



Left to right, an armed Royal Malaysian Police walks at an abandoned migrant camp used by human traffickers in Malaysia; inset, a human jawbone at a grave site there; an abandoned camp; a Malaysian forensics team handles exhumed human remains.

PHOTO: AFP



Signs of fear and abuse

FROM PAGE 1

"We have found 37 graves (at the camp) but we have only recovered one body so far," said local police official Muhammad Bahar Ali.

Malaysian police have said a total of 139 gravesites had been found near abandoned camps spread out along the border and capable of housing hundreds of people.

The discovery of similar sites in Thailand in early May resulted in a Thai police crackdown that severely disrupted the steady flow of migrants that courses from Bangladesh and Myanmar down through Thailand and into Malaysia.

Malaysian police said it remained unclear how many bodies were buried in the inaccessible corner of mountainous jungle just a few hundred metres (yards) from Thailand.

But the Malaysian findings appeared to indicate a system of camps and graves larger than those over the border.

The camp visited yesterday seemed largely to have been picked clean of most evidence indicating what went on there.

But on the ground lay a human lower jaw with several teeth still in it.

A low cage-like pen also could be seen, but it was unknown whether it was used for livestock or people.

Joel Millman, a spokesman for the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), told a news briefing in Geneva that the body's representative in the region "predicts hundreds more (bodies) will be found in the days to come".

SANDALS, TEDDY BEAR

Photos from some of the other camps, provided by police, indicated the presence of small children, including a pair of sandals fit for a toddler, and a pink teddy bear.

Malaysian police have said the camps were discovered in operations launched following the Thai discoveries, and that they were occupied perhaps as recently as two weeks ago.

Several Malaysian villagers had told AFP on Monday that bedraggled Bangladeshi and Rohingya migrants had become a common sight in the area weeks before the current crisis erupted.

Some bore ugly scars or had bloodied feet from trekking across the frontier, and would beg locals for food and water.

Many were later picked up in private cars and driven away by unknown people, residents said.

Apparently abandoned in haste, what remained of the camp visited by Reuters reporters was little more than a tangle of bamboo and tarpaulin, but one police official, who did not want to be identified, said it could have held up to 400 people.

A large plastic water tank could be seen, suggesting a degree of permanence.

There were also signs of brutality, including coils of barbed wire around what appeared to have been makeshift cells and a low cage, too small to stand in, that police said may have been used to punish captives.

Residents in Wang Kelian, the nearest town on the Malaysian side of the border, said they were used to seeing migrants in the area.

"They are often starving, not eaten for weeks," said Abdul Rahman Mahmud, who runs a small hostel.

"They eat seeds or leaves or whatever they can find. It's a real pity and it's sad to see this."

Activists say the trafficking trade thrives likely with the help of corrupt Malaysian and Thai officials.

Before the discovery of the graves, government officials had dismissed the suggestion that such sites existed on Malaysian soil.

The grisly discoveries in Malaysia after the uncovering of similar graves on the Thai side of the border triggered a regional crisis.

"We don't know if there is a link between the Thai camps and Malaysia camps," Phutthichart Ekachan, deputy chief of Thailand's Provincial Police Region 9, told Reuters.

"It is possible that because of the Thai crackdown some of the camps moved and some of them (migrants) then walked over or escaped to the Thai side. It is possible but it isn't something we have been able to confirm."

State news agency Bernama quoted Malaysia's police chief, Inspector General of Police Khalid Abu Bakar, as saying that the camps were thought

to have been occupied since 2013, and two were "only abandoned between two and three weeks ago".

Khalid told reporters on Monday that police had been "shocked by the cruelty" of the camps, where he said there were signs of torture.

OFFICIAL COMPLICITY?

The scale of the discoveries has raised questions about the level of complicity by officials on both sides of the border.

Malaysia's Home Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said yesterday that initial investigations revealed links between forest rangers and smuggling syndicates, Bernama reported, adding that some had been detained by police as part of the probe.

"We suspect some of them were involved...but we are working with the forestry department in terms of enforcement as they are supposed to carry out enforcement in the area," he was quoted as telling reporters at parliament.

The Malaysian government said it was investigating whether local forestry officials were involved with the people-smuggling gangs believed

responsible for such graves discovered around grim camps along the border with Thailand.

Link Myanmar

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to persuade our international and regional aid and grant-making institutions, including the European Union, to adopt a common position making funding the development of Myanmar conditional on the restoration of citizenship, nationality, and basic human rights to the Rohingya," he said.

The 1984 Nobel laureate is an anti-apartheid hero respected around the world as a moral authority.

Tens of thousands of Myanmar's 1.3 million Rohingya have fled the country in recent years, to escape sectarian violence as well as suffocating restrictions preventing travel and employment.

Each year thousands of Rohingya try to flee Myanmar by boat headed for other Southeast Asian countries, spurring a human trafficking trade in

CHECKING TRAFFICKING Bangladesh to form 'special squad'

UNB, Dhaka

Amid the growing menace of human trafficking to some South Asian countries through risky sea routes, the government is preparing a new "work-plan" to stop the crime as it may deal a severe blow to Bangladesh's international labour market.

