

ASIA BOAT MIGRANTS

UN despair over lack of rescues

BBC ONLINE

The UN has condemned the refusal of South-East Asian countries to rescue thousands of migrants adrift at sea.

UNHCR spokeswoman Vivian Tan said the lack of rescues over the week-end was a "bad sign".

Aid agencies say a grave humanitarian crisis is in train as countries in the region refuse to accept the migrants.

People on the boats are believed to be severely malnourished. Survivors who have made it to shore say there have been deadly fights on board over food.

Ms Tan warned that "time is running out" to help the migrants.

"We were hoping that more ships would be found, and that more people would be rescued and allowed to come onto shore. Unfortunately, this

didn't seem to have happened," she said.

The Indonesian authorities have told fishermen not to help the migrants - unless their boats are sinking or they are in the water.

Military spokesperson Fuad Basya said fishermen could deliver food, fuel and water to the boats, or help with repairs, but that bringing them to shore would constitute an illegal entry into Indonesia.

Some fishermen in Indonesia's Aceh province had told the BBC that they were not allowed to help migrants even if they were drowning.

Meanwhile the mayor of Langsa, the Indonesian port where many of the migrants are being cared for, has said the city has no budget for aid on this scale, and that it has received no help from Jakarta.

Myanmar acknowledges

FROM PAGE 1

The Indonesian navy prevented a suspected migrant boat from entering the country's waters at the weekend after the arrival of hundreds of Rohingya and Bangladeshis and has stepped up patrols in the area, the military said yesterday.

The three nations have sparked outrage by turning away some overloaded vessels, and thousands of migrants are still believed to be stranded at sea after a Thai crackdown disrupted long-established people-smuggling and -trafficking routes.

Also yesterday, a spokesman for Aung San Suu Kyi's party said Muslim boatpeople fleeing dire conditions in Myanmar are entitled to "human rights".

Suu Kyi has faced criticism for not speaking strongly on the issue, as surging Buddhist nationalism has deepened the desperation of a group largely viewed as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.

But her party spokesman took the highly unusual step Monday of urging Myanmar to give stateless Muslims in the country a chance to get citizenship.

"If they are not accepted (as citizens), they cannot just be sent onto rivers. Can't be pushed out to sea. They are humans. I just see them as humans who are entitled to human rights," Nyan Win told reporters on the sidelines of a meeting between political parties and President Thein Sein in Yangon.

Myanmar's estimated 1.3 million Rohingya are not accepted as an ethnic group and most are denied citizenship.

They have long been subjected to daily prejudice and a raft of severe restrictions such as controls on movement and family size.

Deadly communal violence in western Rakhine state between Muslims and Buddhists in 2012 saw their situation deteriorate dramatically, displacing tens of thousands who remain trapped in miserable camps.

The violence was the catalyst for a huge exodus of migrants across the Bay of Bengal, with thousands taking to makeshift boats heading for Thailand, Malaysia and beyond.

Myanmar has yet to confirm whether it will attend a regional summit called by Thailand for May 29. It does not recognise the estimated 1.3 million Rohingya as an official minority, instead viewing them as mostly illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.

DEADLY BRAWLS

Grim tales have emerged of deadly fights between migrants on board boats washing into Indonesian waters in recent days.

Some described a vicious brawl breaking out as desperation exploded into bloodshed on their sinking boat, which was discovered off Aceh, on the Indonesian island of Sumatra on Friday.

"Suddenly the Bangladeshis came out of the deck, and they attacked all of us who were on the top of the boat," said Rohingya migrant Hasina Begun.

"Those who wanted to save their lives, had to jump in the sea, but my brother could not. When they found him, they beat him and then they slaughtered him. After that they threw

him into the sea," the 22-year-old told AFP.

Bangladeshi migrants, who are now being kept separately from the Rohingya in an Indonesian shelter, claim that they were kept below deck by Myanmar people smugglers, who denied them food and water.

Those interviewed put the number of dead between 100-200 from a boat carrying around 1,000 but precise figures are difficult to obtain.

