

MUMBAI ATTACK DOSSIERS Pakistan not happy with India's replies

PTI, Islamabad

Pakistani authorities are not satisfied with the India's response to Islamabad's 30 questions seeking more inputs on Mumbai terror attacks as it does not meet their requirements, a media report said yesterday.

"We have gone through the 400-page document provided by India but it does not meet our requirements," a senior official in the Interior Ministry, who did not want to be named, told the Dawn newspaper.

The authorities decided that the information would be included in the trial of four suspects arrested by Pakistani security agencies, including Lashker-e-Taiba operations commander Zakiur Rehman Lakhvi.

The Interior Ministry yesterday handed over the 400-page Indian responses to the Federal Investigation Agency, which is probing the Mumbai attacks.

India has blamed Pakistan-based elements, including several top operatives of the LeT, of masterminding and coordinating the attacks that killed 183 people in November last year.

The official also said that India had not replied to two additional questions one that had sought the eyewitness account of a policeman who was the sole survivor of a terrorist attack on a vehicle that killed Anti-Terrorist Squad chief Hemant Karkare and another query about alleged links between a diamond merchant of Gujarat and some Hindus in Pakistan. PTI



PHOTO: AFP

Labourers drill a concrete at a construction site in downtown Kuala Lumpur yesterday. Malaysia slashed its work permit approvals for foreign workers by almost 70 percent so far this year, faced with the twin threat of layoffs and recession. Malaysia is one of Asia's largest importers of labour and has an estimated 2.2 million foreign workers, who are the mainstay of the plantation and manufacturing sectors.

Emergency rule

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A parliamentary body might be formed to investigate allegations of gagging the independence of newspapers and satellite TV channels if all lawmakers reach a consensus on this, Hasina said in reply to a supplementary question from Opposition Chief Whip Zainul Abdin Faroque.

"Formation of the parliamentary probe body, however, depends on the speaker," she added.

Referring to the premier's reply, Menon said neither the information ministry nor the home ministry imposed any restriction during the state of emergency, but the private satellite TV channels were dictated about who would be invited to their talk shows. "Then who imposed the restrictions?" he said.

In response, the PM said anybody can go to the court to seek remedy against any anomaly during the state of emergency.

Referring to the eviction drives during the time of the caretaker government, Awami

League lawmaker Dhirendranath Shamvu said the wholesale eviction damaged wealth worth at least Tk 50,000 crore.

He asked if the government will take measures to rehabilitate those evicted people.

In response, Hasina echoed Shamvu, saying the drive could bring positive results, but it left many people unemployed. She urged the lawmakers to take initiatives for employment of these people in their constituencies. She assured the lawmakers of government assistance in this regard.

Replying to a query of AL lawmaker ABM Abul Kashem, the PM said her government is working to ensure separation of the judiciary from the executive according to the constitution.

Referring to the dissatisfaction at Bangladesh Judicial Service Association over appointment of the law secretary outside of the judicial cadres, Jatiya Party lawmaker Mujibul Haque Chhunu requested the PM to resolve it.

In response, Hasina said the ongoing conflict between the

judicial and admin cadres is unwarranted and the law minister is working to resolve it.

In response to a query of AL lawmaker Shafique Rahman Chowdhury, she said her government would take steps to amend the electoral roll act to ensure inclusion of Bangladeshi citizens living abroad in the voter list.

In reply to a query of AL lawmaker Shamsul Haque Chowdhury, Hasina detailed the government's short- and long-term measures to increase gas production to meet the growing demand.

She said at present 1,850 million cubic feet (mcf) gas is being produced daily at 78 wells of 16 gas fields. Additional 100mcf gas will be produced daily by this December, another 155mcf to be added daily in the national gas grid by 2010, 70mcf by 2011, 400mcf by 2012, 100mcf by 2013, and 80mcf by 2014, she added.

Besides, 300-500mcf gas will be produced daily during January 2009-2017 subject to exploration of offshore gas field, Hasina said.

NEWS ANALYSIS

At last, one step forward for Pakistan

THE DAWN, Islamabad

The denouement was suitably dramatic, capped by a prime ministerial address to the nation shortly before the crack of dawn on Monday. The timing was unprecedented, but any further delay would have cost the nation dearly.

Keeping an eye on the events that led up to Yousuf Raza Gilani's conciliatory speech was an experience comparable to watching a train wreck in slow motion. You kept hoping someone would have the good sense to pull the chain in time. And someone did, albeit not without a great deal of assistance. The crucial tug seems to have been delivered by a foreign hand. In the circumstances, even those of us wary of external interference in domestic affairs ought to be grateful.

There isn't much cause for pride in the fact that Hillary Clinton, David Miliband and their representatives in Islamabad had to bang heads together in order to curtail a dangerous demonstration of juvenile delinquency. However, the extra-parliamentary opposition mobilised on the streets of Karachi and Lahore played a decisive role in concentrating minds. On its own, Clinton's clout might not have sufficed.

