

Undocumented

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there was a great number of cross-border migration from some neighbouring countries like Yemen, Nazmul Islam, consul general of Bangladesh consulate in Jeddah, told The Daily Star over the phone recently.

"We have explained to the Saudi authorities that there is no possibility for the Bangladeshis to cross the Saudi border. Somehow they might have lost their documents," Nazmul Islam said.

Dr Emdadul Haque, labour minister of Bangladesh embassy in Riyadh, said a few thousand Bangladeshi workers who went to Saudi Arabia before 2008 did not have their fingerprints recorded with the Saudi immigration department, because the mechanism was not introduced before 2008.

"Therefore, the evidence of their entry cannot be verified even by taking finger-

prints," he told The Daily Star over the phone.

Nazmul said the Saudi authorities had assured them of looking into this particular matter later. The foreign minister and expatriates' welfare minister had also raised the issue during their recent visits to the kingdom, he added.

Migrants feel comfortable as the Saudi authorities had extended the amnesty period until November 4 from July 4, Hanif Mia, a migrant Bangladeshi worker in Riyadh, told The Daily Star on July 31.

But the people without any entry documents fear arrest, because the authorities have declared the penalty of hefty sum or imprisonment for those who are not utilising the amnesty.

A total of 2.6 lakh irregular Bangladeshi workers have so far received their documents from the Bangladesh missions to get advantage of the amnesty.



US envoy Dan W Mozena calls on Opposition Leader Khaleda Zia at the latter's Gulshan office yesterday evening.

PHOTO: COURTESY

Two more cases

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Khan, president of Dakua union AL, lodged the cases with Galachipa Police Station in Patuakhali around 10:00 pm on Sunday.

Rony's relatives, who have been accused, are his brother-in-law Md Mokbul Khan, also chairman of Dakua union parishad, and Mahazib Khan, cousin of Mokbul.

In the case statement, Linkon claimed that Panpatti union unit of Awami League (AL) arranged a meeting on August 17, 2010, marking the National Mourning Day.

When the meeting was going on at Panpatti High School, a gang led by Rony and other accused attacked the meeting and foiled it.

The attackers injured people who participated in the meeting and ransacked and looted a shop, owned by Jahangir Hossain, at a nearby market.

They also ransacked Abul Kalam Azad's house at the market and looted goods from his residence, said the case statement.

In the other case, plaintiff Badrul claimed that the accused demanded Tk 5 lakh from Nityahari Devnath and 17 others from Ulania bazar in Galachipa on March 25, 2012 as extortion.

They also snatched Tk 36,700 and three cell phones from local people on that day, he added.

Contacted, SM Ziaul Haque, officer-in-charge of the police station, said "We have already recorded the two cases. We will take action after proper investigation."

Earlier on Sunday, another case was filed against Rony and 14 others with a Patuakhali court in connection with their alleged involvement in embezzling Tk 79 crore from ongoing development projects of the government.

Govt press note trashes Odhikar report

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A government press note yesterday termed baseless rights body Odhikar's claim that 61 people were killed when Hefajat men were flushed out of the Motijheel Shapla Chattar in the early hours of May 6.

Odhikar made the claim in a report published on June 10, using the images of bodies of those who died during the daytime clash to show they were killed during the flush out at night, it added.

The press note also said the 28-page report, posted on the Odhikar website, had tarnished the image of the nation and triggered further clashes across the country.

According to the government statement, a total of 11 persons were killed during the daytime anarchy on May 5 and none was killed when Hefajat men were flushed out by law enforcers form Motijheel in the capital.

Later, two more people succumbed to their injuries, added the statement, signed by Kamal Uddin Ahmed, additional secretary to the home ministry.

Different parts of the capital, including Purana Paltan, Nayapaltan, Shapla Chattar, Dainik Bangla intersection and Stadium areas turned into a battle ground during the mayhem on that day, the press note went on.

As the night fell, the Hefajat men intensified the mayhem damaging business establishments, banks and police stations. In such a situation, the authority decided to evacuate them from the spot. The drive conducted without using lethal weapons, the press note added.

But Odhikar created confusion regarding the number of deaths. This was why, Odhikar secretary Adilur Rahman Khan was arrested under Information and Communication Technology Act-2006 after lodging a general diary with Gulshan Police Station on August 10 against him, it said.

Adilur masterminded the propaganda through Odhikar's official website, flouting the ICT Act-2006. The government will use the report as evidence before the court and if convicted, he might be awarded with up to 10 years imprisonment and a fine of Tk 1 crore, the statement read.

