

ROHINGYA ABUSES

Can Suu Kyi be legally implicated?

UN investigators call for expert evaluation

AFP, Geneva

UN investigators yesterday called for an expert evaluation of whether Myanmar's civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi can be legally implicated in the abuses committed against the country's Rohingya minority.

The fact-finding mission to Myanmar, set up by the UN Human Rights Council, said they were not equipped to determine what level of responsibility Suu Kyi should shoulder for the Rohingya crisis.

"It will become a legal issue whether or not there is an element of culpability here," fact-finding mission chair Marzuki Darusman told reporters in Geneva.

The Human Rights Council recently created a panel to prepare criminal indictments over atrocities committed in the country -- the so-called Independent International Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) -- which could have the expertise to determine what responsibility Suu Kyi bears in the crisis.

"It is still an open-ended question to what extent she might be implicated," Darusman said.

When asked if the Nobel laureate might be implicated, he said "that is for the judicial process to address," referring to the IIMM.

The fact-finding mission last year branded the army operation in August 2017 as "genocide" and called for the prosecution of top generals, including army chief Min Aung Hlaing.

Some 740,000 Rohingya fled burning villages, bringing accounts of murder, rape and torture over the border to sprawling refugee camps in Bangladesh, where survivors of previous waves of persecution already languished.

And in a damning report published Monday, the investigators warned that the 600,000 Rohingya still inside Myanmar's Rakhine state remain in deteriorating and "deplorable" conditions and continue to face a

"serious risk of genocide".

The experts told the rights council yesterday that they had a confidential list of some 150 names, including officials, suspected of being involved in genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

'CRIMINAL RESPONSIBILITY'

Darusman said that the investigators initially shied away from laying blame on Suu Kyi, who spent years in house arrest before her party in 2015 won Myanmar's first fully free vote for generations.

He said that the fact-finding team had taken into account that Myanmar was "going through a transition, a democratic transition, and therefore in our first report we absolved Mrs. Aung San Suu Kyi from any direct responsibility."

But while it was likely that Suu Kyi was not aware in August 2017 of the army's activities, "the issue now is that subsequently, there was no further addressing of this issue on her part," Darusman said.

Another member of the fact-finding mission, Christopher Sidoti, acknowledged that "it is clear that the civilian side of the government does not control the military side of the government."

But "the civilian side of the government has very substantial constitutional responsibilities," he said.

"The longer this goes on, the more impossible it is for the civilian side of the government to escape international criminal responsibility for the human rights situation in Myanmar."

The fact-finding mission, which was never granted access to Myanmar, is expected to wrap up its work during the ongoing session of the Human Rights Council, due to end next week.

But the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights situation in Myanmar, Yanghee Lee, should continue monitoring the situation.

'We're being threatened'

Say JU BCL leaders who spoke up about receiving money from VC

JU CORRESPONDENT

A number of Jahangirnagar University Chhatra League leaders who publicly spoke about receiving a hefty amount of money from JU VC Prof Farzana Islam last night said that they were feeling insecure on the campus after being threatened over phone.

"We got several phone calls from unknown people telling us to leave the campus. Or else we may face consequences," said Saddam Hossain, joint secretary of JU BCL, at a press briefing at Bishwakabi Rabindranath Tagore Hall around 9:30pm.

We received the threats in the afternoon, Saddam said.

Three BCL leaders -- Vice President Niamul Hasan Taj, Organising Secretary Shamim Molla and Saddam -- also claimed that their phone networks went dead in the evening.

A number of teachers who raised

voice during the ongoing protest against alleged corruption on the campus also told The Daily Star that they could not make or receive any calls from their phones from around 7:00pm to 11:00pm last night.

The teachers include Pro-VC Prof Amir Hussain, former VC Prof Sharif Enamul Kabir, Prof Rayhan Rhyne of philosophy department, Prof Sayeed Ferdous of anthropology, Prof Jamal Uddin Runu of environmental sciences department, Prof Tarek Reza and Prof Shamima Sultana of Bangla department.

However, Provost of the Rabindranath Tagore Hall Provost Prof Abdullah Kafi said, "As they have received threats over the phone, they should file general diaries with the nearest police station."

We are aware of the ongoing tension on the campus, he added.

Steps against JU VC

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minister, told a press conference at his ministry office.

In reply to a query, he said, "On which ground, will the VC have to resign? Is it for moral degradation? If it is proved, then steps must be taken against her. She is not above the law."

Asked about BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir's demand of the VC's resignation, Quader said Fakhrul was demanding resignation of everyone, including Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Speaking about the JU issue at a programme, former Dhaka University VC Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique said the incident of giving money to student leaders from development projects was taking place at other educational institutions too.

