



FROM LEFT ... An Indonesian doctor on Tuesday attends to three-year-old Shahira Bibi, a severely malnourished Rohingya girl as she lies unconscious at the hospital in Langsa in Aceh. Beneath the swaying banana trees, there is nothing but a few plants to mark the resting place of Shahira who died on Wednesday. She was rescued from a sinking vessel off Indonesia's western Aceh province. Shahira's mother and sister rest at a confinement area in Langsa port.



PHOT: AFP

Malaysia finds mass graves

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He said the public would be updated as soon as fresh information is available.

Dr Ahmad Zahid added that discovery left little doubt that Malaysians were involved. "Malaysia as a government is not involved. But Malaysians, yes! I recognise that as a fact."

"But you know, in Mexico and the United States, they have more intelligence and state-of-the-art border security but there is still human trafficking happening there," he told reporters at the Kajang Prison during the ministry's "Family Day" celebration.

According to media reports, the mass graves were believed to contain the bodies of hundreds of migrants from Myanmar and Bangladesh.

Police discovered 30 large graves containing the remains of hundreds of people in two places in the northern state of Perlis, which borders Thailand, the Utusan Malaysia newspaper reported.

The Star newspaper of Malaysia reported on its website that nearly 100 bodies were found in one mass grave on Friday.

"I reckon it was a preliminary finding and eventually I think the number would be more than that," Zahid said when asked about reports of the number of mass graves discovered.

Zahid said the camps identified are in the areas of Klian Intan and villages near the border.

"They have been there for quite some time. I suspect the camps have

been operating for at least five years." A police spokeswoman declined to comment on the issue, saying a news conference would be held today, reports Reuters.

A police official who declined to be identified said police commandos and forensic experts from the capital, Kuala Lumpur, were at the site but it was unclear how many graves and bodies had been found.

Northern Malaysia is on a route for smugglers bringing people to Southeast Asia by boat from Myanmar -- mostly Myanmar's Rohingyas fleeing persecution and jobseekers people from Bangladesh.

Smugglers have also used southern Thailand, and police believe the discovery had a connection to mass graves

found on the Thai side of the border this month.

Twenty-six bodies were exhumed from a grave in Thailand's Songkhla province near a camp with suspected links to human trafficking.

DHAKA DISCUSSES WITH DIPLOMATS

Our diplomatic correspondent reports: The Bangladesh government has called out the envoys from Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and Myanmar for an emergency meeting at the foreign ministry today to discuss the ongoing migration crisis and ways to resolve it.

Concerned over the discovery of mass graves and rescue of Bengali speaking boatpeople off the coasts of the four countries, the foreign ministry

called the envoys in Dhaka to know the latest situation and discuss a possible coordination with the countries for safety, security and safe return of boatpeople through proper verification of their citizenship.

Foreign Secretary Md Shahidul Haque will chair the meeting at 3:00pm, which is expected to give guidelines and select team for a meeting in Thailand to be held on May 29.

Thailand is hosting the meeting of 15 countries to discuss ways to address the Southeast Asian trafficking crisis.

Meanwhile, the foreign ministry has called an inter-ministerial meeting at noon to discuss the next course of action to stop the human trafficking.

Senior officials from the ministries of home, Relief, expatriates welfare,

BGB and representatives of other security and law enforcing agencies will attend the meeting.

INDONESIA LAUNCHES SEARCH
Indonesia's military said Sunday following President Joko Widodo's order, a rescue operation for stranded migrant boats began Friday.

"We will save the migrants and take them to shore," military spokesman Fuad Basya told AFP, adding that as of late Saturday, no new boats had been sighted.

Previously, Indonesian fishermen have helped hundreds of stranded Bangladeshis and Rohingyas to shore.

Widodo yesterday indicated that Jakarta would need international help to foot the bill for sheltering thousands of destitute people.

