

6,500 Rohingyas trapped at border

Bangladesh, Myanmar reps are due to meet today to discuss their repatriation

REUTERS, Dhaka

Representatives from Bangladesh and Myanmar will meet today to discuss the repatriation to Myanmar of more than 6,500 Rohingya Muslims trapped on a strip of unclaimed land between the two countries, Bangladeshi officials said.

"It is about taking them back to Myanmar," Relief and Refugee Repatriation Commissioner Mohammad Abul Kalam, told Reuters yesterday. "They are on the zero line and actually on the Myanmar side."

However, several officials contacted in neighbouring Myanmar said they were not aware of plans for a meeting, which Kalam said would take place on the "zero line" near a place called Gundum.

A spokeswoman for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which will not be involved in the talks, said the agency was concerned the Rohingyas may be forcibly returned to Myanmar without due consideration for their safety.

Nearly 700,000 Rohingyas have fled Myanmar's Rakhine state and crossed into Bangladesh since last August, when attacks on security posts by insurgents triggered a military crackdown that the United Nations has said amounts to ethnic cleansing, with reports of arson attacks, murder and rape.

Buddhist-majority Myanmar denied the charge and says its security forces are fighting a legitimate campaign against "terrorists" it blames for the attacks on the security forces.

The vast majority of Rohingyas who fled are in camps at

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A farmer harvesting cauliflower in his field in Durakuti village of Lalmonirhat Sadar on Sunday. A steep fall in the prices of the popular vegetable has caused worries among local farmers.

PHOTO: STAR

Cauliflower sold for just Tk 1 a kg

Growers in Lalmonirhat hit by drastic price fall

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

A sudden fall in the price of cauliflowers has frustrated the farmers in Lalmonirhat as they have been counting losses.

A week ago, they growers sold cauliflowers for Tk 10 per kg, but now the price has come down to Tk 1.

Since the item is perishable, the farmers have no alternative to selling it at whatever price they get.

Trader Ashraf Islam, 50, of Kumrihat vegetable market in Aditmari upazila, said they have not been sending cauliflowers to the capital for the last one week as trucks have not returned from Dhaka due to traffic jams.

"We are not interested in procuring cauliflowers from the farmers since their transportation is uncertain," he added.

Another trader at Goshala Bazar retail market in the district headquarters said they are selling per kg cauliflowers at Tk 3. "Now there is huge supply in the local market with little demand."

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Govt trying to hold one-sided polls again

Claims Fakhrul

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday alleged that the government was attempting to arrange a stage-managed one-sided election again, keeping the party out of the electoral process.

"No election will be acceptable if Khaleda Zia is not allowed to join it," Fakhrul said in his instant reaction to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's statement that the government had nothing to do if the BNP boycotted the polls.

"The government wants to hold a unilateral election in a bid to score goals in an empty field."

The BNP leader was talking to reporters at the party chief Khaleda's Gulshan office hours after the prime minister addressed a press conference at the Gono Bhaban yesterday.

About a remark by the PM on the Zia Orphanage Trust graft case,

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Polls in time, with or without BNP

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The PM said her government would be able to do nothing if the BNP, which is not in parliament, decides to boycott polls again.

"What could we do if they want to stay away from polls?... the court has awarded her [Khaleda] the imprisonment, I did not and [so] I can't withdraw it either," she said.

The PM said the case against the BNP chief was filed in 2008 by the past military-backed interim government led by "her [Khaleda's] own confidants" while an independent Anti-Corruption Commission carried out the investigation.

"The trial ran for 10 long years when she [Khaleda] exhausted all the options to upset the trial proceedings by filing 80 writ petitions, got the judges changed thrice by expressing no confidence [on their neutrality] and had the hearings deferred 109 times," she said.

The premier said the chief of the past-interim government, Fakhruddin Ahmed, was a trusted bureaucrat of Khaleda and on the other hand, she made MU Ahmed the army chief superseding nine generals while the

then President Iajuddin Ahmed was also made the head of the state by her BNP government.

"Yet she [Khaleda] was convicted of graft for embezzling orphans money... such a crime draws punitive actions both from divinity and the court."

She recalled that even Khaleda's counsel Barrister Rafique ul Haque had suggested her to refuse the embezzled money so that she could be acquitted from the graft charges "but she did not do so".

Asked for comments about making Khaleda's "fugitive and convicted" son Tarique Rahman the acting BNP chief after her conviction, Hasina said "wasn't there any sane person in BNP?... couldn't she [Khaleda] keep confidence in any of her party leaders".

QUESTION PAPER LEAKS
Asked for comments on the repeated incidents of question paper leaks sparking nationwide outcry, the PM urged the journalists to help the authorities track down the culprits.

"Please, find out those who are involved in the question paper leaks and surely we'll punish them. We don't want any more leaks of question

paper," she said.

