

# 61 back home

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sixty-one Bangladeshis, out of 138 illegal immigrants to Malaysia confined in a detention camp in Sri Lanka since February 2, returned home yesterday.

The government brought them back after their nationalities were confirmed with the assistance of the Bangladesh High Commission in Colombo with information from Sri Lankan media reports and Coast Guard, said the Director General of the Foreign Ministry's External Affairs Wing, Shameem Ahsan.

"The fate of the remaining 77 will be decided after they have been identified," Shameem told The Daily Star.

Mohammed Kabir Hossain, one of the returnees, said the group started out for Malaysia on January 9 from Teknaf, but were caught by Myanmar's border security Nasaka six days into their journey and later released. The Thai navy also

caught and then released them as they wandered into the Thai sea border region. They were finally arrested by the Sri Lankan authorities 24 days later from the Lankan coastal region.

Kabir, who admitted to have illegally been on his way to Malaysia through assistance by a local broker in Cox's Bazar, said, "We had contracts with a local broker to send us to Malaysia in exchange of Tk 140,000 each. Most of us paid Tk 20,000 as advance money before leaving."

Mohammed Shafiq, another person in the group, added that there were some brokers who cheated people with promises of sending them abroad at reduced immigration costs. He said Abul Hashem, Imam Sharif and Liton, all residents of Cox's Bazar, were some of the brokers.

Police detained Sharif from among the 61 on suspicion of involvement with brokers at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport.

# Latest govt move

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at her Gulshan office last night.

The delegation included William Hanna, head of EU delegation to Bangladesh, Heather Cruden, high commissioner of Canada, Shiro Sadoshima, ambassador of Japan, and Albrecht Conze, ambassador of Germany.

"The chairperson has clearly stated before the delegates that the government's move has frustrated the entire nation as well as the BNP.

"She [Khaleda] also mentioned that the move would surely be an obstruction on the path of a dialogue," said Shamsher M Chowdhury, who was present at the meeting.

"If the government wants people to restore their faith in it, it should follow the way of dialogue," Shamsher, a vice-chairman of the BNP, quoted Khaleda Zia as saying.

During the two-hour long meeting, the foreign envoys told Khaleda that "good faith in political dialogue will help create an environment free of political unrest and violence", Heather Cruden told reporters as the diplomats emerging from the meeting.

She also said: "We call on particularly the two major parties to publicly and explicitly condemn political violence exerted by their own supporters.

"We are concerned about the cost this violence and

political turbulence has inflicted on the Bangladesh economy and its people, particularly those at the bottom who are the most vulnerable."

## John Lennon's

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US buyer in New York.

Harrison played I Am The Walrus on the guitar in a scene from Magical Mystery Tour in 1967. Lennon used it in a video for Hello, Goodbye later that year.

Julien's Auctions said the guitar had exceeded its estimated value of \$200,000-\$300,000.

After playing the guitar, Lennon gave it as a 25th birthday present to Alexis "Magic Alex" Mardas, a member of The Beatles' inner circle in the 1960s.

A plaque on the back reads: "To Magic Alex/ Alexi thank you/ for been [sic] a friend/ 2-5-1967 John."

Mardas sold the instrument in 2004.

## Parties react

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meeting tomorrow [today] to formulate an appropriate action plan against the government's arbitrary decision," BNP leader Moudud Ahmed told The Daily Star yesterday.

The decision is unlawful and goes against constitutional provisions, he added.

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia reacted sharply to the minister's statement, sources in Khaleda's Gulshan office said.

MK Anwar, a BNP standing committee member, said: "The government's decision only reflects its fascist attitude. We'll fight against the farcical move on the streets and settle the issue."

Workers Party of Bangladesh, a component of the ruling Awami League-led alliance, said such a government decision could not be a means to prevent subversive activities.

"It's improper to snatch away the rights of the general masses because of those who are indulging in violent activities," said party President Rashed Khan Menon and its General Secretary Anisur Rahman, in a statement.

Civil society members also condemned the government move.

"The decision is contradictory to the constitutional provisions as it will curb the fundamental democratic rights of the people," said M Hafiz Uddin Khan, former adviser to a caretaker government.

