No one felled the trees!

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Natore*

No one is now taking responsibility for the 25 big trees felled on the premises of Uttara Gonobhaban in Natore.

The Public Works Department has recently floated a tender and gave a work order to cut branches of dead trees to a bidder for only Tk 18,400.

Although the tender was for cutting branches of dead trees, the contractor of PWD has felled 25 trees.

Shohel Faysal, the contractor, claimed that he has not felled the old

trees which are lying on the Uttara Gonobhaban premises now.

"I have cut down branches of dead trees and removed them from the Uttara Gonobhaban premises recently. I do not know who felled the trees which are now kept inside Uttara Gonobhaban," Shohel Faysal said, adding that he has sent a letter to the DC about this matter.

Ziaur Rahman, sub-divisional engineer (SDE) of Natore PWD said, all the trees were cut down by the contractor and his men. No PWD officials and employees have cut down any branches of the trees.

"The contractor Shohel Faysal felled the trees and now he is lying," Ziaur Rahman added.

ABM Abdullah, forest officer of Natore Sadar upazila said, he visited the Uttara Gonobhaban premises along with the DC and other officials and found that additional trees and branches were felled.

The PWD did also not take any approval from the district administration before floating the tender.

"Some trees were not in the list of valuation and were felled illegally," ABM Abdullah said. "I valuated 230 cubic feet of dead branches of different trees [for the tender quotation] but I found 582.30 CFT logs and timber in the Uttara Gonobhaban now. But the contractor has already removed a large number of wood and logs."

"Ziaur Rahman has sent me a letter to valuate some dead trees that have already been felled illegally," ABM Abdullah added. The trees being asked to be included now were not part of the original tender.

Ziaur said the contractor also felled two old mango trees without any tender quotation but he claims that those trees had fallen in a storm and they have sent a letter to the forest division for providing a valuation of those trees. They are yet to get the valuation or permission.

The district administration has formed a five member probe committee, headed by Additional District Magistrate of Natore Razzaqul Islam. The other members are Khairul Islam, additional superintendent of police of Natore, Sharmin Akter Banu, UNO of Natore Sadar upazila, Anondo Mondal, Nejarat Deputy Collector of Natore and also a member secretary of Uttora Gonobhaban management committee and Jalal Uddin, president of Natore Press Club.

Razzaqul Islam, chief of the probe

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Awami League leaders were in electoral talks with the Election Commission yesterday at the Nirbachan Bhaban in the capital. PHOTO: COLLECTED

CEC praises AL for development

FROM PAGE 1

On the deployment of armed forces during the polls, the party referred to Section 129 to 131 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) and army rules which say army may be deployed in aid of civil power.

The AL also proposed not to go for any fresh demarcation as the party thinks it might create legal complications.

Along with the proposals, the party handed over a document to the commission where it mentioned another 11 proposals for holding a free, fair and neutral election.

These proposals included keeping the administration and the law enforcement agencies under the supervision of the Election Commission during the polls and limiting the election-time government's jurisdiction to the essential routine work only.

Earlier on January 11, the party had placed an 11-point proposal during its dialogue with President Abdul Hamid on the formation of a new EC.

Asked whether he discussed the CEC's recent comment on Gen Ziaur Rahman with the EC, Quader said, "We asked [it] and got our answer. But [we] don't want to say anything in this regard. If needed, the Election Commission will come up with the explanation."

Sources in the meeting, however, said there was no discussion on the matter during yesterday's talks.

During the EC's electoral talks with the BNP on Sunday, the CEC lauded the party's founder Ziaur Rahman, which aggrieved many AL leaders. That day, Huda said Ziaur Rahman restored multi-party democracy in the country.

The sources said during yesterday's meeting, many AL leaders advised the CEC to remain careful while making any comments as those might be misinterpreted.

One of the leaders told The Daily Star that they requested the CEC to "consider himself as a constitutional post instead of a person before making comments".

At his introductory speech, CEC Nurul Huda said after the assassination of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Awami League had to face a tough time when Sheikh Hasina returned from abroad and took the helm of the party.

"Awami League participated in the national polls in 1986 and Sheikh Hasina became a member of parliament," he added.

The AL formed governments under her leadership in 1996, 2008 and 2014. He also said trials of Bangabandhu killing case and war crimes cases were held under her leadership.

The CEC also talked about the history of Bangladesh, the 1952 Language Movement, Mass Uprising in 1969, the country's independence and Bangabandhu's role in achieving the independence.

After its meeting with the commission, the 22-member AL team met Hasina at the Gono Bhaban, the official residence of the prime minister, last night.

There, the PM said her party did everything possible so that a neutral election can take place and termed the proposals placed by AL "people's proposals".

Testimony of destruction

FROM PAGE 1

"He witnessed how, in addition to the documented endemic discrimination against the Rohingya population, socio-economic challenges adversely affect all communities," read the note.

During the visit, Feltman met with State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and army chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, diplomats, and representatives of aid agencies based in Myanmar.

