

EC to prevent Rohingyas from being on voter roll

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission has identified 12 bordering upazilas in Cox's Bazar, Bandarban and Rangamati districts as "sensitive" and planned measures so that Rohingyas living there cannot get registered as voters.

Special teams will work in those upazilas to ensure no foreign nationals including the Rohingyas register to vote during the ongoing update of the electoral roll, Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmad told newsmen after a meeting at his office yesterday.

To be headed by upazila nirbahi officer, each team will have 12 members including officials from local government, intelligence agencies and the EC.

The 12 upazilas are Cox's Bazar Sadar, Chakoria, Teknaf, Ramu, Pekua, Ukhiya, Bandarban Sadar, Ali Kadam, Lama, Naikhongchhari, Balaichhari and Kaptai.

Prospective voters in these upazilas will have to fill in special voter forms for registration, the EC added.

If any information furnished appears dubious, field-level EC officials will send the forms in question to the special teams for verification.

There are allegations that many Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar and neighbouring areas had made it to the voter list in the past. They also managed to obtain Bangladeshi passports to go abroad.

In 1991, thousands of Rohingyas crossed into Bangladesh from Myanmar. In the second week of this month, Rohingyas again started fleeing their homes in the Myanmar state of Rakhine amid sectarian violence. The Bangladesh government this time has decided not to allow them in.

HR Watch

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force with sufficient expertise, authority and resources to rigorously investigate the allegations of offences committed during the mutiny and prosecute.

The HRW yesterday in a statement said the mass trial to date had shown numerous violations of the right to fair trial, especially the impossibility of lawyers to give proper advice and prepare for each individual.

On June 18, a mass trial in a military court led to the conviction of 611 of the 621 accused from the 13th battalion.

"Those responsible for killing 74 people during the February 2009 mutiny by the border guards should be held accountable -- but only in trials that meet international fair trial standards and the guarantees of the Bangladeshi constitution.

"The government should halt all trials for the horrific crimes committed in the mutiny until the system is changed to ensure that each accused receives a fair trial," said Brad Adams, Asia director at HRW.

On February 25-26, 2009, members of the then Bangladesh Rifles, later renamed as Border Guard Bangladesh, staged a mutiny against their commanding officers, killing 74 people and injuring many others.

Until now, some 4,000 border guards had been found guilty by "military tribunals". In addition, 847 of the accused also faced charges under the Bangladesh Criminal Procedure Code, some of which carry the death penalty, said the HRW statement, adding that the accused had been held and prosecuted in violation of Bangladesh's obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Even for the few accused who do have lawyers, their lawyers have complained to HRW that it is impossible to provide an effective defence to each accused with so many clients and so little time to talk to each accused, the statement added.

Furthermore, defence lawyers report that the jail authorities make it difficult for them to meet the accused to prepare their cases.

"Mass trials like these cannot possibly provide real answers and justice for the horrible crimes committed during the mutiny," said Adams, adding "This is mass punishment, not justice."

Troubles abound for migrant female workers in the Gulf

UN Women study finds

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Twenty-five-year-old Nazma Begum, who left the country for Abu Dhabi in quest of a better life in 2004, ended up being a sex worker as her employer left no other options for her.

The sad tale of Nazma is one of many recorded by a women empowerment organisation.

There are thousands of other female migrant workers from South Asia who suffer almost the same fate due to improper migration management.

Nazma's story was one of the case studies discussed yesterday at a press conference of United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UNWomen).

UN Women organised the conference at a city hotel to unveil its report on "Migration of women workers from South Asia to the Gulf".

Speakers at the event stressed the need for concerted efforts by the Saarc

countries to promote migration policies and alleviate the woes of the migrant workers.

"For ensuring a smooth migration system, the government must be aware of whom it is sending abroad and where," said Dr Zafar Ahmed Khan, secretary of expatriates' welfare and overseas employment ministry.

Sushma Kapoor, deputy regional programme director of UN Women, South Asia sub-regional office, said, "Over 2.5 million Asian workers annually leave their countries to work abroad. The contribution of migrant workers in the form of remittances is an important contribution, especially in case of Bangladesh."

The other speakers included Naheed M Ahmed, national programme manager, UN Women, and Begum Shamsunnahar, director general of the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training.

Exporters stare

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Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) on Saturday announced the shutdown that began on Sunday.

Nassa Group Managing Director Mohammad Abdullah said five woven garment factories of his group remained closed since.

"I am waiting for the decision of the government and the BGMEA for reopening of the units," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

The five units, which employ 12,000 workers, are directly losing at least Tk 20 lakh every day. The company will have to pay the employees and workers even when the production remains suspended.

"This is the direct loss but the indirect loss is enormous as well," Abdullah said.

