

INDO-PAK ROW
Rivals to
'de-escalate'
tensions

AFP, New Delhi

India's army has reached an "understanding" with Pakistan to "de-escalate" military tensions in Kashmir after a recent deadly flare-up in the disputed border region, a spokesman told AFP yesterday.

"An understanding has been arrived at between the two director-generals of military operations to de-escalate the situation along the Line of Control," army spokesman Jagdeep Dahiya said in reference to a de facto border in Kashmir.

Dahiya said that the two sides' senior military commanders had spoken for 10 minutes over the telephone where they reached their agreement.

"The two DGMOs spoke to each other at 10:00 am (0430 GMT) for 10 minutes and the Pakistan DGMO said strict instructions have been passed not to violate the ceasefire," he said.

Dahiya said Indian troops stationed along the border would also not breach the ceasefire forged between the two nuclear rivals in 2003.

"We have always upheld the ceasefire and have only retaliated," the spokesman said.

The spokesman did not give further details of the conversation between India's DGMO Lieutenant General Vinod Bhatia and his Pakistani counterpart, Major General Ashfaq Nadeem.

An Indian military source in Kashmir told AFP there had been no cross-border firing since the two generals spoke.

POLITICAL TURMOIL IN PAKISTAN

Opposition, govt close ranks over threats

AGENCIES

Pakistan's politicians closed ranks amid threats from a popular cleric and country's top judge to uphold constitution and the hard-fought democratic system, local media reported yesterday.

Pakistan's Prime Minister Raja Pervaiz Ashraf on Tuesday held telephonic contact with oppositions and discussed with them the current political situation.

During his conversation the leaders noted that democracy has been achieved in the country after rendering great sacrifices and struggle by the people of Pakistan, and it would be defended at all costs. Any attempt to subvert the Constitution, derail the democratic dispensation or adopt unconstitutional steps should be dealt with firmly, they all said with one voice.

However, the opposition yesterday demanded an immediate time-

table for polls, but dealt a blow to a massive anti-government protest by refusing to endorse their four-day demonstration.

Speaking on the occasion, PML-N Chief Nawaz Sharif said those creating hurdles in way of people's mandate will be stopped.

At least 25,000 people are estimated to be taking place in the largest rally in the capital since the current government took office in 2008 and leader Tahir-ul Qadri yesterday urged mainstream politicians to support his cause.

But the leader of Pakistan's opposition, Nawaz Sharif, announced after consultations with main opposition parties that they would not be joining Qadri in a move that appeared to isolate the populist Canadian-Pakistani cleric.

Qadri wants parliament dissolved now and a caretaker government set up in consultation with the military

and judiciary to implement key reforms such as setting up a new election commission and banning corrupt candidates.

Qadri's protest rally has threatened to destabilise the nuclear-armed country as it inches towards what would be the first democratic transition of power between two civilian governments at elections due by May this year.

On Tuesday, the Supreme Court ordered the arrest of the prime minister, sparking panic among some observers about a judiciary-military plot using Qadri as a frontman to disrupt the democratic process.

Pakistan PM Ashraf later issued a statement welcoming the opposition parties' position. Commentators say there is no imminent sign that he will be arrested and that he can remain in office until and unless he is convicted.

GRAFT AT RENTAL POWER PROJECTS
Pak CJ vows hearing
at any cost

AGENCIES

Pakistan's Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry yesterday stated that apex court will hear the Rental Power Projects case "even if the sky fall downs".

He remarked that drums are beaten outside the Supreme Court to force it into not hearing the RPP's case.

The Chief Justice stated that the judges have taken an oath of providing justice and will pass a verdict in the case in accordance with the law and Constitution.

He also criticized Federal Ministers for giving out opinions on the case without knowing the details.

The Supreme Court had ordered the arrest of Prime Minister Raja Pervaiz Ashraf in the case on Tuesday. The orders, which were given while Dr Tahirul Qadri's long march was underway in Islamabad, caused uproar across the country.

The deadline for authorities to arrest the prime minister, along with other respondents in the case, ends on Wednesday. The SC will resume hearing of RPP's case today.



Iftikhar Chaudhry

Democracy seen in decline worldwide

AFP, Washington

Democracy around the world was in decline in 2012 for the seventh year in a row as the Arab Spring led nervous autocratic leaders to clamp down on any stirrings of dissent, a study said yesterday.

The annual report by the Freedom House non-governmental organization found 90 countries now enjoyed full freedom, up from 87 nations in 2011, but 27 places saw new restrictions on rights of assembly, expression, and the media.

There "is a critical need for leadership from the United States and other democracies," the "Freedom in the World 2013" report said, arguing in favor of a greater US engagement with civil society in oppressed nations.

