

Release jailed opposition leaders

Khaleda asks govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia has demanded quick release of her party's sick and senior leaders from jail. "I demand immediate release of leaders and activists of opposition parties after the withdrawal of all the false cases filed against them out of political vengeance. I demand quick release of sick senior leaders especially," she said in a statement, signed by her Press Secretary Maruf Kamal Khan, yesterday.

The former premier claimed that her party's arrested leaders were both tortured physically and mentally on remand repeatedly.

"Many of them are elderly people and suffering from various diseases and they have become seriously ill for lack of proper treatment in prison."

"The government is opposing to grant bail to those who instantly need to go abroad for better treatment. I urge the government to shun such inhuman attitude," she added.

The ruling party was in a happy mood, stalling the normal activities of BNP by oppressing its leaders and activists and filing cases against them. But no one ever got good results by halting democratic political process, the BNP chief said.

"I call upon the ruling party to learn this lesson from history and to restore political coexistence and create a congenial atmosphere for healthy politics," she added.

36 HOURS DRIFTING AT SEA The horrific tale of two Bangladeshi migrants

AFP, Lhoksukon

After 36 hours adrift at sea, clinging to an imaginatively improvised float, the two Bangladeshi friends reached the shore of Indonesia's far northwest coast alive to tell their remarkable tale.

The pair had been aboard a cramped boat carrying hundreds of desperate migrants to Malaysia when one of them, Habibur Rahman, unable to withstand hunger pangs, tried to take some food, and was caught and thrown overboard by furious fellow passengers.

His companion, Saiful Islam, watched helplessly as Habibur -- his close friend since childhood -- disappeared over the side, before he flung himself into the water after him.

The pair from Pabna in Bangladesh are just two of an estimated 2,000 boat people from Myanmar and Bangladesh -- including many ethnic Rohingya -- who have swum ashore, been rescued or intercepted off Malaysia and Indonesia in recent days.

Migrant-rights advocates are warning that thousands more men, women and children are believed stuck at sea, exposed to disease, starvation, thirst and drowning as smugglers abandon their human cargoes following a Thai police crackdown that has disrupted people-smuggling routes.

Islam and Habibur washed up at a beach in East Aceh, where astonished locals provided them with food and water.

They were speaking to AFP in Lhoksukon, where roughly 600

Salahuddin

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Meanwhile, State Minister for Home Affairs Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal said both the Indian and Bangladesh governments started legal process so that the BNP leader can be brought home.

It has been proved that Salahuddin went into hiding and changed his locations several times in the last two months, Kamal told reporters after a programme at Tejgaon Adarsha School and College.

The BNP leader faces several cases and action would be taken once he is brought home, added the minister.

Talking to this newspaper over the phone at 6:10pm, M Kharkrang, SP of East Khasi Hills, said, "We could not produce him [Salahuddin] before the court today [yesterday] as the Shillong Civil Hospital authority is yet to release him."

He said they would interrogate Salahuddin about his trespass into Indian territory upon his release from the hospital.

Kharkrang said Salahuddin told them during initial quizzing that a group of people identifying themselves as detectives had picked him up from a Uttara house in Dhaka city. Since then, he had been kept blindfolded most of the time.

Asked how he ended up in Shillong crossing the Bangladesh border, Salahuddin told the Meghalaya police that he had no idea as he had been blindfolded, said the police official.

Dr DJ Goswami, who is attending Salahuddin at the hospital, told our New Delhi correspondent that the BNP leader was suffering from kidney ailments and cardiac problems.

"We have conducted some tests on the patient. His ECG is quite normal. I think we have to consult a surgeon for the kidney stones," said Goswami.

On Monday evening, a Shillong police patrol spotted the BNP leader loitering in Golf Link area of the tourist city around two months after he had been allegedly picked up by plainclothes law enforcers from a house in Dhaka's Uttara area on March 10.

As he could not produce any documents and also appeared to be "mentally unbalanced", they arrested him for trespassing and admitted him to a mental hospital. The BNP leader was later shifted to Shillong Civil Hospital.

Police filed a case against him under Section-14 of the Foreigner's Act for entering India without valid travel documents, said Meghalaya police.

It still remains unclear how and when Salahuddin, joint secretary general of the BNP, landed in Shillong.

On Tuesday, Salahuddin's wife Hasina Ahmed got a phone call from her husband from a hospital in Shillong. She then informed the media about it.

