



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina exchanges greetings with judges and lawyers at a function marking the National Legal Aid Day in the capital's Osmani Memorial Auditorium yesterday.

Suicide bomber kills five troops in Nigeria

AFP, Kano

At least five soldiers were killed and another 40 injured when a Boko Haram jihadist rammed an explosives-laden pick-up truck into a military convoy in northeast Nigeria, security sources told AFP yesterday.

The bomber, believed to be loyal to factional leader Abu Mus'ab Al-Barnawi, targeted the convoy, which was conducting "clearance operations" between Yobe and Borno states, two military officers said.

"At about 1100 hours (1000 GMT) on Thursday, a suicide bomber believed to be a Boko Haram terrorist riding in a van loaded with explosives rammed into a military convoy at Manguzum village," one said.

"We lost five soldiers in the incident and more than 40 sustained various degrees of injuries," added the officer, who asked to remain anonymous because he was not authorised to speak about the incident.

The convoy was heading to the garrison town of Damboa, which is

some 90 kilometres (55 miles) from the Borno state capital, Maiduguri, at the time.

A second military source said the troops were heading into Borno when the jihadist crashed his vehicle into a tank.

The armoured tank was seriously damaged and the operation slowed down," he added.

There has been a spate of deadly attacks on military targets in recent months, as troops fight to end the eight-year insurgency, which has left at least 20,000 dead in Nigeria alone.

The conflict has also spilled into neighbouring countries Cameroon, Chad and Niger, making more than two million homeless.

Most of the recent attacks are suspected to have been carried out by the Al-Barnawi faction, which is backed by the Islamic State group.

Last August IS declared Al-Barnawi, whose father founded Boko Haram, as the group's new leader, replacing its long-time figurehead Abubakar Shekau.

Rare fatwa

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The Southeast Asian nation has a population of 250 million.

Under Indonesian laws, the minimum age of marriage for girls is 16, and 19 for boys.

In issuing the fatwa, the women clerics cited studies saying many Indonesian child brides could not continue their studies once wed and half their marriages ended in divorce.

They urged the government to raise the minimum marriage age for girls to 18, a demand activists have sought for years.

Early marriage not only makes it

more likely that girls will quit school, campaigners say it also increases the risks of exploitation, sexual violence, domestic abuse and death in childbirth.

About 300 participants took part in the congress, which included Indonesian women clerics and women leaders from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Malaysia. Organisers billed the three-day conference as the first meeting of its kind in the world.

The congress also issued two other fatwas against environmental destruction and sexual violence, which the clerics said are against Islamic teaching and fundamental human rights.

No state organ should accuse another: PM

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"So, none of the three state organs can move alone as all of them need to move ahead maintaining an understanding. I'll only say no one should forget that the state should have to be run properly taking everybody along."

The PM called upon judges and lawyers to serve people with a more humane attitude to them to reduce their suffering.

"Come forward with the mindset of

serving people. It's not possible to ease the suffering of justice seekers by merely enacting laws and enhancing infrastructural facilities," she observed.

Hasina said her government was working to establish an independent, neutral and modern judiciary system hoping that such legal aid services would help reduce discrimination.

The government introduced the legal aid services and the poor and

distressed people were getting its benefits, she told the programme.

She said her previous government (1996-2001) had enacted the National Legal Aid Services Act, 2000, but the subsequent BNP-Jamaat government stopped providing such services.

Over the last eight years, legal aid services were provided to some 2,31,626 people, including 1,66,339 females and children, with public fund. Some 46,546 cases were dis-

posed of under the government's legal aid programme during the same period, the premier mentioned.

Chaired by Law Minister Anisul Huq, the function was addressed, among others, by Law and Justice Division Secretary ASSM Zahirul Haque.

A presentation on the successes and achievements of the National Legal Aid Services Organisation was screened on the occasion.

Waiting for help

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Also, the amount of relief sanctioned is inadequate.

According to the district administration data, there are 2,77,188 farmers in Sunamganj. The Department of Agriculture Extension puts the number even higher -- at 3,31,316.

This means the government programme will cover nearly half or less than half of the affected families.

Sunamganj has been the worst-hit, other affected districts being Sylhet, Moulvibazar, Habiganj, Netrakona, Kishoreganj and Brahmanbaria.

In Sunamganj, all of the 266 haors submerged. Government estimate shows the district lost 6 lakh tonnes of Boro output.

"We demand that the government distribute relief among all the affected farmers. Also, the government should consider giving at least 50kgs of rice and Tk 1,000 per month," said Bindu.

District Relief Officer Mahbubur Rahman said the list of the families was almost complete and people in some areas were already getting the relief.

However, the relief distribution will begin in full swing on Sunday when Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is expected to visit the area and launch the relief distribution, he added.

He also downplayed the concern over a fair distribution.

On Wednesday, local lawmaker Peer Fazlur Rahman Misbah and reserved seat MP Shamsunnahar Begum told reporters that many families were left out of the list.