Referring to LGRD Minister Syed Ashrafur Islam's justification for the ban, he wondered how holding a public meeting in Dinajpur could disrupt relief distribution for the victims of cyclone Mahasen.

Bikalp Adhara Bangladesh President AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury and Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal and Islami Andolon Bangladesh also protested the move.



The 61 Bangladeshis captured by the Sri Lankan coastguards return to Bangladesh. The photo was taken at Shahjalal International Airport yesterday.

## No family

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refused to provide funds for it when allegations surfaced of "a conspiracy to exchange bribes".

Sheikh Hasina dismissed evidence of a corruption conspiracy presented by Argentine Judge Luis Moreno Ocampo on behalf of the World Bank, terming it as not "substantial evidence".

"Time and again, we asked for evidence and papers from Canada, and also from the World Bank. But we didn't receive any substantial evidence at all."

When the CBC correspondent, noting that Hasina had been given the names of the persons involved and the dates of the correspondences, asked the prime minister what steps she had taken in this regard, she replied: "I gave it to the Anti-Corruption Commission and they started investigation."

When McKenna pointed out that the ACC had "recommended steps against all officials involved", Hasina insisted, "Our Anti-Corruption Commission works independently. We never interfere."

"How then can you turn around and say that there was no corruption?" asked the CBC correspondent.

The World Bank itself said there had been no corruption, Hasina replied, adding: "Only conspiracy of corruption."

### FAMILY LINK

McKenna, at one stage, pointed out that the ACC had once accused Hasina of raising money through her sister, Sheikh Rehana.

"Here again, it looks as if SNC-Lavalin was asked to pay money to your party, to your friends, to your family. Is that not so?" he asked.

"No, it's absolutely wrong. All concocted. Could they prove it in the last two-three years? No."

### 'NOT A CASHIER'

The CBC correspondent, referring to the allegation that then communication minister Abul Hossain was raising money for the party, termed him as a "cashier" for the Awami League, Hasina brushed his comment aside.

"He is cashier? Treasurer? No!" exclaimed the premier.

She continued: "In our party, he is not the person to raise money. If anybody says so, they are wrong, totally wrong."

### TIES WITH WB 'NOT STRAINED'

She also said that the scandal had not put the country's relations with international donors under strain.

"Other projects of the World Bank in the country are going on smoothly," she added.

The premier said the bridge was important for the economy of the southern region of the country.

"The Awami League is working very hard to develop the country," she insisted.

## Skype talker

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who lives in Belgium, to explain as to why he would not be charged with "obstructing the fair process of the trials pending before the tribunal".

The rule was issued amid considerable controversy over the alleged Skype conversation between Ziauddin and former Tribunal-1 chairman Justice Md Nizamul Huq. The controversy led to the justice resigning and the government reconstituting the tribunals.

In the first week of this month, the tribunal's registrar office received Ziauddin's response through the foreign ministry.

Yesterday, the court observed, "It appears that Mr Ahmed neither admitted nor denied having the conversation with former chairman of ICT-1 [Tribunal-1] through Skype."

It added, "Leaking a private conversation between two persons is a crime. Conceivably, the alleged conversation between Mr Ahmed and the former chairman of ICT-1 has been illegally recorded...."

"Naturally, without coming to a decision on the truthfulness of the alleged part of the conversation, we deem it inappropriate to proceed further...."

It would be unjust, the court noted, to arrive at a decision about its reliability and truthfulness by "simply relying on hacked documents".

Later, around 8:25pm,

# Ban or no ban?

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during a press briefing at the AL president's Dhanmondi office at 1:30pm.

After the announcement of the ban, the AL-led 14-party alliance suspended its rally at Mohammadpur yesterday.

The Daily Star contacted CQK Mostak Ahmed, senior home secretary, around 4:15pm and Hassan Mahmood Khandker, inspector general of police, at 6:25pm to ascertain the legal aspects of the ban. Both men said they had no knowledge about the ban.

This newspaper also talked to several senior officers of the home ministry; they too said they were not aware of such a move.

A spokesman of Dhaka Metropolitan Police said the DMP commissioner is authorised to permit any rally in the capital.

Contacted, Masudur Rahman, deputy commissioner of DMP (media) declined to comment on it.

