

UNSC pushes

FROM PAGE 20

week to see firsthand the aftermath of a Myanmar military crackdown that Britain, the United States and others have denounced as ethnic cleansing of the minority Rohingya. Myanmar denies ethnic cleansing.

Fleeing refugees have reported killings, rapes and arson on a large scale. Myanmar has said its operations in Rakhine were a legitimate response to attacks on security forces by Rohingya insurgents.

"The members of the Security Council in light of the importance of undertaking transparent investigations into allegations of human rights abuses and violations, urge the government of Myanmar to fulfill, based on respect for the rule of law, its stated commitment to holding accountable perpetrators of violence, including sexual violence and abuse and violence against children," the council

statement said on Wednesday.

Rohingya insurgent attacks on security posts in Rakhine in August last year sparked a military operation that has sent nearly 700,000 Rohingya fleeing to refugee camps in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh. Security Council envoys visited those vast camps last week.

The statement said they "were struck by the scale of the humanitarian crisis and remain gravely concerned by the current situation." They also noted the "widespread destruction of villages" in Rakhine.

They also met with Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Myanmar's de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi and traveled to Rakhine state, where the violence erupted.

The council urged Myanmar to conclude an agreement "in the coming days" with the UN refugee agency UNHCR and UN Development

Programme on aid access in Rakhine and help with repatriating refugees from Bangladesh.

The Security Council also said it intends to discuss how it can work with Bangladesh, Myanmar and the United Nations "to resolve the crisis and create the conditions allowing the safe, voluntary, and dignified repatriation of refugees to their homes in Rakhine State."

The prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) has asked the court to rule on whether it has jurisdiction over the deportations of Rohingyas to Bangladesh, a possible crime against humanity.

Suu Kyi's government has expressed "serious concern" over the move at the ICC. Bangladesh is a member of the ICC but Myanmar is not. Human rights groups have called on the UN Security Council to adopt a resolution referring the situation in Myanmar to the court.

Dog killer given 6 months in jail

FROM PAGE 20

of police. A post-mortem was conducted and a case was filed with Rampura Police Station on November 1 for animal cruelty.

Killing stray dogs was common in Bangladesh, but yesterday the country saw the first ever jail sentence of a perpetrator of animal cruelty as a Dhaka court sentenced Siddique to six months' jail under the Cruelty to Animals Act, 1920.

Metropolitan Magistrate in Dhaka, Md Ahsan Habib, also fined him Tk 200, in default, to suffer seven more days in jail.

"Such punishment is a message to the offender that nobody can show courage by killing urban wildlife, like dogs," said the magistrate.

Siddique has been on the run since the argument of the case was placed against him.

His punishment will be effective from the day of his arrest or surrender.

The magistrate said the prosecution has proved the charges against the convict beyond doubt and he was given the highest form of punishment mentioned in the Cruelty to Animals Act, 1920.

Earlier on May 11 last year, Dhaka Chief Judicial Magistrate Jesmin Ara Begum delivered the first-ever judgment under the act, fining Md Mamun of Savar Tk 300 in a case filed with Savar Police Station for killing two dogs.

In the case filed with Rampura Police Station, it was said that the security guard of Bagichartek Welfare Association, a local youth engagement club in Rampura, beat the two dogs and buried them and their puppies alive on October 25, 2017.

After receiving information, Rakibul Haq Emil, founder and chairman of People for Animal Welfare (PAW) Foundation, along with police went to the spot and recovered the bodies. Police then made inquest reports in which they found injury marks on the bodies.

Later on November 11, Emil filed a case against Siddique with Rampura Police Station under the Cruelty to Animals Act, 1920. On November 30,

SI Nasiruddin and the investigation officer of the case pressed charges against Siddique.

Emil, along with other members of the organisation who were present at the court, expressed his satisfaction over the verdict.

"It is a milestone in the history of animal welfare in Bangladesh. This is the first time the highest punishment has been given. We are happy," said Emil, demanding raising social awareness and updating the hundred year old act and making it stringent.

"A new draft had received cabinet's nod recently and we hope it will have stricter provisions to stop cruelty towards animals," he added.

Nandita Das, country director of Humane Society International, works on animal protection issues around the world, also hailed the verdict, terming it a landmark judgment.

"There is a correlation between animal cruelty and human cruelty," she said, adding that studies show that those who commit such animal cruelty early in their lives, indulge in human violence.

