



A migrant gestures while disembarking from the Dutch-flagged Sea Watch 3 NGO rescue vessel after it docked in the Sicilian port of Catania, southeastern Sicily, yesterday. The ship, carrying 47 rescued migrants, was finally given permission to dock in Catania after six other countries agreed to take them in. It had been waiting off the coast of Sicily in the Mediterranean since January 19.

PHOTO: AFP

## Migrants land in Sicily as ship crew faces uncertain fate

AFP, Catania

A charity ship carrying 47 rescued migrants docked in the Sicilian port of Catania yesterday, where the crew feared legal action as Italy's far-right interior minister tries to stop new arrivals.

The Dutch-flagged Sea Watch 3, which had been waiting off the coast of Sicily with people it rescued in the Mediterranean on January 19, was finally given permission to anchor in Catania after six other countries agreed to take them in.

## Extradite

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after a US court rejected his appeal for residency. Mohiuddin was hanged along with four other convicted killers of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on January 28, 2010.

The minister said Miller promised to convey the request of Dhaka to Washington.

The US envoy told reporters that he discussed with the foreign minister issues like strengthening good governance and democracy in Bangladesh, building stronger US-Bangladesh ties, Bangladesh's engagement with the Indo-Pacific Strategy and military purchase from the US.

Despite repeated requests from Bangladesh to deport Rashed, the US granted him political asylum a few years ago.

On the Rohingya issue, Momen said he asked the US envoy to take effective steps and tell its partners to influence early repatriation of over a million of forcible displaced Myanmar nationals.

On the election issue, the foreign minister said the US diplomat talked about the issue of a few "irregularities" raised by some quarters in Bangladesh.

Meanwhile, Saudi Ambassador to Bangladesh Abdullah HM Al Mutairi paid a courtesy call on the minister.

## Equal rights

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given as part of a project titled – "Development Assistance for the Small Ethnic Communities Living in Plain Land", initiated by the Prime Minister's Office in 1996. The project aims to support students of ethnic communities living in plain land.

The scholarship will help the students pursue higher studies and flourish their talent, Hasina said.

This year, some 500 students -- 320 male and 180 female -- were given Tk 25,000 each as scholarships.

Hasina urged those of small ethnic communities to not "feel neglected", adding that her government's goal was to change the fate of the country's people and give them decent livelihoods.

Emphasising on conserving the diversity of lifestyle among ethnic groups, the PM urged them to uphold their own culture and uniqueness.

She hoped that the participation in state affairs by those from the ethnic communities would increase in the future.

Education Minister Dipu Moni, PMO Secretary Sajjadul Hassan and Director General (admin) Khalilur Rahman also spoke at the ceremony, which was presided over by Principal Secretary to the PM Md Nojibur Rahman.

On behalf of the scholarship recipients, A Myat, from the Rakhine community of Barguna district and a student of Bangladesh University of Textile Engineering (BUTEX), also spoke on the occasion.

## Kanamachhi has to stop

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The petitioner's lawyer Manzill Murshid placed the similar argument before the bench of Justice Moyeenul Islam Chowdhury and Justice Md Ashraf Kamal.

In response to his argument, the court said it would give some guidelines on Sunday so that nobody needed to move any case before the court for protecting the rivers and evicting land grabbers.

Manzill said the government formed the NRPC following a landmark HC verdict in 2009, but it had no power to take any effective action against land grabbers.

Yesterday, the HC thanked journalists for their reporting on various irregularities like river encroachment.

Journalists are like "whistleblowers", and the court can take action against the irregularities following their reports in the media, it added.

On Wednesday, the HC bench declared that rivers were a "living entity, legal person and juristic person (artificial person) and have the rights

to protect their rights".

It said all the 450 rivers of the country would have to be protected to save the human being from damage and pollution.

On November 7, 2016, the Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh filed the petition after a report headlined "Time to declare Turag dead" was published in The Daily Star the day before.

Two days later, an HC bench directed the government to stop earth-filling, encroachment and construction along the banks of Turag.

It also issued a rule upon the authorities to explain why their inaction in this regard should not be declared illegal.

In line with the court order, chief judicial magistrate of Gazipur submitted a report before the HC in October 2017. The report said 30 structures were set up illegally along the river banks in Gazipur.

On December 13 that year, the HC directed the authorities to demolish the structures immediately.

