

Free all detained returnees

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embassy arranged their repatriation. After returning home, they were put into quarantine for 14 days and then were shown arrested under Section 54.

Police said the arrestees were “convicted or sentenced to different terms for their involvement in criminal activities abroad.”

The law enforcers said their sentences were commuted and they were sent back to Bangladesh when the coronavirus outbreak surged worldwide.

Police also said after returning to Bangladesh, they allegedly divided into groups while in quarantine and were planning subversive activities against the government.

“If these returnees are released, they can engage in various crimes, including robbery, family violence, killing and militancy,” police said.

Surprisingly, the same allegations were made earlier when 219 migrant workers from Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain were jailed. Both the groups of returnees were arrested under Section 54.

In the statement, the 44 eminent citizens strongly condemned the case and arrest.

“Such acts by the state are disrespect to the international and national laws and are a matter of serious concerns.

“We got to learn that none of the returnee migrants from Vietnam was convicted or sent to jail,” said the statement, adding that they also learned that the Bangladesh embassy in Vietnam did not take timely actions to address the complaints of the migrant workers.

The language of the police report in regard to the arrest of 219 migrants on July 4 also was the same, said the statement and added that a person cannot be punished more than once for a crime.

“It is not understandable for us how the returnees tarnished the country’s image after returning from the jails abroad and by holding meetings during the quarantine,” it said.

At the same time, arresting under Section 54 without arrest warrant contradicts the fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution.

The High Court has clear instructions for police, magistrates and tribunals about starting criminal proceedings against a person.

“We think arrests of migrants in two incidents are violations of the important High Court instructions,” the citizens and rights activists said.

They demanded compensating the migrants for the losses caused to them.

The statement was signed among others by Prof Emeritus Serajul Islam Choudhury, Dr Zafrullah Chowdhury of Gonoshastya Kendra, Prof Anu Muhammad of Jahangirnagar University, jurist Shahdeen Malik, Prof Parveen Hasan of Central Women’s University, Prof Ali Riaz of Illinois State University, Prof Golam Mostafa of Chittagong University, Prof CR Abrar of Dhaka University, Prof Swapan Adnan of London University and photojournalist and writer Shahidul Alam.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Civil Society for Migrants, a civil society network of organisations working on migration, said such arrests on unfounded allegations are violations of human rights.

“We demand an impartial investigation into this incident. All concerned persons and organisations including sub-agents, licensed recruiting agents and others must be brought under investigation,” it said.

It also urged the foreign ministry and the expatriates’ welfare ministry for immediate measures.

The signatories to the statement, among others, include Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit, WARBE Development Foundation, BRAC, Ain o Salish Kendra, Manusher Jonno Foundation, Bangladeshi Ovhibashi Mohila Sramik Association, BASUG and OKUP.

Vicious hammer attack on UNO

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unless the blood pressure, pulse, and level of consciousness improve.”

Wahida was attacked in her official residence, a duplex in the gated community of Upazila Parishad Complex, in Osmanpur area of Ghoraghat.

The officer, her three-year-old son and her father were on the first floor and a domestic help was on the ground floor, police officers said.

Wahida’s husband, who is the UNO of Pirganj upazila in Rangpur, was not at the scene.

The Upazila Parishad Complex has a boundary wall with three gates, two of which were found locked by police.

The UNO’s duplex is also on an enclosed land. There are barbed wire fences on top of its boundary walls.

There is a room for guards at the entrance gate, officers said, adding that the suspects entered into the premises using a ladder and locked the guard’s room from outside.

The suspects then used the ladder to break into the first floor of the building by removing a ventilator in the bathroom wall, they said.

They attackers then went to the UNO’s bedroom and hit her with a hammer.

Her father sleeping in the next room was woken up by the commotion and as he rushed to her room, one of the assailants hit him.

The attackers fled as the three-year-old boy started crying in panic, police said.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

Wahida Khanam, the upazila nirbahi officer of Dinajpur’s Ghoraghat upazila, being taken to Dhaka for treatment yesterday.

