

Pak cabinet backs indicted PM

AFP, Islamabad

The Pakistani cabinet yesterday expressed "full confidence" in Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani as he prepares to go on trial for contempt of court, which could cost him his job.

"The cabinet unanimously applauded the conduct of the prime minister in the Supreme Court and reposed full confidence in his leadership," his office said in a statement.

Gilani thanked the cabinet.

The prime minister was on Monday charged with contempt by the Supreme Court for refusing to re-open corruption cases against President Asif Ali Zardari.

He pleaded not guilty and the court adjourned until February 22, the first step paving the way to a trial that could see him jailed for six months and disqualified from office.

After Delhi, blasts rattle Bangkok

Israel accuses Iran, Tehran denies

AFP, Bangkok

A string of blasts rattled the Thai capital Bangkok yesterday with Israel pointing the finger at arch-foe Iran, a day after bomb attacks targeted Israeli embassy staff in India and Georgia.

The explosions maimed a fleeing suspect believed to be an Iranian national. Israel linked the incident to a wider terrorist threat following Monday's attacks, which left one female diplomat critically wounded in New Delhi.

Police said they found an Iranian ID on the injured man, who was admitted to a Bangkok hospital for emergency treatment.

Authorities also detained an Iranian man at Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport for questioning but it was not immediately clear if he was one of the two other suspects, whose motives were unclear.

Police were searching for the third man.

Thai Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra urged people not to "jump to conclusions" about the blasts and urged people not to panic.

"The attempted attack in Bangkok proves once again that Iran and its proxies are continuing to act in the ways of terror and the latest attacks are an example of that," Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak said.



PHOTO: AFP

Thai bomb squad officials inspect the site of an explosion in Bangkok yesterday.

The country assailed Iran as the world's "biggest exporter of terror" after Monday's attacks amid rising tensions in the region.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also accused the Islamic republic of being responsible, along with Lebanon's Shia militia Hezbollah, for a series of failed attacks against Israeli targets in Thailand and Azerbaijan in mid-January.

Tehran denied involvement in the

Azerbaijan and Thailand over the past few months, were only the start of a wave of attempts targeting Israelis overseas.

Meanwhile, India's Home Minister P Chidambaram yesterday said "a well-trained person" carried out Monday's attack in the capital, Delhi.

Chidambaram said it appeared that a motorcycle rider came from behind and attached an explosive device to the back door of the diplomat's car.

"The investigations are on," Chidambaram told reporters after meeting the city police chief and other officials yesterday morning. "We believe it was a terrorist attack," he said.

Israel is believed to be locked in a wider covert war with Iran, whose nuclear program has been beset by apparent sabotage, including the unclaimed killings of several Iranian nuclear scientists, most recently in January.

The method used in Monday's attacks resembled the tactics of assassins who have been targeting Iranian nuclear scientists, by attaching magnetic bombs to their vehicles.

Three scientists and a physicist have been killed in the past two years in murders blamed by Iran on Israeli and US secret services.

No rumour, please

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killing or suspects.

She said, "You [journalists] will perhaps get a result any moment as there have been remarkable developments." She, however, refrained from disclosing any information about the probe findings.

On the other hand, after claiming "substantial progress" in the murder probe on Monday, police and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) yesterday said no mentionable progress had been made yet.

Meherun Rani, senior reporter of the private TV channel ATN Bangla, and her husband Sagar Sarowar, news editor of another private TV station, Maasranga, were murdered in their West Rajabazar apartment early Saturday.

The home minister yesterday also declined to set a further deadline for the murder investigation to throw up results. She was talking to journalists after addressing the 17th found-

ing anniversary of the Coast Guard at Agargaon.

Asked about her initial 48-hour ultimatum to the law enforcers to find the killers, Shahara said she had mentioned the time frame so that the law enforcers gave importance to the investigation.

She urged journalists to keep away from spreading any rumours regarding the killing or suspects in the investigation.

Meanwhile, three days past the incident, police said they were yet to find any proof of any journalist's involvement in the murder.

"We have not arrested or detained any journalist. We have not even interrogated any media associates on the murder," Imam Hossain, deputy commissioner of Tejgaon division, said yesterday at a press briefing at the media centre of Dhaka Metropolitan Police.

He, however, said police did not know whether other law enforcement agencies, like the Criminal

Investigation Department or the Detective Branch of police or Rab had arrested or interrogated any journalist.

Asked about newspaper reports on arresting six people, he said, "If you [the media] talk about detention, I would say we have picked up two security guards and the caretaker of the building the slain couple used to live in."

He said police yesterday collected documents and information on what Sarowar and Rani had been working on from their offices to see whether there had been any professional issue behind the killing.