OMS RICE, FLOUR
Another government support comes in the form of Open Market Sell, from

where people can buy rice and flour at a low price.

Though the allocation of rice and flour at the OMS outlets in Sunamganj has been doubled over the past few days, the affected families in Sylhet are finding it difficult to buy rice or flour from the OMS points.

Hushna Begum, 55, from Borodool village under Tahirpur upazila in Sylhet, went to the sadar upazila to buy rice from an OMS outlet early in the morning yesterday.

She woke up before the sun rose, drank a glass of water and headed for Tahirpur.

Hushna, a poor woman with an eight-member family, spent Tk 25 to reach there. When she spoke with The Daily Star around 11:00am, she was standing in a long queue, still waiting for her turn.

Her serial number was 665.

"I am not sure if I will get some rice. If I do, I will go home and cook it for my folks," she said, adding that she was tired of standing for so long.

Dozens of men and women had a similar story to tell.

Many of those who managed to buy some said it was not enough for their families.

The local administration says up to 400 people can buy rice and another 200 can buy flour from each of the three OMS centres at Tahirpur upazila every day.

Jagadish Roy, an OMS dealer at Tahirpur Bazar, said they could not sell more than the government allocation - 5kgs of rice or flour for each.

Tahirpur upazila Chairman Kamrul said 23 haors in the area went under the floodwaters, affecting some 2.5 lakh people.

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Libya via Dubai and Sudan.

"We were taken to a building [in Tripoli]. We found 100 other Bangladeshis there. A broker named Hossain took 12 of us to the third floor and demanded money," he said.

Hossain demanded Tk 4.5 lakh and threatened him with confinement and tortures unless the payment was made. The broker then called Ilias' wife Nurunnahar Nipa and made similar threats.

"As my family needed time to gather the money, I was beaten up with a chain several times. They were cruel. They beat up fellow Bangladeshis in front of me and made video calls to their relatives at home on IMO [a messaging and video conference app] to show their tortures," Ilias said.

He said his wife borrowed from banks and relatives and paid Hossain's cohort Idris of Jessor in two weeks.

Ilias was then sent to a bread factory where he was made to work nearly 20 hours a day without pay. He asked the factory owner to send him home as his health was deteriorating, but was denied.

"The factory owner demanded \$5,000. I was undone," Ilias said.

Several months passed by and he could not send a penny to his wife to repay the loans. His wife Nurunnahar died of stroke on December 1 last year, leaving their 12-year-old son all alone.

"I went crazy and rushed to the employer to show the photo of my dead wife," he said.

The employer then freed him, gave his passport back, but did not pay him for the work he had done.

He then contacted some people of Bogra living in another Libyan province and stayed with them.

After over two months, his brother sent him some money and he was able to return home on February 26. "I am now deep in debt," he said.

He spent Tk 3 lakh to go to Libya, but as he was held hostage, his wife Maksuda Islam had to borrow Tk 1.5 lakh to buy his freedom from the traffickers in Tripoli.

Sayeed then moved to Misrata, Libya, but could not return home as no one could send him any money.

Maksuda is now struggling to make ends meet with two sons, seven and nine years old.

"I talked to my husband a month ago and I just cried ... since then there was no communication," she said.

KIDNAPPING FREQUENT

Bangladeshi Rafiq Haider, who has a business in Tripoli, said a section of Bangladeshis and Libyans team up to kidnap Bangladeshis who cannot send

the Mediterranean.

They were then imprisoned in Libya for nearly five months before the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) facilitated their return on March 8.

The IOM repatriated 95 Bangladeshis until March 8 this year.

There are others who remained stranded in chaotic Libya. Abu Sayeed, 45, of Jatrabari in Dhaka, who travelled to Libya with Mohammad Ilias, is one of them.

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money home as remittance houses in Libya are closed.

There were many instances in which Libyans kidnapped migrants and handed them over to their Bangladeshi cohorts for money. The Bangladeshi criminals then held them hostage for ransom.