INDONESIA TURNS AWAY BOAT

On Sunday, the Indonesian navy stopped a boat from entering its waters after the vessel was spotted heading across the Malacca Strait from the direction of Malaysia, Indonesian armed forces spokesman Fuad Basya told AFP.

After radio communication with the boat, it turned back from Indonesia, he said, adding it was not physically pushed back. Basya said it was believed the boat was carrying more migrants, although he was not sure how many.

"It was heading to Indonesian waters from Malaysia and was denied entry," Basya said. "It was intercepted, and we stopped it from passing."

A week ago the navy stopped a boat carrying hundreds of migrants from entering Indonesia, and the military insists it will only help vessels in distress.

Basya said four warships and one plane were now patrolling off Aceh's coast to stop migrant boats from entering, up from one warship and a plane around a week ago.

"The boats are forbidden from entering Indonesia," he said.

Emotional reunion in Shillong

FROM PAGE 1

Meghalaya police arrested Salahuddin on May 11 as he was "hanging around aimlessly" in Golf Links area of Shillong nearly two months after his disappearance.

Hasina stayed with Salahuddin for around half an hour, journalists from Bangladesh and India who were at the hospital told The Daily Star.

Claiming that Salahuddin is "critically ill", she told reporters that they wanted to take him to a third country for better treatment through legal process.

Subrata Acharya, India bureau chief of Somoy TV, told The Daily Star that Hasina entered the hospital around 8:30pm (Bangladesh Time) along with two others.

After visiting her husband, she thanked the Indian government for providing her husband with shelter and treatment.

"We've already talked with lawyers and will bring them along to the hospital tomorrow while meeting my husband," Hasina was quoted by Subrata as saying.

Meanwhile, Salahuddin talking to journalists for the first time since he went missing on March 10 yesterday said that after riding a car for about 12-14 hours with his eyes blindfolded and hands tied, some people left him at the Shillong golf course.

He, however, could not say anything about the identity of the people who had carried him there.

In reply to another query about how the Meghalaya police found him, he said, "After I was left at the Shillong golf course, I requested some locals to take me to a police station. They phoned the police and then policemen took me to a station."

He also criticised the government for "having the Interpol's National Central Bureau in Dhaka in sending a 'letter of request' to its New Delhi office".

In the letter sent on May 14, Interpol Dhaka requested its New Delhi office to arrest Salahuddin who had already been arrested by Meghalaya police.

"I did not commit any crime. I am not an accused or a listed criminal. Nor am I absconding," he told reporters while he was being taken to the main building of Shillong Civil Hospital for a CT scan from the ward of under-trial prisoners.

He said his return to Bangladesh has become uncertain due to this letter.

The BNP leader also said that after finding him near the Shillong Golf Course, police had thought he was a mental patient.

Since he had no valid papers or travel permit with him, police booked him under the Foreigners Act.

Subrata said local lawyer ICJ Jha has

fell into it.

Hearing screams of family members, neighbours rushed to the spot and rescued the victims. While rescuing them, two neighbours -- Ripon Chakma, 22, and Bablu Chakma, 20, -- fell sick.

The three brothers were whisked off to Mahalchhari Upazila Health Complex where doctors declared them dead. Ripon and Bablu were undergoing treatment at the upazila health complex.

Dr Tanzil Farhad of Mahalchhari Upazila Health Complex said the victims were brought dead. He said they might have died because of the toxic gas inside the tank.

The death of the brothers created a

heart-rending scene at the house with family members and neighbours mourning their abrupt loss.

Their aged mother Sadhana Chakma was howling and fainting frequently.

"They left me alone, how would we survive?" she cried.

Semaion Kabir, officer-in-charge of Mahalchhari police station, said after completing all formalities, the three brothers were cremated around 4:00pm yesterday. Several hundreds of people attended the funeral.

Pradip was a local correspondent of the Bangla daily Bhorer Kagoj while Hebentu and Ubuntu were farmers.



Rescued Bangladeshi migrants, Muhammad Mesher Ali, right, shows the head and body scars of Muhammad Murad Husein, left, at the confinement area in Kuala Langsa OF Indonesia yesterday. Ali was attacked by Myanmarse when violence broke out on their boat between the two camps as migrants became desperate for food.

