

# India sends back seven Rohingyas

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India has deported the first seven Rohingyas back to Myanmar after the government ruled that they should be treated as illegal immigrants rather than qualifying for asylum. The men were handed over to Myanmar officials at the border between the two countries, just hours after the Supreme Court rejected a last minute plea from their lawyer. The men were arrested in 2012 in the eastern city of Assam, and have been held in prison since then on charges of illegal entry. Each man carried a single bag of belongings when they were removed from prison for deportation, an officer speaking on condition of anonymity told the Associated Press. Bhaskar J Mahanta, a police official in Assam, confirmed the men had been "handed over to the authorities of Myanmar" at a border post in Manipur yesterday. At the Supreme Court, defence lawyer Prashant Bhushan argued that the men feared reprisals if they returned to Myanmar, and called for the UN high commissioner for refugees to be allowed to intervene in the case.

Though they were arrested some five years before the brutal August 2017 military crackdown that led 700,000 Rohingya to flee Rakhine state in northern Myanmar, the men said the persecution dated to much earlier and they had fled "genocide" like the rest. But the Supreme Court ruled in the government's favour on the basis that, unlike most Rohingyas in Myanmar, the men would be accepted as citizens. A government lawyer told the judges that Myanmar had given seven certificates of identity and one-month visas to facilitate the deportation. "We don't want to interfere with the government's decision," said

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## Khaleda

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physiatrist Associate Professor Badrunnesa Ahmed of the BSMMU. The HC ruled that other members of the board would not be anyone from the current or former members or supporters of Swadhinata Chikitsak Parishad, a pro-Awami League doctors' organisation, or Doctors Association of Bangladesh (DAB), a pro-BNP physicians' platform, Khaleda's lawyers Bodruddza Badal and Kayser Kamal told The Daily Star. The court said Khaleda's physiotherapy and diagnosis would take place as per her choice and that she could involve any physician outside the BSMMU in her treatment subject to approval from the medical board. The BNP chief could be brought to the hospital following jail codes, the court ruled.

The bench of Justice Sheikh Hassan Arif and Justice Razik-Al-Jalil came up with the order following a writ petition filed by Khaleda seeking court directive on the government about sending her to a specialised hospital.

On September 9, she had filed the petition on health grounds as she has been suffering from various illnesses.

The government on September 13 had formed a medical team, led by Prof Abdul Jalil Chowdhury, for examining her health condition.

Other members of the team were cardiologist Prof Harisul Haque, orthopedic surgeon Prof Abu Zaffar Chowdhury, ophthalmologist Associate Professor Tariq Reza Ali and physiatrist Associate Professor Badrunnesa Ahmed of BSMMU. Khaleda was sentenced to five years in prison on February 8 in the Zia Orphanage Trust graft case.

During the hearing on the petition on October 3, Khaleda's lawyer AJ Mohammad Ali told the court that the government had formed the medical board with doctors from Swadhinata Chikitsak Parishad. As a result, Khaleda may not get fair treatment from that board, he argued.

He prayed to the HC to direct the government to send Khaleda to specialised United Hospital as per her choice. Attorney General Mahbubey Alam opposed the petition, saying the jail authorities had taken steps for providing necessary treatments to Khaleda.

Meanwhile yesterday, the HC continued for the 18th day the hearing on the appeal filed by Khaleda challenging a lower court verdict that sentenced her to five years' imprisonment in the Zia Orphanage Trust corruption case. After concluding yesterday's proceedings, the bench of Justice M Enayetur Rahim and Justice Md Mostafizur Rahman fixed October 7 for resuming the hearing on the appeal.

AJ Mohammad Ali placed arguments for Khaleda, while Advocate Khurshid Alam Khan appeared for the ACC.



Holding a crutch and with his right feet bandaged, a man, along with his son, walks at the Shahbagh intersection after getting out of a hospital yesterday. They were having trouble finding transport to go back home as protesters blocked the intersection demanding reinstatement of 30 percent freedom fighter quota for class-I and class-II government jobs.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

## Quota circular issued amid protests

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The government documents now mention "grade" instead of "class" while referring to the tiers in public service.

Meanwhile, Chairman of Bangladesh Public Service Commission Muhammed Sadique said recruitment through the 40th BCS would be done based on merit, reports UNB.

Yesterday's circular, scrapping the 46-year-old quota system, came a day after the cabinet went with a high-powered government committee's recommendation in this regard. However, the quota system will remain in force for class-III and class-IV jobs.

Until the abolition, about 56 percent of government jobs had been reserved for candidates from various quotas. Of this, 30 percent were for freedom fighters' children and grandchildren, 10 percent for women, 10 percent for people of underdeveloped districts, five percent for members of indigenous communities and one percent for physically challenged people.

