

Brokers feast on passport-seekers

BELAL HOSSAIN BIPOLO

Kabir Mia yesterday went to the Agargaon passport office to get his MRP but he instead ended up being detained for forgery and handed over to the Rapid Action Battalion.

Tanim whom Kabir identified as a broker was detained along with him.

The passport office suspected Kabir of committing forgery when it found his application form to have been filled out with information similar to the application of Shaheb Ali Sharif, from Kashiani upazila of Gopalganj.

According to Kabir, he was a tea vendor from Nabinagar upazila of Brahmanbaria and became a victim of deception by brokers who had promised to help him migrate to Malaysia.

His story begins like that of any other who looks forward to making a fortune in a foreign land -- through help from someone he knew as living

abroad.

Kabir talked to a local man, Atiqur who was already working in Malaysia. Atiqur made an agreement with him that he would help Kabir get a student visa to Malaysia for Tk 3.20 lakh.

Kabir was advised to meet Tanim in Dhaka to get a machine readable passport (MRP).

He then met the broker, from Dhaka's Lalbagh area, and gave him Tk 15,000 for the passport.

Tanim, however, rejected these claims of Kabir when he was sharing his story with The Daily Star at the Agargaon office.

Kabir said he had already paid Atiqur Tk 50,000 for visa.

"He [Atiqur] told me to complete the passport's procedure with Tanim. He will then arrange my student visa."

Tanim had introduced Kabir to another broker Parvez, from Jatrabari area. The brokers filled out the application form for Kabir's passport and



SEE PAGE 10 COL 2



Forged passports and rubber stamps, mobile phones and other materials that Rab seized during a raid in the capital's Jatrabari area Sunday night. Three persons were also arrested during the drive.

PHOTO: MUNTAKIM SAAD



"Sadhu" Joy Guru Monir Shah, wearing a white turban, with his followers at Phulanirchhit in Gazipur's Sreepur upazila. The forest department in a drive yesterday reclaimed around one hectare of land from Monir, who had occupied the land by establishing an akhra named "Herabon" there. Six of his followers were arrested for attempting to obstruct the raid.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

'Sadhu' evicted from forest land

Forest department arrests six of his followers for obstructing land recovery

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

The forest department yesterday recovered around one hectare of land from a "sadhu" living deep into the Bhawal forest in Phulanirchhit area of Gazipur's Sreepur.

Six followers of "sadhu" Joy Guru Monir Shah, who allegedly occupied the land by setting up an "akhra" named "Herabon" there, were arrested for obstructing the land recovery, said Forest Range Officer of Sreepur Mozammel Haque.

The arrestees are Sekender, 60, Nazrul Islam, 28, Safiz Uddin, 35, Mahfuz, 24, Russell, 24, and Fazlul Haque, 45. "Sadhu" Monir was not

SEE PAGE 10 COL 4

'FALSE PADMA STORIES' HC asks for report on probe move

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday directed the government to submit a report before it on the progress in forming an enquiry commission to identify the "culprits who made up false stories" about a corruption conspiracy involving the Padma Bridge project.

The home secretary and the cabinet secretary will have to submit the progress report before the HC by May 9, Deputy Attorney General Tapas Kumar Biswas told The Daily Star.

The HC bench of Justice Quazi Reza-Ul Hoque and Justice Mohammad Ullah passed the order during hearing of a suo moto rule issued by it on February 15.

SEE PAGE 10 COL 5

Sonali Bank to offer PayPal service

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sonali Bank has received approval of the central bank to make PayPal services available in Bangladesh, particularly for freelancers.

PayPal allows individuals and businesses to transfer funds electronically. As it is an online service, an individual first needs to open a PayPal account with a valid email address. The PayPal user will also need a valid credit card or a bank account linked with PayPal to avail its service.

Bangladesh Bank yesterday approved the state bank's proposal to roll out the international online payment system, said Mofazzal Hossain, general manager of Sonali Bank.

The government had been negotiating

SEE PAGE 10 COL 4

Hawking

FROM PAGE 16

space. But "Richard Branson has offered me a seat on Virgin Galactic, and I said yes immediately", he said.

Richard Branson's spaceflight company, Virgin Galactic, hopes soon to carry people into space on commercial missions. Branson had suggested that he might be able to complete a flight in 2009, but the plan has been thrown off by a range of problems and disasters.