Talking to reporters at her Gulshan house yesterday, Hasina said she wanted to meet her husband as early as possible.

"We heard that he was arrested in India... I want to meet him at the earliest upon getting Indian visa."

She said they would decide the next course of action for bringing her husband back after she meets him in India.

Save migrants drifting

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Thailand and Malaysia, which were downgraded to the lowest Tier 3 of the US report on Trafficking in Persons last year, were blamed for having shown little appetite to provide shelter to them while thousands of them reportedly were abandoned floating in the sea.

Malaysia said it would not accept any new Rohingya arrivals after 1,158 immigrants were found on the shores of Langkawi on Monday.

Malaysia's deputy home minister, Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar said his country would use tough measures, including turning back asylum-seeker boats and deportation in order to send the "right message".

"We don't want them to come here," the deputy minister was quoted as saying by The Guardian.

"Malaysia has been showing good human faith, which entices people to come here," Malaysia's The Star quoted Wan Junaidi as saying.

The Indonesian navy towed a boat carrying hundreds of migrants from Myanmar out of its national waters, an official said on Tuesday. The boat drifted into Indonesian territory near the Malacca Straits early on Monday, navy spokesman Manahan Simorangkir said. "We towed the boat out of Indonesian waters after giving them food and drinks," he said.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reported that 25,000 people were estimated to have departed Bangladesh and Myanmar via the Bay of Bengal to Southeast Asia since October last year. Some managed to land while the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) said some 8,000 are still at sea.

"UNHCR appeals to governments to continue their life-saving operations to find and safely disembark the passengers, many of whom are believed to be in a weakened state after days, possibly weeks with little food and water," UNHCR Spokesman Adrian Edwards said in a statement from Geneva.

It also urged against indefinite detention of those rescued, who should be given access to basic rights and services including family unification, shelter, health care and, where possible, the right to work while longer-term solutions are sought.

The United States yesterday voiced fears for the lives of the hundreds of migrants abandoned by traffickers at land and sea, calling on Southeast Asian nations to co-operate to address the crisis.

Most migrants were making the journey "because of the dire humanitarian and economic situations they face at home and/or out of fear of ethnic and religious violence", a spokeswoman at the US Embassy told AFP.

"This is a regional challenge that needs to be addressed regionally, through a coordinated international effort and in accordance with international conventions and maritime law," she added.

Matthew Smith, executive director of Thailand-based rights body, Fortify Rights, termed it a grave humanitarian crisis demanding an immediate rescue and protection to the asylum seekers and trafficking survivors, not

Criminals

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Ltd, said when he came home for lunch he found the door left ajar. Inside, he saw his uncle's body on the floor and heard his five-year-old son sobbing inside a locked bathroom. He found Sweetie's body in another room.

The child -- who was wounded, possibly in a tussle with the criminals, and needed seven stitches -- could not recognise the assailants, he said.

Zahidul alleged a man identifying himself as Munna of a gang run by top terrors Prakash and Bikash called him on March 30 and demanded Tk 1 lakh. "They told me to give the money if I valued the lives of my wife and child."

Police have detained guard Khaleq and Ashrafal Alam Chisti Shahin, managing director of Independent Power Ltd.

The couple recently had a dispute with Shahin over the shares of the business, Zahidul said.

CRACKDOWN IN THAILAND Arrest order for 62 traffickers

THE NATION/ANN

Arrest warrants were issued for 62 suspects accused of running or benefiting from the trafficking of Rohingyas and Bangladeshis in the southern provinces, as part of a government crackdown on the illicit business, a Thai police officer said.

Twenty-one of the suspects, including former and current members of local administrative bodies, are in police custody.

Police are still hunting for Pajjuban Angchotephan, a former chairman of the Satun Provincial Administrative Organisation, who has reportedly fled to Malaysia, Pol Maj Gen Phuthichart Ekkachant, a deputy commissioner of Provincial Police Region-8, said.

Like local police in the south, civilian and military authorities based in Songkhla, Ranong, Satun are conducting a complete scrutiny of trafficking activities or relevant crimes along with detention camps to meet the 10-day deadline given last Wednesday by

Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha.

The police officer said the arrest of three other key suspects -- Padang Besar municipality mayor Banjong Pongphol, deputy mayor Prasert Lermleh, and fishery businessman Suwan Saengthong -- were important to the police investigation.