The government also is planning to create a "Special Squad" with members of different law enforcement agencies to conduct drives against human traffickers on maritime border areas of Cox's Bazar and Chittagong, said Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Minister Engineer Khandker Mosharraf Hossain.

The minister voiced fear that the rising human trafficking incidents may close the door of Bangladeshi labour market to the Middle East and Malaysia.

"The recent incidents will spoil our image and goodwill in the international labour market. Even some countries might stop hiring Bangladeshi workers," said Mosharraf.

Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (Baira), Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU), experts and intellectuals also expressed deep concern over the looming risk of

losing the international labour market.

The minister further said the home ministry and the foreign ministry should come forward and work in coordination with his ministry to resolve the crisis.

State Minister for Home Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal said bilateral meetings will be arranged with Myanmar and Thailand to deal with human trafficking.

The BGB and the Coast Guard have been directed to apply rigorous strategies as per the new plan to arrest brokers and human traffickers, Asaduzzaman added.

The minister also said punitive actions would be taken against the human traffickers according to the relevant law.

To prevent trafficking, every fisherman and boatman, who work in the sea, will be given an identity card while each boat will be given a registration number, he added.

Sources at the foreign ministry said the government was trying to resolve the problem diplomatically.

Recently, law enforcers of Bangladesh, Thailand, Myanmar, Malaysia and Indonesia rescued over 1,000 migrants -- Bangladeshi and Rohingyas.

Peacekeeper killed in Mali

FROM PAGE 1

The United Nations peacekeepers were going towards the south of the city from Bamako airport when some assailants opened fire on them from a car, a source from Minusma, the UN's peacekeeping mission in Mali, told AFP.

"Unidentified armed men shot at two peacekeepers who were on board a UN vehicle on Monday night [early yesterday]. One of them was killed and the other seriously wounded," a Malian security source told AFP.

"We are seeking clarification and

details of the incident. This has to be viewed as a terrorist act. The perpetrators are the enemies of peace," the source added.

With more than 40 peacekeepers killed since its inception in 2013, the 11,000-strong Minusma is considered the most dangerous UN mission in the world.

It is regularly targeted by militants in the north. Yesterday's ambush came just five days after a militant opened fire on a UN residence in the city's Faso Kanu neighbourhood, according to AFP.

An unidentified gunman shot and

wounded a civilian guard and hurled two grenades in the early hours of Wednesday last week. The grenades did not explode and no troops were hurt.

The country's northern desert has been plagued by violence by jihadist groups that seized control of the region from Tuareg rebels before being routed by a French-led international intervention that began in 2013.

According to the website of the Armed Forces Division, 1,420 Bangladeshi peacekeepers have been deployed there under the UN mission since April last year.

PM CONDEMS KILLING

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday strongly denounced the "cowardly killing" of the Bangladeshi UN peacekeeper in Mali.

She urged the UN to play a more effective role in tackling such terrorist and militant acts, reports UNB.

In a condolence message, Hasina expressed profound shock at the death of Nilkantha Hajong.

She prayed for the eternal peace of the departed soul and conveyed her deep sympathy to the family members of the deceased.

The PM wished early recovery for the army soldier Sirajul Islam.

Salahuddin back in cop custody

FROM PAGE 1
authorities discharged him.

M Kharkrang, superintendent of police of East Khasi Hills district in Meghalaya, said Salahuddin would be produced in the court tomorrow (today), reports our Delhi correspondent.

"We have taken Salahuddin into custody in the afternoon today [yesterday] for completing necessary procedures," the SP said.

Kharkrang said Salahuddin was discharged after being declared "stable" by the authorities at the North Eastern Indira Gandhi Institute of Health and Medical Sciences

(NEIGRIHMS) at Mawdiangdiang, about 12km away from Shillong.

The BNP leader's counsel SP Mahanta said Salahuddin was discharged yesterday in the afternoon.

Another top official of Meghalaya police told The Daily Star that they would quiz the BNP leader at Shillong Sadar Police Station tonight for intruding into Indian territory on May 11.

Vaskar Borgohain, acting superintendent at the NEIGRIHMS, told the local media that the condition of Salahuddin, who was suffering from kidney and heart diseases, was now "stable".

Subrata Acharjee, India bureau chief of Somoy Television, confirmed this to The Daily Star, quoting Vaskar.

"After examining all the medical tests on him [Salahuddin], a medical board of NEIGRIHMS opined that the patient's physical condition was stable," Subrata quoted Vaskar as saying.

The BNP joint secretary general was shifted to the specialised medical institution from Shillong Civil Hospital for better treatment on May 20.

Salahuddin's wife Hasina Ahmed on Friday filed a petition with a

Shillong lower court, asking it to allow her husband to go to Singapore for treatment. The court, however, did not hold any hearing on that and asked the local police to submit a report on Salahuddin by May 29.

Salahuddin was picked up from a house in the city's Uttara on March 10 allegedly by unidentified men who introduced themselves as detectives.

He was found in Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya State, on May 11 after going missing for around two months.

