

ROHINGYA RETURN BJP, Congress assure Dhaka of cooperation

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

India's ruling BJP and main opposition Congress party have assured Bangladesh of India's cooperation for early repatriation of the Rohingya refugees who fled Myanmar's brutal military crackdown in August 2017 and are now living in Cox's Bazar refugee camps.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and former prime minister Manmohan Singh gave the assurance when visiting Bangladesh Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen called on both of them separately in New Delhi yesterday.

While thanking Modi for India's humanitarian assistance to Rohingyas, Momen requested India's support for the early repatriation of

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Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen calls on Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi at his residence in New Delhi yesterday morning. Momen is on a three-day official visit to India.

COURTESY: PRESS INFORMATION BUREAU, INDIA

Four more ex-ministers made chiefs of House bodies

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Four more former ministers, who were dropped from Sheikh Hasina's new cabinet, have been made chiefs of the same number of parliamentary standing committees last night.

With Leader of the House Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's approval, Chief Whip Noor-E-Alam Chowdhury proposed the names of the committees and the members in accordance with the Rules of Procedure.

The Jatiya Sangsad, with Deputy Speaker M Fazley Rabbi Mia in the chair, unanimously adopted the proposal by voice votes.

Former information minister Hasanul Haq Inu was made chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on the information ministry. The other members of the committee are Golam Mohammad Kader, Kazi Keramat Ali, Begum Simin Hossen Rimi, Shafiqur Rahman, Saimun Sarwar Kamol, Akbar Hossen Pathan Faruque and Ibadul Karim.

Former housing and public works minister Mosharraf Hossen was made chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on the Ministry of

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Madrasa teacher 'confesses to raping minor girl'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

A madrasa teacher yesterday confessed before a Rajshahi court that he raped a minor girl in Charghat upazila of the district, said police.

The accused, Shahjahan Gazi, 60, is an Arabic teacher of Fatehpur Furqania Madrasa and imam of Sarkarpara Mosque.

Abdullah Al Amin Bhuiyan, judicial magistrate of Rajshahi's cognisance court, recorded the confessional statement as per the law.

Police arrested Shahjahan from his relative's house in Govindapur village of the upazila and placed him before court in the afternoon.

According to police, in the confessional statement Shahjahan said, "I teach people good things but I wrongfully committed the sin and

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Thirteen out of 39 buses run without fitness certificates

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An inquiry committee, formed following a High Court order, has found that 33 percent buses had no fitness certificate that run on the roads, said a survey report conducted on 39 buses.

The 15-member committee, led by Road Transport and Highway Division Additional Secretary Rawshan Ara Begum, found the result after conducting the survey in Dhaka's Banani and on three highways -- Dhaka-Tangail, Dhaka-Chattogram, Dhaka-Mawa, -- between November 20 and December 11 last year.

The committee, however, said the result "does not reflect ground reality" of the country, citing several limitations. The committee also recommended engaging a research organisation for carrying out a scientific survey on the vehicles to get the "real picture".

A BRTA lawyer yesterday placed the survey result before the HC in which

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Doomed to early demise

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A private operator, however, said they find properly maintained buses to be financially viable for 10 to 20 years depending on brand and model.

The government has bought 600 buses and 500 trucks from India, with loans from the Indian government, and some of the vehicles have arrived and the rest are expected to join the BRTC fleet by April, officials said.

The new buses have been bought at a time when the state-run transport agency has incurred losses of over Tk 9 crore in the last two and a half years and arrears of drivers and staffers of 17 out of 21 depots remain unpaid for months.

The authorities said they suffered the losses as they had to implement a new pay scale for their staff and no new buses were included in the fleet in the last six years. Beside, the bus fare remained the same over the last few years.

But road safety campaigners and some staff said mismanagement and corruption by some BRTC officials were mainly to blame.

POOR MAINTENANCE

A manager of a BRTC bus depot said the corporation has a serious shortage of skilled mechanics and funds to repair the buses.

"We get money to buy spares months after requisitions are made and during that time the vehicles remain parked gathering dust."

The manager, wishing not to be named, said procurement of "poor-quality buses" was hurting the BRTC operations.

A BRTC driver, however, claimed that corruption by depot managers was a major reason for the dilapidated condition of the buses.

