

After collecting wood from the nearby hill, a Rohingya refugee takes the way back to the camp. PHOTO: SAIFUL HUQ OMI

Refugee camps along the coastal areas seem to be the prime targets for traffickers to find hapless victims as the people who live there have had little opportunity to travel anywhere outside their home. It is easier for traffickers to dupe them.

A broker from Ukhia, who prefers to remain anonymous, tells *the Star* that brokers are usually divided into three categories. The first group organizes refugees and the poor people from different villages, the second group collects money from the refugees and promises them good jobs in Malaysia and the third group collects boats for these 'workers to Malaysia.' "We mainly use Shah Pari or St. Martin's Island since the vigilance is not so strong at those points. It is easy to escape without any problems," he says.

Lt Kazi Harun-ar-Rashid, commander of the Coast Guard's Teknaf station, tells *the Star* that the Coast Guard is forever alert against any kind of illegal trafficking. "Our officials and relevant agencies always check the land and sea territory to stop illegal trafficking," he says. "In the last few months, we have saved many lives from being smuggled out of the country illegally. But the problem is most victims don't approach us in fear of being arrested as they are trying to go to Malaysia or to other countries illegally," he adds.

However, the Rohingyas are treated in a different way when the police catch them. They are either asked for a bribe or put in jail without even given the chance to clear their stance. Brokers usually claim that they have connections with the police to get rid of such difficulties. "We have to pay money to the police before any voyage and everybody living in the coastal area of Cox's Bazaar knows that the police help us," the broker says.

An official at the Ministry of Home Affairs, who spoke under condition of anonymity, tells *the Star* that Bangladesh has enough laws on human trafficking to check any kind of crimes but the implementation never gets priority and thus the problem remains. He also believes that it is quite difficult to implement the new 'Human Trafficking Deterrent and Suppression Act 2012.' "We do not have sufficient man power. And on the other hand the concern body 'Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commission' is only working to provide relief instead of making people aware of trafficking." And even here there is no legal framework that safeguards the rights of Rohingya refugees.

Shabira Nupur, National Advocacy Coordinator of World Vision, says, "The new law is a wonderful achievement but to get its full benefit we need to wait longer." Different non-governmental activists say that although the government formed an anti-trafficking committee, concerned government offices are yet to make any list of victims to provide information to the public.

Kamal lost all his family members four years ago during an ethnic cleansing in Akiab, Myanmar. He is preparing for another voyage to Malaysia. "Now I have to collect Tk 1,70,000. This money will help me to escape from this hell. I do not want to come back to Bangladesh again." Kamal is taking the risk for the second time. For him and thousand others like him, "the other side of the river" is still a better place to live, where they will have a better chance at survival. ■