

Blinken back in ME to push for Gaza truce

AFP, Washington

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken heads back to the Middle East yesterday on a new push for an elusive Gaza ceasefire two weeks before US elections, seeing a new opportunity from Israel's killing of Hamas's leader.

It will be the 11th trip to the Middle East by the top US diplomat since war broke out a year ago, with Blinken on his last visit to Israel in August warning it may have been the "last chance" for a US-led ceasefire plan.

That push did not succeed, and the conflict has escalated and expanded since then, with Israel pounding Hezbollah targets in Lebanon and warning of a new strike directly on Iran, whose clerical leaders back both Hamas and Hezbollah.



A fire burns at the site of an Israeli airstrike that targeted the southern Lebanese village of Khiam yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

'Jamaat to end cycle of revenge'

FROM PAGE 1

their own hands.

Speaking to The Daily Star, the Jamaat chief said the party had a "common principle" for all those who had wronged them: "The politics of revenge and retribution must be put to the grave".

A physician by training, he said it did not matter if no one else was on board. "Someone has to bell the cat. So why not me?"

Noting that the minorities had come under attack in the wake of Awami League's fall, the Jamaat chief said his party activists were among those who had then taken up vigil at temples and pagodas. "But that should not be the case... if mosques did not need security, why should temples and pagodas?"

He added, "Religion and party, to each his own. But the state belongs to everyone. Everyone must converge on this basic point of agreement if people desire a healthy society and a strong state."

Regarding the allegations against Jamaat-e-Islami and its leadership during the Liberation War, Shafiqur said he would have no reservations about apologising for the misdeeds if they were proven beyond doubt.

The Jamaat chief also clarified that crimes of individuals did not constitute culpability of Jamaat as an organisation automatically.

He explained that he heard afterwards that the Jamaat leaders in 1971 feared that an independence, which had been won "with the favour, cooperation and active engagement of India" would not bear rich dividends that the people expected. He said the leaders feared that "there would be an undue influence over Bangladesh, and because of that, we would not be able to emerge and establish ourselves as a truly sovereign nation with full dignity".

About the shifting political landscape and whether he had reasons to be apprehensive, the Jamaat ameer explained how the country had never really been completely stable since its birth in 1971. Regarding the fluid political state at present, he said, "You can never really wish away your

apprehensions."

Shafiqur referred to two events that many thought aimed to destabilise the government. "There was a chance of a judicial coup soon after the changeover. Then there was an incident with the Ansar." He said there were "strange incidents of provocation" at different levels.

He said some members of the government were making political statements at times and cautioned that the partisan statements from advisers did not bode well for the country. "This government is a non-partisan government. It is best that we don't hear anything partisan from a non-partisan government."

Queried about women's participation within Jamaat's policymaking body, the majlis-e-shura, and its central working committee, Shafiqur said while women constituted about 40-42 percent of its full members (rukun), women accounted for about 35 percent in both the shura and the central working committee. "And it is gradually rising."



About women leading the country for over more than three decades, the Jamaat chief said, whether it was Sheikh Hasina, Khaleda Zia or Rawshan Ershad, they all had inherited legacies of their husbands or fathers. "None of them climbed up the ranks from the grassroots as an individual political worker."

Asked when Jamaat might have its first woman ameer, the party chief declined to answer saying, "I will hold my answer for now."

While the Jamaat chief endorsed the Islamic rules of inheritance, saying that those rules favoured women more than men, he refrained from saying whether his party would oppose the Women's

Development Policy of 2011 — calling for equal inheritance between men and women — that was withdrawn in the face of strong protests.

He said, "We are not opposing anyone. We are merely advocating a certain position in the light of Islam."

As for the legal system, he said while the Islamic laws would have equal weight for testimony of Muslims and non-Muslims, it would not have the same weight for men and women. The Jamaat chief explained that the provisions called for two women in the stead of a man. "Allah has explained that it is because one woman can assist the other if one becomes unable to testify."

When asked about his views on songs and dances that are an integral part of the Bangali culture, the Jamaat chief remarked that when the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) migrated from Mecca to Medina, young boys and girls had greeted him with songs and dances. "He did not mind that."

The Pahela Baishakh celebrations have seen opposition from Islamist groups. About Jamaat's views on celebrations like Pahela Baishakh with its mangel shobhajatra and Ekushey February (February 21, International Language Day) with its probhat feri, and whether Jamaat would join in celebrating these festivals, Shafiqur said there was some merit to the reservations expressed by religious scholars about mangel shobhajatra.

