

Force Myanmar to implement Annan report

PM urges global community

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday reiterated her call to the international community, including the United Nations, to keep up their pressure on Myanmar to properly implement the Annan Commission report to solve the Rohingya crisis.

The prime minister made the call when visiting UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Director of UN Women Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka met her at her Jatiya Sangsad office in the evening.

After the meeting, PM's Additional Press Secretary Nazrul Islam briefed reporters.

Sheikh Hasina pointed to the plight of the Rohingyas, particularly women and children, displaced from Myanmar.

Hasina defended her government's move to shift the Rohingyas to Bhashanchar, an island in Noakhali, to keep them away from densely populated localities on security grounds.

Initially, she said, some one lakh Rohingyas will be shifted there and the housing works are in progress to this end.

The prime minister also raised the issue of women empowerment saying that the Leader of the House, the Speaker, the Deputy Leader and the Leader of Opposition are now women in Parliament, which is a unique example in the world.

During the meeting, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka said she will submit a report over the plight of Rohingyas to the committee concerned of the

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NO LESSON LEARNT?



Passengers, including a boy, are walking on the tracks to go to a platform from another while a woman is seen sitting right on the line at Kamalapur Railway Station yesterday. Rubina Akter, a final-year student of social work department at Jagannath University, below, had lost her legs after a locomotive ran her over at the same place (marked by the arrow) on Sunday. It happened after she felt dizzy while crossing the lines and fell on them. However, people seem to have taken no lesson from the incident as they keep on doing the same, ignoring the risks. This photographer saw at least 200 such people who walked on the lines to change platforms in an hour from 12:30pm yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON/FILE

Elephants

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which the elephant had to stand to reach it. This meant they had to realise their own body was preventing them from passing on the stick and get off the mat in order to complete the task.

The scientists behind the study said animals capable of this kind of behaviour may also be better at empathising and be able to consider someone else's perspective.

And that could have implications for the way conflicts between humans and elephants should be handled in places where the two species are competing for land and resources.

Dr Josh Plotnik, a visiting researcher at Cambridge University said: "This is a deceptively simple test, but its implications are quite profound."

"The elephants understood that their bodies were getting in the way, so they stepped aside to enable themselves to complete the task. In a similar test, this is something that young children are unable to understand until they are about two years old.

"This implies that elephants may be capable of recognising themselves as separate from objects or their environment. This means that they may have a level of self-understanding, coupled with their passing of the mirror test, which is quite rare in the animal kingdom."

The test was an adapted version of one used on human children. In that test they are asked to push a trolley attached to a matt, which they normally stand on as they approach the trolley.

Only when they reach the age of about two do the humans realise they have to get off the matt in order for the trolley to move.

Twelve female elephants aged from four to 40, who live at the Anantara Golden Triangle camp in Chiang Rai, Thailand, took part in the tests.

Free of cost

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facility by a good number of business organisations. There is specific information on tax evasion by these firms.

A special team from the CIID headquarters is now thoroughly investigating the matter, he said adding that the directorate is probing such allegations for the first time.

Tareque Mahmood, assistant commissioner of the directorate, said, "We have already found that nine firms dodged tax of around Tk 120 crore by abusing the FOC facility."

"We have also made a list of 20 other firms and are examining documents of more than 500 consignments released earlier."

He said that in primary probe, they found that these firms sold imported raw materials in local market, violating the condition of producing finished goods with those.

"These goods are sold in the capital's Islampur area and Chittagong's Terry Bazar, creating an uneven competition for the firms that import raw materials paying taxes. The government also loses a huge amount in tax."

Giving an example, Tareque said that if a firm imports these raw materials without using the facility, it has to pay 89 percent tax on the items. This means a Tk-100 imported item will cost Tk 189 after paying tax.

Several CIID officials said Miswar Hosiery Mills Private Ltd, based in Narayanganj's Kutubpur, evaded tax of Tk 41.33 crore by abusing the FOC facility.

