

US, UK to help probe mutiny

DIPLomatic CORRESPONDENT

The United States and the United Kingdom assured Bangladesh intelligence support in investigating last month's killing of army officials at BDR Pikhana headquarters, said Foreign Minister Dipu Moni.

"We sought assistance from different countries and we already got positive response from the USA and the UK," said the foreign minister, adding, "We have sought further forensic support from the US and UK, though Bangladesh has some forensic experts for investigation."

Talking to diplomatic correspondents after a meeting with the US envoy at the foreign ministry yesterday, she said both US Ambassador James Moriarty and British High Commissioner Stephen Evans gave assurance during meetings with her.

Moriarty told reporters, "I will do my best to pass the Bangladesh government's formal request to my government."

Asked about the modality of the assistance from FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation), he said it is too early to say which agency will come and assist in the investigation as the US has various agencies for investigation.

The US ambassador expressed hope that the democratic forces in Bangladesh would stay united at the time of this tragedy.

The foreign minister had a similar meeting with UK High Commissioner Stephen Evans in parliament Sunday night and sought assistance of the Scotland Yard.

On Sunday, US Assistant

7 judicial

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Thirty-eight political parties including Awami League, BNP, Jatiya Party and Jamaat-e-Islami got registered submitting provisional constitutions with the promise to ratify the changes in their constitutions in six months since the first sitting of the new parliament.

According to the registration laws for political parties, the parties will have to ratify their constitutions by July 25 as the ninth parliament began its journey on January 25.

"We shall ask the political parties to follow the registration laws. We shall send them letters in this regard by this week," a senior official of the EC Secretariat told The Daily Star.

Prior to the ninth parliamentary elections, the immediate past caretaker government introduced the mandatory registration system for the political parties for contesting the polls.

Political parties needed to bring changes in their constitutions to meet a set of criteria for getting registered with the EC. But it was not possible for them to amend their constitutions because of shortage of time and enforcement of the state of emergency.

In such a situation, the registration laws were amended again with a provision for allowing parties to get registered by submitting provisional constitutions with the necessary changes.

Hundreds of BDR

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quarters till 6:30 pm yesterday while the number was 414 on Sunday, according to the official figure.

The process of reporting back to the headquarters will continue until completion of the formalities for waiting BDR men, an army officer said.

The BDR men were allowed to enter into the boundary of the Rifles Square for primary interrogation and later were taken to another place for final quizzing, he said.

After completion of such interrogation, most of the BDR men were given 15 days leave, the official said.

Apart from the headquarters, 11 BDR personnel reported back in Jessore while 44 in Jaypurhat and Naogaon, 34 in Rajshahi, nine in Sylhet and two in Kishoreganj yesterday.

The gathering of the BDR men at Pikhana headquarters started on Saturday morning following an order of the home ministry that asked those BDR members who did not take leave but remained absent at their stations, to report back within 24 hours.

"The government started 'Operation Rebel Hunt' from yesterday but we could not get any chance for reporting back. We do not know what is there in our fate," said Ibrahim, an anxiety-ridden employee of BDR, who came here at 6:00 am yesterday but could not get call for report till 6:00 pm.

Over 1000 fourth-class BDR employees returned to the headquarters for report-

Secretary of State for South and Central Asia Richard Boucher telephoned Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and offered US assistance in the probe.

Hasina on Sunday told the parliament that apart from help from the two powerful investigation agencies of the US and the UK, the government will also seek assistance from the United Nations in investigating the BDR headquarters incident.

The US ambassador said the decisions made by the prime minister to control the BDR mutiny was correct and timely, says a press release of the foreign ministry.

He said because of the prime minister's well-thought decisions, possible loss of more lives was avoided and safe rescuing of stranded officers, women and children was done.

Probe graft

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Speaker Abdul Hamid, who was in the chair, said an inquiry into the alleged corruption and irregularities should be held to ensure that none involved in corruption could escape action.

"Discussions are held here to prevent corruption in the ministries. If the speaker himself involves in corruption, then the discussions on alleged corruption in the ministries will turn into a farce," Hamid said adding, "We will have to look into the allegation."

He urged all lawmakers to look into each alleged irregularity in the parliament secretariat, and said many reports about alleged corruption of the immediate past speaker were published in different dailies.

The unscheduled debate began when Awami League lawmaker Dharendra Nath Shambhu took the floor on a point of order and said the legislators were provided with very low quality headphones for use in the House. He alleged that corruption took place in purchasing the headphones.

