

Myanmar Muslims on trial in case of 90 'illegal' cows

AFP, Yangon

Three Muslim men went on trial in Myanmar yesterday for illegally importing nearly 100 cows that have spent the last month under police protection, in a case Islamic leaders say targets their religion.

The cows were intended to be ritually slaughtered for the Islamic festival of Eid al-Adha last month, an event that has become a flashpoint for Myanmar's Buddhist nationalists.

Hardline monks, including fire-brand Wirathu from the Ma Ba Tha movement, have rallied against the practice and pressured local authorities to ban it.

Police took possession of 92 cattle last month when a local monk, Pa Mouk Kha, complained they had been brought into the country illegally.

They have been keeping the animals in a football ground north of Yangon for just under a month at a cost of some \$300 a day -- spending more than \$8,000 so far. Two cows have since died.

The monks have drawn derision from social media users, who have called the case a waste of public resources in a country where one in four lives below the poverty line.

Yesterday, the three defendants appeared before the court, charged with illegal trading for allegedly importing the cows without the proper paperwork.

One of them, Myo Myint, in his 60s, has heart disease and had to be supported by police as he approached the courtroom.

His son, Ye Zarni Tun We, said he was "sure" the animals were bought in Myanmar, adding: "We have documents for purchasing the cows."

The men were remanded in custody until their next hearing, while police are still looking for more than 30 other people linked to the case. The cows will soon be auctioned off.

Kyaw Nyein, leader of local Muslim group Ulama Islam, said the case amounted to religious persecution.

"They did not act illegally," he told AFP. "I am not sure whether they technically broke the rules or not, but I think this case is concerned with religious affairs."

Islamophobic sentiment has grown in Myanmar, especially since deadly communal violence erupted between Buddhists and stateless Rohingya Muslims in western Rakhine state in 2012.

Tensions flared on Sunday when nine police officers were killed in a series of attacks on three border posts, which local officials said were carried out by Rohingyas.

Burmese Muslims also complain of being treated as second-class citizens in their own country, told they are foreigners and legally restricted from marrying Buddhist women.

Durga Puja

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faith, goddess Durga descends on the earth from heaven to annihilate evil forces and establish peace and harmony.

Meanwhile, President Abdul Hamid will host a reception on the occasion at 11:30am today at the Bangabhaban.

Govt to constitute

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The cabinet gave the go-ahead to Bangladesh Institute of Nuclear Agriculture (BINA) Research Law-2016 that aims to make the organisation more dynamic and time-befitting.

Shafiqul said under the proposed law, there would be an advisory council, headed by the agriculture minister, and a board of directors at the BINA. The council would guide the board by giving it advice and policy support occasionally.

The cabinet also approved The International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (icddr;b) Act-2016 and a proposal to ratify the treaty between the governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar on the demarcation of the land section of the boundary north of the Naaf river.

The draft of the proposed bilateral framework agreement on the productivity assistance development between Bangladesh and China was endorsed by the cabinet. The deal is likely to be signed during the upcoming visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping to Bangladesh.

The agreement would help increase the capacity and productivity of the country's industrial sector, said the cabinet secretary.

"We will be able to learn from China through transfer of technology," he added.

The third quarterly (July-September) report of 2016 on the implementation of decisions taken by the cabinet was placed at yesterday's meeting. According to the report, 64.29 percent of cabinet's decisions have been implemented during this period, up from 57.69 percent during the same period in last year.

Putin in Turkey to push energy deals

AFP, Istanbul

Russian President Vladimir Putin visited Turkey yesterday for talks with counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan, pushing forward ambitious joint energy projects as the two sides try to overcome a crisis in ties.

Only a few months ago, Putin and Erdogan were exchanging acrimonious accusations over Syria.

But the pair are expected to reaffirm their commitment to the planned TurkStream gas pipeline to pump Russian gas under the Black Sea to Europe, and the Russian construction of Turkey's first nuclear power station.

