

ROHINGYA CAMPS

Govt orders rights group to lock its headquarters

AFP, Dhaka

The authorities have ordered a leading Rohingya rights group to lock up its headquarters, said a spokesman for the group.

Officials told community leaders in the camps at Kutupalong to keep the office of Arakan Rohingya Society for Peace and Human Rights (ARSPH) padlocked until further notice.

“The CIC (Camp-in-Charge) directed us to padlock the office and not to gather in it without his prior consent,” Sayed Ullah, an ARSPH spokesman, told AFP yesterday.

He said all activities by the rights group have now ground to a halt.

The ARSPH has been led by Mohib Ullah, a teacher turned rights activist who has emerged as a key refugee leader and spokesperson in international meetings.

The bamboo and tarpaulin office at Kutupalong, the world’s largest refugee settlement, has often housed meetings among Rohingya community leaders.

But Mohib Ullah came under fire in August this year when he led a massive rally of 200,000 refugees to mark the second anniversary of the Myanmar military crackdown.

The rally stoked fears among the host communities, who have become a minority in the two hilly towns where the Rohingya live in three dozen squalid camps.

After the rally and a failed repatriation attempt the same month, the authorities launched a clampdown on the refugees.

They shut down high speed internet in the region and ordered the army to erect barb-wire fences around major settlements.

Refugee commissioner Mahbub Alam Talukder said they asked the community leaders to “hold meetings in allocated multipurpose community centres” built by the authorities.

“We did not shut down any office. But we will not allow anything that poses questions on the camps’ overall law and order situation,” he told AFP.

The ARPSH was formed in late 2017 to collect evidence of an alleged genocide by the Myanmar army during its offensive in Rakhine, the western Myanmar state where Rohingyas have been living for generations.

A community leader, on condition of anonymity, expressed concerns over the lockdown.

“This office is a symbol of hope and aspirations of our community. Its shutdown would seriously impact the struggle for our rights.”

Bronze stacks

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lives in England, later went on to win the 200m backstroke gold, making her the talk of Kathmandu as Nepal set a new medal record for the country, beating their previous best from 1999 when the Games were in Kathmandu for the second time.

While Gauri and all of Nepal were cheering, there was not much to cheer for in the Bangladesh camp, who scraped two bronze medals from the pool on the second day of swimming.

Gauri’s feat brought to mind that of Mahfuza Khatun Shila, who had salvaged a disappointing campaign for Bangladesh with two individual gold medals in the 2016 SA Games in India. Shila too had won the first individual gold medal in swimming for Bangladesh three years ago.

Shila is in Kathmandu too, but only as a guest of the contingent, leading the team in the opening ceremony and encouraging the current swimmers. Her cheers from the side of the pool must have been falling on deaf ears as the swimmers failed to lift themselves to the required heights in Kathmandu.

Romana Akter, who was competing in the 100m breaststroke event -- one of two events in which Shila had won gold -- finished a disappointing fifth with a timing of 1min 18.87sec.

Bangladesh’s two bronze medals in swimming came courtesy of Junayna Ahmed and Faisal Ahmed while there were three bronze medals in fencing alongside one bronze each in kabaddi and shooting, swelling the bronze tally to 51.

The overall tally for Bangladesh rose, too, to 75 -- equalling the haul from the previous edition -- thanks to four silver medals in golf, two in weightlifting and one in shooting yesterday. However, gold has dried up for the country after four came on the first two medal-deciding days.

And that is where Bangladesh is lagging far behind the four higher-placed nations, namely India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Pakistan.

In fact, Bangladesh are currently second in the bronze-medal count, but a distant fifth in both silver and bronze counts.

That is the worry is for the Bangladesh sports officials, who had hoped to not only increase the number of medals but also the variety in colour of those. So far, the numbers are rising fast but the change in colour is struggling to keep pace.



People celebrate during a gathering in India's Ahmedabad yesterday after police shot dead four detained gang-rape and murder suspects during an encounter in Hyderabad. *Inset*, demonstrators in New Delhi hold placards to protest the alleged rape and murder of the 27-year-old veterinary doctor.

PHOTO: AFP



Police kill 4 suspects

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Shortly after their arrest hundreds of protesters also tried to storm the police station where they were held.

At one demonstration in Delhi, some women wielded swords while one lawmaker called for the men to be “lynched” and another for rapists to be castrated.

SHOWERED IN PETALS

Police are often accused of using extrajudicial killings to bypass the legal process to cover-up botched investigations or to pacify public anger.

