

ROHINGYA REPATRIATION

Myanmar needs more time to verify list

Says its minister

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

A cabinet minister of Myanmar has made it clear that the repatriation of Rohingya refugees will be delayed and they need more time to verify the list provided by Bangladesh.

Myanmar's Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, Win Myat Aye said in an interview with Radio Free Asia on Friday that he would be visiting Bangladesh on April 11-12 to discuss the delay in refugee repatriation with Bangladeshi authorities.

During his two-day visit, he said he will meet with Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal and will also visit Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar.

Over 700,000 Rohingya Muslims fled Rakhine State and came to Bangladesh following the military crackdown on them since August 25 last year. With the 700,000, the total number of the Rohingya population stands at 1.1 million.

Bangladesh has handed over a list of 1,673 Rohingya families (8,032 individuals) to Myanmar Home Minister during his visit to Dhaka on February 16 to start the first phase of repatriation of the forcible displaced people to their homeland in Rakhine state. But the

Myanmar till yesterday verified only 711 people from the list of 8,032 people.

Bangladesh Myanmar signed a repatriation deal on November 23, 2017 and subsequently formed a Joint Working Group comprising of officials from Bangladesh and Myanmar on December 19 to facilitate and expedite the repatriation process.

Talking to Radio Free Asia, Myat Aye said the repatriation has been delayed as the refugees did not fill up the forms in line with the agreement signed between Bangladesh and Myanmar.

"That's why we needed more time to verify people. We sent a list of those whom we could verify to Bangladesh, but we haven't heard anything back yet," he said adding "We will talk about it when I am in Bangladesh."

On asked whether Myanmar will work with UN agencies on the Rohingya issue, the Minister said that in the Rohingya repatriation agreement with Bangladesh, his government already said it would work with UN agencies, such as United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), on this issue when it is necessary.



BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia being taken out of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University yesterday afternoon. Left, police detain a BNP activist who had attempted to demonstrate outside the hospital when Khaleda was being taken there. Right, people, including hospital employees, wave at Khaleda from corridors.



PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN



55,000 without fitness

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Dhaka South and Dhaka North, it's not clear which of the two city corporations now owns the vehicle or if it is operational at all.

The city corporation's vehicle was followed by those belonging to government organisations including ministries, police and banks and different projects. Police own the highest number of vehicles on the list.

The BRTA data show a total of 52,686 vehicles owned by individuals, non-government educational institutions and commercial organisations have their fitness certificates expired.

Talking to The Daily Star last week, Mahbub-E-Rabbani, director (road safety) of BRTA, said as per the Motor Vehicles Ordinance 1983, it is mandatory to receive fitness certificate every year from the authority.

Operating vehicles without fitness certificate is punishable offence and one may face jail and fine for this violation, said Rabbani, also the BRTA spokesperson.

"BRTA will take action against those vehicles through conducting mobile court operations," he said, adding that may be, many of these vehicles no longer ply the streets.

For violating section 47 of the ordinance, which deals with fitness clearance, a person may face, for the first offence, maximum three months' imprisonment, or up to Tk 2,000 fine, or both. And for any subsequent offence, the person may face up to six months in jail, or up to Tk 5,000 fine, or both.

MOVE SINCE 2016

In October 2016, BRTA in a departmental circular mentioned that fitness certificates of a significant number of vehicles were not renewed in the last 10 years in violation of the ordinance.

The authority asked all its circle offices across the country to submit the list of "permanently unfit motor vehicles" to the head office by October 30, sources said.

On August 29 last year, BRTA issued a notice, which was published in different newspapers, saying that under section 47 of the ordinance, it is mandatory to receive fitness certificate every year from BRTA.

As per the BRTA database, a significant number of vehicles did not have their fitness certificates renewed in the past 10 years, meaning those vehicles were operating without fitness certificate or

became unusable, the notice said.

Against this backdrop, BRTA urged the owners to renew fitness certificates of their vehicles and inform it about their permanently damaged or already unusable vehicles, it said.

Otherwise, BRTA will cancel the registration of those motor vehicles after December 31, 2017, considering the vehicles either permanently damaged or already unusable, the notice read.