The meeting in Istanbul between the two post-imperial strongmen will be their third encounter since their governments agreed in June to normalise ties.

Turkey shot down of a Russian warplane over Syria in November 2015, sparking their worst crisis in ties since the Cold War.

Economic sanctions imposed by Russia -- now gradually being lifted -- have severely dented trade. And a ban on charter flights to Turkey, which is also now over, reduced the usually substantial flow of Russian tourists to a trickle.

Putin and Erdogan will meet on the opening day of the World Energy Congress, which brings together players across the energy sector and is a sign

of Turkey's determination to be a global hub despite a traumatic year of repeated terror attacks and a failed coup.

Russia and Turkey remain at odds over the Syria conflict, with Moscow a key backer of the regime of President Bashar al-Assad but Turkey making his exit from power its key strategic aim.

Yet Turkey, which just months ago was loudly accusing Russia of war crimes in Syria, has been remarkably tight-lipped over the Syrian regime onslaught on rebel-held areas of Aleppo in recent weeks, as ties with Moscow have tentatively improved.

Analysts have long noted an ability on the part of Moscow and Ankara to show pragmatism in times of good relations and push disputes to one side, concentrating on strategic cooperation that includes a goal to reach annual bilateral trade of \$100 billion.

Andrew Neff, principal analyst for the CIS and eastern Europe at IHS Energy, said that while it may take more time for relations to recover, Turkey and Russia have decided to focus on areas where they can cooperate.

"Something more along the lines of a healing process has begun with both sides eager to put the ugliness of the past 10 months behind them, aiming to focus on areas like energy where they have mutual interests in cooperation," he told AFP.

A new horizon

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He told The Daily Star that the region's weather and soil have been found to be suitable to malta production.

After only two years Motiur was able to harvest 800 malta, which he sold for Tk 16,000. The locally-produced maltas are of a bright yellow colour, large and very sweet, which appealed to customers. "Customers buy my maltas direct," explains Motiur. "I cannot satisfy their demand."

In such circumstances he extended the orchard last year to cover an additional six bighas, with six hundred more saplings. "I count on one to two hundred maltas per tree," he says, estimating this year's harvest. "About 15,000 maltas will be produced in this orchard."

He also makes a good income from sapling production, with 25,000 saplings produced to be sold from Tk 250 to Tk 400 each. "The investment has been Tk 8 lakhs," he says. "I hope through malta and sapling sales to realise Tk 20 lakhs." Motiur estimates a further 10,000 saplings will be ready for sale within two months.

In part, Motiur's saplings are in demand due to his own success as an orchardist. Following a good crop last year several other farmers in the area have developed an interest in establishing orchards of their own.

"I am planting malta orchards on

my four bighas at Babudaying area in sadar upazila and on my sixty bighas in Gomostapur upazila," says amateur farmer Mahbubur Rahman, who sees value in following Motiur's lead.

In total, 150 bighas in the district are being transformed into malta orchards.

In addition to its sweet taste, Motiur's malta crop does not rely on chemical pesticides and fungicides. Rather, the driver-turned-farmer utilises eco-friendly pheromone traps and bagging to protect his crop from fruit flies and fungal spotting.

"Such methods ensure a good crop of high quality," says principal scientific officer of the Regional Horticulture Research Station, Dr Muhammad Hamim Reza. "As well as making the maltas spotless, physical protection against scratches and scarring is also achieved."

As a result of his pioneering efforts, Motiur received a tree-planting award from the Prime Minister on 1 September this year.

Motiur believes maltas have a good future in Chapainawabganj. "I expect the area devoted to orchards and the number of trees will increase over the next five years or so, due to the demand and the proven quality of the produce." He urges concerned authorities to facilitate easy bank loan facilities for orchard expansion.

Two days gone

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Another Rab operation left two others dead in Tangail town.

Besides, the alleged "Neo JMB" financier died of his injuries after he jumped off the fourth floor of a building to evade arrest by Rab in Ashulia.

