

China backs Pakistan

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CHINESE PREMIER'S MESSAGE TO YAHYA

The Pakistani government announced today that it had received a note from Premier Chou En'lai of China strongly supporting its efforts to put down a movement for autonomy in East Pakistan.

The government said that Chou had denounced the United States, the Soviet Union and India for "carrying out gross interference in the internal affairs of Pakistan" and had promised China's support "should the Indian expansionists dare to launch aggression against Pakistan".

In reporting Chou's statements, the Pakistani government's news agency said that they had come in a letter to President Agha Mohammad Yahya Khan.

In his letter, the Chinese premier praised President Yahya, saying "Your Excellency and the leaders of various quarters in Pakistan have done a lot of useful work to uphold the unification of Pakistan and to prevent it from moving toward a split."

"In our opinion," the letter continued, "the unification of Pakistan and the unity of the people of East and West Pakistan are basic guarantees for Pakistan to attain prosperity and strength. The Chinese government holds that what is happening in Pakistan at present as purely an internal affair of Pakistan which can only be settled by the

Pakistani people and which brooks no foreign interference whatever." KOSYGIN MEETS AMBASSADORS Soviet Premier Kosygin met separately today with the Pakistan and Indian ambassadors as part of an apparently growing Soviet effort to seek a solution to the crisis in East Pakistan.

Diplomatic sources said the Soviet Union was deeply concerned over continued bloodshed in East Pakistan and the resulting charges and countercharges between the Pakistan and Indian governments that have led China to speak out on the side of Pakistan.

The wide publicity given to the meetings by the Soviet media indicated a Soviet desire to underscore Moscow's effort to remain impartial, even though the Kremlin had already publicly criticised the use of force to quell the East Pakistani independence movement.

WHEAT SHIPMENTS STOPPED

The United States announced today that it is suspending aid shipments of wheat to East Pakistan because of congestion in East Pakistani ports caused by "civil strife" there.

INDIA DENIES CHARGE

The Indian foreign ministry today denied a Pakistani charge that two companies of Indian border security forces had crossed into East Pakistan and the Pakistani army had "wiped them out".

Shamsuddoza Sajen is a journalist and researcher. He can be contacted at sajen1986@gmail.com

'It's pre-planned

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Mridha, 32, posted at operations wing of Rab headquarters and allegedly planned and led the abduction; soldier Rokon Mia, 34, of intelligence wing of Rab HQ; Corporal Rony, 26, from the air force; and soldier Md Sagar, 28, of investigation, forensic wing of Rab HQ.

Ranu Begum, 45, of Gazipur, was arrested and is on a two-day remand.

Police also found involvement of two more Rab members who are on the run.

"We think, it's a pre-planned incident. The Rab member Dulal is known to the air force officer Rony who hired the microbus the day before the incident ... Ranu introduced herself as a broker in [garments] business. But we think, she targets people and gets the job done for this group" said a police official wishing not to be named.

In a statement under section 164 of the CRPC before a Dhaka court on Saturday, Tamzid said he was abducted by the elite force members after he went to meet Ranu in the capital's Uttara to discuss starting a business of garment products. He also gave a description of the abduction before the court. He described how he was held inside a vehicle that went around various parts of the city.

A source said the victim owed the woman money and she approached one of the four through another man to realise it.

On Thursday, the four allegedly picked up Tamzid and demanded money from his family over the phone. Tamzid's family informed police about the abduction and police made the arrests.

The next day, the victim's sister Rayana Hossain filed a case with Hatirheel Police Station. She did not mention the names and designations of the accused.

The victim and his family members have left their home on Friday and were staying at an undisclosed location out of fear, police sources said.

Police has handed over the three arrested Rab officers to the elite force.

Rab Legal and Media Wing Director Commander Khandaker Al Moin told The Daily Star, "Our special investigation cell has started investigation. The investigators are talking to the arrestees and the witnesses. The investigation cell will prepare a probe report. If it finds them guilty, they will be sent to their main forces for further probe. Based on the probe findings, legal action will be taken against them."

Voice for harmony, of melody goes silent

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Hamid expressed grief and sent heartfelt condolences to Mita Huq's family.

"We will remember her role in popularising Rabindra Sangeet among the masses", said the President in his message.

She was taken to Chhayanaout Sangeet Bidyayatan at 11:00am yesterday for her colleagues and well-wishers to pay their last respects. She was buried next to her father at Keraniganj's Boromonoharia.

