



A lineman collects toll from an auto-rickshaw with a receipt (inset) at Ghior Bazar bus stand in Manikganj. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: STAR

Illegal toll collection from auto-rickshaws

Some influential people continue the act in the name of Bangladesh Auto-bike Sramik League Kalyan Society

ZAHANGIR SHAH, Manikganj

In the name of Bangladesh Auto-bike Sramik League Kalyan Society, a group of local influential people are allegedly collecting illegal tolls from CNG-run auto-rickshaws at Ghior Bazar bus stand in Manikganj.

More than 300 auto-rickshaws operate on six different routes from the busy bazar in Ghior upazila, according to staffers and owners of the three-wheelers.

They alleged that they have to pay Tk 500 monthly and Tk 15 daily for each vehicle to some influential persons who have been collecting the money in the name of the society for the last two months.

You need to obtain a sticker from them to operate any auto-rickshaw on the route, said an auto-rickshaw driver.

This reporter saw coloured sticker pasted on the windscreens of a number of auto-rickshaws while visiting the bazar area recently.

The sticker read: “Bangladesh Auto-bike Sramik Kalyan Society; temporary office: Ghior, Manikganj”. Inside the sticker it is



also written that the body is authorised by the People’s Republic of Bangladesh.

They are also collecting Tk 15 daily from each auto-rickshaw with a receipt which states that out of the amount, Tk 10 has been charged as donation for ‘labour welfare fund’ and the rest for supervisor and others.

Talking to the owners and staffers of auto-rickshaws on those routes, it was learnt that an 11-member committee with

Nazmul Alam as president, Manik Khan as vice president and Shahin Khan as general secretary was collecting the tolls.

Not a single member of the committee is involved in the auto-rickshaw business, they alleged.

The committee was formed on the recommendation of Habibur Rahman Habib, president of upazila Awami League and chairman of the upazila parishad, and its general secretary Abdul Alam Mintu.

Due to their influence, the members of the committee are collecting the extortion money, said the auto-rickshaw staffers and owners.

They further said without trade union certificate from the Labour Department, no organisation involved in the transport sector can collect money.

Contacted, Nazmul Alam, president of Ghior upazila unit of the society, said they are taking Tk 10 per day for the welfare of the workers.

However, its vice president Manik Khan admitted to have collected Tk 15 daily.

He also said that they have charged Tk

200 for becoming its member.

Communicated with upazila parishad chairman Habibur Rahman, he admitted to have recommended forming a committee. But when asked if the committee was authorised to collect toll, he said he was not aware of it.

However, Hanif Ali, a former Manikganj district unit general secretary of Sramik League, claimed that Bangladesh Auto-bike Sramik League Kalyan Society is a legitimate organisation and its Ghior unit can collect money for welfare fund only from its members.

Rehaz Uddin, a driver of an auto-rickshaw, complained about the illegal toll collection to the Manikganj police superintendent, seeking remedy. The Daily Star has obtained a copy of the complaint submitted on January 12.

On January 18, Police Superintendent Rifat Rahman Shamim, however, told this reporter that he was yet to receive any complaint in this regard.

“If we get a complaint, we must take legal action,” he said.



PHOTO: KONGKONKARMAKER

A portion of the thousand-acre arable land area, affected by persistent waterlogging due to blocking of eight culverts by influential people in Doulatpur union under Dinajpur’s Phulbari upazila. Inset, one of the eight culverts, blocked apparently to ensure optimum water in the adjacent pond dug around two years ago.

1000-acre cropland waterlogged

500 farmers suffering for 2 years due to the man-made menace

KONGKON KARMAKER, Dinajpur

At least 1,000 acres of arable land in Doulatpur union under Dinajpur’s Phulbari upazila has remained unused for the last two years due to waterlogging as influential people blocked the passage of eight culverts after digging ponds for fish farming in the adjacent spots.

The land owners, 500 farmers of 10 villages including Amrobari, Moheshpur, Purbo Moheshpur, Mohadipur, Baraipara, Lalpur, Narayanpur, Kismat Lalpur and Garpinglai used to produce paddy there, said locals.

But, in early 2018, the influential locals excavated nine big ponds for fish farming, and blocked the passage of eight culverts for safety of the ponds.

The callous act led to persistent waterlogging on 1,000 acres of land, said local farmers during this correspondent’s visit to the spot a couple of days ago.

