

Trump tells evangelical voters they have God on their side

AFP, Miami

US President Donald Trump wooed crucial evangelical voters Friday with a speech in Florida where he told them God is "on our side" ahead of this year's elections.

Trump -- who despite three marriages, sexual assault allegations and a controversial business history has made himself a champion of right-wing Christians -- promised "another monumental victory for faith and family, God and country, flag and freedom."

"I really do believe we have God

on our side," Trump told the crowd at the King Jesus International Ministry mega church in Miami.

This was Trump's first campaign rally of the year and sets him up for what will be a tough fight against his Democratic challenger in November.

Trump, who also faces a looming impeachment trial in the Senate, arrived on stage at the church to be blessed by several television pastors.

"Every demonic altar that has been raised against him will be torn down," prayed Paula White, frequently portrayed as Trump's spiritual advisor.

New poison in 'old bottles'

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Rayhan too was arrested by police earlier that year but got bail within a month.

He and a dozen other dealers, backed by local political leaders, are now active in Anwarpur, Champurand Chhoto Kuripaka -- three villages in Akhaura, bordering India.

They are adopting new strategies of drug trade and smuggling. They fill the bottle with a cocktail of Indian cough medicine Eskuf, sugar syrup and a few drops of an energy drink to sell it as Phensedyl.

That's why empty plastic bottle of contraband Phensedyl is sold at around Tk 100 in villages of Akhaura and Brahmanbaria. The condition is that it has to be unscratched and the seal of the cap cannot be broken.

While an intact bottle of real Phensedyl costs Tk 1,200 in the border area, this counterfeit one is available at Tk 800.

Eskuf, which is banned in India, also has popularity among junkies in the district. It sells at about Tk 500.

"Once I was fishing with a net in a pond that I took on lease. I found hundreds of Phensedyl bottles filled with water, but seals of the caps were intact," said Kazi Anwar Hossain, a fish trader of Taragan village.

Md Alamgir, a scrap trader in Narayanganj intersection of Akhaura, said he was doing the business for 20 years. Even a year back, he used to sell 60 bags full of empty Phensedyl bottles every month but now he hardly gets one or two bags.

'RED SIGNAL'
Around 3:00pm on October 8. Champur village

The Star correspondents saw a youth walking on the zero line though it is prohibited. Interestingly, he was wearing a red gamchha (towel) over his jeans.

Noticing onlookers, he just threw a small plastic sack into a dense bush nearby and started walking away.

A local source who was accompanying the correspondents, called out to him, "We are not from the administration; we are here to buy Eskuf."

The youth in gamchha then turned around.

Coming closer, he said he could arrange some but the cost will be Tk 500 per bottle.

But why was he wearing a gamchha over the jeans?

In reply, he said it is a signal for their counterparts in India that the border is clear now and they can throw the narcotics to this side.

About the payment, he said most of the time they hurl the bundles of money across the border fence. "We often send Bangladeshi taka but sometimes we pay in US dollar if there is a big consignment."

According to the database, police recovered 7,813 bottles of Phensedyl and 5,637 bottles of Eskuf in the district in 2018.

In the first nine months of last year, the district police recovered 3,073 bottles of Eskuf and 2,136 bottles of Phensedyl.

During this period, a total of 1363 cases were filed for narcotics charges and police arrested 2,119 people for drugs smuggling and selling.

In 2018, the figure of arrest was 2,051, and around 1,577 cases were filed on narcotics charges, reads the database.

About the use of Phensedyl and Eskuf, Prof Mujib Rahman of the medicine department at Dhaka Medical College Hospital, said if anyone continuously takes cough syrup without prescription, he would become addicted to it.

"The person will gradually lose the ability to lead a regular life," Prof Mujib Rahman told The Daily Star on Wednesday.

HOUSES ON ZERO LINE
Around 5:00pm. October 9. Bautola, a bordering village in Akhaura.

A police informant source took these correspondents to the village from near Akhaura land port on a CNG-run autorickshaw.

Near the border, he pointed to

some houses built on the Indian side's zero line, and said a number of Indian nationals have built those to bring and keep narcotics, including Phensedyl and Eskuf.

The smugglers then sneak the contraband items into Bangladesh when they find lax vigilance on the border.

Md Hanif Mia is one of those Indians who have a house on zero line in Bautola area of Akhaura. He is known to be involved with the narco syndicates.

Talking to The Daily Star later in late November, Rasul Ahmed Nizami, OC of Akhaura Police Station, said narco traders and carriers often take shelter in the houses built on the zero line.

