

Persuade Myanmar to take back Rohingyas

PM asks international community

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday urged the international community, including the UNHCR, to persuade Myanmar to take back Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh.

In a meeting with visiting United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, at the PM's Jatiya Sangsad Office last evening, the premier also said the prolonged refugee problem can only be solved by ensuring a "sustainable repatriation" of the Myanmar refugees to their homeland.

"Myanmar should create a congenial atmosphere for the repatriation of its refugees from Bangladesh," PM's Press Secretary, Ihsanul Karim, quoted the premier as saying while briefing reporters, BSS reported.

The prime minister said the Myanmar refugee problem has created pressure on the socioeconomic condition of the overpopulated Bangladesh.

She said her government has identified some islands for rehabilitation of the Myanmar refugees and planned to build necessary infrastructures such as shelters, schools and hospitals for them.

Hasina said Bangladesh had an insurgency problem in the Chittagong Hill Tracts region, but the problem was ultimately solved through bilateral discussions.

"We brought back our nationals who took refuge in India," she said.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees assured Bangladesh of extending all possible help to solve the refugee problem.

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Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina talks to UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi at her office at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhavan yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

HC stays

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government order that appointed Ashadur Rahman Kiron as panel mayor of the GCC for the next three months and directed the authorities concerned to allow Mannan to continue his office as elected mayor of GCC.

The bench of Justice Syed Muhammad Dastagir Husain and Justice Md Ataur Rahman Khan came up with the order and rule after hearing a writ petition filed by MA Mannan challenging the legality of his suspension order.

The court also issued a rule asking the government to explain why its suspension order on Mannan should not be declared illegal, Mannan's lawyer, Advocate Abu Hanif, told The Daily Star.

Meanwhile, the attorney general's office sources said the government will move and appeal before the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court against the HC order.

On July 6, Mannan was suspended from his mayoral post as a Gazipur court accepted charges brought against him in connection with a corruption case. Local Government Division issued the suspension order for the third time.

Mannan yesterday filed a writ petition with the HC challenging the legality of his suspension order saying that the government has suspended him out of malafide intention. In the petition, he prayed to the HC to stay his suspension order and the appointment of Asadur Rahman Kiron as GCC's panel mayor.

After two and a half years, Mayor Mannan resumed office on June 18 after the SC on May 31 paved the way for him to discharge his duty.

Mannan, who was elected GCC mayor on July 6, 2013, performed his duty for only some 18 months as he was accused in 30 cases and had been in jail for the rest of the time. He had earlier also been suspended twice. Barrister AM Mahbub Uddin Khokon appeared for Mannan.

Mirza Fakhrul indicted for defamation

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defamed by the BNP leader's remarks didn't file the case. It was filed by a leader of a pro-Awami League organisation against Fakhrul for allegedly making defamatory remarks against the AL and its chief Sheikh Hasina.

Metropolitan Magistrate Nur Nabi framed the charge and fixed October 3 for beginning the trial of the case.

On September 1, 2014, Nur-e-Alam Siddique, vice-president of Awami Matsyajibi League, filed the case with the Dhaka Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court.

In the case, he alleged that BNP Secretary General Fakhrul on August 24, 2014 at a press conference at the party's Nayapaltan headquarters termed the ruling AL a "killer party"

and its chief a "killer".

Nur-e-Alam claimed to have been aggrieved by the remarks and filed the case.

Following a report submitted by Paltan police on December 18, 2014, the court summoned Fakhrul, but he didn't respond. On January 22, 2015, an arrest warrant was issued against him.

Section 198 of the Code of Criminal Procedure of 1898 doesn't allow the court to take cognisance of the defamatory charge against Fakhrul as the case wasn't filed by the person who was aggrieved by his remarks.

During yesterday's hearing, the counsel for the BNP secretary general questioned the legality of the case and submitted a petition for discharging Fakhrul.

Lawyer Sanaullah Mia told the court that the complainant of the case was not the aggrieved person and he was not victimised by Fakhrul's comments.

He said Fakhrul criticised the AL and its chief. But the AL chief didn't file any case against him.

Sanaullah cited some rulings and decisions of the higher courts that empower the court to discharge accused persons in such cases.

He stressed that the court couldn't frame charge against Fakhrul and that he should be discharged.

The prosecution, however, argued that Fakhrul's defamatory remarks were against the AL and its chief. The complainant is a member of a pro-AL organisation and his image has been damaged by the comments and he was

aggrieved.

