

Create 'safe zone' for the displaced people in Rakhine

Yunus urges UN to find ways to support them

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus has proposed creating a "safe zone guaranteed by the UN" for the displaced people in Myanmar's Rakhine State and finding ways to support them.

"This will be the best way to get aid to them," he said when Thomas Andrews, Special Rapporteur of the UN on the situation of Human Rights in Myanmar, called on the chief adviser at his Tejaon office yesterday.

Professor Yunus said it could be a "good beginning" to resolving the crisis in Rakhine and that it can prevent thousands of new refugees from entering Bangladesh, according to a statement by the Chief Adviser's Press Wing.

Andrews said at least 3.1 million people have been displaced in Myanmar, including hundreds of thousands in Rakhine State, where insurgent groups have been fighting against the Myanmar military for years.

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Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus in a meeting with Thomas Andrews, UN special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, at the former's Tejaon office yesterday.

PHOTO: PTD

Three Bangladeshis killed in blast at Malaysia factory

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Munshiganj

Three Bangladeshi workers died after being injured in an explosion at a chemical factory in Malaysia on Thursday.

The deceased – Jabbar Ali, Abu Taher and his nephew Salam – were from Munshiganj.

The explosion took place inside a factory building in SILC industrial area of Iskandar Puter, Johor, around 11:30am Thursday.

Three Bangladeshi workers who were inside the factory received burn injuries in the explosion, according to their relatives.

The factory authorities took them to a hospital where Jabbar Ali died at 7:00pm Friday, Abu Taher died at 3:00am on Saturday and Salam at 5:00pm yesterday, the relatives said.

The three went to Malaysia legally eight years ago, they added.

Jabbar's younger sister Nazifa claimed, "The three were not taken to the hospital on time. They did not get proper treatment. Had they been taken to the hospital on time, they would have survived."

"He [Jabbar] used to take care of my parents, three brothers and five sisters. Now I don't know what will happen to us. I hope the administration cooperates to bring my brother's body back to the country."

Abu Taher's younger brother Tapan Mia urged the government to bring the bodies to the country.

Munshiganj Sadar Upazila Nirbahi Officer Afifa Khan said, "We have met the families of the deceased. The bodies will be brought back in association with the expatriate welfare ministry."

Quran recited at Durga Puja event

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

A man performed a recitation from the Quran on stage during a Durga Puja programme in Barishal's Wazirpur upazila on Sunday night.

The makeshift stage was set up on the temple premises – around 10-12 feet away from the altar with the idol of Goddess Durga.

The incident took place at Takabari Sorbojonin Sree Sree Durga Temple at Munshitaluk village under Jalla union.

Witnesses said the union BNP's General Secretary Mizanur Rahman, along with others, came to the temple around 9:00pm on Sunday, which was Bijoya Dashami – the last day of the Durga Puja festival.

Subhash Chandra Biswas, adviser to the temple's management committee, had requested them to speak on stage, said Badal Biswas, an eyewitness.

Subhash announced that speeches would be followed by recitations from both the Gita and the Quran. A Hindu devotee first recited a few lines from the Gita. Then one Yusuf Ali, who was accompanying Mizanur, recited from the Quran, said Badal.

Achinta Baroi, who was also present, said, "Previously, these cultural programmes would continue till late at night. But this time it ended by around 11:00pm because people were uncomfortable after the Quran recitation."

Bimal Halder, president of the temple's management committee; Sahadeb Chandra, general secretary of Wazirpur Bangladesh Puja Ujapan Parishad; and Reba Rani Das, local union parishad chairperson, also confirmed the incident.

Bimal, Yusuf and some others were called to the local police station around 8:00pm.

Protesters to be shielded from cases

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worked for the movement on the field to make this mass uprising successful will not be arrested or harassed. Cases will not be filed against them for the incidents related to the uprising from July 15 to August 8.

"The people concerned have been instructed to remain alert in this regard. They were also warned against providing false information to get benefits," the notification added.

Police have already dropped charges of resorting to violence and cybercrimes against all the accused in around 650 cases countrywide, according to officials at the Police Headquarters.

Several top BNP and Jamaat leaders were among the accused. Most of these cases were filed between July 17 and August 5.

Investigators of the cases submitted the final reports to different courts, requesting that the accused be relieved of the charges, officials said.

But for murder cases, police have been instructed to remain alert so that no innocent people face harassment. However, since murders have taken place, the investigating officers need to analyse and investigate why those crimes were committed and who were behind those.

If the name of any accused was not included in the first information report, the name should be included following an investigation, PHQ officials said.

International Crimes Tribunal reconstituted

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following the Supreme Court's advice.

"We hope the trials will start very soon," he said, adding that the law ministry has completed a major task by appointing the judges.

The prosecution team and the investigators have already started carrying out probes and collecting evidence.

As per the procedure of the ICT, the investigation agency would submit a probe report to the Chief Prosecutor Office after finishing the investigation into a complaint.

Then the Chief Prosecutor Office, after scrutiny of the probe report and relevant evidence, will press formal charges before the tribunal.

