



These two piers for a bridge over the Nasenmahall Canal at South Debra of Nalchity in Jhalakathi were built in 2000. The contractor just left and locals now believe the bridge would never be finished. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: STAR

UK heightens alert

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The fresh alert was issued after the government had taken "additional and tightening" security steps in the diplomatic area of Dhaka city and all over the country, and formed special taskforce group to ensure personal safety of the foreigners.

The UK government further said the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has claimed responsibility for the recent murders of two foreign nationals.

Japanese citizen Hoshi Kunio was gunned down in Rangpur on October 3, five days after the killing of Italian national Cesare Tavella in Dhaka's diplomatic zone.

"Further attacks targeting westerners may occur and could be indiscriminate."

The travel alert also read: "You should be particularly vigilant, consider your movements carefully and take appropriate security precautions. Keep a low profile in all public spaces and limit your attendance at events where westerners may gather, for example in hotels or conference centres."

"There is considered to be a heightened threat of terrorist attack globally

against UK interests and British nationals, from groups or individuals motivated by the conflict in Iraq and Syria. You should be vigilant at this time," it added.

In response to a query from The Daily Star last night, the spokesperson for the British High Commission in an email said, "Our Travel Advice has been amended to reflect the continued high threat from terrorism in Bangladesh and the risk of further attacks targeting westerners. There are no changes to the parts of Bangladesh to which we advise against travel."

"The safety of British Nationals abroad is a major concern for the FCO. We, therefore, attach great importance to providing information about personal safety and security overseas, including an assessment of the level of threat from terrorism, to enable people to make informed decisions about travel," the spokesperson added.

However, other foreign government and embassies, including Australia and Canada, have not updated their travel advice yesterday but continued asking their citizens in Bangladesh to "exercise a high degree of caution."

This level-2 advice may reflect a weak law and order system where violent crime is prevalent. But importantly, it does not say "don't go" to this location, rather advising to take extra precautions and pay close attention to personal security at all times.

However, the United States Embassy in Dhaka has not updated its security message for its citizens in Bangladesh since October 1.

HOME BOSS DENIES US ENVOY'S CLAIM

Meanwhile, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal has denied the claim of US Ambassador Marcia Stephens Bloom Bernicat that before the foreigners were killed, they had informed the Bangladesh government of a possible attack on Western interest.

"We didn't receive any such information," he said at a BBC Bangla programme in Dhaka yesterday.

However, the government had intelligence on plots of attacks on some "big target" of Bangladesh, the minister said. "And we acted accordingly."

"But we had no idea that foreigners would be targeted."

Nobel Peace Prize

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Revolution of 2011," chairwoman Kaci Kullmann Five said.

"The Norwegian Nobel Committee hopes that this year's prize will contribute towards safeguarding democracy in Tunisia and be an inspiration to all those who seek to promote peace and democracy in the Middle East, North Africa and the rest of the world," the panel said.

During the wave of unrest which erupted in January 2011 after the death of a young jobless university graduate who had set himself on fire in protest over police harassment and unemployment, more than 300 people were killed.

Tunisia's powerful General Labour Union, one of the quartet members, described it as a "tribute to martyrs of a democratic Tunisia."

"This effort by our youth has allowed the country to turn the page on dictatorship," said union head Houcine Abassi.

Democracy remains fragile in Tunisia, however, which has been rocked by bloody attacks by Islamic State group jihadists this year and some high-profile political killings.

"The prize is a tribute and a call to support all civil society forces engaged in the fight for democracy, pluralism and rule of law," added Unesco chief Irina Bokova.

TAVELLA MURDER

No headway in probe

No arrest yet; police claim to have found 'some clues' on suspects

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

More than 11 days have passed since the murder of Italian aid worker Cesare Tavella but law enforcers are yet to arrest any of the killers.

The Detective Branch (DB) of police, which is mainly dealing with the case, and the Rapid Action Battalion and several intelligence agencies, carrying out the "shadow investigation", have yet to make any major headway in the murder probe.

However, Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, Mahbub Alam, a deputy commissioner of the DB of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, claimed to have found some clues that could lead them to some suspects.

"We are raiding several places in the capital and elsewhere to arrest them," he said.

Meanwhile, DB Inspector Zeahad Hossain, also the case's investigation officer, said preparations were

underway to send Tavella's body to Italy. "The body might be sent there within a couple of days," he added.

