

Obama, Karzai pledge unity on Taliban

BBC ONLINE

US President Barack Obama and his Afghan counterpart Hamid Karzai have held an hour-long video conference talk in which they vowed to continue working together to combat the Taliban.

Mr Obama also repeated US commitment to working with Afghans on stability and security, the White House said.

June was the deadliest month for US forces in Afghanistan since the conflict began in 2001.

Analysts say mounting casualties have eroded support for the war in the West.

In a statement, the White House said: "Both leaders agreed to continue in our shared efforts to combat violent extremism, protect the Afghan people, improve governance, and deliver basic services, particularly at the local level."

Mr Obama also repeated the US commitment to partnering the Afghan people in trying to ensure that Afghanistan will be stable and secure.



PHOTO: AFP

Indian students dressed as Punjabi dancers attend an Independence Day parade rehearsal at Guru Nanak stadium in Amritsar on Friday. India celebrates August 15 its independence from British rule in 1947.

Aid for 2005 Pak quake spent elsewhere

AFP, London

More than 300 million pounds of aid to help rebuild parts of Pakistan after the 2005 earthquake was diverted to other projects, a British report said yesterday.

The Daily Telegraph newspaper, citing unnamed senior Pakistani officials, said there were fears this diversion of funds would put off foreign donors from giving money to help 20 million people currently affected by heavy floods.

"There's reluctance, even people in this country are not giving generously into this flood fund because they're not too sure the money will be spent honestly," opposition leader Nawaz Sharif told the newspaper.

The Daily Telegraph said more than 300 million pounds (370 million euros, 470 million dollars) of aid for the 2005 earthquake, which killed more than 73,000 people, has yet to be handed over to Pakistan's Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority (ERRA).

It cited one senior ERRA official as saying they were told in March 2009 that 12 billion Pakistan rupees (90 million pounds) was being diverted from their budget to other government projects.

"When we have the money we will pay you," the unnamed official said that ERRA directors had been told. "All the money was given by Western governments, but they said 'we have so many other problems'."

In June this year, ERRA staff were again told their budget was being cut, from 43 billion rupees for 2010-2011 to just 10 billion, the newspaper said.

The paper also said it had visited the town of Balakot, where 5,000 people were killed in the earthquake. Despite a promise to rebuild it on a new site, no new roads had been completed nor had building construction begun.

Pakistan's finance secretary, Salman Siddiq, denied any foreign aid funds had been diverted and told the paper: "No cuts were imposed last year."

Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani said Saturday that 20 million people had been affected by the worst floods in the country's history, for which the United Nations has appealed for 460 million dollars in aid.

India imposes strict curfew in Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar

Security forces imposed a strict curfew in Indian Kashmir yesterday where anti-India protests have claimed 55 lives in two months as the region geared up for a major national holiday.

Authorities stepped up the curfew in the main city Srinagar after four people were killed Friday in the latest of a series of demonstrations against New Delhi's rule in the Muslim-majority Himalayan region.

"We have enforced a curfew across Srinagar to maintain law and order," chief district magistrate Meraj Kakroo said. The strictly enforced curfew was also extended to other parts of the region, police added.

The move comes in response to the ever bolder protests by Kashmiris to force India to withdraw troops from the disputed Himalayan region claimed by both India and Pakistan and end New Delhi's rule.

The latest killings -- of three teenage students and a 65 year-old man -- came as Kashmiris marked the first Friday of the Ramadan fasting month during which many people in the mostly Muslim region visit mosques to pray.

The deaths occurred just two days ahead of India's Independence Day celebrations of the anniversary marking the end of British rule in 1947.

Bloodbath on Road 32

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across the sky. At House 677 of Road 32 in Dhanmondi, it was time to change guards while everybody was still in deep sleep: President Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, wife Begum Mujib, sons Sheikh Kamal, Sheikh Jamal and Sheikh Russell, daughters-in-law, and brother Sheikh Naser.

Bangabandhu's personal assistant AFM Mohitul Islam was on night duty, but he hit the bed around one in the morning. Suddenly the phone rang and he sleepily picked up the receiver. At the other end was the President himself. The clock was about to strike five.

"Get the police control room," Bangabandhu ordered Mohitul. Mujib just got the message that his brother-in-law Abdur Rab Serniabat's house was under attack.

Mohitul dialled the police but the line did not get through. He then tried to reach the Ganobhaban exchange. Somebody picked up the phone at the other end but would not speak.

Mujib was impatient and asked him why he did not contact the police control room. Shakily, Mohitul gave the President the bad news -- he cannot reach anybody.

