

GENOCIDE DENIAL PM hits out at Pakistan over book

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina last night in parliament blasted Pakistan for publishing a book that denied carrying out genocide by the Pakistan occupation force during the Liberation War in 1971.

Strongly criticising Pakistan for its latest move to spread propaganda against the Liberation War, the PM in an unscheduled discussion said Bangladesh would formally register its protest against Pakistan.

Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed initiated the discussion on the issue, saying Pakistan recently published a book titled "Creation of Bangladesh: Myths Exploded" by Junaid Ahmed, which was sent to the Bangladesh High Commission in Pakistan.

He said genocide carried out by the Pakistan occupation force was denied in the book and that it contained false and fabricated information about the genocide, number of martyrs and torture to women by the Pakistan army.

Tofail added Pakistani intelligence agency ISI was involved in publishing the book to malign and humiliate Bangladesh's Liberation War.

He demanded the House adopt a proposal on acknowledging March 25 as genocide day.

Taking part in the discussion, the PM questioned, "How dare Pakistan write such a book? How dare they send the book to our high commission?"

"The entire world had noticed Pakistan carried out genocide against Bangladeshis. Now they are trying to blame our freedom fighters," she said, adding, "This is very unfortunate. This cannot be tolerated."

"We strongly condemn Pakistan's such initiative."

She said her government would take necessary steps so that March 25 is observed as the genocide day nationally and internationally.

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The new chief election commissioner and four election commissioners exchange greetings with Chief Justice SK Sinha after they were sworn in yesterday. The photo was taken at the Supreme Court Judges' Lounge.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Wants to earn trust of all

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Asked about the main challenges, the CEC said, "Our main challenge is to hold fair elections. We will plan and work in that regard."

He said, "We will work to gain the confidence of all the political parties, including the BNP and the Awami League." He hoped that he would be able to do so.

Huda also warned of taking stern actions against those who would be biased during elections.

When his attention was drawn to the BNP's allegation that he was loyal to Awami League, the CEC said, "As I've taken the oath, I've no connection with any political party from now on. I have taken the oath to work neutrally

and I will do so."

He also refuted the allegation of being an organiser of "Janatar Mancha", a platform which was against the then BNP government in 1996. "It is not true."

Huda sought cooperation of the government, political parties, civil society members and the media in discharging the duties.

He said the experience and knowledge of the EC gathered over the years as well as the skill of the EC secretariat officials would help him accomplish his duties.

In reply to a question whether they would hold dialogues with political parties and civil society members seeking their suggestions over elec-

toral issues, the CEC said they would make the decision later.

Four election commissioners -- Mahub Talukder, Md Rafiqul Islam, Begum Kabita Khanam and Shahadat Hossain Chowdhury -- were present at the press conference.

President Abdul Hamid on February 6 appointed the new CEC and four election commissioners for the next five years. The new EC will oversee the 2019 national election.

E-VOTING IN NEXT POLLS: PM Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday in parliament said the plan to introduce electronic voting system could be taken into consideration in the next parliamentary polls to ensure people's voting rights and to hold a

free, fair and impartial election, keeping consistency with all existing rules.

She also congratulated the new CEC and four commissioners and expressed her belief that they would be able to gain people's confidence through carrying out their responsibilities impartially and staying loyal to the constitution.

In a scripted answer, she said her government was determined to provide all kinds of assistance to the EC.

Hasina also suggested formulation of an appropriate law on the appointment of the CEC and other commissioners in future in the light of the directives of the country's constitution.

No election if Khaleda sent to jail

Warns BNP

UNB, Dhaka

The BNP yesterday warned that there will be no election in the country if its Chairperson Khaleda Zia is sent to jail in "false" cases.

"We would like to clearly say if Khaleda Zia is sent to jail in false cases, no election will be held in the country. No patriotic people will take part in such polls," said BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir.

The BNP leader came up with the warning while addressing a discussion at Dhaka Reporters' Unity arranged by the National People's Party (NPP).

