

Myanmar leader promises to tackle Rohingya issue

UN chief meets OIC general secy, urges restraint

AGENCIES

Myanmar's President Thein Sein promised UN leaders he would tackle ethnic unrest between Buddhists and Muslims in Rakhine state which has raised widespread international concern, the UN said yesterday.

Thein Sein made the vow in a meeting with UN leader Ban Ki-moon at the end of the UN General Assembly summit, where Muslim leaders have led calls for action to help tens of thousands of Islamic followers displaced by the unrest.

Ban and Thein Sein discussed the fighting in Rakhine "and the immediate and long-term perspectives to promote intercommunal harmony and address the root causes of the tension there," said UN spokesman Martin Nesirky.

The president confirmed the country would address the long-term ramifications of this question," he said.

The Myanmar leader vowed before the UN General Assembly that he would seek to tackle the problems in Rakhine state.

Meanwhile, the UN secretary-general yesterday urged the



Thein Sein

world's largest Islamic body to "treat carefully" the issue of the stateless Muslim Rohingyas in Myanmar because it could affect the reform process underway in the country.

Over the past year, Myanmar has introduced the most sweeping reforms in the former British colony since a 1962 military coup. A semi-civilian government, stacked with former generals, has allowed elections, eased rules on protests and freed dissidents.

But an outbreak of violence in June between ethnic Rakhine Buddhists and the Rohingyas killed 80 people and displaced thousands.

Rights groups accused Myanmar security forces of killing, raping and arresting Rohingyas after the riots.

An OIC committee set up to deal with the Rohingya issue met for the first time in New York this week and called for them to be given rights as citizens in Myanmar.

Myanmar's president is in a tight spot. Concessions towards the Rohingyas could prove unpopular among the general public, but perceived ill-treatment risks angering Western countries that have eased sanctions in response to human rights reforms.

ANTI-ISLAM FILM Thousands protest in Pakistan

AFP, Karachi

Thousands of people thronged the streets of Pakistan's biggest city of Karachi yesterday in the latest protest against a US-made anti-Islam film, police and witnesses said.

Shafiq Ahmad, a senior police officer in Karachi, said there were "at least 15,000" protesters while rally organisers claimed "millions of people" participated.

Police beefed up security before the rally, while paramilitary forces were also deployed.

The crudely-made "Innocence of Muslims" movie has sparked angry and at times violent demonstrations across the globe.

The protests killed 21 people and wounded 229 in Pakistan.

BJP wants Indian PM to go, predicts early polls

IANS, Haryana

The BJP has demanded Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's resignation and said the 2014 Lok Sabha election could be held early if his government falls.

The main opposition party struck a belligerent note as it concluded a three-day session of its national executive and national council attended by some 1,200 delegates from around the country on Friday.

The Bharatiya Janata Party said the prime minister needed to go over the irregularities in coal block allocations.

BJP leader Murli Manmohan Singh said Manmohan Singh, as then coal minister, was "directly responsible for these questionable allocations. He should resign".

BJP president Nitin Gadkari said he was confident the party would form the next central government.

It was party veteran LK Advani who



Narendra Modi

minister to Gandhi.

Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi launched a sharp attack on the UPA government, accusing Manmohan Singh of working for "foreigners".

"In eight years, you have become Singham (lion) twice, once when there was the nuclear treaty with the US and the second on the FDI issue," Modi said.

"Both benefit foreigners. Why doesn't he become a Singham for India?"

Modi also attacked Sonia Gandhi, saying she was involved in every scam in the country.

India for stable ties with China

PTI, New York

External affairs minister S M Krishna has said that India's a key foreign policy priority is to invest in building a stable and cooperative relationship with China which will be a source of stability and prosperity in the region.

Krishna, who is here to participate in the UN General Assembly session, said a stable and secure Asia, Indian Ocean and the Pacific region is a key requirement of India's own security and prosperity in the 21st century.

"We will continue to invest in building a stable and cooperative relationship with China that is mutually beneficial, and also a source of regional stability and prosperity," he said in his lecture titled 'India's Foreign Policy Priorities for the 21st Century' at Rhode Island's prestigious Ivy league institution Brown University on Friday.

He cautioned that Asia's extraordinary accomplishments in the last few decades could be reversed if "great power rivalry, national chauvinism and arms race" take hold of the region.

On India's relations with the US, Krishna said as New Delhi looks at its foreign policy priorities in the decades ahead, it sees convergence of interests with the US as well as a strong partnership in achieving the shared goals.



