

ROHINGYA GENOCIDE CASE

Suu Kyi to lead Myanmar team to UN top court

REUTERS, Yangon

Aung San Suu Kyi will appear before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to contest a case filed by Gambia accusing Myanmar of genocide against its Rohingya Muslim minority, her government said yesterday.

More than 730,000 Rohingya Muslims have fled to neighbouring Bangladesh since a 2017 crackdown by Myanmar's military, which UN investigators say was carried out with "genocidal intent". Buddhist majority Myanmar denies accusations of genocide.

Gambia, a tiny, mainly Muslim West African nation, lodged its lawsuit after winning the support of the Organisation for Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which has 57 member states. Only a state can file a case against another state at the ICJ.

Myanmar has retained prominent international lawyers to contest the case submitted by Gambia, the ministry for state counsellor Suu Kyi's office said in a Facebook post.

"The State Counsellor, in her capacity as Union Minister for Foreign Affairs, will lead a team to the Hague, Netherlands, to defend the national

interest of Myanmar at the ICJ," it said, giving no further details.

Military spokesman Brigadier General Zaw Min Tun told Reuters the decision was made after the army consulted with the government. "We, the military, will fully cooperate with the government and we will follow the instruction of the government," he said.

A spokesman for Suu Kyi's party, the National League for Democracy, said she had decided to take on the case herself.

"They accused that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi didn't speak out about violations against human rights," spokesman Myo Nyunt said. "And they accused that she didn't try to stop human rights violations. She decided to face that lawsuit by herself."

Both Gambia and Myanmar are signatories to the 1948 Genocide Convention, which not only prohibits states from committing genocide but also compels all signatory states to prevent and punish the crime of genocide.

The ICJ has said it will hold the first public hearings in the case on December 10 to 12. The court has no means to enforce any of its rulings.

Truckers' strike

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enforced the strike amid a work stoppage by bus owners and drivers in 20 districts.

DELAYS AT PORTS

Transport of goods remained halted at all land and sea ports across the country during the strike yesterday.

At Chattogram port, movement of containers carrying imported and export goods remained suspended.

Usually, over 4,000 twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs) of import containers are delivered from the port every day. But not a single truck entered the port amid the strike.

No export container could be sent to the port from the 19 private inland container depots, said Md Ruhul Amin Sikder, secretary of Bangladesh Inland Container Depots Association.

Meanwhile, transport of goods to and from Bhomra Land Port in Satkhira, Hili Land Port in Dinajpur and Burimari Land Port in Lalmonirhat was also suspended.

Sohrab Hossain, public relations officer at Hili Land Port, said goods-laden trucks had arrived at the port from India, but those were not allowed to ply the domestic routes.

No goods were released also from Benapole Land Port due to the strike.

Usually, the port earns Tk 25 crore in revenue every day, but it got only Tk 8.25 lakh yesterday. There was a cargo backlog as no goods were delivered from the port, officials said.

Around 500 trucks carry goods to and from the land port every day.

ESSENTIALS GET PRICEY

The prices of some vegetables, including okras, tomatoes and cucumbers, rose by Tk 5-15 per kg yesterday at the wholesale market in the capital's Karwan Bazar, said traders.

There were a few trucks for hire and those were charging higher than usual fares, they mentioned.

Prior to the strike that began at 6:00am yesterday, a huge quantity of vegetables had entered the capital's wholesale vegetable markets on

Tuesday.

"Usually, I bring one truck of pumpkins, but yesterday [Tuesday] I brought two," said Mahfuz Islam, a wholesale pumpkin seller at the capital's Karwan Bazar.

As news of the strike spread, truckers hiked their fares, he said.

Another vegetable trader, Sayeed Khan, said he used to hire trucks from Jashore's Khajura for Tk 12,000 each, but yesterday he had to pay Tk 15,000.

"I used to sell gourds for Tk 40 each, but yesterday I had to charge Tk 45," he said.

Humayun Alam, a Tejgaon-based agent of Molla Salt and Patia Super Salt, said he hired two trucks for Tk 13,500 each from Chattogram's Patia on Tuesday afternoon.

Yesterday morning, truckers refused to carry goods.

"They finally agreed as I gave them Tk 40,000 per truck," Humayun claimed.

TROUBLES FOR GARMENT EXPORTERS

Garment exporters could not send their goods to Chattogram port from the capital by road because of the strike.

Sharif Zahir, managing director of Ananta Group, a leading garment exporter, said,

"Trucks did not leave the capital for Chattogram.