They are also collecting the book written by Sarowar, he added.

Rab, however, remained tight-lipped about their progress in the investigation.

Commander M Sohail of Rab's legal and media wing said the agency was yet to dig out any information that can be reported.

"We don't want to com-

ment on anyone's detention unless we have adequate information about their involvement," he said.

Meanwhile, the authorities of the Forensic Medicine Department of Dhaka Medical College submitted Sagar and Rani's post-mortem reports to Sher-e-Bangla police on Monday.

"According to the autopsy report, the journalist couple died after being hit with sharp weapons," said Zakir Hossain Mollah, officer-in-charge of the station.

NOABURGES

The Newspaper Owners' Association of Bangladesh (NOAB) at a meeting yesterday condemned the grisly murder and demanded the arrest of the killers.

The meeting also appealed to all editors and journalists in the print and electronic media to adhere to the highest ethical standards of journalism while reporting on the incident and refrain from making any speculative comments.

Mahmudul to become MP

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Mahmudul elected from Tangail-5 constituency and had also declared the parliamentary membership of Jatiya Party leader Abul Kashem illegal.

In the December 29 national polls in 2008, Kashem had beaten his nearest rival Mahmudul.

The SC bench of Chief Justice Md Mozammel Hossain, Justice SK Sinha and Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain reached the verdict after dismissing an appeal filed by Kashem against the HC verdict.

Responding to the verdict, Mahmudul's lawyer barrister M Amir-Ul Islam said the EC now will have to declare his client elected by issuing a gazette notification.

The EC will decide whether it will declare Mahmudul elected in seven days as per the HC verdict or will wait for the full text of the

the SC verdict, he added.

Contacted, Kashem's lawyer advocate Shah Monjurul Hoque said the parliamentary membership of his client has been cancelled following the Appellate Division verdict.

It is not clear whether the EC will hold a fresh election in the constituency or not, he mentioned.

The attorney also noted that he did not get any instruction from his client for filing a review petition with the SC against its verdict.

Following an election petition filed by Mahmudul, the HC on December 15, 2009 had voided Kashem's parliamentary membership and declared his election candidacy illegal as he was found a loan and telephone bill defaulter.

The court had declared Kashem's candidacy illegal citing a provision of the Representation of the

People's Order, 2008, which bars a loan or bill defaulter from contesting national polls.

The court had also asked the chief election commissioner to declare Mahmudul elected.

Two days later, following a petition, the Appellate Division stayed the HC verdict allowing Kashem to continue his role as a member of parliament till further order.

The apex court on August 18, 2010, had allowed Kashem to file an appeal against the HC verdict, and accordingly Kashem later filed the appeal, which was dismissed yesterday.

Barrister Rokanuddin Mahmud appeared for Abul Kashem.

Mahmudul in his election petition said Abul Kashem, who was declared elected was a loan defaulter of Tk 15.44 crore with Sonali Bank, Bangabandhu Avenue

Pakistan allows Nato supplies by air

AFP, Islamabad

Islamabad publicly admitted yesterday that it had allowed Nato to use Pakistani airspace to fly supplies into Afghanistan, despite a more than two-month blockade on the border crossings.

"The permission has been given for food items," a defence ministry official quoted Defence Minister Ahmed Mukhtar as saying at a function in Islamabad.

"Since the food items were perishable, we have allowed them to transport them by air to Afghanistan."

"We have told them to take the supplies out by air and don't bring more for the time being," the official quoted him as saying.

US ambassador to Islamabad, Cameron Munter, last week confirmed that Nato had continued to fly supplies into Afghanistan despite Pakistan's closure of the border to Nato trucks and oil tankers on November 26.

Arabic charms

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Prior to the actual happenings of February 21, certain elements determined to preserve what they called the ideology of Pakistan went out of their way to ensure that the demand for Bangla did not come in their way. The manner in which they did it, of course, often turned out to be pretty hilarious. One might recall here the Aga Khan, who even today is an object of deep respect in Pakistan. But for Bengalis he turned out to be a rather

comical figure when he suggested, in the build-up to February 21 (and that was in 1951), that one way of settling the language question would be for Arabic to be adopted as the state language of Pakistan. In the process, he did defend Urdu to a certain extent, but he said nothing about Bangla.

The Aga Khan's comments evoked a good degree of editorial comments in newspapers in East Bengal.

On February 13, 1951, the Pakistan Observer had this to say:

"We are glad that the Aga Khan has done some plain speaking, at the risk of being misunderstood, regarding the language controversy... The only wise course under the circumstances is to adopt both Bengali and Urdu as the state language(s) of Pakistan."

