

ANALYSIS

Time to stabilise Rakhine for good

SHAHAB ENAM KHAN

As an ominous situation looms in Myanmar across the border, Bangladesh is on high alert to prevent the spillover effect of the ongoing violence and civil war in Rakhine.

Bangladesh's prime concern at the moment should be to find strategic and diplomatic pathways to stabilise Rakhine before considering any meaningful repatriation effort. So far, the Tatmadaw (Myanmar military) hasn't shown any concrete signs of resolving the crisis. It hasn't shown any genuine commitment to repatriate the Rohingyas living in Bangladesh.

The Arakan Army will remain the core feature of the Rakhine administration and society in the coming months as it controls most of the state. It is also difficult to bypass the Arakan Army to materialise the government's Rohingya repatriation goals.

Hence, it is imperative to consider the non-state actors as essential components to stabilise Rakhine and to deter Tatmadaw's act of provocation.

The National Unity Government (NUG) is another critical factor that can potentially serve as a practical conduit in stabilising Rakhine and beyond.

The ongoing crisis also denotes the weakening of Tatmadaw and its loss of territorial control in Rakhine. However, it will still have considerable influence over the Bamar (Myanmar's largest ethnic group) heartland and negotiate with several ethnic armed organisations.

The Tatmadaw has repeatedly dishonoured the tripartite repatriation talks despite Beijing's support and Bangladesh's commitment to the process.

Dhaka and Beijing should now begin talks on Rakhine, as this region is of mutual interest to both countries. However, Dhaka should reach out to Bangkok, Tokyo, Washington (given the Burma Act), and European power centres to stabilise Rakhine for good.

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Palestinians inspect the site of an Israeli strike on a residential building in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

US, UK launch strikes on 36 Houthi sites

The Iran-linked group in Yemen vows response; US plans more strikes against Houthis

REUTERS, Washington

The United States and Britain launched strikes against 36 Houthi targets in Yemen, in the second day of major US operations against Iran-linked groups following a deadly attack on American troops last weekend.

The strikes late on Saturday hit buried weapons storage facilities, missile systems, launchers and other capabilities the Houthis have used to attack Red Sea shipping, the Pentagon said, adding it targeted 13 locations across the country.

They are the latest blows in a conflict that has spread into the Middle East since October 7, when Israeli troops began offensive in the Gaza Strip.

Residents said the strikes shook buildings in Houthi-controlled Sanaa. The group's military spokesperson Yahya Sarea said the US strikes "will not pass without a response and consequences." The group

did not announce any casualties. Houthi-run media called these "the most violent" strikes yet.

The Yemen strikes are running parallel to an unfolding US campaign of retaliation over the killing of three American soldiers

"We intend to take additional strikes... that the United States will respond when our forces are attacked, when our people are killed."

US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan

in a drone strike by Iran-backed militants on an outpost in Jordan a week ago.

US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said yesterday there will be more steps in US response to Jordan drone

attack.

"We intend to take additional strikes, and additional action, to continue to send a clear message that the United States will respond when our forces are attacked, when our people are killed," he told NBC's "Meet the Press" program.

On Friday, the US carried out the first wave of that retaliation, striking in Iraq and Syria against more than 85 targets linked to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and militias it backs, reportedly killing nearly 40.

The violence has added to concerns of the potential for further escalation. Iran has so far avoided any direct role in the conflict, even as groups it backs have entered the fray from Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Lebanon.

Mahjoob Zweiri, Director of the Gulf Studies Center at Qatar University, did not expect a change in Iran's approach even after the latest US strikes.

Bangladesh, US to join hands to fight climate change

Says Saber after meeting Haas

BSS, Dhaka

Environment, Forest and Climate Change Minister Saber Hossain Chowdhury yesterday said Bangladesh and the US will work together to protect the environment and fight climate change.

The minister made the remarks while talking to journalists after US Ambassador Peter Haas met him at his Secretariat office.

"We have discussed how we can further advance our bilateral relations in the future. Today's meeting was a productive step forward in solidifying our partnership and exploring new avenues for collaboration," he said.

