

Rights activists are just a noisy bunch

Duterte tells Suu Kyi amid Rohingya plight

REUTERS, New Delhi

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte told Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi, heavily criticised abroad for failing to stand up for largely stateless Rohingya Muslims, that she shouldn't bother about rights activists as they are "just a noisy bunch".

Duterte said he made the remarks in a speech at the Philippines-India Business Forum in New Delhi where Duterte and Suu Kyi are attending a summit of Southeast Asian countries.

"We were talking about our country, the interest of our country ... and I said 'do not mind the human rights' (activists), they are just a noisy bunch actually," Duterte said.

Suu Kyi is facing international criticism for failing to address the plight of the Rohingya, more than 655,500 of whom have fled to Bangladesh to escape a crackdown by the Myanmar military.

Many people in Buddhist-majority Myanmar regard the Rohingya as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.



Locals join a human chain on the bank of Pagnar haor in Sylhet yesterday demanding immediate start of the construction of all haor protection dams and completion of the work by next month. The Paribesh and Haor Unnayan Sangstha, a platform to protect the resources and environment of haor areas, organised the event.

Police find

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Nizaul's brother Ripon Khan filed a general diary with Narayanganj Sadar Police Station on January 17, claiming that his brother lost the gun during the clash.

On the day of the clash, Ivy and around 50 others were injured as supporters of Shamim attacked her and her followers, leading to a clash on Bangabandhu Road in Narayanganj city's Chashara area over eviction of hawkers from footpaths.

On information, police searched for the pistol and found the gun and 10 bullets in a flowerpot in front of Saint Paul's Church on the Bangabandhu Road around 2:00am, Abdur Razzak, acting officer-in-charge of the police station, told The Daily Star.

The gun was wrapped in a polythene bag, the OC said, adding that police were trying to arrest Niazul, who has gone into hiding.

Apart from Niazul, Shah Nizam, another close aide of Shamim, also flaunted a firearm during the incident on January 16. He is the joint secretary of the Narayanganj city AL and also the secretary of district Community Police.

Talking to this newspaper earlier, Nizam admitted that he had wielded a gun, but claimed not to have attacked Ivy or her supporters.

"I flaunted the gun only to stop my followers from attacking the mayor's supporters who swooped on us carrying firearms," he had said.

BNP wary of Feb 8

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Seeking anonymity, a BNP standing committee member said the meeting would mainly discuss the issues relating to the verdict in the Zia Orphanage Trust graft case and the party's next course of action over the issue.

The BNP chief's son Tarique Rahman and four others were also accused in the case. The Special Court-5 in Dhaka on Thursday fixed January 8 for delivering the verdict.

Khaleda faces 31 more cases. The same court on Thursday set January 30 for resuming proceedings in the Zia Charitable Trust graft case.

According to BNP sources, the party is considering taking to the streets if the verdict goes against Khaleda.

Senior BNP leaders on different occasions had threatened that they would announce tougher agitation programmes if the judgment went against the party chief.

Meanwhile, BNP standing committee member Gayeshwar Chandra Roy yesterday warned that the consequences would be "very bad" if the court gave any "negative verdict" against Khaleda.

He was addressing a discussion organised by Nagorik Odhikar Andolon at the Jatiya Press Club, marking the third death anniversary of the BNP chief's younger son Arafat Rahman Koko.

If Khaleda is convicted of graft, a disastrous situation might be created in the country, no matter whether the BNP announces any protest programme or not, Gayeshwar added.

He said people would give a befitting reply if the government tried to take "political revenge" on Khaleda by using the court.

The BNP leader alleged that the Awami League was plotting to keep his party away from the next parliamentary polls as the ruling party had no ability to contest against the BNP.

On Thursday, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir expressed fear that the verdicts in the two graft cases against Khaleda and the other accused would be pronounced "as per the prime minister's desire".

GOVT TALKS TOUGH AGAINST ANARCHY

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan yesterday said stern actions would be taken if anyone tried to create anarchy centering the verdict in the orphanage trust graft case, reports UNB.

The minister was talking to reporters after attending a function organised marking the Metropolitan Family Day in the city's Dhakeshwari temple.

"The law is equal for all. If anybody tries to create anarchy over the verdict, action will be taken. Members of our law enforcement agencies have been put on alert in this regard."