On February 14, 1951 the Morning News injected a note of sarcasm in its report:

"All the three reasons that the Aga Khan has advanced for Arabic and against Urdu appear to be on the face of them fallacious... We mean no disrespect to the Aga Khan

when we respectfully differ from him. Arabic has not been able to unite the Arabs themselves. How can it unite Pakistan with the Arab world?"

On April 18, 1951, the Pakistan Observer, reacting to suggestions in favour of Urdu as the state language, noted:

"Maulana Akram Khan is reported to have said at the Urdu Conference that those who oppose Urdu in East Bengal are the enemies of Islam... Those who want to see Urdu and Urdu alone as our national language are bad psychologists."

He is, however, optimistic about international financing for the Bibiyana projects. He said the International Finance Cooperation and the Asian Development Bank has assured \$300 million for the two projects. Aziz Khan expects that Summit will be able to secure the fund within March.

Summit was upbeat early last year when it secured the three projects by offering the lowest price in the bid and said that different lenders had assured it of around \$2 billion.

But in reality, it faced difficulties in managing the fund as the World Bank (WB) had backed out from giving the company a performance risk guarantee (PRG). The PRG is an important support for private investors to earn confidence of international lenders.

"The government in the Request for Proposal (REP) assured us of providing the WB PRG, which is getting belated and causing the delay in project implementation," said the Summit chief indicating the stalemate between the government and WB over Padma Bridge financing. Summit believes that the stalemate has influenced the WB in

delaying the PRG process. WB suspended the Padma Bridge financing bringing allegation of corruption in the government's tendering in the project.

Home minister

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In a brief scripted reply, she said 127 people were abducted in 2011 alone, and all but 20 of them were rescued by now.

"Sixty-eight cases filed concerning the issue have already been disposed of while 17 other cases are under investigation. Legal action has been taken against people involved," Shahara told the House.

Incidents of disappearances and secret killings surfaced in the last two years. Accounts of the victims' relatives and in some cases those of witnesses suggested that plainclothes law enforcers had picked them up and whisked them

away in microbuses or other vehicles.

Apart from different rights organisations at home and abroad, the main opposition BNP, even components of the ruling AL-led grand alliance have expressed concern over mysterious disappearances and secret killings in the country, and called for immediate investigations into all such incidents.

They also alleged that disappearances and secret killings had increased in recent times causing panic among people.

Home Minister Shahara Khatun faced severe criticism when she said she had learnt about such incidents

only from newspaper reports.

Reportedly, police showed reluctance in registering cases on forced disappearances and secret killings. Besides, Rapid Action Battalion and police personnel denied their involvement in the incidents.

Addressing a public meeting at Sheikh Kamal Stadium in Gopalganj, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on January 1 said all incidents of secret killings and disappearances would come under probe to bring culprits to book.

She, however, alleged that BNP had resorted to killing and kidnapping across the country in fulfilling its politi-

cal mission.

COUNTER TERRORISM UNIT

The government has made a move to form a counter terrorism unit in the police force to combat militancy and terrorism, the home minister said yesterday.

Replying to lawmakers' queries in parliament, Shahara also said a process of creating 962 posts under different designations was underway for the unit.

Moreover, the government has initiated setting up forensic laboratories in all divisional cities for faster identification of evidence to help catch criminals, she said.

INDEPENDENT UNIVERSITY, BANGLADESH TENDER NOTICE

FOR CLASSROOMS FURNITURE OF IUB CAMPUS AT BASHUNDHARA

- Sealed tenders are hereby invited from bonafide contractors/suppliers for **fabrication and supply of classrooms furniture** for Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB) campus at Bashundhara, Dhaka. The bidders shall be required to submit a complete offer including the cost with detail design, drawing and specifications.
- The bidder shall apply in their official letterheads to the undersigned along with the following documents:
 - The experience certificate from the employer for supplying similar type of classrooms furniture to reputed educational institutions/universities having a contract price not less than Tk.50 lac.
 - Copies of the latest Trade License, Income Tax and VAT Registration Certificates.
- The bidder shall furnish as part of the bid, an earnest money of 2.5% of the bid amount in favour of Independent University, Bangladesh in the form of a bank draft/pay order from a schedule bank located in the country.
- Interested bidders are requested to collect the Tender Schedule from the office of the undersigned between 9:30 am to 4:00 pm from 16 February 2012 to 22 February 2012 on payment of Taka 1,000/- only in cash (non-refundable) for each schedule.
- The tenders will be received at the office of the undersigned up to 2:00 pm of 8 March 2012 and shall be opened at 2:30 pm on the same day at the same place in presence of the bidders who may like to attend the tender opening.
- IUB reserves the right to accept only the technically responsive tender without any consideration of the lowest bid and shall have the right to reject any tender without assigning any reason whatsoever.

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