

North Korea scraps all accords with South

Tensions run high

AFP, Seoul

North Korea announced yesterday it is scrapping agreements with South Korea on easing military tensions, accusing Seoul of pushing relations to the brink of war.

The communist state said all political and military agreements would be nullified, including one covering the Yellow Sea border -- the scene of bloody naval clashes in 1999 and 2002.

The statement from the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea, a state body, heightened tensions after the North's army this month threatened an "all-out confrontational posture" against Seoul.

South Korea stepped up border monitoring and vowed to respond firmly to any violation but said no unusual activities had been detected.

Seoul's unification ministry, which handles cross-border ties, expressed "deep regret". Raising tension between the two Koreas "is not desirable" for regional or world peace, it said, renewing an offer of dialogue.

"The confrontation between the north and the south in the political and military fields has been put to such extremes that inter-Korean relations have reached the brink of a war," the North's statement said.

It blasted the conservative South Korean government of President Lee Myung-Bak for "ruthlessly scrapping" pacts reached at summits in 2000 and 2007.

Lee, who took office a year ago, rolled back the "sunshine" engagement policy of his liberal predecessors and

said he would review the summit pacts.

"The group of traitors has already reduced all the agreements reached between the north and the south in the past to dead documents," the committee said in its statement on the official Korean Central News Agency.

"Under such situation it is self-evident that there is no need for the DPRK (North Korea) to remain bound to those north-south agreements."

The North has also staked out a tough position in stalled nuclear disarmament negotiations with the United States and four regional partners.

Pyongyang, which staged a nuclear test in 2006, has said it may keep its atomic weapons even after ties are established with Washington, as long as any US nuclear threat remains.

Some analysts believe the North will stage a gesture of provocation, to pressure Seoul to reverse its tough stance and to ensure it remains a diplomatic priority for the new US administration.

"The North is apparently paving the way for military provocations," Yoo Ho-Yeol, a professor at Korea University, told AFP. "It is also seeking to shift responsibility for a possible military clash to the South."

Paik Hak-Soon of the Sejong Institute think tank said armed clashes may break out soon. But Baek Seung-Joo of the Korea Institute for Defence Analyses said the statement aims at "heaping pressure on Lee Myung-Bak" and does not mean clashes are more likely.

The South has deployed a destroyer near the disputed border and stepped up sur-

veillance by radar, drones and other reconnaissance planes, Yonhap news agency said.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff declined to comment on the report. "We are preparing for every contingency," a spokesman told AFP.

The North refuses to recognise a sea border drawn unilaterally by US-led United Nations forces after the 1950-1953 war and known as the Northern Limit Line.

The two sides have remained technically at war since 1953 because the conflict ended without a peace treaty. But a 1991 reconciliation pact which the North has now nullified recognised the line as an interim border.

DAVOS REPORT

World heads for 'water bankruptcy'

AFP, Davos

The world is heading toward "water bankruptcy" as demand for the precious commodity outstrips even high population growth, a new report warned yesterday.

In less than 20 years water scarcity could lose the equivalent of the entire grain crops of India and the United States, said the World Economic Forum report, which added that food demand is expected to sky-rocket in coming decades.

"The world simply cannot manage water in the future in the same way as in the past or the economic web will collapse," said the report.

Water has been consistently under-priced in many regions and has been wasted and overused, the report said.

Many places in the world are on the verge of "water bankruptcy" following a series of regional water "bubbles" over the past 50 years.

Khatib leads

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mosque goes before they made their entry.

However, some of the madrasa students staged demonstrations on the road in front of the mosque demanding the removal of khatib Principal Salauddin Ahmed. But police drove them away from the area.

The new Khatib, Salauddin Ahmed, arrived at the mosque at 12:30pm. He delivered his weekly sermon and then led the Friday juma prayer.

According to witnesses, several hundred plain-clothed policemen including some in uniform were deployed in and out of the mosque while some others offered their prayers in the mosque in guise of the musallies (devotees).

The previous three consecutive Juma prayers were marred by demonstrations and clashes over the newly appointed Khatib of the mosque leading to separate prayer sessions in and outside the mosque.

Following the incidents, the government authorities directed the law-enforcement agencies to handle the unpleasant row between two groups of devotees with iron hands.

