

Zia passively involved

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Anthony Mascarenhas, he said.

He said Ziaur Rahman was in the shadow of the whole episode of August 15, 1975 because he was very much one of the main players of the game.

In reply to a question from the HC, Lifschultz said Ziaur Rahman could have stopped the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman because he (Zia) knew the plot.

Zia was a complicated man and was the main beneficiary of the assassination, he said, adding, Zia was responsible for killing many freedom fighters including army official Khaled Mosharaf.

The Pulitzer Prize winner who had covered the trial of Col Abu Taher in 1976 placed his statement before the HC bench of Justice AHM Shamsuddin Chowdhury Manik and Justice Sheikh Md Zakir Hossain.

The bench is hearing a writ petition that challenged the martial law regulation under which the military tribunal was formed and Taher was sentenced to death.

Earlier on January 20, the HC bench requested Lifschultz to appear before it to place a statement on the trial and execution of Taher.

Lifschultz on January 31 sent a written statement to the HC bench through the Attorney General's Office saying that Gen Ziaur Rahman made the decision of Col Abu Taher's execution before formation of the military tribunal that gave the execution order.

Gen Manzur, then high-ranked military officer, knew with absolute certainty that Zia had decided to have Taher hanged before the "so-called trial" began, Lifschultz said in the statement.

"Subsequently, this fact was also confirmed to me by two high-ranking military officers, who were close to Zia at that time," he said in his January 31 statement, which was placed before the HC bench on February 3.

Lifschultz yesterday appeared before the same HC bench around 2:30pm and placed a written and a verbal statement before it.

He said the trial of Col Taher was not even a show-trial since it had no projection or demonstration.

There existed a "Special Military Tribunal No 1" which convened at the Dhaka Central Jail. "I was there. I stood outside the prison. I watched men, like Colonel Yusuf Haider, the so-called Tribunal's chairman, walk through the prison gates," he said in the written statement.

It was a premeditated assassination of which Ziaur Rahman was the assaillant, Lawrence Lifschultz who arrived in Dhaka on March 12 told the court.

Although Zia had convened a meeting of the generals returned from Pakistan as Moudud Ahmed stated in a book, the decision to kill Taher was taken exclusively by Zia, he said, adding that he (Zia) had convened that meeting only to pretend that those generals had involvement in killing Taher.

"Moudud Ahmed claimed that Ziaur Rahman had convened a gathering of 46 'repatriated' officers to discuss the sentence that should be passed on Taher. It was well known that not a single officer who had participated in the Liberation War was willing to serve on Special Military Tribunal No 1. But General Zia's special convocation of repatriates appears to have ended with unanimous decision. They wanted Taher to hang," his written statement said.

"Moudud claims his source for this story was General Zia himself. In this respect, Moudud's version of events tallies with what General Manzur claimed to me regarding General Zia having personally taken the decision on what the verdict would be. One man, Ziaur Rahman, decided, on his own, to take another's life. He

then asked a group of about fifty officers to endorse his decision," he stated.

The US journalist said he had tried to go inside the so-called court but was not allowed.

"I had tried to meet Ziaur Rahman many times for taking an interview from him, but he did not allow me to do so," he said, adding that he was expelled from Bangladesh at that time.

Replying to another question from the HC, Lifschultz said he could not term it as anything other than assassination, as Syed Badrul Ahsan, a journalist of The Daily Star, stated in 2006 that it was purely and simply a murder.

"Syed Badrul Ahsan has called the Taher case 'murder pure and simple'. In an article published in July 2006, Ahsan writes: 'When he (Lifschultz) speaks of Colonel Taher and the macabre manner of his murder (it was murder pure and simple) in July 1976, he revives within our souls all the pains we have either carefully pushed under the rug all these years or have been allowed to feel through the long march of untruth in this country,' according to the statement.

Zia decided to kill Taher as he wanted to appease the army officers repatriated from Pakistan and also consolidate the grief on power.

Taher wanted to return democracy in the country, but Zia wanted to rule the country as a dictator, he said.

Lifschultz said it was one of the saddest human rights violations in the whole of Asia.

He said he had been trying to get the whole truth for so many years and he was happy that he was now in a position to disclose whatever information he had before the HC.

The court will resume the hearing today.

Attorney General Mahbubey Alam and Additional Attorney General also appeared before the court.

BNP decides

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According to meeting sources, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia urged the opposition lawmakers to make preparation to outline government's failure in different sectors.

