

Human rights under attack in Bangladesh

Says British envoy Alison Blake

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

British High Commissioner to Bangladesh Alison Blake yesterday said like other countries of the world, human rights in Bangladesh is under attack.

"Intimidation of and violent attacks on the marginalised and minority people are still taking place," she said.

She, however, praised the government for its generous support to the Rohingyas who were persecuted and driven out of Myanmar.

Blake was addressing a programme marking UN's Human Rights Day, organised by National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) at a hotel in the capital.

Expressing concerns over restriction on media, she said citizens of every nation have the right to enjoy free debate, discuss and criticism, and to hold the government to account round the clock.

Free and independent media are essential for helping defend democratic values, she added.

Swedish Ambassador Charlotta Schlyter

said, "Free and independent media is essential for a democratic society. Freedom of the press needs to be enabled and protected by the state."

"I would like to reiterate our hope that the election will free and fair, transparent, inclusive and participatory," said Charlotta.

Swiss Ambassador René Holenstein said one cannot separate human rights from development. It is in this spirit that Switzerland continues to cooperate closely with the government of Bangladesh and civil society in the areas of democracy, development and human rights.

Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain said human rights education should be introduced in the national curriculum, providing an opportunity to impart human rights knowledge, skills, values and attitude to all young people in Bangladesh.

"Assisting young people to incorporate human rights values into their daily lives is a concrete way to prevent discrimination,

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Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) has been sprucing up the memorial for martyred intellectuals in Mirpur ahead of Martyred Intellectuals' Day on December 14. The photo of two workers cleaning its surface as part of the initiative was taken on Sunday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

No collusion with Pakistan mission, ISI: Fakhrul

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday dismissed Awami League's allegation of BNP's involvement with the Pakistan High Commission in Dhaka and Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), the premier intelligence agency of Pakistan.

The party said it is propaganda ahead of the national election.

"The government is carrying out a serious propaganda against BNP in a planned way. It is also spreading misinformation through social and print media, spending public money. The latest in government's lies is BNP's meeting with the Pakistan High Commission and Tarique Rahman's meeting with ISI," he said.

Speaking at a press conference at the BNP Chairperson's Gulshan office, Fakhrul also warned of taking legal action if the ruling party leaders do not withdraw such remarks.

"We do not expect such irresponsible comments from the Awami League general

secretary. We strongly condemn the remarks," he said.

Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader yesterday said BNP leaders tried to foil the upcoming general election by hatching conspiracy with Pakistani agents.

"Finding no response from the people of the country, BNP and Oikyafront leaders had conducted secret meetings with Pakistani intelligence agency ISI to hatch conspiracy to foil the forthcoming election," he said, according to a BSS report.

"BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir also held meeting at Pakistani High Commission in Dhaka... The election will be held in Bangladesh... So, what is the role of Pakistan here?" he enquired.

Quader, also road transport and bridges minister, said that BNP's internal feud has been exposed. Nomination seekers, who have been deprived, were attacking the BNP office frequently and locked the office, he added.

NATIONAL POLLS HC issues contempt rule against CEC, five others

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday issued a contempt of court rule against the chief election commissioner, four election commissioners and the Election Commission's (EC) secretary for not allowing Oikyaobodho Nagorik Andolon to participate in the upcoming general election.

In the rule, the court asked the respondents to explain in four weeks why legal action should not be taken against them for committing contempt of court by not allowing the party to contest the polls.

The HC bench of Justice Mamnoon Rahman and Justice Ashish Ranjan Das came up with the rule following a contempt of court petition jointly filed by Oikyaobodho Nagorik Andolon's President Dr Kazi Faruk Ahmed and General Secretary Abdus Samad.

In 2008, following an HC directive, the EC registered Oikyaobodho Nagorik Andolon as a political party.

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With intent, the word 'minority' can be turned obsolete

Prof Imtiaz says at seminar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 38 people belonging to minority communities were killed in targeted violence in Bangladesh during the January 2016-October 2018 period, according to a report by the Centre for Genocide Studies (CGS) of Dhaka University (DU).

CGS demanded an effective government role to put an end to such violence.

Prof Imtiaz Ahmed, of DU international relations department and also director of CGS, yesterday shared the report through his presentation, titled "Violence and the Birth of Minorities", at a seminar on "Minorities: Life and Living" in DU's Nabab Nawab Ali Chowdhury

Senate Building auditorium.

CGS organised the seminar in collaboration with Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD).

Prof Imtiaz alleged that at least 201 minority people were injured, 250 were arrested, 64 were assaulted and properties of 116 families were damaged in last two years and 10 months.

