

Europe now takes US cue

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against Bangladesh.

A foreign traders' association in Brussels informed the ambassador of its wish not to buy garment products from factories in Bangladesh with inadequate fire-safety measures, according to the letter.

Europe, which is Bangladesh's largest export destination, buys 60 percent of the nation's garment products.

Meanwhile, the US is threatening to cancel the generalised system of preferences (GSP) facility for Bangladesh, with the unsafe working conditions in factories being one of the reasons.

Bangladesh's delay in signing the Trade and Investment Cooperation Framework Agreement (TICFA) could be another reason, Commerce Minister GM Quader said at a separate event in Dhaka.

"The recent US government move on the GSP facility might have indirectly been linked to the TICFA," Quader said.

Given this backdrop the commerce ministry, in consultation with the different stakeholders, has been preparing the country's 'position paper' to be presented at the next hearing of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) in March.

"The USTR asked Bangladesh to submit the position paper by January 31," the commerce secretary, Mahub Ahmed, told reporters after a consultation meeting at his secretariat.

The USTR in a letter sent to the commerce minister wanted to know the improvements Bangladesh made over the years in four broad areas -- ready-made garment (RMG) sector, shrimp processing sector, export processing zone (EPZ) and fire safety.

With regards to the RMG sector, the USTR wanted to know the progress made in the registration of trade unions, the investigation into the abduction and murder of labour leader Aminul Islam

and the appointment of labour advocate or ombudsman.

The USTR wanted to know the progress made in resolving the recent indecent working conditions in the shrimp sector, Ahmed said.

Regarding EPZ, the USTR sought details about progress in Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority's plan to abolish rules that blacklist workers for labour protests.

On fire safety, the USTR wants to know whether Bangladesh would seek help from the US, the International Labour Organisation or a third party for a baseline analysis of fire fighting capacity and introduce a hotline for fire information.

"We have improved significantly in many areas. I hope the USTR will be satisfied with the measures Bangladesh has taken particularly in improving the fire safety and compliances," Ahmed said.

Lankan

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"The president this morning signed the letter removing Shirani Bandaranayake from the office of chief justice," Rajapakse's spokesman Mohan Samaranyake told AFP. "The letter was hand-delivered to her by a secretary accompanied by presidential security staff."

The Commonwealth had asked Rajapakse on Saturday to reflect on the "constitutional and other ramifications" at a time when Sri Lanka is preparing to host the 54-member group's next summit later this year.

A spokesman for Bandaranayake confirmed that she received the letter sacking her on Sunday, but declined comment. No replacement has been named by the government.

Sri Lanka's Sunday Times newspaper said Rajapakse had offered to allow Bandaranayake to retire and so avoid impeachment during a meeting Saturday with other supreme court judges, but a source close to her told AFP that she was not amenable.

Rajapakse's spokesman would not comment on what was discussed in Saturday's meeting.

The ruling party initially framed 14 charges of financial, professional and personal misconduct against Bandaranayake, but later cleared her of financial wrongdoing and convicted her only on three counts of misconduct.

Legislators had found her guilty of tampering with a case involving a company from which her sister had bought an apartment, of failing to declare dormant bank accounts, and of staying in office while her husband faced a bribery charge.

Bandaranayake walked out of a parliamentary select committee hearing last month after accusing government legislators of verbally abusing her and not giving her a fair trial. She has denied all the allegations against her.

The government launched the impeachment process in November after a spate of Supreme Court decisions went against the administration of Rajapakse, who has tightened his hold on power after crushing Tamil Tiger rebels in May 2009 following a long civil war.

Jackie Chan

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"When you talk about corruption -- the whole world, is there corruption in the United States? The most corrupt in the world!" the Rush Hour star, who has made headlines recently for his controversial views, told Phoenix TV last month.

Chan reaffirmed his view after the show's host questioned him -- "Of course! Where did the great breakdown come from? The world, the United States started it," Chan said, referring to the financial crisis and gesticulating as he spoke.

His comments were rebuked Thursday by Max Fisher, a foreign affairs blogger for the Washington Post, who called them "anti-American" rhetoric that was rooted in China's insecurity.

"To the degree that Chan's comments were anti-American, they likewise reflect a common Chinese view of the United States, one that is rooted not just in attitudes toward America but in China's proud but sometimes insecure view of itself," Fisher said.

Jackie Chan also said China is a relatively young country, where in the first half of its history it was "bullied by so many people", and that it only achieved "real success" in the past decade.

"Our country's leaders admit they are corrupted, etcetera. We are improving -- I can see our country is constantly improving and learning," he said, adding that everyone is making an issue out of China because it is "powerful" now.

Chan, who is known for his martial arts skills and daring stunt work, sparked criticism in Hong Kong, which was returned to China in 1997, after he reportedly told a Chinese magazine last December that protest in the city should be restricted.

In the same interview, he said that he was bullied by Hong Kong triads and had to hide in the United States. He also said he needed to carry a gun everyday to protect himself, leading to a police investigation.

