

RESCUED IN ANDAMAN SEA

114 Bangladeshis brought back

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

One hundred and fourteen more Bangladeshi trafficking victims, who were rescued by the Malaysian authorities from the Andaman Sea in May, returned home from Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

They landed in Dhaka in a Biman Bangladesh Airlines flight around 5:30am.

Begum Shahida Sultana, first secretary (labour wing) at the Bangladesh High Commission in Kuala Lumpur, told The Daily Star over phone that the returnees hailed from Cox's Bazar, Sirajganj, Narsingdi, Narayanganj, Jessore, Jhenidah, Chuadanga and Joypurhat.

With the 114, a total of 620 Bangladeshis, who were rescued from

the sea, have come back to the country, she said, adding that 96 more would return later.

The high commission official also said Bangladesh government was bearing all the expenses required for repatriation of the Bangladeshis.

A total of 716 Bangladeshi migrants were among over 1,051 trafficking victims rescued from Langkawi island of Malaysia on May 11. The traffickers had abandoned them in the island after holding them captive in a Thai jungle for weeks.

Over 3000 Bangladeshis have been rescued in Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and Myanmar in May after the issue of human trafficking through the Bay of Bengal got international media's attention, said sources.



Relatives take Morsheda Begum to Dinajpur Medical College Hospital yesterday, hours after she came under an acid attack at her house in Hakimpur upazila of Dinajpur.

PHOTO: STAR

Housewife hurt as criminals throw acid

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A housewife suffered burn injuries in an acid attack by some criminals in Hakimpur upazila of Dinajpur Monday night.

The victim, Morsheda Begum, 22, is the wife of Ilias Mia of Dakkhin Basudevpur village under the upazila.

Hours after the incident, police arrested Babul Hossain Mondal at Madhabpara village in the upazila in connection with the attack.

Family members said some criminals threw acid on Morsheda through the window while she was asleep in her room around 8:00pm Monday night.

Hearing screams, family members rushed to her room and took her to Hakimpur Upazila Health Complex.

Quoting doctors, police said Morsheda suffered burns to her face, hands, neck and back. ANM Rashedul Islam, residential medical officer of the upazila health complex, said Morsheda's left eye was in danger.

Later, she was referred to Dinajpur Medical College Hospital for eye treatment.

Hakimpur Police Station Inspector Harun-Ur-Rashid said the victim's husband filed a case, accusing eight people, with the police station Monday night. Arrestee Babul Hossain Mondal is one of the accused, he added.

He, however, declined disclosing the names of the other accused.

Police suspected personal enmity behind the attack. A few days ago, Ilias Mia and Babul had a quarrel over sharing power line of Palli Bidyut Samity.

Mokhlesur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Hakimpur Police Station, said they were trying to arrest the rest of the accused.

French firm gets contract

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Tarana Halim.

The government wants to launch the satellite on December 16 on the occasion of the 45th anniversary of the country's victory in the Liberation War, she said.

"This will be a great achievement for us and it will lead us to real digitisation," Tarana told The Daily Star over the phone after the approval.

According to a BTRC feasibility study, the satellite will narrow the digital divide, as it will take broadcasting and telecommunication services to rural areas and introduce profitable services, including direct-to-home services, across the country.

Industry experts said the satellite will help facilitate new services and create jobs.

ATM Monirul Alam, convener of the proposal evaluation committee, said they would need a couple of days to award the work order, as some formalities were still to be completed.

The project documents will be placed before Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for approval. Since it is a high-priority project, the approval is likely to come without any delay, said Monirul, commissioner for spectrum management at the BTRC.

He said they will give Thales Alenia Space 24 months to launch the satellite. The company will, however, get an additional period of

three months given that it shows the reasons behind the delay.

Currently, the country meets its need for satellite connectivity by renting bandwidth from satellite operators, which costs almost \$14 million a year.

According to the BTRC proposal, the project will reach the break-even level in seven years and allow the regulator to sell excess capacity to other nations.