BRTA Director (Engineering) Nurul Islam said after the notice, many owners got the fitness certificates renewed.

"Now, we have issued notice giving one-month time to those who did not renew their fitness certificate in last 10 years. Then we will declare those write-offs," he said on Tuesday.

A "public interest notice" will be circulated through TV scrolls for five days, according to a BRTA document.

Kazi Md Shifun Newaz, assistant professor at Accident Research Institute (ARI) of Buet, told this correspondent that BRTA should have taken this move (declaring vehicles write-offs) much earlier.

"Operation of a vehicle without fitness clearance is very risky because it may cause fatal road accidents besides traffic jam," he said.

The expert said an updated database of vehicles is also very important for better planning.

LIMITATION IN ORDINANCE

BRTA Director Nurul said nothing is mentioned in the Motor Vehicles Ordinance about the higher limit of the lifespan of a motor vehicle, creating problem for BRTA to declare a vehicle "write-off".

"We have nothing to do if someone can maintain his or her vehicles even after 20 years and those remain eligible to be operated in the street."

BRTA had more than 32 lakh motor vehicles registered since 1971, he mentioned.

Some 114,271 vehicles were registered in the first 10 months of last year, while the number was 110,520 in 2016, according to BRTA.

"It is a fact that some vehicles do not exist at all. But BRTA has no statistics about the number of such vehicles, because there is no rule for reporting [by the vehicle owner] about such [unusable] vehicles," Nurul said.

BRTA can cancel registration of a vehicle if found unusable, he added.

'Apparently healthy'

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confidence in the treatment provided to her by the government.

Asked about the former prime minister's health, BSMMU Director Brig Gen Md Abdullah-Al-Harun told The Daily Star that she seemed to be in good health. However, the actual condition of her health would be known upon receiving the test results today, he added.

A SUV carried the BNP chairperson to the hospital, with an escort of police vehicles. A large number of police personnel and prison guards were deployed at the BSMMU.

Khaleda, 73, was taken to cabin-512 on the fourth floor of the Cabin Block building. Her lawyers Mahbub Uddin Khokon and Sanaullah Miah went to the room to meet her.

The BSMMU director said x-rays of her spine, hip joint and pelvis were done. She refused a wheelchair and walked towards the lift of the Cabin Block building, he added.

Syru Kabir Khan, a staff of the BNP's media wing, said Sharmila Rahman, wife of the former PM's younger son late Arafat Rahman Koko, and her daughters Zafiya Rahman and Zahiya Rahman met Khaleda briefly at the BSMMU.

However, this correspondent could not independently verify whether the family members could meet her.

Media personnel, including photographers and videographers, requested Khaleda to pose for photographs. She obliged with a smile, but didn't say anything.

Seeing Khaleda coming out of the BSMMU, many patients' attendants, doctors and nurses waved their hands at her.

Police detained several BNP activists outside the university as they tried to stage demonstrations.

Khaleda fell sick at the jail on March 29 and postponed a scheduled meeting with BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir.

Earlier, a four-member medical board, comprised of four professors of Dhaka Medical College Hospital, was formed for the BNP chief's treatment. The board examined her at the jail on April 1.

The team said Khaleda had been suffering from some old and new health problems, but none of those was serious.

Khaleda was sentenced to five years' imprisonment by a Dhaka court in the Zia Orphanage Trust graft case on February 8.

Talking to journalists at the BSMMU,

BNP leader Moudud said, "We don't know why she was brought here. We were not informed about it beforehand. The medical board formed by the government has clearly said that Begum Zia is sick which we have been saying for a long time."

He said the formation of the medical board was just eyewash. "She has been kept in an abandoned jail where she would fall sick for sure. We want her immediate release so that she can get treatment from her personal physicians."

Meanwhile, Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader yesterday said the government would take necessary measures for Khaleda's treatment as per the jail code after taking advice from the medical board.

Quader, also the road transport and bridges minister, said if physicians suggest sending her abroad for treatment, then the government would do so.

'KHALEDA WAS HARASSED'

BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi yesterday alleged that the party chairperson was harassed mentally and physically in the name of providing treatment at the BSMMU.

