



Some Rohingyas mill around two tarpaulin tents set up for them by India's Border Security Force in the no-man's land near Brahmanbaria's Kasba Kaziatali border, while BSF officers stand nearby. A total of 31 Rohingyas have been stranded in the area for four consecutive days and are struggling to survive in the bitter cold, amidst a shortage of food and water.

PHOTO: STAR

Bottled water

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writ petition yesterday, the HC received the test report and ordered the BSTI to submit another report to this courts by February 24 on the steps it would taken against the companies producing unsafe water.

DAG Mokhlesur also said BSTI would examine the quality of some other companies' bottled water and submit a report in this regard as well to the HC by February 24.

The bench of Justice Sheikh Hassan Arif and Justice Razik-Al Jalil yesterday fixed the same date to pass further orders on this issue.

The HC, in response to the writ petition submitted by Supreme Court lawyer Shammi Akhter, on December 3 last year ordered the BSTI and law enforcement agencies to immediately check the quality of water sold in plastic bottles and other containers across the country.

The court also issued a rule asking the authorities concerned to explain why they should not be directed to ensure the supply of safe drinking water through authorised means and why their failure to this effect should not be declared illegal.

On January 14 this year, the HC extended its December 3 order and asked the BSTI to examine the water and submit the test reports to it by yesterday.

The petitioner's counsel Md JR Khan Robin earlier told The Daily Star that a total of 287 factories were authorised to produce plastic bottles, jars and other containers for bottled water.

More than 3,000 factories were unauthorised, he added.

Total lunar

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followed finally by its full re-emergence, bright and shining.

The full Moon appeared bigger than normal because it was closer to the Earth -- about 222,000 miles (358,000 kilometres) away -- earning it the nickname "super Moon."

Other monikers include a "Wolf Moon," a traditional way of coining an eclipse in the month of January, and a "Blood Moon" because of its rusty, red colour. Hence the name for this year's event: a "super blood wolf Moon."

At its peak, where night skies were clear of clouds, Venus and Jupiter shone brightly in the night sky.

Not everyone was fortunate: in London, for example, astronomy enthusiasts hopes were dashed by a cloudy night.

During a lunar eclipse, the moon appears red because the light of the Sun no longer directly illuminates it, since Earth is passing in between the moon and Sun.

8 years

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Generally, an OSD has no other duty except for attending office and signing the attendance register. Civil bureaucrats are made OSDs usually because of political reasons or personal enmity.

Normally, a bureaucrat needs at least 25 years to be promoted as a secretary after getting several promotions. They also need to receive training from home and abroad, which requires a lot of public money.

Although an OSD officer needs to show up at the public administration ministry to collect bills, no chair and table is allocated for him. OSD officials are used to spending time at the ministry library, said sources.

Contacted, Ebadot refused to make any comment as he was still a serving officer.

According to sources, around 500 officials now have OSD status.

Former cabinet secretary Ali Imam Majumder told The Daily Star that making a serving officer an OSD was not a good practice.

"It was not proper to waste a huge amount of public money, by making a secretary an OSD for a long period," he said.

Ebadot, who hails from Pabna, joined civil bureaucracy after passing the regular BCS in 1982. During his career, Ebadot served as the joint secretary in the defence and home ministry. He was a member of the Tariff Commission and DC of Sirajganj during his long career.

Back home, traumatised

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correspondent from Sunamganj over phone that his daughter went to Saudi Arabia a year ago and she had to change her workplace three times during the period.

"When she talked to me three to four months ago, she said she was in trouble. Her employer abused her. I don't know what type of abuse...", said Yunus, a day labourer and father of four daughters, of whom Halima is the eldest.

"Halima was 18 years old when she went to Saudi Arabia. I had told broker Raju Mia that Halima was young, but he said it was not a problem," said Yunus.

The two others are Fatema Akhter of Habiganj and Aduri Khatun of Narayanganj.

As per the expatriates' welfare ministry order, no woman below 25 years can go abroad as a domestic worker.

According to officials of the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training, around 2.8 lakh Bangladeshi women have gone to the kingdom as domestic workers since 1991. Some 2.4 lakh of them went there in the last four years, they added.

Around 8,000 returned home in the last four years after facing various forms of abuses, including physical and sexual ones. They were also not provided with enough food and their wages were not paid, said Shariful Hasan, head of Brac migration programme, which provides emergency assistance to the returnee migrants.

Most of them came from the shelter home run by Bangladesh Embassy in Riyadh and others from the Saudi detention centres.

There have been a good number of cases where the women returned with pregnancy after rape, with babies and even with psychological problems, he said. Many of the returnees seemed to be adolescents, which is a sharp violation of law, Hasan said.

"Story of each of the returnees is tragic," said Hasan, adding, "We will commit an offence if we don't take strong steps to protect these women."

