

IMMIGRATION DETENTION CENTRE KL asked to probe death of foreigners

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rights organisation Fortify Rights has demanded that Malaysia investigate deaths at its immigration detention centres without any delay.

The National Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM) in its annual report published yesterday says as many as 118 foreigners died in Malaysia's immigration detention centres in 2015 and 2016.

Of those who died, 63 are Myanmar nationals, 17 Bangladeshis, 10 Indonesians, six Indians and four are Pakistanis. The others are from Cambodia, Kenya, Nepal, Nigeria, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Tanzania and Thailand.

Officials say there are some four lakh Bangladeshis in Malaysia. A good number of them are undocumented who often face detention.

According to the Bangladesh foreign ministry, as many as 2,469 Bangladeshis were in Malaysian jails as of February 14 this year.

"A single death in immigration custody is unacceptable. More than 100 deaths are completely inexcusable," said Amy Smith, executive director of Fortify Rights, a rights body working in Southeast Asia.

"SUHAKAM's report should send shockwaves throughout the Malaysian government and elicit an immediate response," she said in a press statement.

The causes of death reportedly ranged from sepsis or septic shock, leptospirosis -- a type of bacterial infection -- pneumonia, lung infections, and heart related conditions. In 50 of the reported cases, the authorities have apparently failed to provide the specific cause of death.

The SUHAKAM described the situation in detention centres as "untenable living conditions with little regard for the inmates' basic human dignity."

"These deaths can't be swept under the rug," said Amy Smith, adding, "Those responsible must be held to account."

Malaysia's Immigration Department implausibly claimed that detainees contracted illnesses prior to their detention.

"The problems with Malaysia's immigration detention practices extend well beyond budgetary concerns," Amy Smith observed.

"Malaysian authorities could begin tackling this by ending arbitrary and indefinite detention of migrants,



Rakib's heartbroken father Nur Alam and his sobbing wife try to console their daughter Rimi Akhter at their Khulna home yesterday after hearing the news that the High Court commuted the sentence of two condemned convicts for brutally killing 13-year-old Rakib.

PHOTO: STAR

1 killed, 30 injured

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a safe place from a tea stall after the tornado began. He was rushed to Faridpur Medical College Hospital where he died around 8:00pm.

Mostofa Hossain Khan, chairman of North Channel union, said around 600 houses were damaged by the storm in the union.

Besides, 40 houses were affected in Decree Char union and 100 more in Char Madhabdia union.

GM Abdul Rouf, director of Faridpur agricultural extension department, said around 50 hectares of onion seed fields, some 59 hectares of banana fields, and about 62 hectares of maize fields were ruined by a hailstorm in North Channel union.

In Pabna, some 30 people were injured and over 400 houses were damaged as a tornado lashed through five villages in Pabna's Sujanager, reports our district correspondent.

The storm also wreaked havoc on trees.

Shakhawat Hossain, Sujanager upazila nirbahi officer, said the 15-minute storm hit Chargobindpur village of Ahmedpur union and Bodonpur, Chinakhora, Dulai and Chardulai villages of Dulai union around 6:30pm.

It could not be confirmed how many houses had been damaged. But they assumed that over 300 houses and many trees were affected

by the storm, the UNO said.

Of the 30 wounded, Halima Khatun, 35, of Chargobindpur, was undergoing treatment at Rajshahi Medical College Hospital, and nine others were admitted to Sujanager Upazila Health Complex.

Vehicular movement on the Dhaka-Pabna highway was disrupted for around two hours as hundreds of trees fell on the highway, sources said.

"When the storm began, we rushed here and there to save our lives. We saw our houses being blown away by the storm," said Akkas Ali of Chargobindpur village, which was affected the most, adding that the storm left them homeless within 15 minutes.

"There is no place to take shelter in the village because all the houses were damaged," Akkas said.

They were living under the open sky, he added.

He also alleged that the supply of food was inadequate.