However, she mentioned that in most cases, the question papers were leaked minutes before the exams began, claiming that the examinees had little scopes of having those questions.

She also opined that blocking the internet was not the right way to address the issue and the education minister or the secretary of the ministry should not be blamed for the leaks.

"But, it's not at all right and we'll definitely look into the matter,"

she said suggesting the journalists to use their pens to suggest abolishing the "tick-mark system" in the exams.

DIGITAL SECURITY ACT
Asked for comments about fears over the wrong application of the proposed Digital Security Act particularly against the newsmen, the PM assured the journalist community that there was nothing to fear.

"If no one commits any wrongdoing, there will be no miss application of it," she said.

Hasina also said if someone commits crime under the act, steps would be taken in this regard as cyber crimes have now become a global problem.

MEETING WITH POPE

About her meeting with Pope Francis, Hasina mentioned that the Pope urged the Myanmar government to be more responsible in solving the Rohingya crisis.

In this connection, the Pope also called on the global community to increase pressure on Myanmar for solving the crisis, the PM said.

She said the Pope lauded the role of Bangladesh in realising the rights of the migrants and refugees.

On her talks with Vatican Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the prime minister said he specially thanked the Bangladesh government and the people for giving shelter to over one million Rohingyas.

He described Bangladesh as a bright example of world brotherhood and humanity to be followed by other countries.

The prime minister said on the sidelines of the IFAD Governing Council Meeting, IFAD President Gilbert F Houngbo and World Food Programme (WFP) Executive Director David Beasley separately called on her.

Hasina said she joined a mass recep-

tion in Rome organised by the Italy chapter of Bangladesh Awami League.

During her visit, she said, Bangladesh and the IFAD signed a loan agreement worth \$92.03 million for the betterment of the vulnerable rural people of six northeastern districts of the country.

UNB adds: About the ongoing Rohingya issue, Hasina said the problem has been created by the Myanmar government and it is their responsibility to solve it. "From our side, we're holding dialogue with them. We've reached an understanding; we've formed a joint committee."

She said Bangladesh wanted to have a solution through dialogue as Myanmar is a neighbouring country. "We want Myanmar to take back their nationals through negotiations."

But, the prime minister said, the Myanmar side was delaying the repatriation process showing various excuses. "When the repatriation will start, the Rohingyas will be interested to go back to their homeland."

Hasina also mentioned that it is the matter of big concern what the Myanmar side will be doing.

GP, Robi

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selected areas of Dhaka and Chittagong cities as part of its planned nationwide 4G rollout.

At least 30 Grameenphone BTSs in Dhaka and 20 in Chittagong started delivering 4G service.

"Indeed, this is a proud moment for us all in Bangladesh and a big milestone to the realisation of Digital Bangladesh," said Foley after the launch.

Mahtab Uddin Ahmed, managing director and CEO of Robi, said they have launched 4G with 179 BTS in different large cities, including Dhaka and Chittagong, soon after getting the licence.

"The ecosystem is yet to be ready for better service of 4G but I hope it will be available within the shortest possible time," said Ahmed in his speech at the ceremony.

Robi's 4G service will be available in most of the district headquarters today.

Third largest carrier Banglalink went live with 4G service via 200 BTSs in different cities.

"This is a great day for us as we stepped into a new era of digital connectivity," said Erik Aas, CEO of Banglalink, after the launch of the service.

Banglalink launched 4G in Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna, and Sylhet yesterday.

After the launch of 4G service, the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) would issue a directive on the quality of service where the minimum speed for the service would be set at 7 Mbps and the regulator would be tough on ensuring quality, said Shahjahan Mahmood, chairman of the BTRC.

The chairman claimed that the 4G service would be much better than that of the neighbouring countries even though they had adopted 4G earlier.

For enjoying 4G, customers' devices need to be 4G enabled and before that they also need to replace their SIM cards with a 4G-enabled one.

Abu Saeed Khan, senior fellow of LIRNEasia, a Colombo-based ICT think tank, said there were some bottlenecks in the system and the state of infrastructure was far below average and therefore service quality could suffer.

Earlier, the BTRC had arranged an auction where Grameenphone and Banglalink bought spectrum. Robi and Teletalk decided to launch their 4G service using their existing spectrum.

Question leaks nothing new

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people including four teachers in Dhaka and Gazipur, who admitted that they got question papers at least two hours ahead of the exams and shared those along with the answers in Facebook Messenger groups for money.

PM ON QUESTION LEAK
The PM said the SSC question papers were being leaked 20 minutes ahead of the tests, reports UNB.

"Perhaps, this is happening when the question paper envelopes are opened right before distribution. Some people probably are taking pictures of the question papers with their mobile phones. What can be done in this situation?" she asked.