Myanmar navy's claim untrue

Reuters finds Rohingyas among 200 rescued

REUTERS, Myanmar

At least eight Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar were among some 200 migrants rescued from a trafficking boat by the Myanmar navy on Thursday, according to interviews conducted by Reuters, contradicting official accounts that all onboard were from Bangladesh.

Myanmar portrayed the rescue operation as a proof that thousands of "boatpeople" were not persecuted Rohingya from Myanmar, denying it discriminates against the minority and resisting pressure to help solve the problem.

Southeast Asia is grappling with a humanitarian crisis involving thousands of people trafficked from Myanmar and Bangladesh into Malaysia and Indonesia. After a crackdown disrupted smuggling routes, many are now trapped at sea on what the United Nations has described as "floating coffins".

"This clearly shows 'Boat People are not from Myanmar', strong evidence," Zaw Htay, a senior official of the office of the president said in a Facebook post announcing the rescue of the boat on Friday.

But on a visit to a remote village in northwest Myanmar, where more than 200 rescued men were being fed and taken care of at an Islamic school, Reuters interviewed a group of Rohingya Muslims from the village of Kyauk Taw in Rakhine state.

"We had no jobs and nothing to lose. So we boarded the boat," said Marmot Rarbi, 23. He said the traffickers let the eight Rohingya men on the boat for free, but later demanded

6,500 Malaysian ringgit for smuggling them to Malaysia.

Rarbi said he was on the boat for more than three months.

Thousands of Rohingyas have boarded trafficking ships.

Most of Myanmar's 1.1 million Rohingyas, an ethnic minority living in western Myanmar, are stateless and live in apartheid-like conditions. Almost 140,000 were displaced in deadly clashes with Buddhists in the state of Rakhine in 2012.

Meanwhile, on a visit to the Islamic school, Vijay Nambiar, special adviser on Myanmar to the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, thanked the government for the rescue and called on the Rakhine Buddhist majority to include the Muslims in nation-building.

Nambiar told Reuters that Myanmar deserved credit for the rescue operation, but added that in addition to abject poverty, it was discrimination in Myanmar that pushed the Rohingyas into the hands of traffickers.

"Part of the cause for the migration is also the treatment of the Muslim community in Rakhine...and institutional discrimination against the Rohingyas are things that we have to work on," said Nambiar, pledging full UN support to help solve the issue.

Myanmar has said it would continue its rescue efforts.

"Our navy and airforce are out there in search of the boats," said Win Myint, deputy minister of immigration and population.

Southeast Asian nations will discuss the "boatpeople" crisis at an emergency conference in Thai capital Bangkok next week.

Rohingyas branded as Bangladeshis

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Kyauk Taw in Rakhine state where the rescued have been kept.

A team of Bangladesh officials will go there today or tomorrow to interview them, said a top foreign ministry official.

"If anyone is a confirmed Bangladeshi citizen, we'll instantly arrange for his repatriation," the official added.

In another development, the Border Guard Bangladesh yesterday sought a complete list from Myanmar of those rescued.

Previously, the Myanmar authorities sent an "incomplete" list of 200 people, claiming they were Bangladeshis. The list does not contain particulars of those rescued in detail.

THE DENIAL
Over the recent years, thousands of "stateless" Rohingya and desperate fortune-seekers from Bangladesh embarked on dangerous sea voyages to Malaysia and other countries.

A recent crackdown on the people-smuggling trade in Thailand led to scores of migrants being abandoned by trafficking gangs in the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea.

Taking advantage of the situation, the Myanmar authorities are labelling the rescued as Bangalees.

Even when the international media reported that several thousand Rohingyas and Bangladeshi people are floating in the sea, Myanmar Vice-president U Nyan Tun on May 21 said most of the boatpeople were not from his country.

On the same day, its information ministry cited Nyan Tun saying the assumption that people are fleeing the state due to suppression and discrimination are completely at odds with what is happening on the ground, although some people may be trying to migrate for economic reasons.