A huge backlog of cases in the slow Indian criminal justice means that many rape victims wait years for justice.

Several hundred people flocked to the scene of the men’s deaths yesterday, setting off firecrackers to celebrate and showering police with

flower petals and hoisting them on their shoulders.

“I am happy the four accused have been killed in an encounter. This incident will set an example. I thank the police and media for their support,” the victim’s sister told a local television station.

Women distributed sweets and tied Hindu ritual threads on the wrists of policemen to thank them.

Further celebrations were held elsewhere in the country, including in the western state of Gujarat.

Many social media users, including politicians and celebrities, hailed police.

“Great work #hyderabadpolice ..we salute u,” top badminton player Saina Nehwal tweeted.

“Let all know this is the country where good will always prevail over

evil,” a former minister and current MP from Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s party wrote on Twitter.

‘STATE MURDERS’

But lawyer and activist Vrinda Grover told AFP the killings were “absolutely unacceptable”.

“Instead of investigation and prosecution the state is committing murders to distract the public and avoid accountability,” she said.

Maneka Gandhi, a lawmaker from ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, termed the incident “dangerous”.

“They would have anyway got hanging for their heinous crime, but you can’t just pick up guns and kill people because you want to. Because law is tardy, you can’t kill people,” Gandhi told reporters.

Congress leader Shashi Tharoor tweeted: “We need to know more, for

instance if the criminals were armed, the police may have been justified in opening fire preemptively. Until details emerge we should not rush to condemn. But extra-judicial killings are otherwise unacceptable in a society of laws.”

“To appease public rage over state failures against sexual assault, Indian authorities commit another violation,” tweeted Meenakshi Ganguly from Human Rights Watch.

Amnesty International India said the “alleged extrajudicial execution” raised disturbing questions and called for an independent investigation.

“In a modern and rights-respecting society, using extrajudicial executions to offer justice to victims of rape is not only unconstitutional but circumvents the Indian legal system and sets a grossly wrong precedent,” it said in a statement.

Murder, not suicide

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The Daily Star has obtained, Dr Soheli Mahmud, head of the DMC’s forensic medicine department, suggested a chemical examination be carried out on the body. Chemical examiners signed their report with remarks on July 19 in 2017.

Sohel then signed the report on August 1, 2017 where he wrote, “Considering the findings of the PM [post mortem] examination and chemical analysis report, my opinion on the cause of death of the victim was ... asphyxia resulting from strangulation [ligature] which was ante-mortem and homicidal in nature.”

Despite the stunning discovery, the report only reached Bhatara police on September 15 this year, more than two years after it was prepared.

A staffer at the forensic medicine department, who used to dispatch autopsy reports, recently said they always send the reports on the very day they receive it from the doctors concerned.

Contacted on November 25, Soheli Mahmud initially said he could not recall the incident.

When given more details, he said, “Oh yes. That one. We had kept the report pending for the chemical investigation.”

Reminded that he had received the

chemical examination report within a short time and even signed the autopsy report two years back, Soheli could not say for sure why there was a delay. He guessed the report may have gotten buried in the stack of files.

He also claimed that they had never delayed in delivering such reports.

Statistics obtained from the Dhaka Metropolitan Police, however, contradict his claims. According to the DMP’s data, investigation into 257 unnatural death cases filed six months or even longer ago with different police stations remain stalled as police are yet to receive autopsy report.

Of the cases, 51 were filed one year ago while two cases filed in 2015.

Asked about it, Soheli insisted dispatching autopsy reports based on police priority. “Despite manpower shortage and absence of proper remunerations, we always send [autopsy] reports quickly in all the important cases,” he told The Daily Star yesterday.

“Sometimes we can’t send the reports in time if the histopathological reports are not available.”

He also said on average eight to 10 autopsies are carried out daily at the DMC morgue, which has three forensic experts and two morgue assistants.

Dhaka Medical College Hospital is the largest public hospital in the country and the DMC morgue

conducts 60 percent of the total autopsies done in the capital’s three hospital morgues, sources said.

Further doubts to Soheli’s version surfaced during conversations with Sheuly Begum, an aunt of victim Asaduzzaman, and Sub-Inspector Shaheen Mohammad Amanullah who is looking into the case.

Sheuly said she visited Soheli several times for a couple of months after the death and requested him to discharge the autopsy report quickly.

SI Amanullah, who sent the body to the morgue, said he himself visited the doctor several times for six months to get the autopsy report, but failed.

