

EDITORIAL ON VERDICT

Tribunal asks NY Times to explain

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The International Crimes Tribunal-2 yesterday asked the New York Times to explain an editorial they published criticising the punishment it handed down to Dhaka-based British journalist David Bergman for contempt of court.

The three-member tribunal led by Justice Obaiddul Hassan with members Justice Md Mozibur Rahman Miah and Justice Md Shahinur Islam asked the newspaper to submit their explanation by February 20 through the Bangladesh Mission in New York.

The tribunal also fixed February 23 for passing next order in this regard.

The internationally acclaimed newspaper on December 23 published an editorial titled "Muzzling Speech in Bangladesh" where it said the tribunal should immediately overturn Bergman sentence and conviction.

The court on December 2 sentenced Bergman, editor (special reports) of the Daily New Age, to imprisonment until the court session ended and fined him Tk 5,000 for two articles he posted on his personal blog, which demeaned the court.

Meanwhile, the tribunal also re-fixed the date to February 23 for passing order regarding the statements issued by 49 eminent personalities over the Bergman punishment.

The court is scheduled to pass the order today (Thursday).

On February 8, the tribunal had fixed Thursday to decide whether contempt of court proceedings be initiated against the 49 dignitaries for a statement they issued expressing concern over Bergman's punishment.

Contempt proceedings against Bergman began in April last year after the court found "prima facie elements of contempt" in his three write-ups posted in his blog in November 2011 and January 2013.

One article was on the indictment order of Jamaat leader Delawar Hossain Sayedee and two others on the verdict on Bachchu Razakar.

Bergman, in his post on Sayedee's indictment, made "relentless efforts to justify that the tribunal was absolutely wrong to mention three million were killed and 2,00,000 women raped in the 1971 war", the petition said.

Anger over hills ban

FROM PAGE 1

The views came at a roundtable discussion on the 11-point Home Ministry order regarding Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). Nagorik Shamaj organised the discussion at Dhaka Reporters Unity yesterday morning.

"This is similar to Nazi Germany, where Jews were not allowed to talk to Germans," said human rights activist Hameeda Hossain. "These decisions raise the question if CHT is a part of Bangladesh, or if we want to use it as a colony that is heavily militarised and ruled by different laws, while the constitution is only applicable to Bangladesh."

The order authorised by State Minister for Home Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal also restricts foreigners' access to the Chittagong Hill Tracts, and puts check-posts at the entrances to Rangamati, Khagrachhari and Bandarban on higher alert.

"The orders should be a cause for concern for every Bangladeshi citizen as these go against the core values of the country's Liberation War," said CHT Commission member Iftekharuzzaman. "The restriction on movement and speech in one part of the country is shamelessly discriminatory, unconstitutional and a violation of human rights."

He also hinted that legal action would be sought against implementation of the orders.

As per the directive, UNDP has to submit a report on the implementation and outcomes of its \$160 million development projects in the CHT in the last 10 years.

Iftekharuzzaman said armed forces who were carrying out projects in the name of "peace and development" with tax-payers' money should also then be asked to do the same.

Sara Hossain, honorary executive director of Bangladesh Legal Aid and Service Trust, said these decisions, taken unilaterally by the government, and were unconstitutional and part of a conscious effort to "othering" the indigenous communities. "If a foreigner or Banglaee marries a pahari, then are we

to assume that the armed forces or local administration must also be present in their bedroom?" she asked.

Pankaj Bhattacharya opined that the order institutionalises the long process of militarisation of the CHT. "It proves that Banglaees are a colonial and fascist people, much like the Nazis, Pakistanis and Israelis," he said. The problems in the CHT were not security issues, but rather political ones, and must be resolved through political means, he added.

Syed Abul Maskud, noted columnist, said, "Such decisions can only come through discussions in parliament, not from bureaucrats behind closed doors. No ministry has the mandate to make such decisions."

The order makes a mockery of the Peace Accord and signals an ominous future for the region and for the country at large.

"We will try to initiate a dialogue with the home ministry officials and demand cancellation of these orders," he added. "We will go to the court, if our demands fall on deaf ears."

Moderated by Dhaka University teacher Rebaet Ferdous, Prof Mezbah Kamal also spoke.

Meanwhile, Human Rights Forum Bangladesh (HRFB) in a statement condemned the home ministry decision and said it was a blatant assurance of government support in favour of land acquisition.

