



A Danish policeman plays with a migrant girl on the E45 freeway north of Padborg yesterday. Migrants, mainly from Syria and Iraq and hoping to get to Sweden by walking on the freeway, arrived yesterday morning in Padborg on a train from Germany and were placed at a school from where they had fled.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Concerns should

FROM PAGE 1
The "shrinking space" for the civil society, concerns over section 57 of the ICT Act, and freedom of religion had been the most pressing issues that came up in his discussions with human rights activists, journalists, academics and independent intellectuals in Bangladesh, he says in a statement released at a press conference at the Jatiya Press Club yesterday.

"While chiefly feeling under pressure from religious militants, some [civil society members] have also experienced friendly fire, as one interlocutor phrased it.

"Even civil society activists who in principle very much agree with the 'secular' political agenda of current government have expressed feelings of alienation and frustration," the UN special rapporteur said in the statement.

UN Resident Coordinator in Dhaka Robert Watkins was with him at the press conference.

On the section 57 of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Act, Bielefeldt said the application of the act is even much wider and the punishment threatened by far more draconian than those of the blasphemy law in the Criminal Code of Bangladesh.

"Although I could not find out any precise figures as to how often section 57 has been used to impose sanctions for hurting religious feelings or similar offences, this law undoubtedly has a chilling effect on civil society organisations, human rights activists and members of religious minority communities.

"It much contributes to the perception of shrinking space for frank public discourse," he stated.

Termining the act "a vague formulation" with scopes of arbitrary interpretation by the law enforcement agencies, Bielefeldt said, "I have taken note that section 57 of the ICT Act has become controversial also within state institutions, including the judiciary."

"Recent arrests of members of human rights organisations, which have long existed in Bangladesh, add to the perception of rapidly shrinking space, to the detriment of the two closely interlinked principles of secularism and democracy.

"In discussions with religious minority communities, 'indigenous' people and civil society organisations, I often sensed feelings of anxiety and insecurity."

He observed that such insecurity has different political, legal and social dimensions which may affect individuals and groups in various ways. "Insecurity of property claims, in particular relating to real estate, sometimes comes in tandem with fears for one's own or one's community's physical security in the face of rising religious extremism."

Observing that there has been a decline in the number of minority populations, particularly the Hindus, in Bangladesh, Bielefeldt said more needs to be done to give them a sense of security.

The Hindu population came down to 8 percent of the total population from 23 percent in 1971, according to the statement.

The Vested Property Act "caused many Hindu families to emigrate to India and other countries. The government has tried to combat this phenomenon through the 2001 'Vested Property Return Act' ... However, the implementation of this act seems to be faced with enormous problems ... At the same time, incidents of land grabbing at the expense of Hindus continue even today," he continued.

Responding to a question, he said freedom of religion is not just about minorities, rather it is a right held by all human beings.

"The Constitution of Bangladesh which enshrines the principle of secularism while at the same time proclaiming Islam as the official state religion gives rise to ambiguities that have a direct impact on human rights in the country, including the protection of religious minorities."

Viewing freedom of expression and freedom of religion as closely interlinked, Bielefeldt in the statement laid emphasis on protecting the internet activists and bloggers.

"Restrictive legislative and administrative measures, which currently seem to shrink the space for religious or political dissent and public discourse, even when enacted with the intention to defend secular democracy, may thus inadvertently erode the very principles which these measures are supposed to protect."

The UN special rapporteur noted that some of the measures established to preserve secularism seem to lead to the opposite result.

"For instance, a number of official statements on the recent murders of online activists were ambiguous. While condemning the threats and acts of violence, government representatives also admonished individuals expressing critical views on religion, asking them not to go 'too far' in their criticisms," Bielefeldt said at the press conference.

On the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), he says, "Much insecurity concerning real estate also exists in the CHT ... Legal insecurity of religious property, in combination with other factors, is a major reason underneath the feelings of vulnerability and insecurity still existing among the indigenous peoples in the CHT region ..."

"In the CHT, where the religious landscape has always markedly differed from that of the rest of Bangladesh, demographic changes have been even more pronounced, not least as a result of government-induced population transfer in the past," Bielefeldt added.

During his August 31-September 9 visit, Bielefeldt met various government officials and local authorities in Dhaka and Chittagong Hill Tracts. He also held meetings with representatives of religious and diplomatic communities, as well as with academicians, civil society organisations and the UN officials.