Shahdul Haque, a farmer of Moheshpur village, said his four acres of land remained underwater since the water flow was blocked two years ago.

“Earlier I got 450 maunds of paddy from the land in two paddy seasons every year, but, I could not cultivate the land in last two years,” he said.

Similarly, five acres of land of Younus Ali and 2.5 acres of land of Sajibul Islam remained under water, affecting their earning from paddy production.

“I have switched to another profession to feed my family,” said Sajibul.

As the waterlogging affected the vast lands due to blocking of the eight culverts, the affected farmers sought intervention of the local administration for a solution, but to no result, said Md Mozaffar Hossain Chowdhury, former chairman of Khayerbari Union Parishad in Phulbari upazila.

Shams Sumon Mishuk, who blocked a culvert adjacent to his fish pond, said, “I did not do it alone, eight other men did the same. The stagnant water will be released if the government authorities build a canal there.”

If the local administration takes immediate steps to open the culverts to restore the normal water flow, the affected farmers will be able to resume paddy cultivation from this Boro season, said Harun Ur Rashid, a farmer of Baraipara village.

Contacted, Md Mahmudul Alam, deputy commissioner of Dinajpur, said, “After learning about the matter recently, I visited the spot and asked the upazila nirbahi officer [UNO] of Phulbari to take action to solve the problem.”

The UNO, Abdus Salam Chowdhury, who went abroad on January 10, is yet to return, upazila administration sources said.

The ‘refugees’ within

Driven out of their ancestral land about three years ago, 15 Chak families struggle for survival

SANJOY KUMAR BARUA, Bandarban

Around three years ago, 15 families of Chak, a small ethnic community, were driven out of their ancestral dwellings and agricultural land in Shui Jaing Chak Para of Bandarban’s Naikhongchhari upazila.

As many as 81 members of these families are now living the life of refugees, in inhumane conditions, after they took shelter in Madhyam Chak Para, another village in the same upazila, where 56 other Chak families already live.

Crammed in a small area where arable land, known as Jhum land, is already allotted to original residents of the village, the new residents now do not have any means to earn a living.

Their hopes of returning to their ancestral land is diminishing as no action was taken all these years against the perpetrators who attacked, looted their belongings and forced them out of their houses and land where they lived for generations, said several of them.

For survival, they are willing to return to their home village and reclaim their land, but the authorities concerned did not assure them of any security either, they also said.

“In February of 2017, a group of eight to ten criminals, with firearms and sharp weapons, came to our para. They beat us up, issued threats and made us leave the Para immediately,” said 70-year-old Thui Hla Aung Chak.

U Mai Ya Chak, another victim and mother of three young children, said, “We left our village following the threats and are now living in Madhyam Chak Para in an inhumane condition.”

A number of victims alleged that the attack was carried out to illegally possess their land and the masterminds behind the attacks were two leaders of the Awami League -- Mohammad Shafiullah, president of Naikhongchhari upazila unit of AL and the chairman of Naikhongchhari Upazila Parishad; and Kwe Shwe Hla, president of Bandarban district unit of AL and the chairman of Bandarban Hill District Council (BHDC).

“Shafiullah and Kwe Shwe Hla illegally occupied around one thousand acres of Jhum land in Naikhongchhari mouza, Jaruliachhari mouza and

Sonaichhari mouza in Naikhongchhari upazila,” alleged Mong Yai Marma, headman of Jaruliachhari mouza.

“They grabbed our ancestral land in the name of tourism business,” he also said.

Bashing Chak, headman of Naikhongchhari mouza, said, “Persistent intimidation from the land grabbers forced the hapless villagers flee their homes... With threats on their lives, they [Chaks] didn’t dare to file any formal complaint with the local police station.”

When asked, Shafiullah denied any involvement in the eviction of the 15 Chak families. “We are working to flourish tourism in government khas land only,” he claimed.

Kwe Shwe Hla refused to make any comment over the allegation.

Last year, on October 20, a team from the civil aviation and tourism

grabbed hundreds of acres of Jhum land using our name, we will direct the local administration to take action against them.”

“No member of any small ethnic community will be evicted from their land if tourism flourishes there,” the minister also said.

Contacted, Shafiul Alam, additional deputy commissioner in Bandarban, said they did not get any letter from any ministry or from any other authorities regarding acquisition of land in Naikhongchhari for tourism purposes.