He, however, said their party wants to participate in the polls, but it has to be held after creating a level-playing field. "The election must be inclusive and acceptable to all."

The BNP leader alleged that the Awami League has set a trap to hold a farcical election. "If the election is held as per their blueprint, it won't be fair, and people's hopes and aspirations won't be reflected in such polls."

Fakhrul called upon all, irrespective of their party affiliation and opinion, to get united to force the government into holding the next parliamentary polls in a credible manner under a neutral administration.

He said their party wants to return to power through polls and a democratic process. "But the Awami League scrapped the caretaker government system as it doesn't want fair elections."

The BNP leader asked the prime minister why she was "so afraid of credible polls". "Why are you opposing holding polls under neutral people? Why are you not taking a chance to be immortal in history by holding a fair election?"

Fakhrul also accused the AL of following 1/11 government's "depoliticisation policy" to destroy the country's major political parties and alliances.

'Conspiracy theories'

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intelligence community (NSA and FBI). Just like Russia."

He went on to claim: "The real scandal here is that classified information is illegally given out by 'intelligence' like candy. Very un-American!"

Trump also singled out a comment piece published by Bloomberg for praise, personally thanking the author for exposing the "very serious situation for USA."

His remarks came as The New York Times on Tuesday reported that US intelligence agents intercepted calls showing that members of Trump's campaign had repeated contacts with top Russian intelligence officials in the year preceding the November 8 presidential election, reported Independent.

US intelligence agencies concluded in January that Russia had intervened in the electoral process at least in part to help Republican property tycoon Trump win. **KREMLIN DENIES REPORT** The Kremlin yesterday denied as "false-

hoods and fabrications" the New York Times report.

"Don't believe newspaper reports, it's very difficult at the moment to differentiate them from falsehoods and fabrications," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told a press conference.

Stressing that the sources quoted by the Times were anonymous, Peskov said "the time has perhaps come for someone to speak out openly about all of this."

"If you don't mind let's wait and let's not believe anonymous information, which is information based on no fact."

Citing "four current and former American officials," the Times report said that intercepted phone calls and phone records showed the repeated contacts with Moscow's intelligence community.

The nature of the purported calls was not disclosed, reported AFP.

TRUMP WARNED ABOUT FLYNN The White House admitted Tuesday that Trump was told three weeks ago that ousted national security advisor Michael Flynn may have misled colleagues about his Kremlin contacts.

The retired three-star general and former head of US defense intelligence initially denied discussing sanctions strategy with Russia's ambassador Sergey Kislyak before taking office, a move that may have breached US law on negotiating with foreign powers.

Flynn was asked to resign on Monday, after what the White House said was an internal investigation that showed no wrongdoing but "eroded" trust.

Republicans and Democratic lawmakers have now called for an investigation into what occurred, although they differ sharply on the scope and powers.

The Senate's top Republican Mitch McConnell said it was "highly likely" that Flynn would have to testify before an intelligence panel.

The Times also reported that the FBI had interviewed Flynn on his calls with the Russian diplomat days into his job.

The CIA, FBI and other intelligence agencies have already investigated Moscow's influence over the 2016 vote, concluding the Kremlin tried to sway it in Trump's favour.

PM, Merkel to talk fighting terrorism

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throughout Europe and post-Brexit issues.

"A joint declaration on fighting terrorism and violent extremism is expected to be signed in presence of the prime minister and the German chancellor to facilitate regular holding of diplomatic dialogues," the minister said at a press conference at the foreign ministry.

Germany and Bangladesh have a very deep and friendly relationship. Germany is the one of the first European countries that recognised Bangladesh immediately after its independence, he added.

"Germany is one of the top development partners of Bangladesh and it is also the second largest destination of Bangladesh's exports," said Mahmood.

Responding to a question from a journalist, the minister said during the meeting with the German chancellor Bangladesh will raise the issue of Rohingya Muslims who fled

Myanmar in the face of persecution and ethnic cleansing.

