

DHS staff blast leaders over Gaza war

AGENCIES

More than a hundred staff members from the United States Department of Homeland Security (DHS) have signed an open letter to Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas denouncing the department's handling of war in Gaza.

The letter, exclusively obtained by Al Jazeera, expresses frustration with the "palpable, glaring absence in the Department's messaging" of "recognition, support, and mourning" for the more than 18,000 Palestinians killed in Gaza since the start of the war on October 7.

"The grave humanitarian crisis in Gaza and the conditions in the West Bank are circumstances that the Department would generally respond to in various ways," the letter, dated November 22, said.

"Yet DHS leadership has seemingly turned a blind eye to the bombing of refugee camps, hospitals, ambulances, and civilians."

The letter's signatories include 139 staff members from DHS and the agencies it manages, like Customs and Border Protection (CBP).



A wounded Palestinian man is rushed to Nasser hospital following Israeli strikes, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas, in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

War will go on unless Kyiv does a deal Says Putin

REUTERS, Moscow

President Vladimir Putin said yesterday Russia would press on with its war in Ukraine unless Kyiv did a deal that took Moscow's security concerns into account, adding that the goals of the "special military operation" would in any case be met.

Fielding questions from the public and the media at an event dominated by the war, Putin - who has announced he will seek another six-year presidential term in March - said his original goals in Ukraine had not changed and that Russian forces were improving their position along most of the front line.

Russia's core goals remain "de-Nazification", "de-militarisation" and securing Ukraine's neutrality, the 71-year-old veteran leader said. "There will be peace when we achieve our goals," he said.

"As for de-militarisation, if they (the Ukrainians) don't want to come to an agreement - well, then we are forced to take other measures, including military ones.

Gaza residents 'running out of time, options'

UNRWA chief warns as 1.9m displaced people receive goods from only around 100 aid trucks per day

AFP, Geneva

The head of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees warned Wednesday that the people of Gaza were "running out of time and options" as Israel's war against Hamas grinds on.

"They face bombardment, deprivation and disease in an ever-shrinking space," UNRWA chief Philippe Lazzarini told the Global Refugee Forum in Geneva.

Lazzarini described the situation in Gaza as "hell on earth".

People in the Palestinian territory were "facing the darkest chapter of their history since 1948, and it has been a painful history", he said.

Since October 7, Israel's relentless bombardment and ground operation in Gaza has left the territory in ruins, killing more than 18,600 people, mostly women and children, according to the Hamas-run health ministry.

The UN estimates 1.9 million of Gaza's 2.4 million people have been displaced and are receiving goods from only around



100 aid trucks per day.

"We are very far from an adequate humanitarian response," Lazzarini said.

When aid was delivered, it was often not more than a can of tuna or beans and one bottle of water for a large family to share, he added.

He described seeing people halting an aid truck and in desperation and swallowing down the food found inside where they stood in the street.

"The people of Gaza are now crammed into less than one-third of the original territory near the Egyptian border, he

added, hinting that the dire situation might soon spark an exodus.

"It is unrealistic to think that people will remain resilient in the face of unlivable conditions of such magnitude, especially when the border is so close," he said.

The city of Rafah on the Egyptian border, the only crossing where aid is entering Gaza, has seen its population explode from 280,000 to more than a million, Lazzarini said. And while most aid delivery in Gaza depends on UNRWA, he warned the agency's capacities were "on the verge of collapse".

Addressing journalists at the same event, UN refugee chief Filippo Grandi also warned of the danger of large population movements out of Gaza.

Any such exodus "would be extremely destabilising for Egypt, for the Sinai region, and it would make a problematic Palestinian problem more difficult", he said.

It is vital that any evacuation of people out of the devastated territory "is not forced", he said.

Revered but not preserved

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memorial there. Nine years on, the government has yet to carry out the apex court order.

Like the Pahartoli killing field, many other sites of genocide and torture centres in Dhaka are currently under the occupation of various individuals and entities.

"From courts to various government offices, there is hardly any authorities where we did not go and request them to preserve the Pahartoli killing field. But the government failed to resolve the issue even after so many years," said eminent historian and genocide researcher Prof Muntassir Mamoon.

THE WAIT IS ON

Researchers, relatives of war martyrs and locals have long been demanding that the government preserve the Pahartoli killing field, one of the genocide sites that bears the hallmark of the Pakistan army's atrocities on civilians.

Nearly three decades after liberation, the Prime Minister's Office in two separate letters in December 1998 and February 1999 instructed the cultural affairs ministry and the Chattogram deputy commissioner's office to acquire the land to build a Liberation War Complex there.