Chief Whip Abdus Shahid, Opposition Chief Whip Zainul Abidin Farooque and BNP lawmaker Abul Khair Bhuiyan joined the debate.

Shahid and Suranjit demanded a parliamentary body to probe alleged corruption in the parliament secretariat in procurements, appointments and expenditures in the last seven years. Rahmat Ali supported the demand.

The treasury bench lawmakers welcomed the demand by thumping desks.

The opposition chief whip said the allegation against the former speaker was not made as per rules since he was not in the House.

The speaker however said it is true that none should talk about somebody who is not present here.

But, he said, it is not right that one should not discuss alleged corruption by an absentee. If discussion on corruption is not held here, it will continue unchecked, he added.

Fire at Habiganj forest; 30,000 trees destroyed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

A devastating fire gutted about 30,000 trees of Telmachhara forest range in Habiganj yesterday afternoon.

However, the wildlife and valuable trees at the nearby Satchhari Jatiya Udyan remained unharmed. The animals escaped deep into the forest due to tremendous heat, informed official sources.

Fire service sources suspect that the fire originated around 2:00pm yesterday from a burning cigarette. It soon spread to the Chhan plantation of the Telmachhara forest range destroying different plant species of the remote area.

On information, fire fighters from Habiganj district town and Chunarughat upazila headquarters rushed to the area. With locals assisting, the fire fighters brought the spreading fire under control around 4:00pm.

Range officer Halimuzzaman said, the fire was brought under control in the afternoon but the loss could not be ascertained immediately. Around 30,000 trees of different species were burnt to ashes in the fire, he said.

AL, BNP pick candidates for Bogra by-polls

Sircar gets ticket for Bogra-6

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

Two main political parties-Awami League (AL) and BNP have finalised their candidates for Bogra-6 and Bogra-7 constituencies, which were vacated by BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, in the parliamentary by-election to be held on April 2.

Party insiders said former speaker Jamiruddin Sircar and BNP chairperson's personal secretary Mahubul Amin Dew got party nomination for Bogra-6 and Bogra-7 respectively while AL picked Momotaj Uddin Ahmed and Mostafa Alam Nannu as its candidates for these seats.

Khaleda won in three seats in December 29 parliamentary polls and kept Feni-1 constituency as her seat before taking oath as parliament member.

Army probe

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culpits and if required a bill will be passed in parliament in this regard. Legal punitive measures will be taken against the perpetrators, he said.

Asked whether the prime minister's visit and address to army officers will dim the pent-up anger in the army, Sina said, "Of course, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was compassionate to our pain and grief. She gave us consolation and courage. She assured us of taking quick action in all matters. We officers are grateful to her."

Replying to a query whether intelligence failed to collect information on the mutiny beforehand, he said the BDR has a very small intelligence unit with only one or two officers and the rest are soldiers stationed in border areas.

He also said other intelligence agencies including Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) are always busy with state security.

It will be clear after investigation whether the intelligence actually failed.

Replying to a question, he said the mutiny suggests that there is a need for remodeling the intelligence agencies, including the DGFI, so that they are more up-to-date and effective.

Lt Gen Sina also said the government has decided, in principal, to change the name Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and restructure the paramilitary force. "Names for the force are under consideration."

"We are sure that seven of our officers who were in the BDR headquarters during the mutiny are yet to be traced," said Lt Gen Sina.

However, sources in the army late last night said the figure of missing officers actually stands at six, not seven.

Lt Gen Sina said they have so far retrieved 56 bodies. Three bodies await DNA tests for identification. Forty officers survived the mutiny.

6, not 72, army

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Morgue sources said there are now seven unidentified bodies, two of those being civilians', in Dhaka Medical College and Mitford morgues.

The army officers whose whereabouts still remain unanswered include Colonel Gulzaruddin Ahmed, widely praised for his role in anti-militant campaign.

The others are Lieutenant Colonel Elahi Manzoor Chowdhury, Major Ahmed Azizul Hakim, Major Kazi Ashraf Hossain, Major Abu Syed Dastagir and Captain Tanvir Haider Noor, said sources.

Civilian fatalities in the butchery that ended Thursday evening stand at five and the number of BDR personnel killed in the revolt is eight.

Rescuers yesterday drew a blank in their search for the missing ones in and around Pikhana. They also did not find any new place that might have corpses buried or dumped.

