition of two—Abdul Aziz Boyatyi, 44, and Majid Sardar, 62—was stated to be critical.

The homeless people have taken shelter at local educational institutions.

Our Chandpur correspondent adds: A tornado lashed Shahpur, Nowjan and Pearikholas villages under Nayergaon Union of Motlab upazila at 8:00am and lasted for three to five minutes.

At least 20 people were injured and more than 100 thatched houses damaged in the violent storm.

The injured are undergoing treatment at upazila health complex. Officials from upazila headquarters visited the villages and distributed relief among the affected people.

In Shariatpur, a tornado lashed Telipara and Chamtia villages in Noria upazila at about 5:00am.

At least five people were injured and over 30 tin-roofed houses damaged in the villages by the violent storm.

The storm also damaged standing crops and uprooted electric poles, snapping power supply to the affected area.

Saifur meets

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detained former BNP lawmaker.

Deputy Inspector General (Prisons) Major Shamsul Haider Siddiqui told newsmen at the jail gate that relatives can meet a detained person at the jail once a fortnight as per the jail code.

The army-led joint forces arrested Naser on February 4 on various charges including illegally occupying government land and manipulating tenders.

Hannan Shah

FROM PAGE 16 The BNP chairperson is also in favour of time-beffitting reforms in the party, he added.

The BNP leader, released recently from jail, said there is nothing like requisition meeting in the BNP constitution.

"Some people are trying to make political blackmail in the name of requisition," he said, adding, "Their ill design will not succeed."

Referring to the changed tone of the pro-reformists in BNP, Hannan Shah said they have been forced to soften their tone realising the situation on the ground.

He claimed that following his release from jail, a large number of party activists from home and abroad had talked to him demanding actions against those trying to create indiscipline in the party.

Suicide blast

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No group claimed responsibility for the attack but it comes amid a wave of violence following the week-long siege and subsequent storming of the mosque between July 3 and 11.

Unrest erupted at the mosque when radical students chased out a government-picked Islamic elder who was meant to lead the first Friday prayers there since the military operation two weeks ago.

Around a dozen people using rollers daubed red paint over the walls, which had been changed to a peach colour during government renovations. The unarmed demonstrators flew black Jihadi flags with crossed swords from the minarets.

Hardliners at the mosque hurled rocks at armoured police vehicles and officers in riot gear, injuring two policemen, officials said. Police fired tear gas at the demonstrators and arrested six people.

The students demanded the return of the mosque's chief cleric, Abdul Aziz, who was caught trying to flee the compound in a woman's burqa during the siege and is now in jail awaiting trial on terror charges.

They chanted "Musharraf is a dog, death to the Musharraf government," adding that the blood of the mosque's rebel leader Abdul Rashid Ghazi, who died in the assault, would "bring an Islamic revolution."

Friday's violence comes despite pledges from President Pervez Musharraf to crush extremism in Pakistan.

The government cracked down on the mosque after it led a Taliban-style vigilante campaign, with the goal of imposing Sharia law, which climaxed with the abduction of seven citizens from China, Pakistan's closest ally.

Religious Affairs Minister Ijaz-ul Haq reopened the complex -- renamed the Central Mosque -- on

Power of attorney

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that they will file a writ petition with the High Court tomorrow seeking dismissal of the case against Hasina, if the government provides them with a copy of the approved letter of the power of attorney sought by the AL chief.

"Although we applied to the jail authorities on July 20, seeking approval for the power of attorney on behalf of Sheikh Hasina, the authorities have not given it to us yet, fearing we might get justice from the High Court," Zillur said adding that an approval for the power of attorney is necessary to fight a case.

"It proves that the case against Sheikh Hasina is fabricated," said the AL leader adding that the government is frightened and dilly-dallying so that AL may not file the writ petition with the High Court.

He said the lawyers are ready with the writ petition to launch their legal battle.

Condemning the government's actions, Zillur demanded that the government approves Hasina's application for the power of attorney and provides AL with a copy of the letter as early as possible so the defence may move to the court.

"If the government continues to dilly-dally, we will have no alternative but to go to court with the matter," said the AL acting chief adding that getting the power of attorney approved is a citizen's fundamental right.

The AL leader said his party is a secular democratic party which believes in the laws and rules of the state. "And for this reason, we have not gone beyond the law even after the arrest of Sheikh Hasina. We have taken legal steps to free her. Instead of launching a movement we have been fighting the case in the court," he said.

Hasina's lawyer, who talked to her for more than an hour in the sub-jail, told reporters in the parliament complex that the AL chief is passing her days there with an apprehension that she will not get justice.

He said the deputy inspector

Fugitive convict in Natore arms looting case held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An accused, sentenced to life imprisonment for looting firearms from Gurudaspur Police Station in Natore after killing a constable in 1987, was arrested in the city's Mirpur yesterday.

The arrestee, Yakub Ali alias Pakhi, was the prime accused in the charge sheet filed against 66 people. On July 19, a Natore court sentenced all the 66 accused to life imprisonment.

With the arrest of Pakhi, 47 convicts are now in jail, 13 are still absconding, while the rest six died.

Acting on a tip-off, a team of Rapid Action Battalion-4 raided Bagbari in Mirpur and arrested Pakhi, aged around 55, at 10:00am, said a Rab official.

On February 24, 1987, a gang of miscreants attacked Gurudaspur Police Station in Natore and looted 24 firearms and ammunition after killing constable Habibur Rahman. They also took away three detainees from police custody, according to a Rab press release.

Thursday, with bullet holes from the bitter fighting plastered over by workmen and damaged fans and lighting all repaired.

But despite tight security, the students on Friday stopped prayer leader Imam Mohammad Ashfaq taking up his position at the mosque's pulpit and used the microphone to deliver their own furious speeches against the government raid.

"I was told everything would be peaceful. I was never interested in taking up this job and after today I will never do it," Ashfaq told AFP as he left with a police escort.

The protesters also threw shoes at cameramen and reporters covering the event.

"We worked day and night to open the mosque for people to offer prayers but some people, mainly former students, are trying to create mischief," interior ministry spokesman Brigadier Javed Cheema told AFP.

Authorities earlier this week raised an Islamic girls' school and some staff quarters within the mosque compound that had been declared dangerous after the clashes.

The madrasa was the scene of some of the fiercest fighting and was where Ghazi was shot dead by government commandos on July 10. He had expressed hopes that his death would spark an Islamic revolution.

Around 10 burqa-clad girl students from the madrasa turned up at the mosque on Friday, saying that the government had lied about the official death toll from the military operation.

The Red Mosque raid set off a wave of revenge suicide attacks and other militant strikes that have killed more than 200 people and piled pressure on military leader Musharraf.