

DEPORTATION OF BANGLADESHI STUDENT

Visva Bharati teachers, students offer legal aid

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Delhi

A section of teachers and students of Visva Bharati University has offered legal assistance to the Bangladeshi student who was asked to leave India for her alleged involvement in "anti-government activities".

Afsara Anika Meem, 20, a first-year student of design at the university's fine arts department, was served a "Leave India Notice" by Kolkata-based Foreigners' Regional Registration Office (FRRO).

Meem on Wednesday received the notice that was dated February 14, said one of her friends.

A Calcutta High Court lawyer on Friday said Meem's friends approached him to take up the case.

"I had a conversation with Meem on Thursday after some of her friends called me up and handed over the phone to her. But nothing has been finalised yet. It is her decision," the lawyer said, requesting anonymity.

A leader of the Students' Federation of India (SFI), the frontal wing of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), said two leading lawyers of the high court had agreed to take up the case of Meem, who has been subjected to "gross injustice".

It is understood that one of the

leading lawyers is a former mayor of Kolkata and a prominent CPI(M) leader.

Hailing from Kushtia, Meem enrolled at the university in 2018.

The notice said, "... She is found to have engaged in anti-government activities. And such activity being a breach of her visa, has thus, committed visa violation.... The foreigner shall not remain in India, shall depart from India within 15 days of receipt of this order."

It, however, did not specify the nature of the "anti-India activities" she was involved in.

Meem allegedly shared some posts related to the protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act on her Facebook account, an SFI member said.

The SFI claimed that Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), the students' wing of the right-wing Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, had complained against Meem to Visva Bharati authorities. The ABVP, however, has dismissed the charge.

"We have always maintained that foreign nationals studying in India should not interfere in the affairs of this country. But, we have never singled out Meem," Shyamasree Karmakar of ABVP said.

Crisis brews as Mahathir

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Ex-interior minister Muhyiddin Yassin was earlier named for the job by the monarch, who appoints the country's premiers after deciding who has backing from MPs, signalling a defeat for Mahathir and the return of a scandal-plagued party to power.

It capped a week of turmoil that began when Mahathir's "Pact of Hope" alliance collapsed and he resigned as prime minister following a bid by his rivals to form a new government and push out leader-in-waiting Anwar Ibrahim.

Their alliance stormed to a historic victory in 2018 that broke the six-decade stranglehold on power of a corruption-riddled coalition, but it was riven by infighting over who should succeed the world's oldest leader.

The victory of Muhyiddin and his coalition, which is dominated by the country's ethnic Malay Muslim majority, was a shock as Mahathir had appeared to be in the lead, and it sparked widespread public anger.

Not only does the win remove a democratically elected government but it also signals the return to power of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), the scandal-plagued party of disgraced ex-leader Najib Razak.

UMNO was the lynchpin of a long-ruling coalition toppled from power at historic elections two years ago amid allegations Najib and his cronies looted state fund 1MDB. Najib is now on trial for corruption.

The coalition also includes a hardline Muslim party pushing for tougher Islamic laws in Malaysia.

Addressing supporters outside his Kuala Lumpur house, Muhyiddin said: "I urge all Malaysians to take the decision that has been made by the palace today well."

The palace earlier said the king believed Muhyiddin had enough support and he would be sworn in Sunday.

'NOT MY PM' But after meeting his political allies, Mahathir said he had received the backing of 114 MPs to be prime minister -- above the required number of 112 -- and released a statement listing their names.

Mahathir said he would send a letter to the king explaining this, and added the number of MPs that Muhyiddin claimed to have supporting him was "not accurate".

Anger was growing at the surprise decision to name Muhyiddin premier and allow UMNO back into power. The hashtag NotMyPM was trending on Twitter, and a small group of protesters gathered in downtown Kuala Lumpur.

"These are not the people we voted for," one protester, who only gave her surname Soon, told AFP, as chants of "long live the people, rise up" rang out. "These are not the people who were given the democratic mandate two years ago."

The political crisis began when a group of ruling coalition lawmakers joined forces with opposition parties in a bid to form a new government without Anwar and stop him becoming premier.

After the government fell, Mahathir was appointed interim premier and he and Anwar initially launched separate bids for power, reviving their old rivalry.

But as Muhyiddin's bid quickly gained support and it became clear that he could get into power with UMNO, Mahathir and Anwar did a volte-face and joined forces again yesterday.

WHO issues highest alert

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with South Korea, Italy and Iran emerging as major hotspots.

South Korea has the most cases outside China, with 3,150 infections as 813 more patients were reported yesterday -- the country's biggest increase to date. Three women in the Daegu area died of the illness yesterday, taking the national toll to 17.