"One possibility is that a few officers might have been taken hostage by the mutineers fleeing the scene. Besides, there's a chance that bodies dumped in the sewers have drifted far along the Buriganga," said a source.

Meanwhile, new Director General of Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) Brigadier General Md Mainul Islam told The Daily Star yesterday, "BDR is now carrying out duties at all border outposts. We have restored communications between the headquarters and the battalions."

At an assembly of army men at Senakunja in Dhaka cantonment Sunday, many officers requested Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to disband the paramilitary force and reconstitute it under a new name like Bangladesh Border Guards. The PM agreed to the idea in principle.

Sources said the government yesterday began the process of reorganising the

border troops. Operational responsibilities of the paramilitaries would soon be re-delineated.

"The prime minister herself will announce the new name for the border force as well as some other changes," said a source.

In the wake of the mutiny, a good number of army officers in charge of BDR battalions had left their outposts on security concerns.

Lately, some of them have joined work while some, who still do not feel comfortable with the situation, are staying in contact with the headquarters from outside.

The rescuers have recovered a large number of grenades, pistols and ammunition from inside the BDR compound. They will continue combing the area for weapons.

A source said, "It's not possible to determine the volume of arms and ammunition used on Wednesday and Thursday till we finish collecting those outside the armoury."

"All records on the Pikhana armoury have been damaged. The persons who could give concrete information about the arms and ammunition are not available or missing."

Some rescuers suspect that some mutineers might have taken small arms and grenades along with them. Boxes of brand new arms that were yet to be assigned to any officers or troops were found open in the armoury and many of them are missing.

The vital documents being searched for include the laptop of Shakil Ahmed.

Meanwhile, the "Operation Rebel Hunt" to be led by police with assistance from the army was not launched yesterday as announced. The authorities have asked the army personnel to mobilise at circuit houses and DC offices across the country.

Probe body recast

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Moipul Hossain is also a member of the reconstituted 11-member body. The previous committee had six members.

According to a home ministry announcement, the Armed Forces Division will now have three officers, one each from the army, the navy and the air force, in the probe body. Judge advocate general of Dhaka Cantonment is also a member of the committee.

Additional secretary to the home ministry, who was in the Sahara-led six-member body, will act as the member secretary of the reconstituted committee.

Law Secretary Habibul Awal, a senior official of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), a cabinet division official and a senior police officer will also be members of the body.

The committee will also enjoy the authority to co-opt any officer into a member of the body, said the home ministry announcement.

The government Sunday decided to reconstitute the probe body.

"The probe committee will look into the background of the bloody mutiny, find out the reasons behind it and submit recommendations in its report," said the home ministry announcement, adding that the joint secretary (political) of the home ministry will provide secretarial assistance to the probe body.

"The reconstituted committee will submit a full report on the carnage at Pikhana including detailed figures on casualties, the BDR personnel present during the mutiny, the absconding jawans and missing firearms," a senior home ministry official told The Daily Star yesterday.

The officials said a complete enquiry report is very important for the case filed against over 1,000 BDR personnel. "The report will also include civilian casualty figures," added the officer.

The home ministry also issued a press release yesterday requesting all with information on absconding BDR jawans to immediately contact the nearest police station of the matter.

CID STARTS PROBE
The CID officials assigned to investigate the bloody mutiny collected evidence from the places of occurrence at the BDR headquarters at Pikhana yesterday, CID sources said.

They visited the Darbar Hall, the residences of slain

BDR director general Maj Gen Shakil Ahmed, and Col Mujibul Huq, the mass graves and several other places at the BDR headquarters.

Around 60 CID officials led by senior Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) Abdul Kahar Akond started the investigation at around 10:00am.

The investigators including eight ASPs, 30 inspectors and 20 sub inspectors also collected snaps and video footages of the bloody mutiny, CID sources said.

"Since the BDR headquarters stretches over a vast area, it took several hours to examine the places of occurrence and collect pieces of evidence," said one of the investigators wishing anonymity.

Chief Investigation Officer ASP Kahar Akond told The Daily Star, "We have just started our work and we are at the primary stage of the investigation."

Cabinet adopts

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situation arising from the carnage at BDR headquarters, a late night UNB report says quoting diplomatic sources.

The cabinet meeting, chaired by the PM, observed that people responsible for the mutiny and bloodshed at the BDR headquarters must be tracked down and brought to justice. The meeting observed that an irreparable damage has been incurred.

It also prayed for the salvation of the departed souls.

The meeting decided to help families of the civilians killed during the BDR mutiny.