The next day, Myanmar's military commander-in-chief said some boatpeople landing in Malaysia and Indonesia were "pretending to be

Rohingya Muslims" to receive UN aid and that the "boat victims" were from Bangladesh, according to Reuters.

"This is nothing but the continuation of its [Myanmar's] policy," said Prof Delwar Hossain of international relations department at Dhaka University.

Bangladesh is already under international pressure to take in more Rohingyas, and Myanmar's denial and trick would result in more pressure on Bangladesh, he observed.

"Bangladesh has to expedite its diplomatic efforts and show with facts and figures that these victims are mostly Rohingyas," said Prof Delwar, also director of Centre for East Asia Studies at the DU.

Asked, a government official said, "We have strong doubt that all the 208 boatpeople are Bangladeshis There may be some Bangladeshis, but we believe that most of them are Rohingyas from Myanmar."

THE PERSECUTION

Over the years, thousands of Rohingyas people have fled to Bangladesh and other countries to escape persecution.

The trend began in the late 1970s as its government continued to impose discriminatory regulations on the Rohingyas, estimated to be 1.1 million, mostly in Rakhine province.

According to the UN refugee agency UNHCR, the Rohingyas were not formally recognised as Burmese national group after the country's independence in 1948. Also, the 1982 Citizenship Law denied them citizenship.

They are subject to various exploitations, including forced labour, extortion, restrictions on movement, denial of residence rights, inequitable marriage regulations and land confiscation.

Amid military oppression, some 5 lakh Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh -- first in 1978 and then in 1991-92. Presently, around 32,000 Rohingya refugees live in the UNHCR-run camps



Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar and Bangladeshis rescued by the Myanmar navy are being interviewed by immigration officers at a Muslim religious school used as a temporary refugee camp at Aletankyaw in the Rakhine state of Myanmar on Saturday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

in Bangladesh, while an estimated 3 to 5 lakh live outside the camps.

Under the present reformist government formed in 2011, Myanmar saw the worst sectarian violence in 2012 that left hundreds dead and 1.4 lakh homeless, mostly Rohingyas in Rakhine, according to media reports.

Already grappling with the refugees, Bangladesh this time closed its door to the fresh Rohingya influx.

Over the past three years, over 120,000 Rohingyas have boarded ships to flee abroad. At least 25,000 migrants left Myanmar and Bangladesh in the first quarter of this year, about double the number over the same period last year. Between 40 and 60 percent of the 25,000 are thought to be from Myanmar's western state of Rakhine, the BBC reported on May 18, citing the UN refugee agency.

BORDER ALERT

Dhaka put on alerts the border guards and local administration to resist any possible pushback from Myanmar.

"From previous experiences, the government has ordered the border force to keep an eye on the border so that no pushback can taken place," said a highly placed source, seeking anonymity.

MASS GRAVES IN MALAYSIA

After the discovery of mass graves in Malaysia believed to contain bodies of hundreds of migrants from Myanmar and Bangladesh, officials at Bangladesh High Commission in Kuala Lumpur said they would look into the matter.

Sayedul Islam, counsellor (Labour Wing) at the mission, told The Daily Star by phone yesterday that there was no way of knowing if there were any Bangladeshi among the victims until the Malaysian police investigated it.

Earlier on May 11, as many as 603 migrants, who claimed to be Bangladeshis, were rescued by the Malaysian authorities.

Sayedul Islam said they would start verifying their nationality by this week.

Indian visa set to get easy

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Short duration medical treatment or casual business visit would be eligible for the visa facility.

"This [eTV facility] will be a gift from the Indian prime minister to the people of Bangladesh," the source in New Delhi told The Daily Star, adding, "The Indian side wants to make the announcement as a unilateral gesture by India for the Bangladeshi people."

"Modi will make certain positive announcements which will be pleasant surprises. e-Tourist Visa could be one of them," the source said.

