

Report rescue measures

HC asks govt about Bangladeshis trafficked, confined in camps abroad

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday directed the government to submit a report before it within four weeks on the steps taken for rescuing the Bangladeshis stranded in the sea and in the trafficking camps in Thailand and Malaysia.

Secretaries to the ministries of foreign and home affairs have been asked to submit the report to the HC.

In response to a writ petition, the court also issued a rule upon the government to explain within four weeks why its "inaction" to rescue those trafficked people should not be declared illegal, and why it should not be directed to take effective and prompt measures to rescue them.

In the rule, it also asked the authorities concerned of the government to show causes as to why they should not be ordered to try and punish the human traffickers under the Protection and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act, 2012.

Besides, secretaries to the ministries of foreign, home and law; inspector general of police, deputy commissioner and superintendent of police of Cox's Bazar and officer-in-charge of Teknaf Police Station have been made respondents to the rule.

The HC bench of Justice Farah Mahbub and Justice Kazi Md Ejarul Haque Akondo came up with the order and rule after hearing the petition filed by the National Forum for Protection of Human Rights, a rights organisation.

On May 26, the organisation submitted the petition seeking an order from the HC on the government to immediately rescue Bangladeshi boatpeople in the sea and the countrymen detained in the trafficking camps in Thailand and Malaysia.

It also prayed to the court to direct the government to try and punish the human traffickers through the formation of special tribunals.

It requested the court to ask for explanation from the authorities concerned of

the government why their "inaction" to rescue the trafficked Bangladeshis would not be declared illegal.

During hearing, petitioner's counsel Tajul Islam told the HC that thousands of Bangladeshis, including women and children, have reportedly been trafficked and many are drifting in the sea.

Around 100 people, most of whom Bangladeshis, died of starvation on a boat, he mentioned.

Tajul argued that the government had not taken effective steps in helping and rescuing them; rather it has said action would be taken against the victims for trying to migrate illegally to other countries.

The government's stance might jeopardise the lives of those trafficked people, he added.

Deputy Attorney General Amatul Karim Swapna opposed the petition, saying the government had taken steps in rescuing the trafficked victims.



The worn-out and damaged buses of BRTC running on the streets near Shahbagh in the capital. The buses were bought only three years ago with a lifespan of 12 years.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Sacked OC

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Helal Uddin, the then officer-in-charge of Khilgaon Police Station.

Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Alamgir Kabir Raj also fined the convict Tk 10,000, in default of which he has to spend three more months in jail. Helal was absconding then.

But, the former OC surrendered before the court yesterday afternoon and sought bail. After a hearing, his bail plea was scrapped and he was sent to jail.

Kadar, then a DU student of bio-chemistry and molecular biology, was detained on charges of robbery when he was returning to his dormitory around 1:30am on July 16, 2011.

He was arrested even after he showed police his identity card, according to the case statement. Kadar said he was even stabbed in the left calf with a cleaver.

Later, police implicated Kadar in three false cases. But following media outcry, the High Court on July 28 that year ordered the inspector general of police to probe the incident.

Three officials of Khilgaon Police Station, including Helal, were suspended and Kadar was released on bail on August 3 the same year.

Trial run

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[officials] will mainly observe the road communication," he told The Daily Star.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee will flag off the air-conditioned Volvo bus, reports our correspondent from New Delhi.

West Bengal Housing and Youth Services Minister Arup Biswas and senior officials are included in the delegation, the correspondent adds.

Currently, three cross-border transport services are running between the two countries including two bus services on Dhaka-Kolkata and Dhaka-Agartala and a train service on Dhaka-Kolkata route.

Both the bus and train services between Dhaka and Kolkata get expected number of passengers, but the Dhaka-Agartala service is apparently a flop, according to BRTC officials.

If anyone wants to travel from Kolkata to Agartala by bus, they must stay in Dhaka for one night.

"We hope the Kolkata-Dhaka-Agartala direct bus service will attract passengers because people of both ends will mostly use this route," the BRTC chairman observed.

After the trial run, governments of both the countries would decide on finalising the date for inaugurating the bus service, said Md Zahangir Alam, additional secretary of Road Transport and Highways Division.

A BRTC bus with Bangladesh government officials has meanwhile made a trial run on Dhaka-Sylhet-Tamabil-Dawki-Shillong-Guwahati route on May 22-26 to observe road infrastructure.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her Indian counterpart Narendra Modi are scheduled to inaugurate the Dhaka-Guwahati bus service during his visit next week.

