

Taliban say team in Qatar for Afghan peace talks

AFP, Kabul

The Taliban's negotiating team has arrived in Qatar, a spokesman said Saturday, in a sign that long-delayed peace talks with the Afghan government are inching closer to starting.

A date for the talks, to be hosted in Doha, has not been set but the warring sides have this week signalled that negotiations could launch soon, following efforts to wrap up a drawn out prisoner exchange.

"All members of our negotiating team have arrived in Doha. The talks will begin once some small

technical issues are resolved," Taliban spokesman Suhail Shaheen told AFP.

US special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad traveled to Doha on Friday, the State Department said, in another sign that talks could be imminent.

"The Afghan people are ready for a sustainable reduction in violence and a political settlement that will end the war," the department said in a statement.

"Afghan leaders must seize this historic opportunity for peace. All sides have taken important steps to remove obstacles for the start of IAN. Now is the time to start," it added, referring to Intra-Afghan Negotiations.

A brother's quest for justice

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that I withdraw the case or the witnesses refrain from testifying in court," Rocky said.

"At other times, they [the accused] or their family members offered huge sums of money to withdraw the case. But I pledged to continue the fight until the killers of my brother are punished."

Financial constraints were a constant but Rocky, the lone breadwinner of his family -- consisting of his mother, Jonny's wife and two children -- had to spend around Tk 10 lakh to fight the legal battle.

"You know how hard it is to file a case against police and wage a legal battle against them till the end. I have spent much of my time and sacrificed many of my dreams for this cause," Rocky added.

On February 7, 2014, a police team led by Sub-inspector Jahidur Rahman Khan picked up Rocky and his 28-year-old brother from the capital's Pallabi Irani Camp area along with some others from a pre-wedding programme of Jonny's friend.

Putting a single cuff on the brothers' wrists, SI Jahid and several other policemen tied them tightly to a pillar and severely beat and trampled them inside Pallabi Police Station for around two and a half hours from 2:30am, alleged Rocky.

He said when Jonny asked for some water, the policemen spit at him.

"I cannot forget that scene for a single day," he added.

Unable to endure the torture, Jonny collapsed and lost consciousness. Police took him to a local hospital that night where Jonny, driver of a mobile operator, succumbed to his injuries.

Rocky was later shown arrested under section 54 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC).

Rocky said it took him six months to file the case since he fell sick being tortured by police.

Both mother and son thanked Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for enacting such a law and requested the government to take the responsibility of Jonny's son and daughter as he was killed in police custody.

THE INCIDENT, CASE, INVESTIGATION AND TRIAL

On the night of February 9, 2014, police informants Sumon and Russell called police after Jonny slapped him

for teasing women at the pre-wedding programme.

The accused policemen then allegedly tortured Jonny to death. The brothers were tortured before three other locals, who were also picked up, according to the case statement.

Rocky filed a case with a Dhaka court on August 7 that year, accusing eight persons.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Maruf Hossain conducted a judicial inquiry and submitted the probe report on February 17 in 2015. The probe found involvement of Pallabi Police Station's then SI Jahid, assistant sub-inspectors Md Kamruzzaman Minto and Rashedul Hassan and two police informants Russel and Sumon in the incident.

SI Jahid and Sumon were arrested later and have been in jail since. Md Kamruzzaman Minto and Rashedul Hassan obtained bail, while Russel has been on the run since the incident.

The court has already issued a warrant for Minto as he did not appear before it during the hearing.

The court framed charges against the five on April 17, 2016, and deposition of witnesses started on May 16 that year.

Rocky said after the court recorded depositions of some witnesses, the accused filed a writ with the High Court seeking stay on the trial proceedings at the lower court.

On February 27 last year, the HC bench of Justice M Enayetur Rahim and Justice Md Mostafizur Rahman cleared the way for the lower court to resume trial against all accused, including the two suspended police officials in connection with the Jonny murder case.

The bench also ordered the trial court to finish the proceedings within 180 days, as per the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act, 2013.

The officer concerned delayed seven months in sending the High Court order to the lower court concerned, prompting the Supreme Court administration to issue a show-cause notice to the official.

Finally, the order was sent to the lower court and deposition of witnesses started again in 2019.

The court recorded statements of 24 witnesses before fixing today to deliver the verdict.

Tk 22.5cr loan taken out

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"He [Tipu] changed his father's name in the bank's Know Your Client [KYC] form," the official said.

In the loan application, Tipu stated that he got a contract from the Directorate General of Food to supply it 50,000 tonnes of wheat worth Tk 120.50 crore.

He also mentioned that he had already supplied the directorate with 15,000 tonnes of wheat by "a truck within a day" after opening the LTR account with the BDBL.

