

Int'l community endorsed polls

PM says Jan 5 polls an achievement against 'criminal activities of BNP-Jamaat'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday claimed that the international community has accepted the January 5 election as "a positive achievement" against "the criminal activities" of BNP and Jamaat-Shibir to foil the polls.

"Parliamentary democracy in Bangladesh will carry forward the achievements in development and good governance of the last five years," Hasina said, responding to a lawmaker's queries in parliament.

In a written question, Awami League MP AKM Rahmatullah of Dhaka-11 enquired of the premier's feelings on the recognition of her new government by ten countries, including Russia, China and India.

In a written reply, Hasina said not only the ten countries, but the heads of a number of other states and organisations had felicitated the new government formed through the 10th parliamentary polls.

"Besides the 10 countries, the heads of many other states and governments and chiefs of a number of international organisations including the UN and the European Union have felicitated me as the prime minister of the newly elected government," she said.

Hasina further said the world community expected Bangladesh to uphold the country's image as a democratic, peace loving, non-communal and

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India may try Barua

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Barua, who leads a faction of insurgent outfit Ulfa which is opposed to talks with Indian government, was given death sentence in absentia in a case in which 10 trucks containing 4,000 weapons were seized.

Under Section 339 B of the Indian Code of Criminal Procedure, an accused can be tried in absentia, The Indian Express newspaper reported quoting an unnamed official as saying.

The Indian home ministry is set to approach the Ministry of Law and Justice to examine legalities if this section is invoked against Barua.

Barua, against whom a red-cornor notice has been issued by Interpol since 1997, is wanted in several cases of terrorism, smuggling and murder

in India.

"There are several cases pending against Barua in India, even the criminal procedure act has the provision to try an accused in absentia.

"We are examining all his cases and they might be put up for trial if the law ministry gives the go ahead," said a home ministry official.

According to Indian intelligence agencies, Barua is hiding either in Myanmar or in China.

"He [Barua] continues to have a strong extortion racket in Assam and is pumping in explosives and arms to insurgent groups in the northeastern part of India.

"The criminal cases pending against him have to be taken to a logical conclusion so that if at all he is caught or extradited his fate will be sealed here," said the official.

RU VIOLENCE BCL leader held

RU CORRESPONDENT

Police yesterday arrested the vice-president of BCL unit in Rajshahi University (RU) in connection with Sunday's violence on the campus.

The arrestee was identified as Delowar Hossain, a masters student of anthropology department.

Delowar was arrested at Rajshahi city's Veripara intersection around 5:00pm.

He was sent to jail after he was produced before a court, said GM Shamshur Noor, OC of Motihar Police Station.

Delowar was shown accused in four cases -- two were filed by the RU authorities and two others by police, the OC said.

In several TV footages, it was found that Delowar was throwing stones at the agitating students.

However, none of the gun-toting BCL leaders has been arrested so far.

On Sunday, police arrested Sajeeb Ahmed, a student of finance and banking department, in connection with the violence. He was shown arrested in four cases.

BCB playing fishy game

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meeting, Papon had said that the principles placed in the last meeting were unanimously agreed upon. There was an air of celebration around Papon -- a ruling party lawmaker -- who was given a hero's welcome by his loyalists. The party line was that Papon had stood up to the Big Three (India, England and Australia) and forced them into a readjustment of their original draft proposal, with notable omissions of words like "two-tier", "promotion" and "relegation". Papon also calmed the passionate cricket fans, many of whom had earlier taken to the streets in protest of the country's Test future being endangered by the original draft proposal, by saying that Bangladesh were going to play more Tests as a result of the meeting. But in reality, it is not as simple as having some words omitted and agreeing to reworded principles.

Although omitting the aforementioned words, there was enough in the reworked version to suggest that the draft retains much of its characteristics, only in more complex terms. One of the reworked principles says that there will be no immunity, an odd clause if there

is to be no relegation. Also, the new draft says that there will be opportunity for all countries (which includes Associate Members) to play all formats based on a meritocracy, again hinting at a tiered system.

