

Sri Lanka blames India for its long civil war

New Delhi rejects allegation, says inequality the cause

THE HINDU ONLINE

Had India acted responsibly, Sri Lanka would not have experienced a 30-year war, its Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa has said triggering a strong response from New Delhi.

According to local newspaper Daily News, Rajapaksa, who is a brother of President Mahinda Rajapaksa, said India could never absolve itself of the responsibility for creating terrorism here, though some of those directly involved in subverting Sri Lanka were blaming the Rajapaksa administration for the plight of the Tamil-speaking people here.

The remarks came in response to a recent article, 'Why India is right on Sri Lanka' by Hardeep S Puri, India's former permanent representative to



Narayanasamy



Gotabaya

the United Nations in New York, published in The Hindu.

Responding to Puri's call for investigation into "specific allegations of war crimes during the last 100 days of military operations", Rajapaksa said: "Those demanding accountability on Sri Lanka's part for alleged atrocities were silent on the origin of terrorism here." Indian intervention had resulted in a major regional crisis,

when Sri Lankan terrorists, trained by Indians, raided the Maldives in early November 1988. "The international community should consider a comprehensive investigation into the issue beginning with the Indian intervention," he said.

He said that arming Sri Lankan Tamil youths was one of the two major policy blunders of prime minister Indira Gandhi.

India yesterday disapproved the Rajapaksa's remark saying the armed conflict there was a result of Colombo denying rights to Tamils there.

Responding to the Sri Lankan defence secretary, union minister V Narayanasamy said the statement was unacceptable.

New Delhi did not support any kind of terrorist activities, he added.

Musharraf admits secret deal with US on drones

Court extents his pre-arrest bail by six days

AGENCIES

Ex-Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf acknowledged his government secretly signed off on US drone strikes, the first time a top past or present Pakistani official has admitted publicly to such a deal.

Pakistani leaders long have openly challenged the drone program and insisted they had no part in it. Musharraf's admission, though, suggests he and others did play some role, even if they didn't oversee the program or approve every attack.

In an interview this week in Islamabad, Musharraf insisted Pakistan's government signed off on strikes "only on a few occasions, when a target was absolutely isolated and no chance of collateral damage."

Still, his admission that Pakistani leaders agreed to even a limited number of



strikes runs counter to their repeated denunciations of a program they long claimed the United States was operating without their approval. The drone strikes -- which the nonpartisan public policy group New American Foundation estimates have killed at least 1,990 people in

Pakistan, including hundreds of civilians -- are unpopular in Pakistan.

Meanwhile, a Pakistani court yesterday extended the pre-arrest bail of Pervez Musharraf by six days during proceedings conducted amid tight security.

Musharraf, 69, had applied to the Islamabad High Court for the extension of his bail in a case registered against him for placing dozens of judges under house arrest after imposing emergency rule in late 2007.

SECTARIAN RIOTS

Myanmar jails trio for 14 years

AFP, Yangon

Three people including a gold shop owner have been jailed for 14 years in connection with religious riots in Myanmar last month, state media and police said yesterday.

The three Muslims -- who also include the owner's wife and an employee -- were accused of beating a Buddhist customer in an argument over a gold hairpin in the town of Meiktila in central Myanmar on March 20.

They were convicted of causing grievous bodily harm and theft with intent to cause death or injury, according to the state-run Mirror newspaper.

The tough sentences are believed to be the first handed down in relation to last month's unrest.

The gold shop row later escalated into several days of Buddhist-Muslim clashes that left 43 people dead and mosques and Muslim homes burned down.

Radical monks -- once at the forefront of the pro-democracy movement and viewed with reverence in the Buddhist-majority nation -- have been linked to the subsequent unrest, which observers said appeared to be well organised.

The situation has calmed since President Thein Sein on March 28 vowed a tough response against those behind the violence, which he attributed to "political opportunists and religious extremists".



Myanmar democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi arrives at the Yangon international ariport before her departure to Japan yesterday. During a six-day trip, Suu Kyi is expected to have meetings with some of the approximately 10,000 Burmese who live in Japan, as well as with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida.

PHOTO: AFP

Taliban attack Afghan army post; 13 troops killed

AFP, Kunar

Scores of heavily armed Taliban militants killed 13 Afghan soldiers in fierce clashes yesterday after storming an army post in the east of the country near the Pakistan border, police said.

