

PM reaches Saudi Arabia

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina reached Dammam yesterday evening. She is on a nine-day official visit to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom.



In the first leg of her visit, the PM will attend the first month-long joint "Gulf Shield-I" military exercise at the invitation of the Saudi King, which will conclude today (April 16) at Al Jubail in the Eastern Province of Dammam in Saudi Arabia.

A VVIP flight of Biman Bangladesh Airlines carrying the prime minister and her 41-member entourage took off from Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport at 4:40pm and arrived in Dammam King Fahad

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The ill-fated cargo vessel in the Passur river in the Sundarbans near Mongla Port. The vessel had 775 tonnes of coal in its hull when it went down on Saturday night.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Coal ship sinks

FROM PAGE 1 Station. On both sides of the river are the Sundarbans.

Visiting the area yesterday afternoon The Daily Star found that the char was not marked.

Shahjahan, a crew member of the sunken vessel, said they were going upstream during low tide.

They anchored the vessel after it had run aground. The crew later noticed that the vessel was talking in water and eventually abandoned ship.

Asked for comment, Dilip Kumar Datta, professor of environmental science at Khulna University, said, "Coal can reduce the pH of water and increase its acidity.

In the low-current areas of the river, it can cause damage to the environment."

He added that if the coal was well covered in the hull, it would not spread rapidly.

Dilip said recurrence of such incidents in the Sundarbans should be prevented.

An oil tanker sank in the Shela river in the Sundarbans in December 2014.

The returnee well linked to authorities

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He maintains good links with the Border Guard Police (BGP) of Myanmar and the local administration in Maungdaw, and updates the authorities on the activities in the border area, according to a number of refugees.

Several thousand Rohingyas have been living in the zone since August, crammed into a cluster of tents. Aktar is one of them.

But when these correspondents met him in mid-October last year, his clothes and attitude bore no signs that he was a member of a persecuted community and driven out of home.

A Myanmar government statement posted late Saturday says a refugee family became the first to be processed in newly-built reception centres earlier in the day.

"The five members of a family... came back to Taungpyoletwei town repatriation camp in Rakhine State this morning," said a statement posted on

the Information Committee's Facebook page, write AFP.

It was Aktar, his wife Sajeda Begum, daughter Tahera, son Tarek Aziz and neighbour Shawkat Ara who left late Saturday night.

They had been living in a camp in no man's land between the two countries, meaning the Bangladesh government had no formal role in their return, said Bangladesh's Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) Abul Kalam.

Some Rohingyas said that Aktar had been in touch with the Myanmar administration since the beginning of the crisis in late August. He was also an elected representative of people in Maungdaw of Rakhine State.

This newspaper talked to Aktar twice and on both occasions he was wearing ironed white shirts and an apparently expensive wrist watch.

Puffing cigarettes and chewing betel leaf, he casually said he worked with the BGP and Border Guard

Bangladesh (BGB) as an interpreter on various occasions and helped the local administration in Myanmar in various tasks.

When violence erupted in Myanmar last year, Aktar said, he was assured that he need not worry, but eventually he was forced to leave the house. He, however, stayed connected to officials in the BGP and the local administration to know the updates about his property.

Aktar claimed he owned more than 100 acres of land, a two-storey building, two private cars and a motorbike. He also ran timber trade "both in Myanmar and Bangladesh".

Like him, he said, his father was also the chairman in Balibazar in Maungdaw of Rakhine State. His property was not damaged or looted in the crackdown and he wanted to go back to his house.

In the presence of these correspondents, Aktar talked to someone over cell phone. Asked who he was talking

to, he said it was BGP officials.

Md Jahir Ahmed, head teacher of Madhyam Ghumdhum Government Primary School, said Aktar was an influential man in Myanmar and helped the Myanmar government on administrative issues.

Although the man took shelter in no man's land on Myanmar's side, most of the time he used to stay inside Bangladesh, claimed Jahir.

Deen Mohammad, a Rohingya community leader, said Aktar's movement in no man's land was "suspicious" and he regularly communicated with the BGP.

Khaleda Hossain, a Rohingya refugee in no man's land, said the way the chairman of Balibazar went back was not a right thing to do, and it will not bring any good to them.

Md Erfan, another refugee, said Aktar "betrayed" the Rohingya community as he went back in the middle of night and without informing anyone.

DEATHS AFTER C-SECTION

Probe points at doctor, staffers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

A probe body has found evidence of negligence by a doctor and hospital staffers after two women died in DMT Safeway Hospital in Sylhet right after undergoing C-section on Friday.

The committee was formed by the Sylhet Civil Surgeon office on Friday night. Abul Kalam Azad, deputy civil surgeon of Sylhet, led the body.

Gousul Hossain, officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station, said though the victims' families alleged that the two died due to negligence of the on-duty doctor and wrong treatment, no case was filed.

No complaint has yet been filed with the Civil Surgeon Office, said

Azad, adding that a primary report regarding the deaths was submitted to the office of Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) in Dhaka.

He said, "We have found negligence in emergency response by the on-duty doctor and staffers of the hospital at a time when the patients' condition deteriorated on Friday morning, hours after their operations.