Bangabandhu-1 will be able to provide services to all South Asian countries, as well as others, including Indonesia, the Philippines, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, if its frequency is properly coordinated.

Bangladesh will be the 54th country to own a satellite once Bangabandhu-1 is launched in the orbital slot at longitude 119.1 degree east with 40 transponders.

Bangladesh bought the slot from Intersputnik, a Russian satellite company, for \$28 million early this year. The purchase agreement stipulates that the satellite has to be launched by June 2018.

Critics say the satellite will not be able to bring much benefit to telecom services, which are run through fibre optic cables in the country.

According to BTRC experts, the satellite will help improve weather forecast system and facilitate exploration of natural resources on land

and sea.

A BTRC official involved in the project said landlocked countries such as Nepal and Bhutan, which have no submarine cable, maintain their telecommunications through satellites. It means, this satellite's importance will not diminish.

Monirul said a company would be formed to handle all financial aspects of the satellite services.

"Commercial success of the satellite will depend mostly on the company's performance. We need to hire experienced people to get optimum benefits."

The BTRC has selected two locations for the satellite's ground handling: Telecom Staff College in Gazipur and Betbunia Earth Station in Rangamati.

The telecom regulator received bids from four companies: Thales Alenia Space, China's Great Wall Industry Corporation, USA's Orbit ATA and Canada's MDA.

Thales Alenia Space was the second lowest bidder with an offer of \$248 million while MDA was the lowest bidder with \$222.75 million.

BTRC officials said both financial aspect and technical side were considered in selecting the bidder.

Bangladesh has applied to the International Telecommunication Union for four more slots, as at least three satellites are needed to run a viable satellite company and cover the entire globe, they said.

Khoka gets 13 yrs

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The court also asked the government to confiscate around Tk 10.05 crore from his bank accounts and a Gulshan building built with ill-gotten gains. The government will also attach three-fourths of his 133.59 acres immovable property, it added.

Khoka, now in the USA for treatment, was earlier shown fugitive in the case. The court on October 31 last year framed charges against him in absentia.

The ACC had filed the case on April 2, 2008 against Khoka, his wife Ishmat Ara, son Ishrak Hossain and daughter Sarika Sadeque for allegedly accumulating illegal wealth worth over Tk 17.57 crore and concealing information in the BNP leader's wealth statement.

Khoka's wife, son and daughter were accused of assisting him in committing the offence.

The anti-graft body pressed charges against Khoka on July 2, 2008. But Investigating Officer Shamsul Alam dropped the names of Khoka's son and daughter from the charge sheet as their involvement was not found.

The ACC could not press charge against Khoka's wife either as the High Court stayed the investigation against her after she had filed a writ petition with it.

IO Shamsul, also an ACC assistant director, in the charge sheet said Khoka in his wealth statement showed wealth worth Tk 9.97 crore, but the ACC found he had amassed more wealth worth Tk 9.76 crore beyond his known sources of income.

He also acquired illegal wealth worth around Tk 9.65 crore which

was concealed in his wealth statement submitted to the ACC, said the charge sheet.

Khoka at one stage moved the High Court challenging the legality of pressing the charge sheet. The HC then stayed the trial proceedings in the case.

The HC on May 20, 2012 vacated the stay order and ordered the lower court to continue with the trial.

'VERDICT POLITICALLY MOTIVATED'

Talking to The Daily Star over the phone, Khoka yesterday said he did not get justice through the verdict.

He claimed the court did not give him enough opportunity to defend himself.

"I had prayed to the court through my lawyer to give me enough time as I am in New York for cancer treatment. But the court didn't allow my lawyer to play his role and sentenced me in a hurry."

He said the court did "injustice" to him though he paid all the applicable taxes to the National Board of Revenue.

"The verdict is politically motivated. It was announced to harass me politically and tarnish my image. I will file an appeal against the verdict with the higher court after consultation with my lawyer," said the BNP vice-chairman.

