

Two-year jail for cruelty to animals

Cabinet okays draft law

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The cabinet yesterday approved a draft law increasing punishment for killing or badly hurting an animal.

As per the proposed law, any person committing such crimes would have to face two years' imprisonment or Tk 50,000 fine or both.

Under the existing Cruelty to Animals Act, 1920 the punishment has been six months' imprisonment or Tk 200 fine or both.

According to the draft law titled "The Animal Welfare Act, 2016," showing unnecessary cruelty to animals, killing animals or behaving cruelly with them or forcing them to do extra hard work would be considered as punishable offences.

Approval of the draft law came at the weekly cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at Bangladesh Secretariat.

Briefing reporters after the meeting, Cabinet Secretary Mohammad Shafiu Alam said the proposed law had been drafted as the existing law was outdated.

He said the definition of animals

has been specified in the draft law. All vertebrates except human being including domestic and pet animals would come under the purview of the law, he added.

The draft law proposes six months' imprisonment or Tk 10,000 as fine or both for cruel or heartless behaviour or for any unnecessary harmful behaviour to animals, he said.

Alam further said the director general of the Department of Veterinary or his or her authorised officer or any police personnel holding the post not below a sub-inspector could file a case against any person committing such offenses.

He added production and reproduction of pet animals and their management would have to be animal friendly and registered with the concerned department.

The cabinet also approved Bangladesh Employees Welfare Board (amendment) Act, 2017, Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre Act, 2016 and the Child (Amendment) Act, 2017.



President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina stand in solemn silence after placing wreaths at the Central Shaheed Minar in the wee hours today on the occasion of Amar Ekushey and the International Mother Language Day.

PHOTO: PID

1971 GENOCIDE PM blasts Pakistan for spreading false info

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday blasted Pakistan for spreading false and fabricated information about genocide committed during the Liberation War in 1971.

"Recently, it has been seen that Pakistan's conspiracy against Bangladesh is going on. They have published a book where they used captions under the pictures of genocide saying that freedom fighters had committed it. This propaganda is not acceptable to anyone," she said.

The PM was addressing a function marking the distribution of the Ekushey Padak, 2017, organised by the cultural affairs ministry at Osmani Memorial Auditorium.

A book titled "Creation of Bangladesh: Myths Exploded", authored by Junaid Ahmad and published in Pakistan, has been handed over to the Bangladesh High Commission in Pakistan which contained some false and fabricated information regarding genocide, number of martyrs and torture of

women by the Pakistani army.

Hasina reiterated her pledge to declare March 25 as the Genocide Day in the country and persuade all to observe the day internationally as the Pakistan occupation forces on that day in 1971 carried out one of the worst genocide in history against the unarmed people of Bangladesh.

She said BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia expressed doubt whether three million people were killed by the Pakistani force. "This number is not right," the PM quoted Khaleda as saying.

"What can be more shameful than this?.. I don't know whether there is any link between the Pakistani propaganda and the statement of Khaleda Zia."

The PM said there is no doubt that genocide was committed during the Liberation War and it was carried out by the Pakistani occupation forces. "Raising questions about the genocide and number of martyrs is very disgraceful."

Congratulating the Ekushey Padak winners, Hasina hoped the award

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35TH BCS VACANT POSTS

General candidates to fill priority quota posts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The cabinet yesterday approved a proposal for filling the vacant BCS posts of priority quotas, including freedom fighter's quota, from the merit list of general candidates, subject to unavailability of eligible candidates.

Under the proposal, the vacant reserved posts for dependents of freedom fighters, females and small ethnic minorities of the 35th Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) exams would be filled after adding those to the vacant posts of respective cadres in the 36th BCS, Cabinet Secretary Mohammad Shafiu Alam told reporters after the weekly cabinet meeting at the Secretariat.

Around 338 reserved posts under the freedom fighter, female and small ethnic minority quotas of the 35th BCS remain vacant which would be filled from the merit lists of general candidates of the 36th BCS exams, he added.

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Homage

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the president. They stood in solemn silence for some time as a mark of profound respect to the memories of the language heroes.

The premier was followed by the Speaker and Deputy Speaker, mayors of Dhaka north and south city corporation, chief whip and whips of parliament. After them, the Opposition Leader in parliament, chiefs of the three services and leaders of different political parties paid their homage.

Flanked by cabinet members and senior party leaders, Hasina, also the president of Bangladesh Awami League, placed another wreath at the Shaheed Minar on behalf of the party.

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia along with party leaders placed wreaths at the Central Shaheed Minar around 1:30am.

Later on, the Shaheed Minar was opened to the public. Hundreds of people walked barefoot to it for paying tribute to the martyrs for their supreme sacrifices.

With Bangladesh, 193 countries across the globe will observe this day, as the Unesco declared it the International Mother Language Day in 1999.