Some three billion people, or 43 percent of the global population, enjoyed full political rights and civil liberties, while 1.6 billion resided in partly free countries, where there is only limited respect for freedoms in place.

Some 34 percent of the world's population, or 2.3 billion people, however lived in countries deemed to be not free.

"Our findings point to the growing sophistication of modern authoritarians," said Arch Puddington, Freedom House vice president for research.

Two Barisal schools

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Tuesday but activities of the event began yesterday with the School Activation and online round in Barisal.

Baptist Mission Girls' High School and Barisal Model School and College were the firsts to move to the divisional round this year.

Israt Jahan Mim, of class-VIII, Alen Biswas Tumpa, of class-IX, and Teresa Scholastica Gomes, of class-X, moved to the divisional round from Baptist Mission Girls' High School while Anika Tabassum, of class-VI, Zunayed Asaf, of class-VIII, and Mehrab Hossen Siam, of class-X, progressed to the round from Barisal Model School and

College.

Both schools witnessed a decent turnout of participants and spectators, who said their number would have been even better had it not been for the hartal yesterday.

The School Activation round follows the standard model for the competition in which rounds continue until there are three best spellers left.

The event is planned to go on until June, when the finals are to be held.

Alongside the competition being held at schools, the online round has started with the Spelling Bee game on champs21.com website where players can play as many times as they want.

The top scorers from the

online round will be selected to go to the divisional round to compete with the winners from schools.

The number of scorers to be chosen from the online rounds has not been determined and students are encouraged to play the game as many times as they like.

Last year, the event was a huge success with over one lakh participants. This year champs21.com expects the number to double.

The school round for Dhaka is to begin today with four schools taking part.

Detailed information about the competition is available on www.champs21.com, the first e-learning portal of Bangladesh.

Court orders further probe

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whereabouts of Kalpana, the then organising secretary of the Hill Women's Federation and an indigenous rights activist.

Shewas picked up from her Rangamati home allegedly by the trio on June 12, 1996. Her two brothers were present at the time of abduction.

The girl, then 22, has vanished ever since. Three official investigations over the last 16 years failed to trace her whereabouts or identify her abductors.

Although the case filed by her brother named Ferdous, Nurul and Saleh as the abductors, all the three probe reports cleared them of the charge.

During a hearing of the case on January 13, Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate in Rangamati

Sirajuddowlah Kutubi expressed his disbelief over such investigations, saying: "How can it be that the police didn't even investigate the names mentioned in the First Information Report?"

Yesterday, the court also rejected the recent report submitted by the Criminal Investigation Department, saying the investigation team failed to do its job properly.

"The case should have been filed under Section 161, but the CID men didn't do this. They didn't even interrogate the three suspects or take depositions from the witnesses in the case," observed the magistrate.

However, despite repeated appeals from the petitioner's counsels, the court did not grant a judicial inquiry, citing lack of resources and judicial

officers.

Asked to comment, Kalpana's brother Kalindi Kumar Chakma, also the complainant of the case, said: "I am suspicious about the impartiality of this probe as the SP himself is a police member. So far, the police have completely failed to investigate the case neutrally. They have instead dropped the names of the suspects."

Jewel Dewan, advocate for the plaintiff, told The Daily Star he was satisfied with the court directing the police to quiz the three suspects. "It would be good to finally interrogate them."

Meanwhile, a number of indigenous and human rights activists have registered concern over the investigation.

Supreme Court lawyer Jyotirmoy Barua said, "I am sceptical whether the SP will be able to speak against

the army as there is no such precedence in Bangladesh. In general, everyone is afraid to challenge the army on any grounds."

He highlighted the need for the lawyers and activists to ensure that there is a proper follow-up on the investigation. "We simply cannot let another negative investigation happen. We need to make sure that the SP follows the specific court directives."

Hana Shams Ahmed, coordinator of the CHT Commission, said, "Many of us fear that an investigation by an SP might be just as biased as the previous reports. An independent judicial inquiry would have been much more credible to the family of Kalpana Chakma and to everyone who has been seeking justice for this abduction for the last 16 years."

Rajuk cancels

FROM PAGE 1

following allegedly a row with State Minister for Housing and Public Works Abdul Mannan Khan over cancelling the company's bid.

His resignation was not accepted and he joined work Monday following requests of officials of the housing and public works ministry.

The state minister in a meeting at the ministry of Sunday had allegedly mounted pressure on Nurul Huda to award the job to Dughah-ASCON-Sikdar.

Ruling party lawmaker and Real Estate and Housing Association of Bangladesh President Nasrul Hamid Bipu, who allegedly influenced Minister Mannan to favour Dughah-ASCON-Sikdar, was present at the meeting, sources claimed.

