

# Sharp decline in Rohingya migrants

Say UN, rights group after Thai, Bangladesh crackdowns

REUTERS, Bangkok

The number of migrants leaving Myanmar and Bangladesh by boat in May following the discovery of plummeted because of Thai and Bangladeshi crackdowns on human smugglers, the United Nations and a rights activist said yesterday.

Thai police launched a sweeping campaign against smuggling gangs in May following the discovery of 30 bodies in graves near a human-trafficking camp close to the Malaysian border.

The police operation led to traffickers abandoning 4,000 migrants from Myanmar and Bangladesh at sea, sparking a chaotic round of "maritime ping-pong" as Indonesian, Malaysian and Thai navies pushed migrant boats away from their shores.

Tens of thousands of Rohingya Muslims have fled poverty and persecution in western Myanmar since religious violence erupted there in 2012.

Most have headed for Muslim-majority Malaysia, but many have made landfall first in southern Thailand or been intercepted and held for ransom in camps hidden deep in

Thailand's jungles.

The region is now in its "sailing season", with calmer seas after the rains, the busiest time for smuggling and trafficking ships plying the Bay of Bengal.

But Chris Lewa from the Arakan Project, a Rohingya advocacy group which tracks migration, said this year the number of people sailing was much lower due to action against smugglers in Thailand and Bangladesh.

About 1,500 people sailed from Bangladesh and Myanmar between September and December, said Lewa, compared with 32,000 people tracked during the same period in 2014.

"Thailand is closed and cannot be used for disembarkation," Lewa told Reuters. "The few brokers that still seem to be involved are the ones that have pre-existing 'orders' for people to be brought over, that's what we are being told at departure."

"Anti-trafficking operations are going on in Bangladesh as well."

Vivian Tan, regional spokeswoman for the UN refugee agency, said preliminary data suggested fewer people took to boats in the last quarter of the year.

# IS 'takes credit' for killing Jhenidah doctor

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Islamic State has reportedly taken credit for the killing of Jamiruddin Khaza in Jhenidah, hours after the homeopathic doctor was found dead inside his dispensary.

The claim could not be independently verified.

His stabbed body was discovered in the medicine store at Baliakhali village in Sadar upazila around 3:30pm on Thursday.

Site Intelligence Group, which monitors terrorist activities online, uploaded a post, saying the IS claimed responsibility for killing a man in Bangladesh identified as "Samir al-Din who had allegedly converted from Islam to Christianity."

Locally known as Jamiruddin, 80, converted to Christianity from Islam some 15 years back, local police told our Jhenidah correspondent.

Five to six years into the conversion, he became a devotee of the great mystic Lalon Shah and started visiting Lalon's majar.

Then around a year ago, he started practising Islam again, said Hasan Hafizur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Sadar police there.

Jamiruddin had four wives, he said, adding that police were investigating the incident.

# Cops collect toll for use of road

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They all are being forced to pay the "parking fee" since the fair began on January 1 even though they are simply driving by the venue, and not going to the fair.

"I often use this road from my home at Geneva Camp at Mohammadpur to my workplace in Banani. It saves a lot of time," said Shampa Parveen.

"But now the [CNG-run] auto-rickshaws, which I usually hire to go to work, do not want to take the road to avoid the toll," she added.

Amir Hossain, a private service holder, felt it extremely irritating when cops stopped his car near the Election Commission office and demanded "parking fee" five days back.

"I said I was going to a hospital in Shyamoli to visit a patient, but they forced me to pay the toll anyway."

A youth, who was returning from Shahjalal airport to Mohammadpur in his car, claimed to have experienced the same.

"Some constables stopped me at the Gono Bhaban end [of the road] and asked for Tk 20 in parking fee. Initially, I refused to pay them, saying I was simply passing through the area and not going to the fair. But eventually I had to comply."

Visiting the venue on Monday and Tuesday, these correspondents found that traffic sergeants and constables -- some in uniforms and some in special vests -- were not allowing vehicles to use the road without the parking fee.

The toll is Tk 10 for CNG-run auto-rickshaws, rickshaws and motorcycles and Tk 20 for private cars and minibuses.