More security alerts for Philippines

AFP, Manila

Britain, Canada and Australia yesterday joined the US in issuing a security alert for their citizens in the Philippines after the US embassy warned of a threat against Americans in the capital.

The warnings urged Westerners in Manila to be on alert amid fears they could get caught up in an attempted attack against Americans, following the US embassy warning issued Friday.

On Friday, the US embassy warned that an unspecified threat against Americans in the capital had been detected by "reliable security forces".

"This threat remains in effect until October 10, 2012," the advisory said. The US embassy would not elaborate on the danger.

Pilot error behind plane crash: Nepal

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal yesterday said an error by a "panic-stricken" pilot likely caused the crash of an Everest-bound plane that killed all 19 on board.

The twin-propeller Sita Air plane had just taken off on Friday from Kathmandu and was headed to the town of Lukla, gateway to Mount Everest, when it plunged into the banks of a river near the city's airport around daybreak.

"The pilot's failure to maintain the required radius is a likely cause of the accident," said senior ministry official Suresh Acharya, adding the plane turned too sharply because it had not gained enough altitude.

The Dornier aircraft, which crashed minutes after take-off, was headed for Mount Everest, the world's tallest mountain, killing the 19 people on board, including British and Chinese Everest-bound trekkers.

The plane's right engine burst into flames after being hit by a large bird, causing the aircraft to plummet into the river bank and explode into a huge fireball.

"A plane crash does not occur simply just because its engine was hit by a bird," he said, noting incidents when one engine of a twin-engine aircraft has failed and the plane is still able to land safely.

"The pilot may have been panic-stricken," he added, and "made a steep narrow turn instead of forming a wider radius required to bring the malfunctioning aircraft back to the runway."

ISI behind Hina-Bilawal relationship rumour

Claims Pak ruling party; Hina denies rumours

STAR REPORT

Senior Pakistan People's Party (PPP) figures on Thursday said they believed the claims -- their Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar and Bilawal Bhutto Zardari have an affair -- were part of a plot by the country's feared Inter-Security Intelligence (ISI) agency to damage Hina's reputation, reports London-based The Daily Telegraph.

The PPP figures said it blames their minister for her part in facilitating a UN investigation into thousands of missing people detained by the security forces, the newspaper said.

One PPP official told The Daily Telegraph that the ISI expects the United Nations' Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances to recommend senior army



Bilawal Bhutto



Hina Rabbani Khar

and intelligence officials be charged for their role and blame Hina for allowing the delegation into the country.

"They are not happy with her," the official said.

"The UN mission received a cold reception but Hina was called in by the president to meet him and the army chief. She crossed some red line," he added.

The government has not officially commented on the allegations.

Claims of an affair between Hina, the 34-year-old glamorous foreign minister, and 24-year-old scion of the country's most powerful dynasty Bilawal have fuelled feverish speculation and outrage in Pakistan since they were reported in a Bangladeshi tabloid earlier this week.

Is this freedom

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religious references, and not impose concepts or cultures that are unacceptable to us."

Morsi was one of the first leaders to be democratically elected after Arab Spring revolutions that led to changes in the governments of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen last year.

Western states that backed the uprisings have urged these countries to quickly foster democratic reforms and adhere stringently to human rights principles and basic freedoms.

They fear a more austere version of Islam could hijack the protest movements. Most Western speakers at the United Nation defended freedom of speech, but shied away from calls by Muslim leaders for an international ban on blasphemy.

While repeating his condemnations of the video, US President Obama staunchly defended free speech, riling some of those leaders.

"The strongest weapon against hateful speech is not repression, it is more speech - the voices of tolerance that rally against bigotry and blasphemy," Obama said in a 30-minute speech dominated by this theme.

'CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS'
Speaking after Obama, President Asif Ali Zardari of Pakistan, where more than a dozen people were killed in protests against the anti-Islam film, demanded insults to religion be criminalised.

"The international community must not become silent observers and should criminalize such acts that destroy the peace of the world and endanger world security by misusing freedom of expression," he said.

Highlighting the anger of some, about 150 protesters demanded "justice" and chanted "there is no god but Allah" outside the UN building on Thursday. One placard read: "Blaspheming my Prophet must be made a crime at the UN."

Foreign ministers from

the 57-member Organization of Islamic Cooperation met on Friday. The film topped the agenda.

"This incident demonstrates the serious consequences of abusing the principle of freedom of expression on one side and the freedom of demonstration on the other side," OIC Secretary-General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu told reporters.

Human Rights First and Muslim Public Affairs Council, two US-based advocacy groups, warned of the risks of regulating such freedoms.