Despite financial pressure, Nassa now plans for air shipment to make up for the time lost on the shutdown. "Air shipments are very expensive," he added.

The group has 30,000 workers employed in its 34 units.

Dekko Group that operates five units at Ashulia expects a quick solution to the impasse that recurs almost every year.

"I am waiting for the decision from the government as I have shut down five of my 12 units over the last nine days," said Shahadat Hossain Kiron, managing director of Dekko.

The next worry for the factory owners will be the manpower shortage as many workers left the area, either for their village homes or in search for work in Gazipur and other areas, Kiron said.

"The buyers are worried about the situation as much as the manufacturers," he said, adding: "We are in international business. We always race against time and we are committed to the buyers."

"If the crisis prolongs, it will be a disaster for the country and the economy." Ismail Hossain, managing director of Sharmin Group, said he kept shut three of five units of his company.

The three units based in Ashulia make 35,000 pieces of shirts per day. But with production on hold, the company sees red ink.

"If you fix even \$5 a shirt, I am still losing \$1,75,000 a day," Ismail said.

Ashulia factories account for 20 percent of the total garment exports of Bangladesh. By one estimate, Bangladesh is exporting \$10 million less a day due to the halt in production at more than 300

Tea drinkers

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prostate cancer, according to new research.

A team from Glasgow University tracked the health of more than 6,000 male volunteers over a period of 37 years.

They found men who drank over seven cups of tea per day had a 50% higher risk of developing prostate cancer than moderate and non tea drinkers.

The team said it did not know if tea was a risk factor or if drinkers lived to ages where cancer was more common.

Prostate cancer is the most common cancer amongst men in Scotland and diagnosed cases increased by 7.4% between 2000 and 2010.

The Midspan Collaborative study began in Scotland in 1970 and gathered data from 6,016 male volunteers, all aged between 21 and 75.

Researchers found that men who drank more than seven cups of tea per day had a significantly increased risk of prostate cancer compared to those who drank no tea or less than four cups per day.

Rubber dam

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last year. The initiative for creating the reservoir for use of river water for irrigation was taken by officials of the Local Government Engineering Department (LGRD), and the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) in Dinajpur.

Farmers and fishermen in five unions in Dinajpur Sadar upazila and four unions in Chirirbandar upazila will benefit from the dam. The unions are Sheikhpura, Fazilpur, Sasra, Uthral and Shankarpur in Sadar upazila, and Saitara, Abdulpur, Bhiyail and Auliyapur in Chirirbandar upazila.

DAE Deputy Director in Dinajpur Anwarul Alam said irrigation using river water would be a big boost for farming in the areas since underground water level continued to fall.

Contacted, Md Mokhlesur Rahman, LGED executive engineer in Dinajpur, said construction of the dam was progressing steadily for completion within this year.

Meanwhile, farmers in the areas appear upbeat about the rubber dam. Md Altaf Uddin, a farmer from Mohanpur village in Sadar upazila, said, "When the dam is completed, we will be able to irrigate our lands with the river water. Depleting groundwater was causing problems for us every year."

BCL, Shibir

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including its president Hasan Mamunur Rahman, its general secretary Rafiqul Islam, Noor Islam, Taleb and Zia.

Campus sources said that the clash got triggered due to earlier feud between the two unions over establishing supremacy.

According to Mehedi Hasan Mithun, BCL president of KMC unit, a gang of 12 Shibir activists stormed into the college canteen in the morning and attacked BCL activists with iron rods and sticks, injuring at least 13 of them including the general secretary of BCL.

Of the injured, Mahbub, Chandan Sarker, Abdullah-al-Monzurul, Arup Ratan Roy and Tonmoy Saha were admitted to KMC Hospital while the others received first aid.

The Shibir activists also vandalised the main gate of the campus and broke furniture and window panes of the conference room, Mehedi added.

However, the Shibir President of KMC Hasan refuted the allegation saying that BCL activists initiated the clash and swooped on them during breakfast at the canteen, injuring at least 10 Shibir activists.

Of the injured, Zillur Rahman, Nur Islam, Mosharrif Hossain and Nurul Islam were undergoing treatment in various clinics of the city, Hasan claimed.

No gas link for homes now

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The adviser made the comments in reply to queries from newsmen following a certificate awarding ceremony at Hotel Sonargaon in the capital.

Petrobangla Chairman Hussain Monsur, who attended the function, said the government should start providing gas connection to the domestic consumers right now rather than only focusing on power stations.

The domestic consumption is not more than 10 million cubic feet of gas per day (mmcf), he said adding, "We are ready to give new connection to domestic consumers."

The government had suspended giving any new gas connections to commercial consumers from July 21, 2009

and domestic consumers from July 13, 2010.

