

One lakh Rohingya refugees on draft voter list!

MUAZZEM HOSSAIN SHAKIL, Cox's Bazar

Around one lakh Rohingya refugees have been included in the draft voter list in six upazilas of Cox's Bazar district, leaders of different political parties and locals claimed.

This correspondent talked to officials of the district administration, Election Commission and refugee repatriation commission about the allegation. They gave to understand that a 'large number' of Rohingya refugees have been enrolled in the draft voter list. EC officials said they are checking the lists and have, by now, dropped names of many refugees.

District Additional Election Officer S M Shahadat Hossain admitted that many refugees could be included as voters. Names of around 20,000 Rohingyas have been dropped and scrutiny is going on, he said.

Md. Shoaibur Rahman, Joint Secretary of Relief and Refugee Repatriation Commission did not rule out the possibility of about one lakh refugees having been included in the draft voter list.

"There are at least 3,00,000 Rohingyas living illegally in deferent areas of Cox's Bazar district. I believe

that about one lakh of them have been recorded in the draft voter list", he told this correspondent on Saturday.

District administration officials said, they prepared a list of 50,525 Rohingya refugees in July last year. The actual number would be much more as the refugees mix with the local people. Many more Rohingyas might have crossed the border in one year. It is difficult to identify them. It is likely that they have been included in the voter list at the behest of local political leaders, they said.

Teknaf Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Mohammed Mohsin Chowdhury said Teknaf and Ukhiya upazilas are more vulnerable in this regard as these are close to Myanmar border.

Mohsin said a 10-member committee headed by land administration official Kazi Mohammed Hassan has been formed to find out names of Rohingyas in the draft voter list.

Sources claimed that at least 70,000 Rohingya refugees have been included in Teknaf, Ukhiya and Ramu upazilas. The number of fake female voters is more than that of males, they said.

In Chakoria, Moheshkhali and Cox's Bazar Sadar, the number of

Rohingya refugees in the draft voter list would be more than 13,000, they claimed. Investigation by this correspondent showed that the number of voters increased significantly in the constituency of a state minister hailing from the area.

District Awami League General Secretary Shalauddin Ahamed CIP alleged that over 50,000 supporters of his party were not included in the draft voter list.

Zafar Alam, Chairman of Chakoria municipality and Abdur Rahaman Bodi, Chairman of Teknaf municipality alleged that BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami leaders influenced enumerators to enroll a large number of Rohingyas.

Teknaf upazila BNP president Mostaque Ahmed Chowdhury said a small number of Rohingyas could be enrolled in the voter list. The number would not be so big as claimed by opposition leaders, he said.

Moheshkhali upazila Awami League president Anwar Pasha alleged that a large number of Rohingyas were listed and that about 20,000 Awami League supporters were dropped from the draft voter list.

He also named a few Rohingyas enrolled in the voter list as Noor

Mohammed (voter no. 0347), Ali Ullah, (no. 0348), Ziaur Rahman (no. 0349), Nurul Amin (no. 0350), Mohammed Taher (no. 0351), Mohammed Idris (no. 0352) and Shajeda Begum (no. 0337). He said he has lodged a complaint with the local election officer.

Talking to this correspondent, Asrafa Yusuf, wife of Mohamed Yusuf in Ukhiya, alleged that none of her family members was listed in the voter list though they filed in registration forms.

Rafiqul Islam, general secretary of Ukiya Press Club, also said none of his family members was listed in the voter list.

Helenaz Tahera, commissioner of Cox's Bazar Pourshabha said she collected voter registration forms yesterday, as many of his relatives were not enlisted in the voter list.

District Additional Election Officer SM Shahadat Hossain said 1,79,880 new voters were enlisted in Cox's Bazar district this time, raising the total to 12,08,279 against 10,28,399 in the list prepared in 2001.



Children offering flowers to their mothers at a function held at North South School in Brahmanbaria to mark the International Mother's Day yesterday. The local Daily Star Readers Club and Save the Society to Introduce Tomorrow (SSIT), jointly organised the function.