More than 100 militants armed with rocket-propelled grenades and guns launched the attack in the Nari district of Kunar province, attacking the post from three directions before dawn.

"The attackers were heavily armed," a senior police officer in the district, who declined to be named, told AFP. "We have recovered the bodies of 13 of our soldiers, the outpost has been nearly destroyed."

The attack was finally pushed back after several hours when Afghan military and police reinforcements arrived. One soldier was severely injured, police said.

Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid claimed responsibility for the assault in an email to AFP, and said that the militants had seized all weapons and ammunition from the remote post. He added that 15 soldiers had been killed.

The border region between Afghanistan and Pakistan is a key battleground in the fight against the militants, many of whom use safe havens inside Pakistan to launch attacks against Afghan soldiers and the US-led military coalition.

Facebook can swing Indian poll results

THE HINDU ONLINE

A Indian study has, for the first time, shown how social media can affect the results of the next Lok Sabha elections. Conducted by the IRIS Knowledge Foundation and the Internet and Mobile Association of India, the research claims that results in over 150 constituencies could be decided by 'Facebook users, making them the newest vote-bank with the power to shape Indian politics.'

Adopting a 'straightforward' methodology, the research assessed the number of Facebook users in all Lok Sabha constituencies. It then measured the margin of victory in these seats. There are 160 'high-impact constituencies' where the number of Facebook users exceeds the margin of victory in the last election, or constitutes 10 per cent or more of the voting population.

In 67 other 'medium-impact constituencies', Facebook users comprise over 5 per cent of voters. Politicians here, the study says, 'cannot afford to ignore social media.'

The study shows that 75 of the 206 seats won by the Congress and 43 of the 144 seats where it finished second are in the high-impact constituencies.



A village that plants 111 trees for every girl born

THE HINDU ONLINE

In an atmosphere where every morning newspapers greet us with stories of girls being tormented, raped, killed or treated like a doormat in one way or another, the story of an Indian village is inspiring indeed.

The village in southern Rajasthan's Rajsamand district is quietly practicing its own, homegrown brand of Eco-feminism and achieving spectacular results.

For the last several years, Piplantri village panchayat has been saving girl children and increasing the green cover in and around it at the same time. Here, villagers plant 111 trees every time a girl is born and the community ensures these trees survive, attaining fruition as the girls grow up.

Over the last six years, people here have



managed to plant over a quarter million trees on the village's grazing commons- including neem, sheesham, mango, Amla among others.

On an average 60 girls are born here every year, according to the village's former sarpanch Shyam Sundar Paliwal, who was instrumental in starting this initiative in the memory of his daughter Kiran, who died a few years ago.

In about half these cases, parents are reluctant to accept the girl children, he says.

Such families are identified by a village committee comprising the village school principal along with panchayat members.

Rs 21,000 are collected from the village residents and Rs10,000 from the girl's father and this sum of Rs31,000 is made into a fixed deposit for the girl, with a maturity period of 20 years.

GD filed against

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Mahmudur at the newspaper's Karwan Bazar office on Thursday. The DB was investigating the complaint, said Apurba Hassan, officer-in-charge of the police station.

A top official of Dhaka Metropolitan Police told The Daily Star last night that the GD might be recorded as a case under the information and communication technology law upon a court order.

Also named in the GD are reporter of the Bangla daily Abul Kalam Azad and its publisher Hasmat Ali.

Mahmudur was now being interrogated at the DB office on Minto Road in the capital.

A Dhaka court placed him on a 13-day remand in three cases on Thursday.

In the case he was arrested, Mahmudur faces sedition charge for publishing Skype conversations between Justice Md Nizamul Huq, former chairman of International Crimes Tribunal-1, and Ahmed Ziauddin, an expatriate Bangladeshi legal expert.

He was shown arrested in two other cases, filed last month with Tejgaon Police Station for acts of violence and assaulting police during hartals. His name, however, was not in the first information reports of the cases.

Amar Desh ran the Makkah report on January 6. It said the imam of the Holy Kaaba at a human chain vowed for Jamaat leader Delawar Hossain Sayedee's good character.

The report included a picture of the traditional ceremony of changing the Gilaf (cover) of Holy Kaaba. The annual event was held

India SC rejects challenge to death sentence

AFP, New Delhi

India's Supreme Court yesterday cleared the way for the execution of a Sikh militant, rejecting his appeal in a ruling that could lead to more death sentences being carried out.

