

Syria faces pressure on aid, rights abuses

REUTERS, Amman

Syria's President Bashar al-Assad faces growing pressure for blocking humanitarian aid and human rights abuses, with the UN humanitarian chief set to visit the country this week and the broadcast of harrowing pictures said to show torture victims at a hospital in the embattled city of Homs.

Secretly shot video footage aired on Monday by a British television station shows what it said were Syrian patients being tortured by medical staff at a state-run hospital in Homs.

The video, which Channel 4 said it could not independently verify, showed wounded, blindfolded men chained to beds. A rubber whip and electrical cable lay on a table in one of the wards. Some patients showed what looked like signs of having been severely beaten.

US Senator John McCain said the United States should lead an international effort to protect key population centres in Syria through air strikes on Assad's forces.

The United Nations says more than 7,500 civilians have died in Syria's crackdown on protests against Assad's government.

UN humanitarian affairs chief Valerie Amos said on Monday that the Syrian government had agreed to allow her to visit the conflict-wracked country later this week, an announcement that followed sharp international criticism of Damascus for not letting her into the country.

Amos said she plans to be in Syria from Wednesday to Friday.

Syria's decision to allow Amos into the country comes after intensifying international criticism, including a rare rebuke of Damascus by the UN Security Council last week for failing to grant the UN humanitarian chief access to Syrian conflict zones.

It was not immediately clear whether Amos would have the unhindered access she has been demanding.

Britain's Channel 4 said it had obtained footage of shocking scenes at the military hospital in Homs, filmed covertly by an employee and smuggled out by a French photojournalist identified only as "Mani."

Braving army patrols and winter weather, hundreds of Syrians crossed into Lebanon in the past 24 hours to escape the heaviest shelling of their border towns since the uprising against Assad began last March.

Homemade meals for Ghulam Azam

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Md Nizamul Huq said the hospital authority must examine the food before giving it to Ghulam Azam.

Azam, 89, is facing 62 specific charges of crimes against humanity during the 1971 Liberation War.

The former Jamaat ameer, one of the front men who actively helped the Pakistani military's attempts to foil the birth of Bangladesh, was moved to BSMMU on January 11 after he was denied bail in the case.

The tribunal in its order yesterday said Ghulam Azam might be allowed home-cooked meals considering his physical condition and old age. It said there was no legal bar to prevent somebody, who is not convicted, from receiving homemade meals.

The tribunal also said no question could be raised against the hospital authority or the jail authorities if the Ghulam Azam's health

deteriorated after taking homemade meals.

Abdur Razzaq, counsel of Ghulam Azam, however asked for modifying this condition of the order.

The tribunal then said it would modify this portion of the order later on.

Ghulam Azam submitted the petition to the tribunal in the second week of February seeking its permission to allow him to have homemade meals. He had said that the hospital authorities were not giving him sufficient and suitable food. He has been suffering from different physical complications, including old-aged related ailments, stated the petition.

After the hearing on the petition, the tribunal on March 5 fixed yesterday for passing order.

Meanwhile, the prosecution yesterday completed placing their arguments in the hearing on charge framing against Ghulam Azam in connection with his involve-

ment in crimes against humanity.

Making his argument, Prosecutor Zead Al Malum told the tribunal that Ghulam Azam was individually and jointly responsible for committing crimes against humanity in 1971 due to his superior status among the anti-liberation forces.

Citing different media reports at home and abroad during the Liberation War, Malum said Ghulam Azam could take part in several high-profile meetings, including with the then Pakistan president Yahya Khan and East Pakistan military administrator Tikka Khan due to his top position.

Besides his personal involvement in the crimes, responsibility of atrocities committed by other auxiliary forces (Peace Committee, Razakars, Al Badr and Al Shams) of the Pakistani occupation forces during the war fall on his shoulders as he was the

ameer of East Pakistan Jamaat-e-Islami, said Malum.

In the formal charges, the prosecution brought six counts against Ghulam Azam for conspiring with the Pakistani occupation forces to commit crimes against humanity. Three counts were for planning to commit crimes and atrocities, 28 counts were for incitement, 24 counts for complicity, and one specific charge for murder and torture during the Liberation War.

