

Khaleda sued for sedition

Court orders probe after case filed for comments on number of Liberation War martyrs

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday ordered an investigation into a sedition charge filed against BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia for her comments on the number of 1971 martyrs.

The court also asked officer-in-charge of Shahbagh Police Station to take legal action against Khaleda after probing the matter.

Metropolitan Magistrate Md Atiqur Rahman passed the order after Moshir Malek, founding president of Bangabandhu Foundation, had lodged the sedition charge.

In his complaint, Malek alleged that on December 21, Khaleda at a programme, organised by Jatiyatobadi Muktiyoddha Dal to mark the 45th Victory Day, said, "There are controversies over how many were martyred in the Liberation War".

Khaleda also said, "He [without naming Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman] did not want independence of Bangladesh, he [Bangabandhu] wanted to be the prime minister of Pakistan, Liberation War would not take place if Ziaur Rahman did not declare independence."

She made the comments to create division among the patriotic people, Malek added.

The news published in different newspapers the following day hurt the complainant, and her comments were tantamount to sedition, he said in his case statement.

Malek also appealed to the court to issue an arrest warrant for the BNP chief and bring her to trial for the indecent remarks about the Liberation War and the number of freedom fighters.

This was Khaleda's first public address in more than a year where Khaleda raised questions about the number of Liberation War martyrs.

On December 23, a Supreme Court lawyer served a legal notice on Khaleda, asking her to apologise to the nation within seven days or face legal consequences.

Khaleda's comments drew widespread flak among pro-liberation forces in the country. Many slammed her, terming an "agent of Pakistan" and demanded that she leave Bangladesh.

BNP's key ally Jamaat-e-Islami has many convicted (some executed) war criminals, some of them became ministers when Khaleda was in power.

Khaleda's comments and statements came hot on the heels of Pakistan's denial of committing any war crimes or atrocities in Bangladesh during the nine-month bloody war.

NIKO GRAFT CASE
Khaleda will not appear before a Dhaka court today in connection with the Niko graft case on personal grounds, advocate Sanaullah Miah, one of her lawyers, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Today is the scheduled date for hearing on charge framing against Khaleda and several others in the case.

Floods in Britain prompt emergency govt talks

AFP, London

Britain's government held emergency talks yesterday as what it called "unprecedented" flooding in northern England forced hundreds of people to leave their homes, including in the historic tourist destination of York.

Prime Minister David Cameron said

he hosted a conference call of the COBRA emergency committee on the floods which caused chaos for families during the Christmas holiday season.

Over 250 flood warnings and alerts are in place around the country, with 24 of them severe, signalling a risk to life. The army has been deployed to help tackle the floods in some areas.



British MP Tulip Siddiq, granddaughter of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, speaks at her wedding reception at the Gono Bhaban yesterday. The programme was also to celebrate her victory in the UK elections. Her husband John Percy, mother Sheikh Rehana, aunt and Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina, and friend mountaineer Wasfia Nazreen are also on stage.

PHOTO: BSS

Signs are very alarming

Says security analyst

M ABUL KALAM AZAD

The recovery of a sophisticated sniper rifle and military suits in Chittagong yesterday and Friday's suicide blast at an Ahmadiyya mosque in Rajshahi are alarming additions to the country's security situation, says a security analyst.

Militant groups are reaching new heights with each targeted attack on different religious groups and security forces, said Major General (ret) ANM Muniruzzaman while talking to The Daily Star about the extent of extremism.

"We have never seen such a modern and sophisticated sniper rifle belonging to any criminal or militant group in the country."

Threats of militancy are on the rise as the country sees attacks on an array of targets with the use of new



technology, said Muniruzzaman, president of Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies.

"Every day, they are striking a new target," he said, citing that the suicide bombing had brought about a completely new dimension to militancy in the country.

An analysis of the attacks made in the last few months concludes that every religious minority group in society has been targeted.

"First on Shia and then on Ahmadiyya, Hindu temple and on pir." Regarding attacks on security forces, Muniruzzaman said militants had first targeted policemen -- hacking on-duty cops to death.

Then military police came under attack in broad daylight in Dhaka city, followed by an attack on two mosques in a highly secured naval base in Chittagong, he said, adding the series of targeted attacks gave an alarming signal.

"Look at the frequency. There was a raid on a JMB den in Mirpur [in the capital] and then they [militants] targeted the Ahmadiyya mosque."

Regarding motives behind bring-

ing in sniper rifle and army vests, he said militants were changing techniques.

Perhaps, they are striving to be as powerful as other global militant groups by acquiring modern arms and weapons, he explained.

Recovery of army vests, however, demands an in-depth investigation, Muniruzzaman said. How those vests went into their hands and what were the sources should be found out.

"The motive might be carrying out an operation in disguise [in the guise of army men]," he said.

Analysing the overall situation, the security expert said militancy was rising rapidly in the country.

"We have to take the issue very seriously. It's a threat to national security and we have to look at it from that point of view."



Researchers and Sultan Hafeez Rahman, executive director of Brac Institute of Governance and Development, in glasses, at the launching of a research report "The State of Governance Bangladesh 2014-2015" at BRAC Centre Inn in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Governance failure holds back democratic culture

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advancement would halt and even reverse at one stage, he said at the launching programme.

POLITICAL ASPECTS

BIGD Research Associate Harun-Or-Rashid said though parliamentary elections held between 1991 and 2008 were deemed acceptable and fair, repeated allegations of manipulation, mistrust and boycott of elections by political parties have put the Election Commission's effectiveness under question.

"Also, ineffective leadership as well as pressure from the executive are impediments to a credible Election Commission," he said.

The study said, "The experience of the 10th parliamentary elections has been very difficult where the major opposition party boycotted the polls and a large number of candidates won their seats uncontested."