The PM at the meeting asked Health Minister AFM Ruhul Haque to take necessary steps to help the people, including army officers, who were wounded during the mutiny.

The cabinet also approved six proposed acts in the meeting, said Prime Minister's Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad at a press briefing after the meeting.

The proposed laws are Real Estate Development and Management Act, 2009, Public Procurement (amendment) Act, 2009, Public Servants (marriage with foreign national) (amendment) Act, 2009, Public Servants (dismissal and conviction) (amendment) Act, 2009, Fertiliser Management (amendment) Act, 2009, Pesticide (amendment) Act, 2009.

DEFAMATION CASE Warrant issued to arrest Abu Karim

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday issued an arrest warrant against recently force-retired information secretary ATM Fazul Karim alias Abu Karim in a defamation case filed for writing a verse criticising Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his family members.

After scrutinising the documents submitted by the complainant of the case, Metropolitan Magistrate Kanika Bishwas took the charges against the accused into cognisance and passed the arrest warrant and fixed May 14 for next hearing of the case.

On February 22, Hazrat Moulana Mohammad Elias Hossain Bin Helali, president of Bangladesh Awami Olama League Central Committee, filed the case against Abu Karim with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka for committing the offence.

After the hearing, the same magistrate recorded statement of the complainant and fixed yesterday for order on the issue subject to submission of a copy of the book.

In his complaint, Helali mentioned that the accused had written a verse titled

'Baganey Phutey Achhey Anek Golap' in February 2006 and the Suchipatra Prokashana published the book in Ekushey Book Fair in 2008.

The Daily Amader Samoy published an excerpt from the book on February 20 this year and the complainant learnt it from the daily. The daily quoted different important points from the verse that defamed, undermined and criticised Bangabandhu and his family members.

In the book, the writer called Bangabandhu Latifur Rahman and also called him Alubokhra, Sheikh Kamal Kamalokoli, Sheikh Jamal Jantoli and Sheikh Russel Roskoli, the complainant said.

Such defamatory writings have damaged and undermined the reputation of Bangabandhu's living family members-- Sheikh Hasina, Sheikh Rehana-- and his party Bangladesh Awami League (AL) and its front organisations.

It also damaged the image of all leaders and activists of Bangladesh Awami Olama League.

The accused defamed the independence achieved through the sacrifices of two lakh mothers and sisters and 30 lakh martyrs. Such heinous offences and activities are subversive to the state as well as to the disciplines, the complainant added.

TWO MORE CASES

The same court fixed March 16 for order on two sedition cases filed against the same accused for writing a satirical verse on Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his family members and publishing malicious remarks subversive to the state.

Advocate Omar Faruque filed the case with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka accusing Abu Karim and Sayeed Bari, proprietor of the Suchipatra Prokashana while AL leader CS Alam filed another case with the same court accusing only Abu Karim.

Prof Yunus

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help in the process," the statement read.

"I strongly feel that as a nation we must go through a thorough cleansing process to wash out the last element of violence in us--in our thinking, in our words and in our deeds," he said in the statement.

The statement accentuated that above all, people must stand united to overcome the crisis and to defeat evil forces, which seek to divide and destroy the nation.

In the statement Prof Yunus expressed tremendous shock and surprise over the vicious BDR outburst on February 25.

"I cannot accept that this kind of thing can happen in our own country and can be carried out by our own people. Are they part of us? Or they are some freaks among us?" the statement read.

"I find no words to express my anguish at the cruel murder of so many of the nation's valiant sons and daughters who have been leading our armed forces and serving the nation and the common people so dedicatedly. I join with the nation in offering my condolences to their near ones at this moment of their unbearable loss. But the loss is not theirs alone," the statement said.

Renegade soldiers kill Guinea-Bissau president

Army chief killed by bomb blast hours earlier

AP, Bissau, Guinea-Bissau

Renegade soldiers assassinated the president of Guinea-Bissau in his palace yesterday, hours after a bomb blast killed his rival, but the military said that no coup was in progress in the fragile West African nation.

The military statement broadcast on state radio attributed President Joao Bernardo Vieira's death to an "isolated" group of unidentified soldiers whom the military said it was now hunting down.

Luis Sanca, security adviser to Prime Minister Carlos Gomes Jr., confirmed the president had died but gave no details.

The military said the armed forces would respect the constitutional order, which calls for parliament chief Raimundo Pereira to succeed the president in the event of his death.

