

# 'UN to take part' in repatriation of Rohingyas

AFP, Cox's Bazar

Bangladesh has signed a deal to involve the United Nations in the controversial process of returning Rohingya refugees to Myanmar, a minister said yesterday.

Shahriar Alam, state minister for foreign affairs, said the government was involving the UN refugee agency so that it could not be accused of sending anyone from the stateless minority back against their will.

He gave few details, but said refugees would be asked to fill out repatriation forms in the presence of UN officials.

Bangladesh reached a deal with Myanmar late last year to repatriate the nearly 700,000 Rohingya who have fled across the border since August to escape a brutal military crackdown.

That was meant to start last month, but was delayed by a lack of preparations and protests by Rohingya refugees, most of whom say they do not wish to return without guarantees of safety.

"We have repeatedly said this repatriation process is very complex," Shahriar told reporters.

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# Myanmar wiping out Rohingya homes, history

Reveal photos of bulldozed villages in Rakhine State

AFP, Yangon

Aerial photos of Rakhine state have emerged that appear to show several bulldozed Rohingya settlements, renewing accusations Myanmar is wiping out the homes and history of the Muslim minority.

Nearly 700,000 Rohingyas have fled Myanmar's Rakhine state to Bangladesh since insurgent attacks on police posts triggered a brutal military crackdown.

The UN has led global condemnation of the army action, describing it as ethnic cleansing.

Rights activists also say the systematic destruction of hundreds of villages, mosques and property is effectively erasing the Rohingyas' ties to their ancestral lands.

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A huge number of BNP leaders and activists gather in front of the Jatiya Press Club around 11:30am yesterday to join a human chain protesting the conviction of party Chairperson Khaleda Zia in a corruption case. Top right, BNP leader Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir trying to control a portion of the crowd. Bottom right, the demonstration led to severe traffic congestion in the area. PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN



# Tangled up in cases

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warrants to produce her before court in the Zia Charitable Trust graft case on February 25 and 26 and in Niko case on March 11.

Currently, she is on bail in all the four cases.

As declared earlier, the BNP will observe sit-ins across the country today demanding the release of Khaleda, who was sentenced to five years in jail on Thursday.

Besides, the party will brief diplomats this afternoon about the current political situation and Khaleda Zia's conviction.

**THE WARRANTS**

Ataur Rahman, special judge-1 of Dhaka, who ran two other courts yesterday in the absence of two judges, issued the warrants following prayers filed by ACC Chief Prosecutor Mosharrar Hossain Kajal.

"We received two production warrants," Brig Gen Syed Iftekhar Uddin, inspector general of prisons, told The Daily Star.

Usually, a defence lawyer files prayer for issuing production warrants against his or her client who is now behind bars in a case but on bail in other cases

and is supposed to appear before court for those. Defence lawyers do it to ensure that the client's bail is upheld.

Khaleda is on bail in Barapukira coal mine and Gatco graft cases, lodged during the past caretaker rule, and the date for the next hearing in Barapukira case is February 18 and in Gatco March 4.

"It's cheating and the prosecution followed an unfair means to keep the BNP chairperson behind bars for a longer period," Masud Ahmed Talukder, one of Khaleda's lawyers, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Khaleda may not be able to file appeal this week against her conviction in the Zia Orphanage graft case as she is unlikely to get the certified copy of the verdict in this case by this time.

The officials of the court that convicted and sentenced Khaleda said they started preparing the certified copy and they may need at least a week to complete it.

Even if Khaleda gets bail by filing appeal with the High Court against her conviction, Masud said, she may not be able to come out of the jail because of the production warrants.



Shamsuzzaman Dudu

To have the warrants recalled, her lawyers will need to file prayers before the courts that are holding trials in the Gatco and Barapukira graft cases. Then the courts will decide whether they will hear the prayers or fix dates for it.

Contacted, ACC's lawyer Kajal denied the allegation raised by Khaleda's lawyer Masud.

"As the prosecutor, it's my duty to inform the courts about the next hearing dates of the two graft cases against the BNP chairperson," he said.

Kajal added that he will file two more prayers before the courts today, seeking issuance of production war-

rants in the Zia Charitable Trust and Niko graft cases.

At least five arrest warrants are pending against Khaleda right now -- three in Comilla and two in Dhaka. Of the three cases in Comilla, two were filed for arson and the other for killing.

Of the two cases in Dhaka, one is for undermining the national flag, while the other for celebrating fake birthday.

**DIPLOMATIC BRIEFING**

The BNP is likely to tell diplomats in details about the Zia Orphanage Trust case, according to party sources.

