

Give khas land to the poor

Rights activists urge govt
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rights activists yesterday urged the government to distribute its khas land (government owned fallow land) to the poor and the marginalised -- especially to people from the ethnic minorities and those who reside in chars.

The speakers also urged the government to follow relevant laws of the land to ensure dwellings for all its citizens as ensured by the constitution and also recognised as a human right by the United Nations.

They were speaking at a discussion jointly organised by seven rights organisations including National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), Association for Land Reform and Development and Nagorik Udyog at BTMC Bhaban in the capital.

Speaking as the chief guest, NHRC Chairman Kazi Reazul Hoque said the country has particular laws for distribution of khas land as well as vested property and the government has the responsibility to implement the laws effectively.

Before acquiring any land belonging to an ethnic minority member who had been using it for generations, the authorities concerned has the responsibility to properly inform its owner of the acquisition and rehabilitate the owner accordingly, he added.

Noted rights activist Khushi Kabir, coordinator of Nijera Kori, called upon the government and non-government rights organisations to work together to ensure land rights of the poor and the marginalised who commonly face land-related discrimination.

Miracle on hold

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rainfall was threatening more flooding that might doom the mission.

"Today is the D-day. The boys are ready to face any challenges," Narongsak told reporters near the cave site yesterday morning.

"There is no other day that we are more ready than today," he said. "Otherwise we will lose the opportunity."

The rescue of the initial batch of boys was a stunning victory in an operation Narongsak had earlier dubbed "Mission Impossible" and led to cautious optimism that the others would also be saved.

Narongsak described the extraction of the initial group of four as "smooth".

But efforts to get the others out were put on hold until this morning to give rescue workers time to replenish stocks of oxygen and other supplies.

"We need to refill," Narongsak said.

TREACHEROUS JOURNEY

Between the base camp operated by Thai Navy SEALs inside the cave and the trapped boys are twisting passageways with torrents of water gushing through.

The water in the cave is muddy and unclear, with one diver comparing it to a cafe latte. Ropes have been installed to help guide the boys through the darkness.

Narongsak said yesterday morning two divers would escort each of the boys, none of whom had previous cave diving experience, out of the cave.

Authorities had looked at many different ways to save the boys and their coach.

One early potential plan was to leave them there for months until the monsoon season ended and the floods subsided completely, but that idea was scrapped over concerns about falling oxygen levels and waters rising too high.

More than 100 exploratory holes were also bored into the mountain-side in an attempt to open a second evacuation route and avoid forcing the boys into the dangerous dive.

American technology entrepreneur Elon Musk even deployed engineers from his private space exploration firm SpaceX and Boring Co. to help.

Meanwhile rescuers fed a kilometres-long air pipe into the cave to restore oxygen levels in the chamber where the team was sheltering with medics and divers.

Thais were quick to jump onto social media on Sunday night to celebrate the rescue of the initial four.

"The rescue team of the Wild Boars should be given this year's World Cup trophy," one person wrote on Facebook, referring to the boys by the name of their football team.

Four killed in 'shootouts'

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commander of Rab-6 in Jhenidah, said they received information at around 3:00am that a group of drug traders were staying at a house in Pabhati village under Sadar upazila.

When Rab went to launch a drive there, the drug traders sensed their presence and tried to flee on a motorbike while shooting at the Rab officials, he claimed.

Sazzad and Razzak sustained bullet injuries during the 30-minute long "gunfight", while the other fled the scene, ASP Morshed further claimed.

The two were rushed to Jhenidah Sadar Hospital where on-duty doctors declared them dead, he said, further adding that two Rab officials also received injuries during the "gunfight".

In Mymensingh, alleged drug trader Faruque Mia, 32, of Teluari in Ishwarganj upazila, was killed in a "gunfight".

On receiving information that a gang of drug traders were engaged in trading at Teluari, police raided the area at around 2:30am, said Ahmed Kabir Hossain, officer-in-charge (OC) of Ishwarganj Police Station, who led the team.

Sensing police presence, the drug peddlers started throwing bricks and fired gunshots aimed at the police officials. Forced to retaliate, the police fired back and a "gun battle" ensued, he claimed.

