

AID TO ROHINGYAS

Govt puts one-week embargo on NGOs

Only those working under UNHCR can operate

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

The Cox's Bazar district administration has imposed a weeklong ban on NGOs involved in distributing aid to Rohingyas at Ukhaia and Teknaf from Monday to restore discipline in local business apparently affected by illegal relief trade.

A circular issued on Monday to that end states that the amount of food and non-food items being distributed by the NGOs among the refugees is more than they require. As a result, they have a surplus of food items, which might be wasted, it reads.

To stop the waste, all NGOs have been asked to halt their relief activities for one week from December 11 to December 17, states the circular.

However, the NGOs working under the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) will remain out of this ban, said the additional deputy commissioner (education and ICT) who signed the circular.

He told The Daily Star that the authorities have yet to introduce a

rationing card system, in absence of which many refugees get more aid than they need.

Many of these refugees sell the items at lower prices, affecting the local business, he observed.

"We have decided to stop the aid activities for one week for the NGOs to bring back discipline in the local market. But those working under UNHCR will continue their activities," he added.

Head of External Affairs and Communications of BRAC Ifat Ara Nawaz told The Daily Star they have halted their relief activities complying with the circular.

After a military crackdown by the Myanmar Army on August 25, over 6,20,000 Rohingyas escaped to Bangladesh. The crackdown followed attacks on police and army outposts on the same day by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA).

On September of this year, the United Nations denounced Myanmar's "brutal security operation" against Rohingyas in Rakhine State as a "text-book example of ethnic cleansing".



Rohingya refugees hold their children as they line up for food at the Kutupalong refugee camp in Ukhaia of Cox's Bazar yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

He 'acted alone'

FROM PAGE 1

The US police say the immigrant from Bangladesh set off a crude bomb strapped to his body in a crowded New York subway passage on Monday but the device failed to detonate properly, leaving him the only one seriously harmed.

Akayed survived with burns and lacerations and was taken to hospital in police custody. Three bystanders sustained minor injuries.

He told police investigators he wanted to avenge US airstrikes on the Islamic State group and was also inspired by Christmas terror plots in Europe, media reports say.

US investigators believe he was self-radicalised after entering the United States, most likely by watching militant propaganda online. They were unaware of any specific militant video that might have led him to produce his faulty explosive device.

Several officials familiar with the investigation told Reuters there was no information indicating Akayed was previously known to any US spy or law enforcement agency for any connection to militant groups. But that does not rule out the possibility some connection could be found.

'TRUMP YOU FAILED'

The accused earlier in a Facebook post wrote, "Trump you failed to protect your nation," according to a criminal complaint.

In an interview with investigators, he admitted that he built and detonated the device and said he was inspired to do so by IS, reports CNN.

"I did it for the Islamic State," he told investigators, according to the federal complaint.

Officials also say Akayed was a limousine driver who reportedly learned to build a bomb on the internet at his Brooklyn apartment in New York.

From March 2012 through March 2015, he held a license to drive a limousine or black cab as an independent contractor, the New York City Taxi and Limousine Commission said in a statement.

He came to the US from Bangladesh in 2011 on a visa available to certain relatives of US citizens, writes The Associated Press.

According to his family sources, his father Sanaullah settled in Dhaka after leaving his house in Musapur union under Sandwip upazila about 30 years ago.

Before going to the US, Akayed had been living with his family in the city's Hazaribagh.

Born and brought up in Dhaka, he

completed his secondary school from Kakoli High School and College on Dhanmondi Road 15 and higher secondary school from Rifles Public School and College. He was enrolled on graduate programme at Dhaka City College but could not complete it.

"He used to stay inside an apartment in Jhigatola when he visited Bangladesh last time to meet his wife and newborn baby," Abdul Ahad, an uncle of Akayed, told The Daily Star. "During his stay, he used to go out to offer prayers at a nearby mosque."

Ahad, who also lives in Jhigatola, said his nephew came to Bangladesh on September 8 and left for New York on October 22. "He mostly stayed with his wife and six-month-old baby boy. I found him calm, quiet and rarely socialising."

Akayed got married when he visited Bangladesh two years ago and stayed for about three months.

"He used to pray regularly in mosque. He sometimes invited me to pray with him," said Mofazzal, caretaker of Akayed's father-in-law's Jhigatola house where he stayed during the last visit.

Ahad, Akayed's wife and her parents were interrogated at the office of Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit of Dhaka Metropolitan Police yesterday. They were taken there at about 3:15pm.

Police dropped them at their houses around 9:15pm, officials said.

Mohammad Saiful Islam, additional deputy commissioner of the unit, said they talked to them to know details about Akayed and whether they saw anything wrong with him.

The police in Chittagong also took three of his relatives into their custody for questioning. They, however, could give little information about him as his family left Sandwip a long time ago.

After quizzing, police released Akayed's uncle Borhan Ullah Talukdar, his cousin Emdad Ullah alias Sohrab and maternal uncle Joynul Abedin, reported The Daily Star's staff correspondent in Chittagong.