Goods-carrying pickups and covered vans have to buy multiple tickets, meaning they have to pay more, alleged some drivers.

About 200 policemen are regularly deployed for collecting the fee and managing vehicle parking and overall traffic there, said officials at the traffic control room at the fairground.

The number of personnel rises to around 250 on weekends, they added.

These cops are deployed despite the fact that the Dhaka Metropolitan Police has manpower shortage, a reason it often cites for failing to properly control traffic in the city.

**QUESTIONS OVER THE LEASE**  
A former inspector general of police, wishing anonymity, said police cannot take lease of something in exchange for money.

"The law allows the police to close roads in public interest. But I do not think any public interest is being served here," he told The Daily Star.

Another senior police official, also asking not to be named because of office policy, said the law did not either prohibit or permit the police to engage in such enterprises.

But the police have long been running businesses for the welfare of its members. It is a matter of tradition, rather than service rules and laws, he said by phone yesterday.

The police paid Tk 13.2 lakh to get the contract for collecting parking tolls at the DITF venue. It was approved in a meeting of the commerce ministry, said EPB officials.

EPB Vice-chairman Shubhashish Bose confirmed that the contract was awarded to the police without tender.

The police wrote a letter to the EPB requesting for the contract, saying the earnings would be spent for the police welfare association.

Imtiaz Ahmed, Deputy Commissioner (Traffic-West) of the DMP denied collecting parking fees from any vehicle taking the road.

And the deployment of traffic police at the fair venue is not hampering their regular duties on city roads, he claimed.

Contacted, DMP Commissioner Asaduzzaman Miah claimed no directives were issued to close the road to regular traffic.

"If there is any such incident, I will look into it and take necessary steps," he told The Daily Star over the phone on Monday.

EPB Deputy Director (Finance) Rezaul Karim said on Thursday that they had received allegations that police were collecting extra money in parking toll and barring locals and staff of private offices from using the road.

The EPB would send a letter to the police authorities in a day or two for an end to the alleged harassment, he added.

# 11-year-old domestic help suffer burns

Police say she tried to kill herself; torture by employers alleged

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A minor girl, who worked as a domestic help at a Siddheswari house in the capital, suffered severe burn injuries after she allegedly tried to set herself on fire yesterday.

With 95 percent of her body burnt, she is now fighting for her life at the burn unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Jaba Akhtar, 11, hails from Bogra. "Her condition is very critical," Partha Sankar Paul, resident surgeon at the burn unit, told The Daily Star.

As Jaba was groaning in excruciating pain, she could only tell newsmen that Synthiya and Poly, members of the family where she worked, beat her up.

Quoting the girl, Sharif Hossain, sub-inspector of Ramna Police Station, said she tried to set herself on fire inside the kitchen of her employer's house.

He, however, could not say how the girl set herself afire.

He also said he could not ask Jaba any further questions as doctors did not allow him to do so.

Quoting the owner of the house, Kallol, a bank official, the SI said Jaba had started working at the house three years ago. But she was sent back to her village home a year later as the family came to know that the girl was mentally ill.

Sharif added that Kallol let her work at his house again six months ago on request of Jaba's parents.

He said an investigation was going on.

# Living with old memories

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to cry again.

The government built the house for Sakiran's family following the death of his son in a mindless arson attack during last year's BNP-led alliance's blockade which took a heavy toll on life and the country's economy.

Like Sakiran, there are six other families of burn victims who were compensated in Malikgram village of Chawlia union under Magura Sadar Upazila.

But, each building is a cruel reminder of life either lost or scarred with serious burn injuries and mental trauma.

Seven people of the village suffered severe burn injuries in a grisly petrol bomb attack on a truck in Magura on March 21. Four of them died later.

Another man from Faridpur was killed in the same attack. He was a relative of one of the victim families.

Of the victims, Matin and his uncle Roushan Ali Biswas, and their neighbour Shakil Ahd died on March 22 while Yadul succumbed to his burn injuries on March 25. Yadul's brother-in-law Imran Mollah, the truck driver from Kamarkhali upazila of Faridpur, died on April 1.

Another brother of Roushan, Ilias Ali Biswas, and their nephew Arab Ali Biswas and neighbour Nazmul Mollah and truck helper were badly injured.

