

ROHINGYA RETURN

It will begin next year, Li Jiming hopes

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

China hopes the Rohingya repatriation will start next year, said Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh Li Jiming yesterday.

He made the statement while paying a courtesy call on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the Gono Bhaban, reported UNB.

PM's Deputy Press Secretary KM Shakhawat Moon briefed reporters after the meeting.

Bangladesh has been sheltering the forcibly displaced Rohingyas on humanitarian grounds, said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

They are now a burden on Bangladesh for various reasons, she added.

Noting that the displaced people are the nationals of Myanmar, Hasina said, "Now they should return to their own country."

She hoped that Myanmar would take the displaced people back to their country.

Despite repeated efforts involving China, not a single Rohingya could be repatriated over the last five years.

More than a million of them now live in Bangladesh.

The prime minister also expressed her satisfaction over the good progress of several China-assisted mega projects for the infrastructural development of Bangladesh.

Hasina thanked China for its investment in Bangabandhu Tunnel under the Karnaphuli river. She also thanked the president and the prime minister of China.

24 ROHINGYAS LEAVE FOR US

Twenty-four Rohingyas yesterday left for the US which has planned to increase the resettlement of refugees from the region.

"This group of Rohingyas is part of 62 Rohingyas recently identified for resettlement in the US," said a foreign ministry official.

The resettlement starts just a day after US Assistant Secretary of the US Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, Julieta Valls Noyes ended a five-day visit to Bangladesh.

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PHOTO: STAR

A fire engulfs the cotton warehouse of SBS Textile Mills Limited in Gazipur's Sreepur. The photo was taken yesterday.

Russia attacks in east Ukraine

Shoots down drone over Black Sea; Putin celebrates seizing territory during nine-month war, vows more strikes

AGENCIES

Russian forces are pressing forward with air and ground attacks on several settlements in eastern Ukraine, officials said yesterday, a day after Russian President Vladimir Putin celebrated seizing territory during the nine-month war.

Near the city of Iyschansk, Russia deployed more troops to try to capture the village of Bilohorivka, Ukraine's governor of the region said, while a commander in another heavily fought-over settlement described an intensifying Russian air offensive.

"They are bringing in more and more reserves," around Bilohorivka to try to capture the village, Luhansk governor Serhiy Haiday told Ukrainian television. "There are constant attacks."

In the settlement of Bakhmut and other parts of the Donetsk region that neighbours Luhansk, the assault killed nine civilians, the regional governor said. Ukrainian forces countered with

barrages from rocket launchers, Reuters witnessed.

Fighting was underway along the entire line of demarcation in Donetsk, with the frontline town of Avdiivka shelled by Russian tanks yesterday morning, said Tatiana Ignatchenko, a spokeswoman for the Donetsk regional administration.

Putin made clear on Wednesday that expanding Russia's borders was a key goal of the war.

He said Russia had already achieved a "significant result" with the acquisition of "new territories" in Ukraine - a reference to the annexation of four partly occupied regions in September that Kyiv and most members of the United Nations condemned as illegal.

Warning that the war could be lengthy, Putin said Russia had made the Sea of Azov its "internal sea", now bounded by Russia and Russian-controlled territory in southern Ukraine including Crimea.

He said that had been an aspiration of Peter the Great - the 17th- and 18th-

century warrior tsar to whom he has compared himself in the past.

At an awards ceremony in the Kremlin yesterday, Putin vowed to continue attacking Ukrainian energy systems despite global criticism of strikes that have left millions without electricity and water at the start of winter.

In Crimea, Russian naval forces shot down a Ukrainian drone over the Black Sea, said the Russian-installed governor of Sevastopol, an important port and the largest city in the peninsula.

Earlier this week, twin strikes on air bases deep inside Russian territory dealt Moscow a major reputational blow and raised questions about why its defences failed, as attention turned to the use of drones in the war between neighbours.

