



Suspected human traffickers arrested in Dhaka and Kishoreganj being taken to court yesterday. The photo was taken at Police Bureau of Investigation in the capital.

PHOTO: STAR

Human trafficking rackets busted

FROM PAGE 1 and a half months.

The traffickers instantly began to demand more money. Saddam was brutally tortured by the gang members. Using video and audio recordings, the gang documented his torture and sent a copy of the tapes to his brother, Hiron Talukder, in Bangladesh. This was their way of demanding ransom for his brother's release.

As any brother would in his position, Hiron gave them around Tk 5 lakh more in installments to the gang's cohorts in Bangladesh.

The traffickers assured Hiron that they would hand over the passport to his brother, but did not do so even after receiving the money.

Hiron finally turned to the Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI) who immediately began investigating the case.

With the combined efforts of National Central Bureau of Police Headquarters, Bangladesh Embassy in Libya and the PBI, Saddam was finally rescued in Libya and brought back to Bangladesh on September 27.

Meanwhile with the crackdown on traffickers gaining momentum, the

PBI arrested four members of the gang, who had been operating from Dhaka and Kishoreganj, in the last two days.

The four members who were arrested by PBI are -- Taslim Uddin, 50, the ring leader, and his cohorts Mohammad Mofazzal Hossain, 48, Ayub Ali, 52 and Mohammad Arman Sarkar, 42, said Ahsan Habib Palash, special superintendent of PBI.

"During my 11-months of captivity in Libya, I was sold off two to three times; they charged 500 to 10,000 Libyan dinars," Saddam said, while sharing his horrible experience with reporters at PBI headquarter in the capital's Dhanmondi yesterday. Saddam also alleged that some members of the Libyan police were complicit in this and would sell off arrested Bangladeshis for as little as 500 dinars.

"I overheard them talking about us like we were commodities," he added.

He spoke of his torture by the syndicate which is run by nationals of Pakistan, Bangladesh and Libya. "The torture left my blood vessel injured," Saddam said, adding that they let him starve for days.

"The conditions are so bad. We feel a sense of insecurity when we hear or meet Bangladeshis because we don't know what their intentions are," he said.

At the camp, Saddam saw 14 other

Bangladeshis who were held hostage by the gang.

"We came to know about more seven to eight victims who were trafficked by this gang in Libya and Iraq," Habib said.

At the briefing, relatives of two more victims were also present. Of the victims, a youth -- Jony, 22, of Jhenaidah, was still in captivity in Iraq's Baghdad, while Mafidul Islam, 35, got released recently after being held hostage for 23 days.

"Taslim's brother Salam ran the gang in Iraq; he called me last night at around 2:00am and asked for more money," Jony's relative Mizanur Rahman said, adding that he had already given them Tk 5 Lakh.

"He even shouted at me and told me to sell my kidney to arrange the money," Mizanur added.

At the briefing, the police officials said the traffickers send people to Iraq and Libya promising them a better life and economic stability, but the fortune seekers are being trapped instead.

Around five months back, one kingpin of this gang, Motahar, was arrested but he was released on bail.

On September 10, PBI arrested six members of another such gang from Kishoreganj and Narsingdi. They used to extract money from the relatives of hostage fortune seekers.

Fighting back

FROM PAGE 16

"It was no less than a miracle that the doctors were able to save my life and vision," said Peara who underwent 22 surgeries over a period of eight months.

The physicians could not perform all the treatment procedures at a time as there were multiple infections needed to heal first.

"It was a long and emotionally taxing journey for me," says Peara who keeps sunglasses on for most part of the day to avoid unwanted stares.

Her youngest son with minor burns received treatment for a month.

Peara's husband Afaz Uddin filed an FIR with Kapasia Police Station the day after the attack.

The accused appeared at the court within a week and the court put him in jail custody. As the trial ended, the court sentenced Rakib to death. Following his appeal against the verdict, the High Court commuted the punishment to 15 years in jail.

The village elders arranged an arbitration to settle the matter out of court, but Afaz did not agree.

"Acid Survivors Foundation came forward to bear all the expenses for my wife and son's treatment," he says.

