

## Pakistan, BD exchange protests on JI leader's hanging

As bilateral relations between Islamabad and Dhaka further deteriorated after the execution of Motiur Rehman Nizami, both the countries on Thursday summoned each other's envoys to record strong protests.

Pakistan brushed aside the charges by the Bangladesh government that Islamabad was interfering in its domestic policies related to the hanging of Motiur Rahman Nizami for alleged war crimes in 1971.

"It is not a matter of interference. The flawed trials pertain to the events before December 1971 and these gentlemen (who have been hanged) are being implicated for upholding the laws of Pakistan. The attempts by the government of Bangladesh to malign Pakistan, despite our keen desire to develop brotherly relations with it, are regrettable," the Spokesman at the Foreign Office said at the weekly media briefing.

Later, the director general South Asia at the Foreign Office summoned the acting high commissioner of Bangladesh and a strong protest was lodged at what it called "the unfortunate hanging" of Motiur Rahman Nizami on the alleged crimes committed before December 1971 through a "flawed judicial process".

"We have expressed our serious concern on the hanging and our concerns are conveyed through diplomatic channels. Let me clarify one thing, this was not a tit for tat response," said the spokesman.

The spokesman brushed aside impressions that Pakistan's response had been weak. "I don't agree that our response is weak. It is not a matter of weak or strong response, the aim is to convey our feelings. We have already expressed our deep concerns on the flawed trials. You might have seen the Human Rights Commission's response to the hanging as well as of those of the European Union," he added.

Pakistan says that it is seriously concerned as could be seen by a resolution adopted by parliament. "The 1974 Tripartite Agreement is the cornerstone of relations between the two countries. It needs to be emphasised that, as part of the agreement, the government of Bangladesh decided not to proceed with the trials as an act of clemency," said the spokesman.

Nevertheless, he pointed out that Pakistan reiterates its desire for friendly relations with Bangladesh. Turning to matters on its western borders, to a query, the spokesman said that the next round of QCG meeting was tentatively scheduled to take place this month.

"After the last QCG round, it was expected that talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban would take place before the next round. This was an expectation and not a compulsion. The challenge of bringing the Taliban and other groups to the table is a shared responsibility of the QCG members. Bringing parties in conflict to the negotiating table is an arduous task, requiring patience and persistence," he advised.

Pakistan feels that all the QCG members were of the view that the Taliban and other groups would gain more through negotiations than without them. "The fifth QCG meeting is tentatively scheduled to take place in May. In the meantime, efforts will continue to bring the Taliban to the negotiating table," he said.

Commenting on the closure of the Pak-Afghan border, the spokesman admitted that there were differences between the two sides on implementation of measures to manage and regulate the border, due to which the border had been temporarily closed. He explained that because the

border was porous, illegal crossings and other associated issues were major challenges for both countries.

“To address the situation, the Government of Pakistan has decided to implement measures at Torkham for effective border management. It is in the interest of both the countries to have a well-regulated border,” he said. He added that both sides are in contact with each other through a military-to-military channel to address this issue.

To another query, the spokesman said that dialogue with India was not linked to the forthcoming Saarc Summit. “In the context of dialogue, Pakistan is ready to start the dialogue but India is not. Whenever India is ready, we are ready to start it. I have also mentioned previously as well dialogue is the best and only option,” he added.

Meanwhile, the Pakistani principal of City School in Dhaka Yasmeen was arrested by the Bangladesh’s police. However, the Foreign Office said she was under protective custody of the Bangladesh police.

Reuters adds: Bangladesh has in the past few years been prosecuting people accused of carrying out crimes during the 1971 war, and has executed five of them, the most recent one, Motiur Rehman Nizami, on Wednesday. Bangladesh summoned the Pakistani ambassador in Dhaka to register its “strong protest” over statements by Pakistan.

“The government of Bangladesh deeply regrets that despite Bangladesh’s repeated overtures, the malicious campaign by Pakistan against the trials of the crimes against humanity and genocide in Bangladesh is continuing,” Bangladesh said in a statement.

International human rights groups say the tribunal’s procedures fall short of international standards but Bangladesh rejects that and the trials are supported by many Bangladeshis. Turkey withdrew its ambassador to Bangladesh on Thursday over Nizami’s hanging.