On September 28, the Italian national, who was a project manager of a Netherlands-based NGO, was shot dead in the high-security diplomatic zone of Gulshan in the capital.

Five days later, Hoshi Kunio, a Japanese man, was killed in a similar manner in Rangpur.

The Islamic State reportedly claimed responsibility for the incidents. Bangladesh, however, said there was no activity of the global extremist group in the country.

Later on, the government alleged the BNP-Jamaat nexus might have a link to the murders of two foreigners -- a charge the opposition denied.

Yesterday, Rangpur police detained two private bank officials from Rajshahi in connection with the murder of Hoshi.

They need love, care

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Five other Chhotomoni Nibash (home for babies) are in Chittagong, Rajshahi, Sylhet, Khulna and Barisal, run by the social welfare ministry.

"If their [children at the shelters] biological parents or legal guardians come with necessary documents and proof, we hand over the children to them through court," Selina said.

They will otherwise be transferred to one of the 13 government-run orphanages across the country as they reach seven.

At the orphanages called Shishu Paribar, they live until they are 18.

Some 219 children were handed over to their biological parents by the shelters in more than half a century until August 2015, while 915 transferred to the orphanages and only 18 given to people who applied for their guardianship through court.

Legal adoption is only applicable to the Hindus in Bangladesh, said Prof Shahnaz Huda of Dhaka University's law department, explaining that only

Hindu males under the Hindu family law were allowed to adopt boys who would enjoy all the rights of a son born to the family.

He automatically inherits property, she added.

Muslim parents cannot adopt children since family laws governed by the Muslim law do not recognise adoption. They can only apply for guardianship of children through family courts.

"The children [in the shelters] as citizen of Bangladesh are the government's responsibility. It is better that the government takes care of them," said Tariqul Islam, secretary of the ministry.

Guardianship has been discouraged since the 1980s when it was noticed that many people took guardianship of children through court but then instead of taking care of them they abused them, turned them into house helps, he added.

Pointing to practices overseas, DU law Prof Shahnaz said, "They not only have a monitoring mechanism in place but also provide the entire cost of raising the

children [orphans] to foster parents."

But in Bangladesh "Who will check whether the children are safe at the houses of the legal guardians?"

Moreover, people here are not keen on applying for guardianship, as the adopted child would not enjoy rights of a biological child, the DU teacher said.

"This system requires a change." There is nothing better than a family where children begin to learn and which has great influence over them, said Prof Afruja Khanam, head of the child development and social relationship department, Home Economics College in Dhaka.

"Those who grow up in orphanages are deprived of this. They grow up with other children often fighting among themselves," she said, adding if the atmosphere at the orphanages is not good it has a further negative impact on children.

A uniform adoption law with proper monitoring mechanism can change the fate of many like Rakibul, Shahnaz said.

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[the owners] started the new company, Synerflux," the source added.

Its appointment was done without consulting the Bangladesh government, according to sources.

Wishing anonymity, a Bangladesh government official said recruiting agents and governments of both the countries would have to fully depend on Synerflux if it finally got the job.

"It will actually deploy sub-agents in Malaysia to collect job demands and thus the recruitment system would be monopolised. It may even control the recruiting agents in Bangladesh," he said.

An official of the Malaysian High Commission in Dhaka last night said the mission was not aware of the development. He did not want to be named or comment further as he is not authorised to.

In a letter on September 21, the Malaysian foreign ministry communicated about Synerflux to Bangladesh High Commission in Kuala Lumpur.

Synerflux will have offices in Bangladesh and Malaysia, and will supervise bio-medical process for workers' registration, verification of eligibility, medical screening and delivery of visas issued by the Malaysian High Commission in Dhaka, the letter said.

"The Ministry therefore seeks the High Commission's kind cooperation to extend all necessary support and assistance to Synerflux to ensure a smooth and orderly implementation by early October 2015," it said.

The Daily Star has obtained a copy of the letter.

Kazi Abul Kalam, joint secretary of Bangladesh's Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employment Ministry, said they received the proposal and were assessing it, but no decision was made yet.

The appointment of Synerflux comes after two of its delegations visited Dhaka -- in early August and in mid-September -- to finalise ways to recruit Bangladeshi workers through private sector, known as B2B.

The B2B was initiated following the apparent failure of state-level or G2G recruitment. Just about 10,000 Bangladeshis were hired through this method since 2013 and only as plantation workers.

In June this year, Malaysia announced that it would recruit 1.5 million Bangladeshis in the next three years.

