

Politician dragged into British sex abuse scandal

AFP, London

Internet speculation was circulating Saturday after a BBC news programme embroiled in the Jimmy Savile sex abuse scandal aired a report in which two men claimed they had been abused by a top politician.

The report on Newsnight did not name the man but said he was a leading Conservative politician from Margaret Thatcher's time as prime minister, from 1979 to 1990.

The claims centred around abuse at children's homes in north Wales, which was the subject of an inquiry in 2000.

Steve Meesham, who claimed he was repeatedly attacked during his time in care, was asked how many times he was abused by the politician.

"Off my head I wouldn't give an exact number because obviously I'm going back many years but certainly more than a dozen," he told Newsnight. "Cars would pull up outside the home and you were taken."

It was alleged that the abuse took place in the late 1970s.

Another alleged victim, who was not named, did not appear on camera and whose words were spoken by an actor, said that he was abused by the same politician, who took him out in his car and a sex act took place.

The politician was described as a shadowy figure of high public standing but the Newsnight report said there was simply not enough to go on "to name names".

The unidentified politician told The Daily Telegraph newspaper that the allegations were "totally untrue" and he had threatened legal action if his name appeared in the story.

"The BBC isn't what it used to be," he added.

"I've never been to this children's home." The BBC has been plunged into crisis over allegations that the late Savile, one of its top presenters from the 1960s to the 1980s, abused hundreds of youngsters, with Scotland Yard considering him one of Britain's most prolific sex offenders.

An independent review is taking place at the BBC into the decision last December to drop a Newsnight item on Savile containing allegations of abuse.

The review will look at whether there were any management failings surrounding the decision to axe the probe.

Meanwhile The Sun newspaper's front page Saturday claimed that three BBC staff tried to rape an 18-year-old male television extra as a popular comedy actor, who died in the 1980s, performed a sex act.

The alleged victim has given a statement to the police.

Iraq attacks kill three

AFP, Baghdad

Attacks north of Baghdad killed at least three people yesterday, including two soldiers gunned down at a checkpoint, officials said.

The two soldiers were killed and three others wounded when gunmen opened fire on their checkpoint in the town of Taji, just north of the capital, early Saturday, security and medical officials said.

Another man was killed in a bomb attack on his car near the main northern city of Mosul, officials said.

The latest deaths came after figures released on Thursday showed a sharp decline in violence last month, with the number of people killed the lowest since June.

Highly successful

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Indira Gandhi International Airport in Delhi before flying back to Dhaka.

Earlier, Khaleda called on Indian President Pranab Mukherjee at the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

She then drove straight to the airport and boarded a flight of Jet Airways at about 12:30 pm.

Asked if BNP would change its policy towards India, Khaleda, who for the first time visited India as the opposition leader, avoided a direct reply and said, "We have to do everything through talks."

She also said her talks with the Indian leaders took place in a "cordial" atmosphere.

During the talks, Khaleda raised different bilateral issues, including border killings, seeking an end to recurrence of such incidents for maintaining strong relations between the two countries.

On her meeting with Pranab, the BNP chief told journalists that they discussed various issues in a very cordial atmosphere.

"I am astonished by the hospitality (India) showed to me. I think this visit is a success," she said.

BNP Vice Chairman and former foreign secretary Shamsher Mobin Chowdhury, who accompa-

nied the party chief, said the two leaders had a 55-minute meeting.

At the airport, senior officials of the Indian foreign ministry and those of Bangladesh High Commission saw her off.

The BNP chief and her entourage arrived at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport at 3:05pm.

Thousands of leaders and activists of BNP and its front organisations carrying party flag, festoons, banners and flowers received the party chief outside the airport. They chanted slogans terming her visit "historic".

In response, Khaleda waved her hands to the supporters. She avoided talking to journalists.

In 2006, Khaleda visited India as prime minister.

Her visit this time, a year before the general elections in Bangladesh, drew huge interest in both the neighbouring countries.

Talking to journalists after Khaleda's return home, BNP standing committee member Moudud Ahmed said her visit was a big success.