Fees not finalised

FROM PAGE 1
Same kind of balance would be maintained on the number of vehicles getting permission. It is not like that a large number of vehicles from a certain country would get priority, according to meeting sources.

During the two-day discussion, all the countries agreed that the fees would be uniform and the amount should not hamper the spirit of the connectivity initiatives.

Another official of the ministry said the routes were almost finalised.

"We have elaborately discussed all the issues relating to implementation of the motor vehicle agreement early next year," the official said, adding that the Asian Development Bank, which is facilitating the sub-regional connectivity, would refresh the two protocols and send that to the governments concerned.

"Everything will be finalised by December upon getting approval of the protocols by the respective governments," the official said.

There will be three trial runs of vehicles on three separate routes involving all the four nations.

Demo hits education

FROM PAGE 1
state-run colleges and different departments under the education ministry. BCS General Education Association, a platform for teachers and officials under the education cadre, will organise the programme protesting cancellation of the selection grade and time scale from the new scale.

However, students and guardians have expressed concern over disruption of academic activities. If the movement continued, students feared, they would face a severe session jam as they are still struggling to recover the time lost during the countrywide blockade by the BNP-led alliance in the first three months of the year.

"The government should immediately sit with the teachers and find a solution," said Gazi Morsalin, a parent whose daughter studies at Dhaka University.

"We don't want our children's future to be doomed for politics and movements. We want the prime minister's intervention immediately," he said.

Meanwhile, private university students have been agitating for withdrawal of the 7.5 percent VAT slapped on their tuition fees by the government. There was a clash yesterday between the students of East West University and police at Badda that left at least 35 people injured.

PUBLIC UNIVERSITY TEACHERS
On Tuesday, teachers of all 37 public universities, under the banner of Federation of Bangladesh University Teachers' Association (FBUTA), refrained from work in protest at the "discrepancies" in the eighth national pay scale. They said they were expecting a separate pay structure that remained unheeded.

After Muhith remarked on their movement, there was an upsurge of protest.

In a press statement issued yesterday, the FBUTA, terming the minister's remark "discourteous", urged him to withdraw his comment in 24 hours and seek an unconditional apology.

They hoped that the government will sit with them soon to fulfil their demands. If their four-point demand is not met, they will go for nonstop stoppage, they threatened.

Their four-point demand includes formation of an independent pay scale for public university teachers, immediate revision of the 8th national pay scale, and keeping senior professor and senior secretaries at an equal level.

At Jahangirnagar University (JU), Jagannath University and Jatiyo Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University in Mymensingh, teachers observed daylong stoppages.

The teachers' association of Agriculture University in Mymensingh announced that its members will not attend any class and conduct any test for an indefinite period to realise their demand for a separate pay structure.

The association of Comilla University announced that teachers there will refrain from class, examination and other works for five days till September 13.

Teachers formed human chains at Rajshahi University and Chittagong University, demanding immediate withdrawal of the finance minister's remarks.

Prof Ananda Kumar Saha, president of Rajshahi University Teachers' Association, said, "He [Muhith] must apologise to the university teachers for such a remark."

At the demonstration of Chittagong University, Teachers Association General Secretary Kazi SM Khasrul Alam Quddusi demanded the removal of Muhith from the cabinet for his

"disgraceful comment".

He said the minister's irresponsible comments resulted from his lack of knowledge about the universities, teachers and academic activities.

SUST TEACHERS
The situation is different at Sylhet Shahjalal University of Science and Technology in Sylhet.

A section of teachers under the banner of Mahan Muktiyuddher Chetona Udbuddho Shikhok Brindo has been demonstrating there for removal of the university's Vice-chancellor Prof Aminul Haque Bhuiyan for his alleged role in some irregularities and his alleged misbehaviour with some teachers.

But things worsened when Chhatra League activists allegedly swooped on them on August 30, assaulting several teachers including Prof Yasmeen Haque.

Yesterday, the teachers observed a token hunger strike. They will observe a daylong stoppage today.

COLLEGE TEACHERS
Selim Ullah Khandakar, general secretary of BCS General Education Association, said they will observe the daylong stoppage in all the government colleges protesting exclusion of the selection grade and time scale.