The firm imported 775 tonnes of raw materials in fiscal 2017-18 and 780 tonnes in the previous fiscal year under the FOC facility though it didn't export any garment items in the last two fiscal years, they mentioned.

Over the last one month, the CIID seized 13 consignments of 333 tonnes of raw materials brought by the company to the Chittagong port under the same facility.

According to data of the Customs Bond Commission and the National Board of Revenue, the company didn't export any items after fiscal 2014-2015.

This newspaper could not reach the firm's Director Shameem Ahmed who is now in Malaysia.

However, his nephew Shofikul Islam, who worked as the company's accounts manager for 22 years, claimed that the firm had closed its import-export operation two years ago, and someone else might have used its name to import raw materials dodging tax.

Shofikul further said he conveyed the matter to Shameem who expressed surprise at it.

Seeking anonymity, one of the CIID officials said they would look into the firm's claims and also quiz its director once he returns home.

Besides, Ashiana Garments Industries Ltd, based in the capital's Rampura, dodged tax of at least Tk 15.22 crore by importing goods more than the permissible limit.

In the first six months of the current fiscal year, the company imported 520 tonnes of raw materials dodging tax of Tk 11.39 crore. The CIID seized its seven consignments for evading tax of Tk 3.83 crore, said directorate officials.

Contacted, Ashiana's General

Manager Arif Hossain refused to comment.

The firm imported most of the goods from Chinese firm Shaoming Gelaitrade Co Ltd, and clearing and forwarding (C&F) agent Delight C&F Ltd was responsible for releasing the goods.

According to the CIID officials, Giant Garments Industries Private Ltd, which exported goods worth \$69,399 (around Tk 58 lakh) in fiscal 2016-17, is eligible to import raw materials worth \$23,133 (about Tk 19.50 lakh) under the FOC facility in fiscal 2017-18.

But in only the first six months of the current fiscal year, the Gazipur-based firm imported goods worth \$537,729 (around Tk 4.48 crore) under the facility - 22 times the permissible limit - and evaded tax of at least Tk 3.92 crore, they pointed out.

It imported these goods in more than 50 consignments from various firms in China, and the same C&F agent - Delight C&F Ltd - was responsible for releasing the goods, the officials said citing information provided by the bank concerned, Seoul-based Woori Bank.

Asked, Delight C&F Ltd Managing Director Md Nasir Uddin Mozammel avoided giving any answer. He, however, said his firm would follow due legal process to settle the issue.

The CIID officials said another local firm, Gazipur-based Capria Apparels Ltd, evaded tax of Tk 9.30 crore and Dhaka-based 3N Fashion (BD) Ltd Tk 8.21 crore by abusing the FOC facility. The CIID already seized 30 consignments (15 each) of the two firms.

SRKH Design Ltd and Saad Fashion Wear - both based in Gazipur - NAAB Fashion Ltd in Dhaka and Apparel Option Private Ltd in Chittagong also dodged tax of Tk 42.17 crore, they mentioned.

This newspaper couldn't reach officials of SRKH Design, Saad Fashion and NAAB Fashion for comment while officials of Apparel Option in the port city's Chatteshwari declined to say anything.

Tareque said that since the certificates issued by the banks concerned do not carry any serial numbers unlike the LCs, customs officials cannot check the export data or other related information of the local firms bringing raw materials from abroad.

He also said the directorate wrote to the NBR with six recommendations for checking abuse of the FOC facility.

In its letter to the NBR early this month, it suggested putting all related information in the NBR's central server about the certificates issued by the banks concerned.

The directorate also asked the NBR to ensure that it is provided with data on the annual permissible limits for local companies to import raw materials under the FOC facility.

Contacted, NBR Member (customs policy) Lutfur Rahman said, "We will consider the recommendations from the directorate and take necessary steps in this regard."

As per the law, the customs can cancel the licence of a C&F agent and bar any firm from importing and exporting goods by locking its Business Identification Number on charge of misusing the FOC facility. It can also file a criminal case against the agent and the firm.