Devinder Pal Singh Bhullar from northwest Punjab, who was convicted over a New Delhi car bombing that killed nine people in 1993, had appealed for his sentence to be commuted to life imprisonment on the grounds that he had spent two decades on death row.

He also challenged the right of the state to execute mentally ill convicts, claiming he had developed psychological problems while languishing in prison, including schizophr

hrenia. A Supreme Court bench ruled that neither his lengthy wait in prison nor his apparent mental problems were reasons to set aside the death sentence.

The ruling was being followed by more than a dozen other prisoners whose executions have also been held up for decades, including three men convicted over the assassination of former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1991.

Indian courts hand down death sentences for the "rarest of rare" crimes but the country had not carried out an execution for eight years until last November when it put to death the only surviving gunman from the 2008 Mumbai attacks.

More than 400 people are on death row in India.

Preparations

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farewell to all previous woes with the slogan "Razakar Mukto Bangladesh, Muktijuddho Onishesh" (Razakar-free Bangladesh, endless struggle for freedom).

Organisers of the Shobha Jatra, in solidarity with the youth of Shahbagh, have urged people across the country to embrace this theme as they prepare for their own processions.

The Mongol Shobha Jatra, a procession brought out by students and the faculty of Fine Arts Institute of Dhaka University (DU), has become an integral part of Pahela Baishakh, the biggest celebration in secular Bangla culture. Every year, the procession centres on a theme relevant to the country's culture and politics.

This year, in addition

to replicas of birds, dragonfly, butterfly, chorka (spinning wheel), masks, traditional dolls and others that highlight the traditional folklores of Bengal, the rally would also feature some motifs of resistance, said Harunur-Rashid, associate professor of Graphics Design at Faculty of Fine Arts.

There would be demonised effigy of former Jamaat ameer Ghulam Azam, snakes, horns and other elements to symbolise the atrocities of war criminals, he added.

Convener of Pahela Baishakh Ujjapon Committee DU Vice-Chancellor Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique said, "We want to build a Razakar-free Bangladesh. In the coming year, we pray that all evil things will be gone from our country."

The Pahela Baishakh

celebrations had always symbolised the secular and inclusive identity of Bengal, said Prof Siddique, "It attracts people of all religions, ethnicities, classes and ages."

He said, the celebration committee, using its extensive network of socio-cultural organisations, would spread the theme and spirit of this year's celebration to different parts of the country.

Eminent cultural personality Nasiruddin Yusuf Bachchu said, "We have seen that the youth of today want justice for war crimes; they want to live in and create a secular, non-communal Bangladesh."

They had always wanted such a country. But this year, their demands, emotions and aspirations had been articulated in a precise way, not only in Shahbagh, but everywhere in the country, he added.

Greens term

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-- a rights group, said: "No concession will be allowed in saving the Sundarbans."

Alam also said the government had acquired land and signed an agreement. The authorities concerned are yet to approve the report.

"If the power plant is set up on the basis of the draft assessment, it will harm the Sundarbans," he added.

Abdul Matin of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon came down hard on the government for not allowing the representatives of BAPA, Transparency International Bangladesh, other civil society and environmental organisations to inspect the project site properly.

"The EIA has only looked at the issues for a 1,320MW project. But it did not clarify what the impact will be when 2,640MW or

5,280MW power will be produced from the same plant," Sheikh Md Shahidullah, convener of the National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources, Power and Ports, told the meeting.

Environmentalist Iqbal Habib questioned the utility of the discussion the NTPC and the PDB would hold later this month to fix the tariff of the power to be produced by the coal-based project.

Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury, energy adviser to the prime minister, said, "The government will not set up the plant in a callous manner. It will take into account the impacts of the project on the people and the environment."

Bangladesh has no other alternative but to set up coal-based power plants, as the natural gas

reserves which now account for 80 percent of the power produced, are depleting, he added.

He rejected the claim that power from the plant would be exported to India.

Muhammad Enamul Huq, state minister for power, energy and mineral resources, said Bangladesh planned to produce 50 percent of its 24,000 MW electricity needed by 2021 to implement its Digital Bangladesh Vision.

"So, we need coal-based power plants. We have to overcome environmental hazards to reach the target," he added.

NTPC is India's largest power company with a current generating capacity of 40,674 MW. It has already formed a company with state-run Power Development Board to set up the plant.