"It is unimaginable that student leaders demand shares from development projects [of JU]. It is also happening at other educational institutions. Maybe these are not being published in the media," he told a discussion organised to mark the National Education Day at the Jatiya Press Club.

He alleged that university teachers were also involved in such extortion and demanded investigations into such allegations.

In another development, Muktijuddho Moncho, a platform comprising descendants of freedom fighters, yesterday burnt an effigy of the JU VC on the DU campus, demanding her removal.

At a rally at the base of DU's Raju Memorial Sculpture, it issued a 24-hour ultimatum for the VC to resign for her alleged involvement in corruption and irregularities in development projects at the JU.

"The corrupt Jahangirnagar

University VC has to be removed within 24 hours. Otherwise, we will lay siege to her office and force her to resign," said Prof AKM Jamal Uddin, convener of the platform.

He also alleged that the VC was responsible for the corruption and former central BCL president and general secretary were made "scapegoats".

Al Mamun, president of Muktijuddho Moncho's DU unit, said, "The Jahangirnagar University VC and her family have formed a syndicate, which is involved in corruption, on the campus. She has lost her moral right to hold the post. We demand her immediate removal."

The JU VC and two of her family members appear to be in a fix with a JU BCL faction publicly claiming it had received Tk 25 lakh as per a settlement reached at an August 9 meeting at the VC's residence.

An audio leak that went viral following the ouster of central BCL president and secretary also indicates that an exchange of money involving the VC's family and JU BCL top brass took place.

Talking to The Daily Star on Monday, the faction leaders said the JU BCL was given "Eid Salami" after the meeting.

Saddam Hossain, joint secretary of JU BCL, and Niamul Hassan Taj, a vice-president, who lead the faction, also talked to other media outlets, making similar claims.

According to them, the meeting decided that they would get Tk 25 lakh while JU BCL President Jewel Rana and General Secretary SM Abu Sufian Chanchal Tk 50 lakh and Tk 25 lakh respectively.

VC Farzana has denied the allegations.



A dead fish floating in Hakaluki haor of Moulvibazar's Kulaura upazila on Sunday. The district fisheries department says ammonia released by rotten weeds might have caused the deaths of fish in the haor. Locals first spotted dead fish on Sunday.

PHOTO: STAR

Fish dying in Hakaluki haor

MINTU DESHWARA, Moulvibazar

When farmers were looking forward to some earnings by fishing, the Hakaluki haor in Moulvibazar has turned into a contaminated wetland with dead fish floating ashore.

According to the district's fisheries department, the deaths have been caused by ammonia released by rotten weeds. The gas is replacing the oxygen dissolved in the water.

The Hakaluki haor flows over 28,000-hectare land in four upazilas of Moulvibazar and one upazila of Sylhet in north-east Bangladesh.

Sight of dead fishes lying ashore have been visible since Sunday in Gourkul, Chokia, Dholia, Nagua, Kanli, and Hawabonna swamps.

Puti, Tengra, Veda, Bailla, fries of Boal, Pabda, and Rui are among the dead fish emitting stench in the adjacent areas.

Fish is the second cash crop for farmers of Kulaura, Juri, and Barlekha upazilas of Moulvibazar.

Abdul Kadir of Bhuksimol village of Kulaura told this paper, "This year, I incurred losses after selling Boro paddy through middle men. I thought we will survive by catching fish from

the haor. But now fish are dying just like in 2017."

After flashfloods in 2017, fish in the rich haor died posing health hazards. It came as a double blow for farmers as they had lost acres of paddy just weeks ahead of the annual harvest season due to flood.

"Weeds have died and started to rot lately. As a result, the fish are dying and the water quality is also deteriorating," said Moulvibazar District Fisheries Officer Emdadul Haque.

When asked what measures the authorities were taking, Sultan Mahmud, senior fisheries officer in Kulaura, said, "We have started

pouring zeolite and timsen in the haor. These substances help remove ammonia and bring temperature of water under control."

Abdul Karim, general secretary of Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon Sylhet chapter, said, "At this time of the year, mother fish produce millions of fries in swamps of Hakaluki. But this time they are dying. This might lead to scarcity of fish in upcoming days."

Besides, the haor was home to many animals, birds, and a large variety of flora and fauna, he added.

"The water has become polluted by the rotten weed and dead fish. Usage of this water may cause skin diseases and respiratory problems," said Partho Sarathi Datta Kanungo, superintendent of 250-bed Moulvibazar District Hospital, asking people not to consume the water or the fish.

Marufatuzzahan, chairman of the Animal and Fish Biotechnology Department at Sylhet Agricultural University, said, "Rotten weed could be partially responsible for increase of acid levels in the water, but studies need to be done to determine what actually cost the lives of the fish."



Toxic animal feed still coming in

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"In the past, a group of importers in league with Clearing and Forwarding (C&F) agents earlier took delivery of such hazardous and contraband fish and poultry feed through irregularities such as changing samples and forging lab reports.

