

Lanka denies UN charges of firing on civilians

US voices concern over 'safe zone' deaths

AFP, Colombo

War Sri Lanka Saturday denied UN charges that troops had fired into a safe zone for civilians and said allegations that 2,800 non-combatants had been killed in recent weeks were "unsubstantiated".

Human Rights Minister Mahinda Samarasinghe accused United Nations human rights chief Navi Pillay of relying on "pro-rebel" information in making her allegations on Friday in respect of the decades-long separatist conflict.

"It's very, very unprofessional of her (Pillay's) office to rely on unsubstantiated figures," Samarasinghe told reporters in Colombo. "The figures are similar to those on Tiger proxy websites."

The army is not shelling into the safe zone for civilians."

Colombo has set up at least two so-called safe zones in the embattled north of the island in which civilians can take refuge. Tamil Tiger rebels say they do not fire on innocent people at all, whether in safe zones or not.

Troops have trapped the Tamil rebels in a narrow strip of coastal land in the north-eastern district of Mullaitivu, where they hope to crush the guerrillas by next month.

The international community has begun applying pressure on Colombo amid fears for innocent people caught up in the fighting for an independent homeland for Tamils.

On Friday, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapakse, urging the military to avoid firing at civilians in the safety zone and asking that aid agencies get full access to people in need.

Secretary Hillary Clinton expressed the United States' deep concern over the deteriorating conditions and increasing loss of life occurring in the designated safe zone," US state department spokesman Gordon Duguid said.

Hillary Clinton told Colombo that Sri Lankan troops "should not fire into civilian areas of the conflict zone" and urged him to allow

humanitarian groups full access to people in need, said a State Department spokesman.

The secretary called Rajapaksa to "express the United States' deep concern over the deteriorating conditions and increasing loss of life" in the government-designated zone in the country's north, he said in a statement.

Last month the government in Colombo asked men, women and children to move to a stretch of coastline as troops advanced on rebel positions in the north in a bid to crush all remaining pockets of resistance by Tamil Tiger rebels.

Sri Lankan Foreign Secretary Palitha Kohona called Hillary Clinton's remarks "exaggerated".

"The state is not plotting to kill civilians," said foreign ministry consultant Rohan Perera. "If they are looking at war crimes, they must point the finger the other way (at the Tigers)."

Sri Lanka has accused the Tigers of holding 70,000 civilians, including local UN aid workers, hostage in the tiny territory still under their control as a human shield -- a charge the rebels deny.

The UN, however, says 150,000-180,000 civilians are trapped by the fighting and are at risk as they remain cornered in the shrinking rebel territory.

"Certain actions being undertaken by the Sri Lankan military and by the LTTE (Tamil Tiger rebels) may constitute violations of international human rights and humanitarian law," Pillay had said.

"We need to know more... but we know enough to be sure, the situation is absolutely desperate. The world today is ever sensitive about such acts that could amount to war crimes," she added.

The current level of civilian casualties is truly shocking, and there are legitimate fears the loss of life may reach catastrophic levels," Pillay warned.

The government bars most journalists and aid workers from the north of the island, meaning the claims cannot be confirmed.

Major reshuffle

of Khulna Range DIG office, APBn was made the DIG of Railway Range, Railway Range DIG Sheikh Hemayet Hossain Miah the DIG of Khulna Range, DIG Mohammad Moklesur Rahman of the PHQ the DIG of Dhaka Range, DIG Mohammad Mosharraf Hossain Bhuiyan the DIG of Sylhet Range and Sylhet Range DIG Mohammad Abdul 'Kashem' the additional commissioner of DMP while

DIG Mohammad Amir Uddin of Dhaka Range and DMP additional commissioner Abdus Salam were transferred to the PHQ.

Khulna Range additional DIG Mohamad Ammar Asaduzzaman Miah was made the DIG of Chittagong Range, Khulna Metropolitan Police (KMP) additional commissioner Mohammad Abdur Rahim the additional commissioner of Barisal Metropolitan Police (BMP) and deputy commissioner of DMP Mirza Abdullahe Bakri the commander of Range Reserve Force (RRF), Rajshahi.

DC Saleh Mohammad Tanvir of DMP was made the SP of Rangpur, SP Mohammad Monirul Islam of Nilphamari the DC of DMP DC Golam Kibria of KMP the SP of Sunamganj, SP Mosleh Uddin Ahmed of Kushtia the DC of DMP SP Chowdhury Manjul Kabir of Natore the DC of DMP and SP Towfiq Mahbub Chowdhury of Barisal the DC of DMP.

SP Ashrafur Rahman of Patuakhali was made the commander of RRF in Chittagong, SP Biswas Afzal Hossain of Munshiganj the SP of Narayanganj, SP M Khurshid Hossain of the PHQ the SP of Madaripur, Special SP Golam Rasul of SB the SP of Nilphamari, SP Ansaruddin Khan Pathan of Dhaka the commandant of Police Staff Training School (PSTS) at Rangamati and SP Iqbal Bahar of CID the special acting officer

Bashundhara

FROM PAGE 1

She enquired about the progress in the investigation and the damage done by the inferno.

PM's adviser Maj Gen (retd) Tarique Ahmed Siddiqui was also present.

Meanwhile, the relatives of the seven victims burnt to death at the complex received the bodies without any autopsy.

The dead are Bashundhara City Complex firemen Bakri Billah, 40, Anisur Rahman Babu, 22, and Harun ur Rashid, 48, electrician Ibrahim Mondal, 37, supervisor Mohammad Ali, 55, decorator Renu Sarkar, 27, and plumber Mohammad Hamidul, 25.

Of them, Bakri slipped and fell while trying to climb down a rope. The rest were burnt to death getting trapped on the 17th floor.