Tougher law

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According to the proposed law, an aggrieved person can file a case with the court against a recruiting agency. It also has specific guideline on the procedure of filing and acceptability of the case, and bail and compensation, he said.

Many bad elements secure position

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His close associates said Russell's tender manipulation had begun at Dhaka University. He and his group later moved the business to Biddyt (Power) Bhaban and Khadya (Food) Bhaban.

Evidently, Russell's wrongdoings did not come in the way of his securing a post in the sub-committee.

Like Russell, former BCL leaders Rafiqul Islam Bappi and Saiful Islam allegedly got involved in tender manipulation in BIWTA and Dhaka Zila Parishad, and Shikha Bhaban and family planning offices respectively.

Contacted, both refuted the allegation.

Bappi said, "We four friends are licensed contractors. We do not do anything wrong. If anyone can prove that my company [Bappi Enterprise] or I have exercised power to obtain a work order, I will quit politics."

Saiful said, "My licence is under the name of MR Builders. So far I have been to Shikha Bhaban and family planning offices only for a few times. I never used power to obtain any work. Besides, I am no longer in that profession as I am now looking after my brothers' garment business."

Like them, more than a dozen of former BCL leaders, who have been included in the AL central sub-committee, have either been manipulating tenders or carrying out unlawful activities over the last four years.

According to AL insiders, three among the newly appointed assistant secretaries -- a leader of Awami Swachhchasebak League, a former top leader of Dhaka College unit BCL and another former BCL leader -- were charged with murder in their student life.

A BCL central committee member and a thana unit leader, who are known in

the party as extortionists, have been given the same post, said the insiders.

Three office staff and two personal assistants of an adviser to the prime minister and AL presidium member, and people with criminal past have been included in the sub-committee.

Besides, there are more than a dozen leaders, who had been absent or inactive in party politics for over a decade, but have been appointed as assistant secretaries. These leaders include Farhad Hossain Sangram, Zakir Hossain Maruf, Anwarul Azim Sadek, Faisal Biplob, Mohammad Alam, Mostafa Zaman Babul and Masum Iqbal.

Moreover, appointment of three staff of the AL president's political office -- Shamim, Masud and Alauddin -- as assistant secretaries surprised many senior AL leaders.

Two senior leaders of the party told The Daily Star

that they had not expected appointment of such controversial people.

Contacted, AL Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif denied the allegation of including controversial people in the committee saying that the party high command had selected each assistant secretary after reviewing his or her political background.

He said there would soon be another committee with those who had been left out in the sub-committee.

Surprisingly, the central sub-committee has only one female assistant secretary. In its electoral manifesto, the AL had pledged to keep at least 33 percent positions in the party for females to ensure empowerment of women.

The woman selected is Marufa Akhter Popy, former acting president of BCL.

HC stays remand

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Detectives arrested Adilur at his residence in Gulshan around 10:30pm Saturday on charges of tarnishing the image of the government, the state and law enforcers by publishing a "false report" online about the crackdown on Hefajat-e Islam at Motijheel Shapla Chattar in May.

Yesterday, the vacation bench of HC of Justice Borhanuddin and Justice Kashifa Hossain came up with the order and the rule after hearing a petition filed by the Odhikar secretary, challenging the lower court order permitting the remand.

Meanwhile, at a press briefing at his secretariat office, Information Minister Hasanul Haque Inu yesterday insisted that the arrest of Adilur Rahman was not a violation of human rights.

"He has been arrested against specific complaint under the existing law of the country," he said in reply to

concerns of international rights bodies over the arrest.

Referring to Odhikar's June 10 report titled, "Assembly of Hefazate Islam Bangladesh and Human Rights Violation", Inu said, "The pictures published on the cover of the report were modified using Photoshop."

He said that by publishing the report with these pictures on their website, Odhikar broke the ICT law and tried to instigate communal violence and political strife to create unrest in the society.

Inu claimed that any foreign funded NGO is required by law to provide any information as per government's demand.

By refusing to provide government with the details of all the 61 victims who allegedly died in the drive by law enforcers in the early hours of May 6 in Shapla Chattar, as claimed by Odhikar in its report, the NGO flouted the Rights to

Information Act, he said.

On July 10, the ministry asked for the report and the details of the victims through a letter to Odhikar, but the rights body refused to give the details to the government, saying the security of the victims and their families might be at stake at the government's hand.

