

US lawmakers for targeted sanctions on Myanmar army

STAR REPORT

More than 40 US lawmakers has called upon the Trump administration to reimpose travel bans on Myanmar military leaders and prepare targeted sanctions against those responsible for a crackdown on the country's Rohingya minority, reports Reuters.

In a letter sent to US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, a group of Republican and Democratic members of the House of Representatives on Wednesday called for "meaningful steps" against Myanmar's military and others who have committed human rights abuses in an offensive that has driven over half a million Rohingya Muslims out of the Southeast Asian nation.

"Burma's authorities appear to be in denial of what has happened," stated the letter. "We urge you to do everything possible to ensure protection and security for those trapped inside

Burma or willing to return, as well as possible forcible returns from neighboring countries.

Meanwhile, the European Union has made it clear that the suspension of visits by senior Myanmar military personnel is a "very specific measure" in reaction to the "disproportionate use of force" by the security forces in Rakhine, reports our diplomatic correspondent.

The EU's new Ambassador to Myanmar Kristian Schmidt, who presented his credentials to President U Htin Kyaw on October 17 in Nay Pyi Taw, told the media on Wednesday that the suspension of high level visits by senior Myanmar military personnel was a "very specific measure."

The EU foreign ministers at a meeting in Luxembourg on Monday announced they adopted a resolution stating that the EU and its member states "will

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The five-member probe committee measured the total cubic feet of illegally cut trees during their visit to the Uttara Gonobhaban premises yesterday. This was the second working day of the committee and they have already discovered more discrepancies than previously reported.

PHOTO: BULBU AHMED

Natore's Uttara Gonobhaban trees felled illegally

Probe finds

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Natore

The committee, which has been formed to investigate the felling of trees on Uttara Gonobhaban premises in Natore's Dighapata, found that a large number of trees and branches had been cut down illegally.

The five-member probe body, led by Additional District Magistrate Dr. Natore Razzakul Islam, visited the spot yesterday.

After visiting the spot, chief of the committee Razzakul said ABM Abdullah, Natore Sadar upazila forest officer, earlier found that there were 582.30 cubic feet logs and timber lying in the Uttara Gonobhaban compound.

Besides this, a good number of trees and branches were found yesterday to have been cut down and removed without permission from the district administration.

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Most parties want army deployment

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deployment of the army during the polls with magistracy power.

Bangladesh Communist Party, Sonontontri Party and Bangladesh Ganonghri Muktiyot were among the first to demand a resolution about the deployment of the army.

Defence forces had been mentioned as law enforcers in the Representation of the People Order and they had been empowered to arrest anyone on voting day for violation of electoral laws. However, the RPO was amended in 2009 and the armed forces have not been mentioned as law enforcers.

At least 19 political parties demanded dissolving the parliament before or after the announcement of election schedule while 19 others insisted that the next polls be held under a non-partisan interim administration.

They, however, used different words for "non-partisan interim

administration".

The provision for holding elections under a caretaker government was scrapped in 2011.

Seven parties demanded forming an election-time government with representatives adopted a resolution, to be in parliament or were registered with the EC.

Only eight parties, including the Awami League and some of its alliance partners, opined for holding the next elections under the incumbent government, in line with the constitution.

The BNP and some of its partners want the parliament dissolved and formation of an election-time supportive government.

Eight political parties wanted reintroduction of the "No Vote" system while the Awami League and eight other parties demanded introduction of Electronic Voting Machine.

The Election Commission has

listened to the proposals of the political parties. ... [the commission] will analyse the proposals that can be implemented," Helal Uddin Ahmed, acting secretary to the commission, told the Daily Star yesterday.

He also said the commission would scrutinise the proposals and would discuss what sort of changes it could bring and what could be done staying within the commission's jurisdiction.

He told reporters earlier, "We got many suggestions, including army deployment, stopping the use of muscle power, using black money in the polls. We will play a role from behind the screen to meet most of the common demands."

The EC had also talked to civil society members, editors, and senior journalists about the elections. Most civil society members spoke of restoring the "No Vote" system and ensuring a level playing field for all political parties.

Tax trouble

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been fixed once again although the building structure has not changed at all," he said.

"I can't pay such a big amount all alone. The tenants have to share the additional costs."

Mostafa, who rents out seven medium-sized flats to tenants, had his holding tax reassessed that year.

He said over a dozen building owners in the locality have filed review applications with the corporation. They say the revised amounts are much higher in comparison to the facilities they get.

Mostafa said he too would file a review.

Corporation (DSCC), argued that the tax rate was not being hiked.

"The tax reassessment is not to increase the tax rate, but to make the tax amount equal for the properties of similar value as per the existing tax rates."