Some customs officials helped them," said Akbar Hossain, additional commissioner of Chattogram Customs House.

"We took some strong steps in collecting, sealing and transporting samples, and changed the laboratory when we learned about the forgery," he said, adding that after taking the new measures, they found MBM and animal by-products in the poultry and fish feed.

In the last two and a half years, they sent samples of imported goods to several laboratories but did not get any hazardous and banned items in their reports, he said.

All imported goods have to go through physical or lab examinations before they are released from the Chattogram Port. According to officials, more than 4,500 types of products enter Bangladesh through this port, and about 1,000 of them go through lab tests.

Prof Dr Mukhlis Uddin, a cancer specialist at Chattogram Medical College Hospital, said bacteria and virus can infest animal bones, which are left out in the open for a long time. They may cause cancer in humans if ingested.

"It will not leave any adverse impact immediately, but the consumers can get cancer after 10-15 years."

According to the customs documents, the seized feed were imported by 12 firms -- Aisha Corporation, VNF Agro Ltd, Spectra Hexa Feeds Ltd, Promex Agro & Feed Products Ltd, Fishtech BD Ltd, Aquatech Agro (BD) Ltd, Advance Agrolek Bangladesh, Quality Feeds Ltd, RRP Agro Farm, Inter Agro BD Ltd, Magnify Agro Ltd, and MKA Hatchery.

Talking to The Daily Star, VNF Agro Managing Director AKM Khairul Islam Chowdhury said, "We were not aware of the existence of hazardous ingredients in the imported feed."

Documents show that Aisha Corporation imported 601 tonnes of fish feed worth about Tk 1.7 crore from Vietnam in early July. The authorities gave clearance for the release of their goods based on a report of the BCSIR, and the importer took the delivery of around 322 tonnes.

However, the customs seized the rest as hazardous substances were found when they re-collected samples on information and sent those to the icddr,b and Poultry Resource and Training Centre for retests.

Both the laboratories found MBM,

animal bones, and by-products of pigs in the fish feed.

Naznin Akhter, proprietor of Aisha Corporation, could not be contacted by phone for comments.

AGM Murshed, senior scientific officer at the BCSIR, said, "In no way can there be discrepancies in the reports of different laboratories unless the samples are changed or there is a major fault in the testing equipment."

"Sometimes lab inspection officers may also give false reports after being influenced by someone. But the responsibility lies with the laboratory authorities," he said, adding that BCSIR would look into the matter if a specific complaint was lodged by the customs authorities.

Chattogram Customs Commissioner Fakhrul Alam said they would write to the labs for an explanation of the process they applied for sample analysis.

In the last two months, more than 5,000 tonnes of fish feed were imported to Chattogram Port. But most importers have not received them yet, fearing that tests might detect hazardous elements in them, said officials.

"We are issuing letters to the importers to take their goods away from the port. If they don't do so, the products will be destroyed as per rules," the customs commissioner said.

Mahbub Kabir, member of Bangladesh Food Safety Authority, said MBM was banned because it is made from bones and waste of animals, including cow, pig and goat. It can carry virus, bacteria and other ingredients harmful for human health.

"We had collected samples of fish and poultry feed from the market. We had also collected chickens and fish, which consumed the products, to conduct the research," he said.

Findings showed that apart from creating antibiotic resistance, consumption of these chickens and fish might cause cancer in human bodies, Kabir said.

He said the government banned MBM last year after the Food Safety Authority found such hazardous elements in samples collected from the market at different times.

Elias Hossain, manager (marketing) of Promek Agro & Feed Products Ltd, said the seized consignment was certified by exporter as fish feed. "The first BCSIR lab report also mentions that the consignment was safe."

He alleged the customs authorities had been harassing them to protect the interest of local companies that produce and market such feed.

Monsur Alam, managing director of RRP Agro Farm, said, "Multiple lab reports say the products are MBM when in fact we imported fish feed."

He said they would take some initiatives in this regard from their association -- Feed Industries Association of Bangladesh.

Comments from the other companies were not immediately available.

Moazzem Hossain, owner of Bengal Liner Agencies, which is in charge of releasing the consignment of Aisha Corporation, said they released more than half of the goods on the basis of lab reports in June.

"The customs authorities seized them based on false information and sent them to other labs for running a retest," he said, claiming that the customs officials may have some ill-intents.

Asked about the allegation, Additional Commissioner of Customs Akbar Hossain said, "They have been importing banned and harmful products for long. Now that they have failed to do so, they are raising allegations against honest officials."

He also alleged that these companies were threatening him and other customs officials by phone.

"The government or customs officials have nothing to gain if some goods are seized or get stuck in the port. We have acted out of concern for public health," he added.