In a seized passport, he was named Abdur Rahman from Kushkhali in Satkhira Sadar. Rab sent the passport number to the Department of Passport for verification.

When Satkhira police went to verify his identity, they didn't find anyone named Abdur Rahman in the address mentioned in the passport.

Law enforcers have detained his wife Shahhaj Akhter Rumi, 27. She is on a 10-day remand in two cases filed following the Ashulia raid.

Some neighbours of his in-laws' in Chandoria village of Pirganj in Takhurgaon identified him as Muktarul Islam after seeing his photo in the media.

Rumi left her house after HSC about eight years ago as her family put pressure on her for marriage, her mother Sopura Khatun told The Daily Star yesterday.

She came to Dhaka and took a job at a garment factory and married a co-worker, according to her mother.

Months after their marriage, the couple went to the village but her parents didn't accept them, said her younger sister Beli Akhter.

During this visit, Rumi introduced her husband as Muktarul from Bogra, neighbours said.

But family members could not confirm their daughter-in-law's name or address as they had long been out of contact with Rumi and her husband.

From the photo in the media, they only could say that the man was Rumi's husband.

About the two killed in Lebu Bagan, Rab officials yesterday told our Gazipur correspondent that they were yet to be sure about their identities though they initially found two names through tenants' information submitted to police by the houseowner.

Tulip

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after a shadow cabinet shake-up by Corbyn following his re-election as the Labour leader.

Tulip is the daughter of Sheikh Rehana, younger daughter of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and a niece of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

She was elected an MP in last year's election from Hampstead and Kilburn, the top of the 10 most contested seats in London. She bagged 23,977 votes against her Conservative counterpart Simon Marcus' 22,839.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday offered her heartfelt congratulations to Tulip on her induction into the shadow cabinet.

In a message, she wished success of Tulip, PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim told BSS.

Born in Mitcham, London in 1982, Tulip took two master's degrees -- one in English literature and another in politics, policy and government -- from King's College London.

She was a former councillor in Regent's Park and a cabinet member for culture and communities in Camden Council, according to Wikipedia.

Tulip, who became the first Bangalee woman councillor in Camden Council in May 2010, first contested the parliamentary polls last year.

Earlier, Rushanara Ali, the first British lawmaker with roots in Bangladesh, served as the shadow minister of international development and education.

The debut of Rushanara, who hail from Biswanath in Sylhet, in the House of Commons was made through the previous UK polls in 2010. The Oxford-educated Rushanara won that election with a margin of around 12,000 votes.

With her victory, she entered the UK parliament as the first Bangladesh-origin MP. She retained her seat from East London's Bethnal Green and Bow constituency with a majority of 24,317 votes.

Another Bangladesh-origin candidate Rupa Huq, also from Labour Party, was elected in last year's UK general elections. She was elected from Ealing Central and Acton constituency by bagging 22,002 votes.

Rupa is a senior lecturer at the sociology department of the Kingston University. Her ancestral home is in Pabna.

For the first time in the history of Britain, 11 Bangladesh-origin candidates vied for seats in the House of Commons through the last election. Seven candidates were nominated by the main opposition Labour Party, while three from Liberal Democrats and one from the Conservative Party.

Of them, Tulip, Rushanara and Rupa, who were described as "three daughters" of Bangladesh, became victorious.

New mega city

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"Cairo Capital is a momentous endeavour to build national spirit, foster consensus, provide for long-term sustainable growth," said the project website. "(The) new city will create more places to live, work and visit."

The 700 square kilometre city to be constructed in the desert to the East of Cairo would become the new seat of government, and it is presented as a far grander vision than the current capital.

Proposals for the city include housing for five million people, over 1,000 mosques, smart villages, industrial zones, a 5,000-seat conference centre, and the world's largest park.

Interest in the project has been brisk. An Indian company is reportedly planning a vast medical centre and university, while a Saudi firm intends to build a 12.6 hectare mosque and Islamic museum.