"When a part needs replacement, the depot manager would make every effort to replace it with a used one. But he will make a bill for a new part," the driver said.

Another driver said often buses are cannibalised for parts to keep other buses in service.

Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader while exchanging views with BRTC officials, including its chairman, on January 22, said, "BRTC vehicles are in this state due to a lack of repairs and maintenance."

"New vehicles will arrive and commuters will get some relief. But for how long? I want to know for how long the vehicles will be operational?" he said.

PRIVATE OPERATORS DOING FINE

The Daily Star asked several BRTC officials how long the buses are supposed to last. However, none of them could say it.

But Romesh Chandra Ghosh, managing director of Shyamoli Paribahan Ltd, said Tata and Ashok Leyland buses are commercially viable for 15 years, subject to overhauling of the engines every three years.

Most of the buses in the BRTC fleet are made in India, mainly by Tata Motors and Ashok Leyland.

It takes around Tk 1 lakh or 1.50 lakh for each overhauling, said Romesh, who has 44 years of experience in the transport sector.

He said Japanese buses can be economically viable for 15-20 years while Korean buses more than 10 years.

Another transport businessman,

NEW VEHICLES			
VEHICLE TYPE	NUMBER	VALUE PER UNIT	MAKER
Double-decker bus	300	90 lakh	Ashok Leyland
Non-AC bus	100	49 lakh	Tata Motors
AC city bus	100	67 lakh	Ashok Leyland
AC intercity bus	100	72 lakh	Ashok Leyland
16.2-tonne truck	350	20 lakh	VE Commercial Vehicles
10.2-tonne truck	150	21 lakh	Tata Motors

**** Values include VAT and cost of 10 percent spare parts**

wishing anonymity, said buses from India and Korea become inoperative within five to six years only when the BRTC runs them.

"Lack of timely and proper maintenance is the main reason behind it. In many cases, they would not use the required parts leading to further damage to the vehicles," he said.

Talking to The Daily Star on January 30, BRTC Chairman Farid Ahmed Bhuiyan apparently blamed poorly selected make and model of the buses.

"Spare parts have to be available for maintenance. If you don't have the facilities, you run into problems. That's exactly what happened with the Chinese buses."

The corporation purchased 289 Chinese buses in 2012-13. At least 114 of them are out of service now, he said, adding that spare part for those buses were unavailable in the local market.

About the Daewoo buses, he claimed that the BRTC got only "four percent spare parts" with the vehicles and those were all used within 2016.

Spares for Daewoo buses are costly and only one company in Bangladesh imports them, the BRTC chairman said.

Asked where poor decisions were made, he said, "Holding this post, I can't comment. However, issues of maintenance, availability of spare parts, and technology [used in the buses] should be kept in mind while purchasing buses."

Sidestepping a question on the allegations of poor maintenance and corruption, he said they would start software-based fleet management system in two depots -- Gabtoli and Kalyanpur. The system would be introduced in other depots later, he said.

"Everything will be under proper monitoring, which will ensure proper maintenance."

Software-based fleet management is an application that helps the authori-

ties organise, manage, and coordinate work on vehicles from a central information system.

Farid said this time they were bringing in 10 percent spare parts with each of the new buses and that should enable them to service the vehicles for six years.

"If we can operate these buses smoothly for six years, we will be able to make up the losses," he said, adding, "We hope that people will get proper service this time."

BRTC Gabtoli Depot Manager Md Moniruzzaman yesterday said the software-based fleet management system has been implemented at his depot on February 1.

Mozammel Hoque Chowdhury, secretary general of Bangladesh Jatri Kalyan Samity, said, "People will not get the benefit of the new buses unless the BRTC operates the vehicles with professionalism."

Until the irregularities and corruption in the BRTC are eradicated, things will not change much, he added.

A BPL to cherish

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served up only two. Dhaka's mystery off-spinner Aliss Al Islam became the first bowler to bag a hattrick on T20 debut while Comilla pacer Wahab Riaz and Dhaka's Andre Russell also took three in three.

The Chattogram phase had the most excitement, with the highest and second-highest totals in the history of the BPL -- Rangpur Riders' 239 for four against Chittagong Vikings and Comilla's 237 for five against Khulna

Titans -- being registered in the port city.