He said officials of the education cadre usually remain in the same position for a long time, in some cases for 15 to 20 years, and therefore, the selection grade and time scale was a kind of compensation for that.

"Now we are deprived of the opportunity," he said.

PRIMARY TEACHERS
Teachers of government primary schools have been staging protests too.

Primary headmasters said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in 2013 had announced that the post of public primary school headmaster was upgraded from the third to the second class gazetted officials, but they did not get the salaries commensurate with their promotion.

However, the headmasters were told by the primary ministry in August last year that they would remain in the status of non-gazetted officials.

They protested the move and have been holding different protest programmes since then.

Meanwhile, teachers of newly nationalised primary schools are also staging agitations. They have pressed a 10-point demand including publishing a gazette of the schools and repairing the dilapidated schools.

On September 5, they announced that they would go for tougher protest programmes in front of the office of Upazila Nirbahi Officers across the country from October 1 if their demands were not met.

[Our university correspondents from Jahangirnagar, Rajshahi and Chittagong, and reporters from Mymensingh and Moulvibazar contributed to the report.]

THAILAND ASKS
FROM PAGE 1
Shrine," said Chakthip who will become police chief next month.

A Reuters report yesterday said Inspector General of Police AKM Shahidul Hoque told the agency he was unaware of the new development.

Assistant Inspector General (Media) Nazrul Islam told The Daily Star that he could not immediately confirm whether any help was sought through Interpol. "Whenever any cooperation is sought from Interpol we take it seriously and take legal action."

Being informed about The Nation report, Director Intelligence wing of Rab Lt Col Abul Kalam Azad told The Daily Star, "We will take the matter seriously and will obviously look into it."

Bus, auto fare

FROM PAGE 16
5 in local bus service [No 22] for travelling from Paltan intersection to Farmgate. But now they are charging Tk 10."

Masud Rahman, who travels from Rampura to Gulistan daily, said most of the bus staff on this route are often charging Tk 12 instead of existing Tk 7-8.

"If the passengers collectively protest against extra fare, they take the existing fare," he added.

Shajahan Mollah used to travel from Mohammadpur to Matsya Bhaban intersection at Tk 10 in sitting service buses. Those operators are now charging Tk 15 for the same distance.

"If anyone protests against it, the bus staff become aggressive and ask us to leave. As there is huge shortage of public transport in Dhaka city, we are compelled to pay additional fare," Shajahan said.

Bangladesh Sarak Paribahan Malik Samity Secretary General Khandaker Enayet Ullah denied charging additional fare. He said they would strictly direct all bus owners in Dhaka city not to charge extra fare until the government makes an announcement.

Following gas price hike, Obaidul Quader and road transport leaders repeatedly said bus fare would not increase until the government decided about it.

A fare re-fixing committee headed by the chairman of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) has proposed to increase bus fare by up to 8 percent in Dhaka city, while the bus owners demand minimum 10 percent hike.

As per the existing fare rate, passengers pay Tk 1.5 (minibus) and Tk 1.6 (bus) for travelling per kilometre in the two metropolises.

Besides, another fare re-fixing committee has proposed to increase CNG-run auto rickshaws fare by up to 37 percent.

SLEEP SCIENTISTS
FROM PAGE 16
British Science Festival in Bradford.

Dr Paul Kelley said that adolescents effectively lose up to two hours of sleep per day, which is "a huge society issue".

He and colleagues from Oxford are leading a project called Teensleep, which is currently recruiting 100 schools from around the UK to take part in what Dr Kelley called "the world's largest randomised control trial", due to commence in 2016.

Our body clock is a daily cycle which drives the regular rise and fall of certain genes as well as the ebb and flow of our cognitive performance, our metabolism and so on.

For much of our lives - and especially in adolescence - there is a mismatch between this rhythm and the typical working day. In fact, Dr Kelley said, the body clock of most people between age 10 and 55 is not well suited to rising early.

"Most people wake up to alarms, because they don't naturally wake up at the time when they have to get up and go to work.

"So we've got a sleep deprived society - it's just that this age group, say 14-24 in particular, is more deprived than any other sector."

Dr Kelley and his colleagues, including well-known Oxford sleep researcher Prof Russell Foster, argue that school days should start at 10:00 and university at 11:00, to better match the circadian rhythms of adolescents and young adults.

Re-registration

FROM PAGE 16
temporarily, she said, adding that the SIMs would be re-activated later following due procedures.