The opposition chief whip at the press briefing said parliament has become ineffective, and the ruling party lawmakers themselves have lost interest in attending the session.

Asked why the opposition will join an "ineffective House", Faroque said: "You [journalists] will get the answer when you listen to our speech in parliament."

Treasury bench lawmakers, however, said the opposition will join the House to keep their memberships.

The opposition lawmakers earlier hinted to join the session yesterday but they changed their minds following Bangladesh cricket team's win against the Netherlands and freeing of Bangladesh hijacked ship Jahan Moni by Somali pirates.

They thought their joining parliament would not get extensive media coverage, party sources said.

NZ ranked

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Solomon Islands and Tonga for the 45th place among the 54 Commonwealth countries, according to the report published jointly by Royal Commonwealth Society and Plan UK.

India has secured the 41st place.

The study "Because You're a Girl: Growing Up in the Commonwealth" compares how well girls or women are doing relative to boys or men in their country in eight areas of life.

It used data on issues from survival, for example life expectancy and nutrition, to achievement, including numbers of athletes and medals won at the Commonwealth Games and Commonwealth Scholarships attained.

The report suggests that it is political will -- and not the economic wealth -- which is most important in advancing gender equality.

Some of the poorest countries in the Commonwealth do relatively well in the eight indicators used in the report, while some rich countries remain a long way off gender equality.

The Commonwealth's richest country, Brunei Darussalam, only manages a rank of 23rd.

The report says despite decades of campaigning in Western Commonwealth nations, Rwanda and South Africa top the female political participation table. Rwanda ranks first in the world while the United Kingdom ties with Pakistan for the 17th place.

Subsidy in farm

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subsidy might increase in non-development sector.

The minister in his report said, "One of the main goals of the government is to attain self-sufficiency in food by 2012." For providing agricultural inputs to farmers at rational prices, subsidy in agriculture sector might be increased to Tk 5,000 crore from the current Tk 4,000 crore, he added.

In the report, Muhith said though various steps were taken in implementing ADP, the government failed to infuse the expected speed. He however expressed the hope that the pace will go up in future.

According to the report, the whole of the cut in ADP is from foreign-aided projects.

It projected a revenue collection target of Tk 73,590 crore, by increasing the National Board of Revenue's collection target by Tk 1,000 crore.

But in the non-NBR sector the collection target might be lowered by Tk 1,000 crore.

The minister in his report presented the progress in implementation of some of the commitments he made in his budget speech.

The government placed a plan of adding 11,973 megawatt electricity to the national grid by 2015.

The minister said 1,131 MW power was added to the national grid by December 2010. In 2011 another 2,194 MW will be added, Muhith projected.

Crisis deepens

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An official of IOM, responsible for transportation of the fleeing workers, said they are overwhelmed by the numbers of African workers in Libya crossing the border. Although the Bangladeshi workers were the first wave to arrive there, a lack of initiative by the respective government and sluggish reaction by the international bodies, have been delaying their repatriation.

While thousands assembled before the IOM office, thousands more were queuing up for water and food. Several thousand besieged me to tell their sorrows. Many young men looking extremely disoriented from heat, hunger and cold told me how initially in Dhaka they had been subjected to deception and lies after each one of them had paid up to three lakh taka to go to Libya few months ago.

Mohammad Yusuf from Dagonbhuiyan, Feni stood up for several thousand migrant workers, and told me how false promises, and later intimidation in Libya, ruined the lives of the compatriots.

"Each one of us, unlike other workers from other countries of Asia, paid an exorbitant fee of up to three lakh taka to come to Libya," Yusuf said, "In Dhaka, before we paid, the agencies told us we would get three hundred and sixty US dollars per month. And just before we boarded the aeroplane they forced us to sign a paper and sent us to Libya."

He said once the workers were in Libya, notorious middlemen employed by the

agencies back in Dhaka, received them and took them to camps.

"Many of us did not even work for months, and eventually those middlemen sold our labour in exchange for food. Now we have been robbed of our last belongings to come here to die," Yusuf said.

As soon as Yusuf finished speaking, several men started crying, without even trying to hide it. Some raised their fists and others shouted slogans against the corrupt system in Bangladesh under which they were treated badly.

"We all want to go home please. Write about us, so that the government takes some initiative for our return home," said Mohammad Ali from Shariatpur, Naria who has been at the camp since March 3.

