

PM for exporting arms, ammo

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday directed the Bangladesh Ordnance Factories (BOF) to produce arms, ammo, weapons and explosives for various forces to reduce dependence on import.

"You [ordnance factories] will have to keep in mind that we won't import all the arms and explosives.... If we can produce enough, we'll go for export in future," she told a meeting of high officials of the defence ministry and its associated bodies at the ministry conference room.

Hasina, also in-charge of the ministry, said the ordnance factories have been producing 7.62 millimetre auto rifle, cartridges of various calibre and hand grenades for the Bangladesh Army.

She hoped that steps would be taken to enhance the capacity of the officials and employees of the BOF to meet the local demand for arms, ammo and explosives.

Referring to the verdicts in maritime boundary cases against Myanmar and India, the PM said it was both political and diplomatic success of her previous government to gain the vast maritime area through winning the cases and the relations with the two neighbours are intact.

Hasina said the target of her present government is to reduce poverty by another 10 percent from the present level of 24 percent.

The extreme poverty in the country

is now nine percent, which would be eradicated within the next two to three years, she added.

She stressed the need for building a modern defence system to safeguard national independence and sovereignty.

Terming the armed forces the symbol of the country's independence and sovereignty, she said various programmes are being implemented for further enhancing the capability of the army, navy and air force.

Referring to the defence policy framed in 1974 as per directives of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, she said the Forces Goal- 2030 has been formulated in light of the defence policy.

Praising the role of the members of the armed forces in maintaining international peace, stability and security, she said they earned huge appreciation of the world community. The forces would have to continue their laudable role in maintaining global peace, she noted.

Hasina said her government was very much active in maintaining Bangladesh's position as the highest number of peacekeeper-contributing country to the United Nations.

Maj Gen (ret'd) Tarique Ahmed Siddique, PM's security affairs adviser; the chiefs of the three services, Md Abul Kalam Azad, PM's principal secretary; Kazi Habibul Awal, senior secretary at the defence ministry; and AKM Shameem Chowdhuri, PM's



Rohingya migrants, who recently arrived in Indonesia by boat, queue up as they wait to have their identification recorded inside a temporary compound for refugees in Aceh Timur regency, Indonesia's Aceh Province yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

They risk death only to live

Rohingyas face abuse, extortion and even death to flee horror camps in Myanmar

Afp, Sittwe

As Mahmoud Yasien knelt before the people smugglers and begged for his pregnant wife's life, the Rohingya migrant's dreams of a better life evaporated, his ship stranded hundreds of miles from its destination in Malaysia.

His pleas spared her life and when phone calls relayed news of their nightmare journey back to their community in a displacement camp in Myanmar's western Rakhine state, neighbours cobbled together the cash to pay off the smugglers and buy them back from the boat.

"She was unconscious and they said they would throw her in the water. But I begged at their feet and apologised. That's why they didn't throw her overboard," said the 24-year-old who arrived back in Anauk San Pya camp outside the town of Sittwe on Sunday.

His entreaties for mercy were not, however, enough to spare Bebe Nu Asha, who is eight months pregnant, the beatings or starvation rations handed out by the smugglers who held them at sea for 40 days.

An estimated 2,000 other migrants remain stranded on ships off Myanmar and Bangladesh - with little food or water - as smugglers mull their next move after a Thai crackdown disrupted established trafficking routes through that country, which had long been used to funnel fleeing Rohingyas to Malaysia.

The United Nations says desperate relatives are buying back some migrants from those boats for around \$300 per head - stemming the smugglers' losses after their cash-cow networks further south were pulled.

Fears for the passengers' safety are mounting with the monsoon storms ready to lash the region.

But life in Anauk San Pya, one of a cluster of bleak sprawling camps of bamboo huts provided by overseas donors to the marginalised Rohingyas, is not much better, Yasien says.

"If we went to Malaysia, we would be able to eat... We have nothing here, no job. If we get food, we will eat.

Otherwise, we die," he said.

The Muslim Rohingyas are stateless and reviled by Myanmar's Buddhist majority, who deny their estimated 1.3 million community rights by describing them as foreigners.

Some 140,000 people, the majority Rohingyas, were displaced by deadly communal violence in Rakhine in 2012 between local Buddhists and Rohingyas.

Each year thousands try to flee Rakhine State, with the rate of departures particularly high at this time of year as many are desperate to leave before the monsoon adds further danger to an already perilous crossing.

Food in the camps is carefully rationed, limited to staples such as rice and pulses, and suffocating restrictions prevent the Rohingyas from travelling and working.

Wiry and energetic Yasien had not had a job for three years when he finally made the decision to sail to Malaysia with his wife.