The statement, issued by the forum's convener Sultana Kamal, criticised the CHT ministry's assurance to extend its support if BGB needed land from the forest department to establish border outposts.

"This raises serious concerns in the context that land disputes remain at the heart of the CHT conflict, [and] local residents are severely affected by land acquisitions," it read.

Calling on the government to cancel its decision, it urged civil society, members of parliament, mass media and other stakeholders to raise their voices against the order.

In pain, yet they smile

FROM PAGE 1

A four-member family, Selim suffered burn injuries to his face, neck, hand and back. Doctors at the burn unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital said his injuries were severe and it would take him quite a few months to fully recover.

"The pain that the arson has caused me and my family is so immense that no one can actually understand the fullest extent of this suffering," he said, adding that no amount of money could ease the pain and mental scars he suffered.

Sixty three victims were handed over the savings certificates yesterday, BSS reports.

Of them, 54 are now being treated at the DMCH burn unit and the rest at other hospitals in the capital, said Dr Paul.

126 burn victims have so far been treated at the unit. Eight of them have died while the rest have been released.

The prime minister sought separate lists of those who died and those released, according to hospital sources.

The victims will be able to yield interest income from savings certificates on a monthly basis and draw the full amount after 10 years, said Partha Pal who, among other hospital staffs, was with the PM during her visit.

According to an official of Directorate of National Savings, the

monthly yield against Tk 10 lakh will amount to around Tk 10,000.

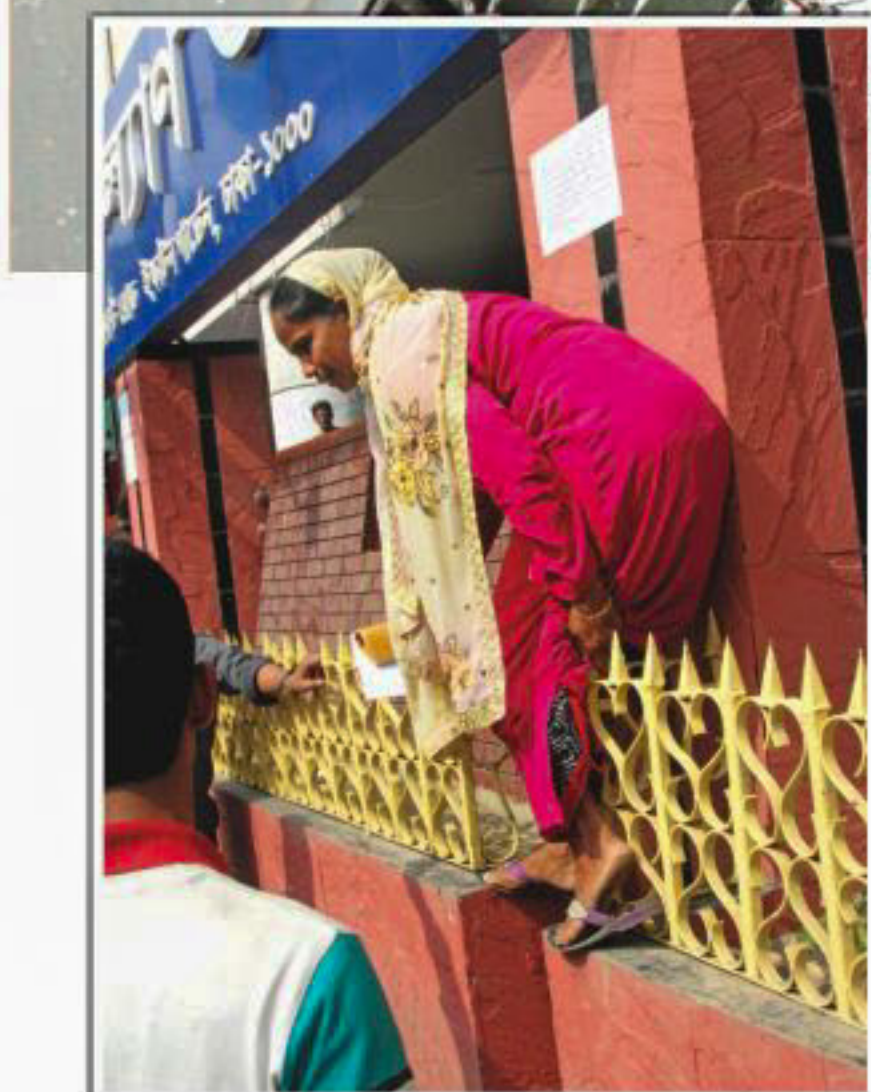
Other burn victims, while talking to this correspondent, have echoed Md Selim.