"I am shocked," said eminent Rabindra Sangeet exponent, Rezwana Chowdhury Bannya. "This is an irrevocable loss for Rabindra Sangeet. We always kept in touch and her premature demise really hurts me. May she rest in peace."

Sadi Mohammad, one of the most revered Rabindra Sangeet artistes in the country, said that he saw Mita as his younger sister. "I have done so many shows with her both at home and abroad... She would visit me whenever she felt better and would be really happy whenever we visited her. I would often cook and take food for her. My heart is filled with sorrow now."

Renowned Nazrul Sangeet artiste Sujit Mustafa also shared his grief. "She was a rare talent -- a top tier artiste. There are many singers who can sing commercially today but very few have the calibre of Mita Huq."

She wanted to get well and return to music. Unfortunately, this will not happen anymore."

"I am at a loss," said National Award winning singer-composer Bappa Mazumder. "It is difficult to accept that Mita di left us."

Famed classical exponent and guru Asit Dey considers Mita Huq to be an example for the next generation to follow. "She was an artiste's artiste -- a role model. I have never seen her without a smile on her face. She used to come to our classical music ashore and would listen to music all night, such was her love towards music."

Noted actor Runa Khan said, "I lost someone so dear to me. This void is never to be filled. I just pray that she found peace in her passing."

Her passing is indeed a huge loss to Rabindra Sangeet.

The artiste, who had carved her own niche in the art, was unique in her presentation. In both West Bengal and Bangladesh, she was seen as a pioneer with a inimitable style, never likening herself to anyone else's pattern.

Born into a musical family, the noted artiste received her training from maestros such as the late Wahidul Huq, Sanjida Khatun and Ustad Mohammad Hossain Khan. She was a regular performer in the Bangladesh TV and radio since 1977.

She participated in the Berlin International Youth Festival in 1974,

and since then, travelled all over the world for performances.

The singer rose to prominence in the 90's with her first album "Amar Mon Mane Na". With her mellifluous voice, she won over the hearts of all Bangladeshi listeners. She voiced over 200 albums throughout her illustrious career.

Mita Huq was also the founder director and teacher of the Music Training and Performance Group -- Surtirtha -- and served as the head of the department of Rabindra Sangeet at Chhayanaout Institute in Dhaka. She was also the former general secretary and incumbent vice-president of the Rabindra Sangeet Shommelon Parishad. In 2017, she and writer Hayat Mamud received the Rabindra Puraskar from Bangla Academy.

The legendary artiste was awarded the coveted Ekushey Padak in 2020 for her contributions to music.

She was outspoken about the divisiveness, moral corruption and violence in a world where Tagore had spoken of unconditional peace and urged everyone to be kinder to one another.

For the last five years, Mita Huq had been battling various kidney-related diseases and underwent dialysis.

The singer was married to actor-director Khaled Khan, who passed away in December 2013. Farhin Khan Joyita, a renowned singer, is their only daughter.

Closure of madrasas

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caused mayhem in various parts of the country during its peaceful daylong strike on March 27".

"We want to know who caused mayhem during our programme. Who vandalised the government and non-government structures? There is CCTV footage which can help the government identify the real culprits behind the incidents," he said.

He termed the Narayanganj's resort incident involving Mamunul Haque, joint general secretary of Hefajat, a personal matter.

None would be suspended from the organisation over the matter, he said.

Claiming that Chhatra League and Jubo League men were behind the mayhem, he said activists of the

pro-ruling party attacked and torched various structures to frame Hefajat.

"Hefajat did not declare any programme on March 26. When aggrieved people took to the streets to protest the attack on innocent people at Baitul Mukarram Mosque, police killed five people on March 26. When Hefajat declared programme on March 27 and 28, police killed 21 others," he claimed.

Chief adviser of Hefajat, Mohibullah Babunagari, chaired the meeting.

On April 8, Deputy Education Minister Mohibul Haque Chowdhury Nowfel warned Hefajat that they would suspend the recognition of degree from Qawmi madrasas if the organisation continued to create anarchy in the name of Islam.

China to give 5 lakh Covid

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supply us their vaccine. Additionally, they will send five lakh jabs as gift. On the other hand, discussions are going on to procure the Russian vaccine Sputnik V," Prof ABM Khurshid Alam, director general of health directorate, told The Daily Star last night.

The development comes at a time when the uncertainty looms over the ongoing Covid-19 inoculation campaign after the Indian government banned the export of Oxford vaccines produced by the Serum Institute of India (SII).

While the World Health Organisation approved the Oxford vaccine, Sinopharm has yet to get approval for their vaccine from this UN health agency so far.