To ensure a favourable atmosphere, police will prevent people from accessing the 200-yard radius of the exam centres.

The restriction begins today and will continue till the exams are over, Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner Benazir Ahmed said in a press release on Thursday.

The exams will end on November 15 and results are expected to be published before December.

Buddhists point

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The leaders handed over the adviser a seven-point charter of demands to bring back communal harmony in the upazila.

Incensed apparently by a Facebook posting of a photo derogatory to the holy Quran, religious bigots in Ramu destroyed 12 pagodas and more than 50 houses on the night of September 29.

The charter held inaction of the police responsible for the atrocities on the Buddhists. "Had the police played its due role, the situation would not have been so grave."

The demands include immediate identification of the culprits, their arrest and meting out exemplary punishment to them, formation of a special tribunal for a fair and neutral probe into the atrocities, engagement of senior and experienced investigators in the probe, appointments of competent OC at Ramu Police Station and SP in Cox's Bazar, better treatment for top monk Satyapriya Mohathero and financial support to the family of Swapan Barua, who died of heart attack after seeing the destroyed monasteries.

Later, addressing a citizens' rally on the Sima Bihar premises, Gowher Rizvi said he went there to say sorry for the Buddhist community for the atrocities.

Termining the Ramu incident a national disaster, the adviser said, "I have lost my words seeing the level of the atrocities. Those who unleashed the despicable violence have no religion, party and humanity. They will be tried on the soil of this country."

The Ramu atrocities had nothing to do with politics and nobody should do politics with the incident, he mentioned.

Speaking at the programme as the chief guest, Industries Minister Dilip Barua asked, "Why the police are not arresting the culprits even after a month of the attack?"

The minister warned of trying the people who are harbouring the culprits.

Special Public Prosecutor and Cox's Bazar Awami League Joint Secretary Nurul Islam said the home minister, industries minister and inspector general of police visited Ramu on September 30.

"How could fresh attacks be carried out in Teknaf and Ukhiya the same day following their return to Dhaka? Who is responsible for this? Has this not put the role of the local administration into question?"

Though the Ramu upazila administration organised the programme, upazila chairman, upazila nirbahi officer and the SP did not speak due to objec-

tion by the Buddhist leaders. Monk Satyapriya Mohathero, Deputy Commissioner of Cox's Bazar Mostak Ahmed Chowdhury, Buddhist leaders Nitish Barua, Tarun Barua, Awami Swachhchasebak League leaders Rahul Barua, Sunil Barua and Hindu community leader Babul Sharma addressed the programme, among others.

All the speakers blasted the police for their miserable failure to check the savageries and demanded the authorities concerned take the cops under the purview of law.

He reads

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monk of the Buddhist community in the country, wept time and again while reading out his speech, which was one of sorrows.

A pall of gloom and silence descended on the venue. Tears rolling down his cheeks, he recounted the devastation of a monastery that had survived for three centuries.

The prime minister's advisor, ministers, lawmakers, politicians, civil society personality, hundreds of men and women -- none could hold back their tears as the monk wept.

Ramu had long been a holy place for the entire Buddhist community. Archaeological monuments like the Bihar attracted countless visitors to the place, said the monk.

Satyapriya noted that the Buddhist community had long been living in Ramu in communal harmony with followers of other religions, cherishing the pride of brotherhood.

But the barbaric attacks of September 29 not only ruined the Buddhist archaeological sites but also defiled their history of communal harmony, he said.

"We believed that we were the safest among the religious minorities," said Satyapriya, one of the most revered monks. "But the horrific September incident has shaken that belief."

What they have lost is irreparable and irrecoverable, said the monk.

Three police shot dead in Egypt's Sinai

AFP, Cairo

Gunmen killed three Egyptian policemen and seriously wounded a fourth in the El-Arish region of the Sinai Peninsula yesterday, state television said.

"Armed men who might belong to a jihadist group attacked a police vehicle and fired on its passengers before fleeing," a security source said.