"It is impossible to transport 15,000 tonnes of wheat by only one truck within a day, yet the bank officials sanctioned Tk 25.5 crore loan to Dhaka Trading," the official pointed out.

Without examining Dhaka Trading's

loan repayment capacity or financial records, the BDBL officials hastily approved the loan on April 9, 2012.

When the bank hired an audit firm to look into the matter in 2015, the auditors found that all the documents related to the tender and supply of wheat to the directorate were false. The truck's registration number was also fake.

When the bank contacted the officials of the directorate, they said no such contract was given to Dhaka Trading, added the BDBL official.

Contacted, ACC Deputy Director Gulshan Anowar Prodhon said the investigation is still going on. He declined to comment further.

The correspondent tried to reach Tipu over his mobile phone several times, but it was found switched off.

2 Myanmar soldiers

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The reports said the men had been in the custody of the Arakan Army insurgent group, which is now battling Myanmar government troops in Rakhine state, when they made the admissions and were later taken to The Hague in the Netherlands, where they could appear as witnesses or face trial.

It was not clear from the reports how the men fell into the hands of the Arakan Army, why they were speaking, or how they were transported to The Hague and under whose authority.

A spokesman for the International Criminal Court (ICC), based in The Hague, said it did not have the men in custody.

"No. These reports are not correct. We don't have these persons in the ICC custody," said the spokesman, Fadi el Abdallah.

Payam Akhavan, a Canadian lawyer representing Bangladesh in a filing against Myanmar at the ICC, said the two men had appeared at a border post requesting the protection of the government and had confessed to the mass murder and rape of Rohingya civilians in 2017.

"All I can say is that those

two individuals are no longer in Bangladesh," he said.

A spokesman for the Arakan Army, Khine Thu Kha, said the two men were deserters and were not held as prisoners of war. He did not comment further on where the men were now, but said the group was "committed to justice" for all victims of the Myanmar military.

Myanmar has repeatedly denied allegations of genocide, saying its military operations in 2017 were targeting Rohingya militants who attacked police border posts.

The ICC is investigating the crime against humanity of forced deportation of Rohingyas to Bangladesh, as well as persecution and other inhumane acts.

A statement from the ICC Prosecutor's Office said: "The office does not publicly comment on speculation or reports regarding its ongoing investigations, neither does the office discuss specifics of any aspect of its investigative activities."

Myanmar is also facing charges of genocide at the International Court of Justice, also in The Hague, though that body does not bring cases against individuals or hear witnesses.



Locals have turned this area along the Dhaka-Aricha highway into a dumping ground, which is polluting the environment. The photo was taken near Savar's Ulail bus stop yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Health guidelines finalised for kids

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All schools will be cleaned, classrooms and office rooms will be disinfected regularly. Cleaning and disinfection will take place after every shift and following every day of classes.

Measures will be taken to maintain physical distancing inside classrooms among students. No indoor assembly will be allowed, according to the plan.

The authorities should prioritise the mental health of the students and make schools a place of joy. Students must be encouraged not to hug each other, said the finalised plan.

"All schools should have a separate reopening plan and they should take measure in line with our plan. If the authorities think they can arrange classes for half the students, they should do it in turns," Mansurul said.

The plan is also to discourage the use of papers at classrooms and encourage more and more online classes.

Besides, the school authorities must ensure everyone is following the health rules properly.

Asked who would bear the cost of the cleaning and disinfection activities, Mansurul said the government, the school committees and others can share the expenses.

"For that, schools need to prepare a budget," he added.

PARENTS' REACTION

As parents came to know about the plan for the reopening, some of them were found confused, while some criticised it.

"This has left us confused. We don't want schools to reopen now even if the infection rate drops. It's a matter of life and death. Thirty to 40 people are still dying every day due to coronavirus," Mahmuda Akter, mother of a class-II student, told this daily.

Ziaul Kabir Dulu, president of Obhibhabok Oikya Forum, a platform of guardians, said it would be impossible for the government to maintain physical distancing among students during class hours. Besides, parents too will gather in front of schools to pick and drop their children.

"There are more than 80 students in each classroom. How can you arrange a bench for each pair of students?" he asked.

Currently, four, five or even six students share a single bench inside crowded classrooms.

Besides, many primary schools have only one classroom and one or two teachers. "Who will monitor all these health protocols?"

He, however, said if the government reopens the schools, it must bear all the additional costs needed to ensure hygiene at the institutions.

DPE's Primary Education Annual Sector Performance Report 2019 supports his comments.

According to the report, 749 government schools are running with only one teacher, 1,124 schools with only two teachers, and 4,018 schools with just three teachers.