Tarana said a list of illegal SIMs would be handed over to the home ministry after the end of the three-month period.

Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) Chairman Sunil Kanti Bose said they had already initiated an online process for verification of SIMs.

In 2008, the BTRC initiated a re-registration process but it was not successful as there was no national identification (NID) database at the time. But now the Election Commission (EC) has an NID database.

Bose said they had already initiated a process to allow the mobile phone operators to verify information from the NID database.

There are 12.87 crore mobile subscribers in the country, according to latest statistics from the BTRC, the telecom regulator.

JSD PROPOSES
FROM PAGE 16
Referring to the JP chief's remark, Ambia said those who do not believe in "Joy Bangla" should be dropped from the cabinet, sources said.

"Joy Bangla" is the slogan of country's Liberation War and those who don't believe in it also do not believe in the country's independence, he added.

National Awami Party (NAP), Ganatantri Party, Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (BSD) and a minister from Awami League also supported the proposal, sources said.

They also viewed that their opinion should be heard by the prime minister as she has the authority to decide on this matter.

Asked about JSD's proposal, JP Secretary General Ziauddin Ahmed Bablu told The Daily Star that his party chairman said "Joy Bangla" was the slogan of Independence and later AL had made the slogan its own.

"If JSD had made the proposal we have no headache about this ... it's immaterial," he said.

At the meeting, left allies of Awami League expressed concern over reported repression over minority community and grabbing of their land. They demanded security for the minorities, sources said.

The alliance yesterday formed a cell to look into the problems of the minority community.

AN ADVENTURE INDEED
FROM PAGE 16
In the inaugural programme, Shamim Osman reminded all that the park was not anybody's paternal property. Talk about irony!

At least he could have agreed that the name of the park was right for him.

The way he "inaugurated" the park looks bizarre. It sets a bad precedence. This is also a direct and unwanted interference in the functions of the city corporation.

A day before, on Sunday, Shamim's older brother Selim Osman, who is an MP of the main opposition Jatiya Party in the Narayanganj area, warned Ivy of intensifying agitation against her if she did not "surrender."

Both the Osman brothers accused her of corruption in construction of the park.

On Sunday, Shamim Osman also tarred and feathered Ivy while speaking at a protest rally organised by "Conscious Citizen Committee" in the city. This committee is run by close aides and followers of the Osman siblings.

A symbolic court was also set up in the middle of Bangabandhu road in the city to hold "trial" of Mayor Ivy.

This is politics as usual in Narayanganj. Shamim and Ivy have wrangled on different issues on some occasions.

Some people however smell a rat. In their views, the Osman brothers have the next city election in their minds. That is why they have ramped up the anti-Ivy actions.

In the first election of the NCC in October 2011, Shamim Osman, a controversial politician, faced a humiliating defeat to Ivy by a margin of more than one lakh votes. His bid to become the city father failed miserably.

The victory of Ivy appeared as a challenge to the primacy of the Osman family in local politics.

The one-sided parliamentary election held on January 5, 2014 appeared as a blessing for the Osman family and others loyal to them. Shamim Osman and Nasim Osman were elected uncontested MPs from two seats in Narayanganj. They have started regaining their control over the local administration since becoming MPs. After the death of Nasim Osman, his older brother Selim Osman was elected in a by-election.

The next election to NCC is likely middle of next year. Again, Ivy may appear as the main challenger to the Osman siblings.

The changing situation may pose major hurdles for Ivy.

Ivy, a physician, had earlier migrated to New Zealand, but returned and got involved in Awami League politics. In 2003 she was elected mayor of Narayanganj municipality which was later upgraded to City Corporation.

The current maneuvers have encouraged speculations about the future of Narayanganj's politics.

Will Ivy contest the next mayoral polls or say good bye to dirty politics?

SECOND WAVE OF MIGRANTS EYE EUROPE
AFP, Kabul
Clutching prayer beads and a Taliban death threat, Mirwais joins a queue outside Kabul's passport office, potentially about a second wave of migrants attempting perilous journeys to Europe, inspired by images of refugees being welcomed.

Afghans are the second largest migrant group -- behind Syrians -- arriving in Europe, where authorities from the Mediterranean to the Baltic Sea are struggling to cope with the continent's worst refugee crisis since World War II.