However, although a huge buzz was created by the fact that Rangpur's AB de Villiers, Sylhet Sixers' David Warner and Comilla's Steve Smith would be playing their maiden BPL, fans would have been disappointed to not have seen more of the Australian duo after both Smith and Warner were forced into early departures owing to injuries.

On the other hand, de Villiers did his part to heighten the standard of the tournament as he strung together an

unbeaten 184-run third-wicket partnership with Englishman Alex Hales -- the highest for the wicket in BPL history -- during their encounter with Dhaka. To add to the fans' dismay, Hales also had to leave early from the tournament after suffering an injury against Rajshahi Kings.

On a grander scale, the fans have witnessed a month packed with action and they will be hoping for a perfect end with some fireworks in today's final.

Bees have brains

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Chimpanzees, parrots and pigeons are just some of the creatures that have demonstrated the capacity to add and subtract.

In the new study, a team led by Dr Scarlett Howard, first taught their bees to recognise colours as symbols for either addition or subtraction. Specifically, blue meant "more" and yellow meant "less".

Next, their bees were trained to enter Y-shaped mazes in which they had to make a choice between two sets of

shapes.

In each case, if they made the correct choice they were rewarded with a sugar water treat, whereas the wrong choice would yield a bitter-tasting quinine liquid.

At the entrance to the maze, the bees were met with between one and five shapes, coloured either blue or yellow.

Next they flew into a chamber where they could fly towards either the original number of shapes, plus or minus one, or the incorrect number of shapes.

If they first encountered blue they had

to add, and if yellow they had to subtract.

Over the course of 100 trials, the researchers trained 14 bees to choose the correct option around 75 percent of the time, the scientists wrote as they published their findings in the journal Science Advances.

Dr Howard compared the experiments to humans first learning to link mathematical symbols with concepts.

"We learn as children that a plus symbol means you need to add two or more quantities, while a minus symbol means you subtract," she said.

1 year jail after 2 decades

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months in jail.

Three other accused -- Polychem's manager ASM Golam Qader, and pharmacists Mahbubul Alam and Delwar Hossain -- were acquitted in the case as the allegations against them were not proved, according to the verdict.

All the accused except for Qader were present at the court.

Soon after the verdict, Rob secured ad-interim bail from the same court, saying he would appeal against the conviction.

Expressing dissatisfaction over the verdict, Public Prosecutor Mohammad Nadim Miah told reporters that they would appeal to the High Court, challenging the acquittal of Polychem's three officials and the lenient punishment of Rob.

He said the prosecution was able to prove the allegations against all the accused and sought the maximum punishment for the accused.

"But the court punished only one of them. Those who were responsible for quality control and manufacture of the drug were acquitted," Nadim said.

In its judgment, the court said it has been proved that paracetamol syrup, manufactured by Polychem, contained industrial toxic chemical diethylene glycol.

"M/S Polychem Laboratories Limited director cannot avoid responsibility for manufacturing the adulterated and sub-standard drug. The court thinks he should get appropriate punishment."

Use of toxic industrial chemical in paracetamol syrup is a heinous offence, it mentioned.

"Dishonest businesspeople produce adulterated and sub-standard medicine for excessive profits ... It is like playing games with people's lives. This is a heinous crime."

The judge further said the case had gone on for 26 years, and the company's managing director Harun-ur Rashid died during the trial while Rob spent a month and 14 days in jail.

"Rob is now 65. He faced harassment as he had to appear before the

court for so many years. Abdur Rob has been given a lenient sentence, considering his age, physical condition and detention," he said.

On July 22, 2014, the same court had awarded three officials of Adflame Pharmaceuticals 10 years' rigorous imprisonment for manufacturing adulterated drug that killed 76 children in 1990.

It also fined the three convicts Tk 2 lakh each. The convicts are Adflame director Helena Pasha, and manager Mizanur Rahman -- both aged around 70 -- and production officer Nigendra Nath Bala.

Later on August 17, 2015, the court handed down 20 years' imprisonment to three directors and three employees of pharmaceutical company BCI (Bangladesh Chemical Industries)

- Case filed --19 December,1992
- Charge framing, case stayed -- December 1994
- Case resumed -- 2011

gladesh) Ltd and fined them Tk 4 lakh each in two cases for producing and marketing toxic paracetamol syrup.

The drug administration filed the cases in 1992 for using poisonous diethylene glycol in two batches of its paracetamol syrup that killed at least 76 children.

