

India's uniform civil code sparks criticism

REUTERS, New Delhi

Nine months before a general election, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have dusted off a potentially divisive plan to enact a common set of personal laws for all, irrespective of religion.

Currently, India's Hindus, Muslims, Christians and large tribal populations follow their own personal laws and customs, alongside an optional secular code, for marriage, divorce, adoption and inheritance.

The Law Commission, a government-appointed advisory body, has sought public opinion by yesterday on creating a Uniform Civil Code (UCC). It had received more than 5 million responses online on the eve of the deadline.

The BJP says the common code is necessary to ensure gender justice, equality through uniform application of personal laws, and to foster national unity and integration.

"If there is one law for one family member and another for another family member, can that family function smoothly? How can a country function with such dual systems?" Modi said at a BJP meeting late last month, just days after he returned from visits to US and Egypt.

The comments were his most forceful in favour of the common code and set off a political storm.

Critics call the push for a common civil code a cynical attempt to divide communities and consolidate Hindu votes for the BJP ahead of the 2024 general election. Supporters, who include some Muslim women's rights groups, say it is much needed reform to end discriminatory Islamist practices.

"The idea is to send a message to the majority community so that you are able to keep the majority community polarised in favour of BJP," said Sanjay Kumar, political analyst and psephologist at New Delhi's Centre for the Study of Developing Societies.

"This is a kind of a tool to divide and mobilise," he said.



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron meet with WWII resister Henri Becker during the Bastille Day military parade on the Champs-Élysées avenue in Paris, France yesterday. Modi began a two-day visit to Paris on Thursday, when he was granted the Legion of Honour, France's highest award.

PHOTO: AFP

Rivalries on show as SE Asia hosts security talks

REUTERS, Jakarta

Foreign ministers of two dozen countries met in Indonesia yesterday with US-China rivalry, war in Ukraine and North Korean missiles dominating talks at Southeast Asia's annual security-focused gathering.

Top diplomats from China, the United States and Russia were among those in Jakarta for the Asean Regional Forum (ARF), where broad-based agendas are typically hijacked by geopolitical flare-ups, offering a theatre for fierce rebukes, superpower squabbles and occasional walk-outs.

United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken urged stability in the Indo-Pacific, the Taiwan Strait and Ukraine, adding there was "no greater challenge" to regional security than North Korea's "provocative" missile launches.

"We need to work together to end North Korea's unlawful weapons of mass

destruction programme and ballistic missile launches," he said.

Blinken on Thursday held what the State Department called "candid and constructive" talks with top Chinese diplomat Wang Yi, the latest in a series of interactions it said were aimed at managing differences between the two big powers.

Wang had told Blinken "a rational and pragmatic attitude" was key to getting their relations on the right track.

US-China sparring marred last year's ARF, which came a few days after then US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan, enraging Beijing, which launched live-fire drills around the self-ruled island and cut off several channels of dialogue with Washington.

Separately, the European Union's foreign policy chief said after the ARF concluded that Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov had "aggressively" rejected a

call to withdraw troops from Ukraine.

"Lavrov responded... very aggressively and explained his point of view and said that everything is a Western conspiracy," said Josep Borrell.

Lavrov did meet China's Wang Yi, however, and the two sides would "strengthen strategic communication and coordination", according to the Chinese foreign ministry.

The closed-doors ARF brings together the foreign ministers of Australia, Japan, Britain, India, South Korea, China, the United States and more.

The foreign minister of host Indonesia, Retno Marsudi, said the forum had agreed to "strengthen preventive diplomacy".

Asean is struggling to de-escalate a bloody crisis in its member state Myanmar, whose ruling military was roundly condemned at yesterday's forum for its alleged atrocities against the civilian population.

289 children died in Med crossings this year: UN

AFP, Geneva



Some 289 children are known to have died in the first half of 2023 while trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea to Europe, the United Nations said yesterday. The figure is double that recorded in the first six months of 2022, the UN children's agency Unicef said, as it called for expanded safe, legal and accessible pathways for children to seek protection in Europe. Verena Knaus, Unicef's global lead on migration and displacement, said the true figures were likely to be higher as many shipwrecks on the central Mediterranean leave no survivors or go unrecorded. "The number of children who have lost their lives while attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea to reach Europe has doubled in the first half of this year compared to the same period last year," she said. "In the first six months of this year, we estimate 11,600 children made the crossing - again, nearly twice as many as in the same period in 2022."

ICC opens new probe into Sudan violence

US welcomes the move

AFP, United Nations

The International Criminal Court (ICC) has opened a new probe into alleged war crimes in Sudan, its chief prosecutor Karim Khan said Thursday, expressing major concern over escalating violence.