On this day in 1952, students and people from all walks of life took to the streets in Dhaka to protest the then Pakistan government's refusal to recognise Bangla as one of the state

languages and imposition of Urdu as the only official language of Pakistan.

Salam, Barkat, Rafiq, Shafiq, Jabbar and a few others were killed when police opened fire on their procession.

Pakistan government was ultimately compelled to include an article in the country's constitution on February 29, 1956 that declared, "The state languages of Pakistan shall be Urdu and Bengali."

To mark the day, the Central Shaheed Minar and its adjacent areas on Dhaka University campus wore a colourful look with street paintings and graffiti with Bangla alphabets and verses about mother languages on the walls.

Today is a public holiday. The national flag will be hoisted at half-mast in all educational institutions and government, semi-government and autonomous offices to show respect to the language martyrs.

The president, the PM, the opposition leader, the BNP chairperson and leaders of other political parties issued separate messages on the day.

Abdul Hamid in his message said being a source of ceaseless inspiration, Amar Ekushey had inspired the nation to establish a sovereign state through a nine-month struggle under the far-sighted and charismatic leadership of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, UNB adds.

20 hurt in AL infighting

A CORRESPONDENT, Magura

At least 20 people, including three policemen, were injured as two groups of Awami League activists clashed in Mohammadpur upazila of Magura over establishing supremacy in the area yesterday.

Some 20-25 houses were also vandalised during the clash in Balidia Dakkhinpara village, said police.

Locals said there had been a long-standing conflict between Mofizur Rahman Mina, general secretary of Balidia union unit AL and also former chairman of the union, and former BNP leader Yunus Ali Sarder, who later joined the AL, for establishing dominance in the area.

Yesterday morning, some supporters of Mina beat up Rebeka, daughter of Yusuf Mollah, who is a supporter of Yunus. They also ransacked Rebeka's house.

After the incident, followers of the two groups, equipped with sharp weapons and sticks, attacked each other around 10:00am.

The injured were admitted to different hospitals.

Tariqul Islam, additional superintendent of Magura police, said police opened fire and lobbed teargas canisters to bring the situation under control.

He said 20-21 people, including three policemen, were wounded in the clash and 20-25 houses were also vandalised.

The police official said additional policemen were deployed in the area to avoid any untoward incident.

Police also detained six people for their alleged involvement in the clash.

Schoolteacher beaten up again

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

A schoolteacher was beaten up again by criminals over the formation of school managing committee when he was going to school in Lalmonirhat's Kaligonj yesterday.

The teacher, Indrajit Adhikary, 40, is the assistant headmaster of Khander Chawra village purpose High School in Malgara village. He was admitted to Kaligonj Upazila Health Complex.

Indrajit alleged that holding sticks in their hands, three people -- Rokonzaman, Nayon Islam and Kajo Islam -- of Malgara village stopped his motorcycle on his way to school around 10:00am. They then started beating him, saying why he supported headmaster's stance over forming the school managing committee.

He would file a case, Indrajit said. On Saturday, headmaster of the school Abdul Latif, its assistant teacher Mukul Chandra Roy and Indrajit were assaulted over the same issue in front of the school.

Latif lodged a case with Kaliganj Police Station against Golzar Hossain, Tofazzal Hossain, Rokonzaman, Bachcha Miah Khalifa and six other unnamed people.

He said the attackers had been putting pressure on him to form the committee with their choice of people for the last six months, but he did not agree. So, they attacked him and other teachers.

Protesting the attacks on other teachers, students of the school would bring out a procession and form a human chain on the school playground today.

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From far and wide for love of Bangla

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different. The 32-year-old came here with a student visa only to learn Bangla. He left his country for Bangladesh out of his love and affection for this language.

"I have been learning Bangla for the last one and a half years. The language has become a part of my life. I am so fascinated with this language that I read translated Bangla Bible during my regular prayers," Retegan told The Daily Star.

He is learning the language at a private organisation named "Learn Bangla". Now at the advanced level of this course, Retegan can read Bangla poetry and literature and can sing Bangla songs.

"I was surprised when I came to know about the history and struggle for the language which is very rare in the world. I think the nation can be proud of its historical events," he said.

Like Retegan, around 500 foreign students have learned Bangla at this institution in the last seven years. It

has offered the language course to 500 other foreigners who work in diplomatic missions or international organisations in Dhaka.

Launched on April 14, 2010, at the capital's Banani with only an American woman working in Dhaka, Learn Bangla now has 45 foreign learners, including 35 students.

Registered under the commerce ministry, the organisation runs foundation courses for non-native and non-resident people to help them achieve proficiency in using Bangla.