Currently, some 6,00,000 Bangladeshis are working there, about half of them believed to be undocumented. Malaysia said it would send back the undocumented migrants and replace them with the fresh recruits.

Migrant rights organisations are critical of the fresh recruitment decision, saying Malaysia should first regularise the undocumented ones if the country really needed foreign workers, especially as its economy is down with falling values of Ringgit.

They are also wary of Malaysian government's outsourcing of private company. They say handling immigration data by a private company is not a good idea because it is a security issue. Also, there are huge scopes for monopoly and corruption that might lead to labour abuse.

In August, two IT companies -- Real Time Networking Sdn Bhd and Bestinet -- had lobbied for the recruitment job, but later backtracked after Malaysian media and rights groups raised a hue and cry.

Real Time is owned by Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi's brother Abdul Hakim Hamidi, according to Malaysiakini, an online news portal of Malaysia.

Contacted, Muhammed Abul Basher, president of Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (Baira), said they conveyed their concerns about Synerflux to Nurul Islam, expatriates welfare minister of Bangladesh.

"Synerflux is actually syndicating with certain recruiting agents in Bangladesh. We don't want any syndicate. We all, 1,200 members of Baira, want to do business," he said.

It may be mentioned that Basher had

earlier endorsed Real Time Networking for the hiring job.

Mohammad Harun-Al Rashid, regional coordinator of CARAM Asia, a regional migrant rights network based in Kuala Lumpur, told The Daily Star that Bangladesh needed to critically analyse the company profile and the way the recruitment would be done.

"It is because labour recruitment system between Malaysia and Bangladesh has always been flawed. Time and again, migrants were brought in at high migration costs. Often they were unemployed and seriously exploited," he said.

Malaysia had frozen labour recruitment from Bangladesh in early 2009 after discovery of massive anomalies in recruitment that caused abuses in 2006-08. During the time, official migration cost was set at Tk 84,000 per person, but job seekers were charged around Tk 2 lakh.

Later in 2012, Bangladesh and Malaysia signed an MoU on G2G, through which Bangladesh could send workers for less than Tk 40,000 each, though only in plantation sector.

Malaysia also did not open other sectors like construction, manufacturing and services although under the G2G Plus it wants to recruit Bangladeshis in all sectors.

Brokers said powerful lobbies were the reason why the G2G failed, and these groups lobbied both the Malaysian and the Bangladeshi authorities again to open labour market through the private sector.

During its visit to Dhaka in mid-September, the Malaysian delegation said it would not allow Bangladeshi recruiting agents or brokers to collect job demands from the Malaysian employers, saying brokers were behind the high migration cost and other malpractices.

Harun Al Rashid of CARAM Asia suggested that the Malaysian government itself operate the system, instead of Synerflux, if it is really interested in recruiting Bangladeshi workers because, "[Malaysia's] track record of recruiting migrants from Bangladesh is very bad."

Nasa unveils missing pieces in journey to Mars

AFP, Miami

Nasa has outlined the many challenges that remain before humans can set foot on Mars, calling the problems "solvable" but setting no firm date for an astronaut mission to the Red Planet.

Updated details of the US space agency's Mars strategy were contained in a 36-page document released to the public late Thursday, ahead of upcoming talks with Congress about budgets for space exploration and a major international meeting of the space industry to be held in Jerusalem next week.

Astronauts who journey to Mars could spend three years in deep space, where radiation is high and so are the risks of cancer, bone loss and immune problems, said the document, called "Nasa's Journey to Mars: Pioneering Next Steps in Space Exploration."

"Living and working in space require accepting risk, and the journey is worth the risk," it said, calling Mars "an achievable goal" and "the next tangible frontier for expanding human presence."

But some experts said the report -- which included

no schedule or budget -- was weak on key details.

John Rummel, senior scientist at the SETI Institute, said the document contained "curious shortcomings," noting that it only mentioned the terms "food" and "air" once, without elaborating on how astronauts will grow food in space in order to survive.

It also ignored "the fundamental issue of contamination risk" if Mars is found to host tiny life forms, or if humans take them there by accident, Rummel told AFP.

"The document does not address how the question of whether Mars provides a 'home to microbial life' today will be answered, or when, nor what that discovery would mean to future exploration," he said.

"Without sufficient care, Earth contamination could be misread as Mars life."

Nasa administrator Charles Bolden said in a statement that the US space agency is "closer to sending American astronauts to Mars than at any point in our history."