"Both sides emphasised the importance of scaling up collaborative initiatives that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and enhance Bangladesh's capacity to adapt to the impacts of climate change. Both sides look forward to continuing their close collaboration in the years to come."

Haas said the US will work with Bangladesh on different issues, including climate change.

"We are committed to strengthening our partnership to support its climate goals. Today's discussion highlighted the significant opportunities for collaboration, and we look forward to working together to build a more climate-resilient future for both our nations," the US envoy added.

N'GANJ GAS BLAST

Couple die of burn injuries

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

A man and his wife died in the hospital early yesterday, hours after being burned in an explosion at their rented flat in Narayanganj's Rugganj upazila.

The deceased Shamim Mia, 29, and his wife Jahana Begum, 25, were undergoing treatment at Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery, said Deepak Chandra Saha, officer-in-charge of Rugganj Police Station.

The bodies were later taken to Taraganj village in Rangpur for burial.

A case of unnatural death was filed in this regard, said police.

Early Saturday, an explosion took place in a house in Saoghat Noyapara area of Golakanda IUP under the upazila where the couple was living as tenants.

They rented the flat three days earlier, said Abu Musa, the owner of the building.

12kg LPG cylinder now Tk 1,474

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The price of a 12kg LPG cylinder has been set at Tk 1,474 for the month of February, up Tk 41 from Tk 1,433 the previous month.

The new price of the essential fuel came into effect at 6:00pm yesterday, as announced by the Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC).

Prices of other liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) cylinders – from 5.5 kg to 45 kg – will go up proportionately, BERC Chairman Nurul Amin told a press briefing at his office.

As per the BERC decision, the price of "auto gas" (LPG used for motor vehicles) also increased to Tk 67.68 per litre (including VAT) from Tk 65.76 per litre.

Tensions spill

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to enter at this moment."

BANGLADESHIS INJURED

A man named Ferdous got shot when Myanmar troops opened fire from a helicopter, said a local man named Abdur Rahim who took the victim to a MSF Hospital in Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar.

Around 5:30pm, another man named Shamsul Alam was taken to the same hospital with bullet wounds, locals said.

Shamim Hossain, officer-in-charge of Ukhiya Police Station, said 15 Myanmar border guards with bullet wounds were treated at the MSF facility.

The Daily Star correspondent visiting Tumbru saw countless bullets and explosives crossing the border. A mortar shell landed half a kilometre inside Bangladesh.

Locals said they saw helicopters dropping bombs twice during the day.

The Arakan Army has reportedly captured many areas of Rakhine state in recent days. According to sources, Arakan fighters captured all the Border Guard Police outposts along the Naikhongchhari border several months ago.

But the junta had a base known as Right Camp across the border from Tumbru. The Arakan fighters are now trying to take over the camp, sources said.

Locals said Myanmar junta and Arakan rebels were jointly exchanging fires on two hills within a two-kilometre radius of the border. They have been hearing intermittent gunshots since 3:00pm on Saturday.

Govt seeks to bar Prof Yunus from going abroad

FROM PAGE 1

In the petition, he prayed to the HC to pass an order so that Prof Yunus and three others cannot go abroad without permission from the court concerned until the Labour Appellate Tribunal disposes of their appeals, Adv Khurshid told The Daily Star.

Citing the petition, he said an appellate court cannot stay the conviction and sentence delivered by a trial court to any convict under the relevant rules of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC).

He also said that the appellate court can stay the order of only a fine, adding that the HC bench led by Justice Md Nazrul Islam Talukder may hold a hearing on the revision petition today.

Meanwhile, Dr Yunus's lawyer Barrister Abdullah Al Mamun told The Daily Star that the revision petition was filed to harass Prof Yunus and three others.

Prof Yunus, a well-known international figure, will travel abroad to attend seminars that will

help elevate the country's standing, and barring him from going abroad will damage the country's image, he said.

He stated that DIFE is concerned with workers' benefits in factories and establishments and that such a petition is typically filed against political figures and in connection with sedition cases.