"We are not sure yet whether their caesarean operations were properly done, or any other complexities arose. But further investigation into the matter will be helpful in finding details."

He also added that they were now

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Eyewash!

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Photos posted alongside the statement showed one man, two women, a young girl and a boy receiving the ID cards and getting health checks. It said the family had been sent to stay "temporarily" with relatives in Maungdaw town.

It has been learnt that the five are Aktar Alam, his wife Sajeda Begum, daughter Tahera, son Tarek Aziz and neighbour Shawkat Ara.

After the move, Bangladesh Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan said such an announcement was nothing but a farce, while rights activists and experts said the one-sided step by Myanmar is an eyewash and a public relations stunt.

The Rohingya family did not reach Bangladesh as they used to live in no man's land, added Asaduzzaman. "I hope Myanmar will repatriate all the refugee families within the shortest possible time," he told reporters after a meeting at the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Some 700,000 Rohingyas have crossed over into Bangladesh since August and joined over 300,000 who had fled earlier waves of violence in Rakhine. At least 6,000 Rohingya families have been living in the no man's land since that month.

Bangladesh and Myanmar in November signed a bilateral deal for the repatriation. The UN high commissioner for refugees said on Friday that the conditions in Myanmar were not yet conducive to safe, voluntary and sustainable returns of the Rohingya.

Andrea Giorgetta of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) told AFP that Myanmar's announcement of repatriation is "a public relations exercise in an attempt to deflect attention from the need for accountability for crimes committed in Rakhine State".

Asif Munier, an independent researcher on migration and refugee, said Myanmar's unilateral action and



A Rohingya family's identity being verified by authorities in Myanmar. The family later got national verification cards, becoming the first family, of five, to return to Myanmar.

PHOTO: AFP

the efforts to manipulate the issue by portraying it as "repatriation" could undermine the bilateral deal signed in November.

Though the family lived in no man's land, there should have been an exchange of information between the two governments, but nothing of that sort happened. Even, the UN agencies or other international agencies that are providing humanitarian support to the Rohingyas in no man's land were not aware of it.

"Such an action is quite provocative," Munier told The Daily Star.

A foreign ministry official said, "There is no scope to call it repatriation... it's a total hoax because the family which the Myanmar authorities claimed to have been repatriated was not within the territory of Bangladesh."

Talking to The Daily Star, the official categorically said the repatriation has not started at all. The Myanmar government has not finished verify-

ing the first list of 8,032 Rohingyas handed over to Myanmar on February 16.

"How can they claim it to be repatriation since the Rohingya family was not taken back from the camps within Bangladesh. There is no way to call it repatriation... under no criteria it's repatriation... its nothing but a hoax."

The foreign ministry is not ready to discuss it or take it into consideration because the issue is not related with the repatriation of the hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas who took shelter in Bangladesh after fleeing military crackdown in Rakhine State, the official said.

YET ANOTHER TRICK?

The Rohingyas, who have been denied citizenship and basic rights in Myanmar, have fled into Bangladesh in various waves since 1980s -- the latest being the largest and creating the fastest growing refugee crisis of the world.

Thousands of Rohingya villages

were burnt, and according to the Doctors without Borders, some 6,700 Rohingya men and women were killed in one month since a brutal military crackdown began in late August.

Women were raped and Rohingya houses were looted.

The UN termed it ethnic cleansing and having hallmarks of genocide, creating global pressure on the Southeast Asian country.

Even after signing a bilateral repatriation deal in November, Myanmar authorities reportedly bulldozed the already burnt houses of the Rohingyas and set up security installations.

The repatriation was supposed to begin on January 23, but a week before the date, the Myanmar authorities demanded a family-wise list in their prescribed form, something Bangladesh needed time to prepare.

Still, Myanmar ministers were quick to blame Bangladesh as no repatriation took place in late January.

Then, Bangladesh handed over a list of 8,032 Rohingyas in mid-February, and Myanmar verified only some 700 of them. Again, Myanmar officials blamed Bangladesh for that, saying the forms were not properly filled up.

Asif Munier said Myanmar has time and again blamed Bangladesh when the latter is bearing the brunt of the Rohingya crisis, something the country is in no way responsible for.

Bangladesh should immediately issue a note of protest against such PR stunt by Myanmar, he added.

Munier also said Bangladesh has also signed a deal with the UNHCR on voluntary repatriation of the Rohingyas, while the UN Refugee Agency is negotiating another deal with Myanmar.

When things regarding repatriation keep moving, Myanmar's behaviour is suspicious, he said. "Such actions by Myanmar may threaten the bilateral repatriation."

Gmail adding self-destruct feature

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But it may also include some intriguing tools like expiring emails and a "confidential mode", according to TechCrunch.

A series of screenshots show how the new version of Gmail will give users greater controls over their emails via new tools in the "Compose" window.

Clicking on a lock icon in the window will open a popup that tells users they can set a date for when the email will "self-destruct", as in they'll be destroyed after a certain amount of time expires.

Users can set an email to expire after one week, a month or after a couple of years.

