

## Don't respond to ICC warrants

### Myanmar junta orders its military personnel

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Myanmar junta has ordered all military personnel not to answer letters related to arrest warrants or summons from the International Criminal Court (ICC) or the Argentinian judiciary on the human rights violations of the Rohingya and other communities.

In an order issued on January 6, it said Myanmar still stands by its position that it is not a member of the ICC, so it does not need to abide by the ruling of the ICC.

"Possibilities are that judges of the ICC could decide that the evidence of the plaintiff is sufficient to issue arrest warrant or summons," said the order signed by Captain Aung Ko Zaw, said Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK (BROUK) in a statement yesterday.

Therefore, responsible officials of all levels of battalions under the command of the regional operation commands shall supervise and implement strictly to ensure that no one shall accept any letters or arrest orders related to travel restrictions or arrest warrants or summons or letters sent by express carrier services from abroad and other means from ICC or Argentinian Courts or the plaintiff, it said.

On September 6 in 2018, the ICC filed that Rohingya Muslims from northern Rakhine State in Myanmar were forcibly relocated to Bangladesh.

BROUK on November 13, 2019, filed human rights violations and crimes against former heads of state, military senior officials and government leaders in the Federal Court of Buenos Aires, Argentina.

In December 2021, the Argentinian judiciary accepted a petition by BROUK to open a case against senior military officials over genocide and crimes against humanity in Rakhine State since 2016.

BROUK, in a statement yesterday, said Myanmar has led a decade-long genocide against the Rohingya people.

In August 2017, the Myanmar military and its proxies launched a vicious operation in Rakhine State, killing thousands of Rohingya and driving hundreds of thousands to flee into Bangladesh.

BROUK said it is outrageous that the Myanmar military is now desperately trying to cover the tracks of its genocidal crimes against the Rohingya.

This leaked memo shows clearly how the Myanmar junta can never be trusted to cooperate with international justice mechanisms in good faith. However, it also is a sign that the efforts to hold the junta to account for its atrocities are working, said Tun Khin, president of BROUK.

"This must also be a wake-up call to the international community to act. The UN Security Council must support a full referral of the situation in Myanmar to the ICC, while other countries should look to open universal jurisdiction cases like the one in Argentina."



Family members of paddy traders drying parboiled Balam paddy in the sun in Uttarkul village of Barishal's Banaripara upazila. The paddy, bought from Patuakhali, Barguna and Bhola, would be sent to millers for husking. The special variety of Balam rice sells for Tk 1,500 to Tk 2,000 a maund. The photo was taken on Tuesday.

PHOTO: STAR

### GOPALPUR MASS KILLING '71

## PM's gift brings joy to martyrs' families

OUR CORRESPONDENT, TANGAIL

On September 30 during the 1971 Liberation War, Ramajan Ali Miah, along with others, was killed by the Pakistani forces in Mahmudpur area of Tangail's Gopalpur.

After the war ended, his widow, Ifatan Bewa, received a letter from Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. In the letter, Bangabandhu said Ramajan was a martyr. He also expressed deep sympathy to Ramajan's family.

A cheque of Tk 2,000 was also sent to Ifatan from the relief and welfare fund of the then prime minister.

Ifatan, however, did not get any further assistance and so she had to beg to feed herself.

Despite all the odds, she preserved the letter for the last 50 years.

Last week, a daily published news on the matter after which it grabbed the attention of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.



Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman wrote this letter to Ifatan Bewa after the war ended.

The PM then directed the deputy commissioner of Tangail to stand beside Ifatan and the families of 16 other victims of the mass killing on

September 30, 1971.

The families were overwhelmed with joy after receiving a special gift from the prime minister.

DC Ataul Gani along with others went to the house of Ifatan in Pankata village in Dhanbari upazila on January 9 and handed over Tk 20,000, clothes and fruits to her on behalf of the PM.

The families of 16 other martyrs were provided with the same gift.

The DC told reporters that Bir Nibas (houses) would be built for the martyrs' families as per the PM's wish.

Steps will also be taken so that they get state recognition and necessary supports as members of the martyrs' families, he added.

In her reaction, Ifatan said, "I have been fighting poverty for the last 50 years. I have had to starve as well. I feel blessed to have received the cash and gift items from the prime minister."

She wished the PM a long life.

## HRW report unacceptable

### Says information minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The recently published Human Rights Watch report is "one-sided, unacceptable and politically-motivated", said Information and Broadcasting Minister Hasan Mahmud yesterday.