Besides, 6,546 have only one classroom and 2,809 have two classrooms. "This situation hampers teaching and learning," said the report.

There are over 65,500 government primary schools across the country.

All educational institutions have remained closed since March 17 due to the pandemic, hampering academic activities of about two crore students of more than one lakh primary schools and kindergartens.

These are not reopening at least until October 3, according to a government announcement.

The government has cancelled Primary Education Completion (PEC) and its equivalent Ebedayee Education Completion exams as well as this year's Junior School Certificate (JSC) and its equivalent Junior Dakhil Certificate exams.

Instead of public exams, students will have to appear in final exams at their schools.

The PEC and its equivalent exams for fifth-graders and JSC and its equivalent exams for eighth-graders were scheduled to take place in November. These are the two largest public exams in the country.

Besides, first- and second-term exams at primary schools and half-yearly tests at secondary schools have been postponed.

This year's Higher Secondary Certificate and its equivalent exams have also been deferred for an indefinite period from April 1.

Bangladesh unique in vulnerability, resilience

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marking the launch of the regional office of the Global Centre on Adaptation (GCA) in Dhaka.

She expressed optimism that the GCA regional office would serve as a "Centre of Excellence" and a solution-broker for climate adaptation measures in the South Asia region.

"I hope this regional office will share the best adaptation practices of Bangladesh as well as other countries and exchange practices within the region," the PM said.

Hasina and former UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon, also the chair of the GCA Board, jointly inaugurated the "Global Centre on Adaptation Bangladesh" in the capital's Agargaon digitally. Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte also spoke at the virtual function.

Noting that climate change is a global affair, the Bangladesh PM called upon all countries to enhance their nationally-determined contributions by December 31 this year in tackling the menace as well as executing the 2015 Paris Agreement.

About the newly-opened GCA office in Dhaka, she said this is a

historic moment for combating climate change in South Asia through adaptation.

"It is heartening to note that the GCA Bangladesh office will facilitate, support and develop on-the-ground action in South Asia to enhance adaptation and climate resilience."

Hasina expected that the GCA Dhaka office would also support Bangladesh during its chairmanship to Climate Vulnerable Forum and Vulnerable-20, two climate-based important international bodies under the UNFCCC process, during the next two years.

She said South Asia is the most vulnerable region to climate-induced natural disasters like cyclone, flood, tidal surge, drought, Glacial Lake Outburst Flood, landslides and avalanches. Even a 1.5 degrees Celsius rise in temperature would have severe consequences for Bangladesh and the region.

"We also must not forget the vulnerability of the children, women, elderly people and people with special needs against disasters," she added.

Hasina said Bangladesh remains committed to implementing the Paris Agreement and adopting all measures

to prevent the rise in temperature from the emission of greenhouse gas and other environmental degradation.

She said her government has taken up various mitigation and adaptation programmes under Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan formulated in 2009 to offset climate change impacts.

"We established Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund in 2009 and so far allocated \$430 million from our own resources to implement the action plan."

The government has also been spending about 1 percent of GDP equivalent to \$2 billion per year since 2010 for adaptation purposes, Hasina said.

The PM urged the GCA to explore the opportunity of supporting the Delta Coalition on a long-term basis.

She said the Covid-19 pandemic fallout calls for greater cooperation and collaboration among the nations.

Ministers from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Bhutan, Nepal and the Maldives as well as GCA Chief Executive Officer Patrick Verkooijen also spoke on the occasion.

Law there, but victims afraid to file cases

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An executive member of Bangladesh Bar Council and a trustee member of Bangladesh Legal Aid, ZI Panna said if the people are made aware of the law, cases will be filed under it and custodial torture and death will be reduced in future.

They made the remarks ahead of delivering judgment in such a case.

In January 2014, the case was filed with the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court of Dhaka against a former sub-inspector of Pallabi Police Station and four others over the custodial death of Ishtiaq Hossain Johnny.

Speaking on the issue, Supreme Court lawyer ZI Khan Panna said, "The act has been formulated by the government to prohibit torture or cruel, inhuman, degrading punishment or treatment to anyone in law enforcers' custody. But its implication is not found as the victims of custodial torture and families of custodial death victims dare to lodge cases against the law enforcers."

Citing an example, he said a rickshaw-van puller, detained by police on charge of possessing drugs, allegedly killed himself in custody a month ago.

"We requested the victim's family to lodge a case under the act against the police. But they did not dare to do it. So, no case was filed and therefore, no justice was ensured to the victim's family," said ZI Panna, also the chairperson of Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), a leading rights organisation.

offences defined under the law. Again, any person attempting to commit, aiding and abetting to commit, or conspiring to commit an offence must be considered an offender.