Faruque sustained bullet wounds and was immediately rushed to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital (MMCH) where doctors declared him dead, the OC added.

His body was sent to Mymensingh Medical College morgue for autopsy. Police recovered 100 yaba pills, seven used bullets, a mobile phone and a sharp weapon from the spot, he claimed.

Faruque was wanted in some 11 narcotics-related cases, the OC alleged.

He added that four policemen--Sub-Inspectors Safayet Hossain and Anwar Hossain, Assistant Sub-Inspector Khalilur Rahman, and constable Samiron Chandra Sarker-- were

injured during the incident and were treated at Ishwarganj Upazila Health Complex.

A case was lodged with Ishwarganj Police Station in this regard.

With the inclusion of these deaths, the tally of drug-related killings in "shootouts" with police and Rab raised to 170 since anti-narcotics crackdown began in early May.

In Gaibandha, alleged robber Shamsul Huq, 38, of Bedkapa village in Palashbari upazila, was killed in a "gunfight" with police.

Khan Md Shahriar, OC of Gaibandha Sadar Police Station, said Shamsul was a member of a robbery gang, wanted in several criminal cases.

Based on information, a combined force of Gaibandha Sadar police and Sadullapur police raided Dholbhangaz bazar area in Palashbari and arrested Shamsul from there on Saturday.

Based on Shamsul's statement, police, along with him, conducted a drive in his house to recover firearms and nab his cohorts at around 4:00am.

Afterwards, when they reached Shakoya bridge area, his gang members opened fire at the police officials to try and take him away.

In retaliation, police fired back. Shamsul sustained bullet injuries in "shootout" and his associates managed to flee, the OC claimed.

He also claimed that six policemen received injuries in the incident.

Critically injured, Shamsul was taken to Gaibandha Sadar Hospital where doctors declared him dead.

The injured cops were also admitted at the hospital while Shamsul's body was sent to the morgue for autopsy.

Shamsul was accused in 12 criminal cases which included robbery. He had been on-the-run and continuing criminal activities in different areas, said Abdullah-Al-Faruq, ASP in Gaibandha.

[Our Jhenidah, Mymensingh and Gaibandha correspondents contributed to this report]

Thai rescuers prepare to raise sunken tourist boat, 41 confirmed dead

REUTERS, Bangkok

Rescuers in Thailand yesterday prepared to lift a sunken tourist boat and said 15 people are still missing after the craft capsized off the coast of Phuket island, killing at least 41 people.

The Phoenix - which had 105 people on board, including 93 Chinese tourists and 12 Thai crew - went down in bad weather on Thursday evening, in one of Thailand's worst recent accidents.

Police on Saturday said they have charged the ship's captain with negligence leading to damages, injury and death.

The captain, who was police did not name, has denied the charges.

"The captain of the boat has been charged with negligence causing damages and loss of life," Police Lieutenant General Sorasak Yenprem, provincial police commissioner, said on Saturday.

A note circulated by rescue workers invited reporters to join an effort yesterday to raise the sunken Phoenix.

Forty-one of those on board have been confirmed dead and another 49 rescued, officials said, leaving 15 unaccounted for.

Divers have been searching inside the submerged vessel for any survivors. Helicopters have also joined the search.

100 balloons

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during Soviet times when flying balloons was formally forbidden, but no one could keep us on the ground," organiser Gintaras Surkus, a pioneer of the activity in Lithuania, told AFP.

One balloon flew a 100-metre-long national flag, while others were in shapes including hearts and cats.

"Hot air balloons are associated with the idea of freedom," Lukas Mikelevic, a 23-year-old psychology student who is also a balloon and aeroplane pilot, told AFP before launching.

"So many balloons taking off from the city centre -- it's unheard of," he added.

Poles, Latvians, Estonians and Chinese enthusiasts also came to fly their balloons in Kaunas.

Until World War I, Lithuania was a province of the Russian empire, which sought to crush nationalism and even banned the Lithuanian alphabet.

The Lithuanian council declared independence on February 16, 1918, when the country was still under German occupation.

Brief wars with Bolsheviks and Poles followed before Lithuania won international recognition in the following years.