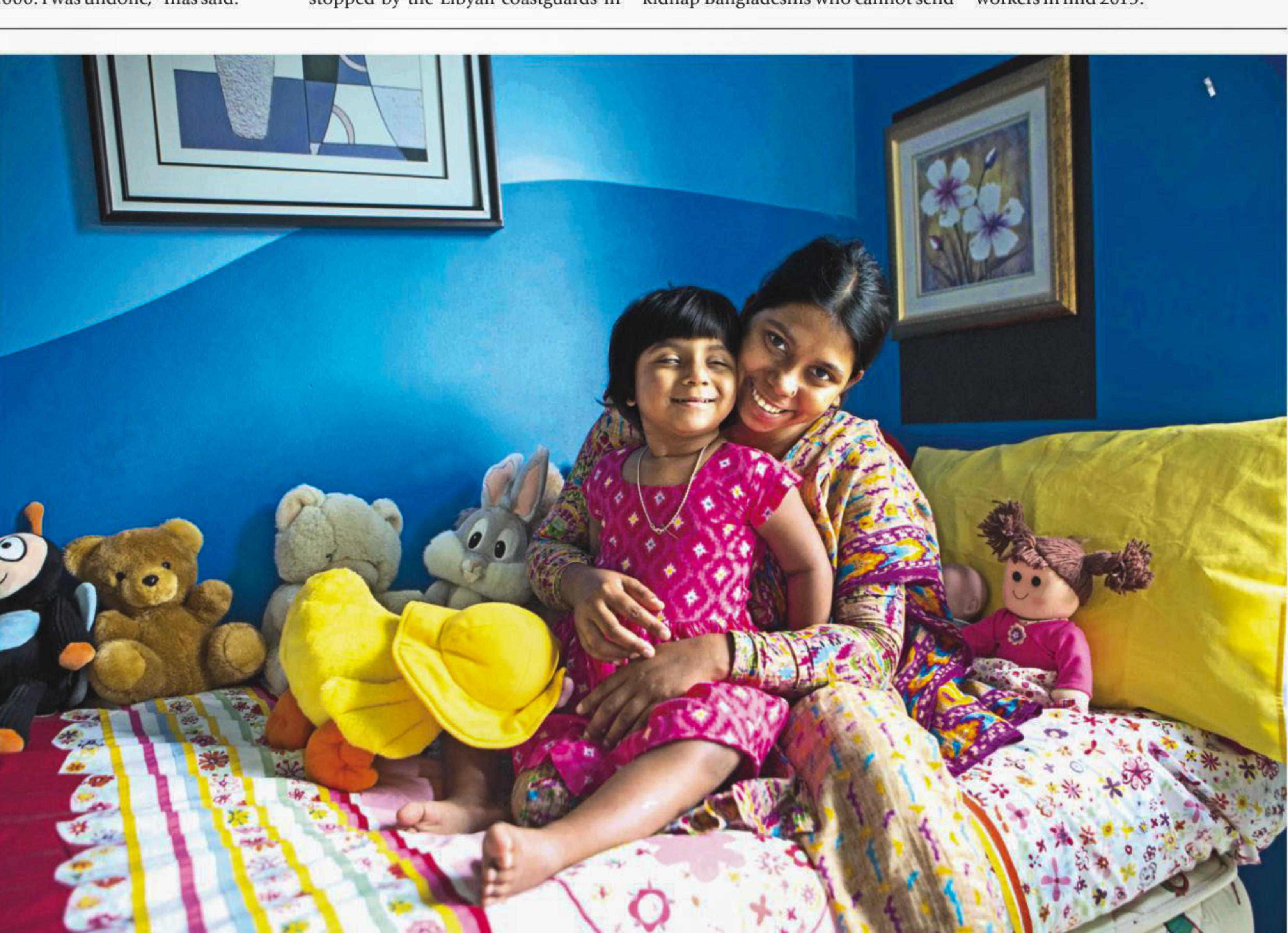
Ashraf Islam, labour counsellor of the Bangladesh embassy in Tripoli, said the mission recorded some 300 cases of kidnapping of Bangladeshis in 2016. The actual number of kidnapping cases would be several times more, he said.

An estimated 20,000 Bangladeshis are still in Libya, and they are either waiting to return home or cross the Mediterranean to reach Italy, said Ashraf.

According to the IOM, 521 people from 10 countries, including Bangladesh, died in the Mediterranean between January 1 and March 9 this year. The death toll of Bangladeshis was not known.

During this period, 1,303 Bangladeshis managed to reach Italy. The number was 8,131 in 2016, up from 5,040 in 2015 and 4,386 in 2014, it said.

Libya banned Bangladeshi migrant workers in mid 2015.



This undated handout photo released yesterday by the Children First Foundation shows three-year-old Choity Khatun, left, with her mother Shima, right, in hospital in Melbourne after she had life saving reconstructive surgery. Choity had parts of her twin developed in her perineum -- the area between the anus and the vulva -- as well as a third leg, and was considered to have little prospect of survival. But an Australian charity, Children First Foundation, bought her to Melbourne last year, where a team of surgeons spent several months mapping out a procedure to reconstruct her anatomy.

Attacks on religious minorities

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prosecute perpetrators and increase protection for likely targets, the threats and violence have heightened the sense of fear among Bangladeshi citizens of all religious groups."

It also said illegal land appropriations -- commonly referred to as land-grabbing -- and ownership disputes remain widespread, particularly against Hindus and Christians.

"Other concerns include issues related to property returns and the situation of Rohingya Muslims."

The report said, "The January 2014 parliamentary election was neither free nor fair, and was followed by violence in 16 out of 64 districts. The worst attacks occurred in minority-dominated villages. Dozens of Hindu properties were looted or set ablaze, and hundreds of Hindus fled their homes. Christian and Buddhist communities also were targeted. Most attacks were attributed to individuals and groups associated with the BNP and the main Islamist party Jamaat-e-Islami