Police have nothing to do about it as they are not allowed to go there, he added.

In late October, Lt Col Gulam Kabir, commanding officer of Border Guard Battalion 25, said those houses were built on the Indian side, and they have no authority to visit there.

"But we are expressing our concern to Indian Border Security Force and working to improve the situation."

He added, "We are trying our best and keeping our vigilance in the bordering area. The situation is improving."

PATRONS?

In the police list, Abdul Hannan Swapan, chairman of Akhaura North Union Parishad, is a social worker playing a major role in the surrender of drug dealers.

But narco sources claimed that he is one of those running the illegal business. His nephew Saddam Bhuyan was arrested on October 25 from Azampur area of Akhaura over drug smuggling.

He is operating a gang of 100 people to control the trade, claimed the sources.

Swapan, however, refused to comment on this allegation. He asked these correspondents to talk to local law enforcers and visit the area.

Sources also claimed Swapan is backed by his uncle Abul Kashem Bhuyan, chairman of Akhaura upazila.

Contacted, Kashem admitted that some of his family members are involved in narcotics business.

There are some narcotics traders in Akhaura upazila, including my brother's son Kajal Bhuiyan. But we have already taken steps to make them surrender to police," he told The Daily Star in November.

About Swapan, he said it's the political rivals who are bringing false allegation against Swapan. "Even a section of people are spreading negative propaganda against me to tarnish my image."

OC Nizami said he doesn't know what Swapan used to do earlier but now police have nothing against him.

Kashem also doesn't have any criminal record as per police file and he is helping arrange the surrender of drug dealers, said the OC.

Around 50 to 60 narcotics traders of Akhaura have already communicated with police for surrender and officials are now working to arrange the programme soon, added Nizami.

In November, Md Alamgir Hossain, additional superintendent of police, said a major challenge in combatting narcotics trade in the district is the accused walk out of jail on bail months after they are arrested.

They get involved in the trade again and again but police are aware of the issue and working to solve it, he said.

Asked about political leaders' involvement, he said none will be spared, no matter what's the identity.

The Daily Star called OC Nizami again on Thursday to get the updates.

"The situation is better now as we are taking stern action regarding narcotics trade, no matter who is involved in the business," he said, adding that police registered around 29 drug cases in December.

Asked about the allegations against local public representatives, he said they are taking action on the basis of police intelligence list. "If anyone's name is not on the list, how would we take action?"

Near the border, he pointed to

the trail in Chzanpur village of Akhaura upazila Brahmanbaria leads to the

airport of India's Agartala. The trail is used by smuggles to bring in Phensedyl from India and traffic people to the country.

PHOTO: MASUK HRIDOV



Bangladesh Chhatra League's new President Al Nahian Khan Joy, left, and General Secretary Lekhak Bhattacharjee, centre, giving Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina a bouquet at a programme marking the 72nd anniversary of the pro-AL student organisation at the Suhrawardy Udayan yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

Move ahead with proper values, ideals

FROM PAGE 1

Since the removal of Rezwanul Haque Chowdhury Shovon and Golam Rabban from the BCL top posts over extort allegation last year, Nahian and Lekhak had been serving as their substitutes.

Yesterday afternoon, Hasina presented the two with full responsibility of Chhatra League.

Hasina said the country's future leadership must emerge from the meritorious and bright students, reports UNB.

It is not possible to build leadership without ideals, values, and honesty, she said, adding that Chhatra League should be imbued with these virtues.

Hasina also criticised those military

rulers and autocratic governments who had grabbed the state power illegally.

She said Ziaur Rahman used the meritorious students by giving them arms and money, and ruined their lives, the UNB report says.

The PM said she had seen brilliant students used as armed cadres and militants during the tenures of Ziaur Rahman, HM Ershad and Khaleda Zia to secure their power, it says.

Former BCL leaders Tofail Ahmed, Khaleq Mohammad Ali, and Obaidul Quader were also present in the programme, reports our correspondent.

The AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader urged the incumbent BCL leaders and activists to restore the

organisation's lost glory.

"For whatever reason, the reputation of Chhatra League has been diminished. Those who were involved in Abrar murder and insulting a principal in Rajshahi, are not needed in the organisation," he said.

The road transport and bridges minister also urged the BCL activists to follow the footsteps of Bangabandhu Jafar Zadil slammed as "foolish".

Zarif also spoke with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi, who argued that "the dangerous US military operation violates the basic norms of international relations and will aggravate regional tensions and turbulence," according to Chinese media.

