



Visiting Canadian Minister of International Development Marie-Claude calls on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her parliament office yesterday evening.

PHOTO: BSS

BANGLADESH VISIT Pope to meet Rohingya refugees

AFP, Vatican City

Pope Francis will meet Rohingya refugees from Myanmar in Dhaka when he visits the Bangladeshi capital next week, a Vatican spokesman said yesterday.

Francis, who has repeatedly spoken out over the persecution of the religious minority by the Myanmar authorities, will meet a small group of Rohingyas during an interfaith meeting scheduled for December 1.

The Argentine pontiff's trip to Bangladesh will be preceded by a three-day stop in neighbouring Myanmar, which will now include a private meeting with the head of the country's army, General Min Aung Hlaing.

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Woman leader of B'baria AL murdered

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

Unidentified criminals killed a local woman leader of Awami League in Nabinagar upazila of Bahmanbaria last night.

The deceased, Swapna Akter, 45, was the woman affair secretary of the upazila unit AL, said police and the vice president of the upazila unit of party.

A group of unidentified men stabbed Swapna near Bangara Government Primary School area around 9:30pm as she was returning to her home in Charpara, said Ashim Chandra Dhar, sub-inspector (SI) of Nabinagar Police Station.

Doctors of Nabinagar Upazila Health Complex pronounced her dead after she was rushed there in critical condition, Mustafa Ashraf, a doctor of the health complex, said.

Shib Shankar Das, vice-president of the upazila unit AL, also confirmed the incident.

ATTACK IN FENI Dist AL refutes allegation against Nizam Hazari

STAR REPORT

Feni Awami League leaders in a press conference yesterday rejected the allegations against lawmaker Nizam Hazari of playing a key role in the attack on Khaleda Zia's motorcade in the district.

Feni AL member Azharul Haque Arzu at a press conference at the Jatiya Press Club on Tuesday said lawmaker Nizam Hazari was behind the attack on October 28.

Terming the attack pre-planned, Arzu said the lawmaker did this to "take revenge against media outlets" for running reports against him.

But AL leaders in Feni yesterday binned Arzu's claim terming it a lie and conspiracy against the party.

Abdur Rahman, president of Feni AL read out the statement at yesterday's press conference.

He hurriedly wrapped up the event when reporters started to ask questions.

Other Feni AL leaders present there included Aziz Ahmad Chowdhury, district council chairman;

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No permit? No problem!

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the earnings of the vehicles with route permits.

Over Tk 5 crore comes from bribes every month, and middlemen, traffic policemen and even high-ranking police officials get their cut, they said.

Rafiqul Islam, who heads the Dhaka district unit of the Four-Stroke Autorickshaw Drivers Union, said these autorickshaws enter the city through six points -- Jatrabari, Shyampur, Hazaribagh, Mohammadpur, Gabtoli and Abdullahpur.

The drivers pay the syndicate Tk 5,000 to Tk 7,000 a month to operate in the city and "the syndicate makes Tk 5 crore to Tk 6 crore a month", he said.

A few correspondents of this paper went undercover in Jatrabari area recently to know the extent of the illegal practice.

They came across Abdur Rahim whose autorickshaw was registered in Narayanganj. He had been pulled over by one constable Masud near Jatrabari Police Box and Rahim was about to be fined.

Rahim contacted someone over the phone and said, "I repeatedly told him [Masud] it's TI [Traffic Inspector] Mostafiz Sir's CNG [autorickshaw]. But he won't pay any heed."

He then requested Masud to talk to the person on the other end. A little hesitant Masud took the phone and said, "Hmm ... Okay then talk to him. Sir [apparently Mostafiz] hasn't given me any instructions yet."

By this time, Rahim's three-wheeler along with five other vehicles had their wheels clamped at the southeast corner of Jatrabari Police Box.

However, it was clamped only for 30 minutes.

The Daily Star correspondents saw Traffic Inspector Mostafiz arrive and ask Masud to let Rahim's vehicle go. The constable complied.

Before leaving, Rahim told the correspondents, "We give them [police] Tk 5,000 monthly, even after that this harassment. How much money do they need?"