Talking to The Daily Star, UNO Shakhawat said the upazila and the district administrations were working in the affected villages.

"We have already distributed 20kg of rice, Tk 1,000 and dry food among each of the 200 victim families," he said.

Relief work would continue, and the victims would be given support for their rehabilitation, the UNO added.

Relief for two death convicts

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The punishment was reduced on the ground that the convicts -- Omar Sharif and Mintu Khan -- had taken critically sick Rakib to hospital for treatment and that there was no record of previous criminal activities against them.

The HC also fined them Tk 50,000 each. The money should be given to Rakib's family members. Otherwise, the convicts would have to serve two more years in jail, according to the verdict.

Earlier in November 2015, the Khulna Metropolitan Magistrate Court sentenced Rakib's former employer Omar and his uncle Mintu to death for killing Rakib by pumping air into his rectum -- an incident that triggered public outrage across the country.

An HC bench of Justice Jahangir Hossain Selim and Justice Md Jahangir Hossain came up with yesterday's verdict upon hearing the death references and appeals by the convicts.

Terming the HC verdict unjust, the victim's father said he and his wife had been praying that the culprits would be hanged, reports our Khulna correspondent.

"But it seems that was not to be," Nur Alam said.

He expressed concerns over the safety of his daughter, saying there were attempts to kidnap her when the trial was on at the Khulna court.

"The culprits would come out of

jail one day. Who would give us protection then?" he said, adding that his daughter goes to school with fear, as Omar's house is on the way.

Rakib's mother Lucky Begum who was passing out frequently said, "I don't accept the verdict. I want my son back."

Fifth grader Rimi Akhter, sister of Rakib, was wailing inconsolably holding his brother's shirt brought before Eid that year.

"The shirt is still new, but my brother is no more."

Due to financial hardship, Rakib had dropped out of school.

"He wanted to do something for the family and that was why he took the job at the motor garage. He was killed there," Rimi said.

Rakib's intestines had been torn apart and lungs burst as air filled the abdomen, which left him dead.

WHY HC COMMUTED DEATH PENALTY

Delivering the verdict, the HC made an observation that accused Omar and Mintu had understood the gravity of the crime, and they had tried to save Rakib as stated by some prosecution witnesses, two magistrates and investigation officer of the case that they had taken Rakib to a clinic in Khulna for treatment.

According to statements of the witnesses, Omar had donated one bag of blood to save Rakib and Mintu had gone to bring medicines, instead of fleeing after committing

the offence on the day of the incident, the HC said.

Doctors of Good Health Clinic were confused as to how to treat Rakib and so he was sent to Dhaka.

Rakib died on the way to Dhaka four and a half hours after the incident, the HC said, adding that it was unknown whether such an incident took place in the country in the last hundred years.

The punishment for killing the innocent boy is either death penalty or life imprisonment with fine, and in the middle point of view, the lesser punishment that is life imprisonment should be sustained, the court said.

Attorney General Mahbubey Alam told The Daily Star that his office would contemplate moving an appeal before the Supreme Court, seeking death penalty for the convicts, after the release of the full text of HC verdict.

Omar's lawyer Gola M Mohammad Chowdhury Alal and Mintu's lawyer ASM Abdul Mobin said they would decide whether to appeal against the HC verdict after consulting with their clients.

Under section-57 of the Penal Code, life sentence means 30 years' prison term.

But Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha, while pronouncing a verdict in a 2001 murder case, in February this year said life imprisonment means jail sentence until natural death.

Chhatra League leader among seven arrested militant suspects

Says Mymensingh

BCL leader

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Al Amin, one of the seven suspected militants arrested on Monday, is a union level leader of Chhatra League.

He is the vice-president of Bagher union BCL under Mymensingh's Dhobaura upazila, Saurob Hossain Milon, general secretary of the Chhatra League unit, told The Daily Star.

"We've heard about his arrest as a suspected militant. If he is found involved in militancy, he will be expelled from the organisation," said Milon.

Al Amin used to take part in the student front's programmes regularly, he added.

