

India central govt fails to win over NCTC critics

PTI, New Delhi

An agreement still appeared to elude the Centre's proposal on the National Counter-Terrorism Centre with States ruled by non-Congress parties rejecting it as "not acceptable" and opposing it "tooth and nail", notwithstanding appeals by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Home Minister P Chidambaram for a broad consensus.

A day-long meeting, convened by the Centre to bridge the differences with the States, especially a dozen non-Congress Chief Ministers who have opposed the NCTC, went on expected lines.

Even Congress ally National Conference voiced reservations over the NCTC in its present form saying it makes it as stringent as the controversial Armed Forces Special Powers Act.

Significantly, BJP leader and Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Raman Singh said they would support the NCTC if their suggestions are incorporated and it is suitably amended.



Mamata Banerjee

'Not a state vs centre issue'

Making a strong pitch for the formation of the NCTC, the prime minister said its establishment is not a state versus centre issue but will work as a vehicle of country's combined efforts to curb terrorism.

Stressing that NCTC will supplement the counter-terrorism capabilities of the States and not supplant them, Manmohan asked the State governments to work with the Centre in dealing with terrorism.

In his speech, the Home Minister, the prime mover of the NCTC proposal, said terrorists do not recognise boundaries and the Centre and State



Manmohan Singh

governments have to work together to make the country safe and secure.

UPA constituent and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee outrightly rejected the NCTC saying it was not required.

Banerjee said setting up of institutions like the NCTC with the proposed powers of arrest and seizure upsets the federal structure of the country and strongly urged the central government to withdraw order on its formation as it was "not acceptable" to the States.

Accusing the Centre of behaving like "Viceroy of yore", Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi said consti-



Narendra Modi

tution of the NCTC is a conscious strategy to cast the Centre as an "omnipresent" ruler with States portrayed as dependent vassals.

Modi accused the Centre of changing the "well-defined and constitutionally mandated" boundaries of Centre-State relations and said there was a disturbing sequence of events in the recent past which revealed "centralists and autocratic mindset that militates against all canons of federalism".

Opposing the NCTC "tooth and nail", Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalalithaa accused the Centre of taking the country towards "autocracy" and demanded that a sub-committee of Chief Ministers be set up to go into the proposed body till when it should be kept in "abeyance".

Launching an all-round attack on the Home Ministry, she alleged that Tamil Nadu was being shown "utter contempt" by the Centre which did not even send a copy of the order setting up the NCTC.

US drone kills 10 in Pakistan

AFP, Miranshah

A US drone attack targeting a militant compound killed at least 10 insurgents in a troubled Pakistani tribal district along the Afghan border early yesterday, security officials said.

The Pakistani officials said two missiles hit and destroyed the compound in Shawal area, some 70 kilometres west of Miranshah, the main town in North Waziristan.

According to US, Waziristan is the most notorious militant stronghold in Pakistan's semi-autonomous northwestern tribal belt.

Yesterday's attack was the second strike since Pakistan's parliament in March approved new guidelines on relations with the United States, which included a call for an end to drone attacks on Pakistani territory.

PRESIDENTIAL RACE IN INDIA Pranab gets DMK chief's blessing

PTI, Chennai

Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam yesterday gave its backing to Union Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee as United Progressive Alliance's presidential candidate.

"If he is the candidate of the UPA coalition, the DMK will not hesitate to back his candidature," party chief M Karunanidhi told reporters in Chennai.



Pranab Mukherjee

Asked about his earlier observation that his party favoured a "good President" and whether Mukherjee could be the one, the DMK chief said, "I have no objection. But there has been no decision on the presidential candidate."

The DMK leader, whose party is a key partner in the UPA-led government at the centre, recalled that he had invited the Finance Minister as early as in 1969 for a conference on State autonomy.



M Karunanidhi

He also involved in transport business, went to Dhaka by bus yesterday morning, and they are trying to trace him "through mobile phone tracking."

His wife Ranu Akter told this correspondent yesterday afternoon that he went out of their residence around 11.00pm just for a walk but did not come back. He had no rivalry with anyone in politics and also in business, she mentioned.

"His cell phones were found switched off when I called him around 11:40pm. We are still waiting for him," Ranu said in a choked voice.

Zia's elder brother Mohammad Ilias said they looked for him in their relatives' houses and hospitals but did not find him. Then they filed a general diary (GD) with Double Mooring Police Station.

BNP Pathantuli ward unit General Secretary SM Jamal Uddin Jashim said Zia had no rival in politics since there is no feud in the unit.

Contacted, Assistant Commissioner (AC) Arefin

Jewel of Double Mooring zone of Chittagong Metropolitan Police (CMP), said there is no case against Zia.

Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Double Mooring Police Station Mohiuddin Selim told this correspondent that they have come to know Zia bought a ticket for Dhaka from the counter of Bagdad Poribahan in Gorbullah Shah Mazar area on Friday night and went to Dhaka.

"We contacted a person named Suman, who sat beside Zia on the bus, and Suman's description of Zia's appearance match with the information we have," said the OC.

Zia talked to several persons over mobile phone after reaching Dhaka in the morning (yesterday), he added.