2 workers

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"They have been shown arrested in the case involving Mahmud Fashion Ltd as per the directives of the SP [superintendent of police] and the OC [officer-in-charge]."

Though Saybolt did not file any case, it provided police with a list of criminals, he claimed. "The two have been arrested on the basis of the list."

Asked why Sabuj and Aatur have been shown arrested in the case that mentions no one other than workers from Mahmud Fashion, Ashulia Police Station OC Rizaul Haque said, "I will not answer this question."

Talking to The Daily Star over the phone, he also said, "We have done what seemed right after primary investigation."

According to the case statement, around 8:30am on January 9, the aforementioned unruly workers on second floor (sewing section) of the main production building of (Mahmud Fashion) forced other workers to stop discharging their duties.

They beat some of those who wanted to work. Four officials and staffers were also assaulted when they asked the accused about the reasons of their behaviour, it read.

The statement also said when the line chief wanted to make the workers perform their duty, the unruly workers hit him on the head with an iron rod. Some 28 pants worth about Tk 56,000 were stolen while some machines were vandalised.

The case was filed on January 11. Sabuj and Aatur were sent to the court the next day and the court ordered sending them to jail custody.

The Daily Star obtained a copy of the case statement.

Sabuj's wife Zahura Begum said her husband was regular at his factory. "He attended his work on January 11 as usual but police picked him up from our house at night without showing any cause."

He was not involved in the recent garments workers' movement for wage structure reform, she claimed.

"We are now in deep trouble," she

The expatriates' welfare ministry repeatedly said it would take up a rehabilitation programme for the returnees, but no visible initiative had yet been taken in this regard.

Asked about legal actions against the Saudi exploiters, Gazi Mohammad Julhas, director general of the Wage Earners' Welfare Board, said the women did not want to initiate any case as it took a long time to settle.

Hasan said, "It is shameful for us the way they are abused abroad and we do almost nothing."

Spice Girls

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overtime, made to work despite poor health, and verbally abused with insults such as "daughter of a prostitute".

Low wages and trade deals with Western countries have turned Bangladesh's garment sector into a \$30 billion industry accounting for 80 percent of the country's exports.

Bangladesh has been hit by violent demonstrations in recent weeks after thousands of workers took to the streets demanding better pay. Garment owners agreed to raise wages last week but many workers rejected the pay hike and launched fresh protests.

From clothes and cosmetics to shrimp and smartphones, major brands face rising regulatory and consumer pressure to ensure their supply chains are free of labour abuses as the world looks to meet a United Nations goal of ending modern slavery by 2030.

Yet consumer trust seems to be at an all-time low, according to Joanna Ewart-James of the anti-slavery group Freedom United, who highlighted the irony of a T-shirt intended to back gender equality being produced by women in a exploitative workplace.

"All buyers - charities as well as companies - must take contractual responsibility for ensuring decent working conditions in their supply chain," the executive director of the global campaign group told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

told The Daily Star, adding she has already spent around Tk 9,000 for securing bail for her husband, but the lawyer could not say anything about his bail.

She demanded release of her husband from the "fabricated case".

Aatur's wife Rahima Begum said when her husband was picked up, she asked police about the reason behind this but got no reply.

Rahima said her husband worked in the factory the day he was picked up. "Police picked him up to harass them."

Both Zahura and Rahima said Sabuj and Aatur went to the factory on January 9. Four fellow workers of the two echoed the same.

Asked whether the duo attended work on January 9, Fazlur Rahman, deputy general manager of Saybolt Tex Ltd, yesterday said he cannot say for sure without checking. The workers enter and exit factory punching ID cards.

He also said they shut their factory from January 12 till January 16 after workers carried out vandalism and beat up a general manager, but did not file any case.

"After their arrest we came to know about it, but do not know the reason," he told this newspaper.

A worker of Saybolt Tex, preferring anonymity, said they went for work stoppage in the factory on January 12 protesting arrest of their two colleagues. They also observed work stoppage for several days in December last year demanding changes in wage structure.

Worker leaders claim that not only these two, many others have been picked up following the recent RMG unrest.

UN expert

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reporters, saying she will brief them in Dhaka at the end of her visit.

Lee arrived in Bangladesh on Saturday and held a meeting with Foreign Minister Abdul Momen at his office on Sunday.

9-year-old raped by uncle

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

A nine-year-old girl was allegedly raped by her 45-year-old uncle in Sreemangal upazila of Moulvibazar on January 14.

The incident came to light when the victim's parents filed a case with Sreemangal Police Station in this regard on Sunday.

The accused has been on the run since the incident, said Nazrul Islam, officer-in-charge of the police station.

Father of the girl said her daughter was a third grader at a local school.

On the day of the incident, the girl went to her uncle's house to play with her cousins and stay over, he added.