"Countless incidents show that when governments or religious movements seek to punish offences in the name of combating religious bigotry, violence then ensues and real violations of human rights are perpetrated against targeted individuals," they said in a joint statement.

The 47-member UN Human Rights Council, dominated by developing states, has passed non-binding resolutions against defamation of religion for over a decade. Similar ones were endorsed in the UN General Assembly.

European countries, the United States and several Latin American nations in the council opposed the resolutions, arguing that while individual people have human rights, religions do not, and that existing UN pacts - if enforced - were sufficient to curb incitement to hatred and violence.

German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle attempted to dampen talk of a clash of civilizations on Thursday.

"Some would have us believe that the burning embassy buildings are proof of a clash of civilizations," Westerwelle said in his UN address. "We must not allow ourselves to be deluded by such arguments. This is not a clash of civilizations. It is a clash within civilizations. It is also a struggle for the soul of the movement for change in the Arab world."

Child Helpline

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lost child was crying her eyes out as she could not find any familiar face in the crowd.

Fortunately, for the traumatised child in such unkind surroundings, there was a tea stall vendor who took notice of her. This vendor is a volunteer for the NGO Aparajevo Bangladesh's project called Child Helpline that helps lost and distressed children.

The vendor contacted the Child Helpline and soon afterwards, the child was united with her family in Narayanganj on Eid day.

"A child getting lost in crowds is not an uncommon scenario in Bangladesh and unfortunately dangers in the guise of child traffickers and molesters are on the prowl for such opportune moment to make their move. A scary thought indeed but it is exactly to counter such frightful act social workers and volunteers of Child Helpline stay vigilant at these places as well," says Tanzima Taslim, Documentation and Publication Officer, Child Helpline.

"Child Helpline is the first toll-free land line number in Bangladesh and anyone can dial 1098 within the project area that covers 8 police stations -- namely Motijheel, Paltan, Lalbagh, Chakbazar, Bongshal, Kotwali, Sutrapur, Shyampur and 20 wards of Old Dhaka. Its services are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. And others outside the project area can call from mobiles or landlines on 027312340," says Tanzima.

"We want to set up booths at Gabtoli bus terminal and Kamalapur station similar to our Sadarghat launch terminal mobile rescue booth. With the help of police we make special provisions during festivals and keep vigil at these points," she adds.

However there are a few challenges and difficulties faced by the project. These include accessing the 1098 toll free number from mobile phones, providing information in a short time, domestic violence case intervention

and access to children, support to disabled children, referrals in a short time, safe shelters for boys, rescues and referrals from outside the project area.

"We are pursuing mobile operators to give us a toll free number because we believe that if we had a mobile number, our outreach would have multiplied," says Russel Ahmed Sojib, Child Rights Officer of Aparajevo Bangladesh. Mobile operators are yet to lend a hand to the project.

The project has very elaborate and earnest awareness building and outreach programmes, namely school awareness sessions and peer team formations, human chains, campaigns at different programmes and distribution of awareness materials. Besides, visiting religious institutes to raise awareness through khutba during Friday prayers, meeting with Imams, NGO representatives, teachers, guardians, and social clubs/panchaet members are also done.

"The social workers also visit health care centres, factories, launch terminals, police stations and victim support centres. They also arrange for night field visits and maintain regular contact with mobile recharge shops and local grocery shops which help them to locate children at risk and in need of help quite effectively. Along with all these awareness building steps, Child Helpline has a help desk at every Ward Secretary's office throughout the project area," says Russel.

Interactive popular theatre is another means to build awareness where child actors interact and ask the audience questions and get their opinions regarding the project.

The Child Helpline office is situated inside the Mahanagar Shishu Hospital premises at Lalbagh. The Dhaka City Corporation gave the project a rent-free room for its official use and the project is funded by UNICEF.

Go for deep sea port

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(South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) countries, he added.

Once established, the deep-sea port would boost intra-regional trade in South Asia that currently stands at only five percent compared to 26 percent in Asean.

Hafeez Rahman said the annual growth of container traffic through Chittagong port is 11.2 percent, which will go up further in the future.

Asian economy, he noted, would contribute 60 percent to the global economy by 2050 with the emerging Chinese and Indian economies.

Indian Deputy High

Commissioner Sandip Chakraborty said India is currently working with Bangladesh Railway and Mongla port authority for developing their infrastructure.

Only 42 percent of the Mongla port's capacity is utilised currently and there is scope to further increase its capacity, he added.

BNP leader and former minister Osman Faruq said no evident progress has been made since BNP took an initiative to set up the deep-sea port in 2004.

