

War crimes court releases Rwandan rebel leader

AFP, The Hague

Rwandan rebel leader Callixte Mbarushimana was released in France yesterday after the International Criminal Court last week dropped charges against him, the court announced.

"Thanks to the full cooperation of the Netherlands, the host state of the ICC, and of France, Mr Mbarushimana was released on French territory, as he requested," it said in a statement issued in The Hague.

Mbarushimana's lawyer earlier told AFP his client would be released later yesterday and be flown to France from the Netherlands, where he has been in ICC custody for almost a year, facing crimes against humanity and warcrimes charges.

Cargo vessel

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Secretary Farhad Uddin Ahmed, however, said before Hanjin Semarang got stuck, 11 vessels crossed the channel.

He hoped that the vessel could be pulled to the jetty during the high tide in the night.

Arrested six

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locals handed over the six to the police.

Five of them confessed to their involvement in the killing during primary interrogations, police said.

SUST students Diponkar Ghosh Anik and Khairul Kabir were beaten to death by alleged muggers during a cruise on the river Chenger Khal. Their bodies were recovered from the river the next day.

Police and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) raided Nalkot, Nilgaon and other neighbouring villages of Badaghat areas almost every night since. They surrounded Nalkot on Thursday morning to catch the suspects.

Villagers then caught the six and handed over them to police.

The suspects are Abdus Shahid and Abdur Rouf of Nilgaon and Shahin Ahmed, Jamal Miah, Lal Miah and Saim Ahmed of Nalkot.

Earlier, police arrested a boatman, Gulzar Miah, and three others in connection with the killing.

BNP protests

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price will bring in a disaster for the people," he said at a party meeting at its Naya Paltan office in the capital.

The government on Thursday increased electricity price by 21.28 percent.

Industries are closing down due to gas and power crises but the government has no headache, he said, adding that the government is busy increasing prices.

Referring to incidents of secret killing, Fakhru said the government is doing those to eliminate the opposition. Militancy and terrorism rose during the previous AL government rule, he added.

He also held the government responsible for the street violence on December 18 in the capital and elsewhere in the country.

"The finance minister himself on Wednesday said that the country's economy is in danger," he said.

He alleged that the current government is an autocratic one that has snatched the democratic rights of the opposition party and foiled its programmes by using the law enforcement agencies.

Fakhru also directed the party leaders and activists to reorganise themselves for a tougher movement to "oust the government".

The party will hold protest rallies today in all the thanas and municipalities across the country against the police action on the party men.

Similar programmes will be held in district towns on December 26.

Intra-party conflict

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BNP leaders are confident that Sakku, also the last mayor of Comilla municipality, will win the polls race as he is a popular leader and the ruling AL is divided into many factions.

Nine candidates are fighting for the post of mayor of the newly-formed city corporation.

Talking to The Daily Star, many voters pointed finger at the role of local lawmaker trio AKM Bahauddin Bahar, Whip Mujibul Haque and AHM Mustafa Kamal, saying that much will depend on these influential persons.

The trio has long-running disputes with Afzal, joint convener of Comilla (south) unit AL.

Contacted, Bahar denied any conflict of interest in the party. "There is no conflict among us. I am working for him [Afzal] for a long time now."

Kamal, convener of Comilla (south) AL, said they have asked all their party leaders to work jointly for Afzal.

Many AL leaders, however, said mayoral hopeful Noor-ur-Rahman Mahmud Tanin is blessed by Kamal.

At a party meeting at his

village residence in Nangalkot on Thursday night, Kamal categorically denied the allegation.

According to party insiders, another candidate Anisur Rahman Mithu is enjoying support from Whip Mujibul, who refuted the allegation.

"The prime minister has backed Afzal Khan and that is why we will do our best to ensure his victory," he said.

Both Tanin and Mithu have taken a strong stance against Afzal. Even they have turned down a party request made by Thursday's meeting for withdrawing from the mayoral race in favour of Afzal.

"There is no scope to quit the race. Rather Afzal Khan should quit as he is sick," Tanin said yesterday.

Citizens of Comilla have decided not to vote him due to his family's bad reputation, mentioned Mithu.

Earlier, Afzal branded both of them as dummy candidates.

Meanwhile, Afzal yesterday campaigned in Nurpur Housing Estate area while Sakku was busy meeting people in Thakurpara, Ashoktola, Kashariopoti and Unaishar areas.

Commuters

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following a fight with rival group Rangpur Motor Sramik Union.

MA Mojid, a leader of the federation, and five others were injured in the clash.

The strike was, however, called off as law enforcement agencies assured them that the miscreants responsible for the attack on Mojid would be brought to book, police said.