At night, when everyone else was asleep, her uncle took the girl to another room and raped her, he further said, adding that her aunt was not at home during the incident.

The accused also threatened to kill the girl if she told anyone about the rape and gave her Tk 510, said the girl's father.

Returning home, the girl suddenly fell sick and told everything to her mother.

Following the incident, the child was admitted to Moulvibazar Sadar Hospital where she is currently undergoing treatment.

Polash Roy, residential medical officer at the hospital, said, "The victim is now out of danger."

The girl had undergone all the necessary medical test, he added.

"We will send the reports to the police station once we get the complete test results," the RMO added.

Olama League

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raised at a human chain in front of the Jatiya Press Club organised by Olama League and 13 other "like-minded" organisations, said a press release.

Hours later, the AL said media reports on Olama League's demand for banning BPL came to the party's attention.

"We want to clearly say that at present Bangladesh Awami League has no affiliated organisation called Awami Olama League and the party has no such committee at any level by that name. Awami League has no relation with the published reports," the AL said in a statement signed by the party's Office Secretary Abdus Sobhan Golap.

The party also called for taking appropriate actions against those engaged in activities that go against its principles, the statement said.

Formation of a national minority commission and formulation of a minority protection law are among the electoral pledges of the AL.

Olama League is said to be divided into two factions. The faction led by Abdul Hasan Sheikh Shariatpuri came up with the demands yesterday.

On April 9 in 2016, the same Olama League faction had called for a ban on the Bangla New Year festival terming it haram (forbidden in Islam) and urged the government to cancel the festival bonus for Pahela Baishakh, saying the allowance should instead be given to Muslims on the occasion of Eid-e-Miladunnabi.

The faction also demanded revoking the minimum marriageable age for girls, making a law with a provision of death penalty for demeaning Islam, banning the CHT Commission, taking all Indian TV channels in Bangladesh off-air and cancelling the education policy and Vested Property Return (amendment) Act.

In February 2017, Hefajat-e Islam, Olama League and Muhammad Arifur Rahman, who claimed to be the editor of news portal bishwabarta.com, had demanded immediate removal of a sculpture of what they claimed to be a Greek idol installed in front of the country's apex court.

Shariatpuri and Arifur sent a letter to the Registrar General of the Supreme Court on February 2 that year demanding removal of the sculpture.

In face of the demand, the Supreme Court authority later removed the sculpture and installed it at another place on the SC premises.

Dhaka leg

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edition -- and a BPL-record 148-run fourth-wicket partnership between Evans and Ryan ten Doeschate to boost their side to 176 for three and set up a 38-run win against Comilla.

In the second game, Chittagong won by three wickets against Dhaka in chase of 139 for nine, thanks to a late cameo of 25 runs off 10 balls from Robbie Frylinck. Dhaka skipper Shakib Al Hasan scripted an all-round performance in the game as he scored a run-a-ball 34 before ending with figures of four for 16 runs with the ball, but unfortunately ended up on the losing side.

However, Rajshahi batsman Evans's century remained the highlight of the day. Being sent in to bat, Rajshahi lost three quick wickets but the unbroken stand with ten Doeschate made sure their side finished with a flourish, which they certainly did with 74 runs coming in the last five overs.

ACC finds 40pc doctors

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take stern action for negligence of duty.

ACC sources said some doctors sign the attendance sheet once or twice a week to draw their salaries, but remain absent throughout the month.

The ACC will send reports today to the authorities concerned for taking action against the absentees, he said.

The 11 teams visited Sarkari Karmachari Hospital, Najira Bazar Mattri Sadan, Mugda General Hospital, Mymensingh's Muktagacha Upazila Health Complex, Delduar Upazila Health Complex in Tangail, Pirgachha Upazila Health Complex in Rangpur, Godagari Upazila Health Complex in Rajshahi, Dinaipur Sadar Hospital, Kumarkhali Upazila Health Complex in Kushtia, Pabna Sadar General Hospital and Atgharia Upazila Health Complex.

The ACC matched the numbers of doctors present with the rosters of the hospitals and health complexes and found discrepancies almost everywhere.

Eleven out of 99 doctors on the roster were absent at Sarkari Karmachari Hospital and Najira Bazar Mattri Sadan.

Mugda General Hospital in the capital, however, had all doctors present during the ACC visit. But the anti-graft watchdog caught an emergency division staffer Abu Musa Bhuiyan taking bribes from a patient's relatives.

The hospital authorities later suspended him.

The scenario was even worse outside Dhaka.

In the 250-bed Pabna Medical

College Hospital, a total of 35 out of 49 doctors, including its assistant director Dr Ranjan Kumar Dutta, were found not to have arrived around 9:00am, reports our Pabna correspondent.