It also gives users the option to turn on confidential mode, which means that the recipient will be unable to forward, download or print the email. They also can't copy and paste content from the message.

Another feature allows users to require recipients to confirm their identity with a passcode sent via text message.

It's unclear if the passcode feature will work for non-Gmail users, TechCrunch noted.

Google is hoping the update will give a "fresh, clean look for Gmail on the web" - although it has revealed very few details.

It's likely that Google will release the new version of Gmail at its I/O developers conference, which starts on May 8, according to the Verge.

The new design features a sidebar with the option of using the Calendar, Keep note-taking app and tasks next to user's emails.

This could make it easier to schedule meetings and check availability while emailing people.

A default view highlights attach-

ments such as documents and photos, a comfortable view doesn't show attachments, and a compact view shows more messages.

G Suite administrators, who manage the online Google domain, gave some details of the design to 9to5Google.

They said Google apps will be better integrated with "easy access" to services like Calendar from within Gmail.

The "snooze" button will also temporarily hide emails from user's inbox until a certain time. Both Snooze and Smart Reply are part of Google's Inbox app on Gmail.

West keeps Syria

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ally Russia, whose foreign minister Sergei Lavrov called them "unacceptable and lawless".

Speaking to Iran's President Rouhani by telephone yesterday, Russian President Vladimir Putin said "if such actions, carried out in violation of the United Nations Charter, are repeated, that would inevitably provoke chaos in international relations," according to a statement from the Kremlin.

In Damascus, Syria's deputy foreign minister Faisal Mekdad met inspectors from the global chemical weapons watchdog OPCW for about three hours in the presence of Russian officers and a senior Syrian security official.

The inspectors were due to visit the site of the suspected gas attack. Moscow condemned the Western states for refusing to wait for their findings before attacking.

As he left the hotel where the meeting took place, Mekdad declined to comment to reporters waiting outside.

British Foreign Secretary (Minister) Boris Johnson defended Prime Minister Theresa May's decision to take part in the attack, saying it was to deter further use of chemical weapons.

"This is not about regime change... This is not about trying to turn the tide of the conflict in Syria," he told the BBC.

"There is no proposal on the table at the moment for further attacks because so far thank heavens the Assad regime have not been so foolish as to launch another chemical weapons attack."

"If and when such a thing were to happen, then clearly with allies we would study what the options were," he said, echoing US ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, who told an emergency Security Council meeting that Trump told her that if Syria uses poisonous gas again, "The United States is locked and loaded."

Asked if this meant Assad could carry on using barrel bombs and other means in the war provided he did not use chemical weapons, Johnson said that that was the "unhappy" consequence.

Assad was determined "to butcher his way" to an overwhelming victory and only the Russians could pressure him to come to the negotiating table in Geneva, Johnson said.

British opposition leader Jeremy Corbyn said that the legal basis used to support the British role was debatable, adding that he would only support action backed by the UN Security Council.

"I say to the foreign secretary, I say to the prime minister, where is the legal basis for this?" Corbyn said in an interview with the BBC.

The Western countries blame Assad's government for a suspected poison gas attack in Douma on April 7 that killed up to 75 people. Russia, whose ties with the West have sunk to levels of the Cold War-era, denies any gas attack in

Douma and said Britain staged it to whip up anti-Russian hysteria.

RESILIENCE

In Damascus, Assad told a group of visiting Russian lawmakers that the Western missile strikes were an act of aggression, Russian news agencies reported.

Syria released video of the wreckage of a bombed-out research lab, but also of Assad arriving at work as usual, with the caption "Morning of resilience" and there were no immediate reports of casualties.

The Russian agencies quoted the lawmakers as saying Assad was in a "good mood", had praised the Soviet-era air defence systems Syria used to repel the Western attacks and had accepted an invitation to visit Russia at an unspecified time.

Russian Foreign Ministry official Vladimir Ermakov struck an apparently conciliatory tone yesterday, saying Washington would want to maintain a dialogue with Moscow about strategic stability after the raids, Russian media reported.

ASSAULT ON ROHINGYAS

UN blacklists Myanmar military

DAWN ONLINE

A new UN report puts Myanmar's armed forces on a UN blacklist of government and rebel groups "credibly suspected" of carrying out rapes and other acts of sexual violence in conflict for the first time.

An advance copy of Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' report to the Security Council, obtained by The Associated Press, says international medical staff and others in Bangladesh have documented that many of the almost 700,000 Rohingyas who fled from Myanmar "bear the physical and psychological scars of brutal sexual assault."

The UN chief said the assaults were allegedly perpetrated by the Myanmar armed forces, known as the Tatmadaw, "at times acting in concert with local militias, in the course of military 'clearance' operations in October 2016 and August 2017."

"The widespread threat and use of sexual violence was integral to this strategy, serving to humiliate, terrorise and collectively punish the Rohingya community, as a calculated tool to force them to flee their homelands and prevent their return," Guterres said.

The report, which will be a focus of a UN Security Council meeting today on preventing sexual violence in conflict, puts 51 government, rebel and extremist groups on the list.