The six other arrestees are Shahidul Islam, 28, and Ashiqur Rahman, 19, of Mymensingh's Haluaghat; Masum Ahmed, 30, Shah Al Hossain Shamim, 27, Ruman Miah, 27, of Netrakona's Purbadhala; and Nasir Uddin, 27, of the district's Mohanganj.

Police claimed to have arrested the seven at a one-storey building on Boro Kalibari Road in Mymensingh town. Most of them were staying there for several months.

According to Shawkat Alam, officer-in-charge of Dhobaura Police Station, Al Amin's father Iqbal Hossain, a hatchery businessman, is involved in Awami League politics and his cousin Zakir Hossain is the president of Bagher union BCL.

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It won't

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social media including Facebook. So it will not take any moves which will bar the way of digitisation," she said.

In a letter dated March 23, the cabinet division drew the telecom division's attention to a "decision" taken during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's open discussion with deputy commissioners last year.

"Facebook browsing at the dead of night is especially hampering students' studies and work of youths ... Facebook may be blocked from 12:00 at night to 6:00 in the morning for developing a healthy, able and active nation," reads the letter.

The letter sought a report on implementation and development following proper steps on the prime minister's "directive".

Referring to the letter, Tarana said the cabinet division was seeking opinions. "The division just did the routine work. But it does not mean the decision has been taken," she said.

The telecom division had forwarded the letter to Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) for recommendations.

Instead of going for the ban, the BTRC, in a letter sent to the telecom division on Monday, recommended that parents be urged to use parental control software, security software and privacy features to prevent their children from using Facebook excessively.

It recommended government steps like launching awareness programmes in schools and colleges and in the media about responsible use of Facebook.

The BTRC also laid importance on guardians' awareness on the mobile and internet usage of their wards.

Talking to The Daily Star, BTRC Chairman Shahjahan Mahmood said, "We were told that top-level government officials are not in favour of any step that blocks Facebook usage."

58 killed in 'gas' attack

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Spokesman Sean Spicer said President Donald Trump had been briefed extensively on the incident, adding that Washington was "confident in its assessment" that Damascus was to blame.

Spicer also suggested it was in the "best interest" of Syrians for Assad not to lead the country.

"The idea that someone would use chemical weapons on their own people, including women and children, is not something that any civilised nation should sit back and accept or tolerate," he said.

UN envoy Staffan de Mistura said the attack was believed to be chemical and launched from the air, adding that there should be a "clear identification of responsibilities and accountability".

The Observatory said the attack on a residential part of Khan Sheikhun came early yesterday, when a warplane carried out strikes that released "toxic gas".

As well as those killed, at least 160 people were injured, it said, and many died even after arriving at medical facilities.

The monitor could not confirm the nature of the gas, but said the attack was probably carried out by government warplanes.

"We heard strikes this morning ... We ran inside the houses and saw whole families just dead in their beds. Children, women, old people dead in the streets," resident Abu Mustafa said.

Russia's military, which has been fighting in support of Assad's government since September 2015, denied carrying out any strikes near the town.

Hours after the initial attack, air strikes also hit a hospital in the town where doctors were treating victims, the AFP correspondent said, bringing

down rubble on top of medics as they worked.

He saw a young girl, a woman and two elderly people dead at a hospital.

A father carried his dead little girl wrapped in a sheet, her lips blueish and her dark curls visible.

As doctors worked, a warplane circled overhead, striking first near the facility and then hitting it twice, inflicting severe damage and prompting nearly a dozen medical staff to flee.

government and Russian air strikes, and has also been hit by the US-led coalition fighting the Islamic State group, usually targeting jihadists.

Syria's leading opposition group, the National Coalition, blamed Assad for the attack and demanded that the United Nations "open an immediate investigation" and hold those responsible to account.

"Failure to do so will be understood as a message of blessing to the regime

of Damascus.