At the briefing yesterday, throwing a challenge to BNP, Jamaat, Hefajat and Odhikar, Inu said, "Just give me one name who died during the drive in that night [early hours of May 6]. If you cannot, then stop this false propaganda."

In the meantime, different rights organisations demanded Adilur Rahman Khan's release.

The Supreme Court Bar Association at a rally on its office premises yesterday threatened to initiate a country-wide movement if the Odhikar secretary, a former deputy attorney general, is not released immediately.

5.7-magnitude quake hits Tibet

AFP, Beijing

A 5.7-magnitude earthquake hit a remote area of Tibet in western China yesterday, the US Geological Survey said.

The quake struck at 5:23 am (21:23 GMT Sunday) 142 kilometres (88 miles) south-southeast of the city of Qamdo at a depth of 50 kilometres, the USGS said.

The China Earthquake Networks Center measured the quake as 6.1 magnitude at a relatively shallow 10 kilometres, the official Xinhua news agency reported, while the Hong Kong Observatory registered it as 5.9.

Rights activists demand release of Adilur

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against Islamist group Hefazate Islam in Dhaka in the early hours of May 6.

Referring to the report, the signatories of the statement said the arrest was a hostile reaction of the government to criticism of its actions ahead of the upcoming national elections.

The arrest was made in violation of the freedom of expression, they said.

The signatories include rights activists Khushi Kabir, Hameeda Hossain, Sultana Kamal, Shaheen Anam and Shireen Huq, barrister Sara Hossain of the Supreme Court; Anu Muhammad, professor of Jahangirnagar University; Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of

Transparency International Bangladesh; Imtiaz Ahmed, professor of Dhaka University; Prof Piash Karim of Brac University, researcher Meghna Guhathakurta and health activist Zafrullah Chowdhury.

In separate statements, Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association, Shushasoner Jonnyo Nagorik (Sujon) and Nagorik Udyog demanded immediate release of Adilur Rahman Khan.

The government has misused the 2006 Information and Communication Act in arresting Adilur, said Sujon and Nagorik Udyog.

INT'L RIGHTS GROUPS

In a press statement, Amnesty International said the arrest of

Adilur "sends a chilling message to government critics" and "it is a clear violation of the rights to freedom of expression".

"He must be released immediately and unconditionally," said Abbas Faiz, Bangladesh researcher at Amnesty International.

"Instead of punishing human rights defenders, the Bangladeshi authorities must address alleged violations by carrying out investigations and holding accountable those responsible," he added.

In a statement of the Human Rights Watch, its Asia Director Brad Adams said, "The arrest of Adilur Khan appears to be an attempt to silence one of the Bangladeshi

government's most vocal critics prior to national elections. The Awami League government should not respond to its low public approval ratings by making a mockery of its claims to respect the free speech rights of everyone."

If the government believes that Adilur made errors in his reporting of the May violence, it should have the courage to debate the matter with him instead of throwing him into jail, Adams added.

Odhikar had published a report in which it said law enforcers exercised excessive and unlawful force resulting in 50 deaths on May 5 and 6.

It also claimed that the government had failed to reply to their letters regarding

the events of these two days.

HRW expressed concerns that Adilur might be mistreated in police custody, saying that it had previously found evidence of extensive torture on detainees by security forces.

Also, Asian Human Rights Commission condemned the arrest, saying it appears to be a threat to the civil society.

"The arrest and detention of Adilur, and the raid at Odhikar's office, are by all means a calculated, unforgiving, and condemnable assault upon the professional freedom and integrity of a human rights defender and the organisation he represents by the government of Bangladesh," reads an AHRC statement reads.

Clarification

A report headlined "Row over death figure" published yesterday in our newspaper mentioned that "The Daily Star also has estimated that the number of casualties could be not more than 40." This figure is of May 5 and 6, which our report did not specify.

On May 5, twelve people were killed during the daylong violence around the Baitul Mukarram mosque and other areas in the capital.

Besides, a police sub-inspector was killed being hit by brickbats in the heat while flushing out Hefajat men at Shapla Chattar at night.

In total, the death figure of May 5 stands at 13.

On May 6, twenty-seven more persons were killed in clashes between Hefajat men and law enforcers in Kanchpur of Narayanganj, pushing the death toll of the two days to 40.

Poor quality

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fied not to use the toilets while the train is on the bridge but the cautions were not heeded.

In Bangladesh, wastes from the toilets of almost all passenger trains are not retained in tanks. They are dumped on rail lines.