He went on to say that celebrations, no matter what they were, should be in an orderly fashion. "But that does not happen, which is the main point of concern."

He said good will not come from just a shobhajatra. "For that we have to change our characters. If the character and actions are well-intentioned, only then will good come from it."

Jamaat has recently put forth a number of reform proposals, and one of them endorsed sculptures based on the nature of Bangladesh rather than figures of living beings like animals or humans.

Asked about Jamaat's position regarding sculptures like Aparajeyo

Bangla or Raju Bhashkorjo, both of which depicted humans, Shafiqur said, "We are indifferent."

Asked if Jamaat would call for these sculptures to be razed or whether it would want to put a stop to building any more of such sculptures, he explained that extreme actions were almost always a result of outburst. "It is because our society is intolerant. We must increase our tolerance."

He said whatever had to be done would have to be on the basis of consultations and discussions.

When pointed out that Shafiqur used words like mazlum, khalaas, and majlis-e-shura and asked about the reason behind Islamist politicians' preference for Urdu, Farsi or even Arabic words over Bangla, Shafiqur said, "This language is a rather generous one."

Bangla has become enriched with words from so many other languages. It has words from Sanskrit, Arabic, Urdu and even English, he said.

"Take Awami League for instance. Awami is Urdu and League is English. There is no Bangla at all. Our name is fully Arabic. Take BNP...it's all English."

"The people will accept whatever words they understand easily. You might say this the beauty and generosity of the Bangla language," said Shafiqur getting ready for his afternoon prayers.

SHAFIQUR RAHMAN'S BIO
Shafiqur Rahman's political activism began with a street march in his village during the 1969 mass upsurge. He was still in his teens when he was picked to write posters leading up to the 1970 general election. Like millions, Shafiqur too rooted for the "boat", Awami League's electoral symbol.

In later years, he got involved with the student wing of Jatiyatabadi Samajtantrik Dal, commonly called Jasad Chhatra League.

He was soon disillusioned with Jasad and decided to move away from its influence.

Shafiqur was first introduced to the Jamaat-e-Islami's student wing Chhatra Shibir when he had just started at the Sylhet Medical College, which he says was a turning point in his life.

Six state-run commercial banks get new MDs

FROM PAGE 1

Md Jasim Uddin, former DMD of Janata Bank, has been made MD and CEO of Bangladesh Development Bank, while Md Kamruzzaman, former DMD of Janata Bank, has been made the MD and CEO of BASIC Bank.

Sonali Bank Chairman Mohammad Muslim Chowdhury confirmed the receipt of the letter.

"We will approve the appointment of managing director and chief executive officer in the board meeting and then send the decision to the central bank for consent."

It will take two or three more days for the new MD to take charge, he added.

Meanwhile, the interim government yesterday issued a notification promoting four officials of different banks and appointing them as the new MDs at four state-run specialised banks: Ansar-VDP Unnayan Bank, Palli Sanchay Bank, Bangladesh Krishi Bank, and Probashi Kallyan Bank.

Mofazzal Hossain, DMD of Sonali Bank, has been promoted as the MD of Ansar-VDP Unnayan Bank, while Salma Bantu, the DMD of Bangladesh Krishi Bank, was made the MD of Palli Sanchay Bank.

Sanchita Binte Ali, DMD of Sonali Bank, has been made the MD of Bangladesh Krishi Bank. Chanu Gopal Ghosh, DMD of Bangladesh Krishi Bank, has been made the MD of Probashi Kallyan Bank.

Will apologise

FROM PAGE 1

reservations about it."

But, he cautioned, he would not accept trumped up charges. "It has to be clear what is the truth."

When pointed out that there were volumes of historical documents that strongly suggested culpability of Jamaat-e-Islami and its student wing Chhatra Sangha for having led the formation of militia outfits like Razakar, Al Badr and Al Shams, Shafiqur said there was a saying that history is for the victors. "History backs those who emerge victorious."

He said that while his party had stood behind a unified Pakistan, it was not only Jamaat but many other parties too had done so. He explained that individuals "who thought it appropriate, responded to the then government's call. But this cannot be mixed up with a party's responsibility. It is rather an individual's responsibility".

"But yes, if the East Pakistan Jamaat-e-Islami had decided to form such militias through a resolution, and if the Awami League has such a document, then the whole nation will accept that. I will too."

It is documented that there was a fundraising drive in the name of Ghulam Azam — the Jamaat chief in 1971. He had personally delivered speeches and lectures on a number of occasions, including Razakar gatherings, urging them to become actively involved for a united Pakistan.