Meanwhile, the strike added to sufferings of the people of Thakurgaon amid cold snap, reports our district correspondent.

Thakurgaon District Transport Workers' Union also observed the strike.

People in hundreds including women and children were seen waiting at the Thakurgaon bus stand for pick-up vans, human haulers and other vehicles to return home.

Several BRTC buses were obstructed to ply on Thakurgaon-Panchagarh and other routes by unruly transport workers that also added miseries to passengers.

Amena Begum of Baragaon village under the Sadar upazila was forced to travel 18 kilometres in rickshaw and Nosimon, an improvised vehicle, with her nine-month-old ailing child to see a doctor in the district town.

However, she could not see the doctor as there were many patients and she arrived too late to take a serial number. "Now it is very difficult for me to go back home," she said.

Another mother, Rashida Khatun, of Jhathibhanga village, also suffered greatly as she travelled 20 kilometres by rickshaw with her one-and-a-half-year-old son, who has been suffering from fever for the last two days. She also expressed anxiety for returning home with the minor.

Road crash

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Traffic resumed at about 12:00noon with police intervention.

Police said they confiscated the bus but the driver fled the spot.

Does president

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major political parties.

However, we observed some serious anomalies between the president's claim and the provisions of the constitution.

The president in his written speech referred to article 118 of the constitution as the source of his power to appoint the EC.

But article 118 cannot be read in isolation from the constitution's article 48 (3) that clearly says: "In the exercise of all his functions, save only that of appointing the Prime Minister pursuant to clause (3) of article 56 and the Chief Justice pursuant to clause (1) of article 95, the President shall act in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister."

Even in these two cases, his discretionary power is very nominal. Because he has no option but to appoint the leader of the majority party in parliament as the prime minister.

And in case of the appointment of chief justice, the president is expected to appoint the senior most judge of the Appellate Division.

When article 118 is read along with article 48 (3), it becomes clear that the president's claim that the constitution empowers him to appoint the CEC and other EC members is misconstrued.

His statement that after discussions with political leaders he "will decide..." is also beyond his power, as he must act on the advice of the prime minister in all cases except the two mentioned above.

It is only natural that the president's written statement was drafted by his staff. So we want to ask did the president's staff do their homework, and are they well versed in the constitution?

We feel that the president was misguided in this matter which should be immediately looked into, as otherwise the president might be dragged into unnecessary and undesirable controversies that must be avoided to maintain the prestige of the high office that he holds.

Upazila parishads

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If the polls to reserved women seats were held, it would have elected women representatives to the upazila parishad for five years. But if the polls are now held, they will get only two-year term.

The military-backed past caretaker government led by Fakhruddin Ahmed, in its efforts to empower women politically by ensuring their participation in local government system, introduced the provision of reserved seats in 2008.

"The polls to the reserved posts were not held due to the government's indifference to the upazila parishads," local government expert Prof Tofail Ahmed told The Daily Star.

He also held the EC responsible for the situation as it did not persuade the government to arrange the polls.

"It is unbelievable that formation of the parishads was not completed in even

three years. It is a manifestation of how dysfunctional upazila parishads are," Tofail said.

Had the parishads were functional, the polls to the reserved seats would have been held long ago, he said.

The upazila parishad law however has a provision that prevents one to question the formation of the parishads on legal grounds for not holding of polls to the reserved seats.

Immediately after the upazila polls, the EC did not move for holding the elections as the specified tenure of the electorates for the polls had expired, an EC official said on Friday.

Women representatives elected to reserved seats in union parishads and municipalities are electorates and are entitled to contest the polls to the reserved seats in upazila parishads.

The tenures of union parishads and municipalities expired in early 2008 and

mid-2009.

Like other representatives elected to these bodies, women representatives are still holding office only to keep the continuity till the next elections to the two local government bodies.

Moreover, after the upazila polls held in January 22, 2009, the EC lost the authority to fix timetable for the polls to any post of an upazila parishad as the government did not ratify the upazila parishad ordinance under which the January 22 polls were held.

The government in February 2009 reintroduced the upazila parishad act of 1998 that had empowered the government to fix the polls schedule.

The EC had planned to hold polls to the reserved seats on completion of municipality and union parishads polls which were completed by the middle of this year.

Tensions rise between

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been growing that the powerful generals will try to oust him somehow. The tension is a worrying sign for the region and for Pakistan's uneasy relationship with its key ally, the United States.

The military does not want to be seen interfering in politics. But it could use its vast influence to isolate Zardari, or offer him an honourable exit by guaranteeing he won't face prosecution on long-standing corruption charges.

