

FALLOUT FROM INTERFAITH MARRIAGE

Police move to end family's sufferings

HABIBUR RAHMAN, Pirojpur

Police yesterday reopened the tea stall whose owner was forced to close it for over three months by local UP chairman in Pirojpur's Nesarabad upazila.

Victim Nurul Haque alleged that Mahmud Kabir Talukder alias Sabur, chairman of Samudoykathi Union Parishad, pressurised him to shut down the shop as Nurul's daughter developed a relationship with a Hindu youth, who converted to Islam and married her.

Police reopened the shop following a written complaint from Nurul in this regard, said Shahidul Islam, officer-in-charge (investigation) of Nesarabad Police Station.

Nurul, 60, from Rajbari village of the upazila, said he had been living with his family in Sagarkanda Bazaar for over 20 years.

He has four children -- three daughters and a son.

Nurul said around six or seven

months ago, his second daughter Sonia Akter, 20, fell in love with a Hindu youth, Sumon Mondal, 32, of Shashid village in the upazila.

After learning of the relationship, influential locals, including UP Chairman Sabur, became angry with the family.

They held a village arbitration at the bazaar over three months ago and asked Nurul to shut down his tea stall, the only source of income of the family.

"For over three months, I could not earn any money," said Nurul, adding that they had to pass many days without food.

He already sold his goats and hens to run the family.

"Almost every day over the last three months, I went to the chairman and requested him to let us reopen the tea stall. But he did not pay heed," said Shadida Begum, 40, wife of Nurul.

Their son, Nahid Sheikh, 15, is a class nine student and youngest daughter Sumaiya took part in this

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Nurul Haque's tea stall previously shuttered by local union parishad chairman.



A man casts his vote through an electronic voting machine (EVM) at the Begum Rokeya Government College centre during yesterday's RCC polls. Inset, women line up to exercise their franchise in front of another polling centre at Kellabandh Government Primary School in the city. PHOTO: STAR



JP wins big in bastion

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defeating the heavyweight AL candidate, he said his commitment to the people and his party's popularity in Rangpur played a decisive role.

He also said he would take advice from Jhantu in running the RCC.

Meanwhile, at a press conference at the district BNP office, Kawsar rejected the election results, claiming that the "results were rigged".

Briefing journalists at the Election Commission office in the capital, Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda said, "We are satisfied with the overall situation."

He also dismissed BNP's claim that the local administration created obstacles to a smooth voting environment. "We collected information from local level. Voters did not come up with any allegation. So the allegation [by the BNP] does not seem to be authentic."

The BNP alleged that its polling agents were driven out of some centres, raising question about the neutrality of the Election Commission. But elec-

tion officials said they received no written complaints from any candidates or parties.

Voting began at 8:00am and continued till 4:00pm without a break. As many as 3,93,994 voters were registered to vote.

Voters' turnout was 74.3 percent, said Returning Officer Subhas Chandra Sarker.

Seven candidates ran for the mayor post and 276 for 33 ward councillor seats. As many as 65 fought for the reserved seats for women.

More than 5,500 security personnel were deployed during voting that ended without any incidents of irregularities.

After the Comilla City Corporation election in March, it was the second major polls held under the Nurul Huda-led EC.

Visiting the polling centres at Tajhat High School, Senpara High School and Lions School and College, The Daily Star correspondents saw an overwhelming turnout of female

voters, many gathering in front of polling stations before voting opened.

Supporters of mayor and councillor candidates thronged polling stations in a festive mood.

"I am happy to cast my vote without any fear. The environment is peaceful," said Abdul Wahed, 60, who voted at Tajhat High School centre.

Mahbuba Nasrin, a housewife from the city's college road, voted for the second time in her life.

"The situation is much better this time compared to the last time [2012]," she said.

AL mayor candidate Jhantu voted at Guptopara Salema Girls High School centre, BNP candidate Kawsar at Mahiganj Dewandigi Govt Primary School centre and JP's Mostafa at Alamnagar Govt Primary School centre.

After casting their votes, Jhantu and Mostafa said they were satisfied with the polls environment and that they were optimistic about their victory.

But Kawsar alleged that his agents were barred from entering many poll-

ing centres.

Casting his vote at Senpara Shishu Mongol Govt Primary School centre around 9:00am, Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad said the Rangpur city polls were a "test for the Election Commission" to prove its capability and impartiality.

As part of a trial, Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) were installed at Begum Rokeya Government College centre (2,069 voters) in ward-25.

Six EVM devices were set up at six polling booths there, said Azharul Islam, the presiding officer.

Voting at the centre remained suspended for about 20 minutes due to technical glitches, but it resumed after the problem was fixed, said Abu Saleh Mohammad Jangi, an official who helped voters to use EVMs.

In the first RCC polls in 2012, Jhantu had won with 106,255 votes, defeating Mostafa by 30,000 votes. Jatiya Party-backed AKM Abdur Rouf Manik got 37,208 votes and BNP-backed Kawsar bagged only 21,235 votes.