After the reworking the board chiefs have taken the proposal to their home boards before going back to the ICC table on February 8 and 9. The Pakistan Cricket Board on Monday lashed out over the controversial plans to reform cricket's governing body, describing the proposed revamp as unjust and even asked their chairman Zaka Ashraf to seek guidance from Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and "to apprise him on this matter of immense significance and of national interest, which will have wide reaching impact on future of cricket in Pakistan".

Bangladesh have much more to lose than Pakistan, Sri Lanka or South Africa (the only three Full Members still opposed to the proposal), because if two tiers are still on the horizon the long-term future of Tests in the country will be seriously threatened. In that light, it seems doubly strange that the issue has not been discussed formally at the

highest level.

As an explanation some of his loyalists have said that the BCB boss had already gotten the guideline from the last board meeting in January -- before the first ICC meeting on the draft proposal took place. That is a simply ridiculous explanation, as things have not remained the same and there is a new proposal to pore over. Just because he agreed in principle, the matter is not done and dusted. As Pakistan have shown, it was only the starting point of more deliberation by home boards, which has evidently not happened in the BCB.

Most importantly, the president has not gone beyond the demagogic in his utterances about a matter of such import and contention. Before he leaves for Singapore, it is his duty to leave the people with a clear idea on where the BCB stands -- whether he fully understands the meaning of the meritocracy principle, and which way Bangladesh will vote if it means a two-tiered system.

The onus is on him as he has seemingly taken the dangerous stance of unilaterally speaking for and negotiating

Rein in your 'terrorists'

FROM PAGE 16

party leaders and workers had been arrested until January 31, Hasina told the journalists that all of them, whose names she [Khaleda] read out at a press conference, had been identified as terrorists.

She said the government would take stringent measures if Khaleda's party men continued to indulge in terrorist acts. "There will be no point in shedding crocodile tears."

"I would like to tell her [Khaleda] the efforts she is making to prove the innocence of her terrorists are a mistake," Hasina told the journalists.

Referring to the brutal attack on a woman union council member at Kansat in Chapainawabganj, she said terrorists had cut the tendons of her hands and legs on the directives of a local BNP leader. "We must take action against him."

Hasina, who is the AL president, said the BNP leaders were unleashing atrocities on AL leaders and activists as well as other pro-liberation forces on Khaleda Zia's instructions.

"The BNP chief does not understand anything except terrorism. Her only job is to commit terrorist acts and she under-

stands these misdeeds well," she said.

BNP and Jamaat-Shibir men have killed innumerable people and leaders and workers of the AL and its associate bodies in Chapainawabganj, Satkhira, Rajshahi, Gazipur, Sylhet and other areas.

They killed 16 to 17 leaders and workers only in Rajshahi, she said, adding: "Killing people is their pleasure."

Asked what steps the government was going to take against the terrorists, Hasina said, "We will arrest them whenever they are tracked down."

Steps have been taken to ensure the safe return of people who fled their homes after falling prey to atrocities at the hands of BNP and Jamaat-Shibir men, she told the newsmen.

Earlier, Hasina talked to the wounded party leaders and workers from Rajshahi, Chapainawabganj, Gazipur and Sylhet and assured them of taking necessary steps for their better treatment.

She also directed on-duty doctors to ensure their proper care round-the-clock.

Health Minister Mohammad Nasim, State Minister for Home Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal, AL lawmakers Jahangir Kabir Nanak and Rahmat Ali, among

BNP's rejoinder, our reply

FROM PAGE 1

fails to even recognize that the governments of those days were either incompetent to curb the ULFA activities during its early years or were in connivance with them.

On the other hand, the correspondent also fails to appreciate that for the first time in the history of ULFA operations in Bangladesh, the government of Begum Khaleda Zia successfully intercepted and seized the 10 trucks arms haul in 2004 and another one in Bogra in 2003. Such clandestine activities are serious matters and have enormous security implications for both Bangladesh and India. The then State Minister of Home met Begum Khaleda Zia on the day after the incident at the CUFL docks and reported on the matter. Begum Zia instructed him to promptly institute an enquiry into the matter. There was, however, no such meeting with the then DG DGFI and the so-called "quizzical silence" by Begum Zia during such a meeting, as headlined in your report, is baseless, false and motivated.