TI Mostafiz brushed aside the allegations that he takes money to let such autorickshaws go.

"Many can bring allegations. But you've to deliver proof," he said.

Asked about their procedures, he said there was a provision for impounding the illegal autorickshaws in the city but they make exceptions in case of emergencies, like transporting patients and examinees.

"In such cases, we just charge wrecker fees [towing fee] and let them go," he said.

However, visiting the spots on October 31 and November 8, the correspondents found that a number of autorickshaws were held in front of the police box but none of those were carrying patients or examinees. They were all eventually let go.

HOW IT WORKS
Posing as clients, The Daily Star correspondents met one of the middlemen in Jurain who went by the name Patwary Billal.

"You'll have to give me Tk 5,000 [a month] to operate CNG [autorickshaw] in Dhaka. If you've any problem with driving licence or documentation, I will not be able to do anything. I will only ensure your free movement," he said.

"From Jatrabari you will be able to go up to Shukrabad, up north you could go up to Jasimuddin Road of Uttara. You will have to skip Farmgate, Bijoy Sarani and Mohakhali areas since law enforcers are strict there," he said.

"If any sergeant catches you, you will call me and I'll talk to the sergeant. You can be worry-free."

"Usually, when a senior officer catches these vehicles, they charge wrecker fee [towing fee]. You'll have to pay that. But be assured that the vehicle won't be dumped [impounded]," he said.

Refusing to disclose his profession, Patwary said, "He changes his identity with circumstances. When I talk to police I use a different identity but that's none of your concern."

Another middleman, Anwar Bhandari of Shanir Akhra, said he

manages three such autorickshaws this way.

"You better contact journalists Soljar and Taslima who work as line-men [middlemen]," said Anwar, adding that he did not know where the two worked. "You can reach them if you contact drivers at Jatrabari," he added.

The Daily Star could not find the two after talking to several autorickshaw drivers at Jatrabari.

Rafiqul Islam said, "When an autorickshaw is pulled over, the driver contacts the respective sergeant or TI who then communicates with their colleagues to make sure the vehicle is allowed to go."

Sergeant Tushar in Kuril Biswa Road area said they impound those autorickshaws but could not say how many they impound each day.

"You'd better talk to senior officers and they would be able to give you the number," he said refuting allegations that they get a cut of the bribe.

Mosleh Uddin Ahmed, additional commissioner (Traffic), DMP, said he was not aware of any syndicates. Stern actions would be taken against the people involved if the allegation was found true, he added.

The drive against illegal CNG autorickshaws that enter Dhaka is going on. "We've strengthened our force to restrict their entrance at different points," he claimed.

Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) Chairman Md Moshir Rahman said the autorickshaws pulled over for illegally plying the streets of Dhaka were supposed to be impounded.

"We conduct regular mobile court drives to check this. But, it is largely the duty of the police to monitor it and send the CNG autorickshaws to the dumping ground [impound]," he said.

Sakhawat Hossain Dulal, member-secretary of Dhaka Zila Autorickshaw and Mishuk Drivers and Workers' Union, said, "Let's allow these autorickshaws in the capital ... we're willing to pay the government for this but not bribe the police."

Violence still forcing them to flee home

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"It is difficult for them to move around, have access to services and even to harvest crops. This situation is certainly continuing, which triggers the continuation of the movements towards Bangladesh," he said in an exclusive interview with The Daily Star at ICRC Dhaka office on November 21.

Boris had arrived in Bangladesh on November 19 on a five day visit and visited refugee camps in Cox's Bazar.

Over 620,000 Rohingyas have fled atrocities by Buddhist-majority Myanmar military since August 25, following attacks by Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army on police posts. The new influx joins over 200,000 Rohingyas who fled violence in previous years.

Around 200,000 more Rohingyas are expected to arrive in Bangladesh in the coming weeks, said US-based International Rescue Committee, despite Myanmar de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi's statement that there were no conflicts in Rakhine since September 5.

The UN had earlier termed the violence as a "textbook example of ethnic cleansing", while rights groups termed it as "crimes against humanity and genocide".

Operations of all aid agencies, except for ICRC, had been suspended in Rakhine since the violence erupted.