She demanded that the government makes the new law stricter so that no one can get away with brutality against animals.

Stressing on raising social awareness, she said, this is the high time to raise awareness about the fact that the lives of animals are not worthless and they have also the right to live.

The case is now under trial.

THE ANIMAL WELFARE BILL

The new draft, termed the Animal Welfare Bill, worked on by Maya Barolo Rizvi, country head of Humane Society International (HSI) Bangladesh, and Jayasimha Nugeghalli, managing director of HSI India who had visited Bangladesh a year ago to create the new draft, will

include stray animals, whereas the 1920 Act defines 'animal' as either domesticated or captured.

The bill will first and foremost focus on changing the name from "The Cruelty to Animals Act" to the "Animal Welfare Act". "The word cruelty is what we will focus on in this regard, because when you are ensuring that an animal is not facing cruelty, we're not necessarily concerned about its 'welfare' and well-being," said Nugeghalli when he spoke to The Daily Star last year.

The need for these changes was recognised by the government and on February 20, 2017, the Animal Welfare Bill received a go-ahead from the cabinet.

Dawn

FROM PAGE 1

country's history. It will help boost digitisation and earn global respect," Jabbar told The Daily Star.

The satellite, a Tk-2,765.66 crore project, will offer Direct-to-Home (D2H) services, making people's access to worldwide TV faster and easier.

Remote haor, hill tracts and coastal areas will also have internet connections. It will also be helpful for e-treatment and disaster management facilities.

"Bangabandhu-1 will open up a new digital chapter in the history of the country and will be a crucial tool for further successes in the future," State Minister for ICT Zunaid Ahmed Palak, who was present at the launching site, said in a statement.

After the launch, the 3.7-tonne satellite will travel up to 36,000km up and then make adjustments for its orbit in about 10 days, said project director Mezbahuzzaman.

The launch process has two phases. The first is the Launch and Early Orbit Phase (LEOP) and the second one is Satellite in Orbit. The LEOP phase will take 10 days while the second one will take another 20.

Once the satellite becomes active, it will be controlled from three stations in the US, Italy and South Korea, Mezbahuzzaman said.

Hardly an improvement

FROM PAGE 2

It should also take strong action against militant groups who seek to suppress free speech by engaging in violent attacks on those holding different religious views, said the New York-based rights body.

The HRW report said scores of people had been arrested over the past five years in Bangladesh under section 57 of the Information and Communication Technology Act for criticising the government, political leaders, and others on Facebook, as well as in blogs, online newspapers, or other social media.

"The government of Bangladesh acknowledges that the current section 57 of the ICT Act is draconian, and needs to go," said HRW Asia Director Brad Adams.

"But the new law being proposed is hardly an improvement, creating a series of new offences that will undoubtedly be used for years to come against govern-

ment critics in the country's highly politicised criminal justice system."

The 89-page report, "No Place for Criticism: Bangladesh Crackdown on Social Media Commentary" details dozens of arbitrary arrests since the ICT Act-2006 was amended in 2013 to incorporate harsher penalties and allowing the police to make arrests without warrant.

As of April 2018, the police had submitted 1,271 charge sheets to the Cyber Tribunal in Dhaka, claiming sufficient evidence to prosecute under section 57 of the ICT Act.

Press freedom is also under threat from section 57.

Many journalists and editors have been arrested for online articles alleging corruption, maladministration, or criticising particular individuals.

In June 2017, police arrested Golam Mostafa Rafiq, editor of Habiganj Samachar, for an article published in the online edition of the newspaper

which speculated a ruling party MP would not get the party nomination.

Others were arrested for offending religious sentiment or for defamation.

The rights body said Bangladesh should hold civil society consultations to ensure that any new law passed to replace section 57 is compatible with its obligations under international law, and protects and respects freedom of speech.

Criminalisation of speech offences should be limited to the worst cases, such as direct incitement to violence, and not for criticism of the authorities or defamation.

Adams said, "Bangladesh authorities should accept that criticism, however unpleasant and hurtful, is part of public life and can serve to correct mistakes and provide redress.

"The government should work with domestic and international experts to draft a new law that fully upholds the principles of free speech and internet freedom."

The silent spirit

FROM PAGE 20

are slippery and often steep, especially with our heavy equipment.

With field supplies, water and possible risks on our minds, we set off to explore the southern part of Bandarban in order to find rare hill birds. The trail had not been used last summer and vegetation on both sides had reclaimed the paths created by humans.