In talks with leaders of the armed forces, including General Hlaing, Feltman noted that in the UN's experience, successful counterterrorism efforts do not rely exclusively on security measures and urged Myanmar's commanders to support "credible investigations into allegations of human rights abuses by security officials".

He also visited several communities affected by the recent violence and Internally Displaced Persons' camps outside Sittwe, set up in 2012.

Most of Feltman's discussions focused on the situation in Rakhine state and the plight of the hundreds of thousands of refugees who have fled to Bangladesh.

Returning to New York, Feltman will report to the UN Secretary-General his experience and findings during the visit.

The UN press note comes a day after the Human Rights Watch released new satellite images showing at least 288 villages have been partially or fully destroyed by fire in Rakhine since August 25. At least 66 villages were burned after September 5, when security force operations supposedly ended.

"These latest satellite images show why over half a million Rohingya fled to Bangladesh in just four weeks," said Phil Robertson, deputy Asia director.

"The destruction encompassed tens of thousands of structures, primarily homes inhabited by ethnic Rohingya Muslims," the rights body said.

In another development yesterday, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said his country held Myanmar's military leadership responsible for its harsh crackdown on the Rohingya Muslim minority, but stopped short of saying whether the US would take any action against Myanmar's military leaders, reports Reuters.

"The world can't just stand idly by and be witness to the atrocities that are being reported in the area," Tillerson told Washington's Center for Strategic and International Studies think tank.

"We really hold the military leadership accountable for what's happening," said Tillerson, who said the US was "extraordinarily concerned" by the situation.

Meanwhile, the Amnesty International has accused Myanmar's security forces of committing crimes against humanity.

In a report released yesterday, Amnesty cited testimony from more than 120 Rohingya men and women who have fled to Bangladesh in recent weeks to escape a bloody army campaign.

Thirty medical professionals, aid workers, journalists and Bangladeshi officials, were also interviewed for the research, titled "My World Is Finished".

Witness accounts, satellite imagery and data, and photo and video evidence gathered by Amnesty all point to the same conclusion, it said.

"Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya women, men, and children have been the victims of a widespread and systematic attack, amounting to crimes against humanity."

Tirana Hassan, Crisis Response Director at Amnesty International, said, "In this orchestrated campaign, Myanmar's security forces have brutally meted out revenge on the entire Rohingya population of northern Rakhine State, in an apparent attempt to permanently drive them out of the country. These atrocities continue to fuel the region's worst refugee crisis in decades.

"Exposing these heinous crimes is the first step on the long road to justice. Those responsible must be held to account, Myanmar's military can't simply sweep serious violations under the carpet by announcing another sham internal investigation."

She added General Hlaing must take immediate action to stop his troops from committing atrocities.

Amnesty said that it had consistently documented at least six crimes against humanity. They include murder, deportation and forcible displacement, torture, rape, persecution based on ethnic and religious grounds, including through burning of homes, and other inhumane acts such as denying food and other life-saving provisions.

Amnesty said dozens of eyewitnesses of the worst violence "consistently implicated specific units, including the Myanmar Army's Western Command, the 33rd Light Infantry Division, and the Border Guard Police" and that troops were sometimes joined by local vigilantes.

Amnesty International's own review of fire data from remote satellite sensing indicates at least 156 large fires in northern Rakhine State since 25 August. In the previous five years, no fires were detected during the same period, which is also the monsoon season, strongly indicating that the burning has been intentional.

"Given their ongoing denials, Myanmar's authorities may have thought they would literally get away with murder on a massive scale. But modern technology, coupled with rigorous human rights research, have tipped the scales against them," said Tirana Hassan.

Also yesterday, the Unicef warned it would not be able to continue providing lifesaving aid and protection to Rohingya children without immediate additional funding. Almost 60 percent of the 582,000 refugees who have fled Myanmar since August 25 are children, as thousands more are crossing each week.

The growing needs are far outpacing resources. As of yesterday, the Unicef has received just 7 percent of the $76 million required to provide emergency support to children over the next six months, according to a press release issued yesterday.

Int'l community backs Bangladesh

Foreign minister on Rohingya crisis

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali yesterday said an international consensus has been created in support of Bangladesh to end the Rohingya plight, thanks to the country's diplomatic efforts.

Because of Bangladesh's continuous diplomatic efforts, especially after the prime minister's speech in the United Nations General Assembly, the international community understood that the crisis originated in Myanmar and they have to resolve it, the minister told a press briefing at his office.

"Hopefully, this consensus will be bolstered in the coming days," he added.

According to the foreign ministry, over nine lakh Rohingyas are currently living in Bangladesh. Of them, 5.4 lakh have entered the country during the recent influx following violence erupted in Myanmar's Rakhine state on August 25.

On Tuesday, nine United States senators including Republican Marco Rubio in a statement lauded Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's efforts to end the crisis, thanking her "for her strong leadership and compassion in keeping Bangladesh's borders open and providing assistance to more than half a million Rohingya refugees."

"We thank you for your courageous efforts to protect the most vulnerable individuals fleeing atrocities in Burma," reads the statement, which was provided at the briefing.

The US senators also commended her call that a UN fact-finding mission be granted immediate access to Rakhine state, given the credible evidence of grave human rights violation, including gender-based violence, the statement adds.