One neighbour in the Brooklyn neighborhood of Windsor Terrace said she had not seen Akayed in months but described his home as quiet and observant in Islamic customs. She saw no evidence of extremism.

"They're really nice people. This is shocking," said the neighbour, Arlene Jorgraj, a teacher who had greeted Ullah in passing.

"We all know each other. We have block parties. I've been over there for dinner parties after Ramadan. We're a

really tight-knit street," she said.

Meanwhile, New York officials yesterday said they charged the suspect with terrorism, accusing him of setting off a pipe bomb a day earlier in a crowded Manhattan commuter hub.

Akayed was charged with criminal possession of a weapon, supporting an act of terrorism, and making a terroristic threat under New York state law, the New York Police Department said.

He faces five federal terrorism-related charges and three state terrorism-related charges, according to court documents.

The NYPD and the Federal Bureau of Investigation were conducting the investigation in conjunction with other agencies through the Joint Terrorism Task Force, and were asking the public for any information about the suspect.

New York Mayor Bill de Blasio called it an attempted terrorist attack, and US officials said it appeared to be a rare if not unprecedented attempt at suicide bombing on US soil.

'THEY'RE DISGRUNTLED' Governor Cuomo called the suspect a "lone wolf," similar to the suspect in the most recent attack in New York, when an Uzbek immigrant driving a rented truck ran over people on a bicycle path on October 31, killing eight.

Each acted alone, inspired by jihadist groups such as Islamic State, Cuomo said.

"Both of them went on the web, downloaded information," Cuomo said of the two suspects, adding that Ullah learned to make a bomb online.

"They're not people who come from overseas. They live here. They're disgruntled," said Cuomo, who went to the scene of the crime where he met with investigators.

Ullah was influenced by violent Islamist extremists and was "angry," Cuomo said. This could have been for any number of reasons, whether because of US policy abroad or his lot in life at home, he said.

New York police shut down an entire block of row houses in Windsor Terrace, deploying a large show of force with at least one helicopter flying overhead. It was not clear if the neighbourhood was Ullah's most recent address.

Neighbours called it a diverse, family-oriented neighbourhood of long-standing white families of Italian and Polish descent with more recent Chinese, Indian and Bangladeshi arrivals.

"This is a great neighbourhood. It's very family oriented, very safe," Jorgraj said. "This doesn't change my opinion of the neighbourhood at all. This is just the state of the world we live in now."

Chain migration to blame

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said in a statement that called for various changes to the immigration system.

Earlier, White House spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders said Trump's proposed policies "could have prevented this", reports The Associated Press.

In a scenario New York had dreaded for years, Akayed strapped on a crude pipe bomb with Velcro and plastic ties, slipped unnoticed into the nation's busiest subway system and set off the device, authorities said.

The device didn't work as intended; authorities said Akayed, 27, was the only person seriously wounded.

"This is one of my nightmares ... a terrorist attack in the subway system," Gov Andrew Cuomo told cable channel NY1. "The good news is: We were on top of it."

Law enforcement officials said Akayed looked at IS propaganda online but is not known to have any direct contact with the militants and probably acted alone. Cuomo said there was no evidence, so far, of other bombs or a larger plot. The Democrat said officials were exploring whether Ullah had been on authorities' radar, but there was no indication yet that he was.

Since 1965, America's immigration policy has centred on giving preference to people with advanced education or skills, or people with family ties to US citizens and, in some cases, legal permanent residents.

Citizens have been able to apply for spouses, parents, children, siblings and the siblings' spouses and minor children; the would-be immigrants are then screened by US officials to determine whether they can come.

Trump's administration has called for a "merit-based" immigration system that would limit family-based

green cards to spouses and minor children.

Akayed lived with his father, mother and brother in a Brooklyn neighbourhood with a large Bangladeshi community, residents said. He was licensed to drive a livery cab between 2012 and 2015, but the license was allowed to lapse, according to law enforcement officials and New York City's Taxi and Limousine Commission.

His family was "deeply saddened" by the attack but also "outraged by the way we have been targeted by law enforcement," the family said in a statement sent by the New York Chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations. A teenage relative was pulled out of class and questioned in school without a parent, guardian or lawyer, the statement said.

Bangladesh's government was quick to condemn the subway attack.

"Bangladesh is committed to its declared policy of 'Zero Tolerance' against terrorism, and condemns terrorism and violent extremism in all forms or manifestations anywhere in the world, including Monday morning's incident in New York City," the government said in a statement.

"A terrorist is a terrorist irrespective of his or her ethnicity or religion, and must be brought to justice."

The incident also drew a chorus of condemnation from the Bangladeshi community in the United States.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, several Bangladeshis living in the US, particularly in New York, slammed the violent incident and said the terror attack has badly embarrassed the entire community.

The incident has created a sense of serious uncertainty among the Bangladeshi expatriates, especially among those who are in the process of being legalised, students pursuing higher studies and those living there with limited permission as they fear

wholesale harsh action by the US administration.