Boy dies

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Of the injured, Robin, 10, suffered fracture in his waist and Ratan aged nine had a leg broken. They are under treatment in private hospitals.

The concrete arch fell on Samrat who was standing under it, while the other two were on top of it for plucking wood apples (Bel) from a nearby tree, said Harun-or Rashid, a sub-inspector at Demra Police Station.

Fatally injured Samrat was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where doctors declared him dead.

JSC exams

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examinees is 47,252 more than that of last year.

Of the examinees, 15,53,575 are from schools, while 3,54,790 are from madrasas. A total of 388 students will sit for the exams at seven centres overseas.

The number of female students is higher than male. Overall, 53 percent examinees are female.

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Plan takes shape for Syria opposition overhaul

AFP, Amman

Details emerged yesterday of plans to reshape Syria's opposition into a representative government-in-exile, on the eve of key talks between regime opponents.

The talks starting Sunday in the Qatari capital Doha come amid US criticism of the main exiled opposition group, the Syrian National Council (SNC), which Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said this week was not representative.

Reports have emerged that Washington is pressing for an overhaul of the opposition, with long-time dissident Riad Seif touted as the potential head of a new government-in-exile dubbed the Syrian National Initiative.

Seif and about two dozen other leading opposition figures gathered in Jordan's capital Amman this week and came up with proposals for a new body to represent the disparate groups opposing President Bashar al-Assad.

Among those in attendance were some SNC members, former premier Riad Hijab, who defected in August, Ali Sadreddin Bayanuni of the Muslim Brotherhood and Kurdish and tribal representatives, participants said.

In a statement Saturday, participants sought to quell concerns the overhaul is aimed at building an opposition that would be willing to negotiate with Assad.

"Assad and his entourage leaving power is a non-negotiable precondition for any dialogue aimed at finding a non-military solution, if that is still possible," the statement said.

The Amman meeting also came out in support of "efforts underway to put in place a unified political body for the whole of the opposition," according to the statement.

It examined "the means to unify the opposition in a way worthy of the sacrifices on the ground and to secure the international, regional and Arab support needed to overthrow the regime."

The group backed the rebel "Free Syrian Army and the movements behind the revolution on the ground as legitimate means to topple the criminal regime."

Confusion back

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Sending him on leave was one of the WB's key conditions for its revival of \$1.2 billion loan.

Following his return, WB's local and Washington offices contacted several key government policymakers on Thursday and Friday to know about Mashur's current job status. The Bank was told that he was still on leave.

AWB official said they are still confused about the latest development and will closely watch the situation.

Some government officials claim that Mashur will not take part in any government activities even if he has joined office.

But the WB official said they judge leave as leave, and an individual, who is on leave, would not go to office.

The Washington-based lender cancelled its loan in June this year also because all the public officials, allegedly involved in corruption, were not sent on leave, he told The Daily Star.

The WB agreed to revive the loan following the government's written commitment that it would meet all of the Bank's conditions that include sending on leave all government officials, allegedly involved in

corruption.

His return has surprised top government officials and Awami League leaders, who think it could jeopardise the Padma bridge project, one of the key election promises of the ruling party.

A finance ministry official said the WB has never revived any fully cancelled loan in its history. Now, there could be new troubles over the financing of the \$2.9 billion project because of an individual, said the official.

Top AL leaders are also embarrassed about his sudden return. They think this would only fuel new debate and bring no good to the government, the country or the party.

The Daily Star talked to a number of ministers and high-profile AL leaders about the Mashur issue. Most of them expressed resentment at his sudden return.

They said Mashur's leave has expired. The government neither engaged him in a new job nor dismissed him from his position.

A source at the finance ministry said the issue of Mashur's leave extension was discussed at a meeting between Finance Minister

AMA Muhith and his ministry's high officials.

The minister told them that the prime minister will decide on it after she returns on November 7 from her visit to Vietnam and Laos, said the source.

The Daily Star tried to contact Finance Minister and Prime Minister's Public Administration Adviser HT Imam over the last two days, but they could not be reached.