Irritated, Bangabandhu took away the telephone receiver from Mohitul.

"This is President Sheikh Mujib speaking," he thundered.

Just then a hail of bullets smashed Mohitul's office room and shattered the windowpanes.

Bangabandhu had little idea that the assassination mission had started. Little did he know he would not live to see the false dawn turning into a morning darker than night.

It was also in this false dawn that Havildar Md Quddus Sikder along with seven other guards were hoisting the national flag to the tune of bugle at Bangabandhu's residence. It was time for the guard changeover. Then he heard gunshots coming from the lakeside.

The guards immediately took position behind the boundary wall. They were baffled and were still looking for bullets to retaliate when some army men in black and khaki uniform thundered into the house through the gate.

"Put your hands up," they shouted at the guards. The tragedy showed its first signs.

Inside Mohitul's office, Bangabandhu stepped beside a table and pulled Mohitul to the ground. Right then house help Abdul brought Bangabandhu's punjabi and glasses from the first floor. The president quickly put them on and came out into the veranda. He shouted at the sentries.

"There have been firings all around. What are you doing?"

And off he went to the upper floor where his wife, sons Russell, Jamal and wife Parvin Jamal Rosy and brother Sheikh Abu Naser were sleeping. He did not realise this would be his last meeting with his family.

House help Rama was sleeping on the veranda in front of Bangabandhu's bedroom. It was around five in the morning. Suddenly the door opened and Begum Mujib emerged.

"Criminals have attacked Serniabat's residence," she said.

Rama sprang up from his sleep. He ran down in panic and went outside the front gate and saw some army men advancing toward the House 677 with weapons raised and firing bullets in the air. An unknown fear gripped him.

The immediate person he thought of informing about this impending peril was Sheikh Kamal, Bangabandhu's elder son.

He again entered the house and ran up to the second floor where Kamal and his wife Sultana were staying. He woke Kamal up and somehow blurted out that the army had attacked their house.

For them, the mission was accomplished.

Rama saw Bangabandhu dying in a hail of bullets. He was walking behind the group of Mohiuddin who brought the president out of his room.

The killing over, the army men ordered Rama to get lost.

Trembling and feeling weak in his knees, Rama slipped into the bathroom of Begum Mujib's room. Sultana, Kamal, Sheikh Jamal and his wife Rosy, Sheikh Russell and Sheikh Naser were all holed up there. Naser was bleeding from his hand.

Rama told Begum Mujib that Bangabandhu had been killed.

Just then the killers returned and kept knocking on the door. The soldiers were too impatient to wait. They fired on the door. A terrifying moment of noise, cordite, flying bullets and splinters.

Then Begum Mujib softly said, "If we will have to die, let's die together." And she opened the door and begged for the lives of her family members.

The army men then herded Sheikh Naser, Sheikh Russell, Begum Mujib and Rama towards the stairs.

Begum Mujib stopped as she saw Bangabandhu lying in a pool of blood on the stairs. She broke into tears and said: "I won't go further. Kill me here."

The killers took Begum Mujib back into her room. Quddus then witnessed another most terrible thing that was to haunt him for the rest of his life. Major Aziz Pasha and Rizalda a Muslumuddin started firing from their Sten guns. Begum Mujib, Sheikh Jamal, his wife Rosy, and Kamal's wife Sultana stumbled on the ground with bullets in their bodies.

The killers took Naser, Russell and Rama to the ground floor and made them stand in a line beside Mohitul.

Sheikh Naser pleaded: "I am not into politics, I do business for a living."

Mohitul heard an army officer telling Naser, "We won't hurt you. Take your seat in that room."

He took Naser into the bathroom attached to Mohitul's office and opened fire.

Mohitul could hear Sheikh Naser begging for water. One of the army men winked at another, "Go and give him some water."

Then the other army person went inside the bathroom and shot Naser again.

The most horrifying thing happened next. The killers went up and came down with Russell, Bangabandhu's 10-year-old son -- bewildered and devastated. He first held Rama close and then Mohitul.

"Bhaiya (brother), Will they kill me too?" the child asked.

"No Bhaiya, they won't kill you," Mohitul said. He had no idea what was next.

An army man in khaki uniform wrenched Russell away from Mohitul. The child wanted to go back to his mother.

"Take him to his mother," Major Pasha ordered an army havildar.

The havildar with a mischievous smile held Russell by his hand and took him to the first floor. Russell was wailing. Then came another burst of gunshots.

A little later, Major Farooq Rahim met Bazlul Huda at the gate.

"All are finished," Huda announced.