Home Minister Sahara Khatun and Finance Minister AMA Muhith yesterday visited the injured at Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Both the ministers admitted that the Fire Brigade lacks necessary equipment.

The home minister said Fire Brigade will be modernised soon with state of the art equipment and fire fighters will be given training to tackle such fire incidents efficiently in future.

The finance minister said the three-member enquiry committee will examine all aspects of the fire incident.

Fire Brigade Director (Training) Maj Matiur Rahman, also a member of the probe body, told The Daily Star, "The fire gutted five floors -- from 15 to 19 -- and damaged the 14th floor partially."

He said they talked to two Bashundhara Complex architects about the mall's fire-fighting system.

Iqbal Khan Chowdhury, joint secretary (Police) of home ministry and also head of the committee, said, "We are collecting information from the witnesses to find out the cause of the fire."

Diarrhoea

FROM PAGE 16

usually we don't have more than 250. But during this season, as the situation is deteriorating every day and we had to set up extended temporary tents," said Prof Shahadat Hossain, scientist and head of longer stay unit of ICDDR,B.

While talking to The Daily Star he also said some 618 patients had been admitted to the hospital till yesterday evening and the number might exceed 800 by midnight. On Friday there were 652 patients.

The situation is not likely to get any better soon until the water supply in Dhaka improves. The increasing number of diarrhoea patients might linger during April and May as the temperature rises, said the scientists of ICDDR,B.

The experts suggest that everybody should drink boiled water and avoid unhygienic food.

Workers

FROM PAGE 1

Minister Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, however, earlier said Malaysia would allow them all entry and employment.

The Malaysian authorities are taking such measures after cancellation of over 55,000 work visas to Bangladeshis on March 10. The country also had earlier directed the airliners not to carry Bangladeshi workers.

The minister said it might happen because Malaysia has given blanket orders to their immigration to restrict the entry of Bangladeshi workers.

"But those going to that country with work permit should be allowed entry," he said, adding he will write special letters to the Malaysian authorities if he is informed by those now on vacation with valid work permit.

"There might be 5,000 to 7,000 workers on vacation. They must inform their position to me to write to the Malaysian authorities," he added.

Meanwhile, as many as 25 Bangladeshi workers returned home from Malaysia, 114 from Singapore and 34 others were deported from the United Arab Emirates in last two days, according to an official at Zia International Airport.

The frustrated workers say they went abroad following all legal procedures and paying Tk 2-4 lakh.

"I went to Malaysia one and a half years ago and was provided with job only for six months. My agent neither gave me a job nor any salary. Police also kept me in jail for three months for not renewal of work permit," said Amanat Ali, a worker from Comilla.

He said hundreds of workers in Malaysia are waiting for similar fate.

Mofizul Islam, security officer of the building said

Heads high

FROM PAGE 16

Marjuk Sultan from Sunshine Grammar School and College got 5 As in one sitting in January 2008 while Ahsan Mosharraf Barkatullah from Scholastica obtained 6 As in one academic year -- one A in January 2008 and 5 As in May-June 2008.

Eight O-level students scored the highest marks worldwide in pure mathematics, accounting, Bangla, biology, chemistry, economics, English language, human biology, Bangladeshi studies, mathematics, computing, English literature and Physics under the Edexcel board.

Meanwhile, 12 A-level students under the same board obtained the highest marks worldwide in accounting, mathematics, pure mathematics, chemistry, further mathematics and physics.

Three O-level students under Cambridge International Examinations scored the highest marks worldwide in Bangla, computer studies and human and social biology.

The Daily Star at its 10th annual award presentation ceremony also handed out special honours to 41 O and A level students for achieving the highest marks in the country.

Among them, 13 students under Edexcel International and 11 under Cambridge International secured the highest marks in the country at O-level examinations in different subjects.

Twelve students under Edexcel International and five students under Cambridge International achieved highest marks in the country in different A-level subjects.

WHAT THE ACHIEVERS SAY

Rumana Fouzia Choudhury of Sunbeams School, who obtained 11 As in O-level exams in a single sitting in the May-June 2008, considers private tuitions unnecessary for students.

Asked if he would like to go abroad for higher studies, Azam said, "Yes, I would, but will surely return to use my expertise."

He proposed that all students get united and do some community service in the country.

Nandita Khan Nitol, who secured the highest marks worldwide in Bengali, said a simple desire to learn Bengali and learn about the cultural heritage of the country is all that it takes to get going.

Rajshahi colleges

FROM PAGE 1

RU unit ICS organising secretary Farhad Alam yesterday filed a case against over 33 BCL men with Motihari police station in connection with the killing of its general secretary Sharifuzzaman Nomani.

BCL RU unit president Ibrahim Hossain Moon, cultural secretary Joy and legal affairs secretary Roni, among others, were made accused in the case.

The RU authorities formed a probe committee at its syndicate meeting yesterday to investigate the Friday's violence.

The provost council of RU also met RU Vice-chancellor Prof Abdus Sobhan at his office and discussed the campus situation.

Later, an hour-long meeting was held at RU VC Lounge with VC Abdus Sobhan in the chair to discuss law and order on the campus.

DC Shefau Karim, Police Commissioner Mahbub Mohsin, Additional Police Commissioner Hafizur Rahman, Deputy Police Commissioner Sazzadur Rahman, Assistant Police Commissioner Zahangir Hossain and Motihari thana DC Rafiqul Islam were also present in the meeting.

When contacted RU Proctor Prof Zakaria told The Daily Star that its registrar will file a case with the police station in connection with Friday's violence.

Risalat Khan, who wants to pursue environmental studies, thinks the new generation have the potential to build a prosperous nation.

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