World Food Programme (WFP) was finally allowed to operate there only in late October.

ICRC says there is a long history of inter-communal violence between different communities in Rakhine where Rohingyas are denied citizenship and basic services including health and education.

Additionally, the latest clashes between different armed groups, armed forces and security forces have aggravated the situation, Boris Michel said.

Asked about the steps taken by Myanmar authorities to defuse communal violence, he said authorities are aware of the necessity to restore law and order, but it is very challenging as "communities are involved in the communal violence".

He said ICRC is encouraging people at all levels -- state, military, security forces and communities -- to make sure that the civilian population should not be subjected to violence.

"It is very important to restore law and order if we want to see the tension diminishing and if we want to see some solution in the future," said Boris Michel.

For this to happen, the ICRC official said, the solution has to be political under a "very deep agreement" between different stakeholders as there has been differences in access to services among different communities including jobs

opportunities, health and education services.

He said there has to be massive investments to create economic opportunities so that all the grievances of all the communities can be met in a way to prevent any further communal violence.

On his visit to refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Michel said the scale of the requirements is huge given the massive population movement in a short time, and it is very difficult for Bangladesh and local authorities to absorb them.

He stressed on better management of emergency services in the refugee camps and ensuring law and order in and around the camps.

"There has to be good balance between local communities and the refugees. Otherwise, it can quickly turn into problems locally," Boris Michel warned.

This is because local communities see their daily lives totally disrupted by the arrival of other people, which creates imbalance in terms of job opportunities, business, security and access to land, he added.

"So, it is a very complex situation to handle," he said.

The international community needs to be committed to financing emergency response to the crisis until Bangladesh and Myanmar find a political solution, Boris added.

'WB funds to cover both refugees, host community'

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The World Bank has offered financial assistance to Bangladesh to help Rohingya refugees and their host community in Cox's Bazar where the extreme poverty rate is more than 40 percent.

The bank on November 13 sent an aide-memoire to the External Resources Division (ERD), expressing its willingness to provide assistance in the areas of health, nutrition and population service; water, sanitation and hygiene; social protection and livelihood; environmental improvement, access road and disaster risk management; and education and life skill development.

A six-member WB team prepared the aide-memoire after touring Bangladesh from October 22 to November 4. The delegation visited Cox's Bazar and had meetings with officials of different ministries.

The global lender has sought a feedback from the finance ministry by November 26. On the basis of the feedback, a proposal will be placed before the WB board to provide the

assistance.

Sources at the ERD said they would convey their opinion to the WB after receiving opinions from the ministries concerned.

Amid atrocities on Rohingyas in Myanmar, termed ethnic cleansing by the UN, Bangladesh shared its scarce resources with over 6 lakh Rohingyas, who crossed the border in just around three months since late August, and gave them shelter. Over three lakh Rohingya nationals were already in Bangladesh following previous influxes.

The WB said, "We recognise that the influx has placed an immense strain on existing infrastructure and services that would adversely impact the host communities. Therefore, bank support will be designed to respond to the needs of both the host communities and the displaced Rohingya population."

According to the aide-memoire, the overall impact of the Rohingya influx on the Bangladesh economy is uncertain, given that the Cox's Bazar region accounts for comparatively a smaller part of the country's economic activities.

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US condemns

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More than 600,000 Rohingyas have fled the mainly Buddhist country for Bangladesh since the military launched a counter-insurgency operation in Rakhine state in late August.

While the army insists it has only targeted Rohingya rebels, refugees massing in Bangladeshi camps have given chilling and consistent accounts of widespread murder, rape and arson at the hands of security forces and Buddhist mobs.

"These abuses by some among the Burmese military, security forces, and local vigilantes have caused tremendous suffering and forced hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children to flee their homes," Tillerson said.

Tillerson said Myanmar's response to the crisis would be vital to determining the success of its transition to becoming "a more democratic society."

'HORRIFIC' SCENES

Myanmar's de facto civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi -- a Nobel peace

laureate -- has been criticized by rights groups disappointed with her failure to condemn the crackdown or publicly criticize the military.