Asked whether that translated into a collective organisational responsibility for Jamaat, Shafiqur said since they (Jamaat leadership of that time) favoured a united Pakistan, they said whatever they deemed necessary for the

discipline and peace of the country. But Shafiqur also agreed that anyone found guilty must be punished. "If anyone has committed atrocities, even if it is Ghulam Azam himself, they should be punished, I have no problem with that."

A political activist since he was a teenager, Shafiqur questioned the veracity of the war crimes trial against Jamaat leaders under the International Crimes Tribunal, saying it was "...a complete kangaroo trial."

He mentioned there were 24,000 cases against war criminals soon after the Liberation War and many went to jail. "But those who were charged 42 years after the war, why were they not charged back then? Why were there no cases or even a whiff of an allegation back then in any police station at that time?"

Jamaat-e-Islami's top leadership had been accused of war crimes and convicted at the International Crimes Tribunal that began trying the cases of crimes against humanity and genocide in 2011. Jamaat's vice-president Delwar Hossain Sayedee's case was the first to go to trial. His initial death sentence was later reduced to imprisonment till death. A former chief of Jamaat, Motiur Rahman Nizami was accused of masterminding the execution of intellectuals through the Al Badr vigilante militia that he led, while Ghulam Azam who was the chief of Jamaat in 1971 was found guilty of war crimes as well. Nizami was hanged and Ghulam Azam was sentenced to 90 years in prison. Besides, Jamaat leaders Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed, Mohammad Kamaruzzaman, Abdul Quader Mollah and Mir Quasem Ali were hanged after trials at the tribunal.

ZI Khan Panna

FROM PAGE 1

"So far I've learnt that a section of people, including a lawyer from Muladi in Barishal, are behind the filing of this case, although I am not involved with Barishal's politics," Panna said.

Following a petition filed by him on Sunday, the High Court bench of Justice AKM Asaduzzaman and Justice Syed Enayet Hossain yesterday granted him anticipatory bail until the submission of the investigation report by police in the case.

After the court passed the bail order, Panna also told reporters that he fought for Bangladesh's independence in 1971, but never collected a freedom fighter certificate.

"I am always against the certificate for the freedom fighters as I think all the people of Bangladesh, except for the anti-liberation people, are freedom fighters. I will not tolerate any attack on the Liberation War and its spirit. And I will fight them till my last breath," he said.

Contacted, Panna told The Daily Star, "The case has been filed against me either to save the real culprits or to humiliate me. I didn't get afraid."

He also said he was even ready to sacrifice his life and would continue to stand up to injustice.

"I have nothing to lose. I am now leading an extended life [after the 1971 Liberation War]. And I will not silence my voice and conscience against injustice," he said.

Mohammad Baker, the 52-year-old plaintiff in the case, visited Khilgaon Police Station yesterday and asked Officer in Charge Daud Hossain to drop Panna's name from the list of accused in the investigation report.

Citing an application filed by Baker, Daud said Panna was wrongly accused "due to ignorance and by mistake".

According to the original case statement, Ahadul, the 25-year-old son of Baker, and others were protesting

near Meradia Bazar on July 19 afternoon when "many of the named accused along with other unnamed BGB, police personnel and Awami League leaders and activists opened fire at the behest of some other accused".

Ahadul suffered bullet wounds in the left leg and was beaten up as he fell to the ground, according to the case dossier. He later took treatment at multiple hospitals, Baker said in the First Information Report (FIR).

Baker sells vegetables on a rickshaw van in the Banasree area. He told this newspaper on Sunday that he did not know Panna and how his name ended up on the list of accused.

"A lawyer named Jashim and some other people made the list and I just signed the FIR," Baker told The Daily Star over the phone.

Baker added he had no details of lawyer Jashim. Several attempts by this newspaper to reach the lawyer failed.

The inclusion of Panna in the list of accused raised eyebrows since he backed the student protesters during the mass uprising that toppled the Awami League regime.

Panna was among the Supreme Court lawyers who stood for a writ petitioner at the High Court on July 29, seeking orders to stop the use of bullets on the protesters during the anti-discrimination student movement.

He was also a member of a citizen's commission formed to investigate human rights violations and loss of lives during the protests.

Ain O Salish Kendra, of which Panna is the chairperson, and several other rights groups condemned the inclusion of Panna in the list of accused in the case.