Mohammad Ejaj, a young man from Adamdighi, Bogra said most people could not get hold of their passports at the time of leaving Libya, as the middlemen -- who were holding the passports -- demanded extra money for returning the documents.

On the way to the Tunisian border, the group of people he travelled with were robbed of everything after armed men stripped them on the road and searched their bodies.

"I don't know how I will go back home and start a new life, after what I have gone through in Libya," Ejaj said.

The stranded workers also corroborated yesterday's report on abduction of Bangladeshi nurses working in Libya. Ali Amjad from

Golapganj, Sylhet came to the camp from Tripoli in the first week of March.

He said, "The Libyan police and military forced two nurses out of the bus in which forty Bangladeshis including myself were travelling, and they took them away."

Md Tarek Siddik from Jatrabari was looking for some water on the northern side of the huge camp now accommodating around 17,000 displaced workers.

"I spent months in detention in Libya, and last week they let me go. Now they are telling me I will be repatriated soon. I have no money, no clothing, nothing," said Tarek, about 25 years of age, with tears rolling down his cheeks.

IOM Spokesperson Omari Jumbe had some good news for the Bangladeshi migrant workers. He said they sent 2,700 Bangladeshis from Choucha camp on nine flights to Dhaka yesterday.

"We had a good day today and hopefully tomorrow will be better," Jumbe said adding, "Last night three hundred and eleven Bangladeshis crossed the border, but if the pace of Bangladeshi repatriation continues this way the Africans are set to outnumber them soon."

Jumbe also said there is an international effort to send the Bangladeshi workers home on a priority basis.

The African nationals arriving at the Ras Jdir crossing reported that they were also subjected to torture and theft on their way to the Tunisian border.

Biden warns Russia on corruption

AFP, Washington

US Vice President Joe Biden warned yesterday that Russia needed to cleanse corruption in business and the legal system and forge democracy to fully benefit from joining the World Trade Organization.

Biden, who is just back from a trip to Russia warned, in an opinion article for the International Herald Tribune, that "only bold and genuine change" could entice Russia's desired share of international investors.

He also praised the recent warming of ties between Moscow and Washington, saying it had averted a "dangerous drift" in relations.

The United States is backing Moscow's entry into the WTO as part of a "reset" of its ties with the Kremlin and talks on Russia's entry to the body could conclude as early as April.

Yahya Khan

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conspicuous by its absence. It was only in the cantonment and at the President's House as well as the Governor's House that the flag of Pakistan could be observed. Everywhere else, it was the Bangladesh flag that had been raised by a people clearly unwilling to remain part of Pakistan any longer.

In Peshawar, Air Marshal Asghar Khan said that it was Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who had kept the country united despite great odds and therefore it was essential that power be handed over to him immediately. He condemned the PPP chairman's call for a transfer of power to his party in West Pakistan and to the Awami League in East Pakistan.

For his part, ZA Bhutto repeated in Karachi his earlier position that the rule of the majority did not apply to Pakistan. He noted that the on-going deadlock in constitution-making could not be resolved 'by ignoring the wishes of the people of West Pakistan as represented by the majority party in West Wing.' All across the west wing of the country, he drew flak from politicians over his demand for a transfer of power on his terms. Some even criticized him for advocating a new two-nation theory.

In Dhaka, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman announced a new series of measures aimed at continuing the non-cooperation movement in East Pakistan. In a statement, the Awami League chief said: 'The heroic struggle of the people marches forward. All those who cherish freedom and are struggling for it the world over should regard our cause as their own. Our people have proved how a determined and united people can be a bulwark of freedom against those who conspire to rule by force.'

The people of Bangladesh, civil servants, office and factory workers, peasants and students have demonstrated in no uncertain terms that they would die rather than surrender.'

Japan grapples with nuclear

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Edano.

A similar cooling system breakdown preceded the explosions at reactors 1 and 3.

Technicians have been battling to cool reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi plant since Friday, following the quake and tsunami. Tens of thousands of people have been evacuated from the area around Fukushima Daiichi plant.

At least 22 people were said to be undergoing treatment for radiation exposure.

Meanwhile, the capital Tokyo is still experiencing regular aftershocks, amid warnings that another powerful earthquake is likely to strike very soon.

Roads and rail, power and ports have been crippled across much of Japan's northeast and estimates of the cost of the multiple disasters have leapt to as much as \$170 billion.

Analysts said the economy could even tip back into recession, Reuters reported.