The Complex would include a main stambha, a circular wall, a flag stand and alter base and a central yard, similar to the one in Rayer Bazar Boddhobhumi in Dhaka.

The government also allocated Tk 94 lakh for the acquisition of 1.754 acres of the land, and in 2003, a land acquisition notice was served on the owners, according to court documents.

By that time, however, the ownership had changed. In May 2002, the USTC authorities bought the land from its previous owners to build a university and a hospital. So the USTC authorities challenged the land acquisition order in a Chattogram court, but the court in November 2002 asked them not to build any structure there.



A full-fledged residential area now occupies the infamous Kalapani Killing Field in Mirpur-12, Dhaka. Five decades after independence, the government has still not preserved many such killing fields in the capital and elsewhere. The photo was taken last month.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HUQ

However, following negotiations with the USTC, the Liberation War affairs ministry in 2005 decided to build a monument on 20 decimals of land donated by the university authorities. Subsequently, making a U-turn, the ministry revoked its original land acquisition order, and began constructing the monument on a small scale.

After a prolonged court battle, the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court in 2014 ruled that the Liberation War affairs ministry's decision to abandon the project and revoke the land acquisition order was unlawful.

The SC also ordered the authorities to resume the process to acquire the 1.754-acre land to build a monument there, and pay the "entitled compensation" to the USTC authorities, the current land owner.

USTC Registrar Dilip Barua told The Daily Star on Sunday that the Liberation War affairs ministry never spoke with them about the SC verdict.

"This land is a property of the

USTC. We bought this land legally. Our founder Dr Nurul Islam even donated 20 decimals of land to build a memorial there, which has already been built," he said.

Md Jahangir Alam, deputy secretary of the Liberation War affairs ministry, said they wrote to the Chattogram deputy commissioner's office twice, but there has not been any progress.

He added that they even allocated funds for the land acquisition twice, but they took back the money as the acquisition was not done within the stipulated time.

Chattogram Deputy

Commissioner Abul Bashar Mohammad Fakhruzzaman said, "We sent a fresh request to the ministry for fund allocation. We are trying our best to acquire the land."

THE LOST KILLING FIELDS IN DHAKA

Throughout the war, the Pakistan army and their local collaborators including Razakar and Al Badr Bahini committed genocide across Dhaka as well. According to researchers, there are 76 mass graves and killing fields in the capital, 27 of them in Mirpur alone.

According to a list by the Liberation War affairs ministry, the government has so far built memorials on only seven of the 76 killing fields - five in Keraniganj, one in Rayer Bazaar and another in Azimpur.

Not a single killing field in Mirpur has been preserved.

In Mirpur-1, for example, two wells near the shrine of Monir Uddin Shah witnessed a horrific genocide. After the war, locals discovered the wells filled with dead bodies. During a clean-up drive in 1991, City Corporation workers found numerous human skulls and bones there.

Both wells have vanished, The Daily Star found during a visit last month.

The site of one well is now occupied by a high-rise. Construction of another building is currently underway on the site of the other well.

The Kalapani killing field in Mirpur 12 saw the most horrific genocide in Dhaka, but it has yet to be preserved. The entire Kalapani killing field is now a residential area.

Many notorious torture centres in Dhaka also remain unrecognised. Nakhalpara's MP Hostel is one of them. The fifth charge against Ali Ahsan Muhammad Mojaheed and eighth charge against Motiur Rahman Nizami involved tortures committed there. Both got life sentence for the war crimes there.

The MP Hostel is now a residential complex for lawmakers. There is no sign or plaque commemorating the atrocities on the compound.

The sixth complaint against

Ali Ahsan Muhammad Mojaheed was related to his war crimes at Mohammadpur Physical Training Institute. He was given death sentence for the atrocities there. But the centre was never recognised as such.

"Everyone knows about the killing fields in Mirpur. But the government could not preserve any of them. It is an absolute shame for the ministry, and humiliation of the memory of our martyrs," said Dr MA Hasan, a freedom fighter and genocide researcher.

Contacted, Liberation War Affairs Minister Mozammel Haque said, "We don't have any plan to build monuments in every killing field at this point, but the ministry will consider building some memorials in the killing fields in Mirpur upon completion of the ongoing projects."

Slow pace

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the monuments made by eminent artist Hashem Khan to the cultural affairs ministry. If the ministry accepted that design, they could have constructed monuments in all the killing fields by now," said Prof Muntassir Mamoon.

"But the ministry always seems interested in constructing large-scale monuments," added the eminent historian, who is also the chairperson of 1971: Genocide-Torture Archive and Museum Trust.

