

'Fake' FFs enjoying allowances

Says minister, mentions court orders as reason

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Many people, who have falsely claimed to be freedom fighters, continue to enjoy government allowances by obtaining court orders, Liberation War Affairs Minister AKM Mozammel Haque told parliament yesterday.

He also requested courts to verify whether a person was really a freedom fighter before issuing orders.

"The court has even ordered me to count someone, who was only four during the Liberation War, as a freedom fighter. How can we count those who were four as freedom fighters?" he told the House, answering treasury bench MP Nurul Islam Milon's supplementary question.

"It is shameful and regretful for the nation that those who are not freedom fighters are listed as freedom fighters and taking allowances."

Mozammel stressed that only those who fought the war have the right to be named in the freedom fighters' list.

Nearly 33,000 people were listed

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STONE EXTRACTION

Teenage girl killed, 3 hurt in landslide

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

A 17-year-old girl was killed and three others injured in a landslide in Mandir Jum area of Jafalong in Sylhet yesterday morning.

Witnesses said the four were illegally extracting stone by digging holes in the ground near Kali Mandir of the Mandir Jum area when a chunk of soil came crashing down on them, killing Shompa Das.

Hillol Roy, officer-in-charge of Gowainghat Police Station, said the body was sent to Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital for an autopsy and injured Jyoti Bikash, Dipto Sarkar and Ajit Sarkar were admitted there for treatment.

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4 BCL men

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Secretary of Patharghata upazila unit BCL Mohammad Mahmud, said Officer-in-Charge SM Ziaul Haque of Patharghata Police Station.

Police produced the four before the Senior Judicial Magistrate's Court in Barguna with a five-day remand prayer for Ruhi and Saddam. The court granted a two-day remand for each of them. Mahidul and Mahmud were sent to jail, the police official said.

On August 10, police recovered the body of an unidentified girl from a pond near Patharghata College.

Police arrested BCL leader Mahmud on Saturday night in connection with the murder following a tip-off, said OC Ziaul.

Mahmud gave a confessional statement before the Senior Judicial Magistrate's Court on Sunday about the murder and rape.

As per his statement, police detained the other three BCL leaders on Sunday night at their homes in Patharghata town.

The identity of the victim could not be known, the OC said.

Meanwhile, different organisations yesterday formed a human chain in front of Barguna Press Club, demanding punishment of those involved in the murder.



Rohingya refugees take shelter along the roadside after crossing Bangladesh-Myanmar border in Teknaf of Cox's Bazar. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Change of guard in Rakhine

REUTERS, Yangon

Myanmar's army has replaced the general in charge of Rakhine state following a military crackdown that has driven more than 600,000 Rohingya Muslims into Bangladesh amid reports of mass rape, torture and other crimes against humanity.

No reason was given for Maj Gen Maung Maung Soe being transferred from his post as the head of Western Command in Rakhine, where Myanmar's military, known as the Tatmadaw, launched a sweeping counter-insurgency operation in August.

"I don't know the reason why he was transferred," Maj Gen Aye Lwin, deputy director of the psychological warfare and public relation department at the Ministry of Defence, told Reuters. "He wasn't moved into any position at present. He has been put in reserve."

The move comes ahead of a visit tomorrow by US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson who is expected to deliver a stern message to Myanmar's generals, over whom national leader Aung San Suu Kyi has little control. Suu Kyi has been criticised in the West for failing to halt the atrocities.

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US to step up pressure on Myanmar army

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In the name of putting down a supposed Rohingya rebellion, the army has since Aug 25 waged a sweeping military campaign in the western state of Rakhine, burning villages and sending thousands into what has become the largest exodus in the world today.

The UN has denounced the campaign, including allegations of killings and mass rape, as "ethnic cleansing".

Recently returning from Myanmar and the overflowing refugee camps in Bangladesh, Simon Henshaw, the State Department official responsible for refugee and migration issues, said the scene in the camps was "shocking."

"The world can't just stand by and be witness to the atrocities that are being reported in that area," Tillerson said in October.

But it is unclear what steps the United States might take. Up till now, the State Department has merely strengthened a few punitive measures aimed at Myanmar's army.

In the absence of more determined action from the White House or State Department, several members of the US Congress are calling for sanctions to limit military cooperation with

Myanmar and ban its army members from US soil. A draft bill would also ban the importation of rubies or jade from the country.

ASEAN SUMMIT SKIPS OVER ROHINGYA CRISIS

According to Reuters, a draft of the statement to be issued after a Southeast Asian summit makes no mention of the exodus of Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar's Rakhine state following a military crackdown that has been described by the United Nations as ethnic cleansing.

One paragraph of the communique, seen by Reuters yesterday, mentions the importance of humanitarian relief provided for victims of natural disasters in Vietnam and a recent urban battle with Islamist militants in the Philippines, as well as "affected communities" in northern Rakhine state.

In the ASEAN summit in Manila yesterday, it was unclear whether the crisis was on ASEAN's official agenda, although two countries -- Malaysia and Indonesia -- did bring it up in talks on the meeting's sidelines, according to a report of CBS news yesterday.

