

Pakistan to stay quiet on war trial

UNB, Dhaka

Pakistan has said it would not make any comment in future on the trial process of war criminals in Bangladesh.

Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations Masood Khan conveyed Islamabad's position to Bangladesh Permanent Representative to the UN AK Abdul Momen in New York.

"Yes, it was confirmed through our Permanent Representative to the UN," State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam told UNB over the phone on Saturday.

On December 16, the Pakistan National Assembly adopted a resolution expressing concern over the execution of Jamaat-e-Islami leader Abdul Quader Mollah for "his loyalty to Pakistan in 1971".

The following day, Pakistan High Commissioner Afrasiab Mehdi Hashmi was summoned to the foreign ministry and Bangladesh strongly protested the resolution reminding them that the matter was absolutely Bangladesh's internal affair.

The resolution voicing concern over the execution of war criminal Mollah sparked strong protests and widespread condemnations across Bangladesh.

Zia's birth

FROM PAGE 16

boost the morale of BNP leaders and activists as it prepares to begin a fresh anti-government movement to press for a free, fair and inclusive election at the earliest, party high-ups have said.

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia will offer fateha at the mazar of Ziaur Rahman in the capital's Sher-e-Bangla Nagar this morning.

She is likely to inaugurate a voluntary blood donation programme at the mazar premises.

The party will also host a discussion at the Jatiya Press Club today. Besides, milads and doa mahfils will be held at the Nayapaltan headquarters of the BNP and elsewhere in the country.

Different front and associated bodies of the BNP and pro-BNP professional bodies will also organise programmes to mark Zia's birth anniversary.

BNP acting secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir in a message yesterday called upon the people to work together to restore people's voting rights, human rights and justice.

BNP

FROM PAGE 1

Hefajat-e-Islam that controls almost all Qawmi madrasas in the country.

Referring to the meeting of top leaders of the BNP-led combine on January 13, an alliance leader said, "Madam [Khaleda] seemed serious about maintaining relations with the Jamaat-e-Islami."

"She even told us that it is up to people to judge whether BNP's ties with the Jamaat are good or bad. If they consider it bad, they can choose not to vote for us in polls," said the leader.

In a resolution on Thursday, the European Parliament urged the BNP to cut ties with the Jamaat and Hefajat-e-Islam, saying there should be a ban on political parties associated with "terrorist acts" in Bangladesh.

Pointing a finger at the Jamaat, it said, "Parties which turn to terrorist acts should be banned".

Earlier on several occasions, foreign diplomats in Dhaka called upon Khaleda to sever relations with the Islamist party.

In a number of interviews with the foreign media after the January 5 polls, Khaleda said, "BNP's ties with the Jamaat are only strategic and nothing permanent."

95pc rejects elections

Claims BNP

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Senior BNP leaders yesterday claimed 95 percent people had rejected "the staged-managed, farcical polls" of January 5 by responding positively Khaleda Zia's call to resist the election.

At a meeting yesterday, they also said the ruling Awami League's move to enforce a "one-party rule" in the country would be resisted through a movement.

The meeting was organised at the Jatiya Press Club to mark late president and BNP founder Ziaur Rahman's 78th birth anniversary. This was the first time since October last year that BNP organised any meeting in public.

BNP acting secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir was not present at the meeting, triggering speculations inside the party that he might be removed from his post for "poor performance" during the anti-government movement.

Many top BNP leaders, who had gone into hiding and did not appear in public to avoid arrest since October last year, attended yesterday's discussion.

Speaking at the programme, BNP standing committee member Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain said AL held a voter-less election on January 5. There was no participation of the opposition in the polls.

"Awami League has killed democracy and moved to begin a one-party rule. We will have to start fresh movements against the move to rescue democracy from the hands of Awami League," he said.

Pointing to those who are saying that the opposition has failed to resist January 5 polls, Mosharraf said, "Some people are saying that our movement was wrong. But we would say that 95 percent people responded to BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's call to resist the election and thus made our movement a success."

The BNP leader added that not a single MP who took an oath in parliament will be able to say what percentage of vote he or she has got. There was no election on January 5; seats were just distributed among AL and its allies.

The government held one-sided polls because they fear BNP and the family of the party founder Ziaur Rahman, the former minister said.

BNP senior leaders Abdul Moyeen Khan, Osman Farruk and Zainul Abdin Farroque, among others, spoke on the occasion.

US condemns

FROM PAGE 16

especially against minority communities -- inflaming rhetoric, and intimidation," said Jen Psaki, spokesperson of the US Department of State on Friday.

She said this during a question answer session about US position on the allegations of violence against the minority communities in Bangladesh.

Her comments came when attacks on the Hindu people have been continuing in the country since the January 5 parliamentary elections.