"After reading the report, it appears that someone from Bangladesh had drafted it and later they [HRW] published it following revision," he said while talking to journalists at his residence in the capital.

In its World Report 2022, HRW said the security forces in Bangladesh continued to commit crimes such as enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings with impunity.

All these incidents happened while the ruling Awami League government made it clear in 2021 that it had no intention of addressing a pattern of grave abuses like these ones, added the report published on Thursday.

"Authorities cracked down on critics, journalists, and even children who criticised the government or dared to question its response to the Covid-19 pandemic," reads the report.

It also said the government denied the findings of a report after HRW released it in August 2021 documenting enforced disappearances by "Bangladesh security forces" under the AL-led government between 2009 and 2020.

## Will engage in lobbying if needed

### Foreign minister says about govt response to US sanctions on Rab

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Minister Abdul Momen yesterday said the government would engage in lobbying if required to further the country's interests.

Speaking to reporters after inaugurating the international conference on "Law & Legal Education during and post-pandemic" at the Bangladesh Institute of Law and International Affairs (BILIA) Auditorium in the capital, Momen was asked if Bangladesh would hire new lobbyists in the wake of US sanctions on Rab.

"Every country does this. It's an American practice. Where lobbying is needed, we will lobby. Lobbying is also needed at home many times while working. We will see how we can work out the legal process," he said at the event jointly organised by BILIA and the Asian Association of Law Professors.

The US on December 10 sanctioned Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and seven of its current and former top officials in relation to human rights violations, including alleged extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances.

The parliamentary standing committee on foreign ministry on January 5 recommended appointing lobbyists in the USA, especially to engage the US Congress.

Later, a Bangla daily revealed that the Bangladesh government actually appointed Washington-based lobbying firm BGR Government Affairs in 2014 and paid it several million US dollars.

## Leave them alone

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the relatives, police are adding to the miseries of the suffering family members," the HRFB said in the statement.

Citing media reports, the forum said an allegation has been raised against policemen over putting pressure on victims' family members in different ways.

The family members were summoned to police stations and interrogated by cops at their own houses. In some cases, attempts were made to have signatures of the family member on blank papers or previously-written statements, it said.

Moreover, family members were put under pressure to change their stand or narrative and

mention their dear ones as "missing" persons, the statement added.

The HRFB statement was issued by 23 leading rights activists, including Hameeda Hossain, Sultana Kamal, Raja Devasish Roy, Golam Monowar Kamal, Shaheen Anam, Iftekharuzzaman, Sara Hossain, Fauzia Moslem, Shamsul Huda, and Khushi Kabir.

Meanwhile, Dhaka Metropolitan Police in a statement yesterday protested reports run by different media outlets on the police harassment.

The reports contained "exaggerated" and "fabricated" information and it was an attempt to tarnish police's image, the DMP claimed.

## Money thrown down the drain

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secretary of Bangladesh Institute of Planners, said a modern city requires a road network of 20 to 25 percent its size. Dhaka's road network is just 8 percent of its size.

**COSTLY EXPERIMENTS**

In 2001, Dhaka's traffic control system saw a major change with the introduction of automatic signals under Dhaka Urban Transport Project. With funding from the World Bank, nine traffic signals were set up in 2001-02 and 59 more in 2005, spending Tk 13 crore.

It soon became dysfunctional mainly due to poor maintenance, the WB said in a report to the government in 2006.

Officials say the 68 automatic signal lights were meant to synchronise the signal system, but they worked rather independently and did not work as intended.

Later in 2012-13, the two Dhaka city corporations restored the signal lights by adding solar panels and timer countdown systems at 70 crossings, under another World Bank-funded project.

In the first phase of the project, solar panels and timer countdowns were installed for Tk 15 crore in 2011-12. In the second phase, another Tk 11.5 crore were spent to set up new signal lights in 2013.

But the trial run failed, forcing the city corporations and traffic police to ditch the new signal system and return to manual traffic management.

"The system was initiated based on a flawed plan, as traffic volume and speed were not considered," said a city corporation official.

The city corporation later introduced remote controls to use the signal lights, but the experiment did not last even a month.

"Timer countdown and solar panels are additional features, which they introduced without having any experience. Perhaps, the inclusion was done to make the project size bigger. We see a lack of good governance here," said Prof Shamsul Hoque, former head of ARI at Buet.

"We are allowing vehicles without considering the road capacity. No signal system will work with this existing pressure of vehicles. We must think of striking a balance between road capacity and number of vehicles," he added.

