



India-Bangladesh relations moving towards crisis

Foreign adviser questions why Indian authorities allowed protest near Bangladesh High Commission

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The India-Bangladesh ties, which came under strain following the August 5 political changeover, have deteriorated further, with both countries voicing concerns over security of their missions.

Yesterday, the Indian Visa Application Centre (IVAC) in Chattogram city suspended its operations until further notice, citing the recent security situation at the Assistant High Commission of India (AHC) in the port city.

Last week, the IVACs in Dhaka, Khulna and Rajshahi remained partially closed for one day each, citing security concerns amid protests in the three cities.

Dhaka and New Delhi issued conflicting statements yesterday over a demonstration near the Bangladesh High Commission in New Delhi.

The Indian external affairs ministry said a group of 20-25 youths protested

on Saturday against the killing of Dipu Chandra Das, a garment worker, by a mob in Mymensingh, and called for the protection of all minorities in Bangladesh, but did not create any security situation.

At a media briefing, Randhir Jaiswal, spokesperson for the Indian external affairs ministry, said they noticed misleading propaganda by some sections of the Bangladeshi media regarding the incident.

He said there was no attempt to breach the fence or create a security situation at any time, and that the police stationed at the spot dispersed the group after a few minutes.

In Dhaka, at a press briefing at the foreign ministry yesterday, Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain questioned why the Indian authorities allowed protesters to enter and demonstrate in the secure

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Dr Kamal Hossain, along with other members of the Gono Forum, yesterday visited The Daily Star Centre in the capital's Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue to inspect the destruction left behind after the building was attacked and set on fire on December 19.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Take firm action against vandalism, arson attack

EC tells law enforcers; armed forces assure all necessary measures taken for fair, smooth polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission yesterday warned that it will not tolerate any activities that disrupt the election environment and directed law enforcement agencies to act firmly, if necessary, to prevent such incidents.

In a meeting with top military and law enforcement officials, the commission urged them to show "humane behaviour" only towards those who act humanely. It also instructed the joint forces to intensify operations to recover illegal weapons and arrest terrorists.

The EC noted that the recent vandalism and arson attacks on the offices of The Daily Star, Prothom Alo, and other locations have "undeniably" affected the election atmosphere following the announcement of the schedule on December 11.

In a separate meeting with the EC, the chiefs of the three services – Chief of Army Staff General Waker-Uz-Zaman, Chief of Naval Staff Admiral M Nazmul Hassan, and Chief of Air Staff Air Chief Marshal Hasan Mahmood

Khan – assured the commission that all necessary measures have been taken to ensure a fair and smooth election. They confirmed that deployments will be made as required, with the army alone deploying around 100,000 personnel.

At a press briefing after the meetings, Election Commissioner Brig Gen (Retd) Abul Fazal Md Sanaullah said He said that the law enforcement agencies had been instructed to act with humanely, but many people took undue advantage of this.

"Now the message is very clear. We have instructed all forces and agencies that we will be humane towards those who act humanely. But there is no need to act humane towards those who seek to carry out banditry, vandalism, destroy the election environment, or kill our brothers," he said.

Asked about the recent attacks on The Daily Star, Prothom Alo, and other locations, as well as the killing of Sharif Osman Hadi, coordinator of Inqilab Moncho and a frontline figure of the July uprising, Sanaullah said, "The election

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Democracy slipping into 'mobocracy'

Says BNP; editors call for tolerance, assurance of environment to practise independent journalism

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The demand for democracy after the July uprising is now sliding towards "mobocracy" and the interim government's weakness is to be blamed for it, BNP Standing Committee member Salahuddin Ahmed said yesterday.

Speaking at the same event, editors and senior journalists said attacks on media houses were attacks on Bangladesh itself. They sought assurances that, if voted to power, the BNP would demonstrate tolerance and ensure an environment where independent journalism could be practised.

The discussion, organised by the party, was held at a city hotel ahead of BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman's homecoming.

Salahuddin said Bangladesh's image had been damaged globally by the attacks and arson on Prothom Alo and The Daily Star, adding that mob rule must be suppressed firmly.