Prof Khurshid also said the government is now working on regulation issue regarding the Chinese vaccines.

"We approved the Oxford vaccine before the WHO did. In case of

Sinopharm vaccine, we are also considering so. The health minister has been overseeing the issue," said Prof Khurshid.

On March 15, the health ministry wrote to the secretary of the Economic Relations Division "to take necessary initiatives to request the Chinese embassy to get the vaccine", according to an official letter obtained by this newspaper.

On December 30, Sinopharm announced that the vaccine had an efficacy of 79.34 percent, leading the Chinese government to give its approval, according to the New York Times Coronavirus vaccine Tracker.

The company has yet to publish the detailed results of its phase-3 trial.

However, the United Arab Emirates, which approved a Sinopharm vaccine in January, said the vaccine was 86 percent effective, reports BBC.

This Chinese vaccine has already been approved in Bahrain, China and United Arab Emirates.

Meantime, it has received emergency use authorisation in Argentina, Cambodia, Egypt, Guyana, Hungary, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Peru, Venezuela, and Zimbabwe and limited use approval in Serbia and Seychelles.

Meanwhile, the Sputnik V, also known as Gam-Covid-Vac, is a Covid vaccine developed by the Gamaleya Research Institute, research organisation of Russia's health ministry.

It has an efficacy rate of 91.6 percent and approved for emergency use in 60 countries, according to the New York Times Coronavirus Vaccine Tracker.

Scientists

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The finds are critical to completing the evolutionary puzzle of the Gondwanatheria, a group of long-extinct early mammals that co-existed with dinosaurs, said Sergio Soto, a University of Chile paleontologist.

The Daily Star

CARE Bangladesh

THE KENDED A FUND

BOLI KOTHA OKOPOTE

The Daily Star and Tipping Point Initiative of CARE Bangladesh, with the support of The Kendeda Fund, jointly organised a discussion titled "Boli Kotha Okopote" on March 22, 2021. Here we publish a summary of the discussion.

Rawnak Jahan,

Team Leader, Care Bangladesh

The rate of child marriage in Bangladesh is alarmingly high. The Tipping Point Initiative of CARE Bangladesh is addressing the root causes of child marriage through a social norms approach. Our work has revealed that people are aware of the negative aspects of child marriage but they are unaware of alternatives. Furthermore, it is not clear to many what benefits can be reaped if they invest in a girl child.

We have thoroughly studied the root causes of child marriage and have come across several factors—from people's uncertainties about the results of investing in a girl child's education to the many challenges standing in the way of girls' aspiration.

Tipping Point works to bring about a behavioural transformation in the community because child marriage cannot be stopped otherwise. The purpose of the discussion is to create a safe space where girls can share their issues, challenges, and make specific recommendations to relevant stakeholders. The Tipping Point initiative facilitates youth-led movement, since this is so much necessary at present.

Sehnla Jobayda Zafrin,

Radio Shadhin

The youths present here today are well aware of the importance of speaking up. Speaking up for our rights is the beginning of finding a solution.

We dream of living in a world where we are all viewed as equals. How would the world be if we were seen simply as people and not just women?

Youth,

Protiki Jubo Sangshad

One of the biggest challenges faced by girls is eve-teasing. Parents hesitate to let their daughters out because of this issue. I have faced this issue myself but I pushed through it. I explained to my father that the work I am doing is good. Should girls not go out simply because of problems such as eve-teasing?

Our nation has strict laws regarding child marriage, but the laws themselves aren't sufficient. Awareness among people is necessary.

In cases where my parents do not agree to let me participate in activities, I try to make them see the positive side and ask about the problems they see and explain to them accordingly.

Youth,

Protiki Jubo Sangshad

For a girl, a mother's support is the most important, and to gain that support her trust must be earned. We need to understand their point of view while explaining how we are thinking.

Creating trust in the family is essential. We should make them believe that we are not going astray or engaging in activities perceived as harmful.



Adolescent Girl,

Tipping Point

Even at times when you win over your family's support, societal doubts remain. People ask if a girl can roam around as freely as a boy no matter how independent she is. They speak of how in the world today, no matter how trustworthy and careful your daughter is, she won't be able to defend herself against a male. People view women as weak. The question that keeps arising is, "If you let your daughter go everywhere and she faces an issue, will you be able to protect your daughter?"

Youth,

Protiki Jubo Sangshad

I think it is wrong to expect every member of society to support and accept what we do. If I can convince my parents that the work I am involved in is not negative but rather positive, I won't need to pay heed to most of society's comments. Society will try to restrict me, but if I achieve something, it will be those very members of society who will proudly mention how they know me.