Meanwhile, BNP spokesperson Asaduzzaman Ripon claimed that the senior party leader didn't get justice in the case and the verdict was "politically motivated".

He was addressing a press conference at the party's Nayapaltn central office.

Bribe-taking govt official suspended

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a departmental case against him, Hedayetullah Al Mamoon, senior secretary at the commerce ministry, told The Daily Star yesterday.

The ministry has also launched a further investigation into the allegations against Shahidul, the secretary added.

Mamoon, however, declined to share the details of the preliminary findings of the committee investigating the allegations against Shahidul.

Shahidul could not be reached over the phone for comments.

On October 11, he was withdrawn from his office and attached to the commerce ministry after video clips of his taking bribes surfaced.

The footage, available on the social media, shows Shahidul count-

ing notes at his office in Motijheel, haggling with service seekers over the amount of bribe and putting cash in his trousers pocket.

It was unclear when the video was shot. But commerce ministry sources said their top officials came to know about it before Eid-ul-Azha.

A committee led by the ministry's Joint Secretary Sadar Ali Biswas was formed on September 21, and it launched a probe into the matter after the Eid vacation.

Asked about the footage, Shahidul on October 8 said this was all part of a conspiracy by some officials at his office and outsiders.

Shahidul joined the public service in 1985. Before being made controller at Dhaka office, he held important positions at the commerce min-

istry, the Tariff Commission, and the Export Promotion Bureau.

According to the rules, businesses have to obtain registration certificates from the CCI&E to import or export goods. The fees for imports and exports are fixed, and they vary depending on the volume of the goods.

A number of businesspeople alleged that they had to pay bribes for getting certificates even though they had submitted all required documents. And Shahidul led the group that took bribes from service seekers at the Dhaka office of the CCI&E.

The head office of the CCI&E is in Motijheel, and it shares the same building with its Dhaka office. The agency has 15 branches across the country.

Biometric registration

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the EC database.

On verification, if any SIM is found to have registered with a fake ID, the user will be asked to re-register it with the genuine national ID in seven days. Otherwise, the SIM would then be cancelled permanently.

The operators will start using the system from November 1 on trial basis. The final project will start from December 16.

"It will be a major step towards bringing order in the telecommunication industry," State Minister for

Telecommunication Tarana Halim said yesterday, while addressing a press briefing at the Secretariat.

The biometric registration, re-registration and verification of all 13 crore subscribers will be completed by March next year, she said, adding that the regulator will fine the operators if any SIM is found with fake registration after March.

The government in September announced that all mobile phone users will have to re-register their numbers, and the move came to prevent criminal activities through the cellular networks.

Single authority needed to deal with traffic problem

Says outgoing WB country director

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Johannes Zutt, outgoing country director of the World Bank, yesterday came up with his own idea on how to resolve the nagging traffic congestion in Dhaka city.

"This [traffic congestion] is a metropolitan problem and it will not be solved until a single institution is empowered to deal with the issue," Johannes told reporters at the launch of the Bangladesh Development Update at the WB's Dhaka office.

Lots of institutions, including Dhaka city corporations, Rajuk, roads and highways and BRTA, deal with transport issues. But there is no single institution that is empowered to tackle the problem, he said.

"You have to convince every single institution to adopt essentially the same plan and we all know how difficult it is to deal with six, seven or eight institutions," he said.

Traffic congestion on Dhaka roads eats up much of people's productivity, time and energy. Everyone in the capital -- from ministers to ordinary citizens -- has been facing this problem.

The WB boss in Dhaka said Bangladesh needs to increase competency of its institutions to become a middle income country. It should not be complacent with 6.5 percent growth rate, as many economies grew by 8-10 percent annually for years.

Johannes Zutt, a Dutch national who became WB country director for Bangladesh and Nepal in May 2013, has been transferred to Turkey as country director of the global lender.

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