The law also stipulates that torture at a time when there was a state of war, threat of war, internal political instability or any public emergency; or on an order of a superior officer or a public authority; shall be unacceptable as an excuse.

Torture by a law enforcement officer is punishable with at least five years' imprisonment and a Tk 25,000 fine, and custodial death due to torture is punishable with life imprisonment and a Tk 100,000 fine. In addition, they must compensate family members of the affected with Tk 200,000.

Meanwhile, 1,426 incidents of custodial deaths took place from January 2017 to July 2020, according to a report of Ain o Salish Kendra.

Of the incidents, 195 were in 2016, 162 in 2017, 474 in 2018, 388 in 2019 and 207 from January to July 2020.

The incidents happened due to "encounters, crossfire and gunfight" with the law enforcers.

The ASK prepared the report based on the news published in different leading newspapers, including The Daily Star and the Prothom Alo.

SUSHANT DEATH PROBE

Bollywood actor Rhea arrested

THE HINDU ONLINE

India's Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) yesterday arrested actor Rhea Chakraborty, in connection with the Sushant Singh Rajput's death case, for allegedly procuring drugs. Her brother, Showik, was arrested last week.



"Rhea has been arrested and the due process of informing the family has been completed," said agency spokesperson KPS Malhotra. She had earlier refuted all the allegations, stating that she was innocent.

The agency had first summoned Rhea on Sunday for recording her statement and for the next two consecutive days, she appeared before the investigating team. The NCB yesterday decided to place her under arrest on the basis of the findings so far.

Apart from her brother, Sushant's housekeeping manager Samuel Miranda and staff member Dipesh Sawant have also been arrested in the same case. They all are currently in NCB custody.

Following his son's arrest, Rhea's father Indrajit Chakraborty had issued a statement to lodge his protest.

"Congratulations India, you have arrested my son, I'm sure next on the line is my daughter and I don't know who is next thereafter. You have effectively demolished a middle-class family. But of course, for the sake of justice everything is justified. Jai hind," he said.

Indrajit Chakraborty is also an accused in the case, being probed by the Central Bureau of Investigation, in which Sushant's father has alleged abetment of suicide, criminal conspiracy, cheating, breach of trust, theft, wrongful restraint and confinement. He has been examined several times by the CBI and the Enforcement Directorate.

On Sunday, the NCB had arrested another alleged drug peddler, Anuj Keshwani, after drugs and cash were seized from him on Sunday.

Testing Maj Sinha's equipment unnecessary

Rab says

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rapid Action Battalion did not want to perform forensic and ballistic examination of seized equipment of Major (ret'd) Sinha as the investigation agency did not find anything anti state during the investigation.

But on August 17, Rab in an application sought the court's permission to do a forensics report of the seized iPhones, Canon DSLR camera and a forensic ballistics examination of the magazine loaded gun.

On August 19, the court accepted the application and permitted the examinations to be carried out.

But on September 5, Khayrul Islam, Rab's senior assistant superintendent of police and the investigation officer of the murder case, wrote a letter to the Senior Judicial Magistrate saying they did not find any threats to the state related to the seized objects and thus, think that a forensics and ballistic examination was unnecessary.

He also said that they did not find any evidence pointing to the fact that the victim was shot from the seized gun.

Maj (ret'd) Sinha Md Rashed Khan was shot dead at Shamlapur police check post on Marine Drive in Teknaf on July 31 night, triggering an uproar across the country.

8 survivors

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undergoing treatment are Md Farid, 55, Sheikh Farid, 21, Md Kenan, 24, Nazrul Islam, 50, Sifat, 18, Abdul Aziz, 40, Amzad Hossain, 37, and Abdus Sattar, 40.

Meanwhile, Md Mamun, who suffered 12 percent burns to his body, became the first victim to have been discharged from the burn institute on Monday afternoon.

The 30-year-old man from Pashchim Talla area of Narayanganj was walking along a road beside the mosque on Friday night when the blast took place.

Doctors asked Mamun to come again after a week for a follow-up.

Speaking to reporters before leaving the burn institute, he said, "I am lucky that I am returning home, but many could not. It's God who has saved me."

Fire Brigade officials suspected that an explosion occurred due to leaks in a gas pipeline that runs beneath the mosque.

They found two leaks in an underground gas pipeline adjacent to the mosque. The Titas Gas company suspended eight of its officials and employees over negligence.

The leaking pipeline might have caused gas to accumulate inside the mosque, and a spark then probably led to the explosion, leaving at least 40 people burnt, Fire Brigade officials said.

It happened at the end of Esha prayers around 8:45pm on Friday. The ground floor of the three-story mosque was badly damaged.

All the victims had got trapped on that floor. Besides, six air conditioners there were found melted.