At long last they learn Bangla

Urdu-speaking people in Saidpur send their wards to Bangla medium schools

EAM ASADUZZAMAN, Nilphamari

A band of youths in Saidpur town ahas initiated a pre-schooling programme for poor children of Urdu speaking families. They teach Bangla language so that the kids can be enrolled in local schools.

Usually, most of the children of such families can not avail education because of language barrier and become involved in petty crimes and anti-social activities from tender age.

Besides preparing children for education, the initiative by the youths keeps them away from crimes, thereby contributing to improvement in law and order, people said.

The voluntary programme is run under the banner of a socio-cultural organisation, Satirtho, without any help from government or any NGO.

Mother tongue of majority of the population of Saidpur town is Urdu. They are Biharis, who migrated from India after partition of the sub-continent in 1947.

Starting in August 2004, Satirtho now runs two pre-schooling centres and has opened a library, from where Urdu speaking boys and girls get books in Bangla for free.

Every day, in the afternoon, poor Bihari children come to the centres. They are provided with Bangla text books and other materials for free. About 100 children attend classes in a shift. So far, over 500 children who availed the pre-schooling facility have been enrolled in different primary schools in the town, said Satirtha secretary Abdul Malek.

It also runs a cultural organisation styled Satirtho Shahitya O Sangskritik Sangathan.

Satirtha's efforts got appreciation from local people. The BBC Bangla service also broadcast a



Members of Satirtha Sahitya Sanskritik Sangathan teaching Bangla to Urdu-speaking children in Saidpur.

report on their social services. Like many others, Babba, Zahid, Sabir, Shakila are now students of a Bangla medium primary school after pre-schooling at the Satirtha centre. They said they do not face any problem in reading and writing Bangla at school.

Talking to this correspondent, Urdu speaking Garib Mohammad said his parents did not allow him

education at any Bangla medium school, thinking that they would repatriate to Pakistan. "This was a mistake. I will sent my children to primary school after completion of the language course in Shatirtho".

The ruling party lawmaker from Saidpur Amzad Hossen Sarkar remarked that Shatirtho members are helping to create a society with moral value.

Shatirtho president Narziz Banu, a teacher of Saidpur College, said she is associated with this organisation out of her affection to its students. They are doing a commendable job, she said.

Its activities will be expanded to cover more Urdu speaking children, said its secretary Abdul Malek.

2 Rab men hurt in fight with drug peddlers in Dinajpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Two members of Rab (Rapid Action Battalion) and an alleged drug peddler were injured in a clash at Sadipur village in Dinajpur Sadar upazila Saturday night.

The injured are Md Yusuf and Akbar Ali of Rab Battalion-5 and alleged drug peddler Md. Mossarrif Hossain, 45, son of Abdul Goni of the village.

RAB sources said that acting on tip-off, a Rab team led by Md. Md. Yusuf Ali raided the Bangachhi Madrasa in the village to nab drug peddlers. Sensing the raid, the drug peddlers swooped on the Rab personnel with sharp weapons, injuring two Rab members.

The Rab team fired two shots, injuring Mossarrif Hossain.

The three are being treated at Dinajpur Medical College Hospital. Doctors there said the condition of Yunus and Akbar are critical due to multiple stab injuries but they are out of danger.

Road march for reopening tea gardens

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal (BSD) yesterday started as 'road march' from Juri Bazar to Srimangal to press reopening of all closed tea gardens in the country including the Rutna Tea Garden.

The march, participated several hundred tea garden workers, started in the morning after a brief rally at Juri Bazar, addressed by BSD convener Khalqujjaman.

The marchers reached Moulvibazar town in the evening, where a rally was held. They will reach Srimangal at about 9pm (Sunday).

During march, BSD leaders also addressed roadside gatherings at Kultura, Brahmin Bazar, Tengra Bazar, Giasnagar Bazar and Bhairab Bazar.

Central leaders of BSD including Abdullah Sarker also took part in the march.