Hasina will lead a high-profile delegation which would be comprised of the foreign minister, high officials from the Prime Minister's Office and ministries of foreign, forest and environment and home affairs.

About the security conference, the minister said this is the first time Bangladesh has been invited to the event considering its growing role in the international arena and significant contribution to world peace.

Mahmood said heads of state and government, including those from Poland, Finland, Norway and Turkey, will attend the conference slated for February 17-19.

The Bangladesh PM will take part in discussions on several issues, including climate change and security.

According to the organisers of the MSC, more than 30 presidents and prime ministers from around the world would join the programme.

Hasina will leave Dhaka at 9:45pm today by a commercial flight of Etihad Airways and return home on February 19.

ANNUAL REPORT

The MSC published its annual report on Monday, with the conference chairman saying there is a greater instability today across the globe than there had been since the World War II.

The report titled "Post-Truth, Post-West, Post-Order?" accentuates the threats to the international order in what MSC Chairman Wolfgang Ischinger described as an "illiberal moment".

"The international security environment is arguably more volatile today than at any point since the World War II. Some of the most fundamental pillars of the West and of the liberal international order are weakening," said the MSC chairman.

According to the report, citizens' trust in media and politicians might further erode, creating a vicious cycle that threatens liberal democracy.

No old, unfit buses

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licences with the help of unscrupulous brokers at the BRTA, while the others do not even bother with any official documents.

Khandaker Enayetullah, secretary general of Bangladesh Sarak Paribahan Samity, said, "We welcome the announcement that no vehicle should be operated by drivers who have no proper educational background."

"But the problem is that we are facing a shortage of skilled drivers who have proper driving licences. If such a move from the government is launched, the scarcity of drivers may intensify," he told The Daily Star.

About old buses in service, Enayetullah claimed, "There are no buses in the capital older than 20 years."

"Magistrates from the BRTA and the DMP are regularly conducting mobile court drives against unfit and old vehicles. So, it is not possible in the capital to operate buses over 20 years old."

Around 5,000 buses run in the capital, he said.

Nazmul Ahsan Majumder, director (enforcement) of BRTA, on the new drives said, "This will be very effective as it will be a combined drive and it will start from March 1."

He said over 20-year-old buses might enter the capital and they are fined by the traffic police of the DMP.

He said their mobile courts also fine drivers for not having licences. "Seven drivers have been sentenced to one-month imprisonment each by mobile courts of the BRTA yesterday as they did not have any driving licences and the number was 22 on Monday."

He said class-VIII-pass certificates, 18 years of age for non-professional driving licence and 20 years of age for professional driving licence were a must.

There is no way to get a licence without these, he claimed.

Nazmul said every day their mobile courts conduct drives against vehicles and file 100 to 150 cases or hand down imprisonments.

Experts, however, say that the regular efforts of the authorities were not effective enough and blamed unfit vehicles, unskilled drivers, and drivers without licences as major causes for road accidents.

Kazi Md Shifun Newaz, assistant professor of Accident Research Institute of Buet, said, "The numbers of mobile courts are not sufficient in the capital because the numbers of vehicles are increasing day by day."

Shortage of mobile courts creates room for transport operators to run old and unfit vehicles, he viewed, hailing the move for increasing the number of mobile courts next month.

On average, 64 people die every day from injuries suffered in traffic accidents, a government-supervised survey reveals.

In 2010, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution establishing the Decade of Action for Road Safety (2011-2020) with the goal to stabilise and reduce predicted levels of road traffic fatalities around the world. The issue has also been included in the adopted Sustainable Development Goals with a target to halve traffic deaths and injuries by 2020.

Bangladesh is a signatory to the resolution.

Lost in the maze of misfortunes

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I climbed on to the roof [of a train]," Robin said at the hospital. He fell off the roof as the train was moving at Kamalapur.

Locals took him to Dhaka Medical College Hospital with injuries to his head and the two limbs cut off. After months of treatment there he was released a week ago but no one has come to take him.