In the meantime, the prosecution can seek arrest warrant for any suspect.

Prof Nazrul claimed that more than 1,000 people were killed and thousands were injured during the student-led uprising. "The International Crimes Tribunal is a strong platform to hold trials in this regard."

He said they were ready to provide more manpower to the prosecution team and the investigation agency in phases. They will also consider the necessity of another tribunal, he added.

Replying to a question, he said they held meetings with stakeholders and have been trying to improve the existing ICT Act by bringing significant changes.

He said the existing law was adequate to start the trial process and there was no need to wait for the amendment to the ICT Act.

Asked how they would handle a suspect hiding abroad repatriated, he said the law allows trial of suspects in absentia. The government would take initiatives as per extradition treaties if a convict was in a country with which Bangladesh has an extradition deal.

For other countries, the government would try as per the international law to bring them back, he added.

He said if former prime minister Sheikh Hasina was convicted and was residing in India, then Bangladesh

would surely ask India to hand her over as per the extradition treaty with India.

Prof Nazrul said they have incorporated enforced disappearance as a crime in the draft amendment of the ICT Act, which would allow the tribunal to hold trials.

Asked about the time frame for the commissioning of crimes to be considered, he said it was up to the prosecution and that they have so far learnt that crimes committed between July 15 and August 5 would be considered.

The period can be changed by a day or two later, he said, adding that the "killings at Shapla Chattar 2013 and the BDR mutiny in 2009" can be tried, he added.

Asked about the cases already pending with the tribunal, he said the tribunal would decide on those.

Even though the adviser said the tribunal has been reconstituted, there has been no gazette notification in this regard as of 10:30pm last night when this report was filed.

Dhaka seeks to enhance economic, security cooperation with Beijing

BSS, Dhaka

Foreign Adviser M Touhid Hossain yesterday said Dhaka is keen on strengthening economic and security cooperation with China and deepening collaboration in several critical areas, including clean energy and infrastructure development.

"We need security cooperation from China," he said while speaking at a seminar at a city hotel titled "Bangladesh-China Relations: A Future Outlook".

Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) and the Centre for China Studies (SIS-DU) jointly organised the seminar, with Dhaka and Beijing set to celebrate the 50th anniversary of their diplomatic relations next year.

Underlining the significance of defence cooperation with China, the foreign adviser noted that China is a major supplier of security equipment to Bangladesh and a key partner in

modernising Bangladesh's military.

Dhaka looks forward to further strengthening the cooperation, especially in the military training programmes, he said.

He also said that enhanced defence cooperation could play a role in increasing Bangladesh's involvement in the United Nations peacekeeping operations, which remains a key priority for the country.

Touhid welcomed further cooperation in infrastructure development and energy projects, particularly in green energy, emphasising the completion of projects on time.

He emphasised technological cooperation, including in the ICT sector. The development of Bangladesh's ICT sector with Chinese technological transfer could be one of the main drivers of Bangladesh's economic growth in the coming years.

Up to \$1.5b WB loans to be repurposed

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The official, requesting anonymity, said they held meetings with officials of the relevant ministries and the World Bank to redirect the funds from these projects to other programmes.

They primarily estimated that about \$1 billion could be channelled from the identified projects and the figure could even cross \$1.5 billion, the official said.

The official also said the decision would be finalised during discussions with the World Bank officials, expected to be held on the sidelines of the World Bank-IMF Annual Meetings in Washington, DC towards the end of October.

Finance Adviser Salehuddin Ahmed and Bangladesh Bank Governor Ahsan H Mansur are likely to attend the talks with World Bank officials.

According to World Bank documents seen by The Daily Star, one of the projects from which funds are likely to be shifted is the Bangladesh Private Investment and Digital Entrepreneurship Programme.

The global lender approved \$500

million for the project in 2020.

As of June this year, \$432 million of the fund remained unused, whereas the project's deadline is December 2025.

Another such project is the Western Economic Corridor and Regional Enhancement Programme, for which the global lender approved \$500 million in 2020.

However, only \$58 million of the fund has so far been used.

There are many other ongoing projects, which were undertaken in 2013 but are yet to see full implementation.

During a bilateral meeting with Chief Adviser Prof Yunus on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in New York last month, the World Bank Group President Ajay Banga pledged support for the government's reform initiatives.

In an interview with The Daily Star last month, Martin Raiser, World Bank vice president for the South Asia Region, said the interim government requested budget support for energy and banking sector reforms.

Govt probing role of priest

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It said India noted with serious concern the attack on a puja mandap in Tantubazar, Dhaka, and the theft at the revered Jeshoreshwari Kali temple at Satkhira.

The crown was gifted by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his visit to Bangladesh in March 2021.

"These are deplorable events. They follow a systematic pattern of desecration and damage to temples and deities that we have witnessed over several days now."

Yesterday, Bangladesh's foreign ministry said the attention of the government has been drawn to the Indian statement.

It said there were "just a handful of incidents" reported on which the government authorities acted promptly in ensuring the safety and security of Hindus and other minorities throughout the festival times.