The virus has also spread to new zones in recent days, reaching 10 new countries including Qatar, Azerbaijan, Mexico and New Zealand, as well as reaching sub-Saharan Africa with Nigeria reporting its first case.

"We have now increased our assessment of the risk of spread and the risk of impact of COVID-19 to very high at global level," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told reporters on Friday.

European nations are scrambling to contain the outbreak as new infections mounted in several countries -- many linked to virus hotspot northern Italy -- including in France where a surge of new cases was confirmed yesterday.

President Emmanuel Macron yesterday chaired a ministers' meeting on curbing the outbreak, after officials warned the epidemic had reached a "new stage".

Meanwhile in the US, health officials reported three more cases of the new coronavirus transmitted to people who did not travel overseas or come in contact with anyone known to be ill, indicating the disease was spreading in the country.

There are now four such cases in the United States, all on the Pacific seaboard, in addition to some 60 other infections in the country.

"The virus is here, present at some level, but we still don't know to what degree," said Sara Cody, director of public health for California's Santa Clara County, the heart of Silicon Valley where tech giants like Apple and Google are based.

Official data released in China yesterday showed the extent of the damage caused to the world's second-largest economy, with manufacturing activity falling to its lowest level on

record as key industries ground to a standstill under drastic containment measures.

More global events were disrupted due to the epidemic, with the United States delaying a regional summit of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations due in Las Vegas next month.

"This is not a time for panic. It is time to be prepared -- fully prepared," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said.

While China reported 47 more deaths yesterday, it recorded 427 infections -- fewer new cases than South Korea -- following unprecedented quarantine efforts locking down tens of millions of people in the worst-hit cities.

In Iran, unnamed health sources told the BBC that at least 210 people had died of the coronavirus -- far beyond the official death toll, but Tehran angrily denied that figure.

The official death toll in Iran jumped to 43, a health official told state TV yesterday, adding that the number of infected people across the country has reached 593.

Meanwhile, an Indian official yesterday said all the 112 people, including 23 from Bangladesh, who are housed at a quarantine facility in New Delhi after being evacuated from Wuhan in China, have tested negative for coronavirus.

"The samples of all the 112 people were sent to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences here and the reports are negative. The quarantine period will continue for about a fortnight," our New Delhi correspondent reported quoting a spokesperson for the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP).

Seventy six Indians and 36 foreigners were taken to the ITBP force quarantine centre in Chhawla area of south Delhi on February 27 after they were flown in from Wuhan city on an Indian Air Force transport plane.

"The second samples of the inmates will be taken on the fourteenth day of the quarantine period and all those whose results are negative will be released from the ITBP centre," the spokesperson said.



A wrecked bus is being towed away hours after it fell into a roadside ditch around 7:00am yesterday. At least three people were killed and 15 others injured in the crash.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

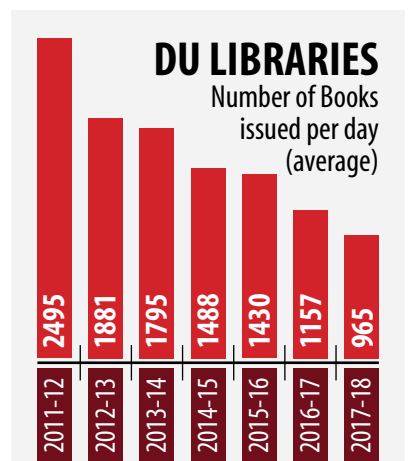
Academic books on shelves

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Dhaka, a report on the trends at Rajshahi University, published last year, revealed that only 9.25 percent of students read printed books from the central library on the campus. On the other hand, all the students, who took part in the survey, said they read e-books, according to the researchers.

In January, The Daily Star visited nine libraries in Dhaka to collect attendance numbers and information on the library uses. Those include DU's central and science libraries, the Sufia Kamal National Public Library, two libraries at Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS), Granthabitan, Gyantapas Abdur Razzaq Bidyapeeth, Armanitola Public Library and Biswa Sahitya Kendra.

Information collected by this newspaper suggests at least 97 percent of library users bring note guides with them to study at those libraries -- with the rest studying library books, reading



newspapers or magazines, or using the internet.

This correspondent found mainly students bringing their own materials, using these libraries as a space to read rather than as a source of books. The library books themselves were covered in dust and many were in tatters, due to a lack of maintenance.

Out of 1,395 total readers present in those libraries when The Daily Star visited, 1,355 were studying from or reading BCS and other job-related books and guide-books.

Nineteen people were reading newspapers or magazines, or browsing the internet. Only 21 users were reading library books.

Biswa Sahitya Kendra was a rare exception, with none of the readers there bringing in any book from outside, as observed by this correspondent.