Many countries reject

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Khurram Parvez, chairperson of AFAD, noted that while denying requests for visits, these countries are also contesting elections to be seated at the UN Human Rights Council.

According to a report presented by the UN Working Group during the 42nd session of the Human Rights Council in September 2019, the Group had reiterated its request to visit Bangladesh, but the government is yet to respond favourably.

Bangladesh was elected member of HRC in 2018.

“Some governments are going back on the promises they have made. In Asia we have seen an aggravation of the situation. Victims are forgotten and families are waiting not knowing the fate of their loved ones,” said Prof Baik.

Brian Dooley, special advisor to the UNSpecial Rapporteur, said, “We’ve seen over the years it takes a lot of pressure internationally and nationally to get a real invitation issued. A rapporteur would make two country visits a year.

The alternative is weaker -- academic visits where special rapporteurs can go in, invited by a university.”

Adilur Rahman Khan, secretary of Odhikar Bangladesh added, “The whole of South Asia is in denial. The UN working group has wanted to visit but how many South Asian countries have allowed it?”

“It is a situation where everything is in a limbo. The wives are half-widows, the children cannot access resources. They move from door to door, from the offices of one agency to those of another,” he said.

Others who spoke included Ruth Llanos, president of The Association of Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared (Bolivia), Maria Adela Antokoletz, Mother’s Delegate Latin American Federation of Association for Relatives of the Detained-Disappeared (Argentina), Fatia Maulidiyanti executive coordinator of Kontras (Indonesia) and Nilda Lagman-Sevilla, co-chair of Families of Victims of Involuntary Disappearances (Philippines).



Hundreds of buses and other vehicles line the Shimulia ferry terminal in Munshiganj, where ferry services were suspended yesterday due to navigation problems. This photo was taken around 11:00am.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Fire fear still stalks old town

PROJECT NAME	LOCATION	INITIAL COST	REVISED COST	INITIAL AREA	REVISED AREA
BSCIC Chemical Industrial Park	Boalkhali, Shirajdikhan, Munshiganj	Tk 201.80 crore	Tk 1615.73 crore	50 acres	308 acres
BSCIC Printing Industries Estate	Baroborta, Sirajdikhan, Munshiganj	Tk 138.70 crore	Tk 345 crore (Proposed)	50 acres	42.21 acres (proposed)
BSCIC Plastic Industry Estate	Baroborta, Sirajdikhan, Munshiganj	133 crore	Tk 397.45 crore	50 acres	50 acres
Light Engineering Electrical Goods	Tungibari, Munshiganj	Tk 213 crore	Tk 309 crore	50 acres	50 acres

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this regard and directed the authorities concerned to take necessary steps to relocate this kind of go-downs promptly.

Accordingly, Dhaka South City Corporation stopped issuing new licences or renewing the old ones for any chemical shops or warehouses in Old Dhaka.

But chemical businesses in the old part of the city remained as it was before.

Although the traders claimed that they have relocated their go-downs to “safe locations”, they said they were unable to move their entire businesses elsewhere unless the government relocated them according to an MoU signed in 2017.

But a drive by Rab on August 17 at a warehouse inside a residential building in Tikatuli only justified experts’ fear that chemical go-downs that had previously been concentrated to a particular pocket in the old part of the city have now grown covering a bigger area.

“We found huge amounts of explosive chemicals which might cause a devastating fire anytime,” Rab Executive Magistrate Polish Kumar Bashu, who led the drive, told this newspaper on Wednesday.

He said there might be many warehouses in Dhaka like this one and that they were collecting information about them.

During a recent visit to some areas, including Mitford Road, Nimtoli, Chawkbazar, Armanitola, Babu Bazar, Islampur, Mohuthtuly and Chhurihatta last week, these correspondents found many chemical shops were being run and many buildings being used as chemical warehouses.

Md Ripon, who lost six of his family members in the Nimtoli tragedy, said they do not allow any warehouse in their area, but there are chemical warehouses nearby.