Harry Roque, spokesman for the

summit's host, quoted Philippine leader Rodrigo Duterte, as saying, "the Rohingya people's plight was discussed in the plenary. It was specifically brought up by two member states, and Myanmar specifically addressed the Rohingya issue."

According to Roque, the delegation from Myanmar said Suu Kyi's government was "in the process of attending to" a report compiled by former UN chief Kofi Annan, laying out a series of steps to end the violence and repatriate the Rohingyas.

Roque said the officials from Myanmar had assured their neighbours that "the process of repatriation for displaced people will conclude three weeks after signing of a memorandum agreement, we're understanding with Bangladesh."

"ASEAN summits are not designed to actually construct policy responses to major human rights issues that affect the whole region," said David Mathieson, a former human rights researcher who is now an independent analyst based in Myanmar. "Right now, Suu Kyi's government is benefiting from ASEAN's culture of inaction."

When the UN Security Council last week called for Myanmar to "end the

excessive military force and inter-communal violence that had devastated the Rohingya community," Suu Kyi's office responded that it regretted the council's statement.

WE CANNOT BE BYSTANDERS

"We must not be bystanders to this genocide. We cannot allow people to be slaughtered and burnt out of their homes, while the world watches," wrote Salman Rushdie and dozens of others in an open letter last Friday.

After every atrocity, we say: "Never again. We must mean it," the letter, which was published by UK's The Guardian, said.

The writers said Bangladesh has opened its borders and is doing what it can, which is a lot for the most densely populated country on earth, already fighting poverty and the consequences of climate change.

"The international response to the Rohingya crisis has fallen far short of what's needed. The UN appeal is still underfunded, and world leaders have not put sufficient political pressure on the government," reads the letter.

The corporations who have invested in this region must speak up and divest, unless human rights are respected, or they too will be

complicit in these horrendous acts, the letters said.

WFP CONCERNED ABOUT HIGH MALNUTRITION AMONG ROHINGYA

The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) is redoubling its efforts to address malnutrition among refugees in Cox's Bazar but warns that a broader effort is needed because clean water, toilets and health facilities are as vital as food in tackling malnutrition.

A new survey shows that the malnutrition rates in Kutupalong refugee camp are alarming. The preliminary findings indicate that one in four Rohingya children are suffering from malnutrition; a higher rate than anticipated. The survey was conducted by UNICEF, Action Contre la Faim, Save the Children, UNHCR and WFP, said a press release yesterday.

Other assessments taking place in November will provide a clearer picture of the nutrition situation for the new arrivals.

The findings will update the projected number of children expected to suffer severe acute malnutrition over the next few months, and guide the wider emergency response.

AL, BNP firm on their stances

FROM PAGE 1

were not possible under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, also the AL president.

She demanded deployment of army with magistracy power during the elections to maintain law and order and ensure free, fair and credible polls.

Sources in the AL said the party was planning to counter the BNP's rally by ensuring a bigger participation of people at its programme at the same venue on Saturday.

The Daily Star yesterday talked to some AL and BNP leaders to know their opinions about holding the next parliamentary elections.

AL presidium member Abdur Razzak said the BNP chief's demand for an election-time non-partisan government was not acceptable as it was a settled issue. The national polls would be held as per constitutional provisions, he added.

"The Election Commission will conduct the polls and the government, led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, will provide necessary assistance to it."

Razzak said if the BNP take to the streets to fulfill its demand, the government and the AL would face the situation politically. "We'll not allow anyone to get involved in destructive activities as ensuring political stability in the country is a key responsibility of the government. The government will do everything to ensure it."

He also said the BNP's demand for deployment of army was unacceptable. The AL leader said he found nothing new in Khaleda's speech.

AL Organising Secretary AKM Enamul Haque Shamim said the BNP chief made some "illogical demands" which could not be met.

He said the government would not allow the BNP to indulge in destruc-

tive politics and it would do everything to make sure that the country's democratic process continues.

BNP HOLDS FIRM ON DEMAND

Senior BNP leaders said the party didn't back down from its demand for a non-partisan supportive government.

They said there might be some confusion about the concept of election-time supportive government, but the party chief on Sunday made it clear that fair elections were not possible under a partisan government.

BNP standing committee member Moudud Ahmed said, "There was a little confusion over the name of the polls-time supportive government and that we will participate in the elections under a political government. But madam [Khaleda Zia] has cleared all the confusions."

He said national elections should not be held under a political govern-

ment, but under a non-political government. "Whatever you call it, an interim government, election-time supportive government or anything else, the issue is that a political government can't be in office during the polls."

The polls are conducted by the Election Commission, but it cannot work without interference from a political government, he told The Daily Star.

Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, secretary general of BNP, said there was no room for confusion over the polls-time government as there was no difference between an election-time supportive government and election-time neutral government.

"We have never said that we will participate in national elections under the incumbent prime minister. We can consider a number of options on the polls-time government. Our chairperson has called for

talks. We believe a solution can be found through dialogues. So holding talks is a must."