Lankan war panel hears Tamils' complaints

BBC ONLINE

A Sri Lankan government war commission has heard testimonies from Tamils alleging their loved ones were abducted or detained by the army.

Six people came forward to speak of their missing sons or husbands at the hearing in northern Sri Lanka, close to the former war frontline.

The panel has invited people to speak - either in public or in private - of their experiences of war.

The government has dismissed calls for an independent inquiry.

Sinnasamy Nallathambi, an elderly tailor, said his son was picked up in an army roundup in late 2008.

He was released by magistrates but, while on his way home, was abducted by people in a white van - a type of vehicle notorious in Sri Lanka for perpetrating forced disappearances.

A woman said her husband was also taken in a van and hadn't been seen since.

Others said they believed the military was holding their husbands, who had previously worked with the Tamil Tigers, but they lacked clear information.

Human rights groups have demanded an international probe into possible war crimes perpetrated during Sri Lanka's 37-year conflict with the Tamil Tigers, which ended last year.

The UN says it believes at least 7,000 Tamil civilians were killed in the final five months of the war during a government offensive against rebel-held territory.

The government disputes these figures.

The commission said it would pass the people's details to the relevant authorities.

The eight Sri Lankans chosen by the government to sit on the panel have been hearing from ordinary people in Vavuniya, a town now home to tens of thousands of Tamil war refugees.

Another complaint involved a man who said there was a broad perception among Tamils that they were being discriminated against in the courts.

The panel also heard allegations that the government was deliberately settling ethnic Singhalese people in previously Tamil areas.

One constantly recurring theme was the poverty of people trying to resettle after the war, several saying they simply didn't have the resources to rebuild their lives.

The commission will also hold hearings in refugee centres and camps where thousands of men and women said to have links with the Tamil Tigers are detained for what the government calls rehabilitation.

The commission chairman has told the BBC that no one needs to fear testifying, as secrecy and anonymity can be guaranteed.

But a report by the US State Department this week cautioned that those who criticise the government in Sri Lanka run the risk of reprisals.

Institute of Health Economics
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Notice for Admission into Post Graduate Diploma and Masters of Health Economics Programmes

Applications are invited from Bangladeshi and foreign nationals for admission into the Post Graduate Diploma and Masters of Health Economics (Session: 2008-2009). It may be mentioned that both are full-time programmes and the classes will be held during day time. Those in service will have to produce a certificate of leave. The application criteria and procedures are as follows:

Post Graduate Diploma:

Applicants having bachelor degree in any subject can apply. The minimum requirements for eligibility to seek admission into the Post Graduate Diploma programme are: a bachelor degree or its equivalent in any field including business, engineering, agriculture or medicine, and 5 (five) points, with at least second division/class (with the exception of medical graduate) in all examination.

Applicants having work experience in the health and population sector will be given preference.

The selection of students will be made on the basis of performances in the written test (90) and viva voce (10) examination. The total number of seats is 50.

The applicants will have to collect the prescribed application form from the Office of the Institute of Health Economics (IHE), Arts Faculty Building (4th Floor), on payment of Tk. 400/- (four hundred) only. The last date of submitting application is 30th November 2010. A written admission test will be held on 3rd December (Friday) 2010 at 2:30pm in the Examination Halls of the Arts Faculty Building (4th Floor), University of Dhaka.

Masters of Health Economics:

a) Those who have passed the Post Graduate Diploma (PGD) from IHE with CGPA 3.0 and above can directly enroll into the Masters of Health Economics programme without the admission test. Candidates who have passed PG Diploma in Health Economics with CGPA 2.5 or more (less than 3.0) will have to take the written test for admission into the programme.

b) Moreover, those who have obtained at least a three years' Bachelor degree (Hon's) in Economics or in any other discipline with substantial course work in economics and obtained 7 (seven) points are eligible to apply.

c) The maximum number of candidates to be admitted is 60.

Applicants will have to collect prescribed form on payment of Tk 500/- (five hundred) only from the IHE office.

The last date of application is 7 December 2010 and the written examination will be held on 10th December (Friday) 2010 at 2:30pm in the Examination Halls of the Arts Faculty Building (4th Floor), University of Dhaka. The students will be selected on the basis of results in written test (95) and viva-voce (5) examination. Contact:

Md Fakhrul Alam, Sr. Administrative Officer, IHE. Phone: 9661900-79/8641

Prof Dr Shamsuddin Ahmad
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Mud submerges the beds in a hospital ward after the recent flash flood disaster in Leh yesterday.

Sudden rain storms on August 6 triggered flash floods that killed 189 people and swept away buildings, roads and power cables in the town of Leh, the main city of Ladakh in the Himalayas. Some 40