Khan made the announcement in a report to the UN Security Council, after three months of war between feuding generals have plunged the northeast African country back into chaos.

The US State Department welcomed the new probe. "Let this be a message to all who commit atrocities, in Sudan and elsewhere, that such crimes are an affront to humanity," spokesman Matthew Miller said in a statement.

Meanwhile, Sudan's capital experienced a communications blackout for several hours yesterday, residents said, as the army and paramilitary forces waged intense battles across Khartoum.

2 stalwarts

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contribution to the Liberation War, including his important role in narrating and broadcasting the historic March 7 speech on the Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra.

Ashfaqur was given the guard of honour before he was buried at his ancestral home in Shologhor union under Munshiganj's Sreenagar upazila.

Meanwhile, no decision was made about the last rites of Bulbul as of writing this report.

The singer is survived by her son, who is currently in the US. Her relatives will talk to her son and decide how to proceed, said her niece, theatre artiste and actor, Jayita Mahalanobish.

Multitalented Bulbul was a poet, author, musician, and stage performer. She also used to anchor cultural programmes on television, radio and stage.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina expressed grief at the death of two valiant freedom fighters and voice soldiers from Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra.

On December 16, 1971, Bulbul lent

her voice to the song "Bijoy Nishan Urchhe Oi", which was broadcasted to mark the historic moment of Bangladesh's victory.

She dedicated her whole life to music. Besides releasing two studio albums, she also authored 12 books in her career.

Bulbul Mahalanobish was born in Bikrampur, on March 10, 1953. She graduated from Dhaka University and even taught there for a long time.

The noted Nazrul Geeti singer served as vice president of Nazrul Sangeet Shilpi Parishad and general secretary of Rabindra Academy.

She also served in important positions at Jatiya Kabita Parishad, Kochikachar Mela, Udichi, Sector Commanders' Forum, Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra Shilpi Parishad and many other cultural and social organisations.

She was conferred with Chayan Gold Medal, the Dewan Azraf Foundation Award, and Nazrul Academy Award from West Bengal for her contributions to the literary and cultural field.

Another accused held

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A murder case was filed with Tongi West Police Station against Hanif, Mazharul, Akash, Russell, Ripon, and Sohail by Kalpana Akter, executive director of the Bangladesh Centre for Workers' Solidarity, and general secretary of the BGIWF.

Police on June 26 arrested Mazharul.

The workers of Prince Jacquard Sweater Ltd, who had not been paid since April, were demanding their arrears and Eid bonuses.

The factory management had told workers that their payments would be cleared by June 25. The workers on that day waited at the factory gate, but the officials did not show up.

The workers started protesting around 6:30pm and called in Shahid, a labour leader for 15 years, to talk to the authorities.

Shahid along with labour leaders Mustafa Kamal and Ahmed Sharif went to the spot, but Shahid entered the factory alone, according to Kalpana Akter.

"When Shahid came out of the factory, some local goons were

waiting for him. They attacked him and the two other labour leaders," Kalpana said.

Mustafa and Sharif escaped with injuries, but Shahid fell unconscious at the scene, she said.

A doctor at Tairunnesa Medical College and Hospital declared Shahid dead after he was taken there.

BGMEA DEMANDS

TRANSPARENT PROBE
Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) President Faruque Hassan yesterday demanded a "transparent and comprehensive" investigation into Shahidul's death.

He also demanded that all those who are involved in the incident are brought to trial immediately and punished.

BGMEA President Hassan visited Shahidul's residence in Sreepur, Gazipur yesterday to express condolences over his death.

He also conveyed sympathy to the bereaved family members and handed over a financial donation to his wife.



Move Forward Party supporters and pro-democracy activists gather to protest the day after Move Forward Party Leader and prime ministerial candidate Pita Limjaroenrat failed to secure the parliamentary vote for the premiership in Bangkok, Thailand yesterday. Thailand's parliament confirmed yesterday that it would vote again for a new prime minister next week.

PHOTO: AFP

Young guns lead Tigers

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When skipper Shakib Al Hasan fell in the 11th over, the chase had appeared distant. By the time Shamim fell, skying Rashid Khan after a courageous 33 following a game-changing 73-run fifth-wicket stand off just 43 deliveries, he and Towhid showed composure of the required order against a quality attack.

Towhid showed the fire in his belly when he hit Faeed Ahmed for six over deep backward square in the 11th over, and the momentum began to shift. Hridoy went on to hit two fours and Shamim one as the duo took 17 off the 13th over bowled by Azmatullah Omarzai.