BUILDING HOUSES FOR ROHINGYAS IN RAKHINE

Myanmar to get \$25m from India

REUTERS, New Delhi

India will provide Myanmar with \$25 million for development projects including prefabricated houses in troubled Rakhine state to enable the return of Rohingya Muslims who have fled the area, the foreign ministry said yesterday.

More than 600,000 Rohingyas have escaped to Bangladesh after attacks by insurgents on Myanmar security forces in August triggered a military crackdown that the United Nations has called ethnic cleansing.

The international community demands the Rohingyas be allowed to go home in safety, and Bangladesh and Myanmar have begun talks on repatriation, but huge doubts remain about the Rohingyas ever being able to return in peace to rebuild homes and till fields.

India, which is concerned about the influx of the refugees into its territory, has stressed economic development of the Rakhine region as a way to help lower tensions.

Foreign Secretary Subrahmanyam Jaishankar held talks with Myanmar leaders on Wednesday and signed a memorandum of understanding to support development of Rakhine and

help create jobs.

"This is intended to help the Government of Myanmar achieve its objective of restoration of normalcy in Rakhine State and enable the return of displaced persons," the Indian foreign ministry said in a statement.

"Under this MoU, Government of India proposes to take up, among others, a project to build prefabricated housing in Rakhine State so as to meet the immediate needs of returning people."

India will spend \$25 million over the next five years on development of the impoverished region, foreign ministry spokesman Raveesh Kumar said.

Besides housing, the proposals include building schools, healthcare facilities and building bridges and roads.

India has been trying to promote economic cooperation with Myanmar to try to push back against China's expansive involvement in infrastructure development across south Asia.

Beijing has also stepped into the Rohingya crisis and proposed a three-phase plan including a ceasefire, bilateral talks and then tackling poverty long-term.

US slaps Myanmar gen with sanctions

AFP, Washington

The United States blacklisted a rogues gallery of alleged rights abusers and corrupt officials yesterday, as a new global sanctions law went into effect.

US diplomats and Treasury officials spent a year compiling evidence of the most brutal and cynical crimes by 14 senior figures and dozens of companies.

Then on Thursday, President Donald Trump signed an executive order blocking any assets that those exposed on the list might have in banks or property on US soil.

Prominent on the list, Myanmar's General Maung Maung Soe is accused of leading a campaign of "ethnic cleansing" against his country's persecuted Rohingya minority.

As chief of the army's Western Command, US officials said, he oversaw "killings, sexual violence, and arbitrary arrest as well as the widespread burning of villages."

Another notorious figure is Gambia's former president Yahya Jammeh, who stepped down this year but once ran a "terror and assassination squad called the Junglers."

"He ordered the Junglers to kill a local religious leader, journalists, members of the political opposition, and former members of the government," the US Treasury said.

The first woman added to the list was Gulnara Karimova, the daughter of the late Uzbek strongman Islam Karimov, and allegedly an organized crime boss in her own right.

Karimova has been charged at home

with theft and embezzlement and the US statement alleged she has laundered her network's profits in a web of companies and funds.

The blacklist also includes officials and businessmen from Russia, China, Ukraine, Guatemala, Pakistan, Serbia, the Dominican Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

"Today's actions advance our values and promote the security of the United States, our allies and our partners," US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said.

"We must lead by example, and today's announcement of sanctions demonstrates the United States will continue to pursue tangible and significant consequences for those who commit serious human rights abuse and engage in corruption."

The global act, based on a previous US law that targeted Russian officials, was passed in late 2016 and officials have spent a year compiling the first list.

Just as the list of Russians under US sanctions has expanded regularly since the Magnitsky Act of 2012, the new global blacklist is also expected to grow.

Under the law, US citizens and institutions are forbidden from conducting business with those on the list, and any assets they hold under US jurisdiction are frozen.

In addition, officials said, non-US foreign banks are often loathe to do business with blacklisted individuals in case their own US operations are exposed to prosecution.

"The United States is taking a strong

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UN set to vote amid Trump warning

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"No vote in the United Nations will make any difference on that," Haley said. "But this vote will make a difference on how Americans look at the UN and on how we look at countries who disrespect us in the UN."

"When we make generous contributions to the UN we also have a legitimate expectation that our goodwill is recognised and respected," she said.

The resolution reaffirms that the status of Jerusalem must be resolved through negotiations, and that any decision reached outside of that framework must be rescinded.

Without explicitly referencing the US move, it "affirms that any decisions and actions which purport to have altered the character, status or demographic composition of the Holy City of Jerusalem have no legal effect, are null and void and must be rescinded in compliance with relevant resolutions of the Security Council."

UNPRECEDENTED TEST The motion was sent to the General Assembly after it was vetoed by the

United States at the Security Council on Monday, although all other 14 council members voted in favour.

While resolutions by the General Assembly are non-binding, a strong vote in support carries political weight.

Ahead of the vote, Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu blasted the UN as a "house of lies," saying Israel "rejects outright this vote, even before it passes."