The doctors were supposed to be present within 8:30am.

After going through the hospital's register, ACC Assistant Director Atikur Rahman said, "We came to know that 49 doctors are posted to the hospital. But we found only 14 present," he said.

Ranjan and some of the absent doctors later came late while some were absent.

Asked, Ranjan said he was late yesterday due to some personal reasons.

He, however, admitted that irregular timing was a common practice. "But doctors do not remain absent," he claimed.

Later, the team visited Atghoria Upazila Health Complex and found that most of the doctors were there on time.

In Rangpur, ACC officials visited Pirgachha Upazila Health Complex at 9:50am. While 10 doctors are posted for services, the team found only two doctors present at the time.

"The two doctors were on deputation to Rangpur Sadar Hospital and the six others, including the chief of the health complex, were absent," said Prabir Kumar Das, deputy assistant director of the ACC.

The Daily Star tried to reach Director General of Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) Mohammad Abul Kalam Azad for comments but his

May refuses to rule out

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May vowed to be "more flexible" with lawmakers in trying to agree changes to the Northern Irish backstop, an insurance policy to ensure there will be no return to border checks between the British province and Ireland.

"I will then take the conclusions of those discussions back to the EU," May said. "My focus continues to be on what is needed to secure the support of this House in favour of a Brexit deal with the EU."

Hardline supporters of Brexit in May's Conservative party object above all to the fact that Britain cannot unilaterally end the backstop, which would keep it in a customs union with the EU until an alternative way of ensuring an open border is found. Brussels says this provision is non-negotiable.

May's task is gargantuan: Convince the EU to reopen negotiations and then secure enough changes to gain the support of at least 115 lawmakers who previously voted against the deal.

The EU, which has an economy more than six times the size of the United Kingdom, says it wants an orderly exit, but senior officials have expressed frustration and sorrow at London's deepening crisis.

German Europe Minister Michael Roth said that even William Shakespeare would not have been able to think up a Brexit tragedy of such drama.

Amid fears that the world's fifth largest economy could drop out of the EU without a deal, some lawmakers are planning to wrest control of the process from the government.

The EU's chief negotiator, Michel Barnier, said the bloc was ready to work on the political declaration on future EU-UK ties that accompanies the binding withdrawal deal, but that the withdrawal deal already agreed was the best one possible.

In a sign of just how grave the political crisis has become, May was forced to deny a report by the Daily Telegraph that she was considering amending the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, which ended 30 years of violence in Northern Ireland. An open border with Ireland is

Men possess

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The new report from the charity, published ahead of the World Economic Forum in Davos, also found that billionaires around the world saw their combined fortunes grow by \$2.5 billion each day in 2018.

The world's richest man, Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, saw his fortune increase to \$112 billion last year, Oxfam said, pointing out that just one per cent of his wealth was the equivalent to the entire health budget of Ethiopia, a country of 105 million people.

The 3.8 billion people at the bottom of the scale meanwhile saw their wealth decline by 11 per cent last year, Oxfam said, stressing that the growing gap between rich and poor was undermining the fight against poverty, damaging economies and fuelling public anger.

"People across the globe are angry and frustrated," warned Oxfam executive director Winnie Byanyima in a statement.

The numbers are stark: Between 1980 and 2016, the poorest half of humanity pocketed just 12 cents on each dollar of global income growth, compared with the 27 cents captured by the top one per cent.

UNDER-TAXING THE RICH

Oxfam warned that governments were exacerbating inequality by increasingly underfunding public services like healthcare and education at the same time as they consistently under-tax the wealthy.

Calls for hiking rates on the wealthy have multiplied amid growing popular outrage in a number of countries over

swelling inequality.

In the United States, new congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez made headlines earlier this month by proposing to tax the ultra-rich up to 70 per cent.

The self-described Democratic Socialist's proposal came after President Donald Trump's sweeping tax reforms cut the top rate last year from 39.6 per cent to 37 per cent.

And in Europe, the "yellow vest" movement that has been rocking France with anti-government protests since November is demanding that President Emmanuel Macron repeal controversial cuts to wealth taxes on high earners.

"The super-rich and corporations are paying lower rates of tax than they have in decades," the Oxfam report said, pointing out that "the human costs -- children without teachers, clinics without medicines -- are huge".

"Piecemeal private services punish poor people and privilege elites," it said, stressing that every day, some 10,000 people die due to lacking access to affordable healthcare.

The report, released as the world's rich, famous and influential began arriving for the plush annual gathering at the luxury Swiss ski resort town, urged governments to "stop the race to the bottom" in taxing rich individuals and big corporations.

Oxfam found that asking the richest to pay just 0.5 per cent extra tax on their wealth "could raise more money than it would cost to educate all 262 million children out of school and provide healthcare that would save the lives of 3.3 million people".