Kerry fractures

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following a crash in the Haute-Savoie department near Switzerland. Kirby said the politician fell off his bike after hitting the curb, did not lose consciousness, and received rapid treatment from paramedics and a doctor in his motorcade.

The US State Department said Kerry was flown to Geneva University Hospital following the incident near Sciez in the French Alps, and that he was expected to make a good recovery.

Families await calls

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in all-too-brief calls, pleading for their families to heed the demands. The families call back but either nobody answers or, if they do, the phone goes dead.

In recent weeks, as reports of mass graves of migrants emerged from Malaysia and Thailand and images of hundreds of starving people abandoned at sea spread around the world, the calls to families in Teknaf have become more persistent.

Khaleda Banu, from a dirt-poor fishing settlement, said a man phoned her four days ago saying her 19-year-old son, missing since November, was alive. She could have him back if she handed over Tk 30,000 taka as part payment.

But she had already paid that amount months ago when the first call came and nothing had happened. The man hung up and wouldn't answer her calls and now the mother, surrounded by neighbours, is sick with worry.

"My son just slipped away. I was sleeping when he left," she said. She found out later a man claiming to be a recruiter had persuaded him that his carpentry skills would earn him 10 times more money in Malaysia than at home.

Some families said that the traffickers had lured their loved ones by not asking for money at the beginning of the voyage to Southeast Asia.

To many in Bangladesh, which exports tens of thousands of workers

each year across the world, that seemed too good an offer to turn down, having seen friends and relatives had over huge amounts in previous years to go abroad.

Mohammad Hassan said agents told his son-in-law, who earned a living making fishing nets, that he could pay for the journey after he had found work in Malaysia.

Then, months after he went away, the call came: the agents demanded that Hassan pay a ransom of 220,000 taka (\$2,830) to get him freed from a Thai camp where he was being held.

"I told the man I am a daily wage labourer. Where can I arrange that money? I don't have things to sell."

A week ago, Hassan said, tears welling up, he received a call saying his son-law and a father of three had been killed and his body buried on a hillside in Thailand.

"This has become an extortion racket. They are preying on gullible people," said Mohammad Abuzar Al Zahid, commanding officer of the Border Guard Bangladesh.

"These brokers have spread everywhere, in the villages, in towns. They are like veins in your body."

Authorities say the traffickers are part of a network that for years has preyed on the Rohingya, a largely stateless minority in Myanmar.

The gangs promise to deliver the refugees to Muslim-majority Malaysia and in recent years targeted Bangladeshis too. Typically there are about 500 to 600 Rohingya on a boat along with some 200-300 Bangladeshis nationals.

'IS operative' held

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new militant organisation called "Jund At-Tawheed Wal Khilafah", detectives said yesterday.

Following the IS model, Galib and his associates have been recruiting members and collecting funds with a mission to wage jihad in Bangladesh. They were also preparing to "destabilise law and order and kill some important figures", added the detectives.

After a tip-off that Galib was holding a meeting with his accomplices, a DB team raided his Baridhara DOHS house on Saturday night and arrested him with a passport, a computer and some jihadi publications, said a senior official.

"We arrested him with hundreds of training videos for Islamist militants, and also a large number of books -- translated into Bangla -- on al-Qaeda and Islamic State," said Deputy Commissioner Shaikh Nazmul Alam of DMP Detective Branch.

The other operatives, however, managed to flee, he added.

Galib, who passed GED or General Educational Development (equivalent to HSC/A' Level) in 2013, is involved in business of Attar (perfume popular among Muslims) and garment accessories, according to Nazmul.

Before launching the new outfit, Galib was with banned outfits Hizb-ut Tahrir and Ansarullah Bangla Team, said the official during a press conference at the DMP media centre. "We have been following him for a long time."

The new militant group had plans to smuggle arms into Bangladesh with the help of Islamic State (also known as ISIS) and send their operatives to Iraq and Syria to join the jihad led by the global organisation, he added.

Before the press conference, detectives claimed a video clip, which detectives claimed to have recovered from the arrestee's computer. The clip showed 10 masked men taking arms training in an unknown place.

The clip was not handed over to the media but The Daily Star found the same image, uploaded in

attahreedmedia.wordpress.com on October 2014.

"They produced the video in Bangladesh and the area seen in the clip is in Bangladesh," Nazmul quoted the arrestee as saying.