AL cancels programme as BNP calls meeting at same venue

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

Shivalya Upazila Awami League (AL) yesterday cancelled a scheduled party meeting as BNP called another meeting at Teota Satghar here at the same time.

AL called the meeting a week ago where BNP lawmaker Shamsuddin Ahmed who joined AL recently was supposed to be present as chief guest while district AL president Golam Mohiuddin was supposed to be present as special guest.

Shivalya police asked both the party leaders to abstain themselves from holding the meetings.

Playing the role of torchbearer

Dishari makes distressed women self-reliant

SHEIKH SHAHIDUL ISLAM, B'baria

Khandura Dishari Mahila Unnayan Sagnata is true to its name. It is showing distressed and divorced women the path to self-reliance and honourable living.

Dishari is a Bangla word which means someone who shows the way.

Launched in 2003 at a remote

village in Nasirnagar upazila by a handful of illiterate poor women, it now draws attention of local elite and officials for its service to the distressed women and creating awareness among them.

Alongside training distressed and divorced women in various crafts to help them become self-reliant, it also performs social responsibilities. In last three years, it

has arranged 10 marriages without dowry and reunited 12 couples who had fallen apart after family feud.

Most of its members are divorcees but they are now self-reliant.

It has trained over 200 women in different crafts like sewing, making fashionable garments and dolls. Their products are sold to wholesale buyers who now come to the village from different areas of the district. After training, Dishari supplies raw materials and buys back the products. The women members make the items at home.

Parbati of Khandura village is one of the members. She was betrayed by her husband Parindra who married another woman.

Later, the couple was reunited following an arbitration by Dishari leaders Nasirnagar thana officer-in-Charge and village elders.

Now, Parbati earns by making garments and adds to her poor husband's income and they are happy, she told this correspondent during a visit to the village.

One Hena Begum had married Safique Mia in 2004. After marriage, Safique tried to engage her wife as a sex worker. She left her husband and filed a petition to the authorities with the help of Dishari.

Now Hena is self-reliant and also supports her parents by sewing clothes, also supporting her parents by sewing clothes.

Talking to this correspondent, Dishari president Begum Ayesha Bulbul said their campaign has created awareness among rural people, particularly women.



Some members of Dishari Mohila Unnayan Sangstha making garments at the association office.

Agitation mounts for pipeline gas to S-W dists

Road barricade, sit-in planned

AMANUR AMAN, Kushtia

Agitation for pipeline gas supply to south-western districts is mounting as several committees formed in the region are holding programmes including meetings and seminars to press the demand.

The agitation mounted after the ECNEC (Executive Committee of the National Economic Council) dropped the Bheramara-Khulna gas pipeline project at its meeting last month. The project, one of five in the country involving Tk 4307 crore expenditure, was proposed by the Petroleum and Mineral Resources Ministry, sources said.

The newly formed Gas Link Implementation Committee (GLIC) in Kushtia at its meeting in the town on Saturday took up programmes including formation of human chain, submission memorandum to the Prime Minister, road barricade, collecting mass signature and sit-in programmes to realise the demand.

The meeting was presided over by GLIC Convener Mozibar Rahman, an eminent industrialist and president of Kushtia Chamber's of Commerce and Industry (KCII).

The committee also held several meetings in the town in last few days, which were attended by industrialists, professionals and cross-sections of people.

A team led by Mozibar Rahman also met with the Advisor for Petroleum and Mineral Resources Ministry recently to press the demand.

Speakers at Saturday's GLIC meeting said o Khulna, Jessore, Chuadanga and Kushtia are prospective districts for setting up industries because of their geographical location and good road links with rest of the country.

In Kushtia, there are at least 20 industries in the BSCIC (Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation) estate producing world class commodities including cable wires.

Products of BRB Cable are earning foreign exchange. But all there are dependent on power supply, which disrupts production due to load shedding, they said.

According to Power development Board (PDB), the districts needs 320 mw power daily but get 200 to 230 mw.

