

MINORITIES IN BANGLADESH

## India’s SC dismisses plea seeking their protection

Says cannot remark on another country’s internal affairs

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

India’s Supreme Court on Monday rejected a public interest litigation that sought protection of Hindus and other minorities in Bangladesh, saying that the court cannot comment on the internal affairs of another country.

“It pertains to foreign affairs...how can this court comment upon the affairs of another country? It would be so odd if this court interferes with another country, that too a neighbour!” said the bench of Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar.

After noting the comments by the two judges, the petitioner withdrew the plea and the matter was dismissed.

“It’s not for us at all. Do you think the government is not aware of this? How can this court comment upon this?” the chief justice remarked.

The petition was filed by a businessman and philanthropist Rajesh Dhandu, chairman of Bhagwan Jagannath Rath Yatra Mahotsav Committee, Ludhiana, and vice-chairman of ISKCON Mandir Steering Board.

Besides the protection of Hindus from violence in Bangladesh, the plea also sought an extension of the deadline for consideration of applications for citizenship to Hindus who have entered India.

The plea said there are instances in modern history wherein many sovereign countries have utilised international forums like the International Court of Justice and United Nations in raising issues related to violation of human rights in other sovereign countries.



As prices of essentials continue to rise, state-run mobile shops selling subsidised goods see large crowds. Sometimes the trucks run out of goods before everyone in the queue gets what they need. The photo of the shop of the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh was taken in the capital's Begunbari yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

## Ensure the expected impartiality

### Tarique urges interim govt

UNB, Dhaka

BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman yesterday expressed hope that the interim government would uphold the impartiality as expected by the people.

While addressing the biannual council of Cumilla city unit BNP virtually, he said various questions have now emerged among the people over different matters of the interim government.

Instability is being seen in several parts of the country, Tarique said.

Since the formation of this government, he said that the BNP has been supporting it because the party wants the government

to be successful.

Tarique said the people of Bangladesh believe that this interim government will do whatever necessary to protect their political and other rights through a fair and impartial election, which were snatched away by the fugitive dictator many years ago in the dark of the night.

But for the past few days, it has unfortunately been observed that different persons within the government are making various remarks about restoring the people's voting rights, he said. “As a result, different kinds of unrest are being created in different parts of the country. We don’t want any instability in

Bangladesh,” he said.

Tarique reiterated his party's support for this interim government for the sake of a smooth journey of democracy in the country. “We want to cooperate with this government because we believe the more smoothly and beautifully this government can hold a neutral election, the smoother the democratic journey will be for this country and its people in the coming days.”

Noting that the BNP firmly believes in democracy, he said the differences – whether within the party or with other parties – should be resolved through negotiations.

## School picnic buses robbed in Tangail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Robbers stopped school picnic buses on Ghatail-Sagardighi Road in Tangail's Ghatail upazila early yesterday and looted cash, gold ornaments, and phones.

Khalilur Rahman, headmaster of Sowaitpur High School of Fulbaria in Mymensingh, said students, teachers, and guardians were going to Green Valley Park of Natore for a picnic on four buses.

He said around 4:00am, a gang of 10 to 12 robbers stopped their buses by placing tree logs on the road near Sagardighi area. Later, the gang, armed with sharp weapons, looted 10 mobile phones, some cash, and gold ornaments from the passengers.

The criminals also assaulted Shakhawat Hossain, a computer operator of the institution, and Shahidullah Talukder, a guardian, when they tried to resist the robbers.

When a call was made to 999, a police patrol car immediately came to the spot, prompting the robbers to flee into the forest adjacent to the road, Khalil said.

To help students recover from the unsettling experience, the headmaster said that they went ahead with the picnic in Natore.

Khalil told this correspondent that they would lodge a case with Ghatail Police Station.

Contacted, Rabiul Islam, officer in charge of Ghatail Police Station, said they would take action after the case was filed.

## Two men sent to jail in rape cases

STAR REPORT

Two men were sent to jail yesterday in separate rape cases filed in Shariatpur and Munshiganj.

In Shariatpur, Md Afzal, 30, was arrested in a case filed over the rape of a 14-year-old speech-impaired girl in Naria upazila on Monday.

The girl is now undergoing treatment at a hospital, said Aslam Uddin, officer-in-charge (OC) of Naria Police Station.

In Munshiganj, Jiban, 30, was arrested in a case filed over the rape of a seven-year-old girl in Sadar upazila early yesterday.

Later in the day, the accused was produced before a court and was subsequently sent to jail, said Rashed Chowdhury, Munshiganj Court Police Inspector.

[Our correspondents from Shariatpur and Munshiganj contributed to the report.]

## Work together, or our sovereignty will be at stake

## 82 senior cops made OSD

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in a beautiful place and then return to my work. I have had enough in the last seven-eight months.”