Modern Lithuania was an independent nation between the two World Wars. Then the Soviet Union invaded in 1940, Nazi Germany invaded in 1941, and the Soviets returned in 1944.

Democracy campaigners launched an independence drive in the 1980s that eventually made it the first Soviet republic to declare independence in March 1990.

Lithuania finally won recognition from Moscow after the failed coup by hardliners in the Soviet capital in August 1991.

In 2004, Lithuania's pro-Western drive culminated with EU and Nato membership. In 2015, the Baltic state of 2.9 million people adopted the euro.

BNP observes

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Speaking at a press conference at the party's Nayapaltna central office, he said police and Dhaka South City Corporation authorities gave their party verbal permission to hold the token hunger strike at the Mohanagar Natya Mancha.

"We hope we'll get necessary documents and papers in this regard at the right time," Rizvi added.

He said their party's standing committee members, pro-BNP intellectuals, civil society members, professionals and leaders and activists of the 20-praty alliance will join the programme.

Besides, the BNP leader said they invited other political leaders to express solidarity with their programme.

He said their programme will be held in a peaceful manner.

On July 2, the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court upheld its previous order staying the High Court order that had granted bail to Khaleda in a murder case filed over an arson attack in Comilla on February 3, 2015.

Transatlantic ties hang in the balance as Trump comes to Europe

REUTERS, Brussels

European leaders say they no longer have any illusions about Donald Trump as they welcome the US president at a Nato summit this week, but they fear his "America first" agenda may force a moment of reckoning that works to no-one's benefit.

After searching for stability and familiarity in US foreign policy in Trump's first year in office, America's friends in Europe have come to accept the president as an unpredictable political insurgent. But that does not make it any easier to see their own priorities undermined.

Germany's Foreign Minister Heiko Maas warned in a recent speech that "old pillars of reliability are crumbling", in a veiled reference to the US withdrawal from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal to tariffs on EU metals exports and the threat of more to come on cars.

On Nato's old foe Russia, the administration has sent mixed messages by intensifying a US military build-up in Europe while railing against fellow Nato members on defence spending and failing to coordinate on new sanctions on Moscow in 2017.

The US president - the de facto leader of the nearly 70-year-old North Atlantic Treaty Organisation - has indicated what his message will be at the two-day meeting from Wednesday: other governments

must dramatically step up military spending and lower import tariffs.

"I'm going to tell Nato: You've got to start paying your bills. The United States is not going to take care of everything," Trump told a rally last week, adding: "They kill us on trade."

US officials and politicians regularly say Washington spends 70 per cent of its defence budget on Nato, a claim that is flatly denied in Europe. One senior EU official said the number is more like 15 per cent. Like many of the officials and diplomats quoted for this story, he asked not to be named because he was not authorised to speak on the record.

EU officials also contend EU tariffs on most US imports are already low.

A disastrous Nato summit could provide even worse optics than the divisive Group of Seven meeting in June, especially if a scheduled meeting with Russia's Vladimir Putin in Helsinki on July 16 is more convivial, Nato diplomats said.

Wess Mitchell, assistant US secretary of state for European affairs, told diplomats and Nato officials in a recent speech in Brussels that Trump was taking a new approach to problems that have festered for years, such as the Middle East peace process - even if it means going it alone.

No treatment

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meeting and announced the indefinite strike.

Abul Kashem, president of the owners' platform, issued a statement around 2:30pm, saying "journalists had launched an attack on a hospital", but it did not specify which hospital or when it happened.

They issued another statement around 6:00pm, saying the Rab had conducted the drives without any prior notice. It stated that Rab officers were fully armed during the raid and thus created a frightening situation.

Contacted, Hasan Ferdous, general secretary of Chittagong Union of Journalists, refuted the allegation brought against newsmen and said the strike was called protesting the Rab drives.

"Later, they [owners] came up with the version that journalists had attacked a hospital. We want to know where and when the attack took place," he told The Daily Star.

Terming it a blatant lie, Ferdous said that doctors holding the mass people hostage was nothing new and it was done to save those accused of administering wrong treatment or of medical negligence.

"The government must come forward to remedy this..."

Liakat Ali Khan, general secretary of the owners' platform, who is also managing director of Max Hospital, told reporters that the drives conducted by a team of the Rapid Action Battalion took place without any prior notice and they considered it a "threat".