Trapped inside the camps, the couple said they were struggling to stretch their food supplies and were desperate to leave the small room they shared with eight other relatives.

Friends already settled in Malaysia had found menial work, Yasien said, achieving at least a modicum of security that currently eludes Rohingyas back in Myanmar.

Yasien described how he and his wife took a small boat under the cover of darkness to link up with the larger ship they later found themselves stranded on - the trip was advertised as taking just a day.

"There were many boats in the sea. Three boats with about four, five or six hundred (passengers) each are still waiting," Yasien said.

Around 100 people have returned in recent days from the ships and local people say that few Sittwe people are now onboard.

The remaining passengers are split between those from Bangladesh and others from northern Rakhine, where Rohingyas communities live in isolated villages penned in by security restric-

A ray of hope for boatpeople

FROM PAGE 1

international efforts to cope with Southeast Asia's stranded boatpeople, the US State Department said on Wednesday, reports AP.

Spokeswoman Marie Harf said the US was prepared to take a leading role in any multi-country effort, organised by the United Nations refugee agency UNHCR to resettle the most vulnerable refugees.

Harf welcomed the decision of Malaysia and Indonesia "to uphold their responsibilities under international law and provide humanitarian assistance and shelter to 7,000 vulnerable migrants".

The US would consider requests from the UNHCR and International Organisation for Migration (IOM) for funds to help receive and screen refugees as they come to shore.

Harf said since October 1, the US has resettled more than 1,000 Rohingyas. Last year, the US accepted nearly 70,000 refugees -- people with a well-founded fear of persecution -- from around the world.

"I think the Malaysians and the Indonesians have requested some help resettling people. We're taking a careful look at the proposal," Harf told reporters in Washington DC.

"It has to be a multi-country effort. We obviously can't take this all on ourselves. But we are prepared to play a leading role in this effort."

Deputy Secretary of State Anthony Blinken was scheduled to visit Myanmar yesterday and urge it to cooperate with Bangladesh to help migrants adrift.

Harf said Blinken would ask Myanmar to improve conditions inside the country for the Rohingyas.

"The only sustainable solution to the problem is changing the conditions that let them put their lives at risk in the first place," Blinken, the second-

ranking US diplomat, told reporters in Indonesia.

At least 120,000 minority Muslim Rohingyas have fled sectarian violence and apartheid-like conditions in predominantly Buddhist Myanmar in the last three years. Myanmar officials refer to the group as "Bangalees" and insist they have immigrated illegally from Bangladesh, even though most have lived in the country for generations.

MALAYSIA ORDERS RESCUE
Ordering search and rescue for the boatpeople in the Andaman Sea, Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak yesterday said they would also deliver humanitarian aid by land and sea.

Najib on Twitter had said it was "basic human compassion" to provide aid to the hungry and the sick. He said search and rescue by the country's naval and maritime authorities was needed to "prevent loss of life".

Meanwhile, the Malaysian Muslim Restaurant Owners Association (Presma), offered to hire the Rohingyas and Bangladeshi "boat migrants" who have been temporarily allowed to land in Malaysia, reports Malaysian daily The Star quoting the association's President Noorul Hassan Saul Hameed.

If the proposal was not contrary to any government policy, the migrants were welcome to work at any of the restaurants affiliated to the association, he said.

"We would like to extend our help to the victims who are just like our brothers and sisters," said Hameed. Currently, 603 Bangladeshi "boat migrants" were staying in Malaysian Immigration detention centre.

AUSTRALIA SAYS NO

Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott yesterday ruled out helping to resettle the wave of migrants fleeing to Southeast Asia, saying it would

worsen the problem and "encourage people to get on boats", reports AFP from Sydney.

Abbott, whose conservative government employs tough measures to stop boatpeople, said Australia "will do absolutely nothing that gives any encouragement to anyone to think that they can get on a boat, that they can work with people-smugglers to start a new life".

"Nope, nope, nope," the Australian leader said when reporters asked whether he would offer resettlement to the Rohingyas.

"If we do the slightest thing to encourage people to get on the boats, this problem will get worse, not better," he said.

Thailand's junta chief yesterday said those who felt his government should do more to help stranded boatpeople should "migrate" to sea themselves and swap places with them.

The comments from Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha came as Bangkok was criticised for not following Indonesia and Malaysia and agree to accept the stranded migrants.

"Anyone who supports this idea [of accepting the boatpeople], please contribute one baht a day or take them to your home when their case has been processed," the former army chief told lawmakers during a speech on the Thai budget at National Legislative Assembly in Bangkok.

"Or you migrate out to the sea and bring them to live here instead," he added.

