

Maldives president faces brother's opposition

BBC ONLINE

Maldivian President Waheed Hassan is facing opposition from an unlikely campaigner among a small but determined band of protesters in the UK.

His brother Naushad Waheed accused the former vice president of "immoral and illegal seizure of power" in February.

He is so upset over developments that he has taken to the streets of London to distribute anti-government leaflets.

He (Waheed Hassan) believes that he is serving his country as the leader of a legitimate government, but I do not agree with him," Naushad Waheed told the BBC while protesting against a visit to London by the Maldivian tourism minister.

8 BSF men

FROM PAGE 1

they will resume duty. The punishment came after the Indian border guard force ordered their court martial for stripping, kicking and beating a Bangladeshi national along the Indo-Bangladesh border at Churmurasi boundary outpost of Murshidabad in early February.

Besides, one of them was demoted from the post of head constable to constable in order to implement his sentence, as a head constable cannot be sent to jail under the BSF rules.

The convicts, according to BSF chief U K Bansal, were found prima facie guilty after an inquiry into the incident. The torture of the 32-year-old Bangladeshi, identified as Abdul Sheikh, a resident of Abasia in Chapainawabganj, had been captured on a mobile phone. He had been allegedly smuggling cattle across the border when BSF troops intercepted him.

As several Indian TV channels broadcast the footage, the force suspended its eight members involved. They are constables Virender Tiwari, V S Victor, Dhananjay Kumar, Anand Singh, Amar Jyoti, Sanjeev Kumar, Suresh Chand and Sunil Kumar, of 105 battalion of BSF.

Hopes fading

FROM PAGE 1

Meghna launch tragedy. As the rescue workers suspended their search yesterday evening, desperate relatives were still waiting by the riverbank at Char Kishori.

"Empty stomach, I have been waiting for about 30 hours to get my brother's body. Everyone is getting their dear ones, but I don't know when my waiting will end," said Md Ali of Shariatpur.

The disaster destroyed many families, said another man, who lost his brother, sister-in-law, and brother's mother-in-law.

Jamaluddin of Sreenagar upazila in Munshiganj said the bodies of six of his relatives were found while five others remained missing.

His younger brother Kamal along with 14 other family members went to Shariatpur where Kamal would get married. The accident happened on their way to Dhaka after the wedding. Four of them managed to swim ashore, but the rest, including the newly married couple, drowned.

"I've lost my whole family," cried Jamaluddin, as he kept hitting the ground in desperation.

Narrating the horrible moments, Rina Akhter, one of the survivors, said, "It was a nightmare. I felt a shock as our launch hit something and started sinking before I could understand what was going on.

"At one stage, I jumped into the river. A few minutes later I found a floating sack of dried chilli. Grabbing hold of it I waited for around half an hour. Later, some people from MV Mitali [another passenger launch that was coming from behind] rescued me."

Robbery at Darbar Bay is ours

FROM PAGE 20

commanding officer of Rab-7, Captain Ohidul Hasan, Deputy Assistant Director Abul Bashar, Sub-inspector Tarun Kumar Basu, Assistant Sub-inspectors Ali Ashraf and Jahangir Alam, nayeks Md Hasanuzzaman and Mohammad Liton, constable Suman, soldier Mohammad Jasim and informants Didarul Alam and Anwar Miah.

Mohammad Shahjahan, officer-in-charge of the police station, said they have already started probe into the case. "We are placing requisitions for arresting the accused."

According to the case statement, about 20 to 30 persons entered into the Darbar Sharif in Talsara village of Anwara upazila around 5:00pm on November 4 last year.

They closed the main entrance of the building and searched the shrine compound, but did not find anything illegal there.

By that time hundreds of villagers had thronged outside the shrine hearing of the Rab raid.

The Rab team then kept Pir (religious leader) Ahammed Safa Shah confined to a room on the first floor. At gun-point they threatened him to give the keys of cupboards.

At one stage, the cops broke three cupboards open and looted the cash kept in six travel bags.

As the Rab team was preparing to end their raid, the shrine men asked them to give a receipt against the "seized" money, which the law enforcers denied them.

The money was raised from the devotees for building and repairing mosques.

On information, a team of Anwara police led by OC Mohammad Shahjahan had rushed to the shrine on that night but the Rab team did not allow them to enter into the compound.

The police team then went back to their duty station.

The shrine authorities had assumed that the Rab personnel would return them the money and that is why they did not file the case earlier, said the OC quoting the plaintiff.

FROM PAGE 1

which would open ways for offshore oil and gas exploration in the Bay.