But talking to this newspaper, a senior official in the foreign ministry said that as per the diplomatic norms, a political party or a leader of any party can't brief foreign diplomats on the internal issues of the country though it has long been a practice here.

And the foreign ministry cannot tell foreign diplomats that they should not go to the briefing but if the diplomats interfere in the internal issues of the country, the government will take it seriously, the official said, wishing not to be named.

He also said the ministry does not have any plan to brief the diplomats

about the current situation.

Contacted, Shahriar Alam, state minister for foreign affairs, said, "If any diplomat wants to know about the case, we will be happy to clarify. Their [BNP's] credibility has come down to zero at both home and abroad. Why they are presenting the issue before the diplomats is beyond my understanding."

"If the BNP has moral strength left, the party should fight it legally. It is not good for the country to engage diplomats in internal affairs."

**SHAMSUZZAMAN DUDU HELD**

In another development, BNP Vice-Chairman Shamsuzzaman Dudu was arrested in the capital's Matsya Bhaban area yesterday. Masudur Rahman, deputy commissioner (media) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, confirmed this to The Daily Star.

Abdul Razi, president of Jatiyatobadi Krishak Dal's Bangshal unit, said Shamsuzzaman was picked up by police around 12:30pm while heading towards Shahbagh from Matsya Bhaban.

The party alleges that 4,400 leaders and activists have been arrested across the country since January 30.

# Four get death for Rupa rape, murder

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on the court premises.

"I hope no other girl meets the same fate as my sister."

After closing the hearing of arguments, the court on February 5 announced the date for delivering the verdict.

"The prosecution has been able to prove the allegations against the accused beyond doubt. The accused is getting capital punishment for the hated crime," the judge said.

Although the incident was widely covered by the media, he said the verdict was entirely based on evidence.

AKM Nasimul Akter, special public prosecutor of the tribunal, expressed satisfaction over the verdict.

Shamim Chowdhury Dayal, the lawyer who defended the accused, said the accused had been denied justice and they would appeal against the verdict with the higher court.

Ataur Rahman Azad, Tangail unit general secretary of Bangladesh Manobadhikar Bastobayon Sangstha, a rights body which provided assistance to the prosecution, said, "The quick trial will be a milestone in the history of Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal in the country."

Hailing the verdict, eminent women rights lawyer Salma Ali said, "If every component of the state machinery works sincerely and promptly, it is possible to ensure justice within such a short time."

She also hoped that the verdict would have a deterrent effect.

Rupa's body was recovered by police from beside Tangail-

their crimes during primary interrogation.

**THE FATEFUL NIGHT**

Life has been tough for Rupa since the early age. She paid for her education in school and college by teaching younger students.

She studied law as her father late Julhas Pramanik of Asanbari village under Tarash upazila in Sirajganj

male acquaintance who also sat for the exam, boarded a Mymensingh-bound bus of Chhoa Paribahan. He got down from the bus at Elenga in Tangail's Kalihati upazila.

After all other passengers had got down from the bus, Shamim forced Rupa to the back of the moving bus. As he tried to rape Rupa, she handed him Tk 5000 and her mobile phone and



wanted her to become a lawyer.

Family members said she enrolled for LLB in a college in Dhaka after obtaining her master's degree in 2014. She also worked for a private company to support her studies.

She went to Bogra from her workplace in Sherpur on August 25 to sit for the teachers' registration examination.

Around 7:00pm, she, along with a

# Govt backtracks

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He claimed that a vested quarter was out to embarrass the government.

Opposition Jatiya Party MP Nurul Islam Milon told parliament that the SSC question paper leak had gone beyond the government's control.

"SSC exam question paper leaks have become the norm. I think honest, bold and active people are not in the offices concerned to prevent the leaks," he said, after Keramat Ali's speech.

Instead of trying to find out how the questions were leaked, the ministry had formed a probe committee on February 4 to investigate if the questions were leaked at all.

The committee is to report on February 18, towards the end of the exams.

The ministry earlier this month also announced a Tk 5 lakh reward for information leading to the arrest of the leakers, but that yielded nothing.

Before the beginning of the exams, the ministry ordered the closure of all coaching centres until the end of the exams this month, but a number of such centres were reportedly running.

Similarly, the ministry ordered that all examinees must be inside the exam halls half an hour before the tests. But there were many exceptions, which the education ministry admitted.

Amid the failures, the leakers have become more daring. They continued to taunt the government and vowed to leak the question papers of upcoming exams.

"Dear Friends, no need to be tensed. You will get questions on time. So it is better not to buy question from anyone. Don't trust me now ... Trust me when you get the questions," a Facebook account under the name Md Sagor Rayhan wrote on the page "SSC QUESTION OUT Team-2018".