Ever since, Peara kept in touch with the foundation for counselling and

training. As she regained strength, she formed Swanirvar Mohila Unnayan Sangstha (organisation for making women self-reliant) in 2009 with 121 members to support other acid attack survivors in Manikganj, Gazipur, Mymensingh and Narsingdi.

At present, there are 35 active members of this association who meet regularly to discuss how to prevent future attacks, give primary medical and judicial assistance to victims, and help them access funds to earn a livelihood.

Rezaur Rahman Laskar Mithu, vice chairman of Kapasia upazila parishad, says that when a group of repressed people unite and protest, it turns into a type of revolution.

Nasrin Akhter, Kapasia upazila women and children affairs officer, says the victims hold monthly meetings at their temporary office at Gosaigaon in Raniganj union of the upazila, where they outline various ways to become self-reliant. The Directorate of Women Affairs helps the female acid victims with strategic advice and grants.

Pankhi Rani, wife of Nimai Chandra Sutradhar, of Dakhhingaon village in Kapasia upazila, also had an acid attack on her on June 4, 2006 in front of her house over land dispute.

Neighbours Molin Chandra Sutradhar and Sokomol Sutradhar, sons of Suresh Chandra Sutradhar, had enmity with the family over land ownership. On the fateful day, they threw acid on her, leaving the skin of one side of her face peeled off and parts of her body deformed.

The attackers were sentenced to 10 years in jail. However, having been granted bail, they returned to beat her up twice.

It was then that members of the association came forward to help her. "I got support from them in terms of filing reports and other legal aid," she says.

Moni Akhter, an acid burn victim who receives support from the organisation, says the acid survivors also get government grants.

"Some of us got sewing machines, others, access to education and guidance on how to take legal measures for social security," she says. Her perpetrator was sentenced to 30 years in jail.

On blistering hot, humid days, her burnt, shrivelled skin still itches. Peara says only a victim of an acid attack will be able to feel the pain of another victim.

She has devoted her life to helping other acid victims and is now an inspiration to both men and women in her locality.

The hungry tide

FROM PAGE 16

said they could take some steps for the time being but it would be of no help and just a waste of money.

"We have sent a proposal to our higher authorities for constructing a one-kilometre embankment on the mouth of the New Dhaleswari River for stopping the erosion permanently," he said.

Earlier, vast tracts of lands, including around 50 homesteads and a bank protection dam near the bridge protection embankment, were devoured by the Jamuna River in seven days from August 23, said sources at the Bangladesh Bridge Authority (BBA).

The BBA had constructed the 200-metre bank protection embankment, near the confluence of Jamuna and New Dhaleswari rivers in 2003, to protect the eastern side of the bridge protection embankment and nearby localities from river erosion, the sources added.

Visiting the erosion-hit areas last month, local Awami League leader Mozaherul Islam Thandu, also the upazila chairman of Kalihati, blamed illegal sand lifting near the bridge and negligence of authorities concerned, including the BBA, for the situation.

"We have submerged sand-filled geo-textile bags in the river to check further erosion in the area. The BBA also has a plan to construct a new embankment for protecting the area," Wasim Ali, assistant engineer of the site office of BBA in Tangail, told this correspondent recently.

On the other hand, locals alleged although sand lifting is banned within 6km radius of the bridge, syndicates of influential people have long been doing that using powerful dredgers, posing a threat to the country's longest bridge.

One of the syndicates, comprising a dozen sand traders and led by a local union parishad chairman, has been active at the Kalihati side of the bridge while another syndicate, comprising around two dozens of sand traders and led by another local union parishad chairman and another local influential man, has been active on the other side of the bridge in Bhuapur upazila, they said.

The syndicates claim that they buy sand from Sirajganj and only use the sites in Tangail as landing stations (ghats) for selling sand. In reality, they, however, lifted sand there particularly during night and transported it with hundreds of trucks on a flood-

protection embankment/road beside over a dozen ponds owned by the BBA.

Recently, sand lifting near Gorilabari has stopped as the Kalihati upazila administration launched drives against illegal traders following the fresh erosion.