Nasrul, however, denied any involvement in the joint-venture company and even his presence in the meeting.

Minister Mannan yesterday told The Daily Star that he did not interfere in the matter before, nor would he do that in future. "Rajuk will make the final decision on it," he said.

In the last two days, Rajuk Chairman Nurul Huda refused to talk to The Daily Star on the excuse that he was not well.

M Mahbul Ul Alam, head of evaluation committee and a member (development) of Rajuk, declined to make any comment yesterday and advised that The Daily Star talk to the Rajuk chairman.

In September, 2012, Dughah-ASCON-Sikdar became the lone bidder for the job of constructing 144 buildings of two types in Uttara Apartment Project.

The estimated cost of the job is around Tk 5,500 crore while the cost of the entire project is estimated to be about Tk 10,000 crore.

Under the project, a total of 223 16-storey buildings would be built with around 21,000 flats of three types, A, B and C. Dughah-ASCON-Sikdar sought to construct B- and C-type flat buildings.

The tender evaluation committee detected that Dughah-ASCON-Sikdar did not submit sufficient designs for the buildings and many among those submitted were not of the quality the committee could be satisfied with, sources said.

The committee also found that the annual turnover of Sikdar Real Estate was beneath the amount the tender criterion had mentioned as required.

Construction work for type-A buildings in the project was inaugurated on March 28, 2012, source said, adding that their construction was going on.

2 new make 22 for Fakhrul

FROM PAGE 1

December 9 last year.

Kalabagan police filed the case for assaulting police and preventing them from discharging their duties in front of Padma General Hospital on Sonargaon Road in the city during the opposition's December 9 road blockade.

The same day, Paltan police filed the other case for blasting cocktails and obstructing the law enforcers from discharging their duties at Nightingale intersection in Nayapaltan area.

Many activists of the BNP-led opposition alliance were made accused in the two cases. In the description of the cases, Fakhrul's name was mentioned as an "instigator" of the incidents, and he was finally made accused.

The same way he was earlier made accused in 16 more cases filed with different police stations in the capital on charge of violence during the road blockade.

And as of yesterday, Fakhrul was made accused in 20 of the 38 cases filed with different police stations in the city against hundreds of opposition men in connection with arson, vandalism and rampage during the road blockade by the opposition alliance.

He has been facing two more cases on charges of torching a vehicle in front of the Prime Minister's Office and throwing cocktails inside the secretariat during a hartal called by the BNP-led opposition combine on April 29 last year.

And in connection with the two cases filed with Tejgaon and Shahbagh police stations on April 29, the BNP leader was arrested and sent to jail on May 16. He was released on bail from the High Court after around a month.

He was arrested again on December 10 as an accused in the two cases for damaging a city corporation garbage truck in Nayapaltan area and blasting cocktails at Indira Road of Rajabazar area during the opposition's road blockade.

Since his arrest, he has been made accused in different cases filed in connection with violence during the road blockade.

And yesterday, Debora Chakrabarti and Khorshed Ali, investigation officers

and sub-inspectors of Kalabagan and Paltan police stations, prayed to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court in Dhaka for making Fakhrul accused in two more cases.

The CMM's Court accepted their petitions. Police then prayed for placing Fakhrul on a 20-day remand for interrogating him.

The court fixed January 24 and January 27 for hearing on the remand prayers in presence of Fakhrul.

Since his arrest, lawyers for Fakhrul have been fighting for his release on bail. But their efforts did not succeed as he has been made accused in new cases. As of yesterday, he got bail only in five of the 22 cases he has been facing.



REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (RFP)

PROMOTION OF DEVELOPMENT AND CONFIDENCE
BUILDING IN THE CHITTAGONG HILL TRACTS (CHT)

The Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Facility (CHTDF), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Bangladesh, seeks proposals from interested and well qualified organizations in response to the following Request for Proposals (RFPs) in the CHT.

- 1. RFP for Provision of services for conducting a Social Capital Assessment of Chittagong Hill Tracts**
The RFP solicitation documents can be downloaded from the following link:
(http://www.undp.org.bd/proc_detail.php?id=423)
- 2. RFP for Economic Baseline Survey of the smaller ethnic groups in the Chittagong Hill Tracts**
The RFP solicitation documents can be downloaded from the following link:
(http://www.undp.org.bd/proc_detail.php?id=422)

These are two (2) separate RFPs and any organization willing to participate in both should submit separate proposals according to the submission guideline provided in the solicitation documents. Proposals submission deadline for both the RFPs is **Tuesday, 5th February, 2013 04:30 pm (Local Time)**

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