Mamun added that the DIFE's revision petition appears to have been filed outside of the scope of the labour law.

On January 28, the Labour Appellate Tribunal's order granted bail to Prof Yunus and three other top officials of Grameen Telecom in the labour law violation case following separate appeals filed by them.

The tribunal accepted the appeals and also stayed till March 3 the lower court's verdict that convicted and sentenced each of them to six months' jail.

On January 1, Sheikh Merina Sultana, chairman of the Third Labour Court of Dhaka, sentenced Yunus, chairman of Grameen

BB's roadmap to knock down bad loans

FROM PAGE 1

Bad loans accounted for as much as 21.7 percent of outstanding loans at state banks. The ratio stood at 7.04 percent for private banks, according to BB data.

The roadmap consists of letting banks write off loans that have been in the 'bad and loss' category for two years by keeping 100 percent provisioning against those. At present, banks have to wait for three years before they can write off the loans.

This is expected to bring down the bad loan volume by Tk 43,300 crore, or 2.76 percent, as per BB's estimates.

Banks will have a separate department called the 'write-off loans recovery unit' under the direct supervision of the managing directors or chief executive officers. And recovery of the written-off loans will be part of the bank CEOs' key performance indicators (KPIs).

Banks will not be able to show the interest accrued against stressed assets as income until the loans are regularised or realised. Until then, banks must show the interest accrued separately in their balance sheets.

The BB is also working on the necessary law to set up an asset management company to buy banks' bad and written-off loans; the received money will be added to the

bank's income account.

The relaxed loan repayment facility that was enjoyed by businesses will not be extended in the coming days, as part of the BB action plans.

The definition of term loans will be brought in line with international best practices.

Banks will have to strengthen their legal department and they will be given targets for alternative dispute resolutions under the Money Loan Court Act 2003.

The central bank will also form rules and policies to take measures against the wilful defaulters as defined by the Bank Company (Amendment) Act 2023.

Bank officers who recover defaulted loans will get special incentives.

The collateral against loans must be assessed by listed evaluation companies, as per the action plan.

The central bank has also come up with six action plans to bring good governance in the banking sector.

Some of the weak banks will be merged with the robust ones with the condition that no one can be fired for three years after the merger.

The central bank will amend the criteria of what is construed as fit and proper when it comes to appointing shareholder-directors. Their responsibilities will be revised too. New policies will be formulated

Telecom, and its directors Ashrafur Hassan, Nurjahan Begum, and M Shahjahan to six months in jail.

Soon after the verdict, the court granted bail to all four for a month, following separate bail pleas.

The four were also fined Tk 30,000 each, in default of which they would have to serve 25 more days in prison.

Further, the court directed them to comply with the relevant sections of the Labour Act 2006 within a month.

The sections of the labour law under which the case was filed carry a maximum of six months' imprisonment.

On September 9, 2021, Labour Inspector (General) SM Arifuzzaman filed the case against Yunus and the three others.

According to the case documents, Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments officials inspected the Grameen Telecom office in the capital's Mirpur on August 16, 2021, and found several violations of labour laws there.

regarding the appointment of independent directors and their responsibilities and remuneration.

Changes have been made in the selection process for appointment and re-appointment of bank MDs.

The single-borrower exposure limit will not be exceeded in any way.

Training and professional examinations will be made mandatory for the promotion of bank officers.

"The intentions are noble but now we want to know how they will be implemented – political commitment is very essential here," said Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh.

The banking sector has become weak due to the inactive role of the central bank, said Salehuddin Ahmed, a former BB governor.

"This reform plan is not new – such types of policies were introduced before but were hardly executed. BB has now announced this roadmap to show that it is very active."

Without the independence of the banking regulator, such reform plans will only remain on paper and not in action.

"The banking regulator must have enough strength to tackle the political interference and pressure from the influential groups," Ahmed added.

Protests erupt at JU

FROM PAGE 1

Siddique, 26, of the same department's 46th batch; and Sabbir Hasan, 24, of the botany department's 47th batch – were arrested yesterday.