However, the same thing is still happening in Bhuapur thanks to some "influential" sand traders, said locals, adding that a section of dishonest politicians are also linked to the illegal business involving crores of Taka.

Asked, Wasim Ali said sand lifting near such an important bridge was totally illegal and that they filed several general diaries with local police stations over the matter in the past.

"Over a year ago, the BBA also sent a letter to the deputy commissioner in Tangail asking for actions against the illegal sand business," he added.

Contacted, DC Khan Mohammad Nurul Amin said the district administrations had carried out mobile court drives against the illegal sand business on several occasions.

"However, the sand lifters could not be ousted from such a sensitive place as they included members from influential quarters, especially politicians," he added.

Govt decides to add arbitration clause in contracts

Says law minister

BSS, Dhaka

Law Minister Anisul Huq yesterday said the government has taken a decision in principle to include appropriate clauses in all public contracts for arbitration.

"I hope the Legislative and Parliamentary Affairs Division of my ministry will initiate a proposal soon in this regard," he said.

The minister was addressing a seminar organised by Bangladesh International Arbitration Centre (BIAC) marking its sixth anniversary in the capital's Sonargaon Hotel.

"Bangladesh International Arbitration Centre, as the only alternative dispute resolution institution in the country, has already achieved remarkable progress in facilitating arbitration in respect of commercial and business disputes. Out-of-court settlements of commercial disputes, through mediation and arbitration, facilitate quick and effective resolution of disputes," Anisul added.

He said the present government appreciates the growing need and significance of the alternative dispute resolution (ADR).

"Apart from the Arbitration Act, 2001, some other laws have incorporated provisions of the ADR in the last few years.... The ADR has also been introduced for resolving customs, VAT, income tax and labour law cases," the minister told the programme.

Chaired by BIAC board Chairman Mahbubur Rahman, the seminar was addressed by BIAC Chief Executive Officer Muhammad A (Rume) Ali, among others.

Chou Sean Yu, chairman of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators Singapore wing, delivered the keynote address on the occasion.

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Mix-up

FROM PAGE 16

As Jahangir woke up and opened the door, the police immediately detained him saying there was an arrest warrant against him.

"I tried my best to convince the police that they came for the wrong person, but the officer-in-charge paid no heed," said his father over phone yesterday.

The police sent him to Joypurhat jail later that day.

Locals said they had seen real accused Jahangir Alam Sardar alias Ujjal in the area on Wednesday.

A pesticide company filed the fraudulence case against him in 2014 as he did not pay its dues. A Dhaka court issued an arrest warrant against him in 2015.

He was also arrested and sent to Joypurhat jail. However, he got bail and then jumped bail, said locals.

The court later sentenced him to six months' jail in absentia and also fined him Tk 11.7 lakh last year.

Talking to The Daily Star over phone, Sirajul Islam, OC of Akkelpur police, said law enforcers arrested Jahangir as per details obtained from the court.

Man held

FROM PAGE 16

He said after the incident, the girl went to visit her grandparents and disclosed the matter. Police learnt about it after some of her relatives talked about the issue on Facebook.

Later, police launched an investigation and arrested the man at Agrabad of the port city around 9:30pm, the OC added.

A case was filed against the man with the police station.

(The Daily Star is not publishing the details of the accused as it would reveal the identity of the alleged rape victim, which is against our editorial policy.)

Taking selfies

FROM PAGE 16

oblige, seemingly not understanding the situation at all.

Jansma set up an Instagram account, Dear Catcallers, for her month-long project where she's documented each incident.

In just a month and 30 posts, the account has amassed over 45,000 followers.

There's a theme to the pictures too - we see Jansma, straight-faced, and grinning men, oblivious to the fact that they've made her feel uncomfortable. The first man she asked replied "with enthusiasm," Jansma told Het Parool.

Explaining her project, Jansma writes that being catcalled is "not a compliment."

"This Instagram has the aim to create awareness about the objectification of women in daily life," she wrote at the end of August.

In a selfie, "both the objectification and the object are assembled in one composition. Myself, as the object, standing in front of the catcallers represents the reversed power ratio which is caused by this project."