It also dismissed claims that the armed forces headquarters was implicated in Vieira's killing as a retaliation for the assassination late Sunday of armed forces chief of staff Gen. Batiste Tagme na Waie at his headquarters in Bissau.

The two men were considered staunch political rivals and both had survived assassination attempts in recent months.

The former Portuguese

Posthumous

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Sources said all formalities for his promotion had been completed before Col Zakir was brutally killed in the BDR mutiny of February 25-26.

President Zillur Rahman, relatives of the slain officers, members of the cabinet, chiefs of the three forces of the country, many MPs, political leaders, army officers and a large number of civilians attended the state funeral.

Ctg arms case

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and Din Mohammad--under section 164 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) around 2:00pm.

It took around two-and-a-half-hours to record the 10-page statement of Hafizur Rahman and two-page statement of Din Mohammad.

Sources said the accused provided new and important information regarding the haul of 10 truck-loads of weapons at Chittagong Urea Fertiliser Ltd jetty on April 2, 2004.

However, the contents of their professional statements could not be known.

Tight security was maintained at the court while their statements were being recorded.

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) had taken the two on remand in two phases.

Some seizures

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the Bangladesh Army and BDR nor by any other government agencies.

Lt Ashiquzzaman of Bangladesh Navy told The Daily Star navy personnel recovered an LMG, five SMGs, two rifles, one pistol, 30 loaded magazines, and 2,000 bullets.

Other recovered explosives, arms and ammunition include 24 grenades, 16 walky-talkies, several thousand bullets of various guns, huge number of uniforms and shoes of the soldiers and their credit cards.

Earlier, about 10,000 bullets and several firearms and grenades were recovered from the BDR Headquarters. Some other arms and explosives were also recovered from neighbouring areas.

Sources say these arms, ammunition and explosives were left behind by the soldiers.

After recovering the arms and equipment, army officials exhibited those to the media at the hall room of Rifle Paribar Kalyan Samity (Ripoks) and the arsenal of BDR.

They also let journalists observe all the places and recovered arms and ammunition and also answered their queries.

Maj Awal said, "The two binoculars recovered in a search really confused us as these are used by neither the army, BDR and police nor any other government agencies in the country."

He suspects other parties imported these binoculars from outside.

"The SMGs recovered are used by BDR but the belts are not, which is another mystery," said Maj Awal.

He also said they recovered some walky-talkies which are used by RSU.

"We suspect some field-level RSU members might have

colony has suffered multiple coups and attempted coups since 1980, when Vieira himself first took power in one. The United Nations says Guinea-Bissau, an impoverished nation on the Atlantic coast of Africa, has become a key transit point for cocaine smuggled from Latin America to Europe.

Bissau was remarkably calm on Monday despite the president's death, and traffic flowed normally in some parts of town.

Just hours after Waie's death late Sunday, volleys of automatic gunfire were heard for at least two hours before dawn in Bissau and residents said soldiers had converged on Vieira's palace.

The Portuguese news agency LUSA reported that troops attacked with rockets and rifles. The president's press chief, Barnabe Gomes, escaped from the house after being struck by a bullet in his right shoulder, LUSA said.

Afghan civilians could bear brunt of increased war

AP, Kabul

Afghan civilians will bear the brunt of an escalation in the Afghan war this year as thousands more US troops deploy unless more is done by Nato forces and Taliban militants to protect them, a top Red Cross official said yesterday.

Civilian casualties in Afghanistan are "significantly higher" today than a year ago, and an intensification of the conflict this year could mean that consequences for many more Afghans will be "dire in the extreme," said Pierre Krahenbuhl, the director of operations for the International Committee of the Red Cross.

"The daily lives of people living in areas where the fighting is taking place are being disrupted, be it because of airstrikes, night raids, suicide attacks, the use of IEDs, or because of intimidation and the population being pressurized or co-opted by the different parties to this conflict," he said.

The UN last month said 2,118 civilians died in the Afghan conflict in 2008, a 40 percent jump over 2007. The world body said insurgent attacks caused 55 percent of those deaths, while US, Nato or government forces caused 39 percent of the deaths. The remaining 6 percent were caused in crossfire.

been involved in the carnage and they did not make aware their senior officials," Maj Awal said. "If they informed the blueprint of the conspirators, the incident could not have been so brutal."

Sources say a huge number of arms were found under the beds and pillows of the sepoy's. Besides, most of the doors to the arsenal and the office of RSU and all the boxes of the firearms were found broken.