A section of lawyers, including Ahsanul Karim, Zainul Abedin, MK Rahman, Shaheed Malik, and Mohammad Shishir Manir appeared for Panna during the hearing of his bail petition.

Deaths in crashes rising

FROM PAGE 1

had been behind the anarchy and indiscipline in the transport sector, and it ultimately led to the rise in road crashes and fatalities.

He said the nexus allowed a huge number of illegal and sub-standard vehicles, including battery-run three-wheelers, to operate on roads. It also allowed unlicensed and unskilled drivers to operate vehicles, seriously compromising road safety.

Besides, several government measures helped the number of motorcycles grow manifold, which has contributed to the rise in road crashes and deaths, said Shamsul, also the director of Buet's Accident Research Institute.

"Breaking out of the vicious circle that developed during the rule of the previous Awami League government is very difficult without a strong political commitment," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said the interim government has a big opportunity to bring discipline in the transport sector as most of the influential transport sector leaders are on the run and the police administration has gone through a major change.

But the authorities seem to be missing this golden opportunity as the advisers are overload with work, he said.

Ilias Kanchan, chairman of Nirapad Sarak Chai, said the interim government has many things to do to ensure safe road.

"We prepared many plans to ensure road safety, but the previous government was not sincere about it. We hope the interim government will be sincere," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said a new road safety act has to be enacted to ensure road safety, as the existing Road Transport Act is now enough.

INITIATIVES FALTERED

The previous AL government had taken several initiatives to improve road safety and reduce the numbers of road crashes and fatalities.

To curb road crashes and pollution, the government in May last year set the lifespans of commercial vehicles — 20 years for buses and 25 years for trucks.

But the government backtracked on the decision amid pressure from the transport associations and put the decision on hold in August last year.

The government had prepared a draft guideline to bring the illegal three-wheelers under regulation, but the draft is yet to be finalised.

In May last year, the government set the speed limits for vehicles as overspeeding is considered as a major reason for road crashes. But the guideline is not followed.

WHAT ROAD ADVISOR SAYS

Muhammad Fouzul Kabir Khan, adviser to the road transport and bridges ministry, yesterday said they would take a "whole new approach" to reducing road crashes and deaths.

He said road crashes and deaths used to be dealt with a "statistical approach" previously, but the incumbent government will take a "human approach" to deal with the matter.

The adviser said he will sit with Syeda Rizwana Hasan, adviser to the environment, forest and climate change ministry, on Thursday to decide on how the outdated vehicles would be withdrawn from the streets.

Debate swirls

FROM PAGE 1

scope for that."

Nazrul was referring to the president's address to the nation on August 5, hours after Hasina fled the country in the face of a mass uprising.

He also termed the president's remarks a lie.

The adviser said if the president stood by his statement, the advisory council of the interim government would discuss whether he was qualified to remain in the position.

Following Hasina's ouster, the president in his address to the nation, said, "You know that prime minister Sheikh Hasina has submitted her resignation letter to the president and I have accepted it."

The law adviser also referred to the opinion sent by the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court, in response to a request made by the president in accordance with article 106 of the constitution, which gives advisory jurisdiction to the Supreme Court.

The apex court said the prime minister had resigned and that the president had the power to appoint chief adviser and other advisers.

The adviser further stressed that the chief justice and judges of the Appellate Division had signed that opinion, and that the president saw the opinion, received it, and signed it as well.

"We know that the constitution says that if you don't have the physical or mental capacity, or if you commit a serious misconduct, then the constitution provides a scope to take

steps about whether you can stay on as the president," he said.

Asked if the government can produce the resignation letter and show it to the public, Nazrul said, "If she resigned, she resigned to the president. [Resignation letter] is supposed to be at the president's office, and according to the constitution of Bangladesh, it cannot be questioned at any court. He [the president] himself said it was handed to him, he received it... now if he says it's not with him, then what he did with the resignation letter is something you will have to ask him."

According to section 57(a) of the constitution, the prime minister's office shall become vacant if he/she resigns from the office at any time by handing the resignation letter to the president.

The Bangabhaban yesterday provided the document containing the opinion of the apex court that said, "In this current situation of the country, since the prime minister [Sheikh Hasina] has resigned and the president has dissolved the 12th Parliament on August 6, 2024, it was not possible for the president to accept the advice of the prime minister as per article 48(3) of the constitution."

The court said since there was no provision for the formation of an interim government in the constitution, the president could on emergency basis appoint a chief adviser and other advisers to fill the vacuum and carry out the executive work of the state.

Yesterday, Nazrul showed reporters the first line of the same document.