Psaki also said that violence could not be an acceptable element of the political process.

"We certainly are disappointed by recent incidents of violence. We condemn that in the strongest terms, the violence from all quarters that continues to mark the prevailing political impasse," she added.

A let-down

FROM PAGE 1

This is unacceptable when our army is being praised around the world for efficiently working in many war-torn countries as UN peacekeepers. Is it not downright absurd for Bangladesh to ask for the Indian army's assistance and for India to agree to send troops when such a request is perceived as suicidal for any government?

For Inqilab, it was a gross editorial error not to have cross-checked the information.

There are more questions needing to be answered. How would the Bangladesh army take it had the government really wanted the Indian army on our sovereign soil?

Would the Indian military enter Bangladesh secretly when the government had "officially" asked them to be deployed in Satkhira? Would there not be a major movement of vehicles and weapons that could not escape the public eye?

Without any such evidence, readers were left with some faxes and emails that anyone can manufacture.

Prior to this so-called news, there had been a buzz among hardcore anti-Awami League people that Indian troops had secretly melted into the Bangladesh army on election duty.

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia on December 29, while being resisted by police from going out of her residence, exploded in a flurry of angry remarks.

In one remark, she blamed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for the Pilkhana carnage and then went on saying: "Today a lot of unknown faces are seen about whom it cannot be said they are really Bangladeshi."

What she implied was an echo of what is being spread through word of mouth.

One cannot ignore the power of lies.

For instance, on March 2 last year, Basherikella published an image of Jamaat leader Delwar Hossain Sayedee superimposed on the moon soon after the delivery of verdict against Sayedee for war crimes during the Liberation War. This had triggered his followers to resort to countrywide violence, leaving many dead.

It revealed how a significant percentage of people could be so religiously blind that they could be instigated by saying anything that hurts their "sentiments".

Basherikella and its likes had always served their followers with "photographic evidence" that was really many lies. They can portray night as day because they have a mission—to stop the war crimes trials at "any cost".

The moderate right-wing BNP's politics has also become so desperate that its top leaders do not hesitate to use cheap lies to instigate people's hatred against the ruling party because it has a mission -- to go to power at "any cost".

The ruling Awami League, which had resorted to shameless tactics to retain power at "any cost", on the other hand resorted to arresting people and shutting down newspapers or websites for spreading lies. It has so far blocked 160 websites, blogs or links through the International Internet Gateways (IIG).

But shutting down a newspaper or website has not proved to be very effective as new propaganda websites are popping up every day. The nation needs a counter campaign based on truth, so that the lies will meet a natural death.

As a newspaper, we must raise the alarm that technology is available today to present lies credibly in the forms of photographs, audio or video. This situation demands that the media should be more cautious.



Silver screen icon Suchitra Sen's daughter Moon Moon Sen bids farewell to her mother at the Keoratala crematorium in Kolkata on Friday.

PHOTO: COURTESY

Upazila polls start in mid-Feb

FROM PAGE 1

this to reporters after a meeting at the EC secretariat yesterday.

"We held a preparatory meeting today [Saturday] with officials of different ministries. We have received suggestions and information from them. We will take the final decision on the election schedule after scrutinising all these," he said.

"The current upazila parishads have different expiry dates and so, we will have to hold the elections in phases," the CEC said.

Sources said the suggestions that the CEC spoke of included holding the polls in two phases-- the first between February 18 and 22 and the second between March 18 and 25.

The commission might announce the schedule for elections to around 106 upazilas out of 487 across the country in the first phase today, sources added.

When his attention was drawn to the fact that the polls schedule might conflict with the Secondary School Certificate examinations beginning from February 9, the CEC said they had no alternative.

"There are legal compulsions to hold the polls within a certain timeframe. But we will try to hold the polls, causing as less disturbance as possible to the SSC examinees," said the EC boss.

The last election to 479 upazila parishads was held on January 22, 2009. The tenure of more than 100 upazila parishads is set to expire in February.

Around 223 upazila parishads will complete their tenure in March, 35 in April, 85 in May, 18 in June and the rest between July and September this year, EC secretariat officials said.

According to the Upazila Parishad Act 1998, the tenure of an upazila parishad begins from the day the first meeting of the elected council is held. This is why, though election to the parishads was held at the same time, the expiry dates of the upazila parishads will vary.

Meanwhile, the EC has identified some discrepancies between the information given by the EC secretariat and that of the LGRD ministry regarding the expiration of different upazila parishads' tenures.

During yesterday's meeting, the EC asked the LGRD ministry for proper information by noon today.

"The ministry's information will be the final one and we will follow only that," an election commissioner told The Daily Star, seeking anonymity.

As per the electoral laws, polls to the upazila parishads are held within 180 days before their tenure expires.

