

US condemns

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The US State Department, in its International Religious Freedom Report for 2012 released in Washington DC on Monday, said there were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

According to the report, there were scattered attacks on the members of religious and ethnic minorities, most notably against the Buddhists in Ramu in September and October of the last year.

"Most attacks consisted of arson and looting of religious sites and homes. Because many members of minority religious groups also had low economic and social status, they were often seen as having little political recourse," the report added.

It said members of Hindu, Christian, Buddhist, and Ahmadiyya Muslim minority groups had experienced harassment and sometimes violence from the Sunni Muslim majority population.

But the government and many civil society leaders had

stated that violence against members of minority religious groups normally had political or economic dimensions, and could not be attributed solely to religious belief or affiliation.

It regretted that the government had made little headway in the long-standing issue of returning "vested property" to the Hindus dating from the country's liberation war.

Although government officials, including police, had sometimes been slow to assist members of minority religious groups who were victims of harassment and violence, the report said, there were examples of timely and effective police intervention too.

The constitution states that Islam is the state religion, but reaffirms the nation as a secular state that "shall ensure equal status and equal right in the practice of the Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, and other religions," the report said.

The constitution provides for the right to profess, practice, or propagate all religions, subject to law, public order, and morality, it added.

War crimes suspect Qaisar lands in jail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The International Crimes Tribunal-2 yesterday sent war crimes suspect Syed Mohammad Qaisar to jail after he was produced before the court in connection with his alleged crimes against humanity and genocide committed during the Liberation War.

The three-member tribunal led by Justice Obaidul Hassan with members Justice Md Mozibur Rahman Miah and Judge Md Shahinur Islam fixed today for hearing on Qaisar's bail petition.

Following a prosecution petition, the tribunal on May 15 issued a warrant of arrest for Qaisar, former state minister for agriculture of military dictator HM Ershad's cabinet, for a "fair and effective investigation" into his alleged crimes.

Police arrested Qaisar around 2:30pm yesterday immediately after he was discharged from the city's Apollo Hospitals, Apurbo Hasan, officer-in-charge of Tejgaon police, told The Daily Star.

Qaisar was under police surveillance at the hospital since May 16.



When he was produced before the court around 4:00pm, Qaisar's lawyer SM Shahjahan sought his bail on physical ground.

Replying to a court query, prosecutor Rana Dasgupta said law enforcers had arrested Qaisar after he was discharged from the hospital. Later, the court sent Qaisar to jail and asked the jail authorities to produce him before the court today.

According to the prosecution, Qaisar, as a local Peace Committee leader, formed "Qaisar Force" in Habiganj and committed "plenty of crimes against humanity and perpetrated genocide" in collaboration with the Pakistani army in Habiganj and Brahmanbaria subdivisions.

The investigation agency, designated to probe war crimes, started an enquiry into his alleged crimes on March



Severe traffic congestion in the capital keeps commuters waiting on the roads for almost the whole day yesterday. The photo was taken at Nightingale intersection in Naya Paltan.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Everest

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"We first got to know of his death from the media. Later, the Bangladesh embassy in Nepal confirmed the incident," said Shahdat Hossain Babu, Khaled's elder brother.

Referring to some Nepalese individuals, Musa Ibrahim, the first Bangladeshi to scale Mount Everest, told The Daily Star that Khaled got to the peak between 10:00am and 11:00am on the day. The accident might have occurred a few hours after he had reached the summit.

The Kathmandu Post, a leading daily in Nepal, reports Khaled lost his life at 8,600 metres.

Korean climber Ho-Seo, 34, also died on Monday, reports AFP, adding that Ho-Seo, who had reached the peak without supplemental oxygen, refused to put on an oxygen mask as suggested by Sherpa guides on his way back.

Five other climbers have died at 8,848 metres (29,029 feet) this season. Some 300 people perished trying to reach the summit in the last six decades. The bodies of some of them are still on the mountain.

May is considered the best time for climbing the Nepalese Himalayas because of mild weather. Some 300 people reached the top of the Everest so far this year, according to AFP.

Khaled was also a filmmaker. He directed a film named Kajoler Dinratr.

He went to Nepal last month.

After receiving a permit from Seven Summit Treks Pvt Ltd, he set off for his mission to conquer Mt Everest.

Earlier in May 2011, he went on an Mt Everest expedition through the north face of China's Tibet border. But he could not climb beyond 23,000 feet, as he felt sick due to accumulation of liquid in his lungs.

Khaled conquered Frey Mount (Sikkim-India), Sindhul Chuli Mount (Nepal) and Mera Mount (Nepal) with Musa Ibrahim in 2006.

Our Munshiganj correspondent reports that as the news of Khaled's death spread, a shadow of shock engulfed his village home at Singpara Hasargaon in the district's Srinagar upazila.

Khaled, youngest of two brothers and two sisters, has left behind his wife Shaily and one-year-old son.

Death, missing

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Nejami, who is also chairman of Islami Oikya Jote, a component of the BNP-led alliance, avoided answering the question but said the list would be made public once it was finalised.