Japanese stocks closed down more than six percent, the biggest fall since the height of the global financial crisis in 2008.

Rescue workers combed the tsunami-battered region north of Tokyo for survivors and struggled to

care for millions of people without power and water in what Prime Minister Naoto Kan has dubbed his country's worst crisis since World War Two.

Officials say at least 10,000 people were likely killed in the 8.9-magnitude earthquake and tsunami that followed it. Kyodo news agency reported that 2,000 bodies had been found yesterday in two coastal towns alone, reports Reuters.

"It's a scene from hell, absolutely nightmarish," said Patrick Fuller of the International Red Cross Federation from the town of Otsuchi.

"The situation here is just beyond belief, almost everything has been flattened. The government is saying that 9,500 people, more than half of the population could have died and I do fear the worst."

Crucially, officials said the thick walls around the radioactive cores of the damaged reactors at the nuclear power plant appeared to be intact after the hydrogen blast, the second there since Saturday.

The core container of the No 3 reactor was intact after the explosion, the government said, but it warned those still in the 20-

km evacuation zone to stay indoors. The plant operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co (TEPCO), said 11 people had been injured in the blast.

Kyodo said 80,000 people had been evacuated from the zone, joining more than 450,000 other evacuees from quake and tsunami-hit areas in the northeast.

"Everything I've seen says that the containment structure is operating as it's designed to operate. It's keeping the radiation in and it's holding everything in, which is the good news," said Murray Jennex, of San Diego State University.

"This is nothing like a Chernobyl... At Chernobyl (in Ukraine in 1986) you had no containment structure -- when it blew, it blew everything straight out into the atmosphere."

Officials said on Sunday that three nuclear reactors in Fukushima were at risk of overheating, raising fears of an uncontrolled radiation leak.

Engineers worked desperately to cool the fuel rods. If they fail, the containers that house the core could melt, or even explode, releasing radioactive material into the atmosphere.

Back home with horror

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"Even a dog's life is better compared to what we had at the Egyptian borders," said Asaduzzaman, 27, who came home from Al Sallum yesterday, three weeks after fleeing politically troubled Libya.

Asaduzzaman used to live in Benghazi but he left the place following violence there and evacuation of his employers. He said he and his Bangladeshi colleagues had to spend nights out in the chilling desert and queue for food and water for hours after reaching the border camp. Almost every time, the food finished before everyone could have some.

According to Asaduzzaman, the Africans, especially the strong Ghanaians, used to unfairly break the queue leaving most of the Bangladeshis craving for food and water for the whole day.

The relief trucks used to leave the refugee camp as soon as chaos had broken out over queuing up. Last week, a Bangladeshi died in a stampede during such chaos, added Asaduzzaman.

International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the UN refugee agencies and Red Cross provided the stranded people with food and medicine, but those were barely enough compared to the number of migrants gathered at the borders.

"Sometimes we had food but very often we went without. I did not have rice for 19 days," said Mohammad Sulaiman of Tangail who was seen sobbing at Hazrat Shahjalal (R) International Airport. All he had with him was a dirty bag and a blanket.

He said he could not contact his family home for over a month, as his cellphone was snatched by Libyan forces when he was at the Libyan side of the Tunisian border.

The Egyptian border forces did not allow the refugees in for ten days. At that time, the migrants only had some biscuits to hold on to, added Sulaiman.

that they were allowed in Tunisian territory on March 2. Food and juice were offered to them after then.

On his arrival in Bangladesh, Sulaiman had no means to contact his relatives in Shakhipur of Tangail. Noticing that, a woman approached him as a Good Samaritan. Astounded by the generosity, the man momentarily forgot what to do.

"What should I do now? How would I face my family?" Sulaiman again broke down into tears as another man came to his help in reaching him home.

The stories of the unfortunate returnees are more or less the same. All along the airport terminals was the same concern -- what is in store for these returnees? Sympathy alone is not sufficient in this case.

In twelve chartered flights of IOM, around 4,000 Bangladeshi migrants came home yesterday. With this arrival, a total of 18,857 Bangladeshis have been repatriated. Of those, IOM arranged repatriation of 15,570 Bangladeshi nationals while 3,287 came through their employees, said a foreign ministry press release.

Meanwhile, the eleven Bangladeshis who have been missing since jumping off a ship in Crete Island of Greece on their way home from Libya have been identified.