SAYEDEE'S TRIAL

Closing arguments start again

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The prosecution started delivering their closing arguments again in the war crimes case against Jamaat-e-Islami leader Delwar Hossain Sayedee at the International Crimes Tribunal-1 yesterday.

The prosecution and the defence had completed their closing arguments on December 6 and the case was awaiting verdict delivery. But, the court decided to rehear the arguments since Tribunal-1 had been reconstituted.

The tribunal was reconstituted after resignation of its former chairman Justice Md Nizamul Huq amid controversy over his alleged Skype conversation with

expatriate legal expert Ahmed Ziauddin.

Even though the defence wanted retrial, the tribunal rejected the plea and asked both the sides to place their closing arguments again.

Sayedee is facing 20 charges of crimes against humanity allegedly committed by him during the Liberation War in 1971.

Prosecutor Syed Haidar Ali yesterday completed placing arguments for 11 charges.

The proceedings of the case were adjourned until today.

Earlier in the morning, the three-member tribunal, led by Justice ATM Fazle Kabir, ordered private television channel ATN News and

state-run Bangladesh Television to refrain from telecasting reports that could interfere with the administration of justice.

The order came after the defence last week filed two petitions with the tribunal to bring contempt of court charges against ATN News reporter Mashhudul Haq and BTV Director General M Hamid and its reporter Sujon Halder in connection with interfering with the administration of justice and prejudicing the case.

The defence alleged the television reports had prejudiced the case, while the prosecution argued that the media reports should not even be taken into cognisance.

3 Iraq soldiers killed in attack

AFP, Samarra

An attack by militants on an Iraqi army checkpoint north of Baghdad yesterday left three soldiers dead, security and medical officials said.

Insurgents threw hand grenades at the checkpoint, which lies east of Samarra, 110 kilometres north of Baghdad, before opening fire with machineguns, an army lieutenant colonel and a medic at the city's hospital said. Both spoke on condition of anonymity.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attacks.

Bikash

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The Special Judge's Court-3 issued the order on January 9, as Bikash defied a court directive and did not appear before it on that day, said court sources.

Bikash's lawyer Moslehuddin Bhuiyan filed a petition with the court the same day and sought time for his client citing security concerns and sickness. But the court rejected it.

The murder case was filed with Tejaon Police Station on April 2, 1997 after two persons -- Khalid Hossain Mamun and Shamim -- were killed in the office of Public Works Department at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar in the capital.

Bikash, who was arrested in 1997, was freed secretly on December 14 from a Kashimpur prison on bail without the knowledge of the law enforcement agencies. Bikash had obtained the bail on June 20, 1999.

But he had been kept in prison for about 13 years on the basis of production warrants, which are used to keep any person detained if he is also accused in many other cases and if the person needs to be produced before the court in those cases.

His release raised questions about the role of the home ministry. A parliamentary committee on January 10 asked the home ministry to explain why it had secretly released such a top criminal from jail without notifying the law enforcement agencies.

Bikash has been accused in at least 12 cases, including five for murder.

Police and intelligence sources said Bikash went into hiding soon after his release. One of the sources said he had sneaked into neighbouring India.

Nazi nurses

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Other groups Hitler deemed "undesirable" and assisting in the creation of "Super Race Children".

A collection of harrowing photographs has captured these women, probably in the nursing profession's darkest hour.

The actions of the Nazi doctors throughout the war are well documented but the actions of the nurses and others who assisted them in their controversial endeavours are often ignored.

Whether they were simply following orders, or trying to help out, or fight, for a cause they believed in, these women are part of the diverse history of the nursing profession.

But this collection of photographs captures the occupation in its probably its darkest hours.

Probably the most disturbing project the nurses of Nazi Germany assisted in was the Lebensborn Program, where scientists, on orders of Heinrich Himmler, attempted to breed an elite race of pure Aryans to lead the Third Reich.

Under the horrific plan, children who didn't measure up were sent to concentration camps.

In 1939, the Nazi's went even further, travelling to occupied territories such as Poland to steal hundreds of thousands of Aryan-looking children.

The youngsters were transferred to Lebensborn clinics where they were "Germanised" and then adopted out to SS families.

Children who refused to be indoctrinated were beaten, and often sent to concentration camps where they were killed.

45,000 get registered

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applicant Tk 200 to Tk 320, far more than the set rate of Tk 50 for the service.

"I had to give Tk 200 for registration," said Rafiqul Islam of Lawta village of Dighi union parishad.

Ramzan of Ramanpur village said he had paid Tk 320 for the online registration.

Contacted by The Daily Star over the phone, Shafiqul Islam and Emdadul Haque, accused of overcharging, said candidates had willingly overpaid them.

In Patuakhali district of Barisal, 19 of its 72 unions remained out of service due to a lack of equipment, trained manpower and slow speed of internet.

"We are facing slow speed internet that causes delay in the registration process," said

Sohel Rana, an operator of a centre.

The Patuakhali additional deputy commissioner admitted that they could not provide the facility in 19 unions.

"We asked people [of these unions] to go to the neighbouring centres where the service is available."

Visiting some centres in Faridpur districts, Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Minister Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain warned aspiring candidates not to let middlemen intervene in the recruitment process.