In July 2008, the Anti-Corruption Commission had filed the orphanage trust graft case with Ramna Police Station accusing Khaleda and five others of misappropriating over Tk 2.10 crore that had come as grants for orphans from a foreign bank.

Too much for human ear

FROM PAGE 1

Presently, police use batons, water cannons, teargas shells, rubber bullets, shotguns and sound grenades for crowd control.

"We bought the device for effective crowd control to avoid any unexpected incidents," Tanvir Momtaz, assistant inspector general (equipment) of the Police Headquarters, told The Daily Star recently.

Asked about the justification for buying these device, police officials said AHDs are an effective tool to control crowd without needing to go anywhere near the targeted gathering. When used, there will be no chance of violence because the demonstrators will not be able to engage in clashes with the law enforcers.

It may be effective, but health experts warn it could damage nerve system of ears of people within a kilometre range, and the available treatment is of little help.

Manufactured by an American company, HyperSpike Technology, the device looks like a heavy-duty speaker (weighing over 16kg) and discharges up to a deafening 148-decibel sonic beams.

Mohammad Abdullah, a professor of Ear, Nose and Throat at Dhaka Medical College Hospital, said this could cause immediate damage to the nerve of ears.

"Repeated exposure to such a high level of sound may also permanently damage the ear nerves, leaving a victim hearing impaired," said Abdullah, adding, "Treatment cannot usually fix the damage."

A normal conversation is usually 60 decibels, a lawn mower could emit up to 90 decibels, and the pain threshold for most humans is 130 decibels, according to international media reports.

Exposure to sound levels over 85 decibels can cause hearing loss, according to US's National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.

On November 30 last year, police used one of the AHDs at Shahbagh for the first time during a half-day hartal by left parties.

A number of demonstrators, hawkers and passers-by complained of dizziness for hours even though they fled instantly, covering their ears with their palms.

They also said they puked within an hour of being exposed and had splitting headaches.

"I had the discomfort till I fell asleep. I only felt better after I woke up the next morning," Jamal, a 15-year-old betel leaf vendor, told The Daily Star a week after the incident.

But officials at the Police Headquarters played down the concerns, insisting that there was no chance of people being harmed as only trained commanders are authorised to use it.

The commanders use AHDs at least 20 metres away from the crowd and the device only allows five-second bursts at 148 decibels. If the device is used for more than five seconds, the decibel level drops to 74, officials said.

The commanders have also been trained to keep the volume between 50 to 65 decibels if the device is used for more than one minute, they added.

But rights activists say police seldom follow rules while using even the conventional crowd-control weapons.

On July 20 last year, Titumir College student Siddiqur Rahman became blind after a teargas canister fired by a constable hit him in the eye.

Under the rules, tear shells should be fired upwards, at a 45-degree angle.

Rights activists also pointed out the safety concerns in a densely populated city like Dhaka.

"I don't think Dhaka is a place where such a sonic weapon can be used," Nur Khan Liton, a noted human rights activist, told The Daily Star.

"No matter how firm the police are in their claim that the commanders are trained and they would work within the law, our past experience is that they do many things going beyond the law," he said.

Initially designed for military use, the sound weapons were used in war zones in Iraq and Afghanistan to get people out of buildings into the range of snipers.

Police in many countries, including the US, Canada, Australia and India, now have LRADs, a type of AHD. The use of the device sparked uproar in almost all countries, and in some cases courts had to weigh in.

Nightmares

FROM PAGE 1

After months of global pressure on Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar reached an agreement on November 23 with Bangladesh to take back refugees.

The returns were supposed to start this week, but were suddenly shelved, with both sides blaming the other for a lack of preparation.

NIGHTMARES

Aid agencies and experts say that is actually a good thing.

"We know the children that are already traumatised and need expert care, will be even more traumatised if they are forced to go back," UNICEF deputy executive director Justin Forsyth told AFP in the Balukhali refugee camp.

"Nightmares, wetting their beds, self-harming. These are things children begin to do in extreme situations. I mean children shaking with fear because they don't know whether they'll see the same type of violence happening again."

The small army of psychologists working in the camps say repatriation could cause the Rohingya children long-term damage just as they are coming to terms with the relative stability of their new lives.