Nur-e-Alam appealed to the court to frame charge against Fakhrul.

Fakhrul, who is on bail in the case, pleaded not guilty and demanded justice after the magistrate read out the charge to him.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, BNP Standing Committee Member Moudud Ahmed said, "Charge cannot be framed in this case. We will go to the higher court seeking that the proceedings be quashed. The case is politically motivated and it has no future. The case is just to harass the political opponent of the ruling party."

WHAT SECTION 198 SAYS

Sections 499 to 502 of the Penal Code, 1860, deal with the procedure of filing defamation case, trial and punishment

for defamation.

On the other hand, section 198 of the CrPC imposes restriction on filing defamatory cases. According to this section, no court shall take cognisance of an offence falling under sections 499 to 502 of the Penal Code except upon a complaint made by some person aggrieved by such offence.

Provided that, the section says, where the person so aggrieved is a woman who, according to the customs and manners of the country, ought not to be compelled to appear in public, or where such person is under the age of eighteen years or is an idiot or lunatic, or is from sickness or infirmity unable to make a complaint, some other person may, with the leave of the court, make a complaint on his or her behalf.

Goons eating up public resources

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"In case of default, the lineman of the syndicate snaps the connection," said Tohur Ali, 65, who lives in Ershadnagar area of Korail Bosti.

"Lineman restores the connection after we settle the bill."

Nur Banu, who ran one of such syndicates for around two years till November 2015, told this newspaper that her collection was Tk 4 lakh per month.

"I had to pay Tk 1 lakh to Banani policemen, Tk 50,000 to the local power office, Tk 10,000 to local Wasa office and Tk 1 lakh to my staff," she said.

Syndicates divide areas among themselves to run the illegal business and each one of them provides services to a certain number of houses.

For example, the syndicate run by Junaid, Nayeb Ali, Sohag and Natib Ali supply water and electricity to around 5,000 houses in Ershadnagar and Beltoli. A member of the syndicate said they get Tk 10 lakh per month from their areas.

One syndicate alone never provides all the three utility services.

Their illegal business had earlier led to bloodshed on several occasions. At least three syndicate members were killed in the last seven years in the slum over internal feuds or establishing supremacy, according to locals.

Nur Banu said her husband Dulal Sardar was killed by his rivals Junaid, Nayeb Ali and others in 2014. Those involved in the murder later grabbed

her business after evicting her from her house in the slum in November 2015.

Mohammad Bashir, who was engaged in providing water service in the slum, was killed by rivals five years ago.

"Criminals first fired shots at his [Bashir's] house at TNT colony house injuring his child. A few days later, he was shot dead inside the slum," a member of a syndicate said.

In another incident, one Mosharrarf was killed six years back over establishing supremacy in the slum.

Earlier this year, a garment worker was raped at a house inside the slum allegedly by four goons involved with a syndicate, according to the FIR the victim filed with Banani Police Station.

Because of low house rents, hawkers, small shopkeepers, roadside vendors, rickshaw and van pullers, CNG drivers and domestic helps and workers involved in garment, construction and transport sectors live in Korail Bosti.

There are people who come from outside the capital to stay here for a certain period of time following natural disasters like river erosion and flood.

The number of slum dwellers increases before the Eid-ul-Azha, Eid-ul-Fitr and Shab-e-Barat.

"You will get an 80 to 100 sq-foot room at Tk 1,500 to 2,500 per month excluding the utility service costs," said Moyez Ali, who lives in Jamai Bazar area of Korail Bosti.

Around 30,000 families living in the slum get electricity and water services while almost all the families have gas facility to cook meal, Abdus Sobhan, president of Korail Bosti Unnayan Committee-1, told The Daily Star.

Mofizur Rahman, elected councillor of ward-20, said all gas connections at the slum are illegal and the lines pose a very high risk of danger.

And fifty percent of water and electricity supplies are unauthorised, said the councillor and several other well-informed sources.

Mofizur added they are trying to legalise all the services.

Banani Police Station Officer-in-Charge (investigation), Md Abdul Matin, binned as baseless the allegation against police of taking bribe from the syndicates.

"We don't allow illegal utility services in the slum," Matin said.

He also added that the Banani Police Station assist the mobile court when it launches drive against illegal connections.