But there have been repeated allegations of chemical weapons use since, with a UN-led investigation pointing the finger at the regime for at least three chlorine attacks in 2014 and 2015.

The army again denied using chemical weapons on Tuesday, insisting "it has never used them, any time, anywhere, and will not do so in the future".

The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons said it was "seriously concerned" by reports of the attack.

And the UN's Commission of Inquiry for Syria said it had begun investigating the "alleged use of chemical weapons".

PEACE TALKS IN DOUBT

More than 320,000 people have been killed in Syria since the conflict began in March 2011 with anti-government protests.

Successive rounds of peace talks, including a UN-sponsored meeting in Geneva last week, have failed to produce a political breakthrough.

Yesterday's attack cast new doubt on the peace process, said the opposition's chief negotiator Mohamad Sabra.

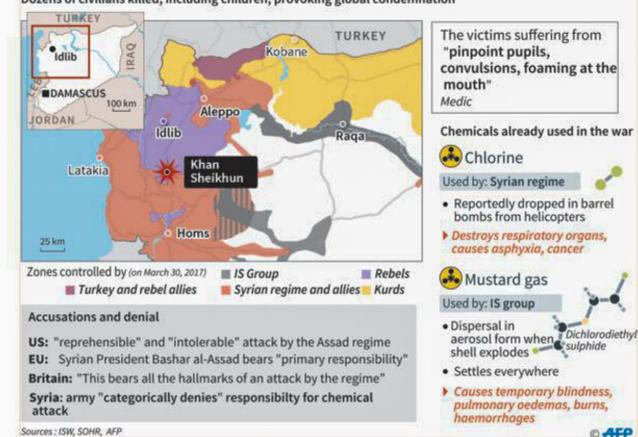
The UN Security Council is to hold an emergency meeting today to discuss the attack following calls from France and Britain.

"I've seen the reports about the use of sarin and as far as I know they have not been confirmed," British ambassador to the UN Matthew Rycroft said.

"This is clearly a war crime," Rycroft told reporters. "I call on the Security Council members who have previously used their vetoes to defend the indefensible to change their course."

Syria: deadly chemical attack

Dozens of civilians killed, including children, provoking global condemnation



Speaking to AFP, medic Hazem Shehwan said victims of the earlier attack had symptoms including "pinpoint pupils, convulsions, foaming at the mouth and rapid pulses".

ARMY DENIAL

Khan Sheikhun is in Idlib province, which is largely controlled by an alliance of rebels including former Al-Qaeda affiliate Fateh al-Sham Front.

The province is regularly targeted in

for its actions," it said.

Damascus officially joined the Chemical Weapons Convention and turned over its declared chemical arsenal in 2013, as part of a deal to avert US military action.

That agreement came after hundreds of people -- up to 1,429 according to a US intelligence report -- were killed in chemical weapons strikes allegedly carried out by government troops east and southwest

Russian metro

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KYRGYZSTAN LINK

No group has claimed responsibility for the attack, which led to the shutdown of the city's metro system. Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev described it as a "terrorist act."

Erlan Abyldaev, the Kyrgyz Foreign Minister, said the bomber's motives were unclear.

"Regarding the link with Islamic radicalism, we have to wait to know more until the investigation yields its full results," Abyldaev said at a press conference with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

Kyrgyzstan is a Muslim-majority nation in Central Asia of around six million people. It is formerly part of the Soviet Union and remains a close ally of Russia.

Russian President Vladimir Putin was in St Petersburg for a media conference the morning of the attack. At a press conference yesterday, reporters asked Kremlin spokesman Peskov whether he thought the President may have been a target.

"Of course the fact that the terror attack happened when the head of the state was in town is a food for thought and is subject to analysis by the special services. Any terror attack that happens in the country is an attack on every single Russian citizen. Including the head of state," he said.

Analysts have speculated that the bomber could be affiliated with either a Chechen separatist group or IS. The bombing of a Russian Metrojet flight over the Sinai desert in Egypt, which killed all 224 people aboard, was claimed by IS.