In the Bangla-dubbed video with English subtitle, a masked man says: "Our mujahideen brothers are prepared to launch attacks at various parts of Bangladesh." He expressed allegiance to IS chief Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and praised al-Qaeda leader Ayman al Zawahiri.

Police are yet to identify any of the masked men.

DC Nazmul claimed that Galib during interrogation said his organisation recruited 15 to 20 members so far.

The detainee is now on six days' remand after a terrorism case was filed against him with Banani Police Station.

Earlier on May 24, law enforcers arrested Aminul Islam Beg, 38, IT department head of a multinational company, and Sakib bin Kamal, 30, a former teacher of an English medium school of Dhaka.

Aminul, previously a regional co-ordinator of the banned militant outfit Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), started following the IS ideologies after going through an online publication, according to DMP Joint Commissioner Monirul Islam.

Aminul had been trying to send operatives to Iraq and Syria from Bangladesh, added the official.

"Aminul has so far selected 20 people from among the JMB operatives across the country, many of whom are ready to leave the country to join IS in Iraq and Syria," Monirul told a press briefing after the arrest of the duo.

Sakib was one of the 20 operatives, said the DB official, adding that Aminul himself was supposed to join the militant group in Syria after sending a good number of operatives there.

Over the last one year, police arrested at least 15 suspected IS operatives in Bangladesh.

JS budget session begins today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The second budget session of the 10th Jatiya Sangsad begins this afternoon, while the budget for 2015-16 fiscal year will be placed on Thursday.

The business advisory committee of parliament would sit with Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury in the chair before the House goes into session around 5:30pm, said a JS secretariat press release.

The duration and businesses of the session will be finalised at the meeting to be held at 4:00pm.

Some important bills are likely to be placed and passed during the coming session, sources at parliament secretariat said.

Prime Minister and Leader of the House Sheikh Hasina, Opposition Leader Raushan Ershad and Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad, among others, are the members of the 15-member business advisory committee.

Dhaka ready

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According to a latest release of the UN, 1,07,805 peacekeepers of 122 countries are now deployed across the world. Of them, 9,593, including 205 female peacekeepers, are from Bangladesh.

"Despite the loss of lives and property, the professionalism, dedication, courage and friendly attitude of Bangladeshi peacekeepers are praised in entire peacekeepers' community, and they are often referred as model peacekeepers."

"Moreover, earnings from their salary and reimbursement bring a huge amount of foreign currency as remittance that boosts our national economy," the PM said.

Hasina also remembered those martyred peacekeepers who have sacrificed their lives for peace.

The premier said the hard work, professionalism, skill and discipline of the Bangladeshi peacekeepers had brought back peace and stability in the war-torn countries.

Ministers, foreign dignitaries, chief of naval staff, air force chief, members of parliament and ex-peacekeepers from army, navy, air force and police, among others, were present on the occasion.

Admission

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Shamsul Haque Khan School and College which topped the list of 20 best institutions under Dhaka Board could accommodate around 600 students including those from its school section.

Similarly, Rajuk Uttara Model College, second on this list, could accommodate around 1,365 students, including its school students.

Ideal School and College, Motijheel, third on this list, has 1,200 spots, out of which 500 is reserved for its own students.

The admission process for class XI in colleges across the country begins June 6 with the distribution of admission forms, which would continue until June 18.

Students would have to apply online at www.xiclassadmission.gov.bd.

This year's admission fee has been fixed at Tk 120, including the cost of the admission form and administrative charges.

Like in previous years, no admission test would be held.

Student could name five colleges as their choice and the education board would decide which of the colleges they would get into on the basis of their SSC results.

BRTC runs

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Seats were shabby. Some had become loose from their mountings.

A dozen of the buses in each of the depots were seen being repaired.

"It is hard to believe that the expensive buses will be in such conditions in two to three years," said a passenger who was travelling on a BRTC bus at Mirpur on Wednesday. Several others echoed him.

Another passenger, Sabbir Hossain, who was travelling to Tongi from Farmgate, said, "When the BRTC buses started plying the streets, they were very nice. But a few days later they became dirty due to lack of maintenance."

Some drivers of the buses blamed the authorities for not properly maintaining the buses. If such situation continued and maintenance was not done properly, the buses would go off the roads within the next couple of years, they said.

Many believe the drivers were primarily responsible for the buses being in such a poor state but the drivers deny it. "The way drivers drive the buses, it is natural that the vehicles will get scratches and dents," said a driver, wishing anonymity.