He alleged that among the minorities in the country, Hindus faced 140 incidents of attack and 12 were killed -- the highest in number.

Prof Imtiaz also said at least 101 temples, 168 houses and 50 businesses belonging to minorities were attacked during the time.

The word "minority" was first used in 1533 to mean "inferior or

subordinate", he added.

If long-term initiatives are taken, the use of this word can be put to rest within 10 years, he said.

He also said Bangladesh has acquired the 25th position in Global Terrorism Index 2018.

Prof Imtiaz demanded strict action against those involved in attacks on minorities and also urged the government to initiate a permanent remedy.

In his presentation, titled "Economic and political protection of the marginalised and excluded communities of Bangladesh", SEHD Founder Philip Gain said according to his organisation's data, a total of 110 communities are living in the country besides the majority group.

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Govt partnerships with all sectors helped in development: Dr Atiur



Prof Mizanur Rahman speaks at a discussion on "Rights and development of the marginalised: Role of government and non-government organisations" at Krishibid Institution Bangladesh in Dhaka yesterday. Sitting on his left are Dr Atiur Rahman, Shaheen Anam, and Sultana Kamal.

PHOTO: STAR

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former Bangladesh Bank governor Dr Atiur Rahman yesterday said a partnership between the government and non-government sectors has been created over the country's development that would not be easy for any government to overlook.

"The private sector, the non-profit sector and the government sector -- all of us are working hand in hand; it's a collaboration or partnership for the development of Bangladesh," he said while addressing a discussion organised by Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF).

The discussion, titled "Rights and development of the marginalised: Role of government and non-government organisations", was organised at the capital's Krishibid Institution Bangladesh, to mark International Human Rights Day.

Dr Atiur termed the collaboration "complementary" and credited the collaboration to the country's annual economic growth of 7.8 percent GDP that helped reduce poverty and extreme poverty.

The collaboration had begun soon after the Liberation War of 1971 through distribution of relief materials by some social entrepreneurs, he said, adding that they gradually transformed their activities into development works and built partnerships with the government.

Now their work has expanded to every sector including education, health and

human rights, Dr Atiur, presently a Development Studies teacher at Dhaka University, also said.

He also observed that the government's vision of a broader socioeconomic development has reflected in national policies including the 7th Five-Year Plan and the Delta Plan that attempts to address issues related to climate change and urban life.

Addressing the discussion, human rights activist Sultana Kamal said whether the marginalised will be benefited from the development process largely depends on the country's economics and the ones who are in charge of politics.

The country's politics is currently heavily dominated by businesspeople who are out there to secure their own benefit, she observed.

Chairing the discussion, MJF Executive Director Shaheen Anam in her speech said despite economic progress, there have been incidents of human rights violations in the country.

She said unless accountability and good governance in service sectors and the judicial system are ensured, rights of the people will not be established in the country.

Prof Mizanur Rahman, former chairman of National Human Rights Commission, said due attention needs to be given to address the concerns of the minority communities who are feeling vulnerable ahead of the election.

A small help that changes lives

Chevron's project making villagers solvent

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In 2011, at the age of 20, Ibrahim Ali was unemployed and confused about his future. That's when Chevron launched its Jibika (livelihood) project. The youth from Dhankandi village of Sylhet sadar upazila received training on duck rearing and borrowed Tk 10,000 from the project.

Now, seven years later, he owns a farm of 130 ducks and cultivates vegetables on 0.9 acres of land. Once a jobless youth, Ibrahim now earns enough to provide for his family and he is expanding his business.

He changed his fate through what is called the "Village Development Organisation" or VDO. Dhankandi Sabuk Sharbik Gram Unnayan Samabay Samity Ltd, one of the VDOs, gave Ibrahim the training and the loan.

Ibrahim and several other beneficiaries from Sylhet region shared their experiences with the Jibika project at a city hotel in Dhaka yesterday.

With \$2.8 million Chevron fund, the project is empowering the marginalised and poor people living around Chevron-operated gas fields in four upazilas of Sylhet, Habiganj and Moulvibazar for the period of 2015-2019.

Brac, which oversees the project in partnership with Sylhet-based development organisation "IDEA", has so far got 106 VDOs registered out of the total 112 in operation.

A VDO consists of 25-30 members. After signing up, the members can apply for loans. A seven-member executive committee then evaluates the applicant's ability and skills as a potential borrower before sanctioning the loan, mostly with an interest rate of 10 percent.

"The interest amounts

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