"The government had the biggest responsibility in this incident. There should have been predictions, intelligence reports, and preparations to prevent it. We also came to know about such reports. But why were those reports not taken into account?" he said.

Referring to the delayed response, he said they had heard that even after law enforcement agencies were informed, action came one to two hours later.

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'Terrible moment for Bangladesh's democracy'

Says EU ambassador Michael Miller



DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The attacks on The Daily Star and Prothom Alo were a "terrible moment" for Bangladesh's democracy, said Michael Miller, the EU ambassador to Bangladesh.

"These are attacks on freedom of the media and on freedom of expression. And I can only underline how critical it is to maintain space for freedom of expression in Bangladesh as you head towards elections," he said during a solidarity visit to the offices of Prothom Alo yesterday.

He interacted with the Prothom Alo journalists and inspected the

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ATTACK ON STAR, PROTHOM ALO Outcry for press freedom resounds at home, abroad

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Violent attacks on the offices of Prothom Alo and The Daily Star continued to draw sharp condemnation from political leaders, journalist organisations, civil society members and international press bodies yesterday.

The incidents, involving vandalism, looting and arson on Thursday night, have reignited concerns over press freedom and the safety of journalists in the country.

Senior jurist and Gono Forum president emeritus Dr Kamal Hossain visited the damaged offices yesterday.

Speaking to reporters during the visit, he said, "Those who set fire to media offices and vandalised them are acting against the interests of the people and the state."

He warned that such organised violence posed a grave threat to democracy, media freedom and public safety. "If the government fails to stop these forces, the safety of the state itself will be at risk," he told reporters.

Dr Kamal said Prothom Alo and The Daily Star have long played a vital role in promoting democracy, human rights and good governance in Bangladesh.

"The government's failure to ensure the safety of these media institutions is unacceptable."

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NOTICE

Today's edition is published in a reduced 12-page format. We regret the inconvenience and are making every effort to return to full capacity.

Several attackers of media houses identified

Says religious affairs adviser

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Religious Affairs Adviser AFM Khalid Hossain yesterday said several people involved in the arson attack on the offices of The Daily Star and Prothom Alo have been identified.

Speaking to reporters at the Secretariat, he said steps are underway to arrest them and bring them to book.

The adviser also condemned the killing of Dipu Chandra Das, a garment worker in Bhaluka, who was beaten and burned to death. Terming the act "heinous," he said the government will not allow anyone to take the law into their own hands.

He also condemned the attack on the cultural organisation Chhayanaut in Dhaka.

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The namaz-e-janaza of the six UN peacekeepers, who lost their lives in a terrorist drone attack in Sudan, being held at the Central Mosque of Dhaka Cantonment yesterday.

PHOTO: CA PRESS WING

Farewell to fallen soldiers of peace with flags, tears

Janaza held in Dhaka Cantonment

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Mohammad Alamgir, father of private Shamim Reza, stood solemnly beside his son's coffin, draped half in the national flag and half in the UN flag.

"My son was my banyan tree. Now it is no more, all my dreams... shattered."

The namaz-e-janaza of six Bangladeshi peacekeepers, killed in a terrorist drone attack, was held yesterday around 9:00am at the Central Mosque of Dhaka Cantonment.

The attack took place on a United Nations peacekeeping base in Sudan's Abyei area on December 13.

The bodies arrived in Dhaka's Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport on an Emirates flight on Saturday. Home Adviser Lt Gen (retd) Jahangir Alam Chowdhury, Chief of Army Staff General Waker-uz-Zaman, Chief of Navy Staff Admiral M Nazmul Hassan, Air Chief Marshal Hasan Mahmood Khan, Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam, and senior armed forces officers were present.

Alamgir said, "Shamim had told his younger brother that he would 'show him a path' for his future when he returned. He had also told his young daughter not to worry and that he would bring her a necklace for her wedding."

Soldier Rony, mourning the loss of his elder brother Corporal Mohammad Masud Rana, asked everyone

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