Some newspapers, referring to a recent meeting of the high officials of the energy ministry with the prime minister, reported that the government is contemplating to withdraw the ban on new gas connection.

About the reports, the energy adviser denied having any knowledge about such a decision.

He said the government has taken steps to improve the capacity of the state-owned Bapex for more gas exploration and production, reports UNB.

"If the government gets adequate gas from the newly discovered gas fields such as Sunetra and Shrikail, it will think allowing new gas con-

nection to domestic consumers," he said.

The Petrobangla chief said, at present, the country is producing 2,200 mmcf of gas.

Of the total production, 55 percent is supplied to power stations, 16 percent to industrial units and 10 percent to fertiliser factories, he said.

Monsur said Petrobangla has already added more than 500 mmcf of gas to the national grid during the tenure of the present government.

Around one lakh illegal domestic gas connections have been created in Dhaka city due to the ban on new gas connection for the last three years, he said.

The government is losing revenue from these illegal connection holders, the Petrobangla chief added.

Gilani disqualified

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threatens to bring general elections forward to later this year if the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and its fractious coalition members fail to agree on a replacement prime minister.

"Yousuf Raza Gilani has become disqualified from being member of the parliament," said the order read by chief justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry.

"He has also ceased to be the prime minister of Pakistan with effect from the same date (April 26)," it said.

"The Election Commission of Pakistan is required to issue notification of disqualification... the president of Pakistan is required to take necessary steps under the constitution to ensure continuation of the democratic process."

The president held emergency talks with leaders in his main ruling Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and summoned coalition parties to meet later Tuesday to decide how to respond, officials said.

Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari cancelled a visit to Russia in a bid to contain a domestic crisis sparked by the Supreme Court ruling, a spokesman said.

Zardari immediately convened emergency talks in his PPP and summoned heads of coalition parties to the presidency at 8:00pm, an official said.

It remained unclear when or how quickly Gilani could be replaced. Officials were tight-lipped, saying only that Zardari was "assessing the situation".

Legal expert and former deputy attorney general Raja Abdul Rehman told AFP the election commission had no choice but to comply with the court order.

Information Minister Qamar Zaman Kaira acknowledged in a news conference that "technically after the court order, Gilani is no longer prime minister".

Legal complainants in the process said the ruling rendered invalid any decision taken by Gilani since April 26.

Analysts suggested the PPP could easily get a new prime minister elected, but warned

it would be impossible to get parliament to overturn the Supreme Court decision without the support of the main opposition PML-N party.

"This is a destabilising move. It is a kind of judicial coup. First the military used to carry out coups and now it's the judiciary which has overthrown a prime minister," said political analyst Hasan Askari.

Gilani, Pakistan's first sitting prime minister to be convicted of a criminal offence, has refused to resign and insists that only parliament can remove him from office.

Members of the government accuse the court of trying to bring down Gilani and Zardari before February 2013, when the administration would become the first in Pakistan to complete a full five-year term.

The judiciary, fronted by the popular, anti-corruption campaigning chief justice, is on a collision course with the PPP administration for a long time.

The government-judiciary confrontation will not ease with the election of a new prime minister, who will also be asked by the supreme court to write to the Swiss over the graft cases, Askari said.

Under Pakistan's constitution, anyone convicted of defaming or ridiculing the judiciary is barred from being an MP.

The Supreme Court weighed in after the speaker of parliament and PPP member, Fehmida Mirza, decided not to refer Gilani for disqualification.

It responded to a petition brought by senior opposition politicians, including cricket legend Imran Khan and PML-N leader, former prime minister Nawaz Sharif.

The cases against Zardari date to the 1990s, when he and his late wife, former premier Benazir Bhutto, are suspected of using Swiss banks to launder \$12 million allegedly paid in bribes by companies seeking customs contracts.

The Swiss shelved the cases in 2008 when Zardari became president.

Newborn baby

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BGB kept the rest at a local camp.

A family -- husband, pregnant wife and two kids -- came to St Martin's Island from Sittve (formerly Akyab), the capital of Rakhine state, on June 13 with a group of around 44.

Soon after their arrival, the woman gave birth to a boy, later named Sangram.

The coast guard pushed back 39 Rohingyas after a few days.

Yesterday, the family was brought to the coast guard station at Shah Porir Dweep and provided with food, medicine and accommodation.

Lt Bodruddoza, coast guard commander at Teknaf, told The Daily Star that they sheltered the family for now considering health of the mother and the newborn.

When weather would be good, the five would be sent back with another 13 Rohingyas who came from Akyab and was under the BGB custody at Shah Porir Dweep yesterday.