"We may have to go for air shipments if we miss the cut-off time," he said, adding that air shipment usually costs up to 40 percent of the value of the export goods.

Sheikh Fazle Fahim, president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, the country's apex trade body, said, "Any disruption without a heads-up puts a strain on businesses."

Rubana Huq, president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, said, "All of them [garment exporters] are complaining. Buyers are getting stuck even during factory visits."



Transport workers demonstrate blocking Dhaka-Chattogram highway Signboard area yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Reconciliation

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and Security" at the UN headquarters on Tuesday.

He emphasised on the necessity of a robust enabling environment in Rakhine underpinned by a dialogue between the Rohingyas, rest of the Myanmar society and the Myanmar authorities.

Momen recalled Bangladesh's successful experience of reconciliation in the Chittagong Hills Tracts in 1997 under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

He also mentioned Bangladesh's contribution, through peacekeeping, to national and local reconciliation strategies in countries emerging from conflicts.

The permanent representative called upon Myanmar to promote active

participation of women and young people and ensure accountability and justice for serious violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law, said the Bangladesh Mission at the UN on Wednesday.

Momen also urged the Security Council to promote sustainable peace in Myanmar's Rakhine State through reconciliation and reintegration of Rohingya community into Myanmar society.

The UNSC has to encourage Myanmar to address core grievances and ensure unhindered and safe passage of relevant personnel and supplies to the Rakhine, he added.

The Open Debate was held under the presidency of the UK. UN Secretary-General António Guterres also spoke on the occasion.



Firefighters spraying water to extinguish a blaze, inset, at Rajdhani Super Market in the capital yesterday evening. It took over an hour to douse the fire.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Fire destroys shops in city market

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DG told reporters at the scene.

The market, built with corrugated-iron sheets, was listed as a risky establishment and fire officials conducted a fire drill around a month ago, the DG said.

He added that they had asked the market authorities to improve safety in two months.

The market houses around 170 stores.

Russell, a shopkeeper at a mattress store, claimed that sparks from a welding work being done close to his store caused curtains and mattresses in his store to ignite.

He claimed that they used fire extinguishers but could not suppress the fire. People then ran out of the market. At least five other witnesses gave similar accounts.

Three people suffered minor injuries

and took treatment at hospitals.

Power connection to the area was cut and nearby roads were closed to traffic until the fire was put out.

Babul, owner of Faisal Bedding Store on the first floor, said he just bought blankets worth Tk 10 lakh for sale in winter.

"Everything has been gutted," Babul said, adding that he had lost goods worth Tk 30 lakh in total.

People left in the lurch

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opportunity to charge passengers with high fares.

Protesting transport workers assaulted some other drivers who had tried to operate their buses defying the strike.

Several hundred buses and trucks were seen parked at different bus terminals and intersections in different districts as the strike began its third consecutive day.

In the capital, the numbers of buses and trucks were low all throughout yesterday.

A workers' leader, preferring anonymity, said many bus drivers and helpers did not operate fearing penalty under the new law as their driving licenses and other related documents were not updated.

He also alleged that some agitating workers vandalised some vehicles and assaulted drivers who tried to operate their vehicles in the capital's Tejgaon area.

Meanwhile, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader at a programme in Noakhali yesterday called upon transport workers to refrain from making commuters suffer.

Our correspondents from different districts reported on the struggles that commuters were facing due to the strike.

Vehicular movement on the Dhaka-Chattogram and Dhaka-Sylhet highways was halted for around eight hours yesterday as workers blockaded the Dhaka-Narayanganj Link Road in Signboard area around 6:00am.

Transport operation resumed around 2:00pm as they withdrew the blockade, however a four-kilometre-long tailback was created. Some people opted to commute on foot, while others had to pay extra money if they chose another mode of transportation.

"I paid Tk 100 to travel from Signboard area to Jatrabari on a rickshaw-van, whereas the bus fare is

Tk 5-10," said Alok Saha, an insurance company employee.

Shakil Ahmed, a student of Dania College, said, "I have an exam at 1:30pm. I got out of home in Shimrail area at 11:00am. Now, I cannot get any transport. I will have to walk to reach my college and give the exam."

On the other hand, bus operation on the Dhaka-Mawa Highway remained halted since morning. A similar situation prevailed at the Shimulia Ferry Terminal area. Many commuters faced trouble after reaching the terminal on launches from southern parts of the country.

Many who crossed the border and entered Bangladesh struggled due to the transport crisis.

"Me and my six-member family came to Bangladesh today [yesterday]. But we could not get any transport to go to our home in Tangail. Today, we will stay at a hotel and will try to catch a train tomorrow," said Rohit Chandra Das, 50, who came to Bangladesh through the Burimari border of Lalmonirhat.