When needed, the duo held their nerves showing composure against Rashid. Hridoy showed the ability of keeping his head in tight circumstances and also quick hands, taking Afghanistan's top pacer Fazalhaque Farooqi for 16 in the 17th over to bring the equation closer.

Despite the late drama when Karim Janat bagged a hat-trick in the final over, Shoriful Islam got the winning runs in the penultimate delivery with a boundary, with Hridoy unbeaten on 47 at the other end.

Earlier, Bangladesh bowlers did a relatively good job during the first 15 overs of the Afghanistan innings,

picking up four wickets while keeping the visitors from scoring at more than six per over.

Left arm spinner struck the first blow, removing Hazratullah Zazai. Rahmanullah Gurbaz, however, was showing signs of unleashing his array of strokes. Gurbaz tried to go after Taskin Ahmed in the very next over but could not get pace on it as he found Mehedi Miraz, who took a low catch at square leg.

Afghanistan wanted to get things moving but when Ibrahim Zadran edged Shoriful Islam in the fifth over, the Tigers were on top. With the pressure on despite Mohammad Nabi's fluent start at one end, Karim Janat departed skying Shakib in the eighth over, leaving Afghanistan four down for 52.

Shakib and his troops had kept things quiet while Nabi and Najibullah Zadran put on a 35-run stand for the fifth wicket. Najibullah departed to Mehedi after sharp work from Liton but Afghanistan turned things around in the last five overs.

60 runs were scored as Nabi launched into Taskin and Mustafizur Rahman in the last few overs. Azmatullah Omarzai got two sixes off Shakib during a rapid 33 off 18 deliveries before departing to Shakib. Nabi's unbeaten 54 off 40 saw Afghanistan reach 154 for seven.

MONSOON FLOODS

Delhi river reaches record high

AFP, New Delhi

The river running through India's capital New Delhi has reached a record high due to monsoon floods, authorities said yesterday as army engineers were deployed to try to contain the waters.

The Yamuna river was flowing in an "#EXTREME FLOOD SITUATION", India's central water commission tweeted, having reached a record width of 208.66 metres late on Thursday.

The figure surpassed the previous mark of 207.49 metres, reached in 1978, and the flows threatened low-lying neighbourhoods in the megacity of more than 20 million people.

Flooding and landslides are common and cause widespread devastation during India's treacherous monsoon season, but experts say climate change is increasing their frequency and severity.

EU delegation to sit with AL, BNP, JP today

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The mission is scheduled to meet BNP leaders at party Chairperson Khaleda Zia's Gulshan office at 9:00am.

The party is likely to reiterate its position that it would not take part in the parliamentary polls if it is not held under a non-party interim administration, sources said.

The BNP will give details of the last two general elections held in 2014 and 2018.

Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, Organising Secretary Shama Obayed and standing committee member Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury will attend the meeting, the sources added.

The EU delegates will talk to the main opposition in parliament, Jatiya Party, at the residence of Masroor Mawla, special envoy to party Chairman GM Quader.

Mawla told The Daily Star that party Secretary General Mujibul Haque Chunnun will be present in the meeting scheduled to begin around 10:00am.

Then EU mission will sit with a team of the ruling AL at a Banani hotel at noon.

AL sources said General Secretary Obaidul Quader will lead the party team to the meeting. The AL leaders would tell the delegation that polls will be held as per the constitution and under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

They would also reaffirm the party's commitment to holding a free and fair election.

The EU delegation will then meet a four-member team of Jamaat-e-Islami, which would be led by Nayebe-Ameer Syed Abdullah Md Taher, at the EU delegation office in the capital at 2:30pm.

Matiur Rahman Akanda, publicity affairs secretary of Jamaat, said they would explain the prevailing electoral environment in the country.

"We would make our position clear that we will not take part in any polls unless under a caretaker government. It has been proved that elections will not be free and fair without a caretaker government," he said.

The visiting EU mission will then sit with Amar Bangladesh (AB) Party at the EU delegation office at 4:00pm.

Mojibur Rahman Monju, member secretary of AB party, told this newspaper that a five-member team, led by party Joint Convener Tajul Islam, will be present at the meeting where they would say that a fair election is never possible under any partisan government.

"Our demand is very clear. The election should be held under a non-party election-time neutral government. The Election Commission should also be reconstituted to hold a free and fair election," he said.

The EU mission has already talked to the EC and different election stakeholders. It is assessing the scope, planning, budget, logistics, and security of a possible election observation mission.

Based on the assessment report, to be submitted to EU High Representative Josep Borrell, the EU will decide whether it will send a fully-fledged Election Observation Mission before the next national polls.

The EU mission, which reached Dhaka on July 9, is scheduled to leave on July 23.