Meanwhile, Moscow confirmed that it had exchanged US basketball star Brittney Griner, who had been jailed in Russia, for notorious arms trafficker Viktor Bout, who was serving a 25-year sentence in the United States.

DEFAMING PM

BNP man sent to jail in DSA case

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

A Faridpur court yesterday sent a BNP activist to jail under the Digital Security Act for sharing an alleged derogatory Facebook post on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

The arrestee is AKM Ujjal Hossain, 40, of Baraipara village of Alfadanga upazila in Faridpur, said police.

Ujjal is a member of Alfadanga upazila unit of BNP, said local BNP leaders.

Md Sohel Chowdhury Ahad, acting president of Alfadanga Sadar Union unit of Awami League, filed a general daily with Alfadanga Police Station on July 14 over the post.

Confirming the matter, Abu Taher, officer-in-charge of the police station, said, "After the GD was filed, we sought permission from the court to investigate the matter."

The court issued an arrest warrant on August 18 in this regard. Police arrested and produced Ujjal before the court yesterday, which sent him to jail, he added.

Mother, her 2 children found dead in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police last night recovered the bodies of a woman and her two minor children from their flat in the capital's Rayerbazar area.

The body of Hasina Begum, 30, was found hanging from a ceiling fan. Bodies of her seven-month-old son Nahid and three-year-old daughter Sadia were found on a bed, police said.

After receiving information, Hazaribagh police recovered the bodies around 8:30pm breaking into the flat. The front door was locked from the inside. The dead bodies were later sent to Dhaka Medical College morgue for autopsy.

Saidul Haque Bhuiyan, officer-in-charge of Hazaribagh Police Station, said they detained the woman's husband Saddam Hossain, a taxi driver, for interrogation.

The OC said they primarily suspect that the woman killed her two children before dying by suicide.

The family was living in one room of a two-room flat. Another family lives in the other room.

Locals and relatives said the couple's elder son Salman, 8, went to coaching centre around 5:00pm.

Salman returned around 7:00pm and knocked on the door but his mother did not respond, they said.

Before being picked up by police, Saddam told this newspaper that he went outside around 4:30pm.

A hopeful prospect

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"A decision will be made tonight or tomorrow [this] morning. We will help the BNP organise the event with adequate security."

Talking to this newspaper, DMP Commissioner Khandker Golam Faruq said, "They [BNP] have placed their proposals and we have given ours."

One of the top officers present at the meeting told The Daily Star that the BNP delegates made phone calls to other leaders during the meeting.

"One of them left the room and updated BNP acting chairperson Tarique Rahman about the meeting over the phone," said the officer, wishing not to be named.

The rally in the capital became uncertain as the authorities and the

opposition party could not agree on the venue for days.

Hours before the meeting with DMP, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir reiterated that the party would hold the rally at Nayapalton unless the police offered an acceptable alternative.

At an event, Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader said, "No more gatherings will be allowed on the streets. No more blocking the roads and causing public sufferings. We will also not do such things. The venue for Friday's [today] Dhaka City Awami League rally was the south gate of the stadium. I asked them to hold the rally at Natya Mancha."

Meanwhile, the city remained tense after Wednesday's violent clash,

and the usual Thursday traffic was not to be seen on most roads.

More than 2,300 BNP leaders and activists have been accused in the three cases filed with Paltan, Motijheel, and Shahjahanpur police stations. Of them, 553 were named and 1,750 unnamed. The DMP in a statement said 47 cops were injured in the clash.

The VIP Road in front of the BNP office in Nayapalton remained almost empty as police diverted traffic at Fakirapool and Bijoyagar. Police didn't allow anyone to enter the area without checking their identity cards.

The road was opened to traffic around 4:30pm.

There has been a dip in the number of people travelling in long-haul buses departing from the Gabtoli

terminal because of what transport associations said was a fear of further violence ahead of the December 10 rally.

Asked, Mahbubur Rahman, organising secretary of Dhaka Road Transport Owners Association, said many bus owners kept their vehicles off the roads fearing vandalism.