The quota system was introduced through an executive order in 1972 and had been amended several times since. From 1972 to 1976, 20 percent was recruited on merit. Merit-based recruitment was increased to 40 percent in 1976 which continued until 1985 when the percentage of merit-based recruitment was upped to 45 percent.

Hours after Wednesday's cabinet

approval, protesters demanding freedom fighters' quota be reinstated kept the capital's Shahbagh intersection blocked for several hours.

The protests continued yesterday with demonstrators putting barriers at Shahbagh intersection around 7:00am. Those demanding quotas for indigenous communities formed a human chain there in the afternoon.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan met the protesters around 9:00pm and requested them not to block the road today since it would cause students sitting for the medical colleges' admission test to suffer.

The protesters said they would withdraw their demonstration for nine hours from 6:00am today. They will take to Shahbagh after 3:00pm.

Five different platforms demanding quotas for freedom fighters' children and grandchildren staged sit-ins and chanted slogans on loudspeakers throughout yesterday.

Commuters suffered a lot as the intersection remained closed to traffic.

"Scrapping the freedom fighter quota in civil service goes against the spirit of the Liberation War," said Shiekh Atikur Babu, president of Muktiyoddha Sangsad Santan Command.

Former president of the platform Mehedi Hasan said they would file a writ petition with the Supreme Court, challenging the scrapping of the quota

system.

"We have not been able to take any legal steps as the gazette was not published, but now we would file a writ petition," he said.

The activists also demanded removing family members of Jamaat-Shibir men and war criminals from government offices and taking actions against those who make derogatory remarks about Liberation War, freedom fighters and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on social media.

Adivasi Quota Sangrakkhan Parishad activists at the human chain said they would stage a sit-in at Nadda area of Gulshan at 3:00pm tomorrow.

In Rajshahi University, around 30 students, including the members of Muktiyoddha Sangsad Santan Command demonstrated at the main gate.

With banners and placards, they began a sit-in around 9:30am and later blocked the Dhaka-Rajshahi highway.

The protesters also lit a fire in the middle of the road. They withdrew around noon.

In February this year, a large number of students of public universities and jobseekers took to the streets demanding reforms to the quota system.

The demonstrations intensified in April when students across the country joined in.

In the wake of mass protests, the prime minister on April 11 announced

in parliament that the quota system would be scrapped.

But as no gazette notification was issued in this regard, students involved in the movement began boycotting classes and examinations in all universities and colleges.

On June 30 and July 1, alleged activists of Bangladesh Chhatra League attacked protesters at Dhaka and Rajshahi universities, leaving several students injured. In the following days, law enforcers arrested a number of quota reform leaders.

The movement lost momentum following the arrests and attacks on demonstrators.

### 40TH BCS RECRUITMENT ON MERIT

Chairman of the Bangladesh Public Service Commission Muhammed Sadique yesterday said the recruitment through the 40th BCS would be done based on merit, not quota, reports UNB.

"The quota system won't be applicable in the recruitment," he told UNB, adding that it was mentioned in the circular of the 40th BCS that the cadres will be appointed on merit.

Sadique, however, said the quota system will be there in the recruitment of the 39th special BCS and other examinations as those are already under process.

The 40th BCS application process began on September 30 and will continue till November 15.

## Several people involved

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the ACC boss said.

"Whoever is involved, whether an important person or not, the ACC will take action against those responsible."

However, ACC sources said the loans, worth about Tk 4 crore, were transferred from Farmers Bank's Gulshan Branch to an account with

Sonali Bank's Supreme Court Branch.

On September 26, the ACC quizzed six people, including former managing director of Farmers Bank AKM Shameem, for around six hours in connection with the ongoing enquiry into "suspicious transaction of Tk 4 crore in the bank".

"In the enquiry, many things have

surfaced. The money was laundered and went to various places and was then withdrawn in cash," said Iqbal, adding that if they found the allegation prima-facie (accepted as correct until proved otherwise) they will file a case.

Regarding the case filed by former BNP minister Barrister Nazmul Huda

against former chief justice SK Sinha, Iqbal said the investigation officer, if required, may quiz Huda for the sake of proper investigation.

About whether Sinha, who is in the US, will be quizzed, Iqbal said there is no legal barrier and if the investigation officer deems it necessary, he may quiz him abroad.



Damaged buses on Dhaka-Chattogram highway in Narayanganj's Kanchpur area yesterday. Locals vandalised the vehicles after a bus hit and injured a schoolgirl while she was crossing the highway. Inset, the bus involved in the accident set on fire.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

## Vandalism in Kanchpur

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busy highway.

