

US to scale up Rohingya resettlement

Says a top official of Biden adminstration

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Scaling up Rohingya resettlement to the US is a priority for the Biden administration, said a visiting top official of the US government.

"The US is proud to be able to support the resettlement of the very most vulnerable Rohingyas in our country – this is a priority of President Biden," said Julieta Valls Noyes, the US assistant secretary of state for population, refugees and migration.

Noyes's comment came yesterday after a meeting with Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen and Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen at the ministry.

During her five-day visit that wraps up today, Noyes held meetings with the principal secretary to the prime minister, the refugee relief and repatriation commissioner, the UN and other aid agencies and also visited the Rohingya camp in Cox's Bazar.

Noyes thanked Bangladesh for sheltering the more than a million Rohingyas who fled the military crackdown in 2017.

"Now that the Rohingya crisis has become protracted due to the genocide by the regime in Myanmar, the time has come to look for alternative solutions and comprehensive approach to solutions."

The most important solution that the Rohingyas want is to be able to return to their country – a solution that the international community also wants and the US supports.

"But, that is not possible now. Until that is possible, other solutions are needed for those people who are the most vulnerable."

The US is working with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to identify the most vulnerable people, and to seek third-country resettlement for them, she said, adding that the Biden administration is discussing with other governments and partners to pursue a comprehensive approach to the protracted Rohingya crisis.

Bangladesh has set a condition that Rohingyas who had taken shelter in the country before 2016 should be resettled in the US first as Myanmar has agreed to take back those who came after 2016, Momen told reporters.

Before 2016, there were 29,000 Rohingyas in the UNHCR camps in Cox's Bazar.

Asked about the relocation of Rohingyas to the US, he said: "It is nothing but a drop in the ocean as Bangladesh is hosting over 1.1 million Rohingyas."

Although the US did not give a specific number, Momen hinted that the number could be 62 at the beginning.

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Leaders and activists of the BNP and its front and associate orgnisations from different upazilas of Jamalpur wait on the High Court premises yesterday afternoon for hearings on their bail petitions in cases recently lodged against them by police in connection with the party's divisional rally in Mymensingh city.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Ukrainian drones hit air bases deep inside Russia

Attacks expose Moscow's air defence gaps with long-range strikes

AGENCIES

A third Russian airfield was ablaze yesterday from a drone strike, a day after Ukraine demonstrated an apparent new ability to penetrate hundreds of kilometres deep into Russian air space with attacks on two Russian air bases.

Officials in the Russian city of Kursk, located close to Ukraine, released pictures of black smoke above an airfield in the early morning hours of yesterday after the latest strike. The governor said an oil storage tank there had been set ablaze but there were no casualties.

It came a day after Russia confirmed it had been hit hundreds of kilometres from Ukraine by what it said were Soviet-era drones - at Engels air base, home to Russia's strategic bomber fleet, and in Ryazan, a few hours' drive from Moscow.

Kyiv did not directly claim responsibility for the strikes but celebrated them, reports Reuters.

"If Russia assesses the incidents were deliberate attacks, it will probably consider them as some of the most strategically significant failures of force protection since its invasion of Ukraine," Britain's ministry of

defence said yesterday.

"The Russian chain of command will probably seek to identify and impose severe sanctions on Russian officers deemed responsible for allowing the incident."

Russia's defence ministry said three service members were killed in the attack at Ryazan. Although the attacks struck military targets it characterised them as terrorism and said the aim was to disable its long-range aircraft.

The New York Times, citing a senior Ukrainian official, said the drones involved in Monday's attacks were launched from Ukrainian territory, and at least one of the strikes was made with the help of special forces close to the base.

Russian commentators on social media said that if Ukraine could strike that far inside Russia, it might also be able to hit Moscow.

Ukraine never acknowledges responsibility for attacks inside Russia. Asked about the strikes, Ukrainian Defence Minister Oleskiy Reznikov repeated a longstanding joke blaming carelessness with cigarettes.

Ukrainian presidential adviser Oleksiy Arestovych went further, noting that Engels is Russia's only base fully equipped for the fleet of huge bombers Moscow has used to attack Ukraine.