"No middlemen will be allowed to exploit the labour market," he said at a Kuizuri union information centre.

Anyone engaging brokers to help him get a job in Malaysia would be punished,

the minister added.

In Barisal district, 77 out of 85 centres gave the service while the rest remained inactive due to power shortage and disruption in internet.

The registration also began in other districts, including the capital Dhaka, Munshiganj, Narsingdi, Narayanganj and Jamalpur.

Expatriates' Welfare Secretary Zafar Ahmed Khan visited some centres of Keraniganj upazila of Dhaka district. He admitted that candidates faced some problems initially but later those were solved.

Asked about the allegations of extra money taken from candidates, he told The Daily Star that none was allowed to charge applicants more than the fixed fee.

Cops cleared

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villagers, saying robbers had been caught.

The mob started bludgeoning the six, without knowing the ill-fated youths had already gone beyond all pain and this was how the murder became known as an incident of mob beating.

The dead were Tipu Sultan of Tejaon College, Towhidur Rahman Palash, Kamruzzaman Kanto and Ibrahim Khalil of Mirpur Bangla College, Shams Rahim Shamam of Maple Leaf International School, and Sifat Jabi Munif of Bangladesh University of Business and Technology.

The next day, sand trader Abdul Malek filed a robbery case against the six and Al-Amin, the lone survivor of the Aminbazar incident, with Savar Police Station.

Arrested in March last year, Malek confessed to the killing before a court and said police had gone to the spot before the villagers

reached. Al-Amin was also beaten up by the policemen's advice.

He also mentioned that he had filed the false robbery case under pressure from Mahubur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Savar Police Station.

According to court sources, Sharif Uddin Ahmed, additional superintendent of Rab and investigation officer of the case, submitted charge sheet yesterday to the Chief Judicial Magistrate's Court of Dhaka.

The IO dropped names of four arrestees -- Forhad, Loton, Shahid and Tara Miah -- as the charges brought against them "were not proved".

He named Malek as the prime accused.

Following the submission of charge sheet, Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate Kazi Shahidul Islam cleared Al-Amin and six others of the

robbery charges and directed the IO to file a case against Malek.

He also ordered filing a case against the sand trader for the false robbery case.

Of the charge-sheeted accused, all residents of Baradeshi village under Savar, 24 were arrested. Thirteen have secured bails from different courts on different dates while the rest 36 are on the run.

Fourteen accused have given their confessional statements.

In the charge sheet, the IO said Malek and his accomplices, all involved in extortion and other crimes, killed the victims and announced over a loudspeaker that robbers had attacked them.

The Rab took over the investigate following a High Court directive on August 7 last year as the Criminal Investigation Department could not make significant progress in investigations.

Ex-NSI chief in the dock

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an AL rally on August 21, 2004 to assassinate Sheikh Hasina, the then leader of the opposition. Yousuf, who was a field officer of NSI, is now an assistant director of the organisation.

Rahim had been admitted to the Combined Military Hospital (CMH) in Dhaka cantonment with piles on August 12, nine days before the grenade attack. And Yousuf was one of the three NSI officials responsible for taking care of their boss by turns.

"The DG sir [Abdur Rahim] went to Hawa Bhaban a day between August 12 and 21 in 2004 while receiving treatment at the Combined Military Hospital," said Yousuf in his deposition as the 66th prosecution witness of the cases before Dhaka Speedy Trial Tribunal.

The then NSI chief returned to the hospital from Hawa Bhaban and received treatment there till August 25.

Soon after the grenade attack on an AL rally at

Bangabandhu Avenue, Yousuf learnt about it over his walkie-talkie.

He was told that AL leader Ivy Rahman and many other activists were killed in the attack. Yousuf then conveyed the message to then NSI chief Rahim.

"DG sir then asked me who were the other leaders that got killed?" Yousuf told the court.

When Yousuf informed his boss about the attack, Rahim specifically wanted to know what happened to Sheikh Hasina, the NSI official said at the court.

In reply, Yousuf told him that Hasina narrowly escaped death, but she sustained injuries to her left ear.

A few hours later, at around 7:00pm, two journalists went to Rahim's cabin in the hospital. The then director of Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) Brig Gen Reza k u l H a i d e r Chowdhury was also in the cabin at that time, said Yousuf who was outside Rahim's cabin.

Yousuf said the two journalists left Rahim's cabin after 15 minutes.

"When they [two journalists] were coming out of the cabin, I heard them discussing that the grenade attack had been carried out following a feud between Sheikh Hasina and Sheikh Selim, and such news would not be acceptable to public at all," said Yousuf.

After an hour, Rezzakul left the cabin, said Yousuf.

The NSI official told the court that he took care of Rahim for three more days after the August 21 attack.

Judge Shahed Nuruddin recorded Yousuf's statement and fixed today for his cross-examination by defence.

Twenty-four people, including Ivy Rahman, wife of President Zillur Rahman, were killed and hundreds of party activists and leaders were injured in the grenade attack at Bangabandhu Avenue on August 21, 2004.