He said his party would come up with an election-time government formula on time.

Following a long political turmoil, a non-partisan polls-time caretaker government system was introduced in the country in 1996. But the constitutional provisions for the system were scrapped by parliament in 2011 during the then AL-led government.

As the government refused to budge on the BNP's demand for restoration of the caretaker government system, the BNP-led 14 party alliance boycotted the 10th parliamentary elections in January 2014.

According to the current constitutional provisions, the incumbent government, led by Hasina, will be in power during the next national elections scheduled for late next year.

Communal group behind changes

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the study, titled "National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB): Challenge of good governance in formulating manuscript and publication management and way out", at a press conference at its office in the capital.

"We have seen that changes have been made in school textbooks following pressure and demand of a communal group, and many of those changes go against the spirit of the Liberation War," said TIB Executive Director Dr Iftekharuzzaman.

Asked about the communal group, he said they never disclose the name of any institution or party in question as per their policy.

"If the authorities concerned ask for the name, we give them that," he said, adding, "You know it all; it's not difficult to find it out."

On the controversial changes in this year's textbooks, Iftekharuzzaman said, "The decision was taken arbitrarily. Those who raised the demands and those who met the demands -- both wielded and misused power. Otherwise, such changes would not

have been possible, especially when the national spirit and constitutional issues are involved.

"Those who are responsible for the decision should be held accountable."

The government has faced widespread criticism from various quarters over some embarrassing blunders in textbooks since the distribution of some 36.21 crore textbooks to 4.26 crore students at primary and secondary levels on January 1.

Eminent citizens and various organisations condemned the anomalies and demanded withdrawal of the books.

"The deliberate changes in the textbooks were the result of regression and fundamentalism," read a statement issued by eighty-five eminent citizens in January.

"There is a dangerous spread of communal politics behind this, which has been evident over the last few years. This year's textbook is the manifestation of compromise of the government with the communal politics."

Faced with criticism, the government made two NCTB officials OSD, suspended one and transferred seven other officials for the errors in the textbooks.

AUTONOMY COMPROMISED

Formed and run under an ordinance of 1983, the NCTB is supposed to be autonomous, but the political party in power exercises an influence over it.

Conducted between October 2016 and October this year, the study said topics and words in textbooks change with the change of government.

Therefore, whenever the government forms committees, preferences are given to people loyal to the ruling party while selecting members. In some cases, competent persons get excluded because of political consideration.

Favouritism works also in the formation of textbook writers' panel. Even incompetent people, who do not have a clear idea about the curriculum, are sometimes picked as members.

Due to the political influence over the institution and failure in ensuring its autonomy, "we are losing the opportunity to build a merit-based society and also getting derailed from the spirit of the Liberation War", said Iftekharuzzaman.

The graft watchdog suggested amending the ordinance of 1983 and

preparing rules of the ordinance.

"As per the ordinance, the NCTB was supposed to be an autonomous institution. Every autonomous body works under a ministry but it has to have autonomy. But this institution never got that status," said the TIB boss.

The study said distortions of original poems, spelling mistakes and incoherent topics and photos are the key challenges in editing textbooks.

The absence of proper planning and system for textbook manuscript preservation and nepotism in the recruitment of proof-readers were some other problems that are needed to be fixed, it said.

IRREGULARITIES IN PUBLICATION, DISTRIBUTION

The study found irregularities and corruption at 16 out of 20 stages of formulation of manuscripts, and publication and distribution of textbooks.

The officials and staff of distribution wing of the NCTB get honorarium for work related to production and distribution though there is no official order to that end.

Around Tk 27.60 lakh was spent this

year as the honorarium for the tasks like making guidelines for tender, publishing advertisement, issuing work order and preparing a list of books sent to the upazilas as per the work order.

Over Tk 50.96 lakh was spent in the last three years for this purpose.

Replying to a query, Morsheda Akhter, deputy programme manager of TIB's research and policy wing, said that the officials and employees, from chairman to MLSS, receive such honorarium though they get six bonuses every year.

The study also said a section of NCTB officials inform some specific organisations about the projected estimate before inviting tender. Therefore, the organisations submit tender after discussing among themselves and reaching an understanding.

The board also in exchange of money gives work order to paper mills that do not have BSTI certificates.

Every year, it also awards the work to paper suppliers who were black-listed for failing to supply quality papers.

In some cases, the monitoring institution gives satisfactory report in favour of some publishing houses in exchange of money.

RECOMMENDATIONS

TIB came up with 16-point recommendation including turning the NCTB into an independent commission. Prior to forming the commission, it said, a committee comprising experts will have to be formed.

"We demand that the NCTB and government consider our recommendations and take the responsibility of reforming the institution," Iftekharuzzaman said.

TIB also suggested curbing the influence and control of education ministry, appointing subject-wise experts and skilled people for writing books and introducing agreement with writers and editors about responsibilities and honorarium.

Prof Dr Sumaiya Khair, adviser, executive management of TIB, and Mohammad Rafiqul Hasan, director of research and policy wing, were also present.