Arman Hossain, 45, a truck driver with 12 percent burns, told The Daily Star yesterday that he was in doubt whether he would recover so well as to resume work. His left hand and armpit were badly burnt in an arson attack on January 17 in the capital.

He said he was worried not so much about his injuries as about the future of his pregnant wife and two children. "Now that I am going to get financial assistance from the government, my worries are gone," he said.

But he, much like Selim, said nothing could lessen the damage done to his physique and psyche. Arman's mother-in-law Aklima Begum, who had been attending him at the hospital, said her daughter Shilpi was staying with her and could not visit her husband yet.

Both Selim and Arman demanded that effective measures be taken to immediately stop such crimes and bring the arsonists to trial. "The politics of this country has caused our suffering. Our politicians must make sure that no one suffers from these heinous arson attacks ever again. I demand the arsonists be brought to justice immediately," Selim said.



They climb on trees and scale the walls to get in and on the building of the expatriate welfare and overseas employment ministry at Eskaton Garden yesterday following a rumour that yesterday was the last day to register for jobs in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Hundreds of others were seen waiting outside the building.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

4 Bangladeshis killed in Oman fire

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Four Bangladeshi workers were killed in a sofa factory fire in Oman early yesterday.

Of them, two have been identified as Ruhul Amin, of Mymensingh, and Md Shipon, said Mohsin Chowdhury, director of the Wage Earners' Welfare Board of the expatriates' welfare and overseas employment ministry.

Officials at the Bangladesh embassy in Muscat visited the spot, he said.

The victims were sleeping inside the factory when it caught fire, according to the embassy officials.

Counsellor AKM Rabiul Islam of the embassy said apart from the four Bangladeshis, two Pakistanis were also killed in the factory fire at Buraimi, some 350km from Muscat.

Three Muslim students killed in US shooting

AFP, Washington

A North Carolina man espousing anti-religious views has been charged with the murders of three Muslim students, including a husband and wife, who were shot to death in the university town of Chapel Hill, police said yesterday.

The shooter, identified as Craig Stephen Hicks, 46, was being held in Durham County Jail on three counts of first-degree murder, Chapel Hill police said.

The victims were identified as Chapel Hill residents Deah Shaddy Barakat, 23, his wife Yusor Abu-Salha, 21, and her sister Razan Abu-Salha, 19, of Raleigh.

Hicks turned himself in after the shooting Tuesday in Chapel Hill, just outside the campus of the University of North Carolina.

"Mr Hicks has been charged with three counts of 1st degree murder," the police said in a statement.

A Facebook page believed to belong to Hicks showed dozens of anti-religious posts, including one calling himself an "anti-theist" saying he has a "conscientious objection to religion" and others memes denouncing Christianity, Mormonism and Islam.

His page also showed a photo of a loaded revolver, alongside a video of a puppy and a promotional clip for Air New Zealand.

One post read: "I'm not an atheist because I'm ignorant of the reality of religious scripture. I'm an atheist because religious scripture is ignorant of reality."

"Given the enormous harm that your religion has done in this world, I'd say that I have not only a right, but a duty, to insult it," he posted under the religious beliefs tab.

Mad rush for 'Saudi ticket'

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names registered with the BMET. Many of them believe that the continued political violence would shrink the job market.

They didn't seem bothered about how many people were already there on the BMET's registration list.

Actually, more than 22 lakh jobseekers have already got their names registered with the BMET.

"High rate of underemployment has prompted many to get their names registered for a job in Saudi Arabia," said Prof Mustafizur Rahman, executive director of Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD).

In Bangladesh, the official rate of

unemployment is around 5 percent and that of underemployment 20 percent. This means, one in every four workforce is either unemployed or underemployed. Besides, 20 lakh people enter the job market every year.

According to Prof Mustafizur, low cost and zero travel expense have encouraged people to get a job in the Middle Eastern country. High unemployment rate -- nearly 50 percent -- among the educated youths pushes them to look for low-end jobs that would fetch Tk 20,000 a month.

Prepared by the Economist Intelligence Unit, a report on graduate unemployment in South Asia last year said that nearly five out of every 10

graduates in Bangladesh are unemployed (against three out of 10 in India and Pakistan).

Saudi Arabia on February 1 decided to resume recruitment of Bangladeshi workers, lifting a six-year ban. It signed an agreement with Bangladesh on Tuesday in this regard.