Selim, who runs a shop on Abul Hasnat Road, said there are many residential houses in the area where chemical products are stored and that those might cause a devastating fire.

Arif Hossain, general secretary of Bangladesh Chemical and Perfumery Merchants’ Association, said, “We will leave the area after getting a plot from the government. Otherwise, it is not possible for us to leave.”

He said there are around 2,000 shops in Old Dhaka which are doing chemical business.

Arif claimed that every chemical item is not explosive or flammable and those who are doing the business of the flammable items have arranged separate warehouses outside Dhaka.

He, however, did not deny that some traders might be secretly running warehouses in the old part of the city despite strict instructions from their organisation against it.

He urged the government to quickly implement the relocation plan in line with the MoU signed between BSCIC and the three organisations -- Bangladesh Chemical and Perfumery Merchants’ Association, Bangladesh Chemical Importers and Merchants’ Association, and Bangladesh Acid Merchants’ Association -- in 2017.

Prof Dr Syeda Sultana Razia, head of the chemical engineering department of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, said the failure of the authorities to relocate the chemical go-downs from the old town might cause another devastating fire.

“Nothing has changed in Old Dhaka,” she told The Daily Star.

The Buet professor also said apart from 35 chemicals identified as extremely hazardous or flammable, there were many more.

“The Department of Explosives prepared the list of hazardous chemicals which are explosive and flammable, but there are some chemicals which do not generate fire. However, those are toxic and if released through vapourisation can create serious problems and kill people,” said Prof Razia.

She said the authorities should have prioritised the relocation plan taking the risk into consideration.

The BSCIC as the implementing authority is constructing “Chemical Polli” for the three merchant associations and another three separate estates for plastic, printing and light electronic industry at different sites in Munshiganj, a neighbouring district of Dhaka.

STATUS OF CHEMICAL POLLI
The Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation Chemical Industrial Park at Boalkhali village in Munshiganj’s Sirajdikhan upazila is running behind schedule. The park will have around 2,000-2,500 plots on around 308 acres of land.

The cost of the project, which will have a central effluent treatment plant and incinerator, now stands at Tk 1,615.73 crore, said Project

Director Saiful Alam.

He hoped to get the possession of the land, for which BSCIC paid Tk 531 crore, from the district commissioner (DC) and start earth filling after the rainy season.

“We will be able to accommodate most of the shops and warehouses of the old town in line with MoU signed in 2017.”

About the delay, he said initially the project was going to be implemented on 50 acres of land, but now it has been expanded to 300 acres land for which it took around one year to complete the land acquisition work.

“We will be able to complete the project by June 2022,” he said.

The project, drafted in 2011, was supposed to be implemented on 20 acres of land. It was then extended to 50 acres at a cost of Tk 201.80 crore and was scheduled to be completed in June 2021, according to documents.

However, the latest completion date of the project might be pushed behind if fund allocation is delayed.

“We needed Tk 200 crore in the current fiscal year for earth filling and other works. But we have so far received only around Tk 60 crore. If we do not get funds timely, we will miss the schedule,” said Mohammad Ataur Rahman Siddique, director (engineering and implementing) of BSCIC.

PLASTIC
The progress of BSCIC Plastic Industry Estate Project has been very slow due to fund crisis.

Director Ataur of BSCIC said they did not get money for acquiring land for which they could not complete land acquisition.

He said 300 plastic factories on 50 acres of land could be relocated from old town under the project.

The Ecneec approved the project in July 2015 and the work was scheduled to be complete by June last year. The Ecneec then approved the revised budget on February 11 this year with an extended project cost of Tk 397.45 crore.

A BISIC official said they have got Tk 49 crore out of Tk 218 crore for land acquisition in the last fiscal year.

PRINTING
The BSCIC Printing Industries Estate Project, whose site is located between the two bridges over the Dhaleshwari in Munshiganj’s Sirajdikhan upazila, is now facing uncertainty due to complication in land acquisition, although the project was scheduled to be completed in December 2018.