With the addition of nine more upazila parishads in the last five years, the EC now will have to hold polls to 487 upazila parishads which have around eight crore voters, said the EC officials.

The EC has already sent letters to its field-level officials to prepare lists of polling centres for the elections and send these to the commission by January 26.

Upazila parishad election was first held in 1985 and then in 1990. After a long break, the last election was held in 2009, just three weeks after the ninth parliamentary polls.

RANGPUR-6 BY-ELECTION SCHEDULE

The EC is likely to announce the schedule for holding by-election to Rangpur-6 parliamentary constituency today.

The constituency fell vacant when Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who was elected from Gopalganj-3 constituency as well, relinquished her membership of the constituency on January 8, three days after the election.

The commission in principle has decided to hold the election by third week of February, an election commissioner told The Daily Star, wishing anonymity.

Meanwhile, the Election Commission yesterday issued a gazette notification on the MPs-elect of seven constituencies where re-elections were held on Thursday.

Earlier, voting was postponed in Jessore-5, Dinajpur-4, Gaibandha-1, 3, 4, Bogra-7 and Laxmipur-1 constituencies because of violence during the 10th parliamentary polls on January 5.

Candidates nominated by the ruling Awami League won in three constituencies, Jatiya Party and Bangladesh Tarikat Federation got one seat each while independent candidates came victorious in two others.

Injury marks found on her body

FROM PAGE 16

"We will conclude our report and opinion in a couple of days," he said.

"Physical injuries on Sunanda Pushkar Tharoor's body may or may not be related to her death. Samples of toxicology analysis rule out poisoning."

Sources told IANS: "It could be a case of drug overdose but things would be clear only after the detailed autopsy report" and added that it could be an overdose of sleeping pills.

Sunanda, 52, was found dead in a five-star hotel room in New Delhi on Friday, reports our New Delhi correspondent.

Sunanda, it is learnt, had checked into a room at the Leela Palace hotel on Wednesday after she returned with Tharoor from Kerala as the official residence of her husband was being renovated and Sunanda was allergic to dust, sources said. The couple was due to check out Saturday.

Sunanda is believed to have moved into a suite with Tharoor Thursday. She was last seen at around 3:30pm Friday when she ordered lunch.

Tharoor, junior minister for human resources development, discovered the body after he returned from a meeting of his Congress party, his private secretary Abhinav Kumar said.

"She seemed to be sleeping in a normal way but later it was found she was dead," Kumar told reporters.

Hours after he found his wife's body, the minister complained of chest pain, and was admitted to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences.

'MURDER BY TWITTER'

The death came as a tragic twist in a tale of apparent marital strife that has played out in full view of the Indian media.

On Wednesday evening, a series of emotional tweets from the Twitter handle of Shashi Tharoor created a flutter on the micro blogging site, reports Hindustan Times.

They were all directed at Pakistani columnist Mehr Tarar, who had interviewed Tharoor and Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah last year.

As the tweets spread out through social media, Tharoor himself was flying back to Delhi from his constituency in Thiruvananthapuram. When the media contacted Sunanda Pushkar, it emerged that she had used his han-

dle.

She had chanced upon a series of messages allegedly sent by Mehr Tarar to Tharoor.

By the time Tharoor landed in Delhi and discovered the series of damaging tweets, Pushkar had hit out at Tharoor in sharply-worded statements to the press.

Tharoor immediately issued a tweet in clarification, assuming that his account had been hacked. But Pushkar started using her own twitter handle to vent out further damaging details.

A close attention to Pushkar's twitter feed of the past few days lends a peek into her troubled state of mind and in hindsight, pre-empted the impending denouement.

An earlier incident in Dubai had been haunting the couple. The local English daily, Khaleej Times, had been mentioned by Tharoor in a clarification issued by him on his Facebook page.

It seems the publication had reported adversely about Pushkar and him while they were attending a marriage there.

Soon after the controversy, Sunanda began to put out quotes indicating hurt and betrayal. "A disloyal and dishonest friend is the worst thing that can happen in (sic) in lie. Lovers have a right to betray you, friends don't."

She would tweet again that she "treated everyone as a friend, but if they betray me, that it. They are out of my life in one way or the other".

This would continue for an hour until she pointed out in a response to a tweet that "This is a woman sadly who lied and cheated to get what she wanted. Feel sorry for the guy she manipulated. Men are so simple."

By Thursday, she and Tarar were locked in a bitter exchange of tweets.

Speaking to The Indian Express, Sunanda even said that she would "seek divorce".

But as people began to heckle her, she stepped back from twitter, emerging hours later, only to tweet a clarification that all the tweets were "unauthorised" and all was fine with their marriage.