The courses it offers are of three levels -- basic, mid and advanced. The duration of the basic level is four months, the mid-level six months and the advanced is eight months, said Dil Ara Leena, director of the institution. Every level is interlinked with different events such as cultural and religious festivals.

The institution holds two-hour classes five days a week. It provides extra classes if anyone wants, she said. Besides, it also offers special and short courses.

Learn Bangla not only enriches its learners through teaching Bangla language, it also introduces them with the Bangalee culture, traditions and literature. People mainly from the USA, the UK, China and Canada come to this institution to learn Bangla.

Apart from students, officials of different foreign NGOs who have a plan to work for a long time in Bangladesh, and those working at high commissions and diplomatic missions in Dhaka are mainly the students of Learn Bangla, officials said.

During a recent visit to the institution, these correspondents saw foreigners rehearsing the historic song "Amar Bhaier Rokte Rangano Ekushey February, Ami Ki Bhulite Pari". Some of them also sang it in their own languages.

They said they found it hard to learn Bangla at the initial stage.

"When we came to Bangladesh two years ago, we couldn't talk to people easily. Now that we are taking the

course, we are able to communicate smoothly with people," said Shelbe Rhea Inskip, who is from the USA.

She came here with her husband, and recently they became parents.

"We are now thinking of teaching our baby Bangla and we have already started communicating with our baby in Bangla. We even advised our house help to speak to our baby in Bangla," said Shelbe's husband Connor Alan Inskip, who is also a student of Learn Bangla.

The couple said they would stay in Bangladesh for a long time to work for the underprivileged people.

"This learning will help us a lot. Sometimes it is difficult to have a smooth communication with people taking the help of an interpreter," Connor said.

Like them, Chinese citizens Sun Hailong and his wife Guo Huiting also want to stay here for a long time.

"We love Bangla and want to stay in this country," said Sun, who has been living in Dhaka for the last few months with his wife.

Take measures to end Rohingya crisis

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longstanding issue of Rohingya influx from Myanmar to Bangladesh, according to a foreign ministry press release.

The minister pointed out that the presence of a huge number of Myanmar nationals in Bangladesh is having adverse effects on the overall socio-economic, political, demographic, environmental, humanitarian and security situation of Cox's Bazar and adjacent districts.

Md Shahriar Alam, state minister for foreign affairs; Kamrul Ahsan, secretary (bilateral and consular) at the foreign ministry; and other high officials were also present.

Lee arrived in Dhaka yesterday on a four-day visit. Today, she is expected to visit various places in Cox's Bazar where Rohingyas, who fled persecu-

tion by the Myanmar army, have been residing temporarily in makeshift shelters.

More than 69,000 Myanmar nationals fled to Bangladesh since the persecution began in Rakhine State on October 9 last year. In addition, more than 400,000 Rohingyas have been living in Bangladesh for years.

At the meeting, the foreign minister apprised the UN special rapporteur of the steps Dhaka has taken regarding Myanmar refugees and the undocumented Myanmar nationals, who entered Bangladesh over the years, said the press release.

Mahmood also informed her about the repatriation status of the refugees under an agreement negotiated in 1992, and said as many as 236,599 Rakhine Muslims had been repatriated

under that agreement until the process came to a halt in 2005.

The minister talked about Bangladesh's initiatives to engage with Myanmar bilaterally through establishment of border liaison offices, and dialogue on security cooperation.

Mahmood also highlighted the endeavours to foster regional connectivity involving Myanmar through BCIM and BIMSTEC, and thus ensure sustainable development of the region.

The special rapporteur thanked the foreign minister for allowing her to undertake the visit and the minister assured her of all sorts of cooperation.

"The announcement that the military security operations in the north of Rakhine has ceased is welcomed. However, we cannot forget the numerous allegations of grave human rights

violations recorded by the team deployed by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR] in Cox's Bazar last month," Lee said, recalling its February 3 flash report based on the testimonies of over 200 individuals.

In a press statement issued from Geneva on February 17, the UN said the human rights expert would focus on the situation of the specific population who had crossed into Bangladesh from Myanmar in the past four-five months, and the events which led to their crossing over into the country.

After her four-day Bangladesh visit, Lee would share her findings in a report to the UN Human Rights Council on March 13. The report would be posted on the UN website.

Lee, who is from South Korea, is a

professor at Sungkyunwan University. She is highly regarded globally for her expertise in human rights.

She served as chairperson of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and also as its member. She was also chairperson of the Meeting of Chairpersons of Treaty Bodies.

NORWEGIAN FM HOPEFUL Speaking at a programme in Dhaka yesterday, visiting Norwegian Foreign Minister Børge Brende said he was hopeful that the Myanmar government would allow its Rohingya nationals stranded in Bangladesh to return home in Rakhine State.

Bangladesh has shown respect to the international commitment regarding refugees, as the country has received Rohingyas crossing into it, added Brende.