HuJi leader Sufian arrested in Magura

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Magura

Police arrested a top trainer of banned militant Islamist outfit Harkat-ul-Jihad (HuJi), Abu Sufian, 47, from his Khamarpara village home in Sreepur upazila in Magura district Saturday night.

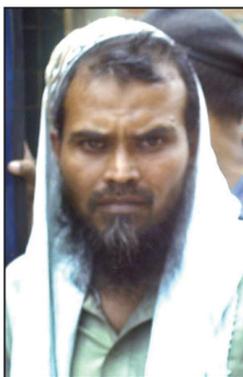
He was a close associate of HuJi chief Mufti Abdul Hannan, police and intelligence sources said.

Abu Sufian was sent to a madrasa in Faridpur district to study Islamic theology. There he joined militant groups and went to Afghanistan to fight Soviet soldiers as a Mujahid, according to intelligence sources.

Sufian was hit with bullets in the head and knee while fighting in Afghanistan, sources said. Villagers in Khamarpara are also aware of his activities as a 'mujahid' in Afghanistan.

"On several occasions I heard stories about Afghan war from Sufian. It was exciting when he used to narrate how he faced Soviet soldiers", a villager told this correspondent seeking anonymity.

Intelligence sources said Sufian was arrested along with 39 other militants on December 17, 1999 by army when he was training militants at a camp in a jungle in Rangamati. He was released on bail following an order from



Abu Sufian

higher court.

He was again arrested by BDR (Bangladesh Rifles) when he tried to cross the border illegally to go to Afghanistan after US soldiers attacked Afghanistan. This time he also managed to get released, sources said.

Sufian was seen in the area before the August 17 bomb blasts across the country last year. He was absconding since the blasts, police said.

Advocate Kalidas Boral, senior Vice President of Bagerhat district BNP, was gunned down on the morning of August 20 in 2000 in Bagerhat town.

38 Bagerhat BNP leaders, workers resign in protest

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Thirty-eight BNP leaders and workers including its president and general secretary in Ward no 19 in Bagerhat have resigned in protest against joining of two chargesheeted accused in Awami League leader Kalidas Boral murder case in the party.

They submitted their resignation letters yesterday to president of Bagerhat district BNP and lawmaker MAH Selim.

The two chargesheeted accused who joined BNP on Tuesday last at Chitalmari upazila are Jewel Shikder and Bablu Kazi, who are alleged operatives of an underground party, sources claimed.

The two chargesheeted accused Jewel Shikder and Bablu Kazi also threatened with death Ashoke Kumar Boral, elder brother of Slain Kalidas Boral. Ashoke Boral filed a general diary with Bagerhat Sadar thana on Saturday soon after getting the death threat.

2 vital Brahmaputra projects ignored

AMINUL ISLAM, Mymensingh

Once mighty Brahmaputra, which was a lifeline for people of Mymensingh and Jamalpur districts, is virtually dead now due to deposit of silt and garbage.

Bringing the river back to life can provide irrigation to about 30 lakh acres of land in greater Mymensingh to produce additional crops worth about Tk 100 crore at negligible cost and make another 20 lakh acres flood-free, Water Development Board (WDB) officials here said.

Two projects—Old Brahmaputra Irrigation Projects and North-

Mymensingh Irrigation Project are gathering dust for over two decades, they said.

Greater Mymensingh can be made flood-free if the North-Brahmaputra Irrigation Project is implemented, they said.

Dredging of any portion of the river was not done in the last two decades, allowing massive deposit of silt, dumping of garbage and emergence of numerous shoals, they said.

Several hundred river ports and trade centers along the 297 kilometre river are now silted.

The river has silted up completely at Kushtia, Ashtadhar,

Bidyaganj, Bygonebari, Boror Char, Char Sirta, Char Iswardia and at many other points in Mymensingh Sadar and Gafarganga upazilas. At many points, people cross the river on foot in dry season.

It has another face also. The silted river can no more retain the flow of water rolling down the hill across the border, triggering devastating floods and washing away habitats and crops on both sides. Thousands of people are made homeless in Mymensingh and Jamalpur every year due to floods and erosion.