Apart from building new houses, the government gave Tk 10 lakh to the dead victims' families and Tk 5 lakh to some of the injured in the village.

These correspondents visited the village last month to see how the victims' families were passing their days. Moments after entering the village, a white house with blue doors stood out amid several semi-pukka houses. A small signboard on the house read "Honourable Prime Minister's priority project -- 9 no Chawlia union".

It was the house of Nazmul Mollah, a day labourer, who survived 30 per-

cent burns after taking treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital for 24 days.

"I have survived luckily, but I cannot work. The burnt parts of my body still ache," Nazmul said.

After taking a stroll inside the village on narrow dirt roads, four similar houses were spotted. Two buildings were for Matin's and Roushan's families while the other two for injured Ilias Biswas and Arab Ali.

In front of one of these was sitting Sakiran Begum. As these correspondents wanted to engage her in a talk about her son, she kept mum. After some time, she started speaking in a low voice.

Both her husband, Tokon Biswas, in his 60s now, and her youngest son, Ripon Biswas, are day labourers.

One of Sakiran's valves has got damaged and she can neither do heavy work nor can speak loudly. It was her eldest son Matin who used to look after her. Lovingly, she used to call him *Moni*.

Holding a hand of one of the correspondents, she cried: "My *Moni* was as tall as you. I would get some consolation if he survived the burns."

After his son's death, she received a cheque of Tk 10 lakh, of which she gave Tk 6 lakh to Matin's wife who lives in her father's house in Magura with their two-and-a-half-year old child.

Seeing a little crowd, Sukrunnesa Begum, wife of Roushan Ali, arrived there. She is also facing harsh reality now.

Like Sakiran, she also got the money and the house but sees a bleak future ahead.

"Raising three young children without their father worries me most... you know how difficult it is for a woman to live without her husband," she said. Her eldest son is nine and studies in class IV; her second son is seven and reads in class II and the youngest one is only one-and-a-half-year old.



Holding her son in her laps, Sukrunnesa Begum, who lost her husband in an arson attack, and Dolena Begum, wife of another arson victim, stand in front of Dolena's house in Malikgram of Chawlia union under Magura Sadar Upazila last month. The government built seven houses in the village for such victims.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

"We were doing fine even when we used to live from hand to mouth. But now we don't find any peace even after getting help from the government and relatives," Sukrunnesa said.

Manjela Begum was the ill-fated mother whose son breathed his last before her own eyes. "He was a gentle boy who kept himself busy working for the family as we are poor," she said.

Shakil studied up to class IV and had to abandon his studies to assist his family, said his father Islam Molla, also a day labourer.

The story of Ayesha Begum is more pathetic. She lost her only son Yadul

and a son-in-law, Imran Mollah, in that bomb attack.

Yadul was the only brother to six sisters.

After his father's death nearly 20 years ago, the family had to struggle enormously to get by. To support the family, he chose to work for a truck as one of his brothers-in-law was a trucker.

"All he [Yadul] wanted was to ease my hardship, but that was not to be," said Ayesha, taking a deep sigh.

With the shock of her son's death still fresh in her mind, her son-in-law Imran, who had 50 percent of his body

burnt and his respiratory tract damaged, died five days later.

She informed that her daughter Lovely was leading a miserable life after the death of Imran. Lovely lives in her husband's house in Kamarkhali of Faridpur with her two-year-old daughter.

"My daughter did not get any compensation. Plus, her in-laws do not give her any support," Ayesha said.

"Will you note down her name so that she can get some help?" she requested.

Our Jhenidah Correspondent Azibor Rahman also contributed to this report.

# Of 'anomalies' and confusions

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the time scale since the issuance of the gazette on December 15.

Teachers of government colleges, doctors, engineers, agriculturists and scientists have also been pressing for fixing "anomalies" in the pay scale. Employees of the central bank have been rallying on the premises of Bangladesh Bank.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina then stepped in and directed to examine the new pay scale's "discriminatory provisions" involving different sections of professionals and take steps accordingly.

However, not everybody minds the removal of the time scale and the selection grade. A number of experts and civil servants have said they support the exclusion but there are some anomalies in the new pay scale that should be fixed.