Over the last five years, the Genocide Museum Trust has repeatedly submitted proposals for constructing monuments in the killing fields within reasonable budgets, but the ministry did not respond, he said.

Genocide researchers say officials are more interested in constructing large-scale monuments as there are more opportunities for bribery.

Liberation War Affairs Minister AKM Mozammel Haque said he is not aware of any irregularities in construction work of monuments, but will take action if there are any specific allegations.

SECURITY BREACH PROTEST

14 Indian opposition MPs suspended

NDTV ONLINE

Fourteen Opposition MPs were suspended from the Lok Sabha and one from the Rajya Sabha yesterday for disrupting House proceedings, a day after a major security breach in Indian parliament. The number of suspended MPs fell by one by evening as the government decided to withdraw the suspension of DMK MP SR Parthiban since he was not present in the House and said his name was included by mistake. Parthiban was named as one of the suspended MPs. Soon, sources in the DMK claimed that the MP was not present in the House and that he was in Tamil Nadu. By evening, the Centre clarified and said Parthiban's name has been dropped as it was a "case of mistaken identity". Of the suspended MPs, nine are from the Congress, two from the CPM, one from the CPI, and one from the DMK. Congress MPs Manickam Tagore, Md Javed, VK Shreekandan, Benny Behanan, DMK MP K Kanimozhi, CPM MPs PR Natarajan and S Venkateshan, and CPI MP K Subbarayan are among the suspended.

CENTURIES-OLD MOSQUE

India court allows survey to look for relics, symbols

REUTERS, Lucknow

An Indian court has granted permission to survey a centuries-old mosque to determine if it contains Hindu relics and symbols, a lawyer said yesterday, in a boost to Hindu groups which claim it was built on a site of a destroyed Hindu temple. The Shahi Eidgah mosque is located in Mathura city in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, and the site is believed to be the birthplace of Lord Krishna, revered by India's majority Hindu population. Yesterday, the Allahabad high court permitted a survey of the 17th century mosque, where Muslims still pray, to determine if there are any relics or Hindu symbols inside the complex. "My demand was that in Shahi Eidgah Masjid there are a lot of signs and symbols of the Hindu temple," Vishnu Jain, a lawyer for the Hindu side, told reporters after the verdict.

Home ministry

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can be used to restrict any kind of activities by the opposition, especially the BNP, its allies, and several left-leaning political parties.

The parties have been demanding that the election be held under a non-partisan polls time government.

Contacted yesterday, Ruhin Hossain Prince, general secretary of the Communist Party of Bangladesh, said, "It is virtually a ban on the political activities of the opposition parties. We have seen such bans only during emergency periods."

Every citizen has the right to take part in or shun elections and hold peaceful political programmes in favour or against elections, he said.

Talking to this newspaper on Tuesday, former election commissioner Brig Gen (ret'd) M Sakhawat Hossain said, "As far as I recall, the EC had not made such a move in recent times."

The parties that have taken to the streets may be forced to choose some other type of programmes, he added.

AL to share 7 seats

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The JSD had also demanded the AL leave Feni-1 for incumbent Shirin Akhter, but the ruling party said that she would be made lawmaker from a reserved seat for women, said AL sources.

The AL will keep aside Lakhsmipur-4 for JSD standing committee member Mosharrar Hossain. In the 2018 national election, the AL had left it for Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh. Abdul Mannan of Bikalpa Dhara is the incumbent. The AL had nominated Faridun Nahar Laily for the seat.

The ruling party will share Pirojpur-2 with Jatiya Party (Manju). Party Chairman Anwar Hossain Manju, also the incumbent, will run again.

Meanwhile, JSD chief Inu in a video message last night said his party did not agree to the AL's decision on seat-sharing.

He requested the ruling party to reconsider the decision and withdraw the "AL independents" from the seats to be shared with the alliance partners.

Both the Workers Party and JSD have three MPs each in the current parliament. The AL had shared 11 seats with its alliance partners, including five with the Workers Party and four with JSD, in the 2018 national election.

During a series of meetings with the AL, its alliance partners this time demanded 30 seats.

They also repeatedly requested the ruling party to withdraw "its independents" from the seats to be shared with them. But the AL did not agree.

Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh, an electoral partner of the AL, got three seats from the ruling AL in the last national election.

Mahi B Chowdhury, Abdul Mannan and MA Shahin contested the polls for Munshiganj-2, Laxmipur-4, and Moulvibazar-2 with the AL's electoral symbol "boat".

"I had no discussion with Awami League leaders regarding seat-sharing. I had no expectations anyway," Mahi B Chowdhury told The Daily Star.