Khalilur Rahman, secretary of Hefajat's Faridpur district unit, claimed that eight Hefajat men had been identified as missing. When he was asked to give their names, he said the list was kept with another Hefajat leader Maulana Asad.

When contacted over the phone yesterday afternoon, Asad said he would call back this correspondent after getting the list because he didn't have it.

Asked whether he could tell even a single name from that list, Asad said he was inside a shop and would call back later. However, he didn't contact this correspondent till last night.

On May 5 night, Rab and

its activists and leaders were disabled in the drive.

Asking not to be named, a Hefajat leader admitted to The Daily Star that those who had been claimed to be missing or disappeared actually had gone into hiding or taken shelter in the houses of their friends or relatives in Dhaka or elsewhere after the drive.

"Those madrasa students started to return to their houses and madrasas, as the situation became normal," he said.

Following the drive, the top leaders of Hefajat asked their district-level Ameer to prepare lists of missing or dead madrasa students and teachers, and send the lists to the organisation's Hathazari headquarters.

Asked whether they had received any list from the district Ameer, Hefajat spokesperson Nijampuri said, "We are yet to receive any list. It may take a week or more to get the lists."

Bolivian law backs Morales bid for 3rd term

AFP, La Paz

Bolivia has passed a law allowing leftist President Evo Morales to seek a third term in elections next year, after the country's highest court had earlier approved the move in a binding decision.

The tribunal determined last month that Morales, the first indigenous president of South America's poorest nation, could run for a third straight term. The law passed by Congress on Monday reaffirms the verdict.

Morales was found able to seek immediate re-election because his first term did not take place under the current constitution, which only allows two terms.

Morales, a socialist and staunch US critic, was elected for his first term -- set for 2006 to 2011 -- in 2005.

But, under a new constitution, his first term ended in 2009 with a new election, which he won. His current term, which began in 2010, runs to 2015. Should he win next year's election, he would serve until 2020.

Morales, 53, would get 41 percent of the vote in a national election, according to a poll released last month. His closest rival, Samuel Doria Medina, would get 17 percent.

Doa gathering

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programme at Bhasani Hall, opposite the BNP headquarters. But police again foiled their attempt.

Fakhrul is now in Singapore for treatment.

Justifying their action, police said they had information that activists of Islami Chhatra Shibir, student wing of the Jamaat-e-Islami, had planned to intrude into the function and resort to violence.

Asked, Ashrafuzzaman, deputy commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (Motijheel zone), said they did not impose any restriction on doa mahfil.

"But Shibir has called for countrywide demonstrations today [yesterday]. Since they have easy access to BNP programmes, they might resort to violence at the doa mahfil," he said.

Police also did not allow two factions of journalists' bodies -- BFUJ and DUJ-- to gather in front of the Jatiya Press Club yesterday to form a human chain protesting closure of the daily Amar Desh and demanding release of its acting editor.

"Police told us that holding meetings and rallies outside are banned," Executive Editor of the daily Syed Abdal Ahmed told The Daily Star yesterday.

Abdal, also general secretary of the press club, alleged that police were also harassing people coming to the club to hold various programmes there.

Defying the "unofficial ban", Shibir men brought out small processions in New

Market, Mohakhali and Doyaganj areas of the capital yesterday morning, protesting arrest of the Shibir chief and exploded at least 20 cocktails.

Police chased the Shibir men and also foiled a Shibir bid to bring out a procession in the press club area. They detained seven Shibir activists.

Annoyed by the police obstruction, BNP leaders blasted the government and said it has virtually declared an emergency in the country by banning all meetings and processions.

"The situation is very alarming. Police are not allowing us to gather at any place even for religious programmes," said Lt Gen (ret'd) Mahbubur Rahman, member of the BNP standing committee.

Contacted yesterday, Mahbub said he went to the party office to join the doa mahfil as chief guest. But he did not find any body there as police had driven them.

Jasas activists said they gathered at the venue yesterday morning but the law enforcers asked them to vacate the place.

Police told them they were acting as ordered by the higher authorities, said the activists.

At a press conference in the afternoon, BNP spokesperson Shamsuzzaman Dudu said the standing committee of the party will sit today to review the prevailing political situation, and decide the next course of action.

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Saudi executes 5 Yemenis for murder

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi Arabia yesterday executed five Yemenis and displayed their bodies in public for killing a national and forming a gang that committed robberies across several towns in the kingdom, the interior ministry said.

The five were executed in the southwestern town of Jizan, bringing the number of people executed in the kingdom this year to 46, according to an AFP tally.

Aim was to oust govt

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mouth shut.

"[Those leaders] even said, 'Our movement was not only to press for the 13-point demand only. Now this will be a movement to oust the government. The 18-party men will provide all sorts of assistance -- money, food and water. We have an understanding with the 18-party leaders,' said the Hefajat second-in-command in the statement.

Babunagari went to Shapla Chattar after Maghrib prayers. There, the 14 leaders insisted that the sit-in at Shapla Chattar continue till their 13-point demand was met and the government was ousted from power.