Malum pleaded that the tribunal frame charges against Ghulam Azam as per relevant sections of the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act.

The defence counsel will place their arguments before the tribunal on March 12.

QUADER'S HEARING DEFERRED

The tribunal yesterday deferred the hearing on charge framing against

another Jamaat-e-Islami leader Abdul Quader Molla until today.

The tribunal deferred the date following an adjournment petition from defence counsels. On March 5, the tribunal had deferred the hearing until yesterday.

The defence counsels filed the four-week adjournment petition on March 1 as they could not complete preparations and did not get all the documents from the prosecution.

The tribunal said it would fix a date for the defence counsels to place their arguments in this regard after the prosecution complete placing their arguments today.

The tribunal also permitted two counsels of Quader Molla, an assistant secretary general of Jamaat-e-Islami, to meet their client in jail between 10:00am and 1:00pm on March 10.

It also verbally ordered the prosecution to provide the required documents to the defence.

Avalanche blankets Afghan village, kills 37

REUTERS, Kanduz, Afghanistan

At least 37 people died and hundreds were still trapped in northern Afghanistan yesterday when a snow avalanche covered an entire village near the northern border with Tajikistan, local officials said.

Afghan army helicopters descended on the remote village in the north of Badakhshan province to try rescue families, the latest victims to Afghanistan's worst winter in 30 years.

"The way to the village is closed, it is covered in snow," provincial governor spokesman Abdul Marof Rasikh said of the village of around 300 people, located in the Shikai district.

Though avalanches are fairly common in the mountainous north, yesterday's deaths were seen as particularly painful for a country that has experienced its worse winter in decades, killing dozens in the capital Kabul and creating further food shortages in one of the world's poorest countries.

Before yesterday, freezing cold and avalanches had claimed the lives of 60 people in Badakhshan province this winter, officials said.

Make food safety

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council has representatives from the ministries of LGRD, agriculture, commerce, food, health, environment and forest, home, public administration affairs, and fisheries and livestock.

Members of the Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution (BSTI) and the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), the chairman of food and nutrition, and chemistry departments of Dhaka University, and the deputy commissioner of Dhaka were also included in the council.

Referring to the six laws dealing with food safety, the

parliamentary body recommended that the government should move to introduce stringent and exemplary punishment by amending them.

Citing the role of the ministries, it said in the report that the government should take coordinated measures engaging the cabinet division to check adulteration of food and drug.

Besides, the city corporations, municipalities and district administrators should be active in dealing with this issue, and steps like holding discussions and review meetings at district and upazila levels every month should be taken to

create public awareness, the report adds.

Committee chief Tofail Ahmed placed the report, urging the House to accept the recommendations.

Disposing of a call attention notice on food adulteration, the House on October 24 last year directed the committee to prepare a report on what the government should do to address the issue.

After the report was placed yesterday, AL lawmaker Maj (ret'd) Rafiqul Islam, who had issued the call attention notice, however, did not agree with the recommendations.

The committee should

review its recommendations, he said. It had made the recommendations keeping the existing laws and mechanism unchanged.

"We need to take drastic measures against food adulteration to save our new and future generations," the ruling party MP observed.

Deputy Speaker Shawkat Ali, who was presiding over the sitting, however, rejected Rafiqul's suggestion.

Rafiqul also said that in the USA there is a dedicated body, food and drug administration, to ensure safety of food and life saving drugs. "But in Bangladesh, we do not have any such dedicated organisation."

DU, BOU teachers

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Sociology 2nd paper and Civics 2nd paper of Higher Secondary School Certificate under his university (BOU).

The BOU teachers are Md Galib, Kobeda Aktar, Md Abdur Rahim, Md Kutubuddin, Md Ansaruzzaman, Md Mizanur Rahman, Anwarul Islam, Md Ashek Ali, AB Khairul Islam, Abdul Karim and Md Nasimul Islam.

Prof Aminur Rashid, DU pro-VC Prof Harun-or Rashid, Prof Shawkat Ara Hossain, Prof Sadiha Sultana, Mahfuza Chowdhury and HM Delwar Hossain yesterday appeared before the HC as per its earlier

order in connection with a writ petition filed on charge of distorting history of the Liberation War.