GAIBANDHA-5 BY-POLLS Voting again on January 4: EC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The re-polling in Gaibandha-5 constituency will be held on January 4, the Election Commission announced yesterday.

The decision came at a meeting presided over by Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibul Awal at the EC office in the capital.

After the meeting, EC Secretary Jahangir Alam told reporters that voting will begin at 8:30am using Electronic Voting Machines and will continue till 4:30pm without any break. All polling centres will be under CCTV coverage.

He also said the returning officer of the previous polls has been replaced as per the probe committee's recommendation.

Faridul Islam, Dhaka division election officer, will be performing the duties of the returning officer.

On October 12, the EC halted the by-polls in the constituency following electoral anomalies.

On December 1, it recommended punishment of 134 officials involved in Gaibandha-5 by-polls after its probe found their involvement in irregularities and negligence in duty.

They include the returning officer for the October 12 by-election; 125 presiding officers, including teachers and bankers; an executive magistrate; and an additional deputy commissioner.

Cop burnt to death in Habiganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

A constable was burned to death, while three others were injured, after a fire broke out in a tin shed house in Habiganj's Pool area yesterday morning.

The dead was identified as Rubel Miah, 25, a constable of Habiganj traffic police, from Sylhet's Jaitiapur upazila.

Golam Mortuza, OC of Habiganj Police Station, said four out of the five members of police who used to live there were at home that night.

The three others injured were rescued and sent to Habiganj Sadar Hospital for treatment.

Fire service officials said they suspected that the fire originated from an electric short circuit.

Crashes claim 5 lives in Tangail, Dinajpur

STAR REPORT

Two people died after being run over by a speeding truck on the Dhaka-Tangail Highway yesterday.

The dead were identified as Mehedi Hasan, 24, of Bogura Sadar, and Shahin Miah, 22, of Rangpur.

Jahirul Haque, in-charge of Elenga highway police, said a Rangpur-bound truck, coming from Dhaka, punctured its wheel when it reached Tangail's Kalihati upazila around 6:00am.

When two people got off the truck to check the tire, another speeding truck coming from behind ran over them and crushed them to death on the spot.

Mohammad Nabin, sub-inspector of Tangail General Hospital Police Box, said both trucks were seized after the incident.

Meanwhile in Dinajpur, three motorcyclists were killed in two separate accidents in Birampur and Kaharol upazilas.

Birampur police said Rohan Islam, 17, took his father's motorcycle out on Monday night and was hit by a speeding truck in front of Mamata Filling Station on the Dinajpur-Gobindaganj regional highway around 10:00pm.

He died on the way to Birampur Upazila Health Complex, police said.

In Kaharol upazila, Shahin Mia, 40, and Shahid Islam, 35, died as they fell off their motorcycle after hitting a dog on the Panchagarh-Dinajpur highway.

The two died on the spot after being hurled from the bike, police added.

Freedom fighter, son attacked over land dispute

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

A freedom fighter and his son were attacked over a land dispute in Patuakhali's Bauphal upazila yesterday morning.

The injured are Abdul Majid, 76, and his son Monir, 43.

Locals said freedom fighter Majid had been involved in a long-standing land dispute with his neighbour Sagar Fakir.

Though an arbitration meeting was scheduled for yesterday morning, Sagar, his brother Robin and sisters Shampa and Champa attacked Majid with sharp weapons.

When his son Monir came to save him, they attacked him too, locals said, adding that the two were rescued and sent to Bauphal Upazila Health Complex.

Contacted, Sagar claimed, "I was not present at the time of the incident."

Al Mamun, OC of Bauphal Police Station, said legal action would be taken if a complaint is filed in this regard.

Ghost cases haunting BNP men

FROM PAGE 1

In recent months, police and ruling party men have been filing cases against BNP men in different districts.

The BNP claims 169 "repressive" and "ghost cases" have been filed against 6,723 BNP leaders and activists and 15,050 unnamed people between August and November.

BNP leaders said these were Awami League's "political strategies" to suppress their movement.

In August, BNP started holding rallies demanding the next parliamentary elections are held under a neutral government, and protesting commodity price hikes.

Such "ghost cases" saw a rise ahead of BNP's December 3 rally in Rajshahi and the party's plan for a gathering in the capital on December 10.