Law Commission

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the commission's chairman has remained vacant since December 5, 2007 when the then chairman Justice Mustafa Kamal's term expired.

Then again, another member of the commission retired on February 22 last year but nobody bothered about appointing someone to fill the vacant post.

The commission's lone member Justice Md Sirajul Islam is currently acting as its chairman who is also going on retirement on March 8 this year.

Apart from the two key positions, 10 of the 13 official posts of the Law Commission including those of a chief research officer, two senior research officers and two translation officers have remained vacant for the past nine months.

The officials of the commission are picked from the judicial cadres who work on deputation, sources said.

The areas in the close proximity to the commission office located on the Old High Court premises are so appalling that these new officials, soon after their joining, begin to look for opportunities elsewhere.

War crime tribunal

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It is the government process, but it is the government, not any individual, that needs to file cases as these are crimes against humanity," he told The Daily Star.

He said it is the responsibility of the Awami League government to fulfil their election pledge of trying the war criminals because the new generation cast vote for them in the December 29 polls because of the pledge.

Advocate Sultana Kamal, former adviser to a caretaker government, suggested forming a special tribunal for trying war criminals as it will be difficult to find hard evidences of war crimes committed about 38 years ago.

"It is a very good sign that an Awami League lawmaker placed the proposal and it was passed in the House unanimously. I hope that the trial process will begin within six months," Sultana Kamal told The Daily Star.

Lalbagh killing

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kitchen-knife in absence of Zahir's wife, the DB police said.

However, the motive behind the killing is not clear yet as the versions of police, locals and family members do not tally.

Meanwhile, police yesterday recovered the severed head of Asgar from Kamrangir char area in river Buriganga with the help of the divers of fire brigades. A total of 15 pieces of Asgar's body were recovered from five places stretching from Lalbagh to Kamrangir char in the city.

Locals and relatives of Asgar demonstrated against the brutal murder and attacked the house of Zahir yesterday for four consecutive times since Thursday afternoon.

Speaking at press conference at DB office in the evening, detective police told the newsmen that Zahir and two others killed Asgar due to a feud related to women affairs. Police also produced Zahir before newsmen.

"Asgar usually visit the house of Zahir and had a good relation with him. He had an illegal relation with Zahir's wife Poly," Deputy Commissioner of DB Md Awlad Hossain said quoting Zahir.

He added that Asgar was killed in a pre-planned way.

Confessing his involvement in the killing, Zahir told The Daily Star that he killed Asgar due to a feud involving cable TV business. He, however, denied the DC's claim that Asgar had an illegal relation with his wife.

He said he along with Mohsin and Rubel cut the body of Asgar into 15 pieces at his bathroom from 1:00am to 5:00am on Thursday. They later started dropping the pieces at different places from 7:00 Thursday morning.

Mohsin and Rubel also had disputes with Asgar over micro-credit business, Zahir said.

Locals said Zahir who faces several cases, including three murder cases remained fugitive for seven years. He came to the area four months ago and started criminal activities again.

Asgar's wife Nurunnahar Eva told The Daily Star that Zahir had been threatening Asgar for the past one week

She said the government will find the evidences of war crimes going through the documents, newspapers and magazines published at that time.

Barrister Rafiqul Haque proposed that the government form a special tribunal with a High Court Judge as chairman and two to four judges as its members.

"After forming the special tribunal, government will have to file cases and submit charge sheets against the war criminals," he told The Daily Star.

Former vice chancellor of Dhaka University Prof Maniuzzaman Miah said questions about the trial's acceptance might be raised if it is held as per the laws of the land.

"I suggest that the government start the trial under international laws. But strong evidences are required to bring the war criminals to justice," the academician added.

over cable business. "Zahir asked Asgar to invest Tk 5 lakh in cable TV business and to be a partner of him," said Eva.

Eva said Zahir called Asgar several times over mobile phone to meet with him on Wednesday. Family members of Asgar demanded exemplary punishment to Zahir for such gruesome murder.

Poly along with two children went to her father's residence in Mirpur area Wednesday afternoon, Zahir's mother Maleka Begum told The Daily Star.

Police are also searching for Poly to interrogate her about the relation with Asgar.

Locals attacked the house of Zahir for four times since Thursday afternoon, said Maleka. Police forces were deployed there to avoid any untoward incident.