Jansma had had the idea in her head for a while, but after two men harassed her on a train, she decided to take action.

Over the course of the month, only one man asked her why she wanted to take a selfie, which says it all really.

No let-up in atrocities

FROM PAGE 1

As Bangladesh struggles to cope with the unprecedented influx, UN's Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock stresses that the origins of the crisis are in Myanmar and that its solutions ultimately have to be in that country.

He told reporters in Geneva on Friday that the people who have arrived in Bangladesh from Myanmar in recent weeks need a greater level of help from the international community.

The humanitarian aid chief called the situation "one of the most heart-rending," recalling his encounter with an 11-year-old boy who was cradling his critically ill baby sister during his visit earlier this week to the host communities, reports the UN News Centre.

"His mother, the boy and his four siblings had set off on a journey lasting, I think nine days, fleeing violence and the burning of their village. The mother died on the journey. This little boy is now in sole charge of his four siblings, including his two-and-a-half-year-old severely acutely malnourished sister."

Earlier, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Committee on the Rights of the Child called on the Myanmar authorities to immediately stop violence in northern Rakhine State, and to promptly and effectively investigate and vigorously prosecute cases of violence against women and children.

"We are particularly worried about the fate of Rohingya women and children subject to serious violations of their human rights, including killings, rape and forced displacement," the experts said in a joint statement issued on Wednesday.

"Such violations may amount to crimes against humanity and we are deeply concerned at the State's failure to put an end to these shocking human rights violations being committed at the behest of the military and other security forces, and of which women and children continue to bear the brunt."

The committees urge the civil and military authorities of Myanmar to fully comply with their obligations under both the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

UN's migration agency IOM this week issued an appeal for \$120 million through March to provide desperately needed aid to the refugees who have flooded into Cox's Bazar.

The appeal is part of a broader humanitarian response plan seeking \$434 million to help 1.2 million people, including the host community.

An estimated 2,000 Rohingya refugees a day are still arriving in Cox's Bazar, according to IOM staff monitoring the Bangladesh-Myanmar border.

Observers believe that as many as 1,00,000 more people may be waiting to cross into Cox's Bazar from Rakhine's Buthidaung.

"Our humanitarian colleagues now tell us the number of Rohingya refugees who have fled Myanmar for Bangladesh since August 25 stands at 5,15,000 people," said Stéphane Dujarric, spokesman for the UN secretary-general, during a briefing in New York.

Bangladesh was already hosting more than 3,00,000 refugees before this influx.

As the government plans a mega refugee camp for 8,00,000-plus refugees, UN Resident Coordinator in Dhaka Robert Watkins told AFP that the country should instead look for new sites to build more camps.

"When you concentrate too many people into a very small area, particularly the people who are very vulnerable to diseases, it is dangerous," Watkins said.

"There are stronger possibilities, if there are any infectious diseases that spread, that will spread very quickly," he said, also highlighting fire risks in the camps.

"It is much easier to manage people, manage the health situation and security situation if there are a number of different camps rather than one concentrated camp."

EU-INDIA STATEMENT

Also on Friday, India and the EU expressed deep concern at the recent spate of violence in Rakhine that has resulted in the outflow of a large number of people.

In a joint statement at the end of the 14th EU-India Summit, both the sides recognised the need for ending the violence without any delay.

They urged Myanmar to implement the Annan Commission's recommendations and work with Bangladesh to enable the return of the displaced persons from all communities to Rakhine.

India and the EU also recognised the role being played by Bangladesh in extending humanitarian assistance to the people in need.

In another development, India has identified 140 vulnerable locations, deployed more security personnel and surveillance gadgets, and launched a "campaign" against organised criminal gangs that help Rohingyas sneak.

BSF Director General KK Sharma said the paramilitary has deployed more security personnel and surveillance equipment to check the syndicates that help the Rohingyas to sneak into the Indo-Bangla border, the New Indian Express reported yesterday.

"The BGB has ensured that their [Rohingyas'] movement is being regulated and they have mounted some 'nakas' and check posts on various routes to ensure that they do not cross over to our side," he said.