A senior DMP official, wishing anonymity, however, said the minister did not have the jurisdiction to impose the restriction.

Later, around 8:25pm,

the public relations officer of the state minister for home sent the newspaper a press release to clarify the statements MK Alamgir had made in Chittagong.

In the aftermath of a cyclone, the government will not give permission for any political activities that might damage public life and properties and create insecurity or risk of subversion, the press release quoted the minister as saying.

The minister said there was no restriction on the usual rallies. This is not a ban, but rather a precautionary measure. There is no room for confusion in this regard, it added.

### CRITICISM

The main opposition BNP and its ally Jamaat-e-Islami have termed the step as draconian and said it was aimed at putting up roadblocks to the opposition's movement for the restoration of the caretaker government system. They demanded the withdrawal of the ban.

The Workers Party, a component of the Awami League-led ruling alliance, other political parties, including Bikolpodhara and the Left, also bitterly criticised the measure.

No government since the restoration of democracy in 1991 through a mass upsurge against autocratic ruler HM Ershad has imposed such a ban, except for the nearly two-year-long military-backed caretaker regime between January 2007 and December 2008.

### BAN FOR DISASTER?

According to a government handout issued on Saturday, so far nine districts -- Cox's Bazar, Noakhali, Laxmipur, Feni, Patuakhali, Bhola, Barguna, Pirojpur and Jhalakathi -- have been affected by Thursday's cyclone Mahasen that left at least 17 people dead.

The government launched relief work immediately after the cyclone hit the coastal belt. However, it did not portray the cyclone's impact as serious as none of the nine districts were declared disaster-affected.

The national disaster management committee led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina did not sit after the cyclone to decide how to carry out rehabilitation work in the disaster affected areas.

Wishing anonymity, a

minister, who is a member of the national committee along with more than half a dozen ministers and the chiefs of the three services, told this correspondent that his ministry was doing its own work.

### WHAT AL INSIDERS SAY

AL insiders claimed the government had information that the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami planned to carry out another chaotic programme like the one resorted to by Hefajat-e-Islam on May 5.

Additionally, the Jamaat and its student wing Islami Chhatra Shibir might indulge in mayhem after the verdict in the war crimes case against former Jamaat ameer Ghulam Azam is handed down.

Talking to The Daily Star, Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury said the government did not want a repetition of the burning of the holy Quran, prayer carpets, destruction of public properties and killings of people in the name of programmes, like the chaos unleashed by Hefajat on 5 May.

"The government has responsibilities of protecting public lives and properties and their businesses."

# Prospect of GSP very bleak

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responsible for developing US's trade policy, is scheduled to give out the decision on Bangladesh's GSP status early next month.

Under the GSP scheme, a host of Bangladeshi products enjoy duty-free entry into the US market at present.

Following the Tazreen fire last year that killed 112 workers, American Federation of Labour and Congress of Industrial Organisation, the largest trade union in the US, filed a petition for discontinuation of GSP for Bangladesh.

On the Trade and Investment Cooperation

Framework Agreement (Ticfa) with the US, Quader said the commerce ministry placed the issue to the cabinet last week but it was dropped from the agenda for further discussion.

Another high official of the ministry said the government has no plans to sign the Ticfa so soon for political reasons.

"The government is stalling on signing the Ticfa as it is observing the situation," the official said, asking not to be named.

The Ticfa is a platform for resolving trade disputes between the two countries through holding dialogues.

Currently, Bangladesh

and the US have a platform to hold partnership dialogue, which does not include trade issues.

The second such dialogue will be held in Dhaka on May 26-27, while the first one took place in Washington in September last year.

## Man behind

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the mountain stoves and even the airbuds.

Without Pugh, Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay would never have reached the summit. So it is all the more regrettable that his role was largely ignored in the official history written by expedition leader Colonel John Hunt.

In the summer of 1941, Pugh was given the post of his dreams -- training the newly formed Mountain Warfare Ski Unit at the resort of Cedars in the Lebanese mountains. He was himself an Olympic skier.

Pugh's first test came with the 1952 expedition to Cho Oyu and an invitation from the Joint Himalaya Committee to help develop new methods of using oxygen at high altitude -- all in preparation for the assault on Everest.