Sources in the CMP said Zia talked to a woman over cell phone in Dhaka.

Chittagong city BNP President Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury, who was in Dhaka, expressed deep concern over Zia's "missing".

He urged the law enforcement agencies to take prompt steps to trace Zia.

WAR IN AFGHANISTAN Americans wants limited US role

REUTERS, Washington

Most Americans want US troops out of Afghanistan and oppose a significant long-term commitment to support that nation's economy and security, a Reuters/Ipsos poll showed on Friday.

But the poll also indicated that most Americans favor keeping some US forces in Afghanistan to help train that nation's troops, and to continue missions targeting al-Qaeda.

Taken together, the findings suggest "Americans essentially want to be done with Afghanistan," said Ipsos pollster Chris Jackson.

Seventy-seven percent said they wanted all US combat troops - excluding trainers and special forces - to leave Afghanistan by the end of 2012. Nearly the same amount, 73 percent, said they did not want the United States to establish any permanent military bases in Afghanistan.

Nato's roughly 130,000 troops there - of which about 99,000 are from the United States - are scheduled to withdraw by 2014.

The poll was conducted in the days after President Barack Obama marked the one-year anniversary of Osama bin Laden's death with a surprise trip to Afghanistan and the signing of an agreement laying out a long-term US role in Afghanistan.

In a televised speech, Obama said there was a "clear path" to fulfilling the US mission in Afghanistan and said the defeat of al-Qaeda was "within reach."

Eyes on China after Hillary deal on dissident

AFP, Beijing

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton ended a tense visit to China yesterday with a fragile deal in hand over a top dissident, as anxious activists waited to see if Beijing would let him leave the country.

After a turbulent week in ties between the Pacific powers, the United States said Friday that China would move soon to allow blind rights campaigner Chen Guangcheng to go to the United States with his family to study.

New York University said it had invited him to attend the institution.

Chen, who has alleged beatings under house arrest in conditions that are unusually harsh even by Chinese standards, dramatically escaped and took refuge in the US embassy on April 26, days before Hillary was due on a visit.

US officials, saying that Chen never requested asylum, escorted him to a Beijing hospital on Wednesday and said China had assured his safety. But Chen later said he felt unsafe and wanted to



leave China, at least temporarily.

He was still believed to be in the hospital where a heavy security detail has kept journalists and supporters from entering.

T Kumar, the Washington-based advocacy director for Amnesty International, welcomed the agreement but said it was critical to watch if China follows through and ends harassment of Chen's family and those who assisted him.

Bob Fu, an exiled Chinese Christian

Fatal unhappiness

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teach them in the morning, the ASP said quoting locals.

Later, he killed Simanto and Soma, students of class III and I, at his home by twisting the same rope around their necks, the ASP said.

Police suspect that Prakash might have committed suicide around 10:00am as he talked to his sister Shukla Barua over phone around 9:00am, ASP Babul said.

Locals saw Prakash's body hanging from the ceiling of the tin-shed house through the window, put him down and informed police, said Sunando, a monk of the nearby Buddhist temple.

The door was shut, but not locked from inside, locals said.

Law enforcers recovered the bodies around 11:00am and found a suicide note from the house.

In the note, Prakash confessed to the killings of his wife and children, and mentioned "family feud" as the reason behind his decision to kill himself after killing the other family members.

He wrote that Rozi converted to a Buddhist from a Hindu to marry him ten years back, and they had been a happy couple for first nine years.

But some conflicts developed between them for the last one year. His wife recently told him that she would not attend any family functions of Prakash's relatives, according to the note.

Locals close to the couple said the duo engaged in a feud two days back over attending a marriage function of one of Prakash's relatives.

The children's tutor Champa Dey said, "I came to Prakash's home at around 7:30am but nobody opened the door. From inside Prakash told me that his children would not sit for study today."

bodies of Prakash and Simanta lying on the bed while of the others on the ground in another room, said Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Rangunia Police Station Manjur Morshed.

The bodies were sent to Chittagong Medical College Hospital for autopsy, he said adding that an unnatural death case was lodged with Rangunia police.

"We are investigating the incident. Handwriting in the suicide note is being examined," the OC said.

Prakash married Rozi in 2002 following a love affair, said Prakash's sister Shukla adding that Prakash used to practice at a chamber in Panchlaish area in the port city -- some 45 kilometres off their home -- and his brother-in-law Bappa Das assisted him.

Shukla told The Daily Star that they had normal conversations when Prakash called him last morning. "We never noticed any feud in my brother's family," she claimed.

Tutor Champa said, "I have been giving lesson to them for one year. Most of the time, Prakash used to pass the daytime in his chamber and sometimes did not return home in the night. I used to come in the morning and found Rozi in sleep every day."

The suicide note reads, "I am Prakash Barua. I killed my wife and children strangulating them with nylon rope and after that I killed myself with the same rope. Nobody helped me in this work. I killed Rozi at 2:00am and in the morning, I killed my children," said the suicide note.