Meanwhile, 17 large and 14 small digital boards displaying traffic rules and speed limits were set up at some key points, but they remain largely ignored. The Dhaka Metropolitan Police set up those displays at a cost of Tk 27 crore.

Many of them have since been removed for ongoing projects like Metro Rail and U-loops.

Two years ago, the High Court directed the authorities to submit a report on the "mismanagement" of the traffic signal monitoring system.

A committee headed by a joint secretary of the home ministry formed after the directive is still working

on the report, officials said.

Asked about their findings, Monibur Rahman, additional commissioner (traffic) of DMP, said he could comment only after the committee completed its work.

**'INTELLIGENT' SYSTEM IN LIMBO**

Six years ago, the government undertook an even more sophisticated project to bring Dhaka's four crossings – Paltan, Phulbari, Mohakhali and Gulshan 1 – under a single automatic traffic control system.

Each of these crossings is notorious for bad traffic, and the pilot project aimed to improve traffic management in these intersections.

Originally scheduled to complete in June 2017, the Intelligent Transportation System (ITS), as it is officially called, is yet to come into operation.

A joint initiative by Bangladesh and Japan governments, the project got four extensions so far, and its estimated cost shot up from Tk 36.37 crore to Tk 52 crore when the cost was last revised in 2019.

By November 2019, the ITS system – including ultrasonic vehicle detector, vehicle image detector, CCTV to keep track of traffic volume and control the traffic signals – got installed at the four crossings.

The following year, two special computers with ITS software were brought from Japan, but one of them was stolen from a warehouse of Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC)

before installation.

After the theft, the authorities ordered suspension of the project for two years. It was eventually revived after Dhaka Transport Coordination Authority in December 2020 sent a proposal to Roads Transport and Highway Division to procure a server through internal budget adjustment, without increasing the total project cost.

The project deadline was then extended to June 2021 without any cost increase.

Project Director Mohammad Rabiul Alam said they are now seeking another extension, up to July this year.

**EXPERTS ARE SCEPTICAL**

Experts say they have doubts about its success.

Given the number of vehicles and their unpredictable movements, digital traffic signals will help little to ease the gridlock, they said.

"It is very difficult to make the digital traffic signal functional in Dhaka due to its unpredictable volume of traffic," said Kazi Md Shifun Newaz, an assistant professor of ARI.

He suggested reducing intersections and building circular roads to ease the congestion, created by heavy traffic crossing the intersections after coming from different lanes and by-lanes erratically.

Prof Shamsul said the huge volume of traffic during peak hours is the main reason why the digital signal system has failed.

If well managed, even

low-cost signal systems can be effective, he said, citing the example of India where traffic cops operate the signal lights manually depending on the traffic rush.

"But the authorities in our country set up a signal system thinking it will solve everything. The reality is the system will only minimise the workload of police, not the problem," Prof Shamsul said.

## Gen Rawat's chopper crashed due to pilot error

### India's court of inquiry finds

NDTV ONLINE

Pilot error caused the chopper crash that led to India's Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat's death last month, according to preliminary findings of the inquiry team investigating the matter.

"The accident was a result of entry into clouds due to an unexpected change in weather conditions in the valley. This led to spatial disorientation of the pilot resulting in a Controlled Flight Into Terrain (CFIT)," the team found after analysing the Flight Data Recorder and Cockpit Voice Recorder besides questioning all available witnesses to determine the most probable cause of the accident.

### Ex-DU teacher

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Anwarul attacked the victim at a secluded place when she was on her way back to her residence, around one kilometre off the construction site.

After dumping her body, the arrestee took her key and stole gold ornaments, mobile phone, laptop, tablet and money from her residence, said police and the victim's family.

The construction work was at the final stage and Sayeda was supposed to move to her new home in a week, her son Sayed Iftekher Bin Zahir said.

He said his sister Sadia Afrin filed a general diary with Kashimpur Police Station on Thursday after Anwar informed them the previous evening that the door of Sayeda's home was ajar and there was no trace of her.

Sikder Monoare Murshed, a professor of the department of linguistics of DU and also president of the housing project, said police suspected Anwarul and traced him.

Police also recovered a necklace of the victim from the arrestee, Murshed, who visited Gazipur after receiving the news, told The Daily Star over phone. Contacted, Inspector (investigation) of Kashimpur Police Station Sheikh Mizanur Rahman said it will be learnt after further interrogation whether anyone else was involved in the killing.

Police handed over the body to her family after an autopsy.