Shillong police filed a case against Salahuddin under Foreigners Act for

Criminal gangs caught in city

'Robbers, muggers' among 22 held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In separate drives, 22 alleged muggers, carjackers and robbers were arrested in Dhaka and its adjacent districts on Monday.

Detective Branch (DB) of police said one of its teams, acting on a tip-off, nabbed a gang of eight "muggers" from Mohammadpur's Beribandh area in the capital around 9:45pm.

Around an hour later, the same team arrested another gang of five "carjackers" at Motijheel.

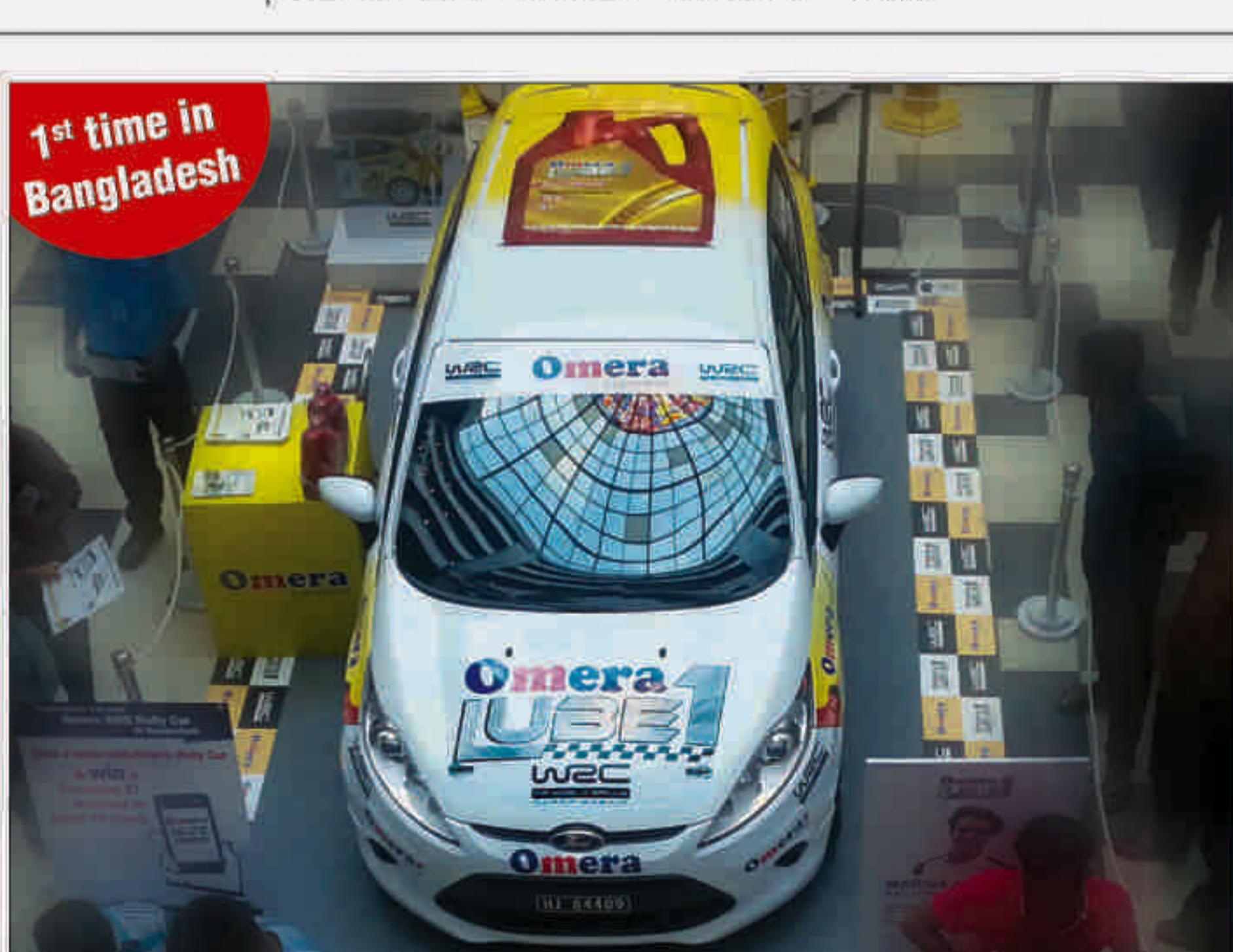
Also, police arrested nine "robbers" in separate raids in the capital, Narayanganj, Gazipur and Savar, said Mofiz Uddin Ahmed, deputy commissioner (Lalbagh division).

According to the detectives, those arrested at Mohammadpur are members of a gang which had long been involved in looting money withdrawn from banks for distributing salaries to factory workers and employees.

Sheikh Nazmul Alam, deputy commissioner (west) of DB police, yesterday told a press briefing at DMP media centre that those arrested at Motijheel were involved in carjacking.

Cases were filed with Mohammadpur and Motijheel police stations.

Mofiz Uddin Ahmed told a press briefing at Lalbagh that police teams in separate raids arrested nine "robbers" along with some locally-made weapons on Monday.



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