Tensions are high between the civilian government, which has ruled since elections in February 2008, and Pakistan's powerful military and intelligence services, after US forces killed Osama Bin Laden in Abbottabad in May.

The army was not told about the raid in advance, reports BBC.

On Thursday, Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani delivered an unprecedented tirade against the military and accused "conspirators" -

- whom he did not name -- of plotting to bring down his government.

"There can't be a state

within the state. They have to be answerable to this parliament."

The latest developments come amid a scandal dubbed "memogate" that has forced the resignation of the Pakistani ambassador to the US and piled pressure on Zardari and the civilian authorities.

Yesterday, an army statement quoted military chief General Ashfaq Kayani as telling troops the military will continue to support democracy in Pakistan and that any talk the army was planning to take over was "speculation".

The general made the remarks while addressing troops in the tribal belt near the Afghan border on Thursday. When asked by AFP why it took 24 hours to release his remarks, military officials refused to elaborate.

Speculation has refused to die that Zardari could be forced out over scandal and illness.

Zardari is expected to address a rally on December 27 on the fourth anniversary of the assassination of his wife, former prime minister Benazir Bhutto, who spent years

opposing military rule before she was assassinated in 2007.

Businessman Mansoor Ijaz, writing in a column in the Financial Times on October 10, said a senior Pakistani diplomat had asked that a memo be delivered to the Pentagon with a plea for US help to stave off a military coup in the days after the raid that killed al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden in May.

Ijaz later identified the diplomat as Pakistan's ambassador to Washington, Husain Haqqani, a Zardari ally who denied involvement but resigned over the controversy.

Dawn, one of the country's most respected newspapers, said talk that a coup was being planned was premature, but also noted the army has seized power before.

Many Pakistanis rallied around the army after a November 26 air attack by US forces in Afghanistan mistakenly killed 24 Pakistani soldiers on the border. The memo has also helped boost the army's image at the expense of the government.

DOE shuts

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will seize the factory and take legal action against them, officials said.

The DoE team estimated that the factory has discharged around 91 thousand cubic metres of untreated waste into the river over the last five years it has been running without proper authorisation.

Under Environment Protection Act, dyeing factories are in a red category and need clearance from DoE before they can begin production.

The factory authority paid up the fine and assured the DoE that it would set up an ETP.

Textbooks

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on last year's performance.

"Like last year, we will observe January 1 as Textbook Festival Day and the students who go to school that morning will return home with a set of new textbooks."

Nahid said because of the free textbook distribution, the schools can start their classes on the very first day of their academic session. Student enrolment, he noted, had gone up.

"There is nothing to worry about textbooks. Almost all the books have reached the upazilas as per demand," NCTB Chairman Prof Mostafa Kamal Uddin told The Daily Star.

The process began as early as April, making the massive task of printing and delivering books easier, he said. Last year, the authorities had started the work in July.

Besides, the printers are sending the books directly to the upazilas to ease distribution. But last year, the books were first sent to the districts after which the district education offices sent them to the upazilas. It thus turned out to be time consuming.

The government has aimed at distributing more than 22.12 crore textbooks to over three crore students of primary (class I-V), secondary (VI-X), ebtedai (primary level of madrasa) and dakhil (secondary level of madrasa) and vocational classes of the 2012 academic session.

The NCTB and district and upazila education offices are working round-the-clock to make the plan a success.

However, around 50 lakh primary textbooks are yet to hit the upazilas.

A local printing agency that won the contract for some 2.22 crore primary books is yet to deliver around 20 lakh copies, and some 30-35 lakh copies printed in India are waiting at Benapole port to enter the country, said NCTB sources.

The local printer, Sarkar Group, had so far delivered some 2.02 crore copies despite their deadline being extended several times, sources said.

Abu Naser Dulal, one of the owners of the group, claimed his agency had already sent 2.07 crore textbooks, with the rest earmarked for delivery by December 28.

"We are delivering books every day," he told The Daily Star.

Asked about the delay, he said all the primary-level books were four-coloured and the printing technology for those books was new in Bangladesh.

This year, the work of printing primary books was awarded through international tender. Three Indian printers won the contract for some 2.89 crore copies while 16 local organisations got the rest.

A bulk share of books from India has already reached the upazilas and 30-35 lakh books will start entering the country today or tomorrow, said Mostafa Kamal.

"On arrival, the books will be directly sent to upazilas of Barisal division which have so far got the least number of copies."

In 2009, the government decided to provide primary and secondary students with free textbooks at the very beginning of the academic session.

Previous governments used to give free books only to primary students.

Secondary students had to buy their copies. But they would hardly get those even well into the first quarter of an academic session due to an artificial crisis created allegedly by a syndicate of printers and government officials.