Another account under the name Prince Arnob wrote: "By now, the questions of Physics, Finance and History have reached us. Give us a message. Beware of fraud and fake questions."

"We are giving question papers for four years. Who can give you 100% common? Inshallah, we will give you the written part at night, and MCQ in the morning."

Such posts were doing the rounds on some Facebook groups and pages, like before every SSC exam of this year.

Another account, Mama, an admin of a group "PSC JSC SSC HSC Degree

Honours Masters Admission Test BCS job Question Out" wrote: "No need to give money, just give me a "Thanks" when you get the question papers."

"I have no wish to do business. I will give you all creative questions part for free."

**DECISION REVERSED**

On Sunday morning, the BTRC directed all carriers to block internet access for 30 minutes from 9:30am. But the block attempt was not successful.

In the evening, it directed carriers and ISPs to virtually block internet access for two and a half hours ahead of every SSC exam.

"The shutdown of internet or speed limitation will be halted until further notice. But it may be resumed any time," BTRC Chairman Shahjahan Mahmood told The Daily Star.

"It's not our decision [to shutdown internet or slash its speed]. We follow government's decision," he said.

A top official, requesting not to be named, said the BTRC did not want to block the internet or reduce speed as it is linked to hundreds of online businesses and lots of digital services.

**PHONES BANNED**

The education ministry's order said, "If anyone is found with a mobile phone within around 200 metres of an exam centre or inside the centre, legal steps will have to be taken against the person following arrest."

The order that was sent out to the chiefs of all district administrations and education boards also said the students, who will fail to take their seats 30 minutes ahead of the test, will not be allowed to take the tests under any circumstances.

It further said despite the instruction, it has been found that students in some centres were entering after the deadline and many people carried smartphones near the centres.

**ARRESTS**

Rab-7 in a drive arrested two people, including an SSC examinee, at Raozan upazila in Chittagong Sunday night, reports our Chittagong office.

The arrestees are: SSC examinee Md Imran, 18, and Md Nurul Afsar Sabuj, 20.

"Both of them are active members of a question-leaking syndicate and they had spread almost all the leaked questions of the ongoing SSC examination through social media," Lt Commander Ashequr Rahman, deputy commander of Rab-7, claimed.

# Colours of February

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removal of a vertical leadership that restricted freedom of expressions. There has ever since a continual desire for occasions where people can connect at a horizontal level to form a type of community that will subsume their lived experience and changed reality. The economic growth allowed more and more people to look for events that will give them breaks from their daily

routines. The participatory mood defined the new mode of celebration as it incorporated a tradition that dates back to Rabindranath Tagore.

Tagore appropriated the concept of joy and brotherhood that he saw in the Hindu celebration of Holi and initiated Basanta Utsav on the day of Dol Purmima (Full moon day of Falgun). At Santiniketan, he did not limit Basanta Utsav to the mythical celebration of the triumph of good over evil. The poet-sage rather focused on the change in nature, and its shaping influence on our cultural and spiritual identity. However, while across the border Basanta Utsav still maintains Holi like fervour including throwing of dyed pow-

der onto each other, here in Bangladesh, the celebration has assumed a measured mixture of care-free revelry and careful reflection on the other categories of our national identity.

The choice to wear yellow or to rejoice in cultural performances that express seasonal change allows one to become a part of a community with shared interests. Yellow is a colour associated with turmeric, a herbal spice that is supposed to be antiseptic and has symbolic nuance of prosperity as it is the colour of the sun. The local espousal of yellow stands in contrast to the jaundiced connotation in some western cultures. Embracing yellow on Pahela Falgun at a time when nature is all bloom does not therefore require rejection of other categories of colour, including that of religion. Basanta after all is all about opening up to the new.

The choices and decisions to make yellow a cultural icon may not be as spontaneous as it seems. What started as a trend by a group of Dhaka

University students of Fine Arts in 1991 became a fad, and the fashion industry and media soon turned it into a cultural capital. And in a media savvy time, where image is everything, Basanta Utsav and its colourful markers are not simply limited to the lyrical opening of window to let the southern wind come in. While the songs of such sentiment still fill in the air, on Pahela Falgun people from all walks of life form a society of the spectacle. What then motivates this group to come out and celebrate? Is it a desire for making deep connections that will forge a national culture? Or is it a superficial desire to be part of a visual feast that can be captured in images and shared before a virtual community? Well, nature is changing! Does it matter if you capture its colour with the pores of your skin or the pixels of your phones?

(The writer is Professor of English (on leave), University of Dhaka. Currently he is the Head of the Department of English and Humanities at ULAB)

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