The speakers also stressed enhancing the capacity of the Chittagong port.

President of Forum for People's Voice Manjur-Ul-Amin Chowdhury and its Secretary Sheikh Rafiqul Islam also spoke.

China on August 1 formally proposed to invest in four mega projects, including the deep-sea port. But the government is yet to respond to the proposal.

The United States, Japan and India also expressed their interest in building the sea port at Sonadia island in the Bay of Bengal.

As per a techno-economic feasibility study done in August 2009, the deep-sea port will be established at an estimated Tk 40,000.

The first-phase work of the deep-sea port was supposed to begin at the end of last year and be completed by 2015.

The only progress made so far in this regard was the formation of a cell in August 2010. None can say when the construction work would start as the government is maintaining a go-slow policy.

The study found that the port would boost the country's GDP growth by 2 percent, as it would create a huge employment opportunity, increase export and import and raise the country's capacity to handle cargos.

Initiative instant hit

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mrigel and other species, Jamal observed.

"We strictly monitor the market so that no trader can sell fish or other perishable items without having those checked by a detector," said Shamim Bhuiyan, general secretary of Malibagh Market Traders Cooperatives Ltd.

"Now we check fish by a sophisticated formalin detector at the entry point of the market from 6:00am to 10:00am every day," Bhuiyan added.

No-one is allowed to sell the fish if formalin is detected in those, he said, adding, the formalin detector can check around 100 fish in every ten minutes.

The move came at a time when food adulteration runs rampant in the country.

Many sellers spray their fish with formalin, which is usually used for preservation of tissues. It makes the fish stiff and keeps those look fresh for long.

Almost everything -- from vegetables, milk, beverages, sweetsmeats, ice cream to

declined in last fiscal year.

According to data from the National Board of Revenue, formalin import declined by 23.8 percent to 205 tonnes in fiscal 2011-12 compared to the previous fiscal.

The apex trade body FBCCI has trained up four staff of Malibagh Market Traders Cooperatives Ltd to operate the Tk 1.35-lakh detector smoothly.

"We check every fish except hilsa through the detector," said Mostafa Kamal, one of the four operators.

He said they often find formalin in imported fish -- rui, katla and mrigel -- and different species of sea fish. Besides, they also find formalin in the fish that usually come from distant areas such as Khulna, Rajshahi and Satkhira.

Kamal said the machine has detected formalin level from 2ppm up to 14ppm during the last six days, which is dangerous for health.

"We did not allow sale of those fish in the market," added Kamal, who is also joint secretary of the Cooperatives.

The traders say they now procure fish from suppliers in small quantities after becoming sure those are not mixed with formalin.

"Many new customers are now coming up to buy formalin-free fish. So, I now procure

fish from Karwan Bazar kitchen market in small quantities so that I can sell out those fish in a day," said Mohammad Babul, one of the 62 fish traders of the market.

Fourteen traders have however stopped business after the announcement of formalin-free market as they used to sell imported fish, said Bhuiyan.

Traders now have to be more cautious about selling fish thanks to the use of a sophisticated machine, said Babul, who has been selling fish in the market for over 30 years.

Babul has however expressed satisfaction with the formalin detector. "We should not sell chemicals-mixed items as those might harm our children," he said. The announcement of the formalin-free market has already attracted a huge number of new customers and also boosted sales. "We get 40 percent new customers and are selling Tk 14 lakh per day, which was hovering between Tk 8 to Tk 10 lakh a week ago," informed Bhuiyan.

"We have so far got a good response from the customers and traders as many people are now going to Malibagh to buy chemicals-free fish," said FBCCI Director Helal Uddin.

Helal is the key initiator to

launch an FBCCI project titled "Formalin and poisonous carbide free ideal market".

Talking to The Daily Star, Helal said they have detected presence of formalin mostly in imported fish such as rui, katla and mrigel that come from Myanmar and India.

The government should ban import of those species, he said, recommending an embargo on export of all types of fish from Bangladesh due to their shortage in the local markets.

He said the government should strengthen its monitoring system and suggest to the apex trade body how to implement and expand its project in other city markets.

The FBCCI director said they will supply similar detectors to 15-20 other city markets in October with the help of banks and other private organisations.

"We have a plan to declare Dhaka a formalin-free city within the next two months," he added.

Backed by finance from the Social Islami Bank Ltd, the FBCCI will soon provide two formalin detectors to Gulshan-2 and New Market kitchen markets.

Helal also urged the government to take preventive action against misuse of formalin at the root level.