Without anyone's support, the boy can hardly rise from bed, let alone leave the hospital.

Seeing him suffer, Mohammad Alam, an attendant of ward-206, and a

couple of his colleagues came forward to help him. They request other patients and their family members for money so that they can buy him food and clothes.

The attendants also let him sleep on any empty bed in the ward at night.

Meanwhile, one man from Robin's village Sadhanpur in Nikli upazila came to DMCH to see another patient and recognised Robin. On his return, he informed his mother Jahanara and other villagers of Robin's situation.

Bakul Miah, a farmer of the village, said he along with two others then came to DMCH with Tk 6,000 and

bought medicines and other necessary things for him.

Robin's mother Jahanara came too to visit him at DMCH but quickly sneaked out, said some hospital staff who are providing him with food now.

Talking about the boy's childhood, Bakul said his mother Jahanara, who is mentally challenged, took him to Nikli when he was just six-months old.

"She used to beg people to help."

Local people married her off to a man named Faizul who is also mentally challenged. Faizul and Jahanara have five children; all adopted by some villagers.

Robin's stepfather used to beat him up frequently. Seeing that neighbours gave him work at a tea stall, the boys said.

One day he fled from there and came to Dhaka by train. He used to sleep on the platforms of Kamalapur station at night.

Robin now wants to go out and play. "I would in the least need a wheelchair to be able to leave the hospital. I hope someone will give me one."

Talking on the phone about his rehabilitation, Bakul quoted the local chairman as saying that they could not afford to keep in the village a boy who lost the right hand and the right leg.

Of plants & healing

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Nipa went from place to place, eager to collect new medicinal species, while her husband Ayub Ali was busy selling leaves, bark and roots as each harvest was achieved. He also collected books. "I bought 81 books so far, some of them very rare, about treating human ailments with medicinal herbs," Ayub says.

"I want to increase community knowledge about disease prevention and cure using herbs," Nipa remarks. "Most people don't know the names of plant species or what medical properties they have." Nipa searched for specific plants among roadside bushes; her husband travelled to various districts of India to purchase rare specimens for high prices. As news of her garden spread, medicinal plant

enthusiasts sought her out too, offering yet more species for her collection.

Nowadays, Nipa earns up to Tk 25,000 per month from her garden and she advises other local women in horticulture. From her exotic plants Nipa has become well-known across Khulna, earning the moniker "Herbal Mother." More importantly, the family is solvent.

"Everyone in society should follow her example," says Batiaghata's Upazila Nirbahi Officer Md Bellal Hossain.

"Her medicinal garden is not only an asset for our upazila but for the whole country. Demand for the medicinal ingredients she supplies is rising, day by day. To encourage her I had a tube well installed nearby and paved the road to her home with bricks for better access."

"Many women in her locality have stepped forward," says the upazila's agriculture officer Rubayet Ara. "Inspired by her, they too wish to establish herbal gardens. I hope to continue cooperating with Nipa and her neighbours, as her pioneering efforts have the potential to improve the economic outlook of the whole community."

"Many of the plants Nipa grows were almost extinct," says Nirependranath Bairagi, vice-principal of Khulna Unani Medical College. "For our practitioners such ingredients were increasingly difficult to source. Nipa has changed that."

"As there is demand for medicinal plants," Nipa says, "more people should cultivate them. I hope to grow these plants for the rest of my life and

to disseminate knowledge of how to use them. I will help anybody to start their own garden. Even growing the plants is medicinal in a way: all the different fragrances themselves work as a kind of inhaler!"

Indeed, one who looks set to follow in her footsteps is her elder daughter Zinia Akhter Nim, currently a student of Khulna Unani Medical College. "Once I have completed my study I hope to expand the garden and take it up as my profession too," she says.

Nipa is pleased with her daughter's ambition. "All women should engage in income-generating activity," she advises, "They should stand on their own feet and achieve economic self-sufficiency."