When Soheli was pressed about these visits, he did not deny that they took place, but would not say much about them.

“We submit reports immediately after getting them. I will look into the matter.”

DMP Additional Commissioner (crime) Krishna Pada Roy recently said, “It is easier to carry out investigation of a murder incident if we receive expert opinions quickly.”

He said delayed expert opinions make it difficult for police to corroborate circumstantial evidence with other findings.

A MURDER CASE FINALLY FILED

Sheuly Begum filed a murder case on September 16 against three named

and several unknown accused over Asaduzzaman’s murder.

Investigation Officer of the case, SI Riyad Hossain, said they have already arrested the three named accused: Tajul Islam, Mehedi Hasan Miraz, and Shahidul Islam.

Tajul and Shahidul were staffers of the developer company where Asaduzzaman worked.

According to the case statement, Asaduzzaman used to live in a room of an under-construction building that his company was constructing in the capital’s Basundhara Residential Area.

His badly decomposed body was found hanging, 23 days after he went missing, on the sixth floor of the building.

Asaduzzaman had completed his Master’s degree from Tejgaon College before getting married.

Days before he was killed, his wife gave birth to a son, whose future seems bleak in the absence of his father. He is only two-and-a-half now.

Assaduzzaman’s mother Aleya Begum said she had to work in others’ homes to bear educational expenses of Asaduzzaman who was younger among two brothers. His elder brother has been suffering from kidney diseases and almost unable to work.

Aleya says she does not know when their wait for justice would end.

ICJ on course

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“Lawyers will also ask the judges of the top UN court to issue orders so that Myanmar does not destroy any evidence of massacres that happened in 2016 and 2017 in Myanmar’s Rakhine state,” said Nay San Lwin, campaign coordinator of Free Rohingya Coalition, a global alliance of the Rohingya, which is closely working with The Gambia.

The African country, on behalf of the 57-member Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), had filed the lawsuit against Myanmar on November 11, accusing it of violating the UN Genocide Convention.

The move came more than two years after some 7,50,000 Rohingyas fled a brutal military campaign in Rakhine and took shelter in Bangladesh.

The Gambia in its lawsuit said the Rohingyas were facing longstanding persecution and discrimination. From around October 2016, Myanmar military and other security forces began widespread and systematic “clearance operations” against the group.

“The genocidal acts were intended to destroy the Rohingya as a group, in whole or in part, by the use of mass murder, rape and other forms of sexual violence, as well as the systematic destruction by fire of their villages, often with inhabitants locked inside burning houses,” it said.

From August 2017 onwards, such genocidal acts continued with Myanmar’s resumption of “clearance operations” on a more massive and wider geographical scale. These facts are extensively documented by UN independent investigators and corroborated by international rights organisations, the lawsuit said.

Myanmar denies allegations of genocide, saying its army was fighting militants who attacked security posts. Nobel laureate Suu Kyi, whose image was tarnished for not doing enough to prevent Rohingya genocide, will try to defend Myanmar at the ICJ.

Rohingya activists say several hundred Myanmar nationals are likely to be present in The Hague to demonstrate their support for Myanmar.

“This is a historic case. We have been facing genocide for decades. It’s a chance we will have justice,” Rohingya activist Nay San Lwin told The Daily Star over the phone from Germany yesterday.

He said over 100 Rohingya activists, mostly from Europe, were going to attend the hearing. Besides, people from a number of other ethnic communities would be there.

Nay will fly to The Hague on Monday.

International Commission of Jurists said any decision by the ICJ shall be communicated to the UN secretary-general for transmission to the UN Security Council. The court may also request information from the parties on any matter concerning implementation of the provisional measures.

Northern Alliance bloc of ethnic armed groups -- the Ta’ang National Liberation Army, Arakan Army and Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army -- have welcomed the lawsuit against Myanmar, reports Anadolu Agency.

The groups said they stand ready to cooperate and collect evidence of war crimes and are in full support of the international organisations that have taken up the matter with the court.

Prof Mizanur Rahman, an expert on international law at Dhaka University, said if the ICJ primarily found evidence of genocide, it could issue an order for provisional measures.

“It would really be a good progress,” he told this correspondent.

Genocide researcher Mofidul Hoque, also a trustee of the Liberation War Museum, said it was quite unique that Suu Kyi, an alleged perpetrator, would be leading a legal team to The Hague.

He said there was enough evidence to prove the case in the court.