“This is absolutely unacceptable that police did not take any action just because no complaint was filed with them,” he added.

On December 5, 2019, locals handed over a memorandum to the Bandarban deputy commissioner, containing complaints to the prime minister



A traditional wooden mortar and remnants of a few houses in Shui Jaing Chak Para of Bandarban’s Naikhongchhari upazila.

PHOTO: SANJOY KUMAR BARUA

ministry, led by State Minister Mahbub Ali, visited the Shui Jaing Chak Para.

The state minister was accompanied by Secretary Mohibul Haque and Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation Chairman Ram Chandra Das.

When this correspondent reached State Minister Mahbub for his comment on the situation in Shui Jaing Chak Para, he said “We visited the area and recently we appointed a consultant for a feasibility study.”

Regarding the eviction of the 15 Chak families from the village, he said, “If Shafiullah and Kwe Shwe Hla

Press Myanmar

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no longer be “business as usual” with the perpetrators of genocide if the Myanmar government fails to comply with the ICJ order.

“The ICJ order to Myanmar to take concrete steps to prevent the genocide of Rohingyas is a landmark step to stop further atrocities against one of the world’s most persecuted people,” said Param-Preet Singh, associate international justice director at Human Rights Watch.

“The governments and UN bodies concerned should now weigh in to ensure that the order is enforced as the genocide case moves forward,” she said in a statement.

The ICJ at the Hague, Netherlands, has also ordered Myanmar to stop the crimes against Rohingyas and prevent the military or paramilitary forces from making a physical and mental harm of the ethnic minorities. It also ordered Myanmar to report on its implementation of the order in four months, and then every six months afterwards.

The order comes after The Gambia filed a case in November accusing Myanmar of violating UN Genocide Convention. Some 750,000 Rohingyas fled brutal military campaign in Rakhine to Bangladesh. An estimated 600,000 Rohingyas remain in Rakhine, but continue to face serious rights violations.

The HRW said the ICJ order does not prejudice the question of the court’s jurisdiction to deal with the merits of the case, the case’s admissibility before the court, or the merits of The Gambia’s allegation that Myanmar has violated provisions of the Genocide Convention. A case before the ICJ can take years to reach a resolution.

The ICJ provisional measures order is legally binding on the parties. The court’s provisional measures orders are automatically sent to the UN Security Council. Therefore, such an order will increase pressure on the council to take concrete action in Myanmar, HRW said.

For example, the Security Council could pass a resolution directing Myanmar to lift restrictions on Rohingyas’ freedom of movement, eliminate unnecessary restrictions on humanitarian access to Rakhine State, repeal discriminatory laws, and ban practices that limit Rohingyas access to education, healthcare, and livelihoods.

Thus far, the Security Council has not taken (significant) action on Myanmar, in part because of Russia and China’s apparent willingness to use their vetoes to shield the Myanmar’s government and military, HRW said.

“The ICJ order brings increased scrutiny of Myanmar’s horrific brutality against Rohingyas and raises the political cost of the UN Security Council’s weak response to the crisis so far,” Singh said.

“China and Russia should stop blocking the Security Council from taking action to protect Rohingyas.”

The HRW said the UN Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly could pass resolutions calling on Myanmar to comply with its terms. This could spur other countries to take action against Myanmar.

The Myanmar government cannot hide behind its powerful friends or the banner of sovereignty to escape its responsibilities under the Genocide Convention.”

“This is a major victory for Rohingyas everywhere,” said Matthew Smith, chief executive officer of Fortify Rights.

Fortify Rights encouraged members of the Myanmar military, state security forces, and the government to come forward with additional evidence of crimes against Rohingyas and others that could be used at the ICJ and in international prosecutions.

“It is now imperative that the international community apply sufficient pressure on Myanmar to comply with the International Court of Justice’s rulings and end its genocide of Rohingyas,” stated Simon Billenness, executive director of the International Campaign for the Rohingya and campaign director of No Business With Genocide.

“We urge governments to impose tough sanctions on the Myanmar military and its business empire. We further call on corporations to end any business relationships with companies owned or controlled by the Burmese [Myanmar] army. There can be no longer be “business as usual” with the perpetrators of genocide.”

The Asia Justice Coalition has urged members of the international community to unequivocally support the pursuit of justice for Rohingyas, and to impress upon Myanmar the legal obligation to comply with the order of the court.