Hyundai Engineering and Construction Co Ltd, a South Korean company, constructed the 4.8km Bangabandhu Bridge at a cost of Tk 4,000 crore.

The bridge establishes much-needed road and rail networks between the capital and 26 northern and southern districts. It also helps supply gas through a pipeline to the northern region.

Numerous cracks had developed on the road bridge a few years after its opening in 1998, forcing the government to take up a Tk 280 crore project for repairs.

Norwegian PM

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company - has been posted on the prime minister's Facebook page and made into a film which will be used as part of his campaign for reelection in September.

"It is important for me to hear what people really think," he told Norwegian media.

"And if there is one place people really say what they think about most things, it's in the taxi."

DRIVING ERRORS

Some of the passengers who appear in the film had been told to wait for the taxi - without being told who would be driving - while others were picked up randomly and from taxi ranks.

Most of them appear to realise very quickly that there is something different about their driver, with one saying: "From this angle you really look like Stoltenberg."

Another says she was lucky to meet him as she "wanted to send a letter".

The conversation turns to politics in most cases.

Stoltenberg engages one passenger on education,

saying: "The main point is to make sure good students have something to stretch for, and to give those who struggle extra help."

None of the passengers was charged for the ride.

Stoltenberg told the VG newspaper: "I'm pretty well known in Oslo, but I tend to sit in the back seat."

The Labour prime minister came in for criticism for his driving, at one point jolting the car abruptly when, he said, he mistakenly applied the brake pedal on the automatic car, thinking it was the clutch.

He said he had not driven in eight years.

Stoltenberg is popular in Norway, but opinion polls suggest he is lagging behind the opposition ahead of the election.

But asked by VG whether he would consider becoming a taxi driver full time if he lost the election, Stoltenberg replied: "I think the country and the Norwegian taxi passengers are best served if I'm the prime minister and not a taxi driver."

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move following severe criticism from Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the last Ecne meeting on July 31 over long delay in implementing the scheme.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, Industries Minister Dilip Barua said the government will take necessary action to relocate the tanneries outside the capital after getting the nod from the Ecne.

Two associations -- Bangladesh Tannery Association and Bangladesh Finished Leather, Leather Goods and Footwear Exporters' Association -- will be the beneficiaries of the project, he added.

Bangladesh Tannery Association, noted the minister, has agreed to relocate their factories, but the latter has laid down some conditions to avoid relocation. "If the tanners want to do their business, they will have to relocate their units."

The tanners, however,

insisted that they would not go to Savar if the Ecne endorses the second revised proposal without resolving their disagreement on some conditions of the MoU.

The draft proposal has recommended charging higher relocation fees from the factory owners and the government has failed to demarcate the land required for building workers' dormitory, complained tanners.

"As per the proposal, we [owners] have to pay at Tk376.15 per square feet (sft) now for the allotted plots ranging from 10,000 to 32,000 sft in Savar. Earlier, the fee was fixed at Tk197 per sft," said Belal Hossain, chairman of Bangladesh Finished Leather, Leather Goods and Footwear Exporters' Association.

"This is not acceptable as the higher charges will increase our relocation costs significantly," he mentioned.

About 21,600 cubic

metres of environmentally hazardous toxic waste, including chromium, sulphur and ammonium, is emitted daily from the tanneries, according to the Department of Environment.

Sources in the industries ministry said the factories could not be relocated in the last 10 years due to a wrangling between the government and tannery owners over bearing the project costs and a long legal battle between the two sides over awarding the CETP contract.

The industries minister said the delay in implementing the project is not only affecting the city environment, but also threatening the country's leather and leather goods sector.

The European Union, the leading destination of the country's leather exports, has already threatened to stop buying Bangladeshi products beyond 2014 if the CETP was not established in the

industrial zone by then, mentioned Dilip Barua.

The government has decided to provide Tk250 crore as compensation to the tanners for relocation and bear 80 percent of the total project cost, said project director Abu Taher.

The factory owners will have to pay the rest (20 percent) of the expenses in instalments over 15 years, he noted.

In this context, the Planning Commission has imposed a condition on the industries ministry to sign MoUs with the tanners for relocation of factories.

The industries ministry has already allocated more than 205 plots on 200 acres of land to 155 entrepreneurs through the BSCIC, a wing of the ministry.

The leather industry exported leather, leather products and footwear worth \$980.67 million in the 2012-13 fiscal year, up from \$765 million in the previous fiscal, according to data from the Export Promotion Bureau.