A handful of child-safe zones have sprung up across the camps, offering a respite from the drudgery of survival, where youngsters can play, draw, sing, act and read in safety.

Little is known about what prepara-

Hospital fire kills 37 in South Korea

FROM PAGE 16

"But when I opened the exit door, the whole stairway was filled with dark smoke and I couldn't see a thing," he told Seoul's major daily JoongAng Ilbo.

"Everybody was running around in panic, falling over and screaming as smoke filled the rooms," he was quoted as saying. Jang tore open window screens and escaped on a ladder erected by firefighters.

"There were so many aged patients on other floors... I wonder if they escaped safely," JoongAng quoted Jang's wife as saying.

SHORT-CIRCUITS SUSPECTED

Hospital director Son Gyeong-Cheol admitted there was no sprinklers system in the building.

None had been required under fire prevention laws, he told journalists, but the hospital had been planning to install them in the coming week to comply with new regulations coming into force in June.

"There were two heating-cooling air conditioners in the emergency room and the fire started in that area," he said. "We suspect electrical short-circuits."

Miryang Fire Station chief Choi Man-Woo apologised for "failing to rescue each and every one" of the patients caught in the fire.

"When our fast reaction squad arrived at the scene, the building was already engulfed in thick smoke and flames and

Muggers' car runs over, kills woman

FROM PAGE 1

fell off his mother's lap and died when some muggers tried to snatch her purse off a moving rickshaw in Dhaka's Doyaganj area on December 18 last year. One Rajib, 20, a drug addict, was arrested in connection with the incident later.

A physician at National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases, Farhad Alam died falling from a rickshaw after muggers on a motorcycle pulled his bag on November 29 last year.

Using cars, muggers usually snatch valuables from people at the dead of night or early morning, taking benefit of light traffic and lax security on roads during the time.

Monirul, a technician at a private firm in Panthapath, demanded immediate arrest of the muggers who killed his wife. He said they had gone to their village to collect their smart NID cards.

Contacted, Maruf Hossain Sorder, deputy commissioner of Dhaka

Make Israel halt violence in Palestine

FROM PAGE 16

Friday during an Open Debate on the "Situation in the Middle East, including the Question of Palestine", said a media release of the Bangladesh Permanent Mission to the UN.

The debate was convened by Kazakhstan, the president of the UNSC.

Mentioning Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's firm stand on the question of Palestine, Masud said the government and the people of Bangladesh remain steadfast in their support for the just and legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people for their inalienable rights, including their right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent, viable, contiguous and sovereign Palestinian state, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in the framework of a two-state solution.

He expressed concern over cutting funding for United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for Palestine Refugees which would have grave consequences for millions of Palestinian refugees in a number of host countries.

"We reaffirm the need for ensuring enhanced, predictable and sustainable funding for UNRWA and urge the member states to help uphold UNRWA's ability to make a difference in the lives of Palestinian refugees."

Ambassador Masud stressed giving immediate priority to ensuring international protection for the Palestinian people suffering for decades from the occupying power's policy of collective punishment.

The body of Helena, mother of three daughters and a son, was being taken to Barisal for burial.

they were unable to make their way into it", Choi said.

South Korean President Moon Jae-In called an emergency meeting with advisers, and demanded an immediate probe into the cause of the blaze.

The fire came only a month after 29 people were killed in an inferno at a fitness club in the South Korean city of Jecheon - a disaster blamed on insufficient emergency exits, flammable finishing materials and illegally parked cars blocking access to emergency vehicles.

Yesterday's fire is South Korea's worst since 2008, when a blaze at a warehouse in the city of Icheon killed 40 workers.

Metropolitan Police (Ramna division), said they would raid different places to arrest the criminals after collecting footage of CCTVs installed near the scene.

Sorhab Ali, manager (admin and HR) of Green Life Hospital, said Helena was supposed to join work yesterday. One of her three daughters also works at the hospital.

The body of Helena, mother of three daughters and a son, was being taken to Barisal for burial.

Saving crops

FROM PAGE 16

"While bottle gourds are at the forefront of bagging for vegetables in Tangail," he adds, "the method can also benefit other crops including wax, snake, sponge and bitter gourd, as well as cucumber and pumpkin."

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