PHOTO: AFP

A day to salute our media

FROM PAGE 1

criminal charges against him. As often happens, the police claimed he was carrying arms.

The incident could have ended here and Kadar would have been languishing in jail. After all who is interested in a routine arrest story?

But no, the newsmen smelled the rat and dug into the story. They found out that Kadar was an innocent victim. The reaction of the police was also typical; they tried to stick to their claim. Finally, the High Court played a noble role by ordering probe into the incident. Investigation found that the police officer was at fault. Just day before yesterday, the officer was awarded a three-year term.

The other incident is the final admission of the police that sex attacks were committed near the Dhaka University TSC on the Pahela Baishakh. On Sunday, they released

pictures of eight offenders after a month of the crime. Again had the media not been so vociferous in reporting the incident, the whole thing would have been pushed under the carpet once again.

Bangladesh media, despite its many pitfalls, have been strong on standing by the helpless. Limon is another case in point. An innocent student, he was shot in the leg by the Rab and then labelled as a criminal. It was the relentless efforts of the media that finally ensured justice for Limon.

This is exactly the role of media worldwide -- investigating events and bringing out the truth. This is why the Watergate scandal was unearthed leading to the resignation of American president Richard Nixon.

In Bangladesh, we should also pitch for a strong media which can function without fear and with utmost professionalism. A free media is for our own interest.

Fishermen rescue

FROM PAGE 1

from Myanmar and handed over to local Bangladeshi fishermen.

The victims are identified as Alauddin Sheikh, Mamun Mollah and Jasim Munsif of Jhenidah; Idris Ali, Mohammad Ismail and Imran Ali of Sirajganj; and Shahadat Sarkar of Jaipurhat.

"A Thai fishing trawler threw them into the Bay of Bengal. A Myanmar boat rescued them and handed [them] over to a Bangladeshi fishing boat. They are now under our custody," said Dickson.

He said the seven had told coast guard officers there were three boats in the area packed with migrants from Bangladesh and neighbouring Myanmar's persecuted Rohingya minority.

"They told us that the three boats were parked eight kilometres south of Myanmar's Sitaparakia coast. In one boat, there were 68 people and the two others have more than 100 people each."

The claims could not immediately be verified by other government agencies, reports AFP.

But a migrant stuck in one of the ships told a Bangladeshi private television station that it was carrying more than 200 Bangladeshis in Myanmar waters.

Maj Arif tells of Zia's role

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accused of committing the offence? Did the investigating officer find any evidence to prove my involvement in the case? The intention behind dragging me into the matter proves they tried in every way to escape punishment after committing a crime," he said.

After Nazrul disappeared on April 27 last year, his wife Selina Islam requested Tareque to arrest Nur Hossain, Nazrul's political rival, to find out her husband. Tareque met Selina and her family members between 8:00 and 9:00 that night at the Rab-11 office in Narayanganj, according to Tareque's confessional statement.

About three hours later, around 12:30am, Tareque received a call in which Maj Arif told him: "I am ready to make the seven disappear."

According to Arif's confession, Tareque then said, "Ok go ahead."

Tareque was duly informed of every development ever since two teams of about 20 Rab personnel abducted Nazrul, his driver and three aides. Senior lawyer Chandan Sarkar and his driver were picked up separately but around the same time as Chandan witnessed the abduction of Nazrul and the others.

Bodies of six of them were found in the Shitalakkhya on April 30 and that of another in the same river the next day.

Earlier, at a conference of commanding officers in March last year, Zia assigned Tareque with arresting

Nazrul.

The Rab ADG gave Tareque a list of criminals to be arrested. "In that list, Nazrul was marked specifically," Tareque said in his confession.

Tareque then ordered Arif to arrest Nazrul and asked Lt Commander Masud Rana to assist Arif in this. Masud confessed to have made several failed attempts to carry out the order.

According to Arif, success came on April 27, the day Nur Hossain informed him that Nazrul was expected to appear before a Narayanganj court.

The message was relayed to Tareque around 10:00am. After Tareque gave the go ahead, Arif led a team of 11 Rab members and Rana a team of seven to eight for the operation.