Speaking about “hostility towards the army,” he said, “Do not attack our army. I see a common trend of hostility of some people towards the army and the army chief. I did not find any reason for this. We are the only force that has been working for you. Of course, the air force and navy are also here – we all are. Do not attack us.”

The four-star general sought constructive advice and said, “Inspire us, give us advice. We will certainly embrace good advice.”

The army chief touched upon various issues, including the current law and order, national election, and the BDR carnage trial, in his speech.

Speaking about the upcoming national polls, he said the country is heading for a free, fair, and inclusive election, and the government will certainly help with the reforms before holding the polls.

“Every time I spoke with Dr Yunus, I completely agreed with him that there should be a free, fair, and inclusive election and that the election should be held within December or close to that, which I initially mentioned about an election within 18 months. I believe the government is heading in that direction.”

He further said Chief Adviser Prof Yunus is trying his best, working to keep this country united. “We need to help him succeed. We will all make our efforts and work together towards that goal.”

### OPPORTUNITY FOR CRIMINALS

The army chief said there are several reasons behind the deteriorating law and order.

“The first reason is that we are busy fighting ourselves. We are busy slandering each other. This is a perfect opportunity for criminals. As we are in a state of anarchy, they know it well if they commit the crimes this time, they will be able to get away... We can definitely deal with this situation only if we stay united,” he said.

General Waker noted that many police officers are not performing their duties because cases have been filed against them while some are in jail. The forces – Rapid Action Battalion, Border Guard Bangladesh, Directorate General of Forces Intelligence, and National Security Intelligence – are jittery as investigations into allegations of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings against some of their officials are underway.

“Investigations must continue and those responsible must be brought to justice. However, this should be done in a way that does not undermine these organisations. If you think peace and order can be restored by undermining these institutions, that will not happen; it is not possible,” he added.

The army chief further said despite some misdeeds in the past, law enforcement and intelligence agencies such as the police, Rab, BGB, DGFI, and NSI have done countless important work for the country.

“The reason the country has remained stable for so many years is that members of the armed forces and civilians collectively kept these organisations effective.”

He said those who committed crimes will be punished, otherwise such incidents will recur. “We want to stop it permanently.”

Noting that maintaining law and order is not the responsibility of the army alone, General Waker said apart from 200,000 police personnel, there are BGB, Rab, and Ansar VDP members. But the army has only 30,000 troops deployed.

“How can I fill this void with just 30,000 soldiers? Troops [30,000] are deployed in rotation – one group goes to the cantonment while another returns. We are working tirelessly.

“The disorders that have happened here are of our own making.... We have created these ourselves. We have to keep in mind that if we continue the contrary actions, peace and order will never be restored.”

### DON'T UNDERMINE JUDICIAL PROCESS

Terming February 25 a day of deep sorrow, the army chief recalled the tragic loss of 57 army officers and their family members in the 2009 carnage.

He said that the atrocity was committed solely by the then-BDR personnel, not by any member of the armed forces.

“It was committed completely by the then BDR men. Full stop. There are no ‘ifs’ and ‘buts’ here. If you raise question, the judicial process that has been going on for the last 16 years will be disrupted.

“We need to keep this in mind very clearly. Do not undermine the judicial process. The convicted members who have been punished deserve punishment.”

He said that an independent commission was formed to investigate whether any political leaders or any foreign entities were involved. The commission will find it out and their findings will be shared, he said.

“The bottom line is that our brave soldiers who lost their lives were killed by the bullets of the then BDR members,” he asserted.

The army chief said that a certain quarter is trying to divert the issues in different directions, which will not benefit anyone. “Let us not create divisions among ourselves... If there are any problems, deviations, or grievances among us, we will resolve them through discussion.”

Regarding the claims of some members of the then BDR to have been unfairly punished, General Waker said that a board with a lieutenant general as its member has been formed to review such cases.

“In the first phase, recommendations for 51 members have been submitted to me. I approved most of the recommendations. I even provided some more recommendations,” he added.

The army chief also said that the navy and air force are conducting similar review processes. However, he made it clear that any proven offenders would receive no leniency.

“It is a disciplined force, and let the force be disciplined,” he said, adding, “Today, at this critical juncture for the country, all forces and organisations have collapsed. Only the army, air force and navy remain properly functional, thanks to their discipline.”

Reiterating his call for unity, General Waker said, “Let’s work together. Let’s take our country to a beautiful place where our children can live peacefully. Let’s not leave them a country for conflicts. Otherwise, our next generation will not be able to live here.”

following a change in the mayor of the Chattogram City Corporation, the top 10 contractors were completely replaced.

Leadership changes in local governments or ministries often lead to shifts in contractors, but overall control remains with the same influential groups,” Iftekharuzzaman said.

Regular monitoring, limiting market share, and disclosing true ownership information would weaken monopolistic control and enhance good governance in government purchases, he added.

The report recommended introducing market share caps for individual contractors and joint ventures.

