

115 Rohingyas held on way to Malaysia

They sneaked out of refugee camps in Cox's Bazar

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Police yesterday detained 115 Rohingyas, including 39 women and 26 children, while they were trying to go to Malaysia through the Bay of Bengal.

The Rohingyas, who were detained from Teknaf upazila's Hoiakyang-Shamlapur area, were taken to Shamlapur Police Investigation Centre to be sent back to their camps, said Anwar Hossain, inspector of Shamlapur Police Investigation Centre.

They were living at refugee camps in Ukhiya and Teknaf upazilas.

During interrogation, the detainees told police that they went to Shamlapur area for going to Malaysia with the help of brokers by sea routes.

Recently, the trend of Rohingyas going to Malaysia by sea routes has increased.

On Wednesday, members of Border Guard Bangladesh detained

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Vote BJP

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democracy cannot function without questioning, debate, and a vibrant opposition. All this is being concertedly eroded by the current government."

"The BJP, which came to power five years ago with the promise of development, has given free rein to Hindutva forces to indulge in the politics of hate and violence," it added.

The letter said Prime Minister Narendra Modi had in 2014 promised to bring back black money and "instead, rogues have looted the country and run away. The wealth of the rich has grown astronomically, while the poor have become even poorer."

The letter appealed to people to protect the "Constitution and our syncretic, secular ethos" and vote "bigotry, hatred, and apathy out of power".

"Vote to empower the weakest, protect liberty, protect the environment, and foster scientific thinking. Vote for secular democratic, inclusive India. Vote for the freedom to dream. Vote wisely," said the letter.

The 616 signatories to the statement include Shanta Gokhale, Mahesh Elkunchwar, Mahesh Dattani, Arundhati Nag, Kirti Jain, Abhishek Majumdar, Konkona Sen Sharma, Ratna Pathak Shah, Lillete Dubey, Mita Vashisth, M K Raina, Makarand Deshpande and Anurag Kashyap, among others.

Last week, a similar appeal was issued by well-known filmmakers like Anand Patwardhan, Sanal Kumar Sasidharan and Devashish Makhija, urging voters to "defeat fascism".

Cops making another list of yaba lords for surrender

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Nearly two months after the surrender of top 102 yaba godfathers and traders in Cox's Bazar, police are now drawing up a fresh list of people involved in the trade of crazy pills for a second surrender programme.

"We have instructed the police to take initiatives for a second surrender programme in Cox's Bazar for those who want to leave their life of crime behind them," Habibur Rahman, deputy inspector general at the Police Headquarters (PHQ), told The Daily Star yesterday.

Earlier on February 16, the 102 narcotics formally surrendered to law enforcers at a programme at Teknaf Pilot High School.

According to sources, at least five people already contacted the district police to include their names in the new list.

Some narcotics traders in Teknaf and Cox's Bazar have communicated with a private TV channel correspondent, who had acted as an intermediary between some drug traders and law enforcers before the first surrender programme, they added.

Requesting anonymity, a top district police official said a number of narcotics traders started contacting the police after the news of the new surrender programme spread in the area.

Mohammad Redwan, 28, and Nurul Haque Bhutto, 33 have confirmed police that they will surrender. Sources said Redwan's brother Ekram Hossain, a top narcotics trader, is now behind bars following his surrender on February 16. The two brothers own a market and two duplex buildings in Maulavipara area of Teknaf, sources said.

Redwan's another brother Abdur Rahman went to Dubai after the law enforcers had launched a countrywide

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Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina addressing a meeting of the Awami League central working committee, the highest decision-making body of the party, at the Gono Bhavan yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

PM takes a dig at onlookers

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Hasina, also the AL president, said people need to change their mentality and find ways to help people during such incidents.

The PM blasted the tendency of blocking fire exits in high-rise buildings.

She thanked some university students, trained volunteers and common people for their quick response to the rescue operation at FR Tower.

The premier regretted that many builders and users of buildings never carried out their responsibilities. "And if anything happens, everyone blames the government."

Bangladesh witnessed 8,461 incidents of fire at residential buildings last year. Of them, 2,088 were reported in Dhaka division.

Thirty-nine percent of the fire incidents were sparked by electric short circuits, while 19 percent by gas and 15 percent from cigarette butts.