## Infected with syndicates

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machines and equipment for misappropriating money. There are allegations that nexuses are created with contractors to embezzle the money," it said.

The ACC also said medical equipment is supplied to different upazila-level hospitals, which have no skilled manpower for operating the tools. As a result, those equipment remain unused for a long time and later go out of order.

In many cases, money is misappropriated in the name of supplying medical equipment to hospitals or repairing the tools, the report said.

The ACC found that "syndicates" are actively taking patients from government hospitals to the private ones. The syndicate members get commissions for doing so.

The report reads, "Usually, a group of influential people with the help of civil surgeons' offices set up diagnostic centres, although they lack proper equipment. Later, they influence doctors and hospital employees to send patients to those centres for unnecessary medical examinations."

The report added that in absence of proper monitoring, hospitals do not provide patients with medicines, specified by the government, even if those are available there. "These medicines are sold in the black market," it said.

The report said the ACC learnt that students got admission to private medical colleges but not on the basis of merit.

Besides, the Central Medical Store Depot (CMSD) at the Directorate General of Health (DGHS) awarded tenders to some "specific organisations", it said.

Some pharmaceutical companies manufacture counterfeit and low-quality medicines. To sell them, the companies "influence" doctors who prescribe those to patients.

In its 25-point recommendation, the ACC asked to include experts in the purchase committees to stop corruption in procuring medicines and medical equipment; forming "receive committees" that will verify authentication of the demand; and surveillance committee to monitor activities of diagnostic and pathology labs.

Others recommendations included ensuring regular transfer of physicians and hospital employees, automation of revenue collection from the hospitals, setting up CCTV cameras to check brokers, and increasing the duration of internship of doctors to two years.

After receiving the report, Health Minister Zahid Malik said they would

not allow any corruption in the health sector.

He said they had already transferred some "people" and that unnecessary purchase of medical equipment would be stopped.

### TRANSFER, INVESTIGATION

The health ministry, in separate orders yesterday, transferred 23 officers and employees of different organisations under the ministry.

The ministry took the initiatives following a request from the ACC to transfer 23 "corrupt" officers and employees on an emergency basis.

Some corrupt, authoritarian and power abusing officers and staffers of different offices of the DGHS have created a strong nexus, taking advantage of working at the same place for a long time, the ACC said in a letter to the DGHS DG.

The ministry has also formed seven enquiry teams to look into the reason behind the absence of physicians at different hospitals and health complexes in Dhaka, Pabna, Kushtia, Mymensingh, Tangail, Dinajpur, Rajshahi and Rangpur.

The move came after teams from the ACC made a surprise visit to 11 government hospitals and health complexes on January 22 and found that 92 doctors out of a total of 230 were absent at their workplaces.

## Myth of King

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The pages were found in a series of 16th century books deep in the archive of Bristol Central Library and are now being analysed by academics from Bristol and Durham universities.

The Vulgate Cycle is believed to have been used by English writer Sir Thomas Malory as a source for his Le Morte D'Arthur, which is itself is the main source text for many modern retellings of the Arthurian legend in English.

Dr Leah Tether, who is leading the team of academics, said what's notable is that the English version's narrative is different compared to the pieces.

"We can't put two and two together but we saw that in general battle sequences there's more detail, they're more extended and the way in which a character dies is different," she said.

"These fragments of the story of Merlin are a wonderfully exciting find, which may have implications for the study not just of this text but also of other related and later texts that have shaped our modern understanding of the Arthurian legend," she added.

## Court denies

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remand for further interrogation about the matter.

On the other hand, the defence submitted a petition seeking bail for the accused, which the magistrate turned down and sent Kader to Dhaka Central Jail in Keraniganj.

The IO is yet to submit any petitions to show Kader arrested in the two other cases filed with Chawkbazar Police Station.

Customs Intelligence and Investigation Directorate (CIID) on Wednesday arrested MA Kader.

The move came after the CIID found Crescent Group colluded with officials of Janata Bank's Imamganj branch in Dhaka to launder a total of Tk 1,297.65 crore abroad against 657 fake export bills.

Apart from MA Kader, the CIID filed cases under the Money Laundering Prevention Act, 2012 against 16 others -- including Managing Director of Crescent Leather and Crescent Tanneries Sultana Begum, Rimex Footwear Chairman Abdul Aziz, its managing director Litul Jahan Mira and 13 present and former officials of Janata Bank -- with Chawkbazar Police Station.