Mashur told bdnews24.com yesterday that he will go by whatever the prime minister decides for him.

In June, the World Bank cancelled its \$1.2 billion loan for the project citing "corruption conspiracy". It said the government must meet three conditions, including sending Mashur on leave, for the revival of the loan agreement.

The global lender decided to revive its loan on September 21 after the Bangladesh government agreed to its terms and conditions.

It then appointed a three-member external panel early last month to assess the conduct of the ACC investigation. The panel recently visited Dhaka.

Trains face little terrors

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places to advise people against such stone throwing, but all in vain.

Safwana Chowdhury, a woman who regularly travels by train, has experienced it first-hand.

She said, "We were near Akhaura on the way to Dhaka when a big chunk of a brick crashed the window near us. My daughter escaped injury but a man, also by the window, was hit in the eye."

Dhaka Divisional Railway Manager Shahadat Ali said railway drivers and guards have been alerted in this regard. "But then no one can predict when and where they will be hit."

The incidents have hap-

pened mostly in Tongi, Akhaura and Ashuganj areas in the recent times, he added.

According to the Railways Act, 1890, anyone involved in activities that endanger the safety of a train passenger will be sentenced to up to 10 years' imprisonment. But not a single offender has been tried under the act, said the railway officials.

"Implementing the law is difficult as the stone throwers do it to a moving train. If we want to stop the train to catch the culprits, they are out of reach by the time the train stops," said the BR director general.

A few years back, railway guards chased and detained some teenagers on suspi-

cion of throwing stones at a train in Tongi. They were all freed later on as they denied doing so and there were no eyewitnesses. There have been no attempts to catch stone throwers since then.

Bangladesh Railway spends more than Tk 10 lakh a year to replace and repair the damaged windows, said the railway officials, adding that it is a lengthy and difficult process.

Tafazzal Hossain, general manager of Bangladesh Railway's east zone, said, "We cannot do the repair work at stations. We have to take the carriage to our workshop, which is time-consuming."

'Outlaw' killed

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region of the country, said police. He had also been sentenced to life term imprisonment in a murder case.

On information that some outlaws were holding a clandestine meeting at Shalua Bazar in the upazila, a Rab team raided the area around 3:30am, said Lt Commander Noor-e-Alam, operation officer of Rab-6, Khulna.

As soon as the team reached the spot, the outlaws opened fire on the Rab men, forcing them to fire back. That triggered a "gunfight", the Rab official said -- a common version provided by the law enforcers after every such gunfight when deaths take place.

After the criminals managed to flee the scene, the Rab team found a man lying on the

ground with bullet injuries, he said. Local people identified the man as Shailen.

He was then taken to Dumuria Upazila Health Complex where doctors declared him dead.

The body was sent to Khulna Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsy.

The Rab personnel recovered a 9mm pistol, a revolver and six rounds of bullets from the spot. Rab claims that a patrol car of Rab was also damaged during the "gunfight".

Shailen, son of Kalipodo Biswas of Sholua village in the upazila, was accused in 28 cases, including for extortion and murder filed with Dumuria Police Station, said its Officer-in-Charge Md Moshir Rahman.

The victim was the second-

in-command of the NBCP until 2004. But after the killing of its ringleader Monoranjan Goshai Mrinal by his rivals at Bongaon in India's West Bengal, Shailen was made chief of the outlawed party, the OC added.

A few years back, Shailen fled to 24-Parganas in India where he was arrested six months ago for his involvement in criminal activities. A local court jailed him for two months, said Moshir.

After he returned from India last month, Shailen started to reorganise his party, the police official said, adding that Shailen was reportedly killed by his rivals in Paschimanga on January 30 this year. But the report could not be independently confirmed at the time.

BNP's India politics

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with the chairperson to hear from her about her position on India.

Several senior as well as many mid-level leaders in Dhaka have given their mixed reaction over the party chief's India visit that concluded yesterday, especially her interaction with the New Delhi leadership.

Liberal BNP leaders said the visit along with efforts to come out of anti-Indian politics was a bold step as such politics had become obsolete.