It also raised concerns about the democratic gains made till then through competitive polls and the exercise of franchise.

Harun said the percentage of lawmakers from the business community rose to 61.3 percent in the ninth parliament from 38.4 percent in the fifth parliament.

Though representation of women and youths in the House increased over the period, it remains very low compared to their large number, he said.

The report said, "Most importantly, persistent boycott of the main opposition party in every national parliament to date has seriously undermined the quality of representation in parliament and hence its effectiveness."

"The effectiveness of parliamentary oversight has been limited due to some factors, including limited independence of parliamentary committees, low capacity of parliamentary staff and lack of responsiveness of the ministries," it said.

"One-third of the standing committees never submitted any report on the working of the ministries," it said, adding that though a large number of reports were prepared by the commit-

tees, very few were accepted.

ECONOMIC ASPECTS

Bangladesh did not face any major economic challenge in a decade till last year, and all indicators on banks showed improvement, said BIGD Senior Research Associate Syeda Selina Aziz.

"Yet, comparatively low performance by state-owned banks or financial institutions than the private ones is a matter of grave concern," according to the report.

The state's subsidy for maintaining financial flows of state-owned banks is a big weakness, it said.

"Excessive politicisation in financial decision-making process and management of financial institutions has made the problem grave."

"To achieve a growth rate of 7.5 percent, required share of investment in GDP should be 28 to 32 percent whereas the current rate is on average 22 percent," it added.

SOCIAL ASPECTS

Indicators on education have improved in terms of pass rate, enrolment, higher scores in public exams

and lower drop-out rates.

The share of trained teachers in primary and secondary education increased over time, but the student-teacher-ratio still shows a serious inadequacy of teachers.

The utilisation of ADP allocations at all levels reaches its peak in June every year, reflecting inefficient management of resources, the report said.

Frequent changes in books, curricula, examination and grading systems are likely to affect the quality and performance of schools, it said.

Though Bangladesh made significant achievements in child and maternal mortality, medical education and high tuition fees in private sector remain a matter of concern.

The mushrooming of private medical colleges, their expensive tuition fee structure and questionable quality of education are major problems, said the report.

Besides, improving healthcare in hospitals, especially in public ones in both rural and urban areas, remains a serious challenge.

Crossing divide

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is something very much present in Bangladeshi society as well. Parents take care of their children and children respect their parents," said Shahida Sasha Binti Mohd Rashidi, 32, wife of Bangladeshi expatriate worker Quamrul Hasan Suman.

Things were not that easy at the beginning, and there still are many challenges that every diasporic community faces. But many families are now promoting cultural bond so that their children can learn about their roots, respect cultures and traditions of both parents and feel proud of being children of mixed marriages.

In order to create a platform to strengthen cultural bond, Rashidi and two other women, Noor Aziza Binti Muslim and Susi, formed an association called Malaysian Wife of Bangladesh Club in January this year. All women members in the association are Malaysian women having Bangladeshi husbands.

They organised a programme at Grand Continental Hotel in Kuala Lumpur on December 5 to present 26 wives with the Iron Lady Award for their success in maintaining a happy family and good education for their children.

Asked about the social stigma attached to Malaysian women marrying Bangladeshi men, Rashidi said the Malaysian society did not look negatively at the couples of mixed marriage or at their children anymore.

"We don't think that we are treated differently. We rather want to say we are happy families and Bangladeshis are good husbands," she told this correspondent, sitting at a Bangladeshi restaurant -- Roshona Bilash -- at Bukit Bintang of Kuala Lumpur on December 10.

Rashidi, a graduate in accounting and now a businesswoman, said they realised very well that children of mixed marriages might suffer from identity crisis at some point in their life. Referring to the association, she also said, "Mixed marriages cannot be blamed for this. So, we took the initiative to unite the mixed marriage couples to know each other and introduce Bangla history, tradition and culture among our children."

She said their next generation thus would know cultures and traditions of two nations.

Malaysia formally began recruiting Bangladeshi migrant workers in the 1990s. Their recruitment has since stopped several times following reports of abuses by employment

agencies and Malaysian employers or Malaysian authorities.

Sometimes Malaysian authorities cited Bangladeshi people's resemblance with Indian film actors while explaining the recruitment ban. They also said Bangladeshi created "social problems here".

Yet, Bangladeshi workers have continued to work diligently here. Many have established their own business, contributing to the Malaysian economy, and many have tied the knot with Malaysian women. Although no exact figure is available, expatriates say there would be over 500 Bangladeshis who have married Malaysian women.

Shahida Sultana, first secretary (labour) of Bangladesh High Commission in Kuala Lumpur, who attended the December 5 programme, lauded the initiative.

She told The Daily Star that mixed married couples might sometimes feel alienated in any society. She said now that many of them were united through the association, they could build stronger ties among themselves.

"I also requested them to educate their children about Bangladesh's independence war, the martyrs, and the values that had inspired the freedom fighters," Shahida said.

Mohammad Faisal, a Bangladeshi expatriate, said Bangladeshis earned a bad name some 20 years back when some of them, having married Malaysian women, had abandoned them.

"Now that bad name is gone. We have a positive image now. Our wives are proving it," he said.

Biman gets another 737

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Biman Bangladesh Airlines received the delivery of a Boeing 737-800, nicknamed Mayurpankhi, in Dhaka on Friday.

With the addition of Boeing 737-800 Meghdoot and Mayurpankhi, Biman now has 14 planes in its fleet, said an official press release.

In 2008, the airline went into an agreement with Boeing for buying 10 new aircraft, including four Boeing 777-300ERs, two Boeing 737-800s, and four Boeing 787 Dreamliners.

Boeing has delivered all but the Dreamliners, which are scheduled to arrive between 2019 and 2020.