Police stopped and searched hundreds of motorcycles and other vehicles entering the capital yesterday.

Fakhru, who was not allowed to enter the BNP office in the morning, told reporters, "Wait and see what happens in Dhaka. People have started to wake up."

He demanded that the government reopen the BNP office and withdraw police from Nayapalton.

AL under fire from allies

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By Amir Hossain Amu, the alliance coordinator and veteran AL leader. It was held at his Eskaton residence.

According to meeting sources, leaders of the allies said the AL president has already started electioneering and seeking votes for 'boat' - the ruling party's electoral symbol.

They told Amu that they were in the dark whether the AL would participate in the next election unilaterally or as an alliance, and that they did not know if they had any role to play as the AL has already begun campaigning.

The AL took part in the 2008, 2014 and 2018 elections under the 14-party electoral alliance, formed in 2008.

Just before the 2008 election, the Grand Alliance was formed with the Jatiya Party.

Workers Party President Rashed

Khan Menon, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal President Hasanul Haq Inu, Jatiya Party (Manju) Chairman Anwar Hossain Manju, Bangladesh Samyabadi Dal General Secretary Dilip Barua, and Tarikat Federation President Syed Nazibul Bashar Maizvandari, among others, spoke at the meeting yesterday.

Inu pointed out that the AL had already started electioneering unilaterally and wanted to know whether the alliance partners should also do so or sit idle.

Meeting sources further said Dilip Barua alleged that a number of financial scams took place in recent years and the government will have to put a stop to these in order to regain the people's confidence.

He also said the BNP wants an anarchic situation.

If the government fails to contain financial corruption, it will help

the opposition party to implement its 'ill motive', which may lead to a constitutional crisis, he added.

Dilip suggested the AL take initiatives to help people regain confidence in the banking sector.

At the meeting, Manju also raised the issue of financial corruption and inflation.

If the current inflation continues, it will create labour unrest, meeting sources quoted him as saying.

He asked whether the AL has any plans if workers take to the streets due to the inflation.

Menon expressed disappointment over "Khela Hobey", phrases used by some AL leaders lately. "Such a slogan doesn't go with the character and spirit of the 14-party alliance."

He also said such a slogan will only push the country towards confrontations and suggested that it be gotten rid of, said sources.

Fitting stage finally set for eternal rivalry

FROM PAGE 1

coming into this game on the back of a swashbuckling 4-1 win over South Korea, a performance reminiscent of the Jogo Bonito of the World Cup winning side of 1970 or that 1982 side, which has been dubbed as arguably the greatest side not to have won the World Cup. They've so far done justice to the hype that surrounds them every time, despite suffering a minor blip in a fairly inconsequential match against Cameroon in their last group stage game.

There was enough evidence from the body language and overall attitude of both coach Tite and right-back Danilo at the pre-match press

conference that they were enjoying their time in Qatar, while staying focused on their job.

Tite, lovingly called 'the professor' by the people of Brazil for his philosophical views on football and other aspects of life, was in a chirpy mood, like you would expect from a man who knows his house is in order and there is no need for any unwarranted alert.

Having praised his opponents, last edition's runners-up Croatia for their 'individual and collective technical ability and resilience', Tite was more inclined to talk about his own team and their mental state. The 61-year-

old, who will step down after the World Cup no matter the result, once again defended his team's celebration against South Korea and his taking part in it, hinting he might do the same again as 'it is the culture of his country'.

Argentina coach, Lionel Scaloni, meanwhile was more serious about his upcoming challenge against the Netherlands, whom the Albiceleste beat the last time they met at the World Cup, in the semifinals of the 2014 edition.

"Tomorrow's game is going to be a nice game to watch because there are two teams that propose to attack

without neglecting their defense," said Scaloni, who guided his side to a first Copa America title in 28 years.

Serious or frivolous, both coaches admitted that at this stage every match is like a final and every opponent is like a finalist. With one win more they step one step closer to the title.