No one could have missed the significance of the fact that it was

Gilani rather than Asif Zardari who made the crucial announcement. The prime minister was able to convey the impression that he was comfortable with the decision to restore Iftekhar Chaudhry and all other judges deposed by Pakistan's most recent military dictator. It is unlikely that the president, who has made no secret of his personal antipathy towards Chaudhry, could have endured the ordeal with a straight face.

Although Gilani was hand-picked by Zardari, and was considered relatively powerless long before the latter owned up to his presidential ambitions, there have lately been reports of increasingly tense relations between the two of them. Among many other things, it remains to be seen whether this week's events will significantly shift the balance of power.

Following his inauguration last year, Zardari made a big deal of his avowed intention to clip his own wings by curbing presidential powers. He has not so far been witnessed wielding a pair of shears which is of a piece with his by now well-established reputation for making promises he has no intention of keeping. However, even before Monday's climbdown, there was growing evidence of his authority being undermined.

Raza Rabbani, a senior member of the Pakistan People's Party, resigned

from his cabinet post after being overlooked for the coveted post of Senate chairman. Sherry Rehman's exit last week was even more significant: she quit as information minister after the government, apparently without bothering to consult her, attempted to block the private Geo News television channel, evidently on account of its live coverage of the lawyers' movement.

Let's not forget, meanwhile, that in the wake of the Liberty roundabout tragedy, the governor deemed it opportune to declare that he knew exactly who the perpetrators were and that they would shortly be apprehended, while an investigation would be completed within 24 hours and its report made public. It is hardly reassuring that, a couple of dozen 24-hour periods later, there's not a terrorist in custody and not a report in sight.

In the interim, as a goodwill gesture, it would be wise to appoint a less adversarial governor (Aitzaz Ahsan would be an excellent choice). In fact, Zardari would be doing the nation a considerable favour were he to relegate not only Taseer but also Rehman Malik whose technically advisory post barely disguises the breadth of his influence to posts where their capacity to do harm is severely constrained.

The scenes of jubilation on the streets of Pakistan have offered a wel-

come respite from confrontational demonstrations. But we shouldn't get carried away. The conditions under which Chaudhry and the other judges will be reappointed by executive order remain unclear: the scale of the popular triumph will obviously be diminished if it turns out to be little more than a token gesture. Let us also not forget that the innumerable other, more significant problems plaguing the country from the dire state of the economy to the jihadist menace have not gone away.

A reality check is also advisable for those who, enthused by Nawaz Sharif's success in hitching his wagon to the lawyers' movement, are beginning to perceive him as some sort of saviour. It is all very well for him to decry Zardari's 'democratic dictatorship' and to champion the cause of judicial independence, but his political antecedents and past conduct ought not to be overlooked.

At the moment, there are no palatable alternatives to compromise and political accommodation. It may well be possible eventually to look back on this week's developments as a crucial turning point. But it's too soon to make that judgment. It's undoubtedly a victory, but what good will come from it only time shall tell.

Lankan deaths blamed on poor medical supply

AP, Colombo

A lack of medical supplies has led to the needless deaths of hundreds of hospital patients in parts of northern Sri Lanka ravaged by civil war, the regions' top health officials said.

The international Red Cross said conditions for civilians were "deteriorating by the day," and the UN Children's Fund said thousands of children were at risk because of "a critical lack of food, water and medicines."

In a letter to the Health Ministry, officials from two northern Sri Lankan regions said just 5 percent of the needed drugs and dressings were received in the last quarter of 2008 and the first part of this year.

The letter, seen Tuesday by The Associated Press, was signed by the health officers of Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu. Kilinochchi was the headquarters of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam until it was overrun by government troops in early January.

The last remaining remnants of the rebels are fighting in Mullaitivu to hold on to a shrinking swath of land estimated at 13.5 square miles (35 square kilometers) on the northeast

coast.

The letter said more than 500 patients died since January after arriving at hospitals and that thousands of others may have died outside of hospitals.

"Most of the hospital deaths could have been prevented if basic infrastructure facilities and essential medicines were made available," it said.

On Tuesday, a further 23 patients died out of 108 wounded civilians taken to a makeshift hospital in the northeast, said Kandasamy Tharmakulasingham, a hospital administrative officer.

Human Rights Minister Mahinda Samarasinghe said any letter coming out of the rebel territory is "suspicious and subject to verification." He declined further response until he could consult senior health officials.

The UN says 150,000 to 180,000 civilians, displaced from Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu, are trapped in the war zone. The government says the figure is much lower, and on Tuesday the Sri Lankan president told the U.N. chief Tamil rebels are holding the civilians by force.



PHOTO: AFP

Palestinian women attend a protest organised by the Islamic Jihad calling for the release of Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails in Gaza City yesterday. The armed branch of Hamas blamed Israel for the collapse of prisoner swap talks and warned it could hike its demands in return for freeing a soldier captured almost three years ago.