Babunagari claimed he had asked the leaders to refrain from delivering such speeches. But they did not listen to him.

"When I asked them if they had received money from any source, the leaders told me that it was the 18-party alliance. It would give more money, if needed.

"Those leaders told me, The next day, May 6, the former Dhaka mayor and an 18-party alliance leader would supply us with breakfast and lunch during our stay at Shapla Chattar. Don't worry. Insha'Allah [God willing], we will stay at Shapla Chattar until the fall of the government'," Babunagari said.

Babunagari said he saw flames around the venue at around 10:00pm.

Hefajat men had joined the peaceful rally place at Shapla Chattar with placards and clothing, he added. "Our peaceful rally had turned violent because of the provocative speeches of those [14] leaders."

The Hefajat leader, in his two-and-a-half hour statement, also said, "I received information that the Jamaat-Shibir had attacked the police and torched and vandalised vehicles.

"Unruly activists of the Jamaat-Shibir and Chhatra

quit power."

The next day, a Hefajat leader in his speech at their rally asked the ruling party leaders to think where they could escape after that night.

Hefajat, a Qawmi madrasa-based organisation, has taken centre stage in recent days as an opposite force to the Shahbagh Gonojagoron Mancha from where youths have been demanding the death penalty for war criminals.

It, however, was not on the scene when the Shahbagh movement commenced on February 5. Its presence was felt with the killing of a blogger, who was branded an atheist.

Tarique

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But the first phase of the meeting at Crown Plaza hotel at East London got foiled amid scuffle between two BNP factions.

Police later forced the BNP leaders to change the meeting venue, our correspondent said, adding that the meeting was later held at Newham, East London.

This was Tarique's first reported appearance before the party leaders since he was forced to leave the country in 2008 during the military-backed caretaker government.

Tarique told the meeting that the present government was violating human rights, and it killed those who came at Shapla Chattar to realise their demands.

Tarique also spoke of corruptions by the prime minister's family members.

"The Hasina government is oppressing the opposition and the general people in the country and the whole world is aware of these human rights violation," Tarique said.

He said the Bangladeshi people wanted the next general election to be held under a neutral caretaker government.

SQ CHY'S TRIAL

Last public witness examined

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The prosecution at International Crimes Tribunal-1 yesterday completed examining the last public witness in the war crimes case against BNP lawmaker Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury.

A book sorter at the Divisional Public Library in Chittagong, Kawsar Sheikh deposed on 28 clippings of the Daily Pakistan and Daily Azadi.

Later, defence counsel Ahsanul Huq Hena cross-examined the witness.

The prosecution had submitted a list of 137 witnesses against BNP lawmaker Salahuddin. Of them, 40 have been examined, including four for different seized documents to prove 23 war crimes charges brought against Salahuddin.

The defence, however, submitted a list of 1,153 witnesses.

Talking to The Daily Star, prosecutor Sultan Mahmud Simon said the witnesses have touched on almost every charge pressed against the accused. "I'm hopeful [about the highest punishment of the accused]," he added.

Among the 23 charges pressed against Salahuddin, nine are for committing genocide, while the rest are for killing, torture, looting, confinement and setting fire to houses.

Investigation officer of the case Nurul Islam is expected to give a deposition on Sunday.

NIZAMI'S CASE

Defence counsel Mizanul Islam yesterday completed cross-examining eighth prosecution witness Khalilur Rahman in the war crimes case against Jamaat-e-Islami chief Matiur Rahman Nizami.

Rejoinder

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process is a confidential document and not yet issued to the pre-qualified bidders. Therefore, one cannot discuss the evaluation criteria.

However, NWPGCL would like to point out that the evaluation criteria will be set after careful investigation of all the factors by the international reputed consultant and NWPGCL.

"The tender document is being prepared on the basis of feasibility study report, project memorandum and practice adopted in power sector of Bangladesh."

"NWPGCL would also like to inform all concerned that the capacity range of the said power plant has already been fixed to 360 MW (-5% to +15%)," the rejoinder said.

The rejoinder denied NWPGCL Managing Director Khurshed Alam's quotation in the report, where he said all the changes in the bid criteria were set by the Japanese donor Jica.

"Bid evaluation criteria will be set by the NWPGCL with assistance of its foreign consultant. Jica will provide their concurrence after observing fairness and competitiveness on the evaluation criteria."

"Jica in no way is responsible for setting the bid evaluation criteria," the rejoinders said.

OUR REPLY

While it was a confidential document, the NWPGCL managing director responded to different points on the evaluation criteria raised in the story.

In fact, he defended the unusual criterion of calculating 30 years' plant life instead of a typical 20 years and other exceptional issues.

He, however, added that the criteria could change as these were not final.

The rejoinder denied Alam's comment that Jica had fixed the criteria when the news story carried his follow-up argument: "the donor's terms prevail in the project if we cannot agree in negotiations on how a tender should be implemented."

We stand by our report.