Both coaches know that these remaining three matches, if any of them go all the way, could help them leave a lasting legacy in footballing folklore. The world has been waiting 20 years for a world champion from South America and even longer for an Argentina-Brazil clash; the latter looks closer than ever, the former not that far away either.

Dream clash casts a shadow

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far from simple for either side, with Brazil taking on 2018 finalists Croatia and Argentina meeting the Netherlands.

But the South American giants can take the ultimate confidence heading into the match, not due to their overwhelming firepower, but because they have lived up to the most important mantra in sport: 'Defence wins championships'.

So far in Qatar, Argentina have allowed just 41 touches in their penalty area, one less than Brazil. La Albiceleste have also conceded 16 shots, of which only four have found the target. They have also blocked eight shots. Meanwhile, Brazil have faced 26 shots with nine on target and 15 blocked. They have also conceded just twice.

There was also a lot to be made of their attacking output, but Argentina continue to rely on Lionel Messi and his magical left foot.

In fact, other than Julian Alvarez, no other Argentine has had more than five shots. Messi has had 17. The 35-year-old has also attempted 18 dribbles. Only Angel Di Maria has more, with 19, but no other Argentine has more than five.

Messi's statistics are eerily reminiscent to Kylian Mbappe's, who is leading France's defence of their World Cup as something of a one-man team.

On the other hand, Brazil have found attacking threats from every angle.

Six of their players have had at least 10 touches in the opposing penalty box and, while Brazil have attempted more dribbles than any other team (82), no one player has had to bear the burden. Brazil's shots have also been varied, with seven players taking at least five.

Still, Brazil were hounded for their profligacy in front of goal in the group stages after scoring just thrice from 57 shots. Coach Tite was unconvinced by that criticism, opining ahead of the knockout match against South Korea that his team had performed admirably in terms of creating chances. He believed the goals would come, referring to his team's Xg (Expected Goals) - a complex measure that calculates the probability of shot resulting in a goal depending on various factors such as distance from goal, defenders in blocking positions and the goalkeeper's positioning.

Through the group stages, Brazil netted just thrice despite being 'expected' to score closer to six.

But indeed, as Tite forewarned, Brazil found their clinical touch against South Korea, netting four times from only 10 shots.

They will hope to keep that clinical streak intact against Croatia, who present a much tougher prospect than the Asians. The Croats are happy to settle down in defence, dominate the midfield and starve opponents of possession. Croatia also have nerves of steel when it comes to penalty shootouts, having won three straight World Cup shootouts.

Meanwhile Argentina's opponents for the quarterfinals, the Netherlands, have been insipid, managing just 14 shots on target for their 8 goals.

However, coach Louis van Gaal has shown his impeccable game-management skills in each match. He will hope to negate Argentina's threats as he did with the USA's in the Round of 16 and hope quick counters can finally work despite the lack of lethal players up front in the mould of an Arjen Robben or Robin van Persie.

At the other end of the spectrum are England, who take on France in their quarterfinal. But while the pre-match discussion has been dominated by Mbappe, there is another interesting aspect.

England have overperformed on nearly every metric. The Three Lions have scored 12 goals in their four games from just 21 shots on target, an inconceivable conversion rate above 50 per cent, and 52 shots overall. In that time, based on the quality of chances, they were 'expected' to score just 6.

While the small sample size of tournaments means such outliers may hold true, Spain's exit shows that things can very quickly swing the other way. They saw all seven of their shots on target bulge the net against Costa Rica, but quickly ran out of luck afterwards.

If the football gods decided to balance out England's fortunes, they will almost certainly run out of luck at some points, even if not against France.

Portugal have also burst into life after benching Cristiano Ronaldo, but without the challenge posed by his aerial ability, Morocco can be even more confident in holding down the fort as they have done better than any other team in Qatar.

The focus from today for the wider footballing world may be the imminent quarterfinals, but eyes have already turned to the semifinals, which may become the most fascinating for a generation of fans if everything falls into place.