'PEOPLE PICKED AWAMI LEAGUE' About the December 30 national polls, Hasina said the people voted her party to power for a third consecutive term due to a massive development over the last decade.

Rejecting the BNP's various allegations, the AL chief said the party had no intention of contesting the national polls as it knew very well that people would not vote for them.

She also denied the BNP's claim that the government filed false cases against its leaders. Not a single case was false, the PM said, adding that the cases had to be lodged against those involved in arson attacks.

The PM said her government was working to take Bangladesh's economy forward.

The government was spreading the economic activities in different parts of the country through establishing economic zones, she mentioned.

About the USA's security alert for its citizens living in Bangladesh, Hasina said the alert was issued without citing any reason or giving any explanation.

"I saw the USA issued a red alert. They didn't inform us why they issued the alert and gave no explanation either."

The AL chief said she has already asked the authorities to find out why the US issued the alert or whether they had any information.

"If they have any information about any incident that can happen in the

coming days, then it is their responsibility to inform us.... They could inform our intelligence agencies so that we could take steps."

The US embassy in Dhaka on Wednesday issued an alert for its citizens living in Bangladesh.

"In light of calls for revenge in the wake of the March 15 terrorist attack on mosques in New Zealand, we encourage US citizens to exercise heightened awareness of the ongoing threat posed by transnational terrorist organisations such as ISIS and al-Qaeda," said the statement.

Terrorist groups, their associates, and those inspired by such organisations remain intent on attacking US and Western citizens around the world, including in Bangladesh, it mentioned.

Four-legged whale fossil found in Peru

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Its mandibles grazed the desert soil and during excavations, the researchers found the lower jaw, teeth, vertebrae, ribs, parts of front and back legs, and even the whale ancestor's long fingers that were likely webbed.

Based on its anatomy, the scientists say this cetacean of about 13 feet (four meters) long could both walk and swim.

"Part of the tail's vertebrae showed similarities with that of present-day

semi-aquatic mammals like otters," lead author Olivier Lambert of the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences told AFP.

"This would therefore have been an animal that would have started to make growing use of its tail to swim, which differentiates it from older cetaceans in India and Pakistan."

Pieces of four-legged whales were found in Egypt, Nigeria, Togo, Senegal and Western Sahara, but they were so

fragmented that it was impossible to decisively conclude whether they could swim.

"This is the most complete specimen ever found for a four-legged whale outside of India and Pakistan," said Lambert.

If the whale in Peru could swim like an otter, the researchers hypothesized that it likely crossed the Atlantic from the western coast of Africa to South America. As a result of continental

drift, the distance was half that of today, around 800 miles, and the east-west current of the time would have facilitated their travel.

This finding would make less likely another hypothesis according to which whales reached North America via Greenland.

The Pisco Basin, off Peru's southern coast, likely holds numerous fossils, given its excellent conditions for preservation.

The rise of the rogues

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Shukkur dropped out of school after class-IX and eventually became the organising secretary of Teknaf municipality Awami League.

"Using the political influence, Shukkur used to bring in big yaba shipments from Myanmar and give shelter and support to yaba dealers," according to a report prepared by police officials who interrogated him.

"He used to get a commission from the yaba dealers for each shipment entering Bangladesh," it added.

According to sources, Shukkur used to smuggle in the pink pills concealing those inside the Burma teak shipments. He did not inherit any property from his father but now owns a luxurious three-storey building in Aliabad area of ward 8 of Teknaf municipality. Besides, his family lives in a flat in the capital's Bashundhara Residential Area.

Family sources said he also initiated gold business in Dubai and bought a number of cars and dozens of CNG-run auto-rickshaws.

He left the country after law enforcers began anti-narcotics drives in March last year and returned getting the chance to surrender.

Bodi's another brother Shafiqul Islam alias Shafiq, 29, was named after Shukkur in the police database.

Though accused in a human trafficking case filed with Teknaf Police Station on December 14, 2014, he was not arrested until the surrender.

Police record shows he started a small business in Teknaf port after completing Bachelor of Business Studies degree. He later got engaged in yaba smuggling by using Bodi's political influence.

Like Shukkur, he also sheltered yaba dealers.

Shafiq's hobby was to buy motorbikes of new models. He owned a car and a dozen bikes, said family sources.

He has a two-storey building in Chowdhurypara area of ward no 7 of Teknaf municipality and acres of land in Cox's Bazar.