The tribunal also awarded Bangladesh a full 12-mile territorial sea around St Martin's Island, overruling Myanmar's argument that it should be six miles.

"We have got everything, even more than what we wanted. We are happy, we are absolutely delighted," cheerful Foreign Minister Dipu Moni told The Daily Star over the phone from Hamburg, Germany.

"This is a great day for Bangladesh. All our strategic objectives were achieved," she said, adding that Bangladesh could now proceed with its oil and gas exploration in the area. "In our claims, we wanted around 1 lakh square miles but the tribunal in its verdict gave us 1.11 lakh square miles," she said.

Yesterday's 151-page judgment was the first by any court or tribunal to delimit the maritime area beyond 200 miles, known as the "outer continental shelf", and is certain to establish an important precedent.

"Bangladesh's full access to the high seas out to 200 miles and beyond is now recognised and guaranteed with our undisputed rights to the fish in our waters and the natural resources beneath our seabed," Minister Dipu Moni said.

The tribunal, based in Hamburg, Germany, was established by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea to adjudicate disputes between states concerning issues covered by the convention, including the delimitation of maritime boundaries.

The president of the tribunal, Jose Luis Jesus of Cape Verde, read out the judgment in the courtroom yesterday at 4:30am Bangladesh time. The 23-member panel of judges of the tribunal delivered its judgment after following a series of procedures and long hearings between September 8 and September 24, 2011, when both the countries presented their arguments.

The verdict, which the judges passed by voting 21 to 1, concludes the case initiated by Bangladesh against Myanmar on October 8, 2009, to resolve a longstanding dispute over the maritime boundary.

Sources said Bangladesh lodged cases after India and Myanmar unfairly cut off a significant portion of Bangladesh's maritime area in the Bay.

Bangladesh's objection to Myanmar's claim was lodged with the tribunal and its objection to the Indian claim was filed with the UN's Permanent Court of Arbitration based in The Hague, the Netherlands. The arbitration with India is expected to be settled in 2014.

Bangladesh favours a principle based on "equity" while India and Myanmar favour an "equidistance" system to get larger maritime areas.

Under the UN charter, the principle of "equity" takes into account a country's population, economic status and needs, GDP growth,

and other issues, while the "equidistance" system marks the boundary through geometric calculations.

According to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, any such dispute should be resolved on the basis of equity, and in the light of relevant circumstances. This makes Bangladesh's demand for equity-based demarcation justified, experts have said.

Foreign Minister Dipu Moni, who was present in the courtroom during the judgment, told The Daily Star immediately afterwards that the people of Bangladesh were deeply connected to and dependent on the Bay of Bengal, both as a source of nutrition and employment.

The legal certainty afforded by this verdict would ensure that "we will be able to maximize the benefit of this important resource for the people of Bangladesh while at the same time ensuring long-term sustainability," she added.

The foreign minister said energy-starved Bangladesh's exploration for petroleum and natural gas in the Bay, which had been delayed by conflicting boundary claims, could now proceed.

The judgment would now allow Conoco Philips Bangladesh to explore oil and gas for Bangladesh in deep-sea areas previously marked disputed. The oil company conditionally signed a production sharing contract last year, leaving out the disputed areas.

The company kept a provision saying that it would explore the disputed areas after the issue had been settled.

"Today's ruling constitutes the equitable solution that Bangladesh has long desired, but was unable to obtain during the 38 years of diplomatic stalemate preceding the lawsuit," the foreign minister asserted.

"The bold and visionary decision of the prime minister to seek a binding judicial resolution of this longstanding dispute has been vindicated.

"But it is a victory for both states...because it finally resolves, peacefully and according to international law, a problem that had hampered the economic development of both states for more than three [almost four] decades. We salute Myanmar for its willingness to resolve this matter by legal means and for its acceptance of the tribunal's judgment," she said.

Myanmar wanted its maritime boundary with Bangladesh cut directly across the Bangladesh coastline, severely truncating Bangladesh's maritime jurisdiction to a narrow wedge of sea not extending beyond 130 miles.

Myanmar also claimed that the tribunal lacked jurisdiction to award continental shelf rights beyond 200 miles from either state's coast.

The tribunal rejected both these arguments.

"We are very pleased with the expertise, fairness and efficiency of the ITLOS [the tribunal] and its judges," said Dipu Moni. "The case

was resolved, from beginning to end, in a little over two years. This is unprecedented in judicial efficiency in a maritime boundary case."