Sadia Akter, a class-IX student of Kanchpur Omor Ali School, was hit by the bus while she was crossing the highway to go to the school around 8:00am, said Qaiyum Ali, officer-in-charge of Kanchpur Highway Police. Locals took 15-year-old Sadia,

daughter of Mintu Kazi from Sonapur area, to a local private clinic. Later, she was sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, said the OC.

The bus driver and his helper fled the scene.

Protesting the incident, more than a hundred students blocked the highway in Kanchpur area around 8:30am.

They torched the bus and vandalised at least 10 more vehicles, leading to severe traffic jam on the highway.

The protesters called off agitation around 1:00pm after Narayanganj-3 lawmaker Liakot Hossain Khoka went to the spot, and told them that a footbridge would be built there. He also assured that financial help

would be given to the injured student.

Kazi Md Habibur Rahman, an uncle of Sadia, said she was out of danger but she suffered fractures in her right arm and both legs in the accident.

The OC said they seized the bus but no case was filed over the incident.

He further said police were trying to arrest the bus driver and his helper.

## Jamaat

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But BNP leaders in a meeting last month assured the alliance partners that their unity would remain intact.

A senior BNP leader said the party has decided in principle that it would support Jamaat leaders in constituencies where they had run before. If the previous candidates could not run, then the nomination could be given to his family members, the leader said.

Jamaat leaders said they have preparations for contesting in at least 100 constituencies but as the party would contest the polls under the alliance banner, the alliance would fix the number of seats for them.

"We are well prepared to contest the election ...," said a senior Jamaat leader wishing anonymity.

The BNP-led alliance boycotted the January 5, 2014, election demanding election under a non-partisan interim government. This time the alliance is yet to announce publicly that it would run in the election slated for December.

The alliance leaders publicly said that they would not take part in any election with BNP chief Khaleda Zia behind bars. But they have been preparing for the polls and speaking about a movement to have Khaleda freed.

Wishing anonymity, a BNP vice-chairman, however, said, "Although the 20-party alliance is not intended for elections, the other parties of the combine boycotted the last polls. We have a plan to share some seats with the partners. But we will not disclose it right now as we have to wage a movement with them by our side."

"It is more or less confirmed who will contest from where. Out of 300 constituencies, I think 30 to 40 seats will be shared with alliance partners. So, it will not be a huge task," Andaleev Rahman Partha, president of Bangladesh Jatiya Party, told The Daily Star.

He, however, said there were a lot of issues still unresolved, including release of Khaleda Zia and formation of an election-time government.

Khandaker Gulam Mortaza, President of National Democratic Party, a component of 20-party alliance, said as election was nearing, the Awami League started campaigning and BNP was also preparing for the polls.

"I think the seat sharing issue will be cleared at the alliance forum soon ...," he added.

He said three contenders from his party were preparing to run.

Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) President Col (Retd) Oli Ahmed said the BNP was yet to discuss the seat sharing issue as their main focus was on freeing Khaleda Zia from jail.

"Once she gets released from jail, we will discuss the election and seat sharing in details," he said.

## Digital Security

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saying it was passed without addressing their concerns.

A number of local and international organisations working for the freedom of the press and good governance have urged the president not to assent to the Digital Security Bill and requested him to return it to the House.

The bill was sent to the president for his assent at a time when Law Minister Anisul Huq at a recent meeting had assured the Sampadail Parishad (Editors' Council) Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists, Dhaka Union of Journalists and Dhaka Reporters Unity that their serious concerns would be placed before the cabinet to work out amendments to make the law acceptable to all.

The law minister also had promised to sit with the editors and journalists again in this regard.

Information Minister Hasanul Haq Inu, Posts, Telecommunications and Information Technology Minister Mustafa Jabbar and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's Media Adviser Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury were also present at the meeting on September 30.

The Sampadail Parishad, a platform of editors of national dailies, had earlier postponed its human chain programme scheduled to be held on September 29, which was called denouncing the passage of the Digital Security Bill 2018, upon request from Information Minister Inu.

The Parishad, journalists and media practitioners have expressed their serious concerns over sections 8, 21, 25, 28, 29, 31, 32, and 43 of the bill, saying that those sections pose serious threats to freedom of expression and media operation.

Parliament on September 19 passed the bill, "totally ignoring" the concerns expressed by journalists and media organisations.

Journalists and rights activists also expressed worries over the new law, saying that it goes against the main spirit of the constitution and that the law will restrict free-thinking, freedom of speech and freedom of expression.