The Ecneec passed the project worth Tk 138.70 core in January 2016.

A BSCIC official, preferring anonymity, said around Tk 78.61 crore out of Tk 79.14 crore for acquiring 43 acres of land for the project has been paid to the deputy commissioner’s office on different occasions.

Sources said a revised Development Project Proposal (DPP) of around Tk 345 crore was sent to the planning commission and

Vaccine group says 76 rich countries now committed to “Covax” access plan

REUTERS, London

Seventy-six wealthy nations are now committed to joining a global Covid-19 vaccine allocation plan co-led by the World Health Organization (WHO) that aims to help buy and fairly distribute the shots, the project’s co-lead said on Wednesday.

Seth Berkley, chief executive of the GAVI vaccines alliance, said the plan, known as Covax, now has Japan, Germany, Norway and more than 70 other nations signed up, agreeing in principle to procure Covid-19 vaccines through the facility for their populations.

“We have, as of right now, 76 upper middle income and high income countries that have submitted confirmations of intent to participate - and we expect that number to go up,” Berkley told Reuters in an interview.

the Project Evaluation Committee was waiting for Ecneec meeting.

LIGHT ELECTRONICS

The work of the Light Engineering Electric Goods project on 50 acres of land at a cost of Tk 213 crore is going on. The earth filling has already been completed, construction of boundary walls and some other works are going on, said BSCIC director Ataur.

He said the project in Tongibari upazila in Munshiganj is expected to be completed by June 2022 with a revised cost of around Tk 309 crore.

TEMPORARY PROJECTS

The government in August last year approved the Chemical Warehouse Project in Tongi to relocate 55 warehouses on six acres of land.

Bangladesh Steel and Engineering Corporation (BSEC) has been implementing the project. “We will complete the first phase of work to construct seven one-storey warehouse buildings by November this year,” said Project Director Maniruzzaman Khan.

However, a revised project proposal on spending Tk 170 crore to construct an eight-storey building to accommodate an additional 48 chemical warehouses is now waiting at the planning commission for approval.

Maniruzzaman said if they get the approval, they will be able to complete the revised project by June 2022.

SHAYMPUR

The construction work of another temporary project named “Go-down for Temporary Facilitating Chemicals Storage Project” at Dhaka’s Shayampur has been facing slow progress.

Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation is implementing the Tk 77.89 crore project on 6.17 acres of land. The project, scheduled to be completed in June 2020, was later extended by a year.

The project is aimed at facilitating 54 warehouses for traders doing businesses of extremely hazardous chemical.

Project Director Md Liakat Ali said the project implementation slowed down due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

Khaleda

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of the former prime minister sought a six months’ extension on the government order that released her for six months in March.

Her younger brother Shamim Iskandar recently applied to the home ministry seeking the extension. The ministry later forwarded the application to the law ministry seeking legal opinion.

Suspension of her sentence is scheduled to expire on September 24. Khaleda, who has been convicted in two corruption cases, was freed from prison on March 25 after she had spent there 776 days.

The government through an executive order released her for six months on conditions that she will stay home in the capital and not leave the country.

It suspended her sentence as per section 401 of the Criminal Code of Procedure on “humanitarian grounds”.

On the day of her being freed, Khaleda went to her home “Firoza” in Gulshan in her brother’s car directly from Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, where she was taking treatment for several months. She has been living in Firoza since then.

The 75-year-old former prime minister has been suffering from rheumatoid arthritis, diabetes, and ophthalmological and dental ailments, said her physicians.

The BNP chief landed in jail on February 8, 2018, after a special court sentenced her to five years in prison in the Zia Orphanage Trust corruption case. On October 30 that year, the High Court raised her punishment to 10 years in the case.

In the Zia Charitable Trust graft case on October 29, 2018, a court jailed Khaleda and three others for seven years.

Besides, she has been facing more than 30 cases on different charges and the cases are now at different stages.