Construction is already under way. According to Egypt's Al-Ahram newspaper, engineers have begun work on infrastructure including bridges and 210 kilometres of roads.

The first phase of the project will see government ministries and residential blocks rise from the sand. This phase could be complete within five years, with the first residents moving in.

Despite the optimism from officials, there are concerns that the project will encounter familiar problems. Egypt has already constructed several satellite towns around Cairo, which have registered low occupancy despite high investment.

Bogra roof

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inspector of fire service and civil defense, Bogra, said several workers were working at the construction site of the nine-storey building of TMSS Refayattullah Community Medical College and Hospital. Suddenly, a portion of the roof of the corridor, which connects two buildings, collapsed on the workers around 6:20pm.

He said after an hour-long hectic effort, they rescued the victims and admitted them to the Refayattullah community medical college hospital. Of the injured, condition of two or three was critical.

Danger lurks in lifts

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A cabin-pulling cable is four to eight times stronger than its actual requirement. An auto-device lock is supposed to be incorporated to stop the cabin from falling through the shaft, he said.

Building owners should involve technical professionals in mechanical equipment installation and maintenance, Prof Ali added.

He stressed the need for supervision by professionals on elevator commissioning, citing that the authorities of Bangladesh Bank and the 37-storey City Centre involved Buet professionals during installation and for re-checking the giant elevators at those buildings.

Kazi Golam Nasir, chief architect at the Department of Architecture, said: "An elevator is not supposed to crash the way it happened at the Uttara shopping mall if the maintenance and safety checks are done regularly."

Generally, lifts are installed casually. In some cases, unscrupulous businessmen overstate lifts' capacity to make some extra money, said Nasir, also a former authorised officer (building approval officer) of Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk).

Referring to his recent visit to New York, he said building authorities there carry out periodic checks of a building to ensure safety.

It is high time for Bangladesh to designate an authority to look after mechanical, electrical and structural safety of buildings, Nasir observed.

During a recent visit to Aziz Cooperative Super Market in the capital's Shabbagh, this newspaper found that a lift at the rear end of the market was carrying only four people.

"The condition of the lift is very appalling. We often hear complaints about it," a salesman at the market told The Daily Star.

Anwar Hossain, office secretary of the market, said the lift was used for residential apartments from the fifth floor upwards.

AK Mohammad Ali, president of Aziz Cooperative Flat Owners' Association, said they had already taken steps to replace it.

M Abu Sadeque, director at the House Building and Research Institute, said all mechanical and electrical safety measures for a building were covered by the Bangladesh National Building Code (BNBC).

So, no elevator crash is supposed to occur if one goes by the building code.

On the one hand, a very few people ensure routine inspection of a building's safety features and there is a shortage of qualified technical personnel to get the job done properly, he said.

Had there been a building regulatory authority in place as suggested in

the BNBC, it would have ensured overall building safety, Sadeque said, adding that the government was yet to form such an authority despite a High Court order in this regard.

Toufiq M Seraj, managing director of Sheltech, a leading real estate company, said building owners usually avoid maintenance of lifts, electric generators and electric sub-stations to save some money, although such maintenance is crucial for safety of life and property.

It is essential to install heavy-duty lifts at commercial establishments like shopping malls, hotels, hospitals and universities so that they can carry higher loads and move frequently.

The elevators procured in Bangladesh are mostly manufactured in China, Thailand and Malaysia. Those are originally of US and European brands like Otis, Mitsubishi, Schindler, Hitachi and Stiltz that ensure a fairly high standard of quality.

Dwijendra Nath Saha, general manager of Creative Engineers Limited that installs 100 to 150 lifts a year, said "poor quality" of lifts is also a major reason for accidents.

Many lesser known companies install "poor quality" lifts, taking advantage of building owners' unawareness about safety and other issues, he mentioned.

"These companies offer lesser prices as they do not provide some equipment, including emergency catching device that ensure safety. But building owners cannot detect it due to lack of knowledge," Dwijendra said.