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duties during the controversial 2018 parliamentary polls.

At least 60 officials on the list, were earlier awarded the Bangladesh Police Medal (BPM), Bangladesh Police Medal (BPM-Service), President’s Police Medal (PPM), and President’s Police Medal (PPM-Service) by the ousted Awami League government for their role in 2018 election.

The home ministry on February 23 stripped 103 police officers of their medals awarded in 2018, including the listed 60 officials.

According to the notification, the award of the officials has been revoked as the officials were directly involved in the controversial 10th National Parliamentary Election held on December 30, 2018.

According to officials, the designation of OSD is generally considered an administrative reallocation, but in practice, it often strips officials of their functional responsibilities. While the government officially states that OSD status is part of administrative restructuring, it is widely perceived as a punitive measure when applied to officials removed from key positions.

In recent years, the police force has witnessed several high-profile reshuffles, with senior officers frequently being transferred or placed in OSD status in line with government policy decisions.

However, the move to sideline 82 senior police officials at once is unprecedented, said officials.

This sweeping action has sparked widespread discussions within law enforcement and political circles, with many questioning the rationale behind such an extensive shake-up in the police force.

On February 23, four DIGs of police, who had previously served as superintendents of police (SPs) and additional DIGs during the 2014 and 2018 national elections, were sent into forced retirement in “public interest”.

The government announced the decision in four separate notifications

signed by Nasimul Gani, senior secretary of the home ministry’s Public Security Division.

According to sources at the Police Headquarters, at least 40 top-ranking police officers between the rank of assistant superintendent of police and additional inspector general of police were sent into forced retirement in the last six months, citing “public interest”.

The move came after the Youth and Sports Adviser, Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuiyain on February 21, said the SPs who were in charge during the 2018 “night-time” elections will be made officers on special duty (OSD) or sent into forced retirement. He made these remarks in a Facebook post.

On February 20, the government sent 22 admin cadre officials into retirement, raising the number of disciplined bureaucrats to 67 for their questionable role as deputy commissioners in the 2014 and 2018 elections under the Awami League regime.

On Wednesday, the public administration ministry placed 33 officials on special duty. Previously, it did the same to 12 other former DCs. Special duty in this context is considered a disciplinary measure.

The ministry is currently reviewing the records of the officials on the list, and most of them are likely to face punishment, according to officials with knowledge of the development.

The last general election, held on January 7, 2024, was boycotted by the BNP and several other parties. In many places, AL leaders ran as independents to make the polls appear participatory.

In 2018, opposition parties alleged that ballot stuffing took place the night before the election.

Transparency International Bangladesh said ballot-stuffing took place in more than one centre in 33 of the 50 constituencies it had surveyed.

In the 2014 election, also boycotted by the BNP, 153 out of 300 lawmakers got “elected” without any vote as they were the only ones running for office in their constituencies.

In remembrance of their sacrifice, he said, “As a nation we are pledge-bound as we can guide ourselves in the right direction. May no more lives be lost due to misrule, conspiracy, and arrogance!”

He also expressed hope that people can reach their deserved destination through their own merit and talent with self-respect and human rights.

The chief adviser said Bangladesh should be the ideal benchmark in the way of building a world free from hunger, poverty and unemployment.

On this day, in memory of the martyred soldiers of the nation, he said, “Let us make a pledge to build a self-reliant and civilized Bangladesh.”

## Govt procurement under monopolistic control

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“Public procurement is among the most corruption-prone sectors globally. While many countries manage to control it, Bangladesh is heading toward greater complexity, as our research shows,” said TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman at the launch of the report yesterday.

Despite the maximum authorised contract value being Tk 881 crore, larger contracts remain outside the e-GP (electronic Government Procurement) framework.

In the road transport and highways division, just 11 percent of all contractors were awarded 93.55 percent of the Tk 82,506 crores spent by the department between 2015 and 2025.

Only 1 percent of contractors – 35 firms – hold 72.9 percent of the market of this division.

Around 9 percent of the contractors control 91.5 percent of the project value in the Ministry of Water Resources, with 38 contractors holding a 30.9 percent market share. The water resources ministry spent Tk 57,809 crores in the last decade.

Only 7.45 percent of all contractors (607) in the Ministry of housing and Public Works control 71 percent of the market.

Even among them, 63 contractors stood out. They were consistently in the top 10 contractors over the past decade and were awarded 35.44 percent of the total money spent by the ministry, taking home Tk

18,229.23 crore.

In the local government division, only 1 percent of all contractors (294 firms) hold 27.7 percent of the market share.

The dominance of the top 5 percent contractors has grown substantially from 36.26 percent in 2015 to a staggering 58.35 percent in 2024, the report said.

The report identified 65 contractors who prominently featured in the top 10 list for the division over the past decade. The contractors got Tk 28,475 crore or 11 percent of the total money spent by the division.

The study found that political leadership changes also influence contractor dominance. For example,