As the agent of Bangladesh in the proceedings, the foreign minister presided over an eminent legal team, including deputy agent Rear Admiral (ret'd) Md Khurshed Alam, attorneys James Crawford, Philippe Sands and Alan Boyle of the United Kingdom, Paul Reichler and Lawrence Martin of the United States, and Payam Akhavan of Canada.

Myanmar was represented by its agent Attorney General Tun Shin. Its counsels included Alain Pellet and Mathias Forteau of France, Sir Michael Wood of the United Kingdom and Coalter Lathrop of the United States.

It may be mentioned that the army-backed caretaker regime invited bids for offshore exploration in February 2008 after dividing its sea territory in the Bay into 28 blocks.

But both India and Myanmar raised objections in all most all the blocks bordering "their maritime boundaries" that prevented Bangladesh from exploring for oil-gas. Myanmar even claimed rights to part of an area of Bangladesh. At the peak of the dispute in 2008, a war-like situation developed when both countries sent their navies to the disputed area.

Most of them

FROM PAGE 1

queries, she admitted the fact that some people had been abducted in and around the capital by criminals, who identified themselves as members of law enforcement agencies.

"According to media reports based on the information given by the victims' families, the abductees in most cases are members of criminal groups in one way or the other," said Shahara in response to a query of Awami League lawmaker Tarana Halim.

The home minister said clash of interest and realising ransom were among the main reasons behind such crimes.

Tarana, who has been vocal against human rights violation on several occasions, also asked the home minister about the measures the government had taken to stop such disappearances.

In a scripted reply, the minister told the House that her ministry had taken "effective" steps including setting up of check posts, increasing police patrol and enhancement of community policing.

She also informed the members of parliament that in some cases law enforcers had rescued the abductees and arrested the criminals.

"Besides, bodies of killed people [who were abducted] have been recovered in one or two incidents and cases were filed accordingly which are now under investigation," she said, adding that efforts were on to arrest the culprits responsible for every incident [of abduction].

On law and order, Shahara as usual claimed that "the situation is better now compared to any other time in the past."

Toll rises to 112

FROM PAGE 1

Many bodies are feared to have floated away.

The exact number of passengers on the launch, MV Shariatpur-1, was not available, but survivors and officials put the number between 250 and 300.

The 32-metre double-decker was coming to Dhaka from Shariatpur.

Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) announced an end to the rescue operation around 5:00pm, but resumed it half an hour later through searching for more bodies, which continued till 7:30pm.

"We'll continue the search efforts until we are sure that nobody is left inside the launch and around the accident scene," BIWTA Chairman Shamsuddoha Khandker told The Daily Star.

The authorities were trying to trace the cargo vessel, which sped away after hitting the passenger launch, he added.

To expedite the salvage operation, the rescue vessel Hamza reached Char Kishori, the scene of the accident, from Barisal at 1:30am yesterday to join the other rescue vessel Rustom, which had been working since Tuesday morning.

Many bodies were seen trapped inside the cabins of MV Shariatpur-1 when it was lifted from the riverbed in the

afternoon. Bangladesh Navy, Coast Guard, BIWTA, Fire Service, police and Munshiganj district administration jointly conducted the operation.

BIWTA sources said it took time to salvage the 200-tonne launch as Rustom and Hamza can lift only 120 tonnes.

Relatives, desperate for the news of their loved ones, were furious at the BIWTA official over the slow rescue efforts.

"Rescue vessel Hamza was in Barisal. It takes five to six hours to reach Munshiganj from Barisal. Why did it take around 23 hours?" asked Hashem Mia, who was looking for his lost brother.

Many relatives stayed at a temporary shelter set up at Char Kishoreganj on Tuesday night waiting for news of their family members.

The district administration gave Tk 5,000 and BIWTA Tk 3,000 each for the burial of the dead.

Launch accidents kill dozens almost every year in the country.

At least 33 people died after MV Bipasha sank in the Meghna in Brahmanbaria in the early hours of April 21 last year.

On July 6 the same year, at least nine people drowned after a passenger launch, MV Madinar Alo, capsized in Munshiganj in the Shitalakkhya.

War trial

FROM PAGE 1

BNP-led alliance's March 12 rally in the capital where Opposition Leader and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia gave the government a 90-day ultimatum -- until June 10 -- to restore the caretaker government system.

The prime minister, however, did not respond to Khaleda's ultimatum and her threat of tougher movements. Instead, she once again alleged that Khaleda had been conspiring to protect war criminals.

"You [Khaleda] and your husband [late] Ziaur Rahman tried heart and soul to save the killers of Bangabandhu but could not succeed. I want to assure you that no matter how hard you try you will not be able to save them. The trial of the war criminals will definitely be held. There is no room for Razakars [collaborators of the Pakistan occupation army during the Liberation War] on this soil," said Hasina.