In a wide-ranging interview, he said that his "three children have brought me great joy - and I can tell you what will make me happy, to travel in space".

Professor Hawking also discussed Donald Trump, who he said was a "demagogue" and made him fear that he might never be welcome in the US. "His priority will be to satisfy his electorate who are neither liberal, nor that well-informed," he said.

He also criticised Jeremy Corbyn, who he said had allowed himself to be portrayed "a left-wing extremist, which he's not". Because of the media portrayals, he said there was not much chance that Corbyn would ever win an election, but that he would continue to support the Labour party.

9 deals on defence during PM's visit

FROM PAGE 1

instrument for exchange of technical information are likely to be signed. They include an agreement on peaceful use of nuclear energy, and three other deals regarding implementation of the country's first nuclear power project at Rooppur involving Russia.

In the shipping sector, seven agreements, MoUs, and standard operational procedures (SoP) are on the cards. Delhi is eager to use both Chittagong and Mongla ports and sign SoPs with Dhaka to that end. Either an agreement or a MoU is likely to be signed for building a coal and container terminal at Payra Port.

One agreement and two MoUs are likely to be signed in the energy sector. Dhaka is working on a MoU between Bangladesh, India and Bhutan for joint investment in a 1,124-megawatt hydro power project in Bhutan.

Besides, Indian credit is expected for setting up a pipeline to carry petroleum products from India to Bangladesh.

Two agreements and a MoU are also on the cards on peaceful use of outer space, and cooperation in the area of geostationary communications satellites.

Fresh line of credit is expected from India for development of economic

SECTOR	AGREEMENTS, MoUs, INSTRUMENTS
Defence	9
Shipping	7
Science & Technology	4
Power and Energy	3
Education	4
Home Affairs	3
Commerce	2
LGED	2

Besides, one agreement will be signed each in health, railway, ICT, industries, information and cultural affairs sectors

zones, shipping, ports and road infrastructure, and also for river restoration in Bangladesh.

Almost a fourth of the expected \$4-billion credit from India would be spent on infrastructure development of Rooppur Nuclear Power Project.

India would also provide credit for upgrading 245km roads -- Benapole-Jessore-Narail-Bhanga (135 km), Ramgarh-Baruerhat (35 km) and Maynamati-Brahmanbaria-Sarail (75 km) --, keeping in mind transit and

No evidence

FROM PAGE 16

Trump Tower in New York, which housed the campaign headquarters for the Republican's surprise election win against Democrat Hillary Clinton.

"With respect to the president's tweets about alleged wiretapping directed at him by the prior administration, I have no information that supports those tweets," Comey told the congressional hearing.

"And we have looked carefully inside the FBI. The Department of Justice has asked me to share with you that the answer is the same for the Department of Justice and all its components: the department has no information that supports those tweets," he said.

Comey also confirmed the agency is investigating possible Russian government efforts to interfere in the election, including any links between Trump's campaign and Moscow.

Russia denies it attempted to influence the Nov. 8 presidential election.

Nunes had opened the hearing by denying Trump's wiretapping claim but did not rule out other surveillance methods.

"We know there was not a physical wiretap of Trump Tower," he said.

"However, it's still possible that other surveillance activities were used against President Trump and his associates."

Comey's disclosure confirmed longstanding reports that the Federal Bureau of Investigation was probing the explosive charges that Trump's stunning election victory over Hillary Clinton last November came on the back of Russian meddling.

US intelligence chiefs said in January they were convinced that Russian President Vladimir Putin was behind that effort.

But they had not commented on whether they were examining links between members of Trump's campaign and Russian officials.

Republican committee chair Devin Nunes opened yesterday's hearing -- the first public hearing into the issue -- by saying the panel had "seen no evidence to date that officials from any campaign conspired with Russian agents."

But Adam Schiff, the Democratic vice chair of the committee, detailed a list of alleged links and communications between the Trump team and Russia.

Govt moves to get UN recognition

FROM PAGE 1

macabre were told and retold by countless many here. And yet, the world did not have time to listen.

Forty-six years after the bloodbath that hardly left any family untouched, Bangladesh has finally taken initiatives to get recognition of the Pakistan army led genocide by the UN.

Ahead of Bangladesh observing March 25, the day when the Pakistan army unleashed its war machine against a sleeping population, as Genocide Day, the government will send two senior officials to the UN headquarters in New York and the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) headquarters in Geneva.

They will talk to senior UN officials to start the process of getting UN recognition of the Pakistani atrocity.