Smugglers rule Benapole train

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It was 9:10am when the train came and passengers started to get off. Surprisingly, a noticeable number of people remained seated in all the six compartments though it was the first station from where it would start for Khulna.

The reporter managed to squeeze into one of the compartments before the train left the station around 9:35am, after going through a “BCG security check”. Noticeably, most of the seats were occupied by women.

This correspondent saw a woman allowed a male passenger to take her seat. When approached, the passenger, Maruf Hassan, a staff of KPCL in Khulna, said he had to pay Tk 150 for the seat.

“I just handed over a small orange paper to the woman that I have collected by paying her associate before boarding the train,” said Maruf, a frequent traveller on this train, adding that the slip also specifies the number of persons.

The train reached Navaran station after around 15 minutes. After the journey, it suddenly stopped although the next station was still far away.

Eight to ten women and a man got on the compartment with heavy sacks

on their back. One of the women sat beside the correspondent, who had managed a seat by paying Tk 50 to another woman.

Asked what she was carrying in her sacks, one of the women frustratingly responded: “The security is very tight now. We usually bring two or three bottles of phensedyl but we don’t have it today. What we got right now is some Horlicks bottles from black market.”

Asked about the prices of phensedyl, one of the women said: “If you take it now, it will cost you Tk 800 but if you want it after getting off the train, you will have to pay Tk 1,200 because at stations, I have to pay railway and local police.”

A passenger named Nazmul Islam boarded the train from Navaran. Most of the time, he said, he had to stand all the way to Jashore during the one-hour journey.

“They [smugglers] bribe the driver, law enforcers and the ticket checkers,” said Nazmul, who runs an export-import business in Jashore. He also alleged that the smugglers manage to stop the train at many points to evade checking by the border guards.

A number of passengers echoed his statement.

“There is a permanent BGB checkpoint at Amrakhali, some three kilometres away from Benapole. The smugglers illegally stop the train to get off before reaching that point,” said Habibur Rahman, another regular passenger.

“They throw away their goods through the windows and get back on the train as per their convenience,” said a businessman, who runs shops in Benapole Bazar.

“The railway police favour the smugglers as they get payment for each luggage.”

The passengers said syndicate members, waiting on the ground, signal to stop the train. Sometimes those on board pull the chain but that doesn’t work always.

The train previously ran on the route twice a day. But due to growing number of passengers, the authorities introduced two more trips daily.

A number of passengers said they still prefer the commuter train over bus on the Benapole-Khulna route as it reaches destinations on time and the road is in bad shape.

As the train moves along, a man in police uniform appeared in the compartment. He was seen collecting Tk 20 from the women with sacks.

Asked about it, he said: “Mind your own business.”

The man was not wearing any nameplate.

Talking with this correspondent, the women said they hide the goods inside seat covers, bathrooms and ceiling of the train.

Sources said, Daulatpur, Gatipara, Teroghar, Sadipur, Sutipur, Putkhali, Goga, Bhulot, Kaiba, Rudrapur, Dhannokhola, Ghiba, Kashipur, and Shalkona are some spots inside India from where the smugglers bring their consignments.

WHAT BGB, RAILWAY SAY

“We routinely check the train every day, sometimes we seize smuggled goods and sometimes we get nothing. We even travel till the next station [Navaran] for security checks,” Subedar Abdul Wahab, head of Benapole BOP of Border Guard Bangladesh, told The Daily Star on November 13.

“BCB is doing its best to stop the practice but the smugglers often take the train after Navaran using village streets,” he added.

Although the exchange of money became an open secret for all, Feroz Ahmed, assistant superintendent of government railway police, said they had no information of officials taking

bribes from smugglers.

“We will take stern action if specific complaint is found against anyone,” said Feroz, responsible to oversee the security of Khulna and Jashore railway.

This correspondent also communicated with the train driver. Wishing not to be named, he said, “We do not stop anywhere other than the regular stoppages. But to stop the train, the smugglers sometimes snap the coupling hoses between compartments, which engages the brakes.”

Benapole Stationmaster Md Saiduzzaman said there was no connection between the smugglers and his staffers. “If anyone is found involved in such activities, he will be punished.”

According to the official database, the BCB seized smuggled goods including Phensedyl worth around Tk 11.25 lakh from the train in October. On July 2 last year, the customs intelligence recovered one tonne of firecrackers from the train after those were smuggled in from India.

[With inputs from our Benapole correspondent Mohsin Milon]