This newspaper recently analysed several cases and found discrepancies in claims made by the complainants and witnesses.

The case filed by SI Rahman Khandaker of Godagari Police Station in Rajshahi on November 17 is one example.

According to the case, Godagari municipality unit Jubo Dal Convener Mahmubur Rahman Biplob and 200 others assembled on Helipad ground in Godagari on November 16 night to destabilise the situation through subversive activities, and make BNP's December 3 Rajshahi rally a success.

The complainant mentioned that Biplob and his supporters pelted a police team with stones and brick chunks when they went to the scene, after being tipped off. He also claimed to have recovered four "cocktails" (crude bombs) from the spot after the accused fled the scene.

The SI claimed that he got the names of Mahbubur Rahman and four other accused from witnesses.

His versions of the event have been contradicted by all the three people named in the case as witnesses.

"Police grabbed me by my arms minutes after I heard an explosion and took me to the Helipad ground nearby. There, police showed me four objects that looked like jorda cans [chewing tobacco can] and said they were bombs. Then police forced me to sign a paper," said Yusuf Ali, one of the witnesses.

He said he did not see any BNP leader or anybody else gathering on the ground. He also said he did not see anyone attacking the police.

Police also mentioned local Md Mohiuddin, 63, and Robiul Awal, an auto-rickshaw driver, as witnesses. Both of them said they did not see any BNP men or anybody else, or see police recovering any bombs.

They said police showed them four cans.

In another instance, a case mentioned that 40-50 BNP men clashed with Bangladesh Chhatra League men and attacked the BCL leaders and activists with bricks, iron rods and hockey sticks in Beanibazar in Sylhet.

Car driver Abdul Hafiz who "filed" the case on November 15 with the local police also mentioned that during the clash his car was vandalised by the BNP men.

Asked about this, Hafiz contradicted the allegations made in the case. He said he saw BNP men take shelter after being attacked by Awami League men and police. The clashes ensued when BNP men retaliated.

"I do not know what is written in the case statement as they [police] did not give me any copy," he added.

Ahead of BNP's November 19 rally in Sylhet, at least three cases were filed against 600 BNP men with different Sylhet police stations.

Discrepancies is also found in another case filed with Bandar Police Station in Narayanganj by BCL activist Md Sohel on November 18.

In the case, he accused 24 named, including local BNP leader Aatur Rahman Mukul, and 25 to 30 unknown others for an attack on a local AL office with axes, sickles, iron rods, and hockey sticks.

He also alleged the accused blasted crude bombs and looted Tk 50,000 and three mobile phones.

Contacted, Sohel said five to six people covering their faces attacked the AL office. One of them was carrying a stick.

In 13 days, 10 cases were filed in Narayanganj over subversive activities, attacking AL offices. Over 250 BNP and its front organisation leaders and workers and over 500 unknown others

were accused.

In Tangail, at least 11 cases have been filed against BNP leaders and activists in different upazilas until Saturday. These cases, which the BNP termed false, named over 200 BNP men and over 600 others.

Police claimed these cases have been filed against the accused on specific charges, including preparation for sabotage.

Rezaul Karim, OC of Sakhipur Police Station where one case was filed, claimed four people were arrested and five crude bombs were recovered in drives in different areas after an explosion on Wednesday night.

Eighty-eight people, including 38 identified BNP leaders and activists, were accused in the case. BNP leaders rejected the police claim, saying no explosion took place there.

Saiful Islam, a local, corroborated the BNP claim. He said on Wednesday night they watched a football match from 10:00pm, and did not hear any explosion.

BNP leaders alleged their partymen had to flee their homes in the police crackdown launched to prevent them from joining the Dhaka rally on December 10.

In Bogura, 12 cases were filed in the last 13 days by police and AL activists in connection with vandalism of AL offices, exploding crude bombs, recovery of bomb-like objects and throwing crude bombs at police.

In Pabna, at least eight such cases were filed by police and local AL leaders since November 20, naming 50 BNP men and over 1,000 unidentified others.

Noted rights activist Nur Khan Liton said, "Recently we have heard about cases where we find dissimilarities between what actually happened and what is recorded about an incident in the case document."

Referring to newspaper reports, he said cases are being filed over crude bomb explosions, but people who live around the spot did not hear any such sounds, which is very unfortunate.