Lanka rules out ceasefire despite int'l pressure

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka will not declare a ceasefire despite growing international concern about 250,000 civilians trapped by fighting with Tamil rebels, Human Rights Minister Mahinda Samara-singhe said yesterday.

"There will be no ceasefire," the minister told reporters after a meeting with Colombo-based diplomats. "We will continue with our military operations and we will continue to liberate areas which have not been liberated so far."

Calls mounted yesterday for a ceasefire in Sri Lanka amid growing fears for an estimated quarter of a million civilians trapped by fierce fighting between government troops and Tamil Tiger rebels.

A group of international relief organisations, including UN agencies, urged the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to allow civilians to leave areas under their control, and the government to stop blocking international aid.

None but IOJ

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Sources in the Majlish-e-sura hinted the possibility of changes at the party's top level at the end of this year when an election in Jamaat will decide its next top brass. They said the intention of the election would be to wash off the war criminal label of Jamaat.

Jamaat leaders hope that the United Nations will be involved in the trial, in which case the party would accept the verdict and remove the guilty people from the party.

The BNP standing committee member Shamsul Islam said, "We do not have any coalition with Jamaat at present. They were our ally in the national elections and it is over. BNP and Jamaat took part in the upazila parishad elections separately."

He, however, said the issue might be raised before the party's standing committee meeting scheduled for tomorrow.

Bangladesh Jatiya Party leaders also said they support the government's initiative to try war criminals. "Jamaat leaders who were involved in committing war crimes should be brought to book," a leader of the party told The Daily Star last night.

Meanwhile, Islami Oikya Jote Secretary General Abdul Latif Nezami said, "All Jamaat leaders, especially the incumbent ones, were not involved in war crimes in 1971. We therefore think that there is not much scope to maintain distance from Jamaat on this issue."

Jamaat-e-Islami directly opposed Bangladesh's independence and many of its leaders were allegedly involved in war crimes.

"We will keep a safe distance from Jamaat over the issue," a close aide to BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia told

Gibbon

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National Hoolock Gibbons Conservation Policy. Conservationists, researchers, educationists, scientists and media personnel attended the programme, chaired by WTB chairman Enayetullah Khan.

Addressing the function, WTB chairman said it is just a beginning to ensure Hoolock's existence and hoped it would be continued.

Executive Director of WTB Prof Anwarul Islam conducted the function followed by screening the documentary.

WTB Vice Chairman Prof Harun-ur-Rashid said Hoolocks should be taken care of, as they are important to maintain a balanced environment. He sought cooperation from media to save Hoolocks.

Describing continued extinction of Hoolock Gibbons, Elliott Haimoff, executive producer of GSP said he found thousands of Hoolock in Bangladesh in 1971 whereas it has now come down to around 300.

"It is a national pride and part of heritage. Bangladesh people should know it. I believe people would be educated through television productions," he said.

Haimoff also informed that the documentary would be screened in global television channels globally.

"Gibbons: The Forgotten Apes in Peril," was screened on Channel i yesterday.

India to allow

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ever, should ensure that Indian investments are facilitated in Bangladesh besides providing better transit facilities.

"...it cannot be a situation where India goes on doing things and does not see appropriate response from the other side," he added.

India became the biggest exporter to Bangladesh (3.27 billion US dollars), overtaking China in 2007-08. Trade between the two countries stood at 3.6 billion US dollars.

India has already scrapped import duty on all items other than those in the negative list for LDCs of South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) with effect from 1 January this year.

The LDCs in the region are Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives and Nepal.

An investment promotion agreement between India and Bangladesh is expected to be inked during External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee's forthcoming visit to Bangladesh.

The sensitive list of goods refers to the list of products where no tariff benefits would be offered.

2 intruders

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A local of Arthapara of Ruma said he saw some gunmen heading towards the border after the gunfight.

Bandarban of Bangladesh shares with India and Myanmar along border where several insurgent groups are active. The groups are equipped with heavy arms and weapons like rocket launchers, mortars, anti-aircraft artileries and powerful explosives, sources said.

The DPA and other groups are allegedly involved in kidnapping people from Roanghchari, Ruma, Thanchi, Alikadam and Naikhangchari upazilas and releasing them after extorting ransom.

Step to prevent

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she said, "I told police not to raise their truncheons against any devotees."