Prayut defended Thailand's policy towards migrants, saying the country was already home to more than 900,000 refugees from decades of regional turmoil.

He claimed that Thai soldiers get a smaller food allowance than detained migrants.

BGB rescues 17 jobseekers in Teknaf

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Border Guard Bangladesh yesterday rescued 17 jobseekers from Shahporir Dwip in Teknaf upazila when they were trying to go to Malaysia by sea illegally.

They were first handed over to Teknaf Police Station and then produced before Cox's Bazar Senior Judicial Magistrate's Court.

On information, a patrol team of BGB-42 Battalion conducted a drive at Jaliapara in Shahporir Dwip around 4:00am and rescued the people, said Maj Abu Russel Siddique, additional director of the BGB battalion in Cox's Bazar.

He said the fortune-seekers had been drifting at sea for around 50 days. They had sailed for Malaysia on a fishing trawler from Maheshkhali on brokers' instructions.

However, the brokers took the Malaysia-bound people to Jaliapara on a small fishing boat and later abandoned them on the bank of the Naf river around 3:00am yesterday.

The rescued include Billal Hossain, Mohammad Shafiq, Kazi Ilias, Kawsar Mia, Mohammad Rakib, Asad Mia, Mohammad Yousuf, Kiron Mubin, Sohel Mia, Mohammad Alam and Mohammad Sahabuddin of Narsingdi; Abu Bakkar, Shahjahan Ali and Yunus Ali of Chittagong; Manik Modak and Nabi Hossain of Narayanganj; and Lokman Ali of Habiganj.

The rescue came at a time when human trafficking through the Bay of Bengal has become a serious regional problem, especially following the discovery of mass graves in Thai jungles and subsequent crackdown by Thailand.

Fake govt staffs being trafficked

FROM PAGE 1

if there were any others behind the forgery.

Admitting the passport forgery, State Minister for Home Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal yesterday said the government would take stern action against traffickers.

"Many names can be revealed by the investigation. But we can't do anything

without verifying the findings of the investigation. I can assure you [media] that if any political leader or government official was found involved in human trafficking, he would be brought to book as per the prime minister's order," the state minister told a Meet the Press event at the secretariat.

According to the Turkish government's letter, Taufiqul Islam (passport# 5125845), Mamunur Rashid (passport# 6126042) and Amin Uddin (passport# 1126639) travelled on fake documents.

Under a bilateral agreement between Bangladesh and Turkey, government officials of both the

countries can visit each other's country without a visa. Reaching Turkey, Bangladeshi officials can easily get visas to Europe, according to home ministry sources.

A trafficking gang with the help of some corrupt government officials has been taking undue advantage of the

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Salahuddin's condition worsens

FROM PAGE 1

him for trespass and took him to a mental hospital. The BNP leader was then shifted to the civil hospital.

Dr Vaskar Borgohain, assistant medical superintendent of the NEIGRIHM, told Indian journalists yesterday afternoon that Salahuddin has been suffering from urology, heart, kidney, prostate and skin related problems, and doctors are closely monitoring his health condition.

He said they will publish a medical report regarding Salahuddin's health at 12:00noon today.

Several sources in Meghalaya police said law enforcers wanted to produce Salahuddin before the court as early as possible. And it was the reason why they requested the Shillong Civil Hospital to shift him to a specialised hospital.

Seeking anonymity, a top Meghalaya police official said they

wanted to have the BNP leader shifted to the NEIGRIHM for two reasons. "One is ensuring his better treatment and another is to get the release order so that they could produce him before the court."

If police get clearance from the NEIGRIHM today, they will try to produce him before the court tomorrow, said the police high-up.

On Wednesday night, the NEIGRIHM authorities allowed Hasina Ahmed to stay beside her husband as patient's attendant.

Meanwhile, sources at NEIGRIHM said Salahuddin talked to BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia over his wife's mobile phone from the CCU for five to six minutes last night.

But no one in the BNP could confirm it.

Speaking to this newspaper, Jony, who had a brief phone conversation

with Salahuddin yesterday, said the BNP leader told him that he was feeling very sick and found it difficult to talk.

Quoting Hasina Ahmed, Jony said she yesterday appealed to the NEIGRIHM authorities to form a medical board if necessary.

Meanwhile, Hasina Ahmed met SP Mahanta, senior advocate of Meghalaya High Court, and discussed the legal procedures for bringing her husband home, Salahuddin's elder brother Giasuddin Ahmed told this correspondent.

Mahanta told her that it was necessary to produce Salahuddin's passport before a Shillong court in the case against the BNP leader for trespass into Indian territory.

Salahuddin's passport would be taken to Shillong upon permission from the Indian court, said Giasuddin.