"Khaleda Zia was forcibly taken to the hospital in an unprepared condition. A

drama was staged in the name of her treatment and she was hurt -- mentally and physically," Rizvi told a press conference at the party's Nayapattan central office hours after completion of Khaleda's medical tests.

Claiming that Khaleda was not in good health at jail, the BNP leader said the party has information that some seven to eight people entered her jail room and asked her to get ready quickly.

Khaleda was "not given" any treatment at the BSMMU indeed. She was even "denied of medical advice" from her personal physicians, Rizvi said.

The former prime minister was taken from "one place to another at the BSMMU deliberately with an intention of harassing her" in the name of treatment, the BNP leader told journalists.

Criticising the government for deploying a huge number of law enforcers in and around the BSMMU, he said there was pushing and shoving and an untoward situation was created on the university premises as the law enforcers showed an "unsolicited attitude".

Khaleda in 2008 went to Block-D of BSMMU to see her ailing son Tarique Rahman. Yesterday, she had to go there for her treatment.

Borrow money, never pay back

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Moreover, they are now claiming that the viability reports, business projections and cash flow analysis have all turned out to be wrong and they are seeking fresh restructuring and rescheduling of their loans.

Those who had identified that the companies would be able to pay back now shirk their responsibilities. The central bank is also apparently washing off its hands saying the issue should be solved on the basis of "bank-client relationship" contrary to what it had said before the restructuring.

Not only that, the BB also allowed some banks to further relax the concessions earlier given to the companies.

"Bangladesh Bank allowed some banks to extend the benefit to one or two clients," said Abu Hena Mohd Razee Hassan, deputy governor of the central bank.

He admitted that the extension went against the special restructuring circular, but said it was given as "the last chance for the clients".

The banks were given the go-ahead for the fresh extension only if they had confidence in the companies' ability to pay back, he said.

Contacted, former BB governor Salehuddin Ahmed said none of the parties -- the CA firms, the banks' audit committees, the bank boards and the BB -- involved in the restructuring process could avoid responsibility.

As the restructuring was done under certain conditions, the BB could take action against those who violated them, he added.

Khondkar Ibrahim Khaled, former deputy governor of the BB, blamed lax monitoring by the central bank for the nonpayment by the big borrowers.

According to him, fresh extension of the benefit would lead to indiscipline in the banking sector.

He suggested that the banks concerned take legal action against the borrowers.

The case of Beximco, the lead bor-

rower that persuaded the BB to allow such a privilege, is interesting. One third of the Tk 15,000-crore loan restructured was taken by this group alone.

It makes profit, pays dividend and yet does not pay back loans, something many view as unjustifiable.

"It is not a good practice if a company declares dividend despite being a loan defaulter," said Saifur Raman, executive director of Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission.

In September last year, Beximco even asked Sonali Bank to lower the interest rate and the size of the instalment. But the bank turned down the proposal and moved to take action to recover a Tk 1,075-crore loan from the company.

In a proposal to the state bank, the group said it could not pay the instalment because its business expansion was below expectation.

"It is impossible to pay instalments until new business starts," the proposal reads.

On November 21, Sonali Bank sent a letter to the BB requesting it to take action against Beximco Group Vice Chairman Salman F Rahman.

The same day, the businessman filed a writ petition with the High Court and subsequently got a stay order on the default status.

A loan defaulter cannot hold the post of a bank director. Salman is also the chairman of IFIC Bank. He will lose that post if he becomes a defaulter.

Though the company could not repay the bank loan, it is going to take up some mega projects in the power and infrastructure sector.

The projects are expected to generate revenues in the next 18 to 24 months, enabling it to pay the instalments, reads a Beximco letter to Sonali Bank.

The company is a good performer in the stock market and has maintained its position in standard "A" category announcing a 10 percent dividend.

The company also declared 5 percent cash and 5 percent stock at the end of June 2017, according to the Dhaka Stock Exchange.

Beximco made a profit of Tk 101.79 crore in 2016-17 year. Its revenue was Tk 2,262 crore, shows its financial statement.