The proposed tax amount should not be compared to the current rates, he said, adding, there can be a tax rebate of up to 40 percent of the proposed amount if authorised by a review board led by a ward councillor and an appellate authority headed by the divisional commissioner.

The holding tax is associated with the yearly valuation of the property. The valuation is calculated by multiplying the total floor area of the property for per square feet of floor. The rate is fixed based on the house rent in a particular area.

The amount is then multiplied by 10 (months). Two months' house rent is excluded considering the expenditure for home maintenance.

For example, the yearly valuation of a 1,000 square feet apartment with a rate of Tk 15 would be Tk 150,000.

In the capital, the holding tax rate is 12 percent of the total valuation, meaning the tax for the abovementioned property would be Tk 18,000, Yousuf said.

"Our West Dhanmondi area is very congested and seems unplanned. It also lacks many basic amenities like storm drainage and sewer facilities. The tax officials did the reassessment after showing our building in Dhanmondi residential area on papers," he said.

"You can take higher holding taxes for an area that is not built and is planned and blessed with wide roads, pavements and improved storm drainage system. But doing that for our area, which often gets inundated during the monsoon, is not a good idea."

Another landlord said the holding tax on his property near Jonaki Cinema in Nayapalata has been increased almost four times.

The city corporations can impose up to 27 percent of the property valuation as holding tax, he said, adding that the valuation would be 40 percent less if the property is not rented out to tenants and the owner lives there.

No holding tax is applicable if there is no establishment on the land.

Furthermore, a house owner is entitled to a rebate of up to 10 percent of the payable tax if that is paid within the deadline, he said.

Asked about the reason behind the tax reassessment, Yousuf said there had been no general tax assessment in Dhaka city for the last 28 years.

As a result, owners of many buildings constructed 28 years ago have been paying a lump sum amount as the tax for all these years. However, the holding tax on the same sized buildings erected in recent times is quite higher.

The DSCC official could not say why the tax was not reassessed for all those years.

"It is absolutely absurd. You can't raise the tax so much at a time. And look at what we get in return!" said the man, who wished not to be named.

"Many homeowners are going for underhand dealings with some city corporation officials and having the tax amount lowered," he added.

Talking to The Daily Star, a number of tenants expressed fear that the landlords would hike the house rent as well as the "additional" tax money.

"Whenever such taxes are imposed or raised, houseowners increase the rent simultaneously and this is probably not going to be different this time as well," said Akib Javed, who along with family lives in Shyamoli.

The man, who works at a private firm in Mohakhali, said when he started living in a 1,200 square feet flat in 2006, the rent was only Tk 14,000. Now, he is paying Tk 21,000 a month. "My salary has not doubled, but the rent has almost," he said.

Rupa Akhter, wife of a primary school teacher in Ighatola, said her family is struggling to cope with the soaring prices of essentials.

She said any hike in house rent would sound nothing short of a nightmare to her.

"If the government increases the holding tax the burden is going to be on us. We can't afford it at all."

Asked, Yousuf Ali Sardar, chief revenue officer of Dhaka South City

Corporation (DSCC), argued that the tax rate was not being hiked.

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Shift Rohingyas from tourist town

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spoke at the press conference.

In these regards, a written statement titled "Localisation of Rohingya Relief activities and accountability" was presented.

The demands of the forum also included that long term plans be formed before the announcement of next budget. They said the UN is committed to localising both national and international NGOs and ensuring their accountability and transparency.

They said the management of the refugee crisis is completely separated from the district administration. They also stressed the urgent need for setting up of an administrative structure led by a secretary level official for Rohingya management.

Instead of dependence on others, the government should establish its full control over the refugee management, the statement read. In terms of child care and rehabilitation, the UN Child Rights Convention should be followed, they said.

The forum said a serious threat has been posed for the local population at Ukhia and Teknaf areas, although it added that the Bangladesh government giving shelter to the Rohingyas was a praiseworthy step.

But for the sake of the tourist zone in Cox's Bazar, the Rohingyas should be shifted elsewhere, while upholding the human rights of the Rohingyas.

taken an initiative to build 'Shishu Palli', a kind of residence, for protecting the orphan Rohingyas children.

"The government has a plan to construct Shishu Palli in next month...after identifying the orphan Rohingyas children," said Syeda Raiyaz Khan, additional director of the Department of Social Services (DSS).

In the last 30 days since September 10, the government has identified 18,449 Rohingya orphan child and the project is being implemented through the Bangladesh National Orphan Child Programme. Akhter, also a coordinator of the programme, said.

The DSS official, however, said that the construction work of the Shishu Palli might be delayed as the Rohingyas are still coming from Myanmar.

The social service department is engaged in registering orphan child from the Rohingyas camps who have been classified into four categories—those who lost both parents, who lost only the father, physically disabled children and children with missing parents.