Petitioners' counsel Belal Hussain Joy told The Daily Star that the six would have to again appear before the HC bench of Justice AHM Shamsuddin Choudhury Manik and Justice Jahangir Hossain Selim on March 12 in this connection.

Supreme Court lawyers Altaf Uddin Ahmed and Mahmud Hossain filed the petition with the HC in January 2010, saying that Sociology 2nd paper and Civics 2nd paper of HSC under the BOU described

late president Ziaur Rahman as the one who had declared the country's independence, although the HC in a verdict in 2009 ruled that Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had declared the independence on March 26, 1971.

The books also say that Zia is the greatest son of the country and nation, although the HC termed Bangabandhu the greatest Bangalee of a thousand years.

The writ petition stated that the books published were suppressing historical facts and incorporating false and fabricated information

into the history of the declaration of the independence.

In an immediate reaction, DU Pro Vice-Chancellor Harun-or-Rashid yesterday told reporters at his residence that the three DU professors committed a crime against the war of liberation and betrayed the martyred freedom fighters through their effort to distort the history.

Terming the distortion of the history a 'cold blooded murder', he demanded exemplary punishment of the accused so that none would dare to do the same crime in future.

Power cut to get

FROM PAGE 1

seen a few years ago, when electricity supply would fail six to eight times a day in many parts of the country, with outage stretching from one hour to two hours.

"If the load-shedding could be equally distributed across the country, there would not be more than an hour's power outage," the official told The Daily Star requesting anonymity.

Power Secretary Azad said, "We are not being able to produce 1,200MW to 1,400MW more electricity due to scarcity of gas."

He was speaking at a press conference organised to brief the media about the latest power agreement deal between Bangladesh and India signed in New Delhi last week.

The deal was signed on February 29 between PDB and National Vidyut Vikas Nigam during a meeting of the Joint Steering Committee, headed by the power secretaries of the two countries.

Under the government-to-government deal of a 25-year tenure, Bangladesh hopes to get 250MW of electricity from the neighbouring country from June 2013.

Power from India will cost the end-users about Tk 5 per unit due to transmission costs, said Azad.

He also said Bangladesh would float a tender this month to award the order for

an additional 250MW of electricity to be bought from the open market of India at market rate.

The winning bidders must supply electricity by June next year, he said.

The secretary also said the work to set up transmission lines and substation was going on in full swing.

The Asian Development Bank is financing the project, which will cost Tk 1,100 crore on the Bangladesh part.

Azad also said a joint venture company between the PDB and the National Thermal Power Corporation, parent company of National Vidyut Vikas Nigam, has been set up. Its board will, for the first time, meet on the first week of April.

He said India also responded positively to Bangladesh's proposal to buy electricity from Tripura.

"A technical committee has been formed. It will give a report within three months outlining how power can be brought to Bangladesh from Tripura."

During the India tour, Azad said they also sat with about 100 Indian investors.

"We talked about the investment potential for the Indian companies in Bangladesh including in the energy sector. This investment proposal could be included in the work of the

technical committee."

"We also held one-to-one meeting with 12 to 14 companies. They have shown interest in investing in the energy projects in Bangladesh."

He said the Indian side also positively responded to Bangladesh's intention of importing power from Nepal. "The Indian officials told us to talk to Nepal first."

Azad also admitted that the power tariff is not fixed.

"India's Central Energy Regulatory Commission adjusts prices time to time."

But SM Alamgir Kabir, chairman of PDB, said, "We will have to abide by the decisions of Indian regulators. But we will have participation in the hearing, where we will be able to ask for explanation for any tariff adjustment."

He said the Indian electricity would replace the electricity that now costs Tk 12 to Tk 15.

T a w f i q - e - E l a h i Chowdhury, energy adviser to the prime minister, said they are getting immense support from development partners. "JICA [Japan International Cooperation Agency] has just shown interest in financing power projects worth 5,000MW."

Azad said the inter-connected grid should be viewed as regional or inter-continental grid to measure its economic viability.

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