Everything seemed so perfectly placed, as if nature was rearranging its realm and we were intruders breaking the order. We did so in many ways – we stepped on the wet grasses as they were cherishing descending clouds and last night's rain on their blades, our footsteps on the soft soil created uneven holes and festival of leeches that fed on our blood.

The unexpected November rain allowed the clouds to meet the mist hidden behind the ridges. All I wanted was an empty mind like a city street at midnight, so I could embrace this beauty and vastness with all I have. The morning was still sedentary - no wind, no track, no bird, only scattered clouds on treetops, freed from the sky, portraying the power of the universe.

We headed south, with a wall of vegetation on one side and a hilly landscape on the other. We could barely see beyond a few hundred metres, the horizon obscured by clouds, mist and a mild drizzle. Above a green ridge, a flock of aerial feeders such as Swallows, Needle-tails and Swifts were active, constantly hawking for insects. I wondered if they ever tire of their continuous flight to survive.

The intensity of the rain increased, we stopped and bloomed opened our umbrellas. I sat on a log and watched the raindrops crashing on a taro leaf. Soon after, the rain stopped, leaving trails became extremely slippery and unsafe.

As I was thinking of our next move and starting to walk again, I saw a dark object appear from the left corner of my eye. I could not see what it was as it vanished into the clouds in seconds. The view was thrilling but unfulfilling. Then suddenly it emerged again just above us, spreading its long, broad wings and disappearing amidst the clouds like a ghost. It did not make any noise, nor beat its wings, as if gliding in slow

motion.

We soon realised that it was the mighty Black Eagle -- the silent spirit of the skies.

The Black Eagle first recorded appearance was in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in 2014. Since then it has been regularly spotted in the region, possibly breeding.

This huge raptor prefers slopes, hilly countries, and areas where there is forest cover to feed on small mammals, reptiles and also other birds. The global population of the Black Eagle is estimated to be around 10,000, but its population is declining owing to ongoing deforestation throughout its range.

Recent records of the Black Eagle from the Sangu Valley in the CHT indicate that the area still holds extensive tropical evergreen forests. These habitats need long-term protection as these are the last of our old-growth forests where human and nature still coexist.

We cannot afford to lose more.

24 Bangladeshis held with fake Indian ID cards in Agartala

AGENCIES

Twenty-four Bangladeshi youths were arrested yesterday with fake Indian identity cards at the Agartala railway station in India.

All of them were carrying fake Aadhaar cards, and a team of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) from Guwahati will interrogate them today, a senior police official told the PTI.

Aadhaar is a 12-digit unique identification number issued to Indian citizens by the central government.

Acting on a tip-off, members of Mobile Task Force (MTF), which deals with illegal immigration and related cases, raided the railway station and arrested the 24 Bangladeshis, who reached there from Delhi by Tripura Sundari Express, said MTF Superintendent of Police Abhijit Chowdhury.

"All of them were carrying fake Aadhaar cards, showing they were issued from West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. We checked the Aadhaar cards online and found they were fake. Some of them had identity cards issued from different madrasas of our country," said the official.

"The youths were not carrying any valid passports. Three had Bangladeshi passports but those expired long ago," he said.

Douma accusations 'a farce': Assad

AFP, Athens

Accusations that Bashar al-Assad's forces used chemical weapons against the Syrian town of Douma last month are a "farce", the Syrian president said yesterday.

"If you look at the videos, it's completely fake," Assad told Greece's Kathimerini daily.

"When you have chemical weapons, how could the doctors and nurses be safe, dealing with the chemical atmosphere without any protective clothes, without anything, just throwing water at the victims? And the victims became okay just because you washed them with water... It's a farce," he said.

"They talk about 45 victims -- when you use WMD (weapons of mass destruction) in such an area, you should have hundreds or maybe thousands of victims," Assad said.

Images of adults and children appearing to be suffering from the effects of a toxic weapon attack sparked international outrage.

4 arrested

FROM PAGE 2

cattle shed.

Jessore Forest Officer Sarwar Alam Khan said it was the first time zebras were recovered from smugglers in Bangladesh.

He added that the zebra might have died due to exhaustion or some disease.

The seized zebras were handed over to Khulna Wildlife Conservation Department.

Our Gazipur correspondent reports, eight of the zebras were released into Gazipur Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Safari Park yesterday afternoon. Only one of them is male, said the park authorities.