The government is enrolling orphan children up to 18 years for the initiative.

Raiyaz's team was meeting with members of the socialist party to coordinate the government's next steps. A spokesman for the Socialists said while they fully stood behind the government they would insist the Article 155 is applied in the most proportionate way.

Madrak can in theory sack the local administration and install a new team,

Balukhali.

Identified orphans will get smart cards from the social services department. Pritam Kumar Chowdhury, Deputy Director of Cox's Bazar Office of DSS, said.

The estimated number of orphan Rohingyas children might be up to 25,000, said the official.

The project has been initiated after a directive given by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. This was purposed a special 'safe zone' would be built for the Rohingyas orphan children.

Scores of Rohingyas have been killed in the ongoing violence in Rakhine state in Myanmar since August 25 and many orphan children have entered Bangladesh to flee the brutality.

Meanwhile, several thousand Rohingyas, who had been waiting for two days near the border point in Anjanpanpara of Ukhia, were given shelter at the Balukhali refugee camp yesterday.

They crossed into Bangladesh through the Naf river on Monday.

They were given relief and medical treatment at the camp.

Those taken to the camp included 3,124 children, 2,044 women and 1,064 men. Of them, 871 were elderly people, said Maj Ashikur Rahim, operation officer of BGB 34 Battalion in Cox's Bazar.

He said 15 other Rohingyas were sent to Médecins Sans Frontières's health clinic in Kutupalong.

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Spain moves to suspend autonomy 30 structures need to be removed

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TERRITORY

The government continues to impede dialogue and continues with the repression, the Catalan parliament could proceed, if it is considered opportune, to vote on a formal declaration of independence." Puigdemont said in a statement.

It is not yet clear how and when a Catalan declaration of independence would take place and whether it would be endorsed by the regional assembly, though many pro-independence lawmakers have openly indicated they would uphold a vote in the Catalan parliament to lend it a more solemn character.

If Rajoy invokes Article 155 of the 1978 constitution, which allows him to take control of a region if it breaks the law, it would not be fully effective until at least early next week. It needs parliamentary approval, offering some last minute leeway for secessionists to split

unilaterally.

LAW/UNCLEAR

The terms of Article 155 are vague and could spur more wrangling with the restive region, though the government said yesterday it had a wide political backing from other parties.

"The government will use all the tools available to restore as soon as possible the law and the constitutional order and recover peaceful cohabitation between citizens and stop the economic damage that the legal uncertainty is creating," government spokesman Inigo Mendez de Vigo said in a statement.

Rajoy's team was meeting with members of the socialist party to coordinate the government's next steps. A spokesman for the Socialists said while they fully stood behind the government they would insist the Article 155 is applied in the most proportionate way.

Madrak can in theory sack the local administration and install a new team,

take control of police and finances, and call a snap election.

But some members of the Catalan government have already questioned this interpretation of the constitution, saying they would seek legal redress for at least several more days.

Puigdemont has already defied Rajoy once this week, when he ignored a first deadline to drop the independence campaign and instead called for talks.

Rajoy says the Catalan government has repeatedly broken the law, including when it held a banned vote on independence on Oct 1 and made a symbolic declaration of independence on Oct 10, only to suspend it seconds later.

Puigdemont says a violent police crackdown on the referendum and arrests of pro-independence leaders on charges of sedition show the Spanish state has become authoritarian.

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Citing the probe report, the lawyer told this correspondent that two government agencies installed demarcation pillars and built walkways along the river keeping empty area from the boundary of the Turag. This gave land grabbers scope to encroach on the river and to set up structures illegally.

The report contained the names of 30 organisations and individuals who built structures along the river.

They are Anwar Group, Eras Uddin University, Corded Land Developer and Capt Zakir Hossain, Reza Uddin, Protyasha Hossain, Gazipur City Corporation, Nargis Akter and Salah Uddin, Srima, Srima Samparko Shikhhay, Tongi New Market (Masjid Market), Shah Alam and others.

ailing rivers from land grabbers and save them from pollution. The court ordered the administration to demarcate the boundary of five dying Dhaka rivers—the Buriganga, the Balu, the Turag, the Shalabandi, the Hilsa and the Chhalabandi.

This apparently turned out to be the "death warrant" for the rivers. Demarcation pillars were set up along the river banks during the lean flow of dry season waterline, excluding a roughly estimated 2,500 acres of foreshores and wetlands of the five rivers.

It lured hundreds of new grabbers into gobbling up river land with massive earth filling and indiscriminate structures.

The entire stretch of the foreshore wetlands of the Turag between Dhour Bridge and Shinnirek along the river embankment road across Binulia, had been filled up with sand dumped by dozens of dredgers round the clock.

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