## 2 Gonoforum

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"We've clearly conveyed to them [the two MPs] our party's decision of not joining parliament, and they won't do it," he said.

The two MPs-elect -- Sultan Mohammad Mansur (Moulvibazar-2) and Mokabbir Khan (Sylhet-2) -- have reportedly expressed their desire to join parliament, going against the alliance's decision.

The BNP, the Gonoforum and some other parties joined the December 30 polls under the banner of the Oikyafront. The BNP bagged six seats while the Gonoforum two. However, the alliance rejected the polls, alleging "massive irregularities". They also demanded a fresh election.

Meanwhile, the Oikyafront yesterday announced a two-day programme, including a demonstration wearing black badges and holding a public hearing, protesting what it called "vote robbery" in the election.

The alliance's spokesperson, Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, announced the programme after the meeting.

"Today's Oikyafront steering committee meeting decided to hold a demonstration wearing black badges in front of the Jatiya Press Club on February 6," he said.

Besides this, he said, their alliance would hold a public hearing, with the participation of the Oikyafront candidates and the "victimised voters", on February 24.

Fakhrul said they would later announce the names of the venues.

He said their alliance deferred its national dialogue, which was scheduled for February 6.

On January 17, the Oikyafront announced that it would hold a national dialogue in the capital demanding fresh polls after rejecting the 11th parliamentary election results.

Apart from Fakhrul, JSD President ASM Abdul Rob, General Secretary Abdul Malek Ratan, Gono Forum Executive President Subrata Chowdhury, Nagorik Oikya Convener Mahmudur Rahman Manna, Krishak Samik Janata League General Secretary Iqbal Siddiqui and Gonoshasthya Kendra Founder Dr Zafurullah Chowdhury, among others, joined the meeting chaired by Dr Kamal.

# Democracy vs graft

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"It is beyond controversy that where corruption begins, all rights end. Corruption devalues human rights, chokes development and undermines justice, liberty, equality, fraternity which are the core values of our constitution," stated the HC.

In the verdict, the court focused on the state of corruption in our country.

"Today, corruption which includes financial crime also in our country not only poses a grave danger to the concept of good governance, it also threatens the very foundation of democracy, social justice and the rule of law," it observed.

The way the last parliamentary election was held has exposed vulnerability of our democracy. The election was marred by alleged corrupt practices. It is beyond debate that a flawed election is always a threat to democracy.

The TI is not alone in speaking about the crisis of democracy. Its cross analysis incorporates data from the Democracy Index by The Economist Intelligence Unit, the Freedom in the World Index by Freedom House and the Annual Democracy Report by Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem).

Let's take a brief look at the Democracy Index produced by The Economist Intelligence Unit in January this year to know our position.

Bangladesh has been ranked 88th among 167 countries with an overall score of 5.57 out of 10 on the democracy index. It was ranked 92nd with a score of 5.43 in the previous year.

This shows Bangladesh advanced four notches on the latest index. But a comparison with the 2006 score is not encouraging.

In 2006, Bangladesh's overall score was 6.11 on the index. Since 2008, the score has been in decline and has remained below 6.

Based on the scores on the democracy index, the countries were put in four categories in terms of functioning of governments -- full democracy, flawed democracy, hybrid regime and authoritarian regime.

New Zealand, Australia, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, the UK, and 12 other countries that scored above 8 on the index were placed in the category of full democracy.

Due to its poor score, Bangladesh was put in the category of hybrid regime along with 38 other countries, including Bhutan, Nepal and Pakistan in South Asia.

India and Sri Lanka were placed in the category of flawed democracy with an overall score of 7.23 and 6.19 respectively.

Countries that were put in the category of hybrid regime scored greater than 4 and less than or equal to 6.

If one goes through the definition of hybrid regime given in the Democracy Index of The Economist Intelligence Unit, he will find its relevance to Bangladesh.

About hybrid regimes, it says, "Elections have substantial irregularities that often prevent them from

being both free and fair. Government pressure on opposition parties and candidates may be common. Serious weaknesses are more prevalent than in flawed democracies -- in political culture, functioning of government and political participation.

"Corruption tends to be widespread and the rule of law is weak. Civil society is weak. Typically, there is harassment of and pressure on journalists, and the judiciary is not independent."