The strike killed a total of five Iranian Guards and five members of Iraq's Hashid al-Shaabi paramilitary network, whose members have close ties to Tehran.

Among the dead was the Hashid's deputy Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, who was a top adviser and personal friend to Soleimani.

Mass ceremonies started in Baghdad yesterday for the dead, with Iraq's caretaker premier Adel Abd al-Mahdi and top pro-Iran figures in large crowds accompanying the coffins.

They were first brought to a revered Shia shrine in northern Baghdad, where thousands of mourners chanted "Death to America!"

Dressed in black, they waved white Hashid flags and massive portraits of Iranian and Iraqi leaders, furiously calling for "revenge".

The remains were then moved to the shrine city of Karbala and would ultimately end up in Najaf, where the Iraqis will be buried.

The Guards' remains would be flown to Iran, which has declared three days of mourning and religious rituals.

As head of the Guards' foreign operations arm, the Quds Force, Soleimani was a powerful figure domestically and oversaw Iran's wide-ranging interventions in regional power struggles.

He had long been considered a lethal foe by Washington, with Trump saying he should have been killed "many years ago".

Tehran has already named Soleimani's deputy, Esmail Qaani, to replace him.

His first order of business was made clear Friday when Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei promised "harsh revenge" for Soleimani's death.

Abuhamzeh, the Revolutionary Guards commander in Kerman province, mentioned a series of possible targets for reprisals including the Gulf waterway through which about a third of the world's shipborne oil is exported to global markets.

The Strait of Hormuz is a vital point for the West and a large number of American destroyers and warships cross there, Abuhamzeh was quoted as saying on Friday evening by the semi-official news agency Tasnim.

"Vital American targets in the region have long since been identified by Iran... Some 35 U.S. targets in the region as well as Tel Aviv are within our reach," he said, referring to Israel's largest city.

Iraqis worry the US strike could unleash a new wave of destabilisation for Iraq, which only two years ago announced it had defeated the Islamic State group.

Abdel Mahdi warned Friday it would "spark a devastating war in Iraq", while President Barham Saleh pleaded for "voices of reason" to prevail.

Yesterday, the Hashid said a new strike had hit a convoy of their forces north of Baghdad, with Iraqi state media blaming the US.

But US-led coalition spokesman Myles Cagins denied involvement, telling AFP: "There was no American or coalition strike."

Amid the tensions, the Pentagon said up to 3,500 additional US troops would be dispatched to Iraq's neighbour Kuwait, to boost some 14,000 reinforcements already deployed to the region last year.

About 5,200 US troops are stationed across Iraq to help fight IS.

They have faced a spate of rocket attacks that the US has blamed on Iran factions and which last month killed an American contractor.

As a result of the tensions, Nato said it was suspending its training activities in Iraq and a US defence official told AFP that American-led coalition forces would "limit" operations.

Monitoring lapses and indifference

FROM PAGE

by police and Buet's Accident Research Institute had said earlier.

Kanchan yesterday said at least 4,356 people were killed and 6,953 others injured in 4,702 crashes last year.

As per international standard, the organisation counted 20 percent of the injuries as deaths and put the total number at 5,227, he said.

Addressing the function, she said, "Through this initiative, there will be a huge development in safeguarding women's health. No plan was ever taken up keeping the special needs of women in mind. It is very normal that such a noble initiative has been taken at the place which spearheaded many protests and is the birthplace of many achievements."

Students and teachers of the university appreciated the move saying that such an initiative would help wage a social movement to raise awareness among all.

Namrata Arpa, a master's student

of the mass communication and journalism department, said, "Period is a natural process which is connected to motherhood. Yet, people in our country still see it as a taboo, which is sad."

"Earlier, if any girl was on her

period, she would have to face a lot of problems just in getting a napkin. Pads were previously available in the girls' common rooms, but they were pricey and of poor quality," said Nahida Akhtar, a fourth-year student of the theatre and performance studies department.

About the students' initiative, Prof Robaert Ferdous of the university's mass communication and journalism department, said, "I am glad that such an initiative has been taken... In a patriarchal society, men have created the myth that menstruation is a 'dirty' process."

He said it would help female students with their reproductive and maternal health and hoped that other educational institutions would replicate the move.

"There are many superstitions centring the period and often it is considered 'filthy'. Even restrictions on a woman's movement and food habits were imposed. Girls were taught by the family and society to suppress her need to speak about it," said Prof Sameena Chowdhury, president of Obstetrics and Gynaecology Society

of Bangladesh.