"Akayed Ullah is a devil and he has brought shame on all of us [Bangladeshis] in the US... He has embarrassed Bangladesh," Mohammad Shahidul Islam, a Bangladesh-born US citizen, wrote in his Facebook status.

Bangladeshi journalist Darpan Kabir, who has been living in New York for the past several years and publishes a newspaper from there, in a Facebook post termed the incident a crime against humanity.

Many over the phone and in messages said Bangladesh community living in the US should stand boldly against any act of terrorism.

"Though Akayed Ullah was born in Bangladesh, he is a black sheep and an insect of sewer... He cannot be a Bangladeshi because Bangladesh is the land of Rabindranath Tagore, Poet Nazrul and Bangabandhu," Kamal Hossain Mithu wrote on Facebook.

There is a common feeling among the community that the Bangladesh government should vigorously conduct probe at home and also cooperate with the US government for averting any such incident in future.

The expats also said Bangladesh government should immediately talk with the Trump administration so that the innocent Bangladeshis living in the US do not fall victim to any action.

Students who are pursuing higher studies in different parts of the US, who are intending to come home on vacation, are scared whether they would be allowed to go back to the US after their vacation.

Asked about the situation of Bangladeshi community after Monday's incident, Shameem Ahsan, consul general at the Bangladesh Consulate in New York, said, "We remain in touch with the US side and our diaspora."

A dangerous nuisance

FROM PAGE 1

Without conducting any research over the impact of bright LED billboards on drivers or preparing any guidelines, Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) have given the tender to five companies to set up digital LED billboards in its territory.

Wishing to remain unnamed, officials of DSCC signed that the brightness of these newly installed LED billboards is risky for the city dwellers especially for the drivers.

Last year, DSCC conducted several drives to remove messy and disorganised billboards from the city.

At the fag end of 2016, with a 13-member committee headed by DSCC Chief Executive Officer Khan Mohammad Bilal, the city corporation agreed a contract with five companies for setting up and maintenance of the digital forms of advertisement.

The companies have been given the liberty to use the technology of their preference and fix the place for installing these LED billboards.

The first big digital billboard was set up in Shahbag. Digital advertisement posts by TCL Optoelectronics are also seen on the footpaths of both side of capital's Hare road.

Though initially welcomed, city dwellers have begun complaining about the brightness of digital screens which often distract drivers.

Shekhar Dutta, a passenger of a Motijheel bound bus, said, "It's far better than the worn out billboards set up in a scattered fashion.

But, these should be set up in a more synchronised way as these affect the eyesight of drivers or passers-by and thus could cause an accident anytime.

Nur Hossain, a CNG driver, complained, "It's flashy. Even on the day, it dazzles the eyes."

Jasim Uddin, who was driving a sedan, said, "City authorities in many countries closely monitor the rules and regulations regarding the construction and display of billboards. For us, that's the biggest problem."

According to DSCC revenue office, the corporation has fixed the quantity of billboards on a particular road and left other matters like setup and maintenance to the private organisations.

"It depends upon them that where and how the billboards will be set up. We only collect tax," said a revenue officer, adding that they are expecting Tk 3 crore revenue in the current fiscal year.

Contacted, Managing Director of DIGI AD Abdullah Aziz Ahmed said these billboards have been set up at a 20-foot height to avert any adverse effect on the eyesight. "So there is no scope for an accident," he said.

Like him, the Director of TCL Optoelectronics Ltd Akhtar Hamid Khan, brushed aside public complaints.

"Following the standard of modern countries, we're setting there up [here]," he said, adding that there was no chance of causing distraction given their height.

Urban expert and architect Iqbal Habib said the brightness of these LED billboards are kept high during the day but not adjusted at night. As a result, the high dispersion of light dazzles drivers.

He said drivers have to fully concentrate at different intersections but some of these billboards are set up at these points which can lead to fatal accidents any time.

There should have been some guidelines like the ones in Singapore, Bangkok, London and Delhi over LED billboards.

DSCC has a town planning department which looks over the city's beautification as well as development. However, it is kept out of the loop.

Contacted, DSCC's Chief Town Planner Sirajul Islam said no one has spoken to him over LED billboards. He suggested speaking with the chief revenue officer.

The Daily Star tried to contact Chief Revenue Officer Yusuf Ali Sardar several times over the phone but he did not answer.

Farazi Shahabuddin Ahmed, DSCC Chief Engineer, said "We've understood it is causing impact on the driver's eyesight."

"It's a new thing for us and naturally there will be some side effects. The brightness of the billboards needs to be researched" he added.

Bilal said, "The concept is new. So we have not fixed any guidelines. We will now sit with experts and prepare a guideline."



Vehicles caught up in a long tailback in Mirzapur bypass area on the Dhaka-Tangail highway around 10:00am yesterday. The tailback stretched around 30 kilometres from Gazipur's Chandra to Natiapara of Tangail, causing sufferings to thousands of passengers since Monday night. The highway has been in a bad condition due to recent untimely rain and the construction work for upgrading it into a four-lane road.

PHOTO: STAR