Israfil Hossain Akanda, executive engineer of Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (Wasa), Mohakhali, said he has no idea about any syndicate illegally supplying water to slum people with the assistance of dishonest Wasa staffs.

He added Wasa has installed 1,000 meters with connections to provide water to the slum's low-income people.

Local officials claim their services

cover the entire Korail slum.

But several syndicate members wishing anonymity said Wasa's meters are connected to around 10,000 houses. And the syndicates are providing water supply to 20,000 to 25,000 houses.

Md Kamrul Islam, sub-divisional engineer of Dhaka Electric Supply Company (Desco), Gulshan office, said they have set up 35 large-size "pole meters" to supply power to the slum people.

However, no official could say exactly how many Korail residents get power supply through those meters. Some syndicate members and locals said Desco can supply electricity to 4,000 to 5,000 houses.

Officials of Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company Limited say they don't provide any gas connection to Korail slum.

HM Ali Ashraf, director (operations) of Titas Gas, said he has lost count of how many times they have snapped illegal gas connections at Korail slum.

"We launch drives against illegal gas connections there regularly. But things get back to square one after a few days," he added.

Responding to a query, Ashraf said he is unaware of any Titas staff's links to illegal gas supply at Korail.

But another official of Titas, wishing anonymity, said a section of their employees and law enforcers assist the syndicates in the illegal business involving crores of taka.

Designed for disaster

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Shakil Newaz Bhuiyan, director (operation) of Fire Service and Civil Defence.

"The illegal and risky gas connections remain a serious threat to people and households as the quality of distribution lines and the way they were installed fall far below the standard," said the official.

Recollecting the fire incident of December 4, 2016 when some 526 houses were burnt to ashes, Major Shakil said there was a gas explosion and they couldn't tame the inferno even after pumping a huge amount of water.

Another fire in January 2017 gutted around 4,996 houses within a short time. That time also, firefighters failed to douse the blaze because of the gas explosion, fire service sources said.

There are at least 10,000 illegal gas connections at the slum, residents say. The syndicates who provide the unauthorised utility service charge Tk 500 for each gas connection to households and Tk 1,500 for hotels and other commercial users.

"Illegal gas lines are spread across the entire Korail Bosti like a spider web. And if a fire begins, the whole slum might be blown up," said Mofizur Rahman, councillor of ward-20.

Mainly two syndicates, with the help of some unscrupulous employees

of Titas, steal gas from the main transmission and distribution lines of the company at TNT Colony, Wireless Gate, Gulshan and Banani points, locals say.

They connect stainless steel pipes to the main lines and then use GI pipes and even hose pipes to distribute gas to the slum houses.

During several visits recently, these correspondents saw gas burners on the narrow stairs of two-storey tin-shed houses.

Slum dwellers were also using gas burners inside their tiny rooms sized around 100 by 80 sq-feet where at least four to five people live. Many of those rooms don't have any windows.

Besides, burners were found in the doorways.

What looked more dangerous was children were playing near open burners.

GI and plastic pipes and even rubber pipes were being used for gas connection. Some were precariously hanging overhead.

Such pipes were seen haphazardly lying on the ground in places. These correspondents at first took those to be water lines but locals confirmed that those were for supplying gas.

Several residents said using GI and plastic pipes is a trick by the syndicates to make everyone think that these are

water lines.

During a visit, these correspondents met two people who were laying down several pipes half or one feet under the ground. They refused to make any comments.

A tea-stall vendor uses a stove that gets gas through a rubber pipe.

"I know the way I am using gas is risky. But what else can I do? It will cost Tk 100 per day if I use kerosene," he said, wishing anonymity.

Two syndicates led by "Gas" Mizan and Manzurul Haq are providing gas to the entire Korail Bosti dividing the slum into two. They have subcontracted part of their work to some smaller groups, said sources.

Through the gas supply, the syndicates and unscrupulous Titas staff get more than half a crore taka from the slum dwellers per month, they added.

There is an allegation that some police officials also get a slice of the pie by backing the illegal trade. The allegation, however, was rejected by the local police station.

Officials of Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company Limited say they don't provide any gas connections to Korail slum.

HM Ali Ashraf, director (operations) of Titas, said, "We launch drives against illegal gas connections there regularly."



This pipe, which at first appears to be a water line, is actually used for supplying gas. The rust makes it vulnerable to leaks which can result in tragedy. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: SHAHEEN MOLLAH