Region-8 headquarters will submit a post-deadline report to Royal Thai Police commissioner-general General Somyot Poompanmoung, who will then forward it to Prayut.

Region-9 commissioner Pol Lt-General Montree Patranant said Malaysian intelligence police would meet with their Thai counterparts in Songkhla's Hat Yai district today to discuss the human trafficking issue and exchange information on the crime.

A police source said that it was likely that Pajjuban, an alias of Ko Tong, the former Satun PAO chairman, would turn himself in, as he was ageing. Ko Tong is likely discussing legal options with his lawyer and will finally give himself up, the source added.

drive them back out to sea.

Governments in the region and the international community should commit financial and technical resources to facilitate a coordinated response, he said in a statement.

Regional meeting on May 29

Thailand will host a regional meeting on May 29 on ways to tackle human trafficking through the Bay of Bengal, Thai foreign ministry said Tuesday.

"The special meeting is an urgent call for the region to... work together to address the unprecedented increase of irregular migration," the ministry said in a statement, according to Bangkok Post.

Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha had called for a summit on the problem to be attended by the heads of the regional governments, but it received no response.

Instead, senior officials from Myanmar, Bangladesh, Malaysia, and Indonesia will join representatives from Australia, Cambodia, Laos, the United States, Vietnam and others at the one-day "Special Meeting on Irregular Migration in the Indian Ocean" in Bangkok, the ministry said.

Three suspects held in Thailand

Thai police yesterday arrested three men they said were instrumental in operating the Satun-based Rohingya trafficking ring led by former local politician Pajjuban Angchotephan, who is still on the run.

One of them was arrested in neighbouring Ranong province and two others in Satun. Police did not immediately identify the men until after an evening press conference. Pajjuban has reportedly fled to Malaysia's Langkawi, while Thai police are seeking cooperation from their Malaysian counterparts to hunt them down.

A police commander, Pol Maj-General Somchai Nittayaworabutr, said Ranong-based assets belonging to local suspects worth around Bt100 million were liable for seizure. He said Thai authorities were seeking cooperation from Myanmar authorities to hunt down suspects fleeing across the Thai border.

Police have obtained arrest warrants for another 11 suspects in addition to 51 wanted. A police source identified some of the latest 11 as Sia Angchotephan, the chairman of tourism industry on Koh Li Pe off Satun, a relative of Pajjuban; Malay Tohdin, the chief of Tambon Poo Yoo administrative organisation; Wut Wutpradit; Anas Hajimasea.

A man identified as Abu Hasura, a councillor of Khone Don district, and a close aide to Pajjuban, has been arrested.

A Ranong-based suspect, Piyawat Phongthai known by the alias of Ko Yong, yesterday turned himself in to the police. Police said that Piyawat was working in the same trafficking ring with Suwan Saengthong, or Ko Nui, who had surrendered and was in custody.

As per the daily Region 9 police briefing, there were 312 migrants under government care, 63 of whom have been identified as victims of trafficking and 249 as illegal entrants. A total of seven detention camps, comprising 111 buildings, have been discovered in jungles and on Khao Kaew in Songkhla.

Man in his

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The nonagenarian will be awarded his Regents Bachelor of Arts degree at West Virginia University, where he began his studies in 1939. Tuition then cost just \$50 (£31), according to a press release from the university.

"It was always important to me to graduate," he said, adding he thought he would "take a break for a while," before pursuing his master's degree.

Brutto originally set himself a four-year goal to graduate when he began his engineering major, but after America entered the World War II, he was drafted into the Army.

He was mostly stationed in the US where he put his engineering skills to good use, working on aircraft and learning to build and repair bombers.

At the end of the war in 1946, he re-enrolled at the university in the hope of finishing his degree, but he could not finish because he had to care for his sick wife. He went on to work as a machinist, officially retiring in the mid-80s, although he said he never stopped working and stayed busy sculpting objects out of wood.

He also made and sold jewellery to local shops in his hometown of Morgantown, West Virginia.

But the desire to complete his degree never left him and he reapplied to the Regents Bachelor of Arts programme.

While it was a bit more expensive than the original \$50 fee, he said it was worth every penny.

New quake adds

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Kathmandu, and also killed 17 people in northern India.