Home to over 15 lakh Bangladeshis, the Kingdom will hire 10,000 workers from next month under 12 categories of domestic workers such as maids, drivers, housekeepers, security guards and gardeners.

Bangladesh received \$3.1 billion in remittance from Saudi Arabia in fiscal 2013-14, the highest from a single country.

Trial, not talks

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The premier said she had already asked the law minister to form a speedy trial court to sue those involved in such subversive activities.

Terming the BNP chief's activities "acts of terror", she alleged Khaleda had become "a killer" and a leader of terrorists. She added Khaleda did not believe in elections to go to power.

Referring to the barbed wire installed around Khaleda's Gulshan office, Hasina, also president of the ruling Awami League, said the BNP chief had done it to safeguard herself from public wrath.

Without naming Khaleda, the leader of the House generally said these persons had no right to get involved in politics as they wanted to destroy everything.

"If people want, they will be banned normally," she added.

Replying to independent lawmaker Hazi Selim's query if the government would do anything to arrest those journalists and civil society members who had been instigating violence on talk-shows, Hasina said:

"Those who would make such provocative speeches will be monitored

and actions will be taken against them accordingly.

"They [civil society members] can criticise the government for its wrongdoings but they have no right to instigate killing of people. If they do so, they will have to shoulder the responsibility of the killings.

"Some people are trying to benefit from these killings. They have no public support but they desire to go to power. They have no sympathy for those who have been killed in arson."

She said when Dr Kamal Hossain and Mahmudur Rahman Manna had gone to console Khaleda after her son's death, she thought the duo would urge her to call off hartals considering the SSC examinations.

"We were surprised that they [Kamal-Manna] made no such request," the PM said.

Referring to BNP's propaganda that something would happen soon, Hasina asked, "What will happen? Will someone come and take her [Khaleda] to power? Has she been killing one after another with this hope?"

"How many of them [civil society members] have visited the arson victims at the burn units?" said Hasina,

adding, Kamal Hossain and Manna could have at least inquired about them and helped them financially.

Hasina said her government would give financial assistance to those who had been killed and injured in arsons and also those whose buses and trucks had been burned.

REJECTION OF PROPOSAL FOR DIALOGUE

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday reiterated that there would be no dialogue with "terrorist and militant groups like BNP-Jamaat alliance, reports UNB.

"Dialogue? With whom? With killers? What dialogue with the killers?" she told reporters after emerging from the burn unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Hasina also criticised those who are describing these killings and arsons as politics.

According to the report, the prime minister harshly criticised those who were pushing for a dialogue.

"If they [advocates of dialogue] have that much interest to hold dialogue then first stop the killing and arson attacks," she was quoted as saying in the report.

No end to crisis without polls

FROM PAGE 1

complex," she said in her first interview with Western media since she was confined to her office more than a month ago.

Khaleda, leader of the BNP, said that she wanted to reach a consensus on the framework for the elections with her arch rival Hasina but there had been no response to proposals that she had previously put forward.

"We said a fair election should be held based on consensus of all parties and through talks. We want that," she said.

"We also have to make some decisions on the election commission, administration and electoral rules so that a level playing field is created for all the parties.

"We made a seven-point proposal on these matters a few days ago... but we've not heard anything from them," she added.

More than 80 people have been killed in political violence since Khaleda was confined to her office in central Dhaka on January 3, shortly before the anniversary of last year's general election that was boycotted by most opposition parties.

Many of the victims have died in firebombings of buses and trucks since Khaleda ordered her supporters to stage a transport blockade which is in its sixth week.

Hasina has said she will not deal with "terrorists" or "murderers", comparing the arson deaths to the recent execution of a Jordanian pilot by the Islamic State organisation.

PETROL BOMBS

But Khaleda said the arson attacks appeared to be the work of Hasina's Awami League.

"It's the Awami League which is

behind all this violence and they are putting the blame on us," said the two-time former prime minister.

"We've read in the newspapers how petrol bombs were found in the Awami League's office."

Khaleda, who is the leader of a 20-party opposition alliance, said that 18,000 opposition activists had been arrested since the start of the year.

Although there were widespread calls for Hasina to stage fresh elections in the aftermath of last year's effective one-horse race, those calls have been more muted in recent months.

Khaleda, 69, welcomed the prospect of greater international pressure on Hasina.

"The world community should put stronger and more effective pressure on the government for compromise and dialogue," she said.