ATTACKS ON

The ABC report says the bodies seen the videos were reportedly found in Gu Dar Pyin village, in Buthidaung township -- one of several sites where mass killings have allegedly occurred.

"The bodies still come out [of the mud] when the rains come," said Puttaneer Kangkun, a human rights specialist with the group Fortify Rights, who viewed the footage in Bangkok.

The ABC received a batch of edited videos from a source whose material has been reliable in the past.

The Myanmar army has confirmed the death of at least 400 people it said were insurgents, but refugees have told stories of indiscriminate killings and gang rape, ABC wrote yesterday.

On September 19, Suu Kyi gave a state address, condemning any abuses in Rakhine. "Since September 5, there have been no armed clashes and there have been no clearance operations," she said.

But that is disputed by several sources.

"We have proof, evidence that the attacks [are] still going on after September 5 and people still move out from Rakhine," Puttaneer Kangkun said.

Separate footage sent to the ABC allegedly shows security forces and vigilantes burning Muslim homes in the town of Maungdaw as recently as Thursday night.

Another video obtained by The Associated Press that villagers said was shot Thursday shows Rohingyas attempting to swim across the currents of a muddy river, from where it is a more than 20km walk through jungles to the border.

Many more people, from young children to old men, stand huddled with their belongings on the riverbank, writes the Toronto Star.

CANADA CONCERNED

"Canada is deeply concerned by the plight of the Rohingya and other ethnic minorities in Myanmar. The killings and other gross violations of human rights are part of a widespread attack against the Rohingya," said two of its ministers in a joint statement yesterday.

"These are crimes against humanity -- and the responsibility for ending this ethnic cleansing falls squarely on Myanmar's military leadership and its civilian government."

Chrystia Freeland, minister of foreign affairs, and Marie-Claude Bibeau, minister of international development, issued the statement on the situation in Myanmar, according to the website of Canadian government.

"Once again, we urge authorities to set the conditions for the safe and voluntary return of Rohingya refugees and other ethnic minorities to their rightful homes, in dignity, where they should live free from persecution and enjoy full equality under the law."

Minister Freeland over the last month has spoken to her counterparts from numerous countries regarding the need to work together to exert pressure on the regime to end the violence in Rakhine.

A week ago, the minister also spoke with Myanmar's commander-in-chief, Min Aung Hlaing, to emphasise Canadians' concern for human rights violations against the Rohingya population.

ARSA OPEN TO PEACE

A Rohingya insurgent group said yesterday that they are ready to respond to any peace move by the government but a one-month ceasefire they declared to enable the delivery of aid in Rakhine is about to end.

The Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) did not say what action it would take after the ceasefire ends at midnight on Monday but it was "determined to stop the tyranny and oppression" waged against the Rohingya people.

"If at any stage, the Burmese government is inclined to peace, then Arsa will welcome that inclination and reciprocate," the group said in a statement.

Government spokesmen were not available for comment, writes Reuters.

When the Arsa announced its one-month ceasefire from September 10, a government spokesman said: "We have no policy to negotiate with terrorists."

The rebels launched coordinated attacks on about 30 security posts and an army camp on August 25. In response, the military unleashed a sweeping offensive across the north of Rakhine, driving Rohingya villagers into Bangladesh.

US selling

FROM PAGE 16

statement said.

"THAAD's exo-atmospheric, hit-to-kill capability will add an upper-tier to Saudi Arabia's layered missile defense architecture."

The main US contractors who will profit from the sale are aerospace giant Lockheed Martin's space systems division and defense contractor Raytheon.

Yaba trader

FROM PAGE 16

act and handed him over to Sreenagar police station.

Sakha is also a suspect accused in the Marin killing case at Radhikhal.

Yesterday evening, at around 8:30pm, SI Nasir brought Sakha out from police lock-up. He was not handcuffed at the time.

SI Nasir then reportedly left the room leaving Sakha alone by himself. The arrestee then fled the police station premises.

Sreenagar thana Officer-in-charge (OC) SM Alamgir Hossain said police are working to arrest Sakha.

Additional police super (Sreenagar circle) Md Saiful Islam said, SI Nasir has been closed and another case has been filed with the police station against Sakha.