Your correspondent should have recognized that the then government went into immediate action. Two cases involving arms smuggling were instituted within twenty four hours of the seizure, the CID started investigation within three weeks of the occurrence, and the Investigating Officer submitted a charge sheet against 39 persons within two and a half months. Had the Government of the day been in cohort or connivance,

these actions wouldn't have been taken so promptly and in due diligence. The correspondent also refers to the statements of the then DG NSI and its former Director to have been working with the ISI. However the complicity of the political Government in this matter has not been proven and the allegations may well be the activities of some rogue elements within the state apparatus working outside the official channel.

The report as written up by your correspondent is not only unfortunate, misleading and unprofessional, it also raises questions about the objectives underpinning it. We absolutely and completely deny any involvement whatsoever of the then Government or of the BNP in any such overt or covert activities. The BNP has always believed and continues to do so unflinchingly in the principles of non-interference in the internal affairs of any country including its neighbours, and not to allow its territory to be used for any acts of hostility against any other country.

We urge you to print this response in its entirety and with the same prominence as was accorded to the reports in contention.

OUR REPLY

Our report is mainly based on the depositions in the court that held the trial of the 10-truck loads of fire-arms.

In the rejoinder BNP claims that the government of Khaleda Zia successfully intercepted and seized the 10 trucks arms haul in 2004 and

another one in Bogra in 2003. But the fact is that both the sensational seizures were accidental. In the 10 truck case, two whistle-blower police officers, Alauddin and Helaluddin, went to the CFUL jetty without having any clear idea about what had been offloaded, leading to the recovery of arms cache.

Instead of being rewarded, the two officers were suspended and implicated in a false arms case, tortured and put behind bars. Such punishment of two whistleblowers contradicts BNP's claims. Alauddin, a key witness in the arms haul cases, later came to know that all these were done on the instructions of Babar.

In the case of the haul of ammunition and explosives in Bogra in 2003, the whistle blowers were the locals who had informed the local police about an abandoned truck that led to the haul of the ammunition and explosives. What led the smugglers to abandon this truck was never found by any investigators. But it was definitely not any government act that stopped this haul.

The rejoinder mentioned the "quizzical silence" of Begum Zia after the then Director General (DG) of Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) had met her.

We have nothing to do with the statement as matters came in as evidence in the court that held the trial of the case. Maj Gen Sadik Hasan Rumi, the then DG of DGFI, in his deposition had told the court that he

informed the then premier Khaleda Zia about the arms haul, but she kept mum. Without expressing any reaction, she only said she would investigate. So, it is up to BNP whether it would term the report baseless, false and motivated.

The BNP rejoinder claims immediate action being taken and charge sheet being submitted against 39 persons within two and a half months. But most of these accused persons were labourers, truckers and trawler drivers and the list left out key players. Only three of these 39 were eventually convicted in last month's judgment.

The trial had started in 2005 on the basis of a probe that overlooked who had brought the arms, from which country, what the destination and how a jetty of a state-owned body was used for unloading the weapons. This demanded further probe. When further investigation was done, it revealed the involvement of the state machinery, including its ministers and high officials of intelligence agencies.

The rejoinder claims that had the Government of the day been in cohort or connivance, these actions wouldn't have been taken so promptly and in due diligence.

The then DGFI DG Sadiq Hasan Rumi in his deposition said when the smuggling was exposed, Babar formed a probe committee that included Rezzakul Haider. According to Rumi's deposition before the court, Babar ignored

objections from Rumi, who believed Haider had a role and wanted that another official replace Haider in the probe body.

"I came to know about the seizure of a huge amount of arms and ammunition at Chittagong CFUL Jetty through television. At the directive of the then state minister for home a probe committee was formed. I was the convener of that probe committee," the then home secretary Omar Faruk said in his statement recorded by a magistrate under Section 164 of the Criminal Procedure Code on February 6, 2011.

"We the members of the committee came to Chittagong from Dhaka on April 5, 2004 and visited the crime scene and Parki Bazar. We talked to people concerned like CFUL authority and members of different law enforcing agencies. At that time we came to know of the involvement of some NSI officials and got some idea. But due to time constraints it was not possible to know specifically and elaborately," Omar Faruk said in his statement.

He continued, "During preparation of the probe report, we informed state minister Lutfozzaman Babar about different findings, including NSI issue. Despite the fact that it was necessary to include involvement of some NSI officials, the state minister did not allow to do that."