In different countries, he said there is an authority that inspects lifts after installation. "But we have no such authority here."

Shariar Emon, maintenance and commissioning engineer of lift, elevator and escalator supplier Maan Bangladesh Ltd, emphasised on proper maintenance of elevators.

He said his company provides one year free maintenance service after installation of a lift. Afterwards, Tk 3,000 is charged monthly for servicing of a lift in a six-storey building.

Emon said the lifespan of their lifts is 20 years and after that period, all mechanical items are needed to be replaced. However, lifespan of lifts often varies from one company to another.

Minister

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open to bring the minister out to safety, the fire official said, adding that without conducting a thorough investigation he could not throw any further light on why the elevator could have become jammed.

Clinton prevails

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A CNN/ORC survey of debate watchers put her 57-34 up while a YouGov snap poll put her margin of victory closer at 47-42.

'ABUSE OF POWER'

President Barack Obama's former attorney general, Eric Holder, led the broad condemnation of Trump's threat, as critics painted him as a dictator in the making.

"In the USA we do not threaten to jail political opponents. @realDonaldTrump said he would. He is promising to abuse the power of the office," Holder said in a tweet.

A number of fellow Republicans also tarred Trump as undemocratic.

"Winning candidates don't threaten to put opponents in jail," said former George W Bush White House spokesman Ari Fleischer.

The debate's opening minutes were tense, with Trump slinging mud even at the two moderators, whom he accused of bias -- it was "one against three" he said -- between a continuous series of interruptions.

Clinton, 68, largely refused to take the bait, opting to adhere to advice from First Lady Michelle Obama: "When they go low, you go high."

"This is not an ordinary time and this is not an ordinary election," she said, appealing directly to voters.

But, as in the first debate, she also laid a series of traps for Trump, prodding him toward admitting he had not paid federal income tax in around two decades.

By accusing Russia of trying to tilt the 2016 presidential election in Trump's favour with a series of email hacks, Clinton forced her rival to contradict the intelligence community, which has also fingered Moscow.

"She doesn't know if it's the Russians doing the hacking. Maybe there is no hacking," he said.

END GAME

Trump faces a make-or-break moment after his crude boasts, which he made in 2005 and which became public in a video Friday, as streams of Republicans have retracted their support for his campaign.

With a campaign based on earning free television air time and little ground game, Trump is dependent on the Republican Party machinery to get

out the vote.

The party leadership had been deeply angered by Trump's misogynistic remarks, and his own running mate Mike Pence said they were indefensible.

But late Sunday Pence tweeted congratulations to Trump on his "big debate win" and said he was "proud" to stand with him.

In an extraordinary step aimed at reversing the tide of public opinion, Trump had convened a press event just minutes before the debate that included several women who accuse Bill Clinton of sexual harassment and rape -- later invited to attend the debate.

Introduced by Trump as "very courageous women," the speakers included Paula Jones, a former government employee in Arkansas who sued Bill Clinton for sexual harassment, and Juanita Broaddrick, also of Arkansas, who claims that Clinton raped her in 1978.

But Trump needs a dramatic boost if he is to claw back ground against Clinton, who has surged in the polls since their first debate on September 26.

Larry Sabato, who heads the Center for Politics at University of Virginia, tweeted that "Trump has done well enough to stop GOP bleeding."

But Dante Scala, political science professor at the University of New Hampshire, said he doubts Trump can recover.

"I didn't see enough this evening to turn things around," Scala told AFP.

"The news of the last 48 hours will continue to settle into voters' minds and I'm not sure this debate will be enough in itself to change the trajectory of the race."

Steven Smith, a political science professor at Washington University, said this was Trump showing his awareness of a difficult juncture.

"He was the old Donald Trump, he sounded like the Trump of the mid-winter and spring primaries, and I think this was an effort to consolidate the base, to rally the troops, to stem the bleeding and to prevent his candidacy from unravelling all together," Smith said.

Clinton is "ahead in the polls and she probably did herself no damage tonight."