Biman to get

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inspected inside the aircraft and talked to its pilots and other crew members.

The PM said that the government has a plan to expand the wings of Biman in the coming days.

She said that Biman would start its flight to Manchester as Bangladeshi people living there have been requesting her for a long time to start Biman's flight operation.

The PM asked the officials of Biman to gain the trust of passengers by ensuring the standard services with honesty and sincerity.

Earlier, the first and second Boeing 787-8 Dreamliners -- named Akash Beena and Hangsabalaka respectively -- arrived here in August and December last year, while the third one -- Gaangchil -- arrived in July this year.

In 2008, Biman signed a US\$2.1 billion agreement with Boeing to purchase 10 new aircraft. Of those, Boeing has already delivered four 777-300ERs, two 737-800's and three Dreamliners to Biman.

The 271-seater Rajhangsha has been designed to be 20 percent fuel efficient compared to other aircraft. The airliner has the capacity to fly 16 hours nonstop with an average speed of 650 miles per hour, and is also equipped with on-board Wi-Fi.

It will provide passengers with Wi-Fi services at a height of 43,000 feet.

EC staffers

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the three, with the police station under the Digital Security Act, the OC said.

The two other accused are one Sagar, 37, and one Satya Sundar Dey, 38, said the OC, adding, police were raiding different places to arrest them.

Sagar and Satya both worked at EC projects in Dhaka in 2012, said an official of the commission, wishing not to be named.

The EC team was working to trace other members of the nexus and the number of forged NID cards provided to Rohingyas using the EC database, said Iqbal.

He said they were also analysing the laptop.

Earlier this month, police and passport officials said some Rohingya refugees were making Bangladeshi passports using forged NIDs with the help of some locals and Rohingya brokers.

The Rohingya people were using fake names and addresses while applying for the identification documents.

Recently, a government probe body committee has found that at least 73 suspicious applications were uploaded to the Election Commission database for issuing NIDs. The committee unearthed the information while probing the forged NID card of a Rohingya woman in Chattogram.

The committee, however, could not determine from which EC office those applications were uploaded, said the head of the body, Kotwali Thana Election Officer Kamrul Alam.

The EC team, headed by Iqbal, was formed for further investigation as per the suggestion of the probe committee.

Talking to The Daily Star, Iqbal said, "We started our investigation in Cox's Bazar on September 11 and identified some members of the nexus."

"We've also identified some Rohingya people who are trying to get fake NID cards," he said, adding, "During our investigation, we came to know that some officials of the Election Commission's Chattogram District Office were involved in the syndicate."

"We then came back to Chattogram and held Jainal. He confessed that he stole an EC laptop and handed it over to his friend Bijoy."

Iqbal said they contacted Bijoy and asked him to appear before the EC office with the laptop. But he sent his sister Sima with the device, he said.

"Examining the laptop, we are confirmed that it is an official device of the Election Commission. It is used for uploading voters' information to the Election Commission's database for issuing NIDs," the EC official said. Bijoy told the investigators he took the laptop to his home in port city's Anderkilla about a month ago.

"We have found data of 51 voters in the laptop," Iqbal said, adding, "The information is being verified."

Mentionable, Anti-Corruption Commission officials, while visiting Chattogram District Election Office on Sunday, discovered that a laptop had been missing from the office since 2015.

Investigators believe it was used for making over 2,000 dubious entries into the EC database, said ACC sources.

Contacted, Munir Hussain Khan, Chattogram District Election officer, said they were not yet sure whether the missing laptop and the one with the EC team were the same device.

Rohingya man, 2

Myanmar nationals

held with 250 SIM

cards

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Police arrested a Rohingya man and two Myanmar citizens with 250 SIM cards in Teknaf land port area yesterday.

Pradip Kumar Das, officer-in-charge of Teknaf Police Station, said the trio was held by the members of Bangladesh Ansar and VDP. The Myanmar citizens were held at a checkpoint inside the port when they were trying to cross it with the SIM cards.

The Rohingya refugee, inhabitant of Shalbagar refugee camp, was waiting outside the port to receive the SIM cards. Ansar and VDP members detained him receiving information from the Myanmar citizens, he added.

A case was filed with Teknaf Police Station against the three, the OC said.

However, names and other details of the arrestees could not be known as of 8:00pm.

Police on alert

as Taiwan's flag

lowered in the

Solomons

AFP, Honiara

Police maintained a strong presence on the streets of the Solomon Islands' capital Honiara yesterday but reported no unrest following the troubled Pacific nation's decision to switch diplomatic allegiance to China from Taiwan.

The move, revealed late Monday when officials in Taipei pre-emptively severed ties with Honiara, prompted a peaceful pro-Taiwan protest on the island of Malaita.

"We've spoken to the police chief there and there were no incidents," a police spokesman told AFP.