At 17, I had received a marriage proposal. However, I strongly protested and the matter was fortunately laid to rest. Had I remained silent that day, I could have been married at 17. Raising your voice and speaking up for yourself can help solve problems.

We are unable to explore our talents because of archaic notions about what a woman can and cannot do.

We do raise our voices in many situations but in most cases, we cannot do so because of a lack of independence. We still need our parents to provide us with a roof over our heads. Even when we are victims of injustice, we are unable

to say anything about it.

Youth,

Protiki Jubo Sangshad

When I was in class 3, I started working with an NGO. A committee called Child Forum consisting of 10 boys and 10 girls was formed. I was elected as the president and we conducted two meetings. However, by the third month, no girls were present there whereas all 10 boys were. We wanted to know why the 9 girls did not attend the meeting, and so we went over to their houses. The guardians stated they are girls and asked what they would do there.

In class four, one of my own classmates was about to fall victim to child marriage. But, when the matter reached my ears I communicated with the local police and higher officials and was able to successfully stop the wedding.

Adolescent Girl,

Tipping Point

With the help of our affiliated organisations, we had decided to arrange a cricket match in our village where boys and girls would play together. The people of the village were strongly against this.

We wanted to show them that girls can partake in all activities. We explained to them that girls also need to play, and they have equal rights as boys to play in the field.

We did not listen to them and still arranged the game. The resulting audience turn-out was huge and at the end, the attending audience ended up requesting for more such events while agreeing to help in the organisation process.

Adolescent Girl,

Tipping Point

Tipping Point first came to our village in 2014.

That was the first time we gathered together in a group and had fun. We discussed about our aspirations, our rights, and about leadership.

The young girls held sessions three days a week, and for one day the session was based on child marriage. Gradually, we started to explain to people the main causes underlying child marriage and its harmful impacts on the child, mother, and even the family.

We also conducted a survey to find out what prevented female youth from being able to move about freely and discussed our findings with the village elders.

Youth,

National Girl Child Advocacy Forum

Village people believe that early marriage is a show of honour. If girls are not married young, society considers them undesirable. Whenever I try to speak up against these issues, people label me as disrespectful. The problem is that the decision-making power of girls is taken away by families and society.

Women constantly have to prove themselves in their careers as well. If men and women are equal, employers think there's no reason to hire a woman unless she proves herself to be better than the man.

We tend to judge the capabilities of the genders based on their physical strength. We need to understand that capabilities are multifaceted and physical strength alone cannot be a true marker of anyone's qualifications.

Youth,

Protiki Jubo Sangshad

If anyone reports a potential child marriage, police officers promise immediate action but do not carry out their duties as soon as they receive

bribes.

We can't even explain why we shouldn't be forced to get married so soon because they deem us disrespectful and refuse to listen to our case.

Another point that bothers me is that girls are vilified for hanging out with boys, whereas boys aren't shamed for hanging out with girls, which is a blatant double standard.

Youth,

National Girl Child Advocacy Forum

Society tells us that we should cover up for our own good. Not covering ourselves will put us at risk of harm. This is conflicting—society is trying to protect and harm us simultaneously.

A married woman is expected to cook for her family, find a day-care for her children, and then go out to study or work. If women have to overcome so many hurdles to do the same work as men, they deserve more recognition and benefits.

Implementing sex education and having good touch/bad touch discussions at educational institutions can play a crucial role in decreasing the rate of child marriage.

We need to showcase more female role models in our textbooks so that young girls and their families realise that they can also achieve success.

Youth,

National Girl Child Advocacy Forum

Our government and NGOs have so many initiatives to support women, but there is no monitoring once the work progresses.

For example, women are increasingly being granted proper maternal leave, but this has, in turn, caused organisations to avoid hiring women since they do not want to give paid leaves.

Youth,

National Girl Child Advocacy Forum

My sisters and I grew up being afraid of our father and have never been able to open up to him. Thankfully, my mother has always been supportive. When I was younger, my mother had to leave the house secretly because my father believed women couldn't go outside their homes. I've also witnessed my father assaulting my mother on multiple occasions. Now that we've grown up, my mother can go out alone.

Youth,

Protiki Jubo Sangshad

My mother studied for her Bachelor's degree but unfortunately could not sit for the final examination. After the wedding, my dad did not allow my mother to sit for that final examination. His justification was that he did not marry a woman for her to be earning.

My father is a Master's degree-holder. How can this man with a master's degree have such a mentality?