Addressing the conference as special guest, State Minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs M Quamrul Islam sought cooperation from the members of the Bangladesh Law Association in the trial of the war criminals, a major pre-election pledge of the present government.

"Without your cooperation, it would be difficult to hold the trial of war criminals," he said.

In the morning, Dhaka University Vice-chancellor AAM Arefin Siddique inaugurated the conference with outgoing BIA president M Abdur Rab Hawlader in the chair.

Prof Mizanur Rahman of DU, Golam Mawla Rony MP, ABMWaliur Rahman, Nizamul Haq Mollah, judges from different districts, members of former bar associations, former and current students of the DU Law Faculty were present at the conference.

Muhith: Recession

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finance minister would head the committee to be represented by political leaders, trade body leaders and stakeholders of trade, industry and business to keep close watch on the effects of the financial crisis and take remedial measures.

However, he did not elaborate on the structure of the committee that would have the authority to take instant decisions to face any emerging challenges.

Earlier, Muhith told reporters that he would invite representation even from the opposition political parties.

The task force of officials formed earlier in this regard would work side by side while the Bangladesh Better Business Forum (BBBF) would continue to function.

As per the expert opinions so far, the issues of concern that deserve close attention by the proposed committee would include the impact on the country's exports and remittance inflow.

Bangladesh Bank Quarterly Report released on Thursday recommended keeping close watch on the impact of global

recession on the country's exports and wage earners' remittance.

Experts and trade bodies suggested possible mechanisms to face the challenge would be to reduce lending rates to a tolerable level particularly for the export-oriented and manufacturing sectors and keeping exchange rate stable and competitive.

Addressing the congress, the Finance Minister said the new government is pledge-bound to ensure supply of arsenic-free water by the year 2013, he said.

Bangladesh Chemical Society (BCS) organised the 31st annual conference titled "Bangladesh Chemical Congress 2008" with the theme: "Chemistry for Clean Water."

Prime Minister's Adviser Dr Alauddin Ahmed, DU vice chancellor AAMS

Arefin Siddique, visiting Nobel Laureate and President Emeritus of

Taiwan Prof Yuan T. Lee, chairman of DU Chemistry Department Prof

Tajmeri SA Islam and BCS president Prof M Muhibur Rahman spoke at the inaugural session.

Rohingya

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possible, the newspaper said.

"Rohingya people are not among Myanmar's more than 100 ethnic minority groups," the newspaper said.

However, the newspaper reported that the government will "take necessary measures and deal with the matter."

The newspaper did not elaborate, though on Monday, Myanmar military leaders told their Thai counterparts they would try and prevent any Rohingya migrants from leaving the country.

The issue of the Rohingyas several hundred thousand people who live along the border with Bangladesh is very sensitive in Myanmar.

It has denied them citizenship and has been accused of widespread rights abuses against their communities including forced labor, forced evictions from their land and prohibitions on their movements.

The mention of the Rohingyas in the state media Friday was the first since allegations arose earlier this month that Thai authorities

were forcing their boats back out to sea.

Human rights groups say the Thai navy has twice intercepted boats with Rohingyas and sent them back to the open seas, where hundreds later died.

Thai authorities have repeatedly insisted they do not force migrants out to sea but only detain and repatriate people entering the country illegally.

Human rights agencies and the US government have long asserted that the Rohingyas face gross discrimination and are denied citizenship in their homeland of Myanmar, also called Burma, because they are Muslims.

For years, human rights groups have accused military-ruled Myanmar, which is about 90 percent Buddhist, of mistreating the Rohingyas.

About 200,000 Rohingyas live in Bangladesh, where about 28,000 live in camps and have been granted refugee status. Many more brave the seas in search of a better life, often traveling to Thailand on their way to Malaysia.

CCC plans to house

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Committee of National Economic Council (Cnec) approved Tk 6 crore for the project and the EED was about to implement the project.

But CCC Mayor ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury, taking charge after his release from jail, refused to take the allocation and declined to go for the reconstruction of the school buildings.

On December 28, he sent another proposal, signed by CCC Chief Engineer Md Nizam Uddin, to the CDA chairman seeking approval for the 16-storey multi-purpose building that would house the schools along with commercial establishments.

The move shocked students, guardians and civil society members.

According to the CCC proposal, the third, fourth and the fifth floors would be given to the schools while the rest of the floors including the two basement floors would be left for commercial establishments.