She also mentioned that it was very hard for an examinee to benefit from the leaked questions as there were very few students with photographic memory, the agency reported.

"Are the [education] minister and the [education] secretary leaking the questions? Neither they nor the teachers are doing this. But, of course, there is something, for which question papers are being leaked out."

She sought cooperation from all, including the media, in finding the culprits.

LEAKS PERSIST
In yesterday's exam, the leaked answers of MCQs were written on what looked like an extra answer sheet provided by the authorities in exam halls.

The comprehensive part of the question paper (Ka-set) was found online 40 minutes after the exam started.

Question papers of 10 Secondary School Certificate (SSC) exams that had taken place earlier, were also leaked and shared on social media, hours before the exams.

This has been the largest-ever reported leaking of SSC questions. Educationists and guardians had expressed concerns that the situation was ruining the education system.

Meanwhile, the 11-member committee formed on February 4 to investigate the leaks, held its second meeting on Sunday. It will hold another meeting on February 25 and submit its report with recommendations the next day.

So far, the inter-ministerial committee has found only one paper to be "fully" identical to the leaked one and some others to be "partially" similar.

ARREST
Rab detained five people including four teachers in the capital and Gazipur yesterday morning in connection with leaks.

Among the detainees, Hasanur Rahman alias Rocky Bhai, 29, admin of a Facebook group, admitted that he took money from examinees and gave them question papers almost a couple of hours ahead of the exams, claimed Mufti Mahmud Khan, director of Rab's media wing.

"Rocky has been in this for last four years," he told a press briefing at Rab Media Centre in the capital's Karwan Bazar.

Along with Rocky, Rab detained four teachers of a coaching centre and a school in Dhaka and Gazipur yesterday morning. They allegedly collected question papers from Rocky and solved

them for the examinees.

"Then they circulated the answers around 8:00am, two hours ahead of the exams," the officer said.

The four teachers are: Tanvir Hossain, 29, Sajib Miah, 26, Ibrahim, 21, and Enamul Haque, 27.

The Rab official said they obtained a handwritten copy of a question paper from Rocky, which was shared among examinees the night before an exam.

He added that Rocky, a student of Bangladesh Open University, had a Facebook account called Rocky Bhai. He started connecting with possible question seekers in social media groups, two months before the SSC exams had started.

Mufti Mahmud said he assured the examinees of "exclusive suggestions".

"For each question paper, he took Tk 2,000 through electronic money transfer services. We found evidence of some of the transactions."

After every exam, Rocky deleted the group concerned, created a new one or changed its title.

Rab seized eight mobile phones and a tablet computer from the detainees.

In primary interrogation, Rocky said he got the questions from a social media group called Top Ten.

"We still don't know the source from where the questions were circulated. We are trying to find it," Mufti Mahmud said.

12 rebel MPs suspended

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Supreme Court since Yameen ordered the arrest of the Chief Justice and another supreme court judge just two weeks ago as he declared a state of emergency.

Earlier this month the remaining judges of the court reversed their earlier order to release political prisoners, including Yameen's main rival Mohamed Nasheed.

That ruling threw the popular holiday islands into turmoil as Yameen cracked down on his opponents. His estranged half-brother, former president Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, was among those arrested on a charge of bribing Supreme Court justices to topple the government through a constitutional coup.

Meanwhile, President Yameen yesterday asked Parliament to extend the state of emergency, parliament's Deputy Secretary General Fathmath Niusha told the legislature.

The Parliament was expected to vote on the proposal later yesterday, one day before the current state of emergency expires, reported AP.

Yameen has faced international censure over his refusal to abide by the top court's rulings and his declaration of a state of emergency, described by the UN human rights chief as "an all-out assault on democracy".

The unrest has dented the Maldives' image as a popular holiday destination. The nation's top earner is tourism, with honeymooners drawn by its pristine islands and crystal-clear blue waters.

The postponement came days after top police officials at a meeting on January 11 had demanded the headquarters centrally recruit constables to prevent entry of inefficient people into the force through corruption and political influence.

As per the existing rules, the superintendents of police (SPs) recruit constables in their districts. But in most cases, they are recruited from the lists of names provided by political leaders, said a number of SPs.

Political leaders and in some cases dishonest SPs take hefty bribes from aspiring candidates, a number of officials told this newspaper.

Some officials said the government high ups had to postpone the recruitment as the date was barely 13 days before the expiry of immediate past IGP AKM Shahidul Hoque's tenure.

Wishing anonymity, they said there

was a proposal that officials at the headquarters will prepare a 40-mark question paper for a written test and evaluate the answers.

The SPs in 54 districts out of the 64 welcomed the move. Eight SPs gave no opinions and two opposed it, an official at the headquarters told The Daily Star.

Besides, 85 of 130 top police officials were in favour of the new system while 29 refrained from giving their views, sources said.

The proposal was never implemented.