Library users this correspondent spoke to cited various reasons why they no longer peruse library books

LIBRARY	No. of library users present	Number of library book readers/news-papers or magazines/ internet users	No. of job-related book readers
Sufia Kamal National Public Library	550	2	548
Central Library, DU	288	9	279
Science Library, DU	400	5	395
BANBEIS -1	64	0	64
BANBEIS -2	32	0	32
Granthabitan	35	2	33
Gyantapas Abdur Razzaq Bidyapeeth	6	5	1
Armanitola Public Library	10	7	3
Biswa Sahitya Kendra	10	10	0
TOTAL	1,395	40	1,355

-- government jobs are increasingly lucrative and students spend a lot of time at libraries preparing for the BCS exams, library books are often outdated, e-books and journals are easily available on online platforms, greater time spent on social media, and limited leisure time.

THEY EYE GOVT JOB On a weekday morning, this correspondent found around 400 students at the DU Science Library. Only five were studying for their classes, whereas the rest were preparing for competitive job exams, having brought their own books.

The teachers' room in the library was seen to be completely empty.

"It's not possible to study uninterrupted at rooms inside the residential halls, so I come here every morning and go to class from here," said Partha Sutradhar, a third-year student of mathematics department, one of the few students using the academic resources available at the library.

Elias Shaon, a student who already graduated in biochemistry and was preparing for BCS job, said, "I only took a book from this library when I was first-year student."

Humayun Kabir Masud, a student of molecular biology, echoed his statement.

The DU library books are too old, Elias said, "No new books are available here."

According to article 27 (1) of the DU Library Use Policy, a student cannot bring books from outside the library. However, this rule has been relaxed since 2009, following protests by the students, said University Librarian Prof

Nasiruddin Munshi.

Sufia Kamal National Public Library was found to be crowded with students around noon the same day. The library had a seating capacity for 550 -- all the tables were occupied by BCS job seekers, studying. Two students were even sitting on the floor.

At Granthabitan, a private library established in 1952 in Old Dhaka's Lalbagh, only two out of 35 students were reading library books on a weekday afternoon.

In the two libraries at the Bangladesh Bureau of Education Information and Statistics (BANBEIS) office in Palashi area, around 100 people present on a weekday afternoon were all studying job-related books.

Prottoy Biswash, a student of English at Dhaka College, was the only one studying from a guide-book at Gyantapas Abdur Razzaq Bidyapeeth, a recently established private library in Dhanmondi.

"Books cannot be brought here from outside. So we separate sections of our books and bring them in as sheets, so that we can study them here," he said.

Talking to The Daily Star on the issue, DU Professor Emeritus Serajul Islam Choudhury said, "This state of libraries shows that the utility and value of knowledge is diminishing among people and life is becoming job and livelihood-centric."

He said that this indicates people are becoming self-centred, busy with using technology, and not developing socially.

"If we want to draw lots of students there [in libraries], we should transfer libraries into socio-cultural institutions," he added.

Aviation flies into turbulence

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Singapore, South Korea, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, UK, US and Vietnam are among the countries which have reported coronavirus cases.

Meanwhile, the aviation sector has been receiving a blow across the world. The global airline industry body -- International Air Transport Association (IATA) -- has warned that airlines stand to lose \$29.3bn in revenue this year due to the coronavirus outbreak.

IATA predicts demand for air travel would fall for the first time in more than a decade, reports BBC.

Airlines in China and other parts of the Asia Pacific region are expected to take the vast majority of the impact, according to global media reports.

Airlines across the world have cut hundreds of thousands of flights because of coronavirus travel restrictions. Carriers are also waiving change and cancellation fees for some routes because of the virus.

The rapid spread of the new coronavirus is testing airlines and other travel companies with a risk that had been nearly unthinkable over the past decade: a broad decline in travel demand, said American business news channel CNBC.

On Thursday, the Global Business Travel Association warned that the virus could cost the travel industry close to \$560 billion this year in revenue.

Talking about the IATA report, Biman and ATAB officials said the aviation industry in Bangladesh was also bracing for a serious global impact. They feared the industry could be hit the hardest in its history, if the situation did not change.

On Saudi's temporary ban on Umrah, Hajj Agencies Association of Bangladesh President M Shahadat Hossain Taslim said around 10,000

Bangladeshis, who already got the visas, might not perform the Islamic pilgrimage to Makkah, given the current situation over coronavirus.

According to sources at the airport in Dhaka, around 72 lakh passengers flew from the HSA in 2018, meaning that around 20,000 passengers travelled from the airport every day.

The number increased last year, but went down significantly since January this year in the face of coronavirus outbreak.

Around 6,500 passengers travelled through the airport last month, said the sources.