Though the firm made the handsome profit, it has paid only two instalments amounting to Tk 114.8 crore since the loan restructuring.

Beximco stopped paying the instalment in March last year, according to Sonali Bank documents.

Later, the company sought to have the interest rate revised down to 8 percent from current 10 percent. It also proposed to pay only the interest money for eight quarters starting from September 2017 to June 2019. It said it would pay the interest money first and then the principal amount.

On March 27, The Daily Star e-mailed Beximco through its public relations agency Impact PR for comments on the issue.

The PR agency requested this newspaper to hold this report until April 3. On Thursday, the agency, in another reply, said, "The loan is now regular with Sonali Bank".

However, when this correspondent contacted Sonali Bank, one of its senior executives, wishing not to be named, said Beximco was yet to make the payment. He said the company "only sent a proposal to repay the dues and the matter is being processed".

The business group made the same proposal to three other banks -- Rupali Bank, AB Bank, and Exim Bank -- to whom it owed more than Tk 1,400 crore.

The three banks accepted the offer after the BB asked them to give the approval on the basis of "bank-client relations".

"We provided further benefits against the restructured loan of Beximco following the no-objection

from Bangladesh Bank," said Md Ataur Rahman Proddhan, managing director of Rupali Bank that restructured loans of Tk 693 crore of Beximco.

Beximco along with five other affiliated business firms failed to pay two quarterly instalments against its restructured loan of Tk 1,849 crore with Janata bank.

It made the instalment payment of September quarter in late December last year. It, however, failed to pay the next two instalments of December and March quarters, automatically becoming a defaulter from April 1 as per the restructuring rules.

Each of the instalments was Tk 52 crore.

Meanwhile, instead of paying the dues, Beximco sought loans of Tk 9.80 crore against imported goods. The company sent a letter in this regard to the bank on April 2, show documents.

THE FIVE OTHER COMPANIES

The other five of the six companies have failed to continue paying instalments against their restructured loans of Tk 2,834 crore.

Shahabuddin Alam, owner of SA Group, is also a member of the board of directors of Mercantile Bank while Maksudur Rahman, managing director of Ratanpur Group, is a director of South Bangla Agriculture and Commerce Bank.

SA Group, Ratanpur Group, RSRM and MR Group have filed writ petitions with the High Court against its defaulter status, said Abdus Salam Azad, managing director of Janata Bank.

Ratanpur Group failed to continue its repayment as the size of the previous loans was not "practical", said Maksudur Rahman.

Keya Group which got approval of restructuring loans of Tk 879 crore with five banks did not take the facility in the end for not paying the required down payment. Later, the company filed a writ petition against its defaulter status, according to central bank.

50 SSC exam scripts lost

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there was nothing that could be done.

The examiner, Amitav Dutta, an assistant teacher at Muktaleshi Girls High School in Boalkhali upazila of Chittagong, was carrying 150 scripts in two bags while commuting by bus in the city's Muradpur area.

According to the GD Dutta filed with Panchlaish Police Station on Friday night, he disembarked from the bus in the evening in front of Sanmar Shopping Complex and accidentally took only one bag containing 100 scripts, leaving the other behind.

Upon realising his mistake, he pursued the running bus in a CNG auto-rickshaw but the bag was gone when he got back on the bus to look for it, Dutta said.

He was given a total of 350 scripts to be marked. Dutta had already returned 150 scripts, said CEB officials.

Deputy Exam Controller (High Secondary) of CEB Tawarik Alam said,

"We learned about the incident. We will remain alert to protect the interest of the students."

Speaking to The Daily Star, CEB's Head Examiner for Science Purnima Gosh said, "The teacher has the mark sheet of the missing answer scripts, but he lost the scripts before he could return them to me."

"I informed the board officials and asked the teacher to file a GD."

Deputy Controller (Secondary) Prasenjit Paul said, "The examiner should not have boarded a public transport with the valuable students' scripts."

"The matter will be discussed at the disciplinary committee led by the chairman of the education board and action will be taken if he [the examiner] is found guilty."

Panchlaish Police Station Inspector Wali Uddin Akbar said they were investigating the matter and would try to recover the scripts.