Around 1:30pm, Arif picked up Nazrul and four others in his car from a relatively deserted area near Fatullah stadium.

Around the same time and place, Rana and his team picked up a man, who later turned out to be lawyer Chandan Sarkar, and his driver as they raised a hue and cry over the abduction of Nazrul and his aides.

The two teams then drove towards Kanchpur and around 1:50pm Arif reported to Tareque that they picked up the seven men.

"No witness can be spared. Make all of them disappear," Arif quoted the CO as ordering him.

Then on April 28 around 2:00am, Zia called Arif. But instead of answering the phone, he called his CO,

HRW deplores health hazards from toxic tanneries

STAR REPORT

Child labour as well as environmental and health hazards in tanneries will be the same even if the industry is relocated from Hazaribagh unless Bangladesh strictly enforces related laws, observes Human Rights Watch.

There is a rare chance today for accountability for the massive health problems caused by Bangladesh's toxic tanneries, the New York-based rights organisation said yesterday.

The High Court has summoned the secretary to the Ministry of Industries to explain failure to relocate around 150 leather tanneries out of Hazaribagh, a heavily populated residential neighbourhood of the capital, says in a media release issued by the HRW.

"Residents of Hazaribagh slums complain of illnesses such as fevers, skin diseases, respiratory problems, and diarrhoea caused by extreme tannery pollution in the air, water and soil," the international rights watchdog states.

The HRW says the HC is entirely justified in demanding the government to explain why the relocation has dragged on for so long.

Fourteen years after the court ruled that the government had to ensure the tanneries installed adequate means to treat their waste, the ministry has only delivered a string of broken promises: the Dhaka Tannery Estate, a relocation site 20km west of Dhaka, was initially supposed to be ready in December 2005, then December 2006, then June 2010, then June 2012 and then December 2013.

The ministry is almost sure to miss its current deadline of June 2015, the release reads.

Welcoming the HC move to summon the industries secretary, the HRW says, "The court should take the opportunity to ask the secretary some basic questions tomorrow about the lack of labour and environmental inspection. It should also summon officials from the Department of the Environment and the Ministry of Labour and clearly direct them to enforce their laws in Hazaribagh."

UK parliament reconvenes after Cameron's victory

AFP, London

British lawmakers are expected to appoint a speaker on Monday as they convene at parliament for the first time after a general election that handed Prime Minister David Cameron's Conservatives a surprise majority.

The former speaker of the House of Commons chamber, John Bercow, is expected to be re-selected unopposed and hundreds of newly-elected Members of Parliament will be formally sworn in starting from Tuesday.

The decision on the speaker will be presided over by 84-year-old Gerald Kaufman, who as parliament's longest-serving MP is "Father of the House".

Kaufman will put forward Bercow's name in a ceremony starting at 1330 GMT and only if the candidacy is opposed would a vote have to be held on Tuesday.

Cameron is expected to speak afterwards.

Tareque, to ask why the ADG was calling him.

Tareque told Arif that he would call Zia and let him know. A little later, he returned the call and said the ADG asked Arif and his team to meet him.

When Arif reached a Narayanganj jetty around 3:30am, he found Tareque already waiting there. Tareque immediately sent Arif to Zia's office at the Rab headquarters, where he reached around 4:00am.

When Zia asked him where Nazrul was, Arif was surprised because all the seven were already murdered and dumped into the Meghna river.

"Why do you ask me this?" Arif told Zia. "I do what my CO [Tareque] asks me to do. So, talk to the CO about the matter."

Zia then phoned Tareque and asked Arif to talk to him. Arif took the phone and asked Tareque: "Sir, why is the ADG sir asking me about Nazrul's whereabouts?"

Tareque told him that he too was not clear why the ADG was asking this.

In the confessional statement, Rana quoted Arif as telling him: "I killed them around 12:30am, by pushing injection, under the Kanchpur bridge, and then strangulating them inside the car. Zia called me around 2:00am. Had he called me around 11:30pm or 12:00am it would not have happened."

Asked about this, Zia said he called Arif as soon as the matter was brought to his notice. "How could I make the call earlier?"