Chittagong Metropolitan Special Tribunal-1 that delivered the verdict in the two cases filed in connection

with the arms haul in the summary of its observation said, "I am very surprised, stunned and disheartened that the said accused who are high military officials of two very important security agencies of the country like DGFI and NSI got themselves involved in the incident of this case by smuggling in the world's biggest arms and ammunition consignment for strengthening ULFA through maintaining close contact and communication with neighbouring countries, separatists organisation, ULFA leader Paresh Barua,"

"The mentioned accused persons did not attach any importance to the apprehension of hampering the existing relations and friendly coexistence with the neighbouring state. Their behaviour gives the impression that they colluded with the ULFA leader with the ill intention of destroying continuous good relations with our brotherly neighbouring state."

"...It is also to be noted that any person will believe without analysing any witness and evidence that in no circumstances it is possible to bring such a cache of arms and ammunition to our country from another country unhindered without any government patronisation."

It continued, "It is revealed from the witnesses and evidences of the case that the ministers of the then government and top-ranking officials of military and civil administrations joining hands with ULFA leader Paresh Barua and in connivance with each others committed the



Protesting against high transport fare and extremely low market price for potatoes, frustrated farmers dump the produce on the Dhaka-Thakurgaon highway at Birganj in Dinajpur yesterday. Potatoes were selling for Tk 1.5 a kg there. PHOTO: STAR

ARMS HAUL LINK

Fakhrul slams PM for blaming Khaleda

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP acting secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday lambasted Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for accusing BNP chief Khaleda Zia of being involved in the 10-truck arms smuggling.

"This was to defame Khaleda Zia with a political motive", he told reporters after placing a wreath at BNP founder Ziaur Rahman's grave in the capital.

BNP Standing Committee member Rafiqul Islam Mia, who was released from jail on Tuesday, was with him.

On Tuesday, the PM said her

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Robbers kill cop

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Munshiganj

A police constable was killed in an attack by robbers on the Meghna river under Gazaria upazila of Munshiganj early yesterday.

The dead is Abdul Malek, 30, of Gazaria Police Station. He hails from Dhamrai of Dhaka.

Habibur Rahman, superintendent of Munshiganj police, said a team of patrol police chased two trawlers carrying the robbers in the river near Meghna bridge around 2:00am.

The robbers first hurled brick chips at the police. They then opened fire, triggering a gunfight with the police, said Habibur.

At one stage of the fight, Malek fell into the river, the police official added.

Three policemen, including Assistant Sub-Inspector Pradip Kumar of the police station, were also injured in the incident.

However, the robbers managed to flee the scene.

Mamun-or-Rashid, officer-in-charge of Gazaria Police Station, said divers found the body of Malek near the Meghna bridge in the morning after conducting a search.

The body bore several injury marks, the police official added.

Police seized a trawler of the robbers with looted goods and several sharp weapons.

AMASSING ILLEGAL WEALTH

Ex-minister's APS under ACC probe

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Commission yesterday launched a probe into allegations of illegally amassing wealth by the assistant private secretary of former state minister for religious affairs Shahjahan Miah.

A top official of the ACC said they had allegation that Shahjahan's APS Sumendra Lal Chandra Soilen amassed properties worth around Tk 50 crore. Soilen siphoned a portion of the money off to a neighbouring country where his mother lives, said the ACC officer preferring anonymity.

"We had information that Soilen had a five-storied building in Patuakhali town, and plots of land and flats in the capital," the officer said, adding, "We are collecting relevant documents."

Despite repeated attempts, The Daily Star could not reach Soilen over the phone for comments.

Sea boundary

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During the question answer session of the day, the state minister expressed the hope that the verdict would go in favour of Bangladesh and its claim to 25,000 sq km of exclusive economic and territorial waters in the Bay of Bengal.

"Through this verdict, a fair and peaceful solution to the maritime boundary case between the two neighbouring countries will be possible," he said.

Earlier on March 14, 2012, Bangladesh won a landmark verdict at the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, which sustained its claim to 200-nautical-mile exclusive economic and territorial rights in the Bay of Bengal rejecting the claims of Myanmar.