The CDA refused to approve the design saying no market could be allowed to be built on the land of two reputed schools.

CCC Urban Planner Rezaul Karim claimed that the CCC design concentrated on giving more space to the schools.

Talking to The Daily Star Wednesday, he said the CCC has the authority to construct the building even if the CDA disapproves of the plan.

The CCC chief engineer, however, refused to give details on the matter.

With the school authorities kept mum by the CCC, civil society members and guardians continued to express resentment at the CCC plan and held demonstrations protesting the CCC move.

Five eminent personalities--noted scientist Jamal Nazrul Islam, Bangladesh Economic Society Chittagong chapter President Prof Md Sikander Khan, architect Zarina Hossain, engineer Subhash Barua and environmentalist Shahriar Khaled--in a joint statement Tuesday demanded an immediate step against the CCC move to construct a commercial building demolishing the historic

schools. In the statement, they termed the CCC move antagonistic to national interest.

Meanwhile, Forum for Planned Chittagong, a Chittagong-based organisation, termed the CCC act immoral.

Samajtantrik Chhatra Front Chittagong city unit formed a human chain and staged a protest rally in front of the schools Wednesday afternoon.

Women leader Mostari Shafi said all should come forward to protect the schools that bear the memory of hero Pritilata.

Tabassum Akhter, mother of a class-VII student of Aparna Charan School, said it is nothing but an attempt to dismantle the reputed schools.

How could the CCC mayor expect students to study having business activities all around them, said another guardian Maya Dutta.

"How would all the students of the schools leave and enter the building without using any staircase at the start and end of classes?" said Bakul Roy, a guardian, adding that she would move her daughter to another school if the CCC succeeded with its plan.

The schools produced people like noted writer Fahmida Amin, Prof Salma Khan, Prof Nazma Siddique, Prof Maleka Azim Khan, Prof Roushan Akhter Hanif, Prof Rita Dutta, Prof Hanna Begum, Dr Joynab Begum and Dr Tamanna Jafar.

Arms traders

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The elite force recovered two pistols, one made in USA, with four magazines loaded with 13 bullets and a revolver with five bullets from their possession.

The arrested are M Rohidul, 35, of Helalpur of Bagha upazila and his accomplices Mostafizur Rahman Mostak, 35, and Raju Ahmed Mintu, 29, of Shimulia of Charghat upazila, said a Rab press release.

The Rab said the arrestees later confessed that a gang of arms traders led by Rohidul was engaged in the illegal trade across the country for long.

Grabbers occupy

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The DCC leased Bazul Rahman Hostel at Mughaltuli and built Shaheed Ziaur Rahman School there. Local Ward Commissioner and BNP leader Hossain Mollah looks after the school.

DCC Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka told The Daily Star that the land was leased from the DC for one year. "It had been occupied by criminals. Dhaka City Corporation recovered it and used it for the purpose of the educational institution," he said.

Asked why the DCC did not return the land to Jagannath University, Khoka said, "If the university authorities have specific plans, the land will be returned to them by abolishing the school."

Former president of Jagannath University unit Jatityatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) Sagor Ahmed, BNP leader MA Halim, local traders Nurul Islam Bepari, Mohan Ghosh and Akim Hossain and a few other JCD leaders demolished the Crown Bhaban at Patuati and built the six-storey Crown Market there. Sagor was shot dead in 2005 by rivals.

MA Halim was a general secretary of JCD during the regime of Ziaur Rahman. After the January 11 declaration of the state of emergency he joined Ferdous Ahmed Koreshi's Progressive Democratic Party but resigned from it following AL's coming to power.

Local traders said the occupants leased the shops of the market to them for huge amount of money.

Local criminals Fazlu and his brother Alizan occupied Shaheed Anwar Shafique Hostel at Armanitola about 15 years ago. The brothers, who were close associates of Old Dhaka don Akbar Sheth, are now in jail on charge of killing Sheth. A Dhaka court sentenced them to life imprisonment for the murder and they have appealed against the verdict.

Sources said the building and the land are being used as godowns and transport depots. Haji Md Abul Bashar alias Bashir and Saleha Begum alias Shaban had installed two signboards on the building but removed them recently.

Local sources said traders purchased one part of the land and building from Fazlu and Alizan at a low cost.