Pak attack halts traffic on Nato supply line

AP, Islamabad

Two men on a motorcycle threw a bomb at a truck carrying an excavating machine to NATO troops in Afghanistan, halting traffic yesterday along a supply route through Pakistan's southwest, officials said.

No one was injured in the blast near the Pakistani frontier town of Chaman, but the machine was damaged, area police chief Gul Mohammed said.

Meanwhile in the northwest, dozens of assailants opened fire at a university, killing three police officers and a security guard. A top official said the Taliban later detained some of the gunmen.

US and NATO forces in Afghanistan rely heavily on two major supply routes running through Pakistan. The main one goes through the Khyber Pass in the northwest, and trucks that use it have frequently been

attacked.

The smaller route through Chaman has attracted less attention from militants, but has not been exempt from violence.

Wednesday's attack happened as the driver awaited security clearance to cross into Afghanistan, Mohammed said. Police closed the crossing and began searching other vehicles, he said. The route was expected to reopen later Wednesday.

The gun attack occurred in Lower Dir, which borders Pakistan's militant-plagued tribal regions and is near the Swat Valley, where the government recently agreed to impose Islamic law to strike a peace deal with the Taliban.

Local police official Pervez Rahim said the gunmen's identities were not clear, but that they fired upon police who were in a vehicle guarding the school. A guard was also shot and died on the spot, Rah said.

Egypt envoy seeks softer US stand on Hamas

AFP, Cairo

Egypt has sent a senior official to Washington to seek a relaxation of the US conditions for recognition of a Palestinian unity government including Hamas.

Intelligence chief Omar Suleiman, Egypt's pointman for Israeli-Palestinian affairs, was in Washington on Tuesday, an Egyptian source said, asking not to be named, amid faltering Palestinian reconciliation talks in Cairo.

Senior delegations from the Islamist movement Hamas, the Western-backed Fatah faction of Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas and other groups began work on March 10 in committees formed to resolve their differences.

Fatah and Hamas have been bitterly divided since Hamas, which won a majority in a 2006 parliament election, seized the Gaza Strip in a week of deadly fighting in June 2007, thus limiting Abbas's authority to the West Bank.

"Egypt is making efforts with foreign parties,

notably the US administration, to obtain agreement to a compromise formula that would be acceptable for Hamas and the international community," Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine delegate Kayed al-Ghoul told AFP.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Abul Gheit is also currently in Brussels for talks with officials including European Union foreign policy chief Javier Solana.

The Middle East Quartet -- consisting of the US and EU as well as the United Nations and Russia -- has conditioned dealing with Hamas on its recognition of Israel and commitment to past Palestinian-Israeli agreements.

Hamas, and some smaller Palestinian factions, say the Quartet's conditions are unacceptable.

Hamas has said it will not agree to abide by previous commitments either by Fatah-led governments or the Palestine Liberation Organisation, which signed the Oslo accords with Israel in 1993 that led to increased autonomy and the creation of the Palestinian Authority.

Malaysia's next PM faces furore over corruption

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia's incoming leader Najib Razak faced a furore yesterday Wednesday over corruption charges against members of his party, while a former cabinet minister called for the king to block his appointment.

Fifteen members of the ruling UMNO party were Tuesday reprimanded over vote-buying during intense campaigning ahead of internal leadership elections next week.

The most prominent was Mohamad Ali Rustam, who was running to become deputy prime minister but is now

disqualified. Najib, the current deputy, is due to replace Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi this month.

Mohamad Ali said he would appeal against the decision.

Home Minister Syed Hamid Albar said the decision to punish the party members was potentially damaging, and that although UMNO needs to stamp out money politics the timing was unfortunate.

"If action is taken before you reach the final hurdle, then things will collapse. When it collapses, it will create a lot of undercurrents," he said, according to The Star daily.

"And these undercurrents for UMNO in its present state are not healthy," he said, referring to the party's crisis of confidence since disastrous results in general elections a year ago.

Najib has rejected suggestions that the move against Mohamad Ali -- seen as close to Abdullah's outgoing administration -- could trigger a split within the party.

James Chin, a political analyst from Monash University's campus in Kuala Lumpur, said vested interests meant Najib would survive the furore despite shouts of outrage from Abdullah's faction.



PHOTO: AFP

Gabon President Omar Bongo (2nd R), his son Omar Denis (R), his daughter Yaciné Queenie (L) and Congolese President Denis Sassou Nguesso (2nd L) leave Rabat yesterday after viewing the body of Gabon's first lady Edith Bongo before her funeral. Bongo, who died on March 14 at a military hospital in Rabat will be buried on March 19 in her native Republic of Congo after a funeral in Libreville. Bongo, renowned for action against AIDS in Africa and other ailments, died at the age of 45.

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