In tears, the couple told journalists they don't want to go back to clash-prone Akyab, a two-day boat journey from Teknaf.

Mohammad Rafiq, 27, father of Sangram, said he was a fish processing worker at Akyab and wife Amina Akter, 24, a homemaker.

He along with his pregnant wife and two sons, aged seven and five, fled his house at Jaliapara of Akyab on June 10 as clash broke out and many houses were burnt down.

Lt Col Zahid Hasan, commanding officer of BGB 42 Battalion at Teknaf, told this correspondent yesterday that no new boats came from Akyab over the last six days. The situation at Maungdaw was also "much better".

About the intrusion attempts by nearly 150 Rohingyas from Maungdaw on Monday, Zahid said, most of them were men aged between 20 and 30. There were also some teenagers.

"People of this age group at Maungdaw regularly try to intrude [into Teknaf] in search of work."

The intrusion increases in January-February, October-November and just before the holy month of Ramadan, he added. The Ramadan is only four weeks away.

The region needs many day-labourers for salt production in January-February and

rice harvest in October-November.

Every year, young Rohingyas try to enter Teknaf to earn some money and return home immediately before Eid-ul-Fitr, said Zahid.

Some of Monday's intruders might have come fearing raids by the Myanmar army. But as all of them were males of a certain age bracket, it's very much likely that they had taken the advantage of the crisis.

The BGB boss of Teknaf noted that all the boats earlier came from Akyab with a good number of males, females and children.

Some local fishermen hire illegal Rohingya immigrants while some Rohingyas living in Teknaf as refugees help others flee Myanmar into Bangladesh.

Mahbubul Hoque, officer-in-charge of Teknaf Police Station, said some criminals of the localities including Shah Porir Dweep assist in Rohingya intrusion just for money.

The BGB on June 14 caught four persons trying to help some Rohingyas to intrude and the coast guard detained another on same charges on June 16.

ASSAULT ON JUDGE

Eight cops face arrest

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narsingdi

A Narsingdi court yesterday issued arrest warrants against eight policemen in connection with assault on a judge.

Chief Judicial Magistrate Nitai Chandra Saha issued the warrants against Mamunur Rashid, inspector of Detective Branch of Police, Nayek Md Abdus Salam and constables Kafiluddin, Md Mokhlesur Rahman, Md Mahbubur Rahman, Md Shahidul Islam, Md Saiful Islam and Sonjoy Kumar.

The arrest warrants were issued based on a report submitted to the court by a judicial investigation committee led by senior judicial magistrate Sihabul Islam on Thursday.

Court sources said some police personnel had assaulted Md Imman Ali Sheikh, a joint district and session judge of Narsingdi, on court premises on June 10 when he tried to enter Narsingdi District Judge's Court.

The court ordered the accused to appear before it on June 27.

Rakibul Hasan, head clerk of Chief Judicial Magistrate's Court, filed a case with the court on June 11 accusing seven policemen including Inspector Mamunur Rashid, Nayek Md Abdus Salam and Kafiluddin in connection with the assault. The rest four of the accused were unknown.

The judicial investigation committee found out the rest five of the accused.

Police on the same night suspended three of the accused policemen.

RMG crisis

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hike in wages.

The owners said they would reopen the factories if government authorities assured them of safety and demanded that legal action be taken against those who had instigated the "anarchy".

Following a three-hour meeting with garment owners, members of parliament of the area, labour leaders and intelligence agencies at the ministry, Monnujan Sufian said it was not wages hike but something else which had caused the unrest.

Investigations are on to find out the reasons behind the unrest, she told journalists, adding that she had ordered law enforcers to identify the "instigators" and bring them to book.

The minister said she had asked the garment owners to reopen their factories in Ashulia and advised the workers to work properly. She would again sit with labour leaders today.

Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters' Association (BGMEA) and Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters' Association (BKMEA) decided to shut down the factories in the face of continuous demonstrations by workers from June 11 for a pay hike.

BGMEA President Shafiqul Islam Mohiuddin said efforts were underway to find a solution to the crisis.

"We did not set up factories for keeping them closed," he noted. The authorities never tried instigators of any instance of labour unrest from 2006 and that is why people had dared to create such a situation.

"We don't want to file cases in wholesale manner," Mohiuddin said, adding it was not difficult to identify the culprits as intelligence agencies had video footage and CCTV cameras inside the factories must have captured evidence.

Meanwhile, State Minister for Home Shamsul Hoque Tuku at the secretariat said police had been kept on high alert to ensure safety in Ashulia.

"The ongoing crisis will be solved through discussions with workers and owners," he said.

The government is playing the role of a referee between workers and owners of the garment factories. They only care about their own interests, which resulted in the stalemate, he added.