She also brought up the allegation of Khaleda's receiving Rs 50 million from Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) prior to the 1991 general elections.

"You took and are still taking money from those whom we defeated in 1971. If you have so much sympathy for that country, why don't you go to Pakistan rather than polluting the soil of Bangladesh," said the premier.

Tens of thousands of leaders, workers and supporters of the grand alliance, its associate bodies, different professionals and like-minded organisations joined yesterday's rally. They carried banners and festoons and chanted slogans demanding the immediate trial of war criminals.

AL lawmakers from Dhaka and its adjacent districts, Magura, Mymensingh, Jessore and Tangail gathered at the venue of the rally with their activists from early afternoon. The areas from High Court intersection to Nawabpur Road in the old part of the city, Paltan intersection to English Road, and Dainik Bangla square to Gulistan square turned into a human sea.

The main dais was set up in front of the south gate of Baitul Mokarram National Mosque. Before the rally began at 3:00pm, artistes performed patriotic songs for a couple of hours to warm up the supporters.

The alliance was allowed the rally under the same 11 conditions the Dhaka Metropolitan Police had imposed on the opposition's March 12 grand rally. Sheikh Hasina reached the venue at 4:00pm and addressed the rally for about 35 minutes.

Accusing Khaleda of trying to assume power through the backdoor, she said the next parliamentary elections would be held in a free and fair manner to uphold democracy and protect the people's franchise.

"Bangladesh will be on the path of democracy and there is no scope of taking state power unconstitutionally," said Hasina.

She said around 5,200 polls in the different tiers of state administration had been held in the country so far under the incumbent government's rule but neither the media nor even the BNP could raise a question over the credibility of a single poll.

On the Tipaimukh Dam issue, Hasina said her government wanted Bangladesh's representation in the joint study on the dam in India and hoped that the neighbouring country would accept it to ensure that Bangladesh was not harmed in anyway.

The AL chief alleged that the BNP spoke in favour of India when in power and against it when in opposition.

During the speech, she also alleged that Khaleda during her tenure as prime minister had destroyed the administration, the legal system and parliament and indulged in corruption, misdeeds, and killing and torturing the then opposition men and religious minorities.

She sarcastically said Khaleda's two sons -- Tarique Rahman and Arafat Rahman Koko -- "obtained graduation in money laundering".

Referring to the BNP's previous agitation programmes, she said if he government had believed in politics of revenge, the BNP would not be able to take to the streets after what it did on December 18 last year in the capital in the name of a reception to freedom fighters. The opposition activists exploded a series of handmade bombs, vandalised around 50 vehicles and resorted to violence from very early that day which killed two people in the country.

"Since we believe in democracy, we did not obstruct your [Khaleda's] long march and human chain programmes," the premier said, adding that the media had been enjoying full freedom under the rule of the present government.

She claimed that her government, among other things, had improved law and order in the country, increased food production, power and gas generation, developed roads and highways and brought down the prices of essentials.

The AL chief also alleged that Khaleda would stop all kinds of development work, if voted to power.

Senior 14-party leaders including Amir Hossain Amu, Tofail Ahmed, Suranjit Sengupta, Matia Chowdhury, Rashed Khan Menon, Hasanul Haque Inu, Syed Ashraf Islam, Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, Mahbul Alam Hanif, Dilip Barua, Mainuddin Khan Badal, and Mohammad Nasim also addressed the rally chaired by Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, coordinator of the grand alliance and deputy leader of parliament.

Dhaka proposes

FROM PAGE 20

appointing consulting firm for the mega bridge project by this month, a finance ministry official said.

The official added that the finance minister may also write to the WB president requesting quick decision on the matter.

After yesterday's meeting, the finance minister told newsmen that Bangladesh made six proposals, including one on financing of the Padma bridge project, to China. In response, the Chinese envoy stressed resolving the unsettled issue with the WB first.

The five other proposals are construction of a tunnel from Jahangir Gate to Rokeya Sarani, 2nd Meghna Bridge, National ICT Park, Pekutia Bridge in Barisal division and capital dredging in different rivers.

Asked to elaborate on China's response, Muhith said, "China wants to increase investment in Bangladesh."

The minister said: "We have been continuing talks with the World Bank regarding the project. The proposal is now lying with its president. It is not possible to say at this point whether the outcome would be positive or negative."

For the WB, Muhith said, cancellation of a credit agreement after it is signed is a rare incident. However, he said, "I am still hopeful about the World Bank financing."

The finance minister said alongside continuing negotiations with the WB, the government wants to keep options open.