It defined a hybrid regime as a system where "corruption tends to be widespread and the rule of law is weak." Bangladesh's poor score on the TI index indicates prevalence of corruption here.

Our overall score on the rule of law index by the World Justice Project (WJP) last year is also appalling.

Bangladesh has been ranked 102nd among 113 countries with an overall score of 0.41 out of 1. Denmark topped the list with an overall score of 0.89.

According to the Washington-based WJP, effective rule of law reduces corruption, combats poverty and disease, and protects people from injustices large and small.

The state of the rule of law speaks about the state of democracy in a country. The rule of law has been proved an effective tool worldwide to fight graft.

Take Denmark for example. It topped the list of the rule of law index last year and also topped the TI's latest index.

Free media is also considered as one of the effective tools to combat corruption. A free press, according to former chief justice of India RM Lodha, is the heart and soul of constitutional democracy.

The Press freedom Index produced by Reporters Without Borders testifies it. The countries that scored well on the indexes of democracy, corruption and the rule of law performed better in last year's press freedom index too.

Bangladesh could not perform well also on the press freedom index. Its position remained unchanged at 146 as in the previous year with 48.62 points.

Given the above examples, the findings in the TI's cross analysis is worth thinking about.

But the reality here tells a different story. Whenever any global index goes against us, we outright reject it. This is the easiest way. The Anti-Corruption Commission chief and a minister have already questioned the accuracy of the TI index. It seems we are stuck in the same old pattern.

As Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has announced zero tolerance to graft, it now depends on her government's top policymakers whether they will take the TI findings into consideration to improve the situation or follow the same old pattern to counter the TI.

Everyone knows that putting the blame on the messenger never works.

## Facebook sees higher

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nine percent to 2.32 billion, the company said in its fourth quarter update.

Net profit for Facebook, which makes most of its money from online advertising, was up a strong 61 percent from the same period last year.

"Our community and business continue to grow," co-founder and chief executive Mark Zuckerberg said in an earnings call.

Facebook shares jumped 11.5 percent to \$167.67 in after-market trades that followed release of the earnings.

The latest update showed Facebook increased its user base both in the United States and Europe, where the social network has faced challenges over data protection scandals.

"With these results, Facebook has clearly demonstrated that the challenges of 2018 have not had a lasting impact on its ability to increase both revenues and usage," said analyst Debra Aho Williamson of the research firm eMarketer.

"Advertisers are clearly still very reliant on Facebook."

The fact that daily active usage in North America and Europe increased was a "surprise" after the flatness seen in the US and Canada last year and the falloff that took place in Europe, according to the analyst.

Facebook has pledged to hire thousands of employees and invest in new technologies to respond to concerns about manipulation and abuse, and to take data protection more seriously.

The number of employees as of December 31 was 35,587, an increase of 42 percent year-over-year.

"We've fundamentally changed how we run our company to focus on the biggest social issues, and we're investing more to build new and inspiring ways for people to connect," Zuckerberg said.

But analysts say the trust issue is crucial for Facebook if it wants to move forward in its mission to connect the world.

Facebook estimated that approxi-

mately 2.7 billion people use its "family" of services including Instagram, WhatsApp, Messenger, and its core social network.

The company faces demographic challenges as younger users shift to other platforms, seeing Facebook as less cool than it once was.

Visual social network Instagram has been a bright spot for Facebook, with use and revenue rising.

Analysts are watching to see how well Facebook's other services, including Instagram, messaging services WhatsApp and Messenger and its Oculus virtual reality division, play into its fortunes.

"Messaging is an area that is growing most quickly, and this year people are going to feel these apps becoming the center of their social experience in more ways," Zuckerberg said.

Facebook is working to let people send messages to one another no matter which of the company's messaging apps they are using, with an increasing emphasis on making content encrypted and ephemeral, according to Zuckerberg.

As it approaches its 15th anniversary, Facebook has been able to keep revenue momentum thanks to its unique advertising model that allows marketers to reach specific segments of users.

More than 90 million small businesses use Facebook, according to the social network.

Zuckerberg has consistently defended the social network's business of keeping the service free by targeting ads based on interests, adamant the social network does not sell people's data.

"The internet is a massive force for change, and we are at the center of a lot of the debates that brings," Zuckerberg said.

"I do feel like we have started to turn a corner and have a clear plan for what we need to do here now."