Aklima Begum, a resident of Narail, was on her way to Khulna Medical College Hospital to visit her grandson yesterday. Due to the unavailability of buses, she got on an easy bike and van after crossing the Bhairab river and then managed to reach Phulbari Gate in Khulna.

In Pabna, several hundred passengers were seen waiting for buses at the town's main bus terminal yesterday noon. However, due to a lack of buses, there was a mad rush whenever one approached.

"I have been waiting here for a bus for around an hour and half but I could not get on. Whenever a bus came, people rushed to get on. I cannot even reach the door due to the huge crowd as I have a baby with me," said a woman, who was looking for a bus to go to Sathia upazila.

The Bangabandhu Bridge, which connects Dhaka to southern districts,

looked almost deserted as there was barely any vehicular movement on it, said workers at the bridge.

Besides, commuters also suffered in Rangpur, Dinajpur, Kurigram, Chapainawabganj, Jhalakathi, Faridpur, Pirojpur, Cumilla, Noakhali and Tangail.

Workers' leaders in most of the districts said they would continue the strike until their demands are met and they get the directives from the workers' central committee in Dhaka.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Passengers' Welfare Association in a press statement yesterday urged transport workers to withdraw their strike immediately considering public suffering.

MOBILE COURTS FILE FEWER CASES

The number of cases filed by the mobile courts of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) declined sharply a day after transport leaders criticised the operation of courts under the new law.

Yesterday, seven BRTA mobile courts in the capital filed 38 cases against different vehicles yesterday. The courts also fined violators of traffic rules a total of Tk 35,600.

The number of cases were 79 and amount of fine was 1.19 lakh just the day before.

At a meeting with BRTA Chairman Kamrul Ahsan on Tuesday, transport leaders placed several demands, including using the BRTA mobile courts for creating awareness for the time being instead of enforcing the law.

"When transport workers in many districts are protesting against the law, operation of these courts are rubbing salt on their wounds. So, we asked the authority to stop operation of those mobile courts," a top transport leader told The Daily Star after Tuesday's meeting.

(Our district correspondents contributed to the report.)

Major polluters far off climate targets

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Programme (UNEP) executive director Inger Andersen.

As well as UNEP, the report was produced by the Stockholm Environment Institute, the International Institute for Sustainable Development, the Overseas Development Institute, and the CICERO Centre for International Climate and Environmental Research and Climate Analytics.

It created a new metric called "the fossil fuel production gap" highlighting the difference between rising production and the decline needed to restrict global warming, reported Reuters.

The gap was largest for coal, with countries planning to produce 150% more in 2030 than would be consistent with limiting warming to 2C, and 280% more than would limit warming to 1.5C.

"The continued expansion of fossil fuel production - and the widening of the global production gap - is underpinned by a combination of ambitious national plans, government subsidies to producers, and other forms of public finance," the report said.

\$7.9 TRILLION BY 2050

Climate change could directly cost the world economy \$7.9 trillion by mid-century as increased drought, flooding and crop failures hamper growth and threaten infrastructure, new analysis showed yesterday.

The Economist Intelligence Unit's (EIU) Climate Change Resilience Index measured the preparedness of the world's 82 largest economies and found that based on current trends the fallout of warming temperatures would shave

off three percent of global GDP by 2050.

Its analysis, which assesses each country's direct exposure to loss as climate change brings more frequent extreme weather events, found Africa was most at-risk, with 4.7 percent of its GDP in the balance.

In general, developing nations fared poorer in terms of resiliency than richer ones.

"Being rich matters," John Ferguson, EIU country analysis director, told AFP.

"Richer nations are really able to be more resilient towards the impacts of climate change, so this really threatens growth trajectories of the developing world as they try to catch up with the developed world."

"When we are already dealing with global inequality, for the impacts of climate change the developing world's challenges are much greater," he added.

Of the countries evaluated, Angola stood to lose the most - as much as 6.1 percent of gross domestic product.

The study put this down to a mixture of a lack of quality infrastructure, as well as its geographical exposure to severe drought, soil erosion and rising sea levels.

Land degradation in Angola would prove a "significant" economic hindrance, the report said, given that agriculture is its largest employer.

Nigeria (5.9 percent negative GDP), Egypt (5.5 percent), Bangladesh (5.4 percent) and Venezuela (5.1 percent) were the next most climate vulnerable nations identified in the analysis.