Minister Mahmood Ali said there is no reason to think that powerful nations like China and Russia are against Bangladesh, making it clear that the two nations are with Bangladesh over the Rohingya issue.

Russia is supporting the Kofi Annan Commission report, which is also supported by Bangladesh. China puts stresson solving root causes behind the crisis, which is addressed by Bangladesh in a similar way, he saidwhile replying to a query.

"We are working and progress is visible," he said, adding,a solution to the Rohingya crisis would not come overnight.

On Monday, the European Union Council adopted several conclusions to address the Rohingya issue, informed the minister.

Uttering that the humanitarian and human rights situation in Rakhine is extremely serious, they called for an immediate end to violence in Rakhine, sought permission for humanitarian access to Myanmar, safe repatriation of Rohingyas to their homeland, implementation of the Kofi Annan Commission report, and resolving their citizenship crisis.

On Sunday, the issue of Rohingya crisis was adopted as the only "Emergency Item" by the Governing Council of the 137th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union through a formal voting session in St Petersburg of Russia.

The issue was jointly tabled by Muslim nations Bangladesh, UAE, Morocco, Indonesia, Sudan, Kuwait, Iran and Turkey and availed 1,027 votes.

On Friday, a closed-door UN Security Council meeting with representation of Bangladesh, Myanmar and Rakhine Advisory Commission Chairman Kofi Anan was held to address the Rohingya issue, Mahmood Ali said.

At the meeting, Bangladesh asserted that in line with Hasina's five-point proposal, steps have to be taken so that all Myanmar nationals living in Bangladesh are repatriated in presence of international organisations and through a "joint verification" process.

Bangladesh has also made a point that Rohingya citizenship issue has to be resolved in line with the Annan Commission report.

France as this month's UNSC chair called the meeting along with the UK.

France Permanent Representative to the UN Francois Delattre in his remarks cited that violence continuing in Myanmar "is an ethnic cleansing happening before our eyes", said Mahmood Ali.

The meeting had two objectives: to refuse and denounce the totally inacceptable status quo and support the recommendations of Kofi Annan in his report and to make progress together on their implementation.

On Thursday, Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak in a statement expressed appreciation to his Bangladesh counterpart and the government for allowing Malaysia to establish a field hospital in Cox's

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Man Booker Prize goes to US author

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and deeply moving narrative," said Lola Young, chair of the judging panel, in announcing the prize at a ceremony in London.

Saunders, 58, described the award as a "great honour, which I hope to live up to with the rest of my work, for the rest of my life."

In a brief, politically-tinged acceptance speech, he made several thinly-veiled references to the controversial policies of US President Donald Trump.

"We live in a strange time," he told the audience. "In the US now we're hearing a lot about the need to protect culture. Well, this tonight is culture."

He later told reporters he was in disbelief and numb at the award.

"For an artist, I think validation is really helpful," he added.

"My opinion of myself improves a little bit."

The winner of the Man Booker receives £52,500 ($69,300, 58,800 euros), although the bigger prize is seen as a spike in sales which invariably follow the announcement of the winner.

RELISHING ARTISTIC FREEDOM

This year's shortlist stoked controversy over its big name omissions and eclectic line up, with one British columnist calling it "baffling" and a leading US critic decrying its "Americanisation".

It pitted three nominees from the US against two British writers and a British-Pakistani author.

The award, launched in 1969, was only open to novelists from Commonwealth states until it began permitting those from other English-speaking countries in 2014.

Last year Paul Beatty became the first American to win for his novel, "The Sellout".

Saunders was the British bookmakers' favourite ahead of the 2017 announcement on Tuesday.

He wrote "Lincoln in the Bardo" over a four-year period, after first conceptualising it 20 years ago, the author told a press conference following the ceremony.

Saunders said he was unsure how exactly to tell the story at the outset, but relished the artistic freedom.

"I think the true mastery (of storytelling) is to be willing to wade into something and not be sure how it's going to turn out," he added.

'NO FIGHTS, NO BLOOD'

In a lengthy and varied writing career, Saunders has penned award-winning short story collections, essays, illustrated fables and a bestselling children's book, as well as many pieces of journalism.

In 2006, he was awarded both a Guggenheim Fellowship and a MacArthur Fellowship, while in 2009 he received an Academy Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

To clinch the Man Booker Prize he beat competition from a varied selection of writers, including fellow American Paul Auster, who penned "4321."

The shortlist also included two other debut novelists -- Emily Fridlund, who wrote "History of Wolves", and Fiona Mozley, the 29-year-old British author of "Elmet".

British author Ali Smith was shortlisted for the fourth time for "Autumn", while Mohsin Hamid, a British-Pakistani writer, completed the line-up with his second shortlisted novel, "Exit West."

The Man Booker's five person judging panel only reached its decision at 2:40 pm (1340 GMT) on Tuesday afternoon, according to Young, the chair.

She said the nationalities of the writers were not a factor, and the group were "very diligent, very thorough" in their considerations.

"There were no fights, no blood on the carpet," she said.