Employees of the Bangladesh Bank, who have long been demanding a separate pay scale, have launched protests rallies.

The present government in its previous term formed a committee for introducing a separate pay scale for the employees of the central bank and state banks. The Pay and Services Commission led by Mohammed Farashuddin, a former central bank governor, also recom-

mended a different pay scale for bankers.

The government's highest level has approved the separate pay scale, but the government had to back off after other sections of the public sectors such as teachers at universities and colleges also demanded separate pay scales for them.

The new pay scale has not only deprived them of a separate pay scale but also curtailed some perks they were entitled to.

According to the new pay scale, the entry level post of the central bank for officers, the assistant director, will join the bank in the ninth grade, but officers under the BCS will join in the eighth grade.

In the past, both officers used to join the service in the ninth grade.

Central bankers said this will hurt the government's plan to hire more talented officers for Bangladesh Bank.

Executive directors of the central bank belonged to salary grade two and they will continue in the same grade.

But they want grade one for the executive directors as this is the highest level a central bank official could hope to reach.

The positions of both governors and deputy governors are contrac-

tual.

Central bankers argue that if the BCS cadre officers can go on to be secretaries of their departments through promotion why can't they be given the same kind of career mobility.

If it is not done, talented candidates will not be too interested to join the central bank, said a central banker.

The Prokrichi BCS Coordination Committee demanded restoration of time scale and selection grade. It is an umbrella of 26 BCS cadre services and non-cadre services except the admin cadre.

Officials of the non-cadre services said their entry level officers have to be given eighth grade like those officers in the BCS cadres.

There are many officials who join the government non-cadre service in areas like agriculture who have great contributions to the economy, they argue.

Salary of professors is the main issue for the public university teachers. Currently it is in the third grade.

Among the professors in the third grade, 25 percent are promoted to the first grade.

The teachers are uncertain how the promotion will work now with the time scale and the selection

grade struck out.

The finance ministry wrote a letter to the education ministry, asking it to look at the issue through consultation.

The finance ministry said a guideline will be formulated under which some professors in the third grade will be promoted to the second grade, and then 25 percent of the professors in the second grade will be elevated to grade one.

The government has recently created a super grade named senior secretary whose pays are more than those in the first grade.

The public university teachers demanded super grade scale for their professors too.

The demand has created a row between the finance and the education ministries.

The government said a civil servant has to wait 27 to 30 years to get salaries in the first grade normally given to secretaries. But a lecturer becomes a professor with salaries in the third grade in less than half the time, within 12 years.

A number of experts backed the government in its decision to exclude the time scale and the selection grade as the systems involved irregularities.

However, they have urged the

government to look into other demands of the civil servants.

**TIME SCALE AND SELECTION GRADE**

The finance ministry has sent a detailed report on time scale and selection grade to the cabinet division.

In the report, the ministry said the benefits in the time scale and in the selection grade are similar.

An employee is promoted to the next position after they receive either time scale or selection grade.

But employees are not automatically elevated to next time scale and selection grade.

For the promotion, the meeting of the departmental promotion committee (DPC) has to be held, and the annual confidential report of the employees and their performance are taken into consideration.

But the meeting of the DPC was not held regularly, causing discontent among the employees about time scale and selection grade.

In case of providing time scale or selection grade, there were complexities in calculating the service year and scale facilities. These complexities result in litigations and these litigations are not disposed of quickly.

As a result, the government has to pay a huge amount of money in a one-off payment when the litigation is finally disposed of with the verdict for the employee, according to the finance ministry report.

This situation had prompted the pay commission of 2004 to recommend the exclusion of time scale and selection grade to avoid the complexities.

The eighth commission led by Mohammed Farashuddin, also recommended doing away with the time scale and selection grade.

The commission also recommended introduction of compound annual increment of salaries by five percent. As a result, their salaries will double in 16 years.

The finance division has recommended either the new incremental system or a higher scale instead of time scale and selection grade to avoid huge fiscal burden.

The government has introduced the new increment system and two selection grades in the whole service life of government employees.

Still, the government employees are not calling for the cancellation of the new incremental system. They also want the restoration of both the time scale and selection grade.