ACT NOW, AND LATER

The analysis said rising temperatures meant the global economy was

projected to hit \$250 trillion by 2050, as opposed to \$258 trillion with no climate impact.

While the United States - still the world's largest economy at market rates - is forecast to be one of the least impacted, the EIU noted that President Donald Trump's policies represented a "temporary setback" in the climate fight.

Russia was predicted to lose five percent of GDP by 2050 and will "suffer more than most other countries in the world from the negative effects of climate change", it said. This held true even when potential benefits in increased agriculture were taken into account.

Melting permafrost - threatening infrastructure such as hydrocarbon pipelines - was forecast to be among the biggest drags on Russia's economy in the coming decades.

Nations agreed in Paris in 2015 to work to limit temperature rises to "well below" two degrees Celsius, and 1.5-C if possible.

To do so, the global economy must rapidly decrease its greenhouse gas emissions - a source of controversy in developing nations which say their economic growth shouldn't suffer after decades of fossil fuel use by wealthier countries.

"The global economy is going to suffer so it's not really a case of act now or act later. We need to do both," said Ferguson.

"Developing countries can't do this on their own. There needs to be a coordinated global effort to deal with the impacts we are talking about."

Armed Forces Day today

BSS, Dhaka

The Armed Forces Day is being celebrated today commemorating the founding date of army, navy and air force during the Liberation War in 1971.

The programmes that have been planned marking the day is going to be inaugurated with special prayers at all the mosques in all the cantonments, naval bases and air force bases across the country. In the prayers, divine blessing is going to be sought for prosperity of the national and progress of the armed forces, said an ISPR statement.

President M Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina issued separate messages greeting members of the armed forces on the occasion.

As part of the day's programme, the president and the premier will lay wreaths at the Shikha Anirban (the Eternal Flame) at Dhaka Cantonment paying deep homage to the martyred armed forces members who laid down their lives in the Liberation War.

They will be followed by Army chief General Aziz Ahmed, Navy chief Admiral Abu Moazzam Mohiuddin Mohammed Aurangzeb Chowdhury and Air Force chief Air Chief Marshal Masihuzzaman Serniabat in performing the ritual on behalf of their respective forces.

The chiefs of the three services will also call on the President at the Bangabhaban and the prime minister at the Armed Forces Division.

The prime minister is scheduled to meet the family members of the Bir Shresthos and other gallantry award winning 1971 veterans at the Armed Forces Division at Army Multipurpose Complex at Dhaka Cantonment. She would distribute peace award for 2018-19 among nine army, two navy and three air forces men.

The premier will host a reception at Senakanja in the afternoon, said the ISPR press release.

The Jatiya Sangsad speaker, chief justice, former presidents, leader of the opposition in parliament, cabinet members, Supreme Court judges, chief election commissioner, election commissioners, foreign envoys, high civil and military officers, the intelligentsia, senior journalists and other distinguished personalities will join the reception.

The state-run Bangladesh Television (BTV) will air the function live. A "Special Anirban" programme illustrating the significance of the day was telecasted by BTV at 8:00pm yesterday and the programme would be telecasted by other television channels while national dailies would publish special supplements highlighting the significance of the day. Bangladesh Betar would broadcast a programme "Special Durbar" today at 7:30pm.

Savar, Bogura, Ghatail, Chattogram, Cumilla, Sylhet, Jashore, Rangpur, Khulna and Rajendrapur cantonments will host receptions marking the day.

Various programmes have also been chalked out at different army garrisons, naval ships, installations and bases of the air force across the country outside Dhaka.

Onion flounders

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On Tuesday, Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi said the government decided to import 50,000 tonnes of onion by cargo planes.

The ministry booked a number of cargo flights of different airlines to import it.

Onion prices began to rise across the country about two months ago when the Indian government imposed a ban on its export. But the prices started to rise sharply last week.

Earlier this month, locally grown onion was sold at Tk 100-120 a kg in the capital's kitchen markets. But the price jumped to Tk 160 late last week and then kept rising.

The price rose by Tk 30-40 a day and hit a record Tk 260 per kg. Against such a backdrop, the government decided to import onions by cargo planes.

Market monitoring teams from the commerce ministry and different divisions as well as government agencies punished traders for their alleged involvement in manipulation of onion prices.

In the last couple of days, the teams had imposed fines and handed down different jail terms to the offenders.

The prices started dropping three to four days ago after locally grown onions and the ones imported from Myanmar, Egypt and China hit the market.

Locally grown onions were being sold for Tk 170-180 per kg and the imported ones for Tk 120-160 a kg.

Traders fear that onion prices may rise anytime soon if the ongoing transport strike continues.