"I am insulted in front of my kith and kin only for her. Moreover, she recently told me that she would not attend any family programme of my relatives. Then, I said if you are facing problem you along with the children may go anywhere," the note added.

Inaction spikes

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have kept vital or burning issues [of audit objections] unresolved for a long period of time," said Hakeem adding that encouraged wrongdoers to continue indulging in corruption.

Timely action against them would have resulted in a significant decrease in corruption, he said while speaking at a roundtable on the media's role as a watchdog of public financial system. The programme was organised at Brac Centre in the capital by Management and Resources Development Initiative (MRDI) and the British High Commission.

The Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General (OCAG) audited a number of government entities in the last couple of years and found irregularities in different accounts, said the top boss of auditing.

But the government has failed to take punitive actions against the people responsible, even in some serious cases, despite repeated recommendations made by OCAG, said Hakeem.

The office of CAG has some limitations -- shortage of staff and skilled manpower and absence of a comprehensive audit law -- though it is a constitutional body and has the mandate to work independently, he said.

On why the CAG office fails to deliver the optimum level of service, he said, "We are running our office only by 40 percent of the staff required."

Referring to the shortage of skilled manpower, he said OCAG has no expert to audit bridge constructions.

However, OCAG has been working to reduce the backlog created over the years.

Since the independence, Public Accounts Committee (PAC) submitted a total of 918 audit reports prepared by OCAG to parliament.

Up to the eighth parliament, 332 reports were discussed there, while PAC placed 586 reports for discussion in the ninth parliament, out of which 293 have so far been discussed.

During the tenure of the current parliament until February, PAC and its sub-

committee held 175 meetings, a record compared to that of other parliaments.

Speaking as the chief guest at the discussion, PAC Chairman Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir stressed the need for broader auditing, especially for a number of government bodies such as the seven city corporations, the local government and rural development sector and the defence.

Defence budgets are not discussed comprehensively in parliament due to "an evil deed" by HM Ershad during his autocratic rule, he said. Ershad had made a provision, making it non-compulsory for the defence ministry to present its expenditure elaborately to the House.

"So, it has made a room for irregularities," said Alamgir.

The chief of the parliamentary standing committee on public accounts also said an audit act will be placed in parliament in the upcoming budget session, aiming to ensure more transparency and accountability in the public financial

management. "This will be the first of its kind in the country," he noted.

In the key-note presentation, AHM Moazzem Hossain, editor of The Financial Express, said the media should raise public awareness about corruption and investigate and report incidences of corruption in a professional and ethical manner.

The media can play a positive role in promoting democracy, good governance, accountability and transparency, only if it gets a favourable environment to do so, he added.

Hasibur Rahman, executive director of MRDI, said the media and government bodies could jointly play a vital role in ensuring proper management of public funds. Civil society can also contribute to the process.

Abdul Quayum, joint editor of Bangla daily Prothom Alo; Ananya Raihan, executive director of D.Net, and Amulya Kumar Debnath, director general of Central Procurement Technical Unit also spoke at the programme.

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diture remains unclear," he said, recommending establishment of a commission on local government and formulation of a separate budget for the local government.

There were many laws relating to the local government. Now it required framing an umbrella law incorporating all, he said.

Foyzur Rahman Fakir, chairman of Mymensingh upazila, said the upazila parishad cannot generate revenue of its own because of delays in formulating a tax schedule in line with the law.

Former election commissioner M Sakhawat Hossain said the political parties extend support to candidates at grassroots level indirectly. It created problems in getting funds in case

No plan to ban hartal

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Calling hartal a democratic right, but the political parties should enforce hartal in a peaceful manner, he said urging the opposition to refrain from damaging the economy by carrying out subversive activities in the name of hartal.

The minister was talking to newsmen after attending the inaugural session of the 113th Judicial Administration Training Course for the lower court judges at Judicial Administration Training Institute in the capital.

Earlier on Thursday, the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) had demanded the government enact a law for stopping hartal for ever in the interest of economic development and political stability in the country.

Killing a bus driver by torching it and vandalising vehicles are not consistent

with hartal, mentioned Shafique.

Replying to a query on whether the war crimes trial would be hampered due to strikes enforced by BNP, the law minister said the trial will go on in due course of law, although the strikes can delay the trial proceedings slightly.

The present government has taken steps to complete the trial in order to establish the rule of law, he added.

Shafique, however, ruled out the allegation against the government made by the opposition of influencing the courts, saying that any judge can feel embarrassed during hearing a case, which is nothing new.

Earlier, during the inaugural session of the training programme the law minister urged the judges to play their roles effectively to dispose of cases outside of the court through the Alternative Dispute Resolution.

a candidate from the opposition party won, he said.

To solve the problem, he said, "Let the parties make their manifestos known to the public at the very outset."

Zarina Rahman Khan, professor of public administration at Dhaka University, also echoed the former election commissioner saying that parties remain unaccountable because of extending silent support to candidates at local government elections.

Former commerce minister Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury and lawmakers Gulam Mawla Rony, Fazlul Azim and Monowar Hossain Chowdhury and Secretary of Local Government Division Abu Alam Md Shahid Khan, among others, also spoke at the discussion.