Livestock officer Nizam Uddin said there used to be 14 zebras in the park, three of which were born there.

Fresh quota

FROM PAGE 20

Secretary of Public Administration Ministry Mozammel Haque Khan said a proposal for forming a committee in this regard was sent to the Prime Minister's Office.

"The committee will be formed after the PM's approval. The next step will be known after the committee submits its report," he said.

Nurul Haque Nur, however, said the government was trying to stage a "new drama".

"We all know that there is no need to form a committee to publish a gazette. The government is now trying to foil a legitimate movement of the students," he said.

He added that the demonstrations would continue until their demands were met.

Students and jobseekers across the country launched widespread demonstrations under the banner of Bangladesh Shadharan Chhatra Adhikar Sangrakkhan Parishad on February 17 to press home their five-point demand including reduction of the quota privilege to 10 percent from the existing 56 percent.

Students of public and private universities across the country took to the streets in support of the demand. The protesters blocked key points in the capital and roads and highways elsewhere.

Amid mass protests, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in parliament on April 11 declared that the quota system would be scrapped. Protesters called off their agitation the following day.

The quota system was introduced through an executive order in 1972 and has been amended several times since.

Big boost for mega projects

FROM PAGE 20

communication system, Padma Bridge and Padma Rail Link projects.

Describing the ADP as the "lifeline" to the country's economic growth, the minister said the government was making progress in a planned way to turn the country into a middle-income one by 2021 and a rich one by 2041.

A planning ministry official said although the government had planned to complete the Tk 28,793 crore Padma Bridge project by December this year, it might be delayed by six to seven months.

According to the website of the road transport and bridges ministry, the project completion deadline is November 2018.

As of February, Tk 15,029 crore has been spent. Under the new ADP, Tk 4,395 crore has been allocated for the project.

The planning minister insisted that the project would be completed by the deadline. He said the implementation status of the project cannot be understood by looking at the allocation of funds as money is paid even six months or one year after the completion of the project.

The Padma Rail Link Project had got a big allocation under the current ADP. But as the loan agreement with China was delayed, the work on over Tk 34,000 crore project could not be started last year.

The deal was signed last month. Under the new ADP, Tk 5,330 crore has been allocated for the project.

The construction of the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant, the largest project under the proposed ADP, has been progressing fast. The work on the Tk 113,000 crore project started last year and Tk 6,047 crore was spent till February this year.

In the next FY, the highest allocation of Tk 11,099 crore has been made for it.

Large allocations have also been made for the Metro Rail, Karnaphuli tunnel, Dohazari-Ghumdum rail line and Matarbari ultra-super coal based power plant projects.

Besides, funds have been earmarked for carrying out feasibility studies of two big projects to ease traffic jam in the capital. A feasibility study and a detailed design will be done for setting up an underground metro rail in the city. The project cost has been estimated at Tk 224 crore and Tk 81 crore has been allocated for it.

ALLOCATION OF FUNDS FOR MEGA PROJECTS IN NEXT FY
Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant Tk 11,099 crore
Padma Rail Link Tk 5,330 crore
Padma Bridge Tk 4,395 crore
Metro Rail Tk 3,902 crore
Dhaka-Ashulia Elevated Expressway Tk 2,226 crore
Matarbari coal-based power plant Tk 2,171 crore
Karnaphuli tunnel Tk 1,905 crore
Dohazari-Gundhum rail line Tk 1,450 crore
Bangabandhu Rail Bridge on Jamuna Tk 78 crore

To lay a circular railway track around the capital, Tk 22.40 crore has been allocated under the new ADP. The Tk 30 crore project will be implemented under a government-to-government (G-to-G) initiative for which Japan has shown its interest.

In the new ADP of Tk 173,000 crore, the government's own funding has increased by 16.59 percent to Tk 1.13 lakh crore and foreign funding by 15.27 percent to Tk 60,000 crore.

In addition, the state-owned enterprises will get Tk 7,869 crore, down by 14.59 percent from the ADP of the current fiscal year.

The second highest allocation (Tk 22,930 crore) of the proposed ADP has been made for the power sector.

Among the other sectors, physical planning, water supply and housing will get Tk 17,890 crore, rural development organisations Tk 16,690 crore, education and religion Tk 16,620 crore, science, information and communication technology Tk 14,210 crore, health Tk 11,905 crore, agriculture Tk 7,076 crore, water resources Tk 4,592 crore, and public administration Tk 3,361 crore.