Replying to another query, Muhith said not only China or Malaysia, talks may be held with different alternative sources including the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Japan International Cooperation Agency (Jica) and the Islamic Development Bank (IDB).

ADB, Jica and IDB -- co-

financiers of the Padma bridge project -- have also extended the deadline of their credits on request from the government.

FINANCE MINISTER'S SPECIAL INITIATIVE Highly placed sources in the finance ministry told The Daily Star that Muhith has prepared the draft of a letter to be sent to WB President Robert Zoellick.

The letter says the government hopes that he will settle the Padma bridge financing issue before he ends his tenure with the institution in June.

The draft letter also says the Padma bridge is one of the main election pledges of the present government. Therefore, the government wants to start the project work soon.

Another official said the government has also been negotiating with several officials of the USA, the major shareholder of the WB, so that the lending agency settles the issue quickly.

Besides that, the government has also been continuing talks through the WB executive director who represents Bangladesh and some other South Asian countries.

An official at the WB Dhaka office said if the Canadian government report does not support the corruption allegation, the issue might be settled soon.

UNB adds: Communications Minister Obaidul Quader yesterday said, "I'll take the responsibility if we fail to start the construction work on the Padma bridge within the tenure of this government."

After a meeting with a Jica delegation at the Secretariat, the minister said the WB is waiting to receive the report from Canada on the graft allegation which is delaying the fund release. "We don't want to engage in any trouble with the World Bank," he added.

Rats no less

FROM PAGE 20

may be just as good as humans at juggling information in order to make the best decision, US researchers said Tuesday.

The discovery could help scientists better understand how the brain works in order to help people with autism who have difficulty processing various stimuli the way that others can, said the study authors.

Scientists at Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory ran tests that presented rats with a variety of sound and visual cues, and analysed how the rodents sifted through that information and recognised patterns in order to get a treat.

Comparing the rats to humans who were given similar tests, they found that both groups made decisions that were in line with the "statistically optimal" curve -- in other words, the best way possible.

"Statistically optimal combination of multiple sensory stimuli has been well documented in humans, but many have been sceptical

about this behaviour occurring in other species," said neuroscientist Anne Churchland, who led the study appearing in the March 14 issue of the Journal of Neuroscience.

"Our work is the first demonstration of its occurrence in rodents."

The findings suggest that the same evolutionary process may be at play in rats and humans that allows for sophisticated decision-making, and could offer a platform for study of autism spectrum disorders, the study said.

People with autism are often unable to choose which sensory stimuli to pay attention to and which to ignore, making commonplace events like going to the grocery store a potentially insufferable outing.

"We can use our rat model to 'look under the hood' to understand how the brain is combining multi-sensory information and be in a better position to develop treatments for these disorders in people," said Churchland.

Place bill to restore CG

FROM PAGE 1

He also accused the government of forcing different public and private organisations to join the ruling alliance's rally yesterday, saying the government has already suffered a moral defeat following BNP's March 12 rally.

"BNP has given 90 days as it believes in tolerance and democracy. Please restore the caretaker government system by amending the Constitution within the June 10 deadline without wasting time," he asked the government at a press briefing at the party's Nayapaltan headquarters.

The Awami League has again proved that the general elections will never be fair and neutral under the present administration by showing duplicity centring the rallies by the opposition and the ruling alliance, he added.

He criticised the government for its contradictory attitude towards the similar kind of rallies held in the capital.

"Public transport is operating normally today [Wednesday]. We have come to know that many vehicles have brought people to the rally for free, while they did not allow us to set up the stage for our Monday's rally and forced us to use loudspeakers in specific areas," he alleged.

Asked about the country-wide hartal on March 29, the BNP leader said, "We have called the hartal in protest against mass arrests, obstruction to the rally and repression across the country."

He demanded immediate release of all detained party leaders and activists, and also thanked everyone for making their rally a success.

"The government made the capital hostage on Monday to foil our rally in vain," he said.

The main opposition BNP and its allies organised a grand rally on Monday to mount pressure on the government to restore the caretaker government system.

On the other hand, the ruling AL and its allies held a grand rally yesterday protesting against "obstructing the ongoing war crimes trial" and attempts to save the corrupt and plot against the democratic governance.

Mirza Fakhrul also expressed deep shock over the death of The Daily Star photojournalist Shawkat Jamil Khan and the launch disaster in Munshiganj.

Party leaders MK Anwar, Gayeshwar Chandra Roy, Dr Abdul Moyeen Khan, Abdullah Al Noman and Ruhul Kabir Rizvi, among others, were present.