

Boats carrying 200 Rohingyas still at sea

Says Malaysia after latest arrival

REUTERS, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysian authorities were on the lookout for boats believed to be carrying up to 200 Rohingyas after dozens of migrants were found near a beach in the country's north yesterday.

Scores of Rohingya Muslims have boarded boats in recent months to try to reach Malaysia, part of what authorities fear could be a new wave of people smuggling by sea after a 2015 crackdown on trafficking.

Forty-one Rohingya men and boys, aged between 14 and 30, were detained yesterday near the town of Simpang Empat after landing at Sungai Belati beach, state police chief Noor Mushar Mohamad said in a statement.

Thirty-five migrants landed at the same beach last month in the northern state of Perlis, bordering Thailand.

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Dozens of people, believed to be Rohingyas Muslims from Myanmar, who were dropped off from a boat are pictured on a beach near Sungai Belati in Malaysia in this undated handout photo released yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

Identify highly risky schools in 15 days

Primary and mass education ministry asks all district primary edn officers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The primary and mass education ministry yesterday asked all district primary education officers to identify the highly risky primary school buildings across the country and inform the ministry within 15 days.

The ministry came up with the directive following the death of a third grader at her classroom in Barguna's Taltali upazila on Saturday.

At least 10 more students were injured in the incident at PK Government Primary School.

In an order yesterday, the ministry asked the district primary education officers (DPEOs) to visit the primary schools before identifying the risky buildings.

In assessing the vulnerability,

DPEOs may seek assistance from the engineers of the local government division, said the order signed by Mohammad Nurunnabi, senior assistant secretary at the primary and mass education ministry.

On Sunday, the ministry has also formed a two-member committee to probe the incident.

The committee members Directorate of Primary Education Director Saber Hossain and Deputy Secretary Mahbubur Rashid -- have been asked to submit the report within three working days.

Meanwhile, the High Court on Sunday issued a rule asking the respondents to explain within four weeks why they should not be directed to pay compensation to the families of Barguna school victims.

Architects question

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government authorities suddenly started doing the routine work they were supposed to be doing all these years, checking safety measures at buildings.

Architect Iqbal Habib said the officials whose sloppiness led to building disasters were now checking building safety.