Tuesday's quake was felt as far away as New Delhi, and caused buildings to collapse in Tibet in neighbouring China, killing at least one person there. A second tremor and more aftershocks also followed.

The United Nations said it faced a "monumental challenge" to bring relief to victims, many of whom live in areas accessible only on foot or by helicopter, before the monsoon rains began.

UN resident coordinator Jamie McGoldrick said Tuesday's quake had exacerbated an already desperate situation as he delivered an urgent call for more funding.

"Damaged houses will be further damaged. Houses and schools and buildings that were spared in the first one were probably affected yesterday. Roads, we know, have been damaged," he said.

"It is extremely urgent that the donors realise that we are running against the monsoon that is coming."

The Nepal army mounted a huge ground and air search for a US Marine Corps helicopter that went missing on Tuesday during a disaster relief operation in the eastern district of Dolakha, near where the latest quake hit.

Spokesman Jagdish Pokharel said the army would keep searching until it found the chopper, which was carrying six US Marines and two Nepal army soldiers when it disappeared in a remote mountainous area.

The Nepalese government has acknowledged that it was overwhelmed by the scale of the April 25 disaster, which destroyed nearly 300,000 homes and left many more too dangerous to live in.

"We had been focusing on relief distribution, but from yesterday our resources were deployed for rescue operations again," said Laxmi Prasad Dhakal, spokesman for the Nepal

BNP keeps

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Zia and its spokesperson Asaduzzaman Ripon, would make any comment on the issue. Earlier, Ripon on several occasions blamed the government and law enforcement agencies, particularly the Rapid Action Battalion, for picking up Salahuddin from a house in the capital's Uttara.

Insiders said the party chief's main focus now was the safe return of Salahuddin.

"That's why the party leaders or Salahuddin's family members don't want to comment on it, no matter how much the government blames the BNP for his disappearance," said a standing committee member of the party.

Even three days before knowing the whereabouts of Salahuddin, Khaleda at a meeting with pro-BNP lawyers categorically claimed that the Rab picked up the former state minister. She warned the government that it would face dire consequences if the BNP leader was not found.

Khaleda on Tuesday night spoke at a programme at her Gulshan office in presence of journalists, but did not say anything on the reappearance of Salahuddin.

The BNP chief last night in a press release blasted the government and law enforcement agencies for "repressing opposition leaders". The release didn't mention anything on tracing the missing BNP leader.

Ripon, also the BNP's international affairs secretary, yesterday at a press conference at the party's Nayapaltn central office refused to make any comment on the issue.

"We will speak up at the right time on the government's propaganda that Salahuddin Ahmed had hid himself," he told newsmen.

Hasina Ahmed in the last two days refused to tell anything to reporters about his husband's reappearance. Earlier, she blamed law enforcers for picking up Salahuddin.

Arrest fugitive

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eight-member cell held only one meeting in last 15 months without any visible achievement.

The tribunal observed that despite its arrest and conviction warrants, the law-enforcement agencies repeatedly failed to arrest the respective accused and convicts.

The court mentioned four cases against Abdul Jabbar, Zahid Hossain Khokon, Syed Hasan Ali and Nasir Uddin Ahmed and four others that showed little success in arresting anyone concerned.

Law enforcers have so far arrested only one among the eight accused.

Jabbar and Khokon have been convicted in absentia, while the case against fugitive Hasan Ali is now waiting for verdict.

Only Shamsuddin Ahmed was arrested in connection with the case against Nasir and four others. The court yesterday took the charges brought against the five into cognisance.

According to the order, the committee will be constituted with representatives from different law enforcement agencies, especially from Detective Branch and Special Branch of police, Rapid Action Battalion and the investigation agency of the tribunal.

The tribunal said the committee would be led by an officer not below the rank of a deputy inspector general of police. Once formed, the body would have to submit a report to the tribunal over its activities in every 40 days, it added.

MONITORING CELL STILLBORN?

Following a proposal of the investigation agency, the government on February 16, 2014 formed a monitor-

Tk 75,000 max

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The review committee in its report agreed with the pay commission's recommendation for abolishing selection grade and time-scale for government employees and introducing an annual increment on a perpetual increase basis for them, the finance minister told journalists at the Cabinet Division.

The recommendations of pay structure would be finalised by July or August, Muhith said.

No matter when the recommendations are finalised, the new pay scales will be made effective from July 1 this year, the minister asserted.