"This is a tall task, needing support from many," Shahriar Alam, state minister for foreign affairs, told The Daily Star yesterday. "We will approach those countries like Russia, India and the UK which had supported our cause in 1971 so that these countries pass resolutions in their own parliaments to recognize the killings in Bangladesh as

genocide."

Shahriar said the foreign ministry has also set up a desk with two secretaries which will monitor the task.

The UN has recognized two massacres as genocide -- the Holocaust and the Rwanda genocide.

Although the world leaders did not pay heed to the grisly murders in this part of the world, often considered as a backwater in the then geopolitical map dominated by the Soviet Union, China, Pakistan, India and Indo-China, concerns were raised by the world press at the time.

The New York Times in a piece in May of 1971 called the killing "one of the bloodiest slaughters of modern times."

In April that year, New York Times, in an editorial headlined "Bloodbath in Bengal," condemned Washington's silence on what it called the "indiscriminate slaughter of civilians and the selective elimination of leadership groups in East Bengal."

The Sunday Times published articles and editorials under headlines of "Genocide."

The US Consul General in Dhaka, Archer Blood, sent a telegram to

Washington headed with the phrase "Selective Genocide."

The recently published book by Prof Gary Bass, based primarily on the declassified White House tapes, has been named as *Blood Telegram: Nixon, Kissinger and a Forgotten Genocide*.

The then UN Secretary General, U Thant, on June 3, 1971, wrote to the President of the Security Council saying "The happenings in East Pakistan constitute one of the most tragic episodes in human history. Of course, it is for future historians to gather facts and make their own evaluations, but it has been a very terrible blot on a page of human history."

But world leaders would not pay much attention to these pleas in the then complicated geo-politics. The onus of having it recognised internationally as genocide and for the dead to be recognised as victims of genocide fell on Bangladesh.

The cabinet yesterday at a meeting with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina approved March 25 to be observed as Genocide Day, clearing all formalities to recognise the brutal genocide committed on this day in 1971.

On March 11, the Jatiya Sangsad

passed a resolution to observe the day as Genocide Day.

From now on, the Government of Bangladesh will observe March 25 as Genocide Day.

"The foreign ministry has started efforts to have the day recognised internationally," Cabinet Secretary M Shafiul Alam said in a press briefing after the meeting.

What significance will UN recognition have? First, it will officially document the atrocities of war against this population by a brutal regime. For humanity to move forward, it has strong significance. A crime has been committed and that has to be recognised as a crime. Otherwise, humanity will see recurrence of genocides. It is also a process of shaming the perpetrators.

Secondly, if Bangladesh takes forward charges against the Pakistani leaders and soldiers for war crimes in international courts, this recognition will help it happen as such recognition has been in the case of the Bosnian genocide.

Bangladesh ranked

FROM PAGE 1

Sweden rounded out the top ten countries.

South Sudan, Liberia, Guinea, Togo, Rwanda, Tanzania, Burundi and the Central African Republic were at the bottom.

The US ranked 14th while the UK 19th.

Countries in sub-Saharan Africa and those hit by conflict have predictably low scores. Syria was placed at 152 while Yemen and South Sudan, which are facing impending famine, came in at 146 and 147.

The World Happiness Report measures "subjective well-being" -- how happy the people are, and why. It also takes into account GDP per capita, healthy life expectancy, freedom, generosity, social support and absence of corruption in government or business.

"This report gives special attention to the social foundations of happiness for individuals and nations... this can be seen by comparing the life experiences

between the top and bottom ten countries in this year's happiness rankings," the report said.

It also said, "Work is also a major factor affecting happiness. Unemployment causes a major fall in happiness, and even for those in work the quality of work can cause major variations in happiness."

The report also said people in China were no happier than they had been 25 years ago while happiness has fallen in America.

"The USA is a story of reduced happiness. In 2007 the USA ranked 3rd among the OECD countries; in 2016 it came 19th. The reasons are declining social support and increased corruption and it is these same factors that explain why the Nordic countries do so much better."

Since 2013, the United Nations has been celebrating the International Day of Happiness on March 20 as a way to recognise the importance of happiness in the lives of people around the world.

HAPPIEST COUNTRIES	
TOP 5	BOTTOM 5
Norway	Central African Republic
Denmark	Burundi
Iceland	Tanzania
Switzerland	Syria
Finland	Rwanda