"Communal harmony and peaceful coexistence remain a time-honoured feature of liberalism and democracy in Bangladesh, uniting all

people," it said.

The foreign ministry said the Bangladesh government attests in the strongest terms that every individual, regardless of his/her faith, religion, or belief, has the right to establish, maintain, and perform respective religious rituals or practices without any hindrance.

"This was vindicated by the peaceful observance of Durga Puja in over 32,000 puja mandaps that were set up across Bangladesh."

Ensuring the safety and security of all citizens, particularly the members of religious minorities, in Bangladesh remains a duty of the government, it said.

"Upholding the rights of every citizen regardless of one's identity, religion, or faith must be recognized as an internal affair of Bangladesh."

The interim government would like to reassure the international community that it continues to do its best to uphold the long-standing secular and inclusive credentials of the people of Bangladesh.

Egg supplies take a hit

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at the government's fixed prices because their costs were higher. "The government should increase the prices."

Denying the presence of any market syndicate, he told The Daily Star that while Dhaka city has a daily demand for 1 crore eggs, they only supply 14 to 15 lakh.

He said they would hold a meeting with the DNCRP today to address the problem.

To check the rising prices of eggs, one of the cheapest sources of protein, the Department of Agricultural Marketing announced on September 15 that retailers would sell brown eggs at Tk 142 a dozen (Tk 11.83 per egg).

However, eggs were sold for Tk 15.83 each in the capital's Tejuri Bazar area yesterday, up from Tk 14.75 logged on the day by the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB).

According to data from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, food inflation has exceeded 10 percent for six straight months since April this year.

Overall inflation has remained above 9 percent since March 2023 even though the Bangladesh Bank has been raising the repo rate since May that year to curb demand and control inflation.

The repo rate is the interest rate at which the central bank of a country lends money to commercial banks.

Rajib Islam, manager of a restaurant in the city's Segun Bagicha, said he visits Tejaon every day to buy 300 eggs.

He said that all wholesale egg shops in Tejaon were closed yesterday evening.

"I had to buy 100 eggs from a retail shop in the same area at a much higher price (how much?) than usual."

Visiting the Tejaon wholesale egg market yesterday evening, The Daily Star found that a dozen customers were leaving because shops were closed.

Wishing anonymity, an employee of Alamgir Traders, an egg wholesaler in Tejaon, said they did not purchase eggs over the last two days.

He said they source eggs mainly from Sakhipur of Tangail and

Bhaluka of Mymensingh.

"We used to sell 60,000 eggs every day. However, we have not been able to supply eggs to our regular buyers over the last two days. This may strain our business relationship with them."

However, a source in the Tejaon Egg Merchants' Association said that some wholesalers were collecting eggs for their regular customers and sending those directly to them to maintain business ties.

A wholesaler, who wished to remain anonymous, said he bought eggs at Tk 1,400 per 100 pieces yesterday without any money receipt, up from the regular price of Tk 1,240.

He said that he sold brown eggs for Tk 160 a dozen two days ago, but the price had risen to Tk 190 yesterday.

In Chattogram city, wholesalers at Pahartali Bazar halted egg sales yesterday afternoon. However, eggs were still available in other areas of the port city.

Abdul Shukkar Liton, general secretary of Pahartali Egg Wholesale Cooperative Society, said that they bought brown eggs for Tk 13.20 each and sold them for Tk 13.50 yesterday.

"I will only sell eggs if I can buy them at the government set prices."

Retailer Mohammad Iqbal from the city's Kazir Dewri Bazar area said that he bought eggs for Tk 13.50 each and sold them for Tk 14.

'GOVT CONCERNED ABOUT SYNDICATE'

Commerce Adviser Salehuddin Ahmed yesterday said the government is dissatisfied with the higher prices of essentials.

He said that the government is concerned about the syndicate in egg business as a group of companies are manipulating the prices.

"We are not much satisfied with the current prices of essentials," he told reporters while visiting the Karwan Bazar kitchen market.

It is very difficult to enforce the prices fixed by the government, he said.

The adviser said the government cannot avoid the responsibility of high prices of essentials by blaming the trader syndicates.

"The government is worried about the syndicates. A few companies such as Kazi and Paragon have been

making hefty profits by selling eggs at higher prices.

"Eggs cannot be produced in factories like chocolates," the former central bank governor said.

He also acknowledged a current shortage in egg production, stating that the country previously produced 4.5 to 5 crore eggs daily to meet the demand of 4-4.5 crore, but the production has now dropped to 3 to 3.5 crore due to floods in different egg-producing areas.

Masud Karim, director general of the DAM, said that egg prices were fixed after discussions with different stakeholders last month.

Some wholesalers have ceased buying and selling eggs, which is unfortunate, he said.

He urged the traders to resume their normal activities.

Atia Sultana, deputy director of the DNCRP, said that they were monitoring the wholesalers who have closed their businesses.

"That is why we have called a meeting tomorrow [today] with traders to stabilise the egg prices and ensure a normal supply," she said.