A total of 78 projects have been included in the next fiscal year's development programme. The projects will be implemented under Public-Private Partnership (PPP). Among the projects is 2nd Padma Bridge at Paturia-Goalundo. The cost of the bridge has been estimated at \$1.5 billion. Another project is Tk 19,951 crore Dhaka-Chittagong Expressway.

Mahathir sworn in as PM

FROM PAGE 20

Mahathir's alliance of four parties trounced Najib's Barisan Nasional (BN), the first time it had ever lost an election.

Earlier yesterday, Najib appeared to raise doubts that Mahathir would immediately take office because no single party had won a simple majority of seats in the 222-member parliament, and it would be up to the monarch to decide.

Official results showed that Mahathir's coalition won 121 seats, comfortably more than the 112 required to rule. But it has not been formally registered as an alliance.

In jubilant mood and cracking jokes, Mahathir dismissed any doubts he would be prime minister. "I got up late, lots of people got up late," he replied when asked why there was a delay in swearing him in, noting that the election result was only officially announced around 5:00 am.

He said he had been assured of support from a raft of parties that would give his government 135 members of parliament.

Najib conceded the election in a news conference yesterday but has not been seen in public since. He did not attend the swearing in ceremony at the palace.

RANKS WITH BREXIT, TRUMP WIN

Malaysian markets were closed and will reopen only on Monday, but overseas investors were nervous about the ouster of Najib and the ringgit lost four percent in offshore trading. An overseas Malaysian equity fund initially showed a 6 percent drop in share values but rebounded partially yesterday.

"This upset ranks up there with Brexit and the Trump election," said Aninda Mitra, a senior sovereign analyst at BNY Mellon Investment Management. "I believe the ringgit will come under pressure as policy continuity will come under a cloud."

Mahathir repeated a promise to repeal a goods and services tax (GST) introduced by Najib and review foreign investments, including major infrastructure projects that are part of China's Belt and Road initiative.

Some economists raised concerns his populist promises could undermine economic prospects at an increasingly challenging time for emerging markets, despite hopes elsewhere he may revive his bold approach to economic management.

Global ratings agency Moody's said some of Mahathir's campaign promises, including scrapping GST and a reintroduction of fuel subsidies, could be credit-negative for Malaysia's sovereign debt rating.

Najib's BN coalition won 79 seats, a collapse from the 133 it won in the 2013 election, which was itself the coalition's worst poll performance

ever at the time.

Few had expected Mahathir to prevail against a coalition that has long relied on the support of the country's ethnic-Malay majority.

However, he joined hands with jailed political leader Anwar Ibrahim, his one-time deputy he famously fell out with in 1998, and together their alliance exploited public disenchantment over the cost of living and a multi-billion-dollar scandal that has dogged Najib since 2015.

Mahathir said that one of his first actions would be to seek a royal pardon for Anwar. Before the poll he had promised to step aside once Anwar was free and let him become prime minister.

His wife, Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, was sitting next to Mahathir at his news conference. Under an agreement with Mahathir, she is to be deputy prime minister.

Anwar was imprisoned, first by Mahathir on charges of corruption and sodomy. He was released in 2004 but jailed again by Najib in 2015.

Mahathir and Najib were once allies but they clashed over a scandal around 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB), a state fund from which billions of dollars were allegedly siphoned off.

The 1MDB affair is being investigated by at least six countries, although Najib has denied any wrongdoing and has been cleared by Malaysia's attorney-general.

Mahathir had vowed to investigate the scandal if elected and bring missing funds back to Malaysia. Yesterday, he said that if Najib had done anything wrong he would "face the consequences".

Police parade

FROM PAGE 20

Police say that in addition to the New Delhi businessman, the father and son may have got money out of up to 30 people across northern India.

Their fake device was apparently based on rare copper "that had been struck by a thunderbolt" so that it could magnetise rice, police explained.

A copper plate covered in a thin magnetic liquid and rice mixed with iron filings were used to show off the machine.

The pair, who employed actors to wear radiation suits and staged fake tests, had said they needed money to develop the invention, detectives said.

The New Delhi businessmen became suspicious when promised experiments were repeatedly called off, mainly because of bad weather. He went to police and acknowledged he had handed over more than \$200,000. It is not known how much the other victims paid.