"Modi is such a politician who can take any major initiative going beyond the structured negotiations of officials," it added.

India and Bangladesh are likely to sign a series of agreements during Modi's visit to Dhaka likely on June 6-7, ushering in plans for road, rail and port connectivity and energy tie-ups.

Modi and his Bangladeshi counterpart, Sheikh Hasina, are expected to flag off Kolkata-Dhaka-Tripura, and Dhaka-Shillong-Guwahati bus services.

Indian eTV fee is \$60 per person, excluding interchange charge for

E-TOURIST VISA APPLICATION PROCESS

STEP 1

APPLY ONLINE
Apply online and upload photo and passport page

STEP 2

PAY VISA FEE ONLINE
Using credit/debit card

STEP 3

RECEIVE eTV ONLINE
eTV will be sent to your e-mail

STEP 4

FLY TO INDIA
Print eTV and carry at the time of travel

credit or debit cards. The validity of the visa will be 30 days from the date of arrival in India, according to the website of Indian e-Tourist Visa.

According to officials, people with eTV can enter India through nine designated airports -- Bengaluru, Chennai, Cochin, Delhi, Goa, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Mumbai and Trivandrum.

However, the foreigner can exit from any of the authorised Immigration Check Posts in India. eTV is allowed for a maximum of two visits in a calendar year.

India launched eTV facility in November last year for 45 countries.

With the latest addition of China, the total number of countries under the scheme went to 76.

Indian media says Modi-led government has decided to extend the scheme to 150 countries by the end of this fiscal year.

Some 6.50 lakh Bangladeshis visited India with valid visas last year, according to an official estimate.

The introduction of eTV, many say, will increase the number every year as getting Indian visas will be hassle-free and quick.

While getting visa, Bangladeshis often face trouble due to delays in visa delivery, long procedural hassle, difficulties in online application and long queue for submitting passports for visa clearance.

Talking to The Daily Star, Gopi Kishan Sureka, a jute exporter from Kushtia, said Bangladeshis who have regular business relations with India will benefit immensely with the introduction of eTV.

"Due to complexities in current visa procedures, we have to communicate with our Indian business partners through emails and telephones. But you know, face-to-face discussion is always a better option," he said.

Gopi said both the countries should introduce eTV facility for its

citizens as businessmen from India also face similar difficulties in getting Bangladeshi visas.

Mohammad Zakaria, a private service holder in Dhaka, said he had planned to go on holiday in India with his family of four.

But he changed his mind after failing to submit his visa form online despite repeated attempts.

He is now going to another country.

eTV ELIGIBILITY

According to the Indian e-Tourist Visa website, the visa facility would be available for the passports that have at least six months validity from the date of arrival in India.

For availing the facility, international travellers should have return tickets or onward journey tickets, with sufficient money to spend during his or her stay in India.

Applicants of the countries eligible for the facility may apply online minimum four days in advance of the date of arrival in India with a window of 30 days. For example: If you are applying on September 1, you can select the arrival date any day between September 5 to October 4, says the website.

Mastermind

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police in Thailand's Ranong province earlier.

Thai sources in Ranong bordering Myanmar said Nuttapat holding Thai-Myanmar citizenship was in Myanmar with his wife.

He is believed to be running the Rohingya trafficking business.

On May 21, Myanmar's navy rescued a group of 208 migrants on board a fishing vessel in its waters.

According to the captain and crew of the vessel, Nuttapat was the owner and ringleader.

Later, Myanmar authorities ordered his arrest and started working with Thai authorities to crack down on human trafficking rings.

Thai officials have identified 10 people allegedly involved in the smuggling ring led by Nuttapat.

They have reportedly uncovered evidence showing a money trail in which properties and other assets were transferred and cross-owned by various family members who are unusually rich.

Apart from Nuttapat, another five suspects are believed to have slipped into Myanmar and they are hiding there now.

[With report from The Nation]