"No General Assembly resolution will ever drive us from Jerusalem," vowed Danny Danon, Israel's envoy to the United Nations.

Palestinian foreign minister Riad al-Malki called the vote an "unprecedented test" for the UN, and referenced the US warning that it was "taking names."

"History records names, it remembers names -- the names of those who stand by what is right and the names of those who speak falsehood," al-Malki said. "Today we are seekers of rights and peace."

Trump's decision on December 6 to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital prompted a flurry of appeals to the

United Nations.

The status of the Holy City is one of the thorniest issues in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with both sides claiming it as their capital.

Trump warned that Washington would closely watch how nations voted, suggesting, like Haley, there could be financial reprisals for those that back the motion put forward by Yemen and Turkey on behalf of Arab and Muslim countries.

"They take hundreds of millions of dollars and even billions of dollars and then they vote against us," Trump said at the White House.

"Well, we're watching those votes. Let them vote against us. We'll save a lot. We don't care."

HOUSE OF LIES

The resolution mirrored the text that was vetoed at the Security Council on Monday, and although it does not mention Trump's decision, it expresses "deep regret at recent decisions" concerning the city's status.

No country has veto powers in the

General Assembly, unlike in the 15-member Security Council where the United States, along with Britain, China, France and Russia, can block any resolution.

Among the 14 countries voting in favour on Monday were Britain, France, Italy and Japan and they did so again yesterday.

Ukraine, which supported the draft resolution in the Security Council, was among 21 countries that did not turn up for yesterday's vote.

Israel seized the largely-Arab eastern sector of Jerusalem during the 1967 Six-Day War and later annexed it, claiming both sides of the city as its "eternal and undivided capital."

But the Palestinians want the eastern sector as the capital of their future state and fiercely oppose any Israeli attempt to extend sovereignty there.

Several UN resolutions call on Israel to withdraw from territory seized in 1967 and the draft resolution contains the same language as past motions adopted by the assembly.

Won't bend knee to seek

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to seek a second four-year term" adding that "in the current geo-political context," to stay "might involve bending a knee in supplication; muting a statement of advocacy."

Hussein did not mention Trump by name, but he has reportedly been under pressure from UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to tone down his human rights criticism of Washington.

Even as Hussein's email became public, Trump was threatening to cut off US funding to countries that vote against his Israel policy at a UN General Assembly emergency session.

During Trump's election campaign, Hussein had blasted the political newcomer's populist promise to ban Muslims from visiting or migrating to the US as "grossly irresponsible."

In August, Hussein took a swipe at Trump over his depiction of media reports as "fake news," saying it could amount to incitement against journalists.

He compared the US president to a bus driver "careening down a moun-

tain path."

From a human rights perspective, he said, "it seems to be reckless driving."

The US remains the single biggest donor to UN coffers and Guterres has been keen to develop ties with the US administration to sustain the broader UN agenda.

In his interview with AFP, Hussein voiced concern over the far-right tilt of Austria's new coalition government and took aim at politicians willing to turn to "the peddling of fear as a means of getting to political office."

Trump's comments have "seemed to find an echo in other countries where leaders who were inclined to shut down civil society or the media were resorting to the same language," he said.

"I think we all recognise how dangerous that is."

Human rights groups have praised Hussein as a strong voice at the UN who spoke with credibility on rights violations in Syria and Myanmar, among many conflicts.

He was the first UN official to

describe the Myanmar army's campaign against Muslim Rohingya as ethnic cleansing.

Hussein is a "stellar exception in a world where populists and enemies of human rights have gotten a lot of air play," said Louis Charbonneau, UN director for Human Rights Watch.

"It's a sorry indictment of the regard for which human rights are held when the high commissioner feels like he would have to compromise with his message and his actions in order to get a second term," said Charbonneau.

"I hope the UN will find a replacement who can continue in this style in an extremely challenging time for human rights defenders."

The 53-year-old career diplomat was appointed as UN rights chief in 2014 under former UN chief Ban Ki-moon, replacing Navi Pillay of South Africa.

He was Jordan's UN ambassador from 2000 to 2007 and served as a UN political affairs officer in the UN peace mission in former Yugoslavia, during the Balkan wars of the 1990s.

SCHOOLGIRL MUNNI MURDER

Prime accused arrested in Sunamganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

The stalker, who fatally stabbed a schoolgirl inside her home in Sunamganj on Saturday, was arrested early yesterday in Sylhet.

Arrestee Yahya Sardar, 22, son of Jamal Miah of Sakitpur village in Sunamganj, was on the run since the murder.

Mostofa Kamal, officer-in-charge of Dirai Police Station, said on receiving information about Yahya's whereabouts in Dorsa village of Sylhet, police arrested him around 1:00am and brought him back to Sunamganj.

Deceased Humayra Akhter Munni, 19, a Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examinee from Dirai Girls High School was a resident of Madani Mahalla in Dirai municipality area.

Family members alleged that she was attacked by Yahya because she refused the man's advances.

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