A BRTC driver who drives on Mirpur-Motijheel route said at the Mirpur bus depot, the buses seem over 10 years old.

Officials of the BRTC, which many believe to be corruption-riddled, were tight-lipped about how the buses became so battered.

BRTC General Manager (technical) SA Karim, responsible for maintenance, refused to comment while Assistant General Manager (operations) Almas Al claimed that all the Indian buses were in operation but some buses were taken off the streets temporarily for repairs.

Sources in the state-run body said negligence in repairs and maintenance coupled with misappropriation of funds allocated for the buses were the main reasons behind the poor state of the buses.

A former BRTC official said whenever the corporation faces fund crisis; its top officials asked the management to run buses to increase revenue. "Then the buses make frequent trips and without any maintenance, which is another reason for the buses being in such a poor condition," he told The Daily Star.

JP suffers

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In reply to the TIB's criticism, opposition Chief Whip Tajul Islam Chowdhury claimed before reporters that JP lawmakers were playing their due roles in parliament. He also said the TIB did not raise any confusion about their role in parliament as the opposition.

Criticising the TIB, Leader of the Opposition Raushan Ershad called upon the TIB officials to come to parliament through polls and play their roles to fight corruption.

"You want a corruption free and accountable society. We are also working on it. We want people like you to come to parliament, not as observers but as elected MPs," Raushan said.

The TIB has meanwhile submitted an eleven-point recommendation to Finance Minister AMA Muhith to ensure transparency, openness and accountability in the budget.

The recommendation submitted through a letter yesterday includes release of all budget information, especially budget allocation in the defence sector; discouraging block allocation; giving priority to allocation in social safety-net programmes and projects; ensuring accountability in implementing projects; disclosure of wealth statements of the prime minister and members of the cabinet, advisers, MPs, justices, high-level government officials and politicians; and updating those on a regular basis.

Teesta deal not now

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state government on board for the Teesta deal was on.

Her statement set at rest speculations swirling in both Indian and Bangladesh media about the signing of the Teesta agreement during Modi's visit.

This time, Indian media highlighted the possibility of signing the Teesta deal following Modi's surprise meeting with his predecessor Manmohan Singh four days ago, and the news of Modi's forthcoming talks with ex-Indian premier HD Deve Gowda on Wednesday or Thursday.

Manmohan is familiar with details of negotiations on the Teesta deal, which couldn't be signed during his Dhaka visit in September 2011 due to opposition from Mamata, while Deve Gowda had signed, along with Hasina, the Ganges water-sharing deal in June 1996 in New Delhi.

Determined not to repeat the fiasco of September 2011 when Mamata pulled out of Manmohan's Dhaka trip, the BJP-led NDA government had worked to bring Mamata on board.

Following the ratification of historic Land Boundary Agreement (LBA), Modi made hectic efforts to resolve the long-pending Teesta issue. He initiated talks with Mamata to reach a consensus.

Swaraj, who has good equations with Mamata, took the lead role in trying to convince her. Finally, the Indian PM invited the West Bengal CM to accompany him on his Bangladesh visit and she accepted it.

During her February 19-21 Bangladesh visit this year, Mamata assured Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina about the Teesta deal, saying

"have faith in me".

Indian Home Minister Rajnath Singh, who visited West Bengal recently, also said the Teesta deal would be signed soon.

On May 28, Partha Chatterjee, Trinamool Congress secretary general and West Bengal education minister, announced that Mamata would accompany Modi.

But in a span of only two days, Mamata made a sudden announcement on Saturday that she would visit Bangladesh on June 5 and return home the next day after signing the LBA.

Many took the announcement as an indication that the Teesta deal might not be inked during the Indian PM's visit, as Mamata will travel to Dhaka from Kolkata separately, not with Modi who will fly in from Delhi on June 6.

Earlier this month, the Indian parliament had unanimously passed a constitution amendment bill to ratify the LBA, seeking to settle India's 41-year-old land boundary issues with Bangladesh.

The legislation would operationalise the 1974 India-Bangladesh Land Boundary Agreement that provides for exchange of 161 enclaves adversely held by the two countries.

ANUP CHETIA
At yesterday's press conference, Sushma Swaraj said the issue of deportation of Ulfa leader Anup Chetia from Bangladesh was likely to figure in the talks and noted that while extradition process will take long, he could be repatriated.

India has been pressing for deportation of Chetia, who is lodged in a Dhaka jail for over 17 years.