Trial proceedings against the companies were stayed in 1994 following a HC order.

The proceedings resumed in 2011 after an investigative report by The Daily Star in November 2009 revealed corruption by government agencies to save the accused.

From June to August in 2009, at least 28 children died of renal failure after they took paracetamol syrup and suspension allegedly manufactured by Rid Pharma. The case is pending with the HC.

According to a survey by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, 2,700 children died due to renal failure after taking toxic syrup from 1982 to 1992.

Teachers

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The order came after Ziaul Kabir Dulu, a guardian of a Dhaka Ideal School and College student, filed a writ in 2011, challenging the legality of running coaching centres alongside classrooms by the teachers of schools and colleges that enjoy the government's monthly payment order (MPO) benefits.

The policy defined "coaching" as teaching students before or after the class inside or outside the institution. It also prohibits teachers of government and non-government schools, colleges and madrasas from giving private tuition during school hours.

According to the policy, a teacher can at best teach 10 students of other institutions a day upon prior permission from his/her head of the institution. S/he will also have to notify the school head about the students and furnish the head with the students' class and roll numbers in black and white.

Teachers can, however, take remedial classes for weaker students only on request from guardians, and the head of the institution would arrange such classes, the policy said.

For extra classes, a student of metropolitan areas will be charged Tk 300 per month for each subject and that of district towns and upazila levels Tk 200 and Tk 150 respectively. The head of the institution can reduce or waive the fees for poor students.

A teacher will have to take at least 12 remedial classes on each subject every month and a maximum of 40 students can attend those.

No teacher will be allowed to have direct or indirect involvement with any coaching centre operating commercially.

With three monitoring committees, the policy kept the provision for stringent punishment for violators, including cancellation of MPO.

Although the government policy is in effect, it is largely ignored by a section of teachers, who continue coaching and tutoring students privately.

Contacted, Ziaul Kabir Dulu, president of Obhimbabok Oikya Forum, a platform of guardians, demanded

banning of coaching students by enacting law.

Delivering verdict on the five petitions, the court yesterday said the "modern government" could make any policy, issue circulars and frame rules when it is necessary for the state, and it is the government's constitutional rights.

Three petitions were filed by several government college teachers in 2012 and 2018, challenging the legality of the policy.

Meanwhile, Farhana Khanam, a teacher of Viqarunnisa Noon School and College, filed a writ last year, challenging the Anti-Corruption Commission's allegation against her of running coaching business.

ACC lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan told The Daily Star that the commission was yet to decide whether it would move any appeal before the Supreme Court's Appellate Division, challenging any part of the HC verdict.

Barrister M Amir-Ul Islam, barrister Tania Amir and advocate Nasir Uddin appeared for the writ petitioners.

'VIGILANT AGAINST GRAFT'

In its verdict, the HC said huge corruption is taking place at some government institutions, including banks, customs houses, ports and land offices, and the ACC should be more vigilant in this regard.

The offices where serious financial crimes take place should be on the commission's priority list, the court said, adding that the educational institutions should be in the bottom of the ACC's priority.

The anti-graft body has jurisdiction to inquire and investigate the corruption allegations against the teachers of government schools and colleges, as they are public servants.

Moreover, the allegation falls under section 166 of the Penal Code and the Anti-Corruption Commission Act, 2004, the court said.

But the commission has no jurisdiction to inquire or investigate the allegation against the teachers of non-government educational institutions, the court added.

War heroes

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11:00am and demonstrated there for almost one and a half hours.

Talking to journalists, Selim's wife Dilara Begum yesterday said her husband had no personal enmity with anybody and might have been killed for his rebellious attitude.

Jahangir Alam, former commander of Pakshey Muktiyoddha Shangsad, said it could not be accepted that a freedom fighter was killed in front of his home like that.

Besides, freedom fighter Fazlur

Rahman Fantu said Selim actively collected a list of fake farmers who claimed to be land owners in the Rooppur nuclear power plant area to illegally get rehabilitation worth Tk 28 crore.

This could be a reason for his murdered, he added.

No case was lodged in this connection as of 8:30pm yesterday.

Bahauddin Faruki, officer-in-charge of Ishwardi Police Station, said they were investigating the incident and would take necessary actions as soon as possible.