In such cases names of a few accused are mentioned, while several hundred others are mentioned as unknown accused.

"When opposition parties announce

any protest programme, their leaders and activists are detained and shown arrested in those cases even though they were not named as accused in those cases," he said.

He said this is done by an authoritarian government to prolong its stay in power by creating panic.

"This is done so that people don't dare to criticise the government for its misdeeds. But the fact is you cannot stay in power for long that way," he observed.

Our correspondents in Sylhet, Tangail, Pabna, and Bogura contributed to his report.

Ramos hits hattrick

FROM PAGE 1

Xherdan Shaqiri drew a fingertip stop from Diogo Costa with a dipping free-kick from distance, but Portugal soon had their second.

Bruno Fernandes whipped in a corner and the 39-year-old Pepe towered above the Swiss defence to powerfully head home.

Diogo Dalot hacked Remo Freuler's header off the line after Diogo Costa failed to properly deal with a cross, but the Swiss simply had no answers against an irresistible Portugal.

Ramos turned in his second from close range six minutes into the second half from Dalot's cross down the right.

He then turned provider by playing in Guerreiro to lash in another just four minutes later as the Swiss defence was ruthlessly ripped apart.

It was also Ramos who inadvertently glanced a corner towards Manuel Akanji at the far post as the Manchester City centre-back pulled one back for Switzerland.

Ramos completed his treble after more outstanding work from Felix, nonchalantly dinking over Sommer with one of his final touches before making way for Ronaldo.

The five-time Ballon d'Or winner's introduced elicited the biggest roar of the night. Ronaldo did have the ball in the back of the net but it was ruled out for a clear offside.

Leao capped off a sensational Portugal performance with a terrific curling strike in stoppage time.

Nasa's Orion spaceship heads for home

AFP, Washington

Nasa's Orion spaceship made a close pass of the Moon and used a gravity assist to whip itself back towards Earth on Monday, marking the start of the return journey for the Artemis-1 mission.

At its nearest point, the uncrewed capsule flew less than 80 miles (130 kilometers) from the surface, testing maneuvers that will be used during later Artemis missions that return

humans to the rocky celestial body.

Communication with the capsule was interrupted for 30 minutes when it was behind the far side of the Moon -- an area more cratered than the near side and first seen by humans during the Apollo era, although they didn't land there.

The European Service Module, which powers the capsule, fired its main engine for over three minutes to put the gumdrop-shaped Orion on course for home.

'There is money in every bank'

FROM PAGE 1

"Many knowledgeable persons and dignitaries have joined hands with the BNP and they make us hear their lectures on democracy. Many, however, say that they are not intellectuals, rather intellectually disabled," she said.

The PM said the intellectuals joined hands with the BNP to oust the government, accepting that their leader was a convicted person who has been sentenced for the August 21 grenade attack, money laundering, and arms smuggling.

"My question is why this attempt is made to snatch away the rights of people by joining hands with such elements?" she asked.

"What is the offence of AL?" she asked, highlighting her government's successes and steps for development in different sectors.

The premier said there was only one instance of peaceful change in power in the history of Bangladesh and it was the Awami League who did it in 2001.

"Awami League believes in democracy and the power of the people. So, the AL handed over the power in a peaceful manner," she said, criticising Khaleda Zia for holding the election on February 15, 1996, in which no voters turned up.

But Khaleda was forced to step

down in face of public movement after that lopsided election, she said, adding that BNP leaders should remember it.

PM Hasina urged the students, including the BCL members, to groom themselves as worthy citizens of Bangladesh so that they can contribute to the continuation of the current development spree.

"Students will have to be worthy citizens of Bangladesh, concentrating on studies properly so that this development trend of Bangladesh continues," she said.

She asked the BCL leaders and activists to create public opinion so that the killers and anti-liberation forces couldn't come to power anymore.

"I want our leaders and activists to be developed in such a way that none can wipe out the spirit of the country's independence and the history of the Liberation War," she said.

Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader, who is also a former president of BCL, spoke on this occasion.

BCL President Al-Nahean Khan Joy presided over the opening session conducted by its General Secretary Lekhak Bhattacharjee.

The last BCL national council was held in May 2018.