According to CAAB, a total of around 28 airlines are operating flights from the HSA, but with low number of passengers, several airlines have cut off the number of flights.

Senior Secretary of the Civil Aviation and Tourism Ministry Mohibul Haque said, "The number of air passengers has fallen due to fear over coronavirus and this is happening to all airlines operating in Bangladesh."

He hoped that the situation would improve soon.

Meanwhile, Taufiq Rahman, founder chief executive of Journey Plus, a tour operator, said the number of foreign tourists from different countries has dropped significantly in recent months, posing an ominous sign for the tourism industry in Bangladesh.

He said, "A tourism crisis management team is a must to tackle a sudden situation like this. The team will give guidelines to the industry stakeholders."

Mohibul said they would write to the tourism ministry to take necessary measures in this regard to spread the message that Bangladesh is safe for tourism.

Mugging attempt claims woman's life in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A woman died after falling off a rickshaw when a group of muggers attempted to snatch her bag in the capital's Mugda area yesterday morning.

The victim, Tarina Begum Lipi, 38, was from Sylhet's Sadar upazila. She along with her family members came to Dhaka on February 24 to visit relatives in South Rajarbagh, police and relatives said.

The incident happened around 5:30am when Lipi and her family members were going to Kamalapur Railway Station to catch a train to Sylhet, said Proloy Kumar Saha, officer-in-charge of Mugda Police Station.

Lipi was on the rickshaw with her elder son Shahriar Rinki, 15, while her husband Golam Kibria and their daughter Tamisa Binte Kibria, 6, were on another one behind.

"When the rickshaw was crossing Mugda stadium, a mugger from inside a white car pulled Lipi's bag so hard that she fell on the road and suffered a head injury," OC Proloy said, quoting a police team patrolling nearby the scene.

She was taken to Mugda General Hospital before being transferred to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where she passed away around 6:45am, the OC added.

Police said they have launched drives to arrest the muggers.

'Robber' killed in 'gunfight'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

A suspected robber was killed in a "gunfight" with police in Sadar upazila of Moulvibazar early yesterday.

The dead, Bulu Mia, 45, was a resident of Sylhet's Osmani Nagar and used to run a notorious robber gang, claimed police.

Alamgir Hossain, officer-in-charge of Moulvibazar Model Police Station, said a police team led by Ziaur Rahman, additional superintendent of Moulvibazar (Sadar circle) police, conducted an operation in Kamalalash area on information that 10 to 12 robbers had attacked a house.

Sensing police presence, the criminals opened fire on them, forcing the law enforcers to retaliate.

Bulu sustained bullet injuries and died on the spot around 4:00am, he added.

Tigers face

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significance although the focus has been on Bangladesh captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, who will return to the national fold after playing his last ODI against Pakistan in the 2019 World Cup at Lord's.

Speculation over Mashrafe's international future has reached new heights recently and circumstances hint that this could be his last series as ODI captain.

Things have soured for the Tigers in the 50-over format after their eighth-placed finish in the World Cup was followed by a 3-0 whitewash at the hands of Sri Lanka in August last year.

However, major changes to the coaching staff, including the appointment of head coach Russell Domingo, means a lot has changed for Bangladesh since then, with the squad against Zimbabwe featuring at least seven changes to the team from their previous ODI.

"Performance is important for all players and it's the same with me. But more important is the that the team wins. We have not won a game in the past three or four ODIs. So, it is important for the team to win," Mashrafe told reporters yesterday.

Domingo will surely be looking to test a few fresh faces in the series with the long-term plan in mind and young left-handed opener Mohammad Naim is a player that may be handed an ODI debut as an opener alongside Tamim Iqbal.

The focus will also be on the experienced Mushfiqur Rahim, who is coming into the series with a record double century in the one-off Test against the same opposition last week.

With an intention to have sporting pitches, Bangladesh are likely to form a pace-heavy line-up.

It was learned that the team management may opt for three specialist pacers with skipper Mashrafe, Mustafizur Rahman and Shafiqul Islam alongside seaming all-rounder Mohammad Saifuddin, who will be making a return from injury as the fourth pacer.

On the other hand, the visitors will be looking to break their seven-year-long losing streak against the Tigers in the format, having lost their past 13 games on the trot.

Zimbabwe's newly-appointed limited overs captain Chamu Chibhabha claimed that playing a lot of cricket in and against Bangladesh over the past years would be an advantage for the visitors. The likes of Sikandar Raza, Brendan Taylor, Craig Ervine and Sean Williams will provide experience in the batting line-up.

The SICCS, which is undoubtedly the most scenic stadium in Bangladesh, will host a full series for the first time, with all three ODIs in the north-eastern city.