"So, we decided to call the strike."

However, Dewan Mahmud Mehedi Hasan, who was present during the raid as a representative of the DGHS, said it was a regular drive and no prior notice was needed for this.

The BMA also issued a statement in the afternoon and expressed solidarity with the strike.

It said Rab can conduct drives in private hospitals with permission from the DGHS chief. But the way the elite force members stormed the hospitals without any prior notice was frightening, it added.

SUFFERINGS
Following the decision of the strike, Max and other private clinics and hospitals drove patients out.

During visits to private clinics and hospitals, patients were seen reluctantly leaving. Some were bandaged, while many others were on wheeled stretchers.

Anu Talukdar, who had been attending a critically ill patient at Max, told The Daily Star, "It's horrible. I am yet to understand why they are punishing us. Where will we go now? It's a crime."

Frustrated, he headed to Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH) around 3:00pm.

Rifatunnesa, a resident of Halishohor, who had a C-section two days back at the CSCR Hospital at Gol Pahar intersection, needed to see a doctor there but was refused an appointment.

"Why should people suffer due to the ego of doctors? If people die, who will take the responsibility? Why are the doctors punishing us?" she said.

Khaleda Begum, an elderly woman suffering from heart complications, had made a long journey from Noakhali to see a doctor at the CSCR Hospital.

"I made an appointment beforehand but the doctor will not see me today. I don't know why. I pleaded

with him [doctor] to see me but he refused."

Patients forced out of private hospitals and clinics were left scrambling for alternatives, which were far and few.

And the rush of patients increased at the CMCH.

Mahinur, a ward staff at the state-run hospital, said there were more patients than on regular days, adding that it was expected to increase further at night.

Relatives of Sohel Rana, a patient who had suffered a stroke, were seen running helplessly around the overcrowded hospital.

"My brother was admitted to Doctors' Clinic near Mirzarpool area. Doctors stopped coming to the hospital today. His condition is serious now. We don't know what to do," said Mizanur Rahman, the patient's brother.

Jesmin Akhter, a pregnant woman, was shifted to the CMCH from Momota Nagar Matrishadan in Lalkhan Bazar area in the city, said Shelly Akhter, a sister-in-law of the patient.

Md Ayub, a patient who would undergo hernia operation, was earlier admitted to Treatment Hospital in Panchlailash area in the city.

"Officials at the clinic told us we could stay if we wanted but no doctor would be available for at least four days. We had no option but to come to CMCH," said Sanowara Begum, guardian of Aiyub.

Brigadier General Jalal Uddin, director of the CMCH, told The Daily Star that they could provide medical services to 3,000 patients and they were ready to cope with the extra pressure.

'WHEN IT INVOLVES LIVES'
Meanwhile, Prof Mizanur Rahman former chairman of the National Human Rights Commission, said, "Strike is no way an acceptable means to bargain or strengthen power when it involves lives."

Referring to the Indian ban on strikes or work abstention by health service providers, the Dhaka University professor sought a similar directive from a Bangladeshi court.

Such a ban should not be deemed a violation of rights as it is in the public interests, he said, adding, "Time has come to legally specify that some professionals must not exercise power holding people hostage."

Sarwoer Alam, executive magistrate of Rab-7, led the drives at Max Hospital, Centre for Specialised Care and Research (CSCR) Hospital, Royal Hospital and Metropolitan Hospital.

Afterwards, he told reporters that they found irregularities in operation theatre, pathology department and ICU of Max Hospital.

Yesterday's drive at the hospital also revealed that the lab there had been run by untrained individuals. There were date-expired surgical items and unregistered medicines, Mehedi Hasan of DGHS told this newspaper over the phone.

The Rab team also found reports of tests done abroad.

"It is like commissioning of pathological tests," said Mehedi, adding that for the irregularities Max Hospital had been fined Tk 10 lakh.

Raifia Khan, daughter of a senior journalist in Chittagong, died of medical negligence at Max Hospital on June 29. Soon after the incident, there came demands for punishment of doctors whose negligence was proven in an investigation conducted by a three-member committee led by the Chittagong civil surgeon.