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industrial waste could be the sources of contamination. From there, the heavy metals may enter the food chain," he added.

A 2016 study by the Atomic Energy Commission found the presence of lead in sweetwater fish, while recently excessive levels of lead and cadmium were found in imported Chandana Hilsa fish. Excessive level of lead was even found in some branded milk powder recently, he said.

Also, studies in recent years found the presence of antibiotics and growth hormones in poultry, while lead in poultry feed, he added.

"Sometimes, the contamination is purposeful and sometimes, it happens due to ignorance of those involved in production and processing of food," Mahfuzul mentioned.

He said while there would be lab tests of suspected products, the

authority was also taking proactive measures, including training of restaurant workers, capacity building of laboratories and government departments involved in monitoring food safety at the field levels.

The BFSa is engaging the industries, business bodies, farmers so they can follow good production, manufacturing and preservation practices, he said.

Initially, the BFSa is signing memorandums of understanding (MoUs) with the departments concerned and specifying their roles and responsibilities.

Mahfuzul said the BFSa already inked MoUs with the departments of livestock, fisheries, food, agricultural extension and Bangladesh Fish and Shrimp Foundation.

"Primarily, we will sign MoUs with 18 government agencies and 486 city corporations and municipalities," he said.

These agencies and local government bodies have their own mandate of inspecting food safety in their own territories and jurisdiction. The BFSa, as the central authority, will specify their responsibilities in the MoUs.

"We will monitor if the organisations concerned are playing their due roles. We will identify the gaps and address those. We will help increase their capacity in need and check any overlaps," said Mahfuzul.

A major challenge the BFSa is facing now is the lack of accredited laboratories for various types of food safety tests. It has so far identified 50 government and autonomous food test laboratories, and most are not accredited. Some of them have equipment, but not skilled manpower, while some have manpower, but not good equipment, he added.

"Therefore, we are facing prob-

lems because the businesses are saying this or that lab test result is not acceptable as it is not accredited and so on," said BFSa chief Mahfuzul.

So, he said the BFSa was trying to build capacity of those laboratories.

Besides, the BFSa has initiated a project to set up its own accredited laboratory that will be considered as the reference laboratory. Test results of this lab will be considered final, he added.

Food safety management requires highly technical and skilled manpower, but Bangladesh has a huge shortage of it, he said.

Therefore, Bangladesh Agricultural University is going to start a four-year course on food safety management and regulatory affairs in collaboration with Ireland's Dublin Institute of Technology next year with the support of the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation, he said.

Stepping up fight for safe food

Angering Israel

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of every Pole to defend the good name of Poland. Just as the Jews, we were victims."

Under the proposed legislation, violators would face three years in prison for mentioning the term "Polish death camps", although the bill says scientific research into World War Two would not be constrained.

Israel "adamantly opposes" the bill's approval, the Israeli Foreign Ministry said.

"Israel views with utmost gravity any attempt to challenge historical truth. No law will change the facts," ministry spokesman Emmanuel Nahshon said on Twitter.

Israeli Housing Minister Yoav Galant, one of several cabinet ministers to denounce the bill, told Israel's Army Radio that he considered it "de facto Holocaust denial".

The bill has come at a time when rightwing, anti-immigrant parties like PiS have been in the ascendancy in Europe, especially in the former Communist countries of the east. EU officials have expressed alarm over the PiS administration in Poland, which they say has undermined the rule of law by exerting pressure over the courts and media.

The ruling PiS, a socially conservative, nationalist group, has reignited debate on the Holocaust as part of a campaign to fuel patriotism since sweeping into power in 2015.

The US State Department said the legislation "could undermine free speech and academic discourse".

"We are also concerned about the repercussions this draft legislation, if enacted, could have on Poland's strategic interests and relationships," State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert said in a statement.

Piotr Buras, head of the Warsaw office of the European Council on Foreign Relations think tank, told Reuters it was likely to push Poland further toward nationalism and isolation.

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