For the following year's assault on Everest no stone was to be left unturned. Expedition leader Col Hunt produced a draft plan that showed Pugh's influence on almost every page. As Pugh had advised, Hunt stipulated that oxygen, delivered at a rate of four litres a minute, should be provided.

When Pugh flew alone from London and arrived in Kathmandu on March 5, 1953, he faced the prospect of living and working with men who were instinctively hostile to the presence of a scientist.

# Politics back to square one

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head.

Eighteen years ago, BNP chief Khaleda Zia, the then prime minister, had made the same proposal, which was rejected outright by Hasina and her party arguing that a free and fair election was not possible under an interim government led by Khaleda.

But Khaleda vehemently opposed a non-elected caretaker government system, terming it unconstitutional and undemocratic.

On the other hand, Hasina was hell bent on having such a government for holding a free and fair parliamentary election.

How ironic that Khaleda is saying today what Hasina had been saying 18 years ago about the necessity of a non-partisan caretaker government!

At that time, in the face of violent street agitations, Khaleda had, however, proposed the formation of an election-time government with elected representatives.

Khaleda had also agreed to resign from the office of prime minister four weeks before the parliamentary election, but made it clear

that one of her party MPs would be prime minister.

In exchange of Khaleda's offer, Hasina had made a proposal for the installation of a neutral and non-partisan prime minister, instead of Khaleda, the then premier, to head the poll-time government.

And to give the non-partisan prime minister an elected character, her proposals mentioned that before assuming office, he would be elected an MP through a by-election.

Hasina's proposal came up during her meetings with five eminent citizens, including former chief justice Kemal Uddin Hossain, Barrister Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed and Prof Rehman Sobhan, who had moved in October 1995 to bring the BNP and the AL to the discussion table to break the political deadlock.

The late Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed in his book, "The Ishtiaq Papers", described in detail the parleys with Khaleda and Hasina. And about Hasina's proposal for a non-partisan prime minister, he wrote that the AL considered a non-partisan

prime minister to lead the interim government as a prerequisite for holding a free and fair election.

But Khaleda was adamant, though, about not accepting the concept of a non-partisan and neutral prime minister to lead the interim government. Today, Hasina will hear nothing and clearly she would like to remain head of the election-time government.

The country is now facing the same problem that it faced 18 years ago.

Taking advantage of a Supreme Court verdict, Hasina's government scrapped the caretaker government system introduced by Khaleda's government in 1996 following massive street agitations and dozens of hartals.

This has cleared the way for Hasina's government to stay in office during the upcoming parliamentary election. But the BNP-led opposition parties have made it clear that they will not join the next parliamentary polls without the installation of a non-partisan election-time government. They have been agitating in

the streets to realise their demand.

Hasina's government and her party have, however, made it clear that they will in no way restore the unelected caretaker government system. They are speaking of holding the parliamentary polls under an interim government composed of elected representatives of political parties.

Hasina has also indicated that the cabinet led by her will remain in office, and if the opposition wishes it can join the cabinet. She has also been urging opposition MPs led by her archival Khaleda to join the interim government under her leadership.

But Khaleda and her party leaders have made it clear that they will in no way accept Hasina as the chief of the election-time government since their demand is the formation of an interim government comprising non-partisan individuals.

All the prevailing signs suggest that the country's political situation is back to square one, as it was in 1995.

Everything keeps evolving, except the country's electoral politics

# Tk 151cr wasted

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made OSDs in the last 10 years, and asked it to explain why keeping the officials as OSDs for an

indefinite period without specific reasons and spending state money for paying their salaries should not be declared illegal.

WASTE BREAK UP	
2004 - 2012	
OSDs 3,605 Salaries Tk 150.9 crore	
1,616 OSDs cost Tk 47.65 crore between 2004 and 2007	19 secretaries, 88 additional secretaries, 280 joint secretaries, 878 deputy secretaries, 244 senior assistant secretaries and 107 assistant secretaries.
1,989 OSDs cost Tk 103.25 crore between 2008 and 2012	13 secretaries, 166 additional secretaries, 490 joint secretaries, 790 deputy secretaries, 460 senior assistant secretaries and 70 assistant secretaries.