They are: Mohammad Shafiul Azam, son of Mohammad Abdul Aziz of Savar, Dhaka, Mahabur Rahman, son of Habibur Rahman Munshi of Rajoir, Madaripur, Shomrat, son of Younus Matubbor of Bhanga, Faridpur, Bhim Kumar Paul, son of Sree Shyam Pada Paul of Bazidpur, Kishoreganj, Mohammad Farid, son of Alim Uddin of Rupgonj, Narayanganj, Ruhul Amin, son of Majir Uddin of Polan, Norsingdi, Billal Hossain, son of late Abdur Rahman of Raipur, Laxmipur, Ronjit, son of late Jibon of Ghatail, Tangail, Arif Hossain, son of F u n n u S h e i k h o f Bhadorgonj, Shariatpur, Mohammad Rubel, son of late Hedayet Ullah of

Chatkhil, Noakhali and Jahid Hasan, son of Akteruzzaman of Pasash, Narsingdi.

According to Crete Island authorities, bodies of three men, believed to be part of a Bangladeshi group that fled a ship while evacuating Libya, were found yesterday, reports AFP.

The bodies were found near Souda Bay in the island's northwest, said local coastguard chief Nektarios Bonatakis to reporters, adding that the men were bare-chested and of around 25 years.

The recoveries yesterday raised the death toll in the ship evacuation to six. Another eight people are still unaccounted for.

Asian govts test Japanese food for radiation

AFP, Singapore

Several Asian governments said yesterday they would screen food imported from Japan for radiation after one of the country's nuclear power plants was damaged by a massive earthquake and tsunami.

Hong Kong, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Taiwan said they would take precautionary measures after two explosions at the ageing Fukushima plant 250 kilometres (160 miles) northeast of Tokyo.

Girl diagnosed

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The girl, however, is not having any serious breathing problem, which is normally the case.

The symptom is so mild that it has been detected because of the extensive surveillance, Mahmudur said, adding that proper treatment of the girl has been ensured.

"She is fine now and will recover soon."

The IEDCR director advised to take precautionary measures, as the virus affected the poultry firms in the country in the last several months.

in Short

Cops nab 5 telephone extortionists

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Detective Branch of police has picked up five suspected extortionists who used to demand money over the phone posing as top listed criminals holed up abroad.

Of the detainees, Lablu Sikder, 28, Imran Hossain, 36, Jamal Sheikh, 33, and Ubaidur Rahman, 28, were hauled up from Benapol Bazar area in Jessore and Rafiqul Islam, 28, an employee of SA Paribahan's parcel section, from the capital's Mirpur-10 on Saturday.

All of them hail from Razorip upazila of Madaripur. They used to go to India to make phone calls to people, mostly businessmen, for extortion, said DB's Assistant Commissioner Obaidur Rahman.

They used to introduce themselves as top criminals Shahdat, Nobil Hossain, Shahid alias Dakat Shahid who have long been absconding in India.

Some courier employees helped them to collect the extortion money. During interrogation, Rafiqul admitted he would get Tk 8,000 for each lakh taka extorted, police said.

Contacted, SA Paribahan's General Manager Abdus Salam said they have heard of Rafiqul being picked up by the DB police but they were not contacted in this regard.

His company will take action if the allegation against Rafiqul is proved, he added.

2 'muggers' beaten to death

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Locals beat to death two unidentified youths at Keraniganj in the capital suspecting them to be muggers at the early hours of yesterday.

Aged between 25 and 30 years, the youths died on the spot when the mob of Kobutrapara under South Keraniganj beat them up severely around 1:30am.

The identity of the deceased could not be known immediately.

Police said the locals caught two members of a gang of five to six muggers when the criminals were running away snatching Tk 4,000 and a cell-phone from a garment employee.

As the employee cried for help, the locals chased the muggers and caught the two while their accomplices fled.

Officer-in-Charge Abul Bashar of South Keraniganj Police Station said they rescued the youths in a critical condition and rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where the doctors declared them dead.

52 Bangladeshis evacuated

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bangladesh mission in Japan has evacuated 52 Bangladeshis from Sendai in Miyagi, the prefecture worst hit by Friday's earth quake and tsunami.

A government release yesterday said the evacuees are safe and sound and expected to reach Tokyo soon. A team led by embassy counsellor and first secretary has been continuing the rescue efforts. The team is comprised of embassy staff and Bangladeshi expatriates in Japan.

As of yesterday, the embassy did not receive any report of Bangladeshi casualties in the twin disasters.