Talking to The Daily Star on Wednesday, former foreign minister M Moshed Khan said it would be foolish to bank on anti-India politics just to please a section of the country's people, as people in general very well understood the importance of good relations with India.

"Those days of anti-India politics are gone and it would be a mistake if anyone still maintains that stance."

But hardliners say late president Ziaur Rahman founded the BNP through challenging Indian hege-

mony and people who strongly opposed India joined the party. The party's main strength is anti-India politics, they added.

They say the people who are new in the BNP and believe in shortcuts think the party can go to power by winning Indian trust, and they have apparently misguided the party chief into saying many things during this tour.

"Those who are the mainstream BNP can't be pro-India... the BNP was born with anti-India sentiment as the majority of people in the country are anti-India," said a senior leader of the party, expressing apprehension that the BNP might lose mass support and true foreign friends if its "new policy to please India" continued.

It would not be wise for the BNP to keep faith in India or expect anything from it because, ultimately, New Delhi will help the Awami League win a second term in office.

Another BNP leader said although media reports suggest Khaleda Zia went to

Delhi only to give commitments to India, he was confident that the party chief would not overnight change her mind and policy towards India.

Many mid-ranking BNP leaders think the visit is part of a conspiracy because her statements in India will weaken the BNP and its mainstream supporters and activists will be unhappy because they are part of the BNP for its anti-India stance.

Asked whether the unity of the 18-party alliance, a combine of extreme right-wing political parties, would be affected by this visit, a top BNP leader said, "Our unity with the Jamaat or other rightwing parties are not based on principles."

This is a strategic alliance and the allies play no role in BNP policy making, the party leader said.

On Khaleda's commitment regarding anti-India militants and insurgency groups, he said the BNP had never said it instigated the activities of separatists or militants. So her statement in this context was not new.

Sagar-Runi

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the Intelligence Wing of Rab. The investigators have summoned him to enquire about his son and if he knew anything about the murder.

Sagar Sarowar, news editor at private TV station Maasranga, and his wife Meherun Runi, senior reporter at another TV channel ATN Bangla, were killed in the wee hours of February 11 at their rented apartment in the capital's West Rajabazar.

Earlier, the home ministry had announced a bounty of Tk 10 lakh for Enamul.

The meeting at the home ministry yesterday discussed the progress of investigations into nine sensational cases including the murder cases of former National University vice-chancellor Aftab Ahmed, Suhin Nahar of Dhanmondi and Khorshed Alam Bachchu of Tejgaon.

The monitoring cell asked the investigation officers to complete the probes soon, said meeting sources.

Mahbub

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said his statement on BNP Senior Vice Chairman Tarique Rahman has been "wrongly quoted".

He said, "My discussion was on Bangladesh-India relation on the background of Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia's ensuing visit to India."

Vice-Chairman Tarique Rahman's name had not come in my discussion as the subject was different and scope limited."

"I also did not state anything like 'controversial activities when the party in power'," added the former army chief.

14 kidnappers killed in Nigeria

AFP, Lagos

Nigerian security forces stormed the hideout of the kidnappers of a Turkish national in oil-rich Rivers State and killed 14 of them in a shootout, police said yesterday.

"The hoodlums were shot dead during a gun battle with the security agents in their camp in Kaani community in Ogoni land," state police spokesman Ben Ugwuegbulam told AFP of the incident on Friday.

He said members of the gang who abducted a Turkish construction worker last month had opened fire upon seeing the security agents in their camp.

"The security operatives returned with a superior firepower and in the process shot dead six of the kidnappers instantly, while eight others with gunshot wounds died on the way to the hospital," the police spokesman said.

He added that two other suspects were assisting the police in their investigation.

Ugwuegbulam said the Turkish national had earlier been released unhurt by his captors after they collected ransom money.

'Militia attack' kills 13 in Sudan's Darfur

AFP, Khartoum

Militia in Sudan's North Darfur state attacked a village and killed 13 people, a local source said yesterday, adding to an upsurge of deadly violence