Washington says Suu Kyi has a crucial role to play in tackling the crisis but has been careful to focus blame on the army.

On his one-day visit to Myanmar's capital Naypyidaw, Tillerson said Washington was "deeply concerned by credible reports of widespread atrocities committed by Myanmar's security forces and vigilantes."

He urged Myanmar to accept an independent investigation into those allegations, after which individual sanctions could be appropriate.

On Wednesday, Tillerson said: "Burma's government and security forces must respect the human rights of all persons within its borders, and hold accountable those who fail to do so."

The army and Suu Kyi's administration have dismissed reports of atrocities and refused to grant entry to UN investigators tasked with probing alleged abuses.

Deal on Rohingya return

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who entered Bangladesh since August 25 this year.

It further said there should not be any timeframe for completion of the repatriation process.

Foreign Secretary M Shahidul Haque, Bangladesh Ambassador to Myanmar M Sufiur Rahman and representatives from the home ministry and Prime Minister's Office also attended the ministerial meeting on "Arrangement on Return of Displaced Persons from Rakhine State", reports UNB.

Earlier in the day, Mahmood and Kyaw Tint Swe in a marathon meeting discussed various issues of bilateral interest, including the Rohingya issue.

Another meeting of senior officials of the two countries was held at the same venue yesterday morning.

The Bangladesh foreign minister will hold talks with Myanmar State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi today.

The two neighbours began their two-day talks with high hopes that it would yield an outcome to sign an MoU to start the repatriation of Rohingyas from Bangladesh.

The international community is also keeping a close eye on the talks and its subsequent outcome as it wants to see a safe and dignified return of the Rohingyas at the earliest.

A senior official said Bangladesh at the meeting raised the issue of keeping a provision in the agreement for a timeframe on completion of the repatriation.

He said the two sides would bridge the gap addressing differences, if any.

According to the official, Dhaka also wants the involvement of the international community, including the UN, in the verification process.

Myanmar didn't fully meet Bangladesh's expectations on the timeframe of Rohingya repatriation, a senior diplomat told UNB, wishing to remain unnamed.

"We agreed on many things though our expectations were not met fully. It's not possible in any negotiations," he said.

Another diplomat said Myanmar wanted to start the repatriation within next two months if a deal was signed.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina last night talked to the foreign minister over the phone about his meeting with the Myanmar minister.

The PM discussed the Rohingya repatriation issue with Mahmood

during a meeting of the Awami League Parliamentary Party at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban, said meeting sources.

Amid mounting international pressure, Myanmar's de facto leader Suu Kyi on Tuesday said they have planned to sign an MoU with Bangladesh this week to start the repatriation of Rohingyas.

"What we're trying to do is to sign an MoU that will enable us to start the repatriation of all those refugees who've gone over the border," she told a press conference at Myanmar International Convention Centre in Naypyitaw.

Suu Kyi said the Asian and European countries were keen to help Myanmar bring about peace and stability in Rakhine as soon as possible.

Apart from international engagement, Bangladesh has been in talks with Myanmar on the safe and voluntary return of Rohingyas.

Foreign Minister Mahmood Ali, who led the Bangladesh delegation to the ASEM Foreign Ministers Meeting, has been in Naypyitaw to discuss the repatriation process with Myanmar leaders.

Escaping persecution in Rakhine, over 622,000 Rohingyas have crossed the border and taken shelter in Cox's Bazar since August 25.

EU FOR DIGNIFIED RETURN OF ROHINGYAS

The European Union has called for steps to ensure a voluntary, safe and dignified return of Rohingyas to Rakhine.

"Conditions for voluntary, safe and dignified return to their places of origin have to be put in place," said a high representative of the EU in a declaration on Myanmar.

In the context of the 13th ASEM Foreign Ministers Meeting in Naypyitaw on November 20-21, the EU welcomed the way forward outlined by Suu Kyi, starting by swiftly finalising a bilateral agreement with Bangladesh on return, and proceeding with implementing recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State.

The EU reiterated its call for the immediate end to all violence and the establishment of non-discriminatory rule of law and civilian administration in Rakhine.

It urged the Myanmar government to ensure accountability for those responsible for committing atrocities.