Seeking to bury the controversy, Tharoor issued a joint statement with Sunanda in which he blamed "unauthorised" tweets and "distorted" media reports for the "unseemly controversy".

"We are distressed by the unseemly controversy that has arisen about some unauthorised tweets from our Twitter accounts," read the joint statement published by NDTV on Thursday.

"Various distorted accounts of comments allegedly made by Sunanda have appeared in the press. It appears that some personal and private comments responding to these unauthorised tweets -- comments that were not intended for publication -- have been misrepresented and led to some erroneous conclusions.

"We wish to stress that we are happily married and intend to remain that way. Sunanda has been ill and hospitalised this week and is seeking to rest. We would be grateful if the media respects our privacy."

The world of Twitter drew a lot of flak on Twitter itself immediately after the news of Sunanda's death broke, The Economic Times reported.

Even as people expressed shock and grief over the incident, there were many who called it "murder by Twitter" "First murder by TwitterIndia, claps, fellow twitter matured guns!" tweeted badminton player PV Sindhu.

Suketu Mehta, a professor at the NY University was also of the same view. He tweeted, "terrible news about Sunanda Tharoor. His is murder by twitter."

This was soon followed by a disclaimer that his Twitter account had been hacked. By then this had turned into a full-scale war on the social media site. Sunanda seemed upset about how this incident was discussed in social media.

WHO IS MEHR TARAR?

A graduate of West Virginia University, the 45-year-old Lahore-based journalist is mother of a 13-year-old boy.

She is reported to be separated from her husband, a rich businessman based out of Bahrain. She used to work with a Pakistani daily, but quit recently.

It's reported that she now works with the group's business channel. Another Lahore-based journo, who has worked with Mehr, describes her as "competitive".

Mehr was quite upset with the whole Twitter face-off, but what hurt her most was Pushkar calling her an "ISI agent".

On Thursday, she told Hindustan Times, "Please tell Sunanda she can call me anything but not an ISI agent. My son is very upset."

SATKHIRA REPORT

Daily Inqilab says sorry

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The authorities of Bangla newspaper The Daily Inqilab yesterday regretted publishing a report on Thursday on Indian forces' participation in operations in Satkhira.

The newspaper on its website uploaded a notice headlined: "We are sorry."

Quoting the editor of the daily, the notice also reads: "While publishing these types of sensitive news items, (the newspaper) should be more careful so that such kind of repetition do not take place."

"It is our request to the readers not to make any statement which goes against religion and the state, and to abstain from any kind of provocative statement," the notice added, claiming that the newspaper had always been respectful to the constitution and public opinion.

On Thursday night, detectives raided the newspaper's office on the capital's RK Mission Road, rounded up three newsmen, seized three computers, and sealed off the press and server rooms for publishing false news on Indian forces' participation in operations conducted by joint forces in the violence-hit Satkhira district.

The move against the Bangla daily came hours after Sub-inspector Jahangir Alam of Wari Police Station lodged a case under the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Act and the penal code, accusing Inqilab Editor AMM Bahauddin and three other journalists.

They have been accused of running a "baseless" report on Thursday, claiming that Indian forces had taken part in operations in Satkhira ahead of the January 5 parliamentary polls.

The three newsmen -- News Editor Rabiullah Rabi, Deputy Chief Reporter Rafiq Mohammad, and Diplomatic Correspondent Ahmed Atique -- were sent to jail on Friday.

How unrest

FROM PAGE 16

foods, lodging and salaries of more than 1,100 employees.

During October-December, the BNP-led alliance enforced 40 days of countrywide shutdowns and blockades. Buses could not ply the roads for at least two more days in December when the government restricted vehicular movement to foil the alliance's 'March for Democracy'.

"I'm ruined," this is how Tahmid Shahed Chayan, the owner of AK Travels, vented his frustrations.

"We're counting huge losses everyday due to hartals and blockades," Chayan told The Daily Star recently at his Satkhira head office.

Chayan, who also owns 20 trucks, said three of his vehicles -- one bus costing around Tk 1 crore and two trucks -- were torched during the political unrest in the last few months.

Besides, 15 buses and trucks were vandalised.

Not only Chayan, all long-haul bus operators faced the same fate.

"I did not experience such a disastrous situation in my 42 years of transport business," said Ramesh Chandra Ghosh, managing director of Shyamoli Paribahan, a leading operator with more than 500 buses on different routes across the country.

He said he incurred a loss of around Tk 40 lakh a day during shutdowns and blockades.

Around one lakh trucks, lorries and pickups, and 86,000 large and small buses operate across the country employing around forty lakh people, according to Bangladesh Sarak Paribahan Samik Federation, a platform of transport workers.

As all these workers earn on a daily basis, frequent shutdowns or blockades push them into deep troubles, transport owners said.