Abdul Amin, 41, was wanted in three separate cases filed with Teknaf Police Station -- two in 2005 and one



Shafiqul Islam



Abdul Amin



Abdus Shukkur



Foysal Rahman

in 2010 -- but never got arrested before like his brothers Shukkur and Shafiq.

Amin, a former secretary of Teknaf municipality AL, started salt business after his SSC exams in 2002. He used to provide legal support to yaba dealers, according to the police report.

"When Amin's close aides were arrested by law enforcers for yaba dealing, he helped them get released," reads the report prepared last month.

Family and local sources said Amin initially used to smuggle salt from Myanmar and sell it at Narayanganj port. Later, he entered yaba business and built his own empire.

He now owns a three-story building in Aliabad area of Teknaf and several flats in Dhaka while his wife and son live in Bashundhara Residential Area. He was planning to contest the municipality election before the surrender, said family sources.

Bodi's another brother Foysal Rahman, 29, was wanted in a case filed with Teknaf Police Station on December 14, 2014 but this is the first time he is in jail.

He discontinued studies after SSC exams and started looking after Shukkur's business. Later, he got engaged in yaba trade and began to help the dealers as directed by Shukkur.

Foysal owns several cars and microbuses. He lived in his father's residence in Chowdhurypara area of Teknaf till the surrender in February though he has several flats in Chattagram.

CONTESTING POLLS FROM JAIL

Enamul Haque alias Enam Member, 24, was a cattle trader but now he owns a luxurious house built on one acre of land in Nazirapara area of Teknaf.

Wanted in 15 cases filed with Teknaf Police Station, including that for arms

and narcotics, Enam was named as a top narcotics dealer in four reports of the home ministry.

Although he did not continue studies after class-V, he is now fluent in English.

Police record shows he was arrested by Border Guard Bangladesh in 2015 with arms and yaba.

But using his illegal wealth amassed through drug smuggling, he took part in Teknaf Sadar Municipality election from behind bars and got elected as a member.

SYNDICATE OF BROTHERS

Abdur Rahman, 32, and his brother Jiaur Rahman alias Jihad, 27, were earlier involved in sawmill business. Jihad is the finance secretary of Teknaf thana BNP while Rahman a member of the party unit, said police database.

They started yaba smuggling together and their names appeared as top listed yaba godfathers in the reports of the home ministry and Cox's Bazar Special Branch.

Sources claimed that they got involved in narcotics business through their brother-in-law Saiful Karim, a top listed yaba godfather now believed to be hiding abroad.

Jihad was wanted in nine cases filed under arms, special power and narcotics acts while Rahman was wanted in seven. All the cases were filed with Teknaf Police Station from 2013 to 2017 but they were never arrested.

Both of them have established an empire in Teknaf. They own filling stations, markets, residential hotels and several luxurious buildings. Besides, they also own several cars and trucks, according to sources.

WORKER LEADER TURNS YABA DEALER

The life of Hasan Abdullah, 34, an

honours student of Chittagong College, changed after he became involved in transport business in Teknaf.

At some point he got into yaba smuggling using the network of transport workers. Learning to make easy money, he saw no reason to continue studies after 2012.

Hasan, also secretary of Sramik League's Teknaf Union Parishad unit, has been named as a yaba dealer in reports of the home ministry and Special Branch.

Six separate cases were filed against him with Teknaf Police Station from 2014 to 2018 but he was never arrested until the surrender.

Sources claimed that he now owns several trucks, a building in Jadimura area of Teknaf and acres of land in Chattogram. One of his hobbies is to buy new motorbikes.

LIFE IN JAIL

The luxurious life of the top narcos continued even after arrest as they managed all possible comforts for them in jail, sources said.

"The top narcotics dealers are passing days in jail gossiping and loitering. Their family members meet them in jail and provide them with food," an official of Cox's Bazar district jail told The Daily Star.

Top ten godfathers, especially, the family members of former lawmaker Abdur Rahman Bodi, applied to get shifted to hospital from jail citing health problems, he said.

Bazlur Rashid Akhand, superintendent of district jail, told The Daily Star that they received the applications of ten narcos.

"The drug traders are not getting any additional benefits but they are getting chance to meet family members and receive food," he added.

ACTION AGAINST ILLEGAL WEALTH The district police said they have taken steps to take action concerning the narcotic traders' wealth.

"We have given letter to CID money laundering unit, ACC and NBR last week to check on the narcotic dealers' wealth," said ABM Masud Hossain, superintendent of police in Cox's Bazar.

Shooter charged

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while police, who have not ruled out further charges, would continue to investigate New Zealand's worst peace-time mass killing.

Prison officials say Tarrant is under 24-hour surveillance with no access to media, according to news reports.

He appeared via video handcuffed and seated, wearing a grey prison t-shirt. He listened calmly throughout the hearing, which lasted roughly 20 minutes.

Around two dozen family members of victims and some survivors of the attacks were present in the courtroom.

"The man had no emotion," said Tofazzal Alam, a regular at one of the mosques, when asked about seeing the suspect on video.

Tarrant would be represented by two Auckland lawyers, one of them, Shane Tait, said in a statement on his website, which did not include any comments on the case.

Tait yesterday said he was arranging for his client to receive psychiatric assessment and that the process would take "some months", according to court minutes.

"As I observed at this morning's hearing, that is a usual and regular step for counsel to take at this point in the proceeding," said Judge Mander.

Media had reported that Tarrant wished to represent himself and legal experts have said he may try to use the hearings as a platform to present his ideology and beliefs.

"If he has lawyers, he will be speaking a lot less in court," said Graeme Edgeler, a Wellington-based barrister and legal commentator. "He can still give evidence...that's possible, but if he's represented by lawyers and it goes to trial he won't be asking questions of people."

Although journalists were able to attend and take notes, coverage of the hearing was restricted, with media only allowed to publish pixelated images of Tarrant that obscure his face. The judge also suppressed the names of people he was alleged to have attempted to murder.

'ALL HUMANS' Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern labelled the massacre an act of terrorism and quickly introduced tough new firearm laws which banned semi-automatic weapons.

Muslims worldwide have praised New Zealand's response to the massacre, with many singling out Ardern's gesture of wearing a headscarf to meet victims' families and urging the country to unite with the call: "We are one."

Thousands of visitors to the reopened Al Noor mosque, where 42 people were killed, have offered condolences and sought to learn more about Islam, said Israfil Hossain, who recites the daily call to prayer there.

"They are coming from far just to say sorry ... although they never did anything to us," said Hossain, 26.

On Thursday, a group of Carmelite nuns stood for the first time inside a mosque, holding back tears as they talked with worshippers about the two faiths.

"Everybody has their own problems and they have their own ideas about religions, and that's fine, and we should all have that, we're all different," said one nun, Sister Dorothea.

"But we're all humans and that's the most important thing, our humanity."

AL rebels win

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behind so many rebel wins," Hafiz said.

AL nominees became chairmen in 308 upazilas, independents in seven, expelled BNP leaders in five, Jatiya Party leaders in three, Parbatya Chattogram Jana Samhati Samiti in three, PCJSS (MN Larma) in two and Jatiya Party (Manju) in one, according to The Daily Star analysis.

"We came to know from media reports that a number of lawmakers were seeking votes for some candidates who did not get the party ticket," Election Commissioner Rafiqul Islam said.

"We have also seen some of the lawmakers trying to campaign and we asked them to leave their constituencies immediately and not violate the polls code," he added.

The Election Commission had asked at least 23 lawmakers, mostly from the AL, to leave their constituencies.

Four phases of the upazila election was held between March 10 and 31. Election in 480 of 492 upazilas is taking place in five phases this year. The last phase will be held on June 18.

The EC has the results from 458 upazilas. No polling was needed in 30 upazilas because chairmen, vice-chairmen and female vice-chairmen candidates were elected unopposed.

The result also shows that 108 chairman candidates had been elected unopposed. Only one of them is independent while the rest are from the AL.

The AL did not nominate anyone in five upazilas of Gopalganj. The positions were won by AL leaders, EC officials said.

The BNP, Left Democratic Alliance, Islami Andolan Bangladesh, Bangladesh Khelafat Andolan and Bangladesh Muslim League boycotted the polls, saying there was no prospect for a free and fair election.

The election was marred by poor voter turnout. At least 38 upazilas recorded less than 30 percent turnout and two upazilas less than 10 percent.

The turnout was 43.31 percent in the first phase, 41.25 percent in the second, 41.41 percent in the third and 36.50 percent in the fourth.