They were produced before a Dhaka court, which placed them on a three-day remand each.

Another prime accused in the case, Mamunur Rashid Mamun, 44, an outsider and acquaintance of Mostafizur, and abettor Murad Hossain, 22, a JU student, are on the run.

Meanwhile, the university syndicate has identified six JU students, including another student – Shah Poran of the university's 44th IR batch – to be involved in the incident.

Of the suspects, Mostafizur is the JU BCL's international affairs secretary, Shah Poran one of its vice-presidents and a former student, Murad an assistant secretary, and Sabbir an executive member.

Meanwhile, around 300 students and teachers of the university held a sit-in from yesterday noon to evening in front of the registrar's building.

They demanded exemplary punishment to the culprits and justice for the 19-year-old, who was raped in the botanical garden near the university's Mir Mosharraf Hossain Hall. They also demanded the university authorities file a case in this regard.

The protests highlighted the lax security on the 697-acre campus and focused on the students' safety, and the immediate removal of anyone staying in the dormitories illegally.

Rayhan Rayne, convener of platform "Jahangirnagar Against Corruption" and a professor of the philosophy department, said, "There is an anti-sexual harassment cell at the university. We want the authorities to coordinate with the cell regarding the incident and instruct it to conduct an investigation. The authorities must take responsibility for such incidents on campus."

Farabi, a student of the anthropology department, said, "All my roommates are terrified after hearing the news. This should not be the image of a university. Where's the safety we need?"

At night, the students brought out a torch procession.

Around the same time, around 100 JU BCL activists formed a human chain in front of the university's Shaheed Minar, demanding the punishment to those involved in the incident.

Upon the allegations, the central BCL expelled Mostafizur from the pro-ruling party student organisation.

The JU syndicate suspended the five students it identified and cancelled their certifications following the proctorial body's primary findings last evening.

It also decided to not issue certificates for Shah Poran, who allegedly instructed the others to help

Mostafizur flee the campus.

Meanwhile, the syndicate has decided to file a case over the rape incident and formed a four-member probe committee, who was asked to submit a report in 15 working days.

It also announced a ban on outsiders' entrance to the university.

Rights body Manabdhikar Shongskriti Foundation, in a press statement signed by its founding president Sultana Kamal, strongly condemned the rape incident and said such heinous acts by students, including a BCL leader, of an apex university, is a disgrace to the nation.

It urged the authorities concerned to take immediate legal action against the perpetrators and ensure mental, physical and social security to the victim and her family.

THE INCIDENT

The case statement said the victim and her husband knew Mamun, one of the prime accused, as he was a tenant of their old house.

Around 10-12 days ago, he called the victim's husband saying he had no place to stay and then began living at the couple's rented house in Bhabanipur area near Zirani Bazar.

On Saturday, Mamun called the victim's husband around 4:00pm and said Mostafizur arranged a place for him to stay at a JU dormitory and that he would move there. He asked the man to meet him on the campus in this regard.

The husband reached Mir Mosharraf Hossain Hall around 6:00pm and there he met Mamun, Mostafizur and Murad in room 317. Mamun then told him to call his wife and bring his (Mamun's) clothes from home.

When the wife came near the campus around 9:00pm, her husband took her to a tea-stall in front of Mir Mosharraf Hossain Hall.

There, Mostafizur and Mamun told the husband to go inside the hall with Murad with Mamun's clothes.

Once in the room, Murad slapped him, took away his mobile phone and confined him there for about an hour, said the case documents.

An hour later, Mostafizur and Mamun came back and told him his wife was sent home. They returned his and his wife's mobile phones.

After being released, he found his wife near the tea-stall, who told him that Mostafizur and Mamun forced her to the botanical garden and raped her.

In the case statement, it was alleged that Sabbir, Sagar and Hasanuzzaman helped Mostafizur flee.

Additional SP Abdullahi Kafi at the briefing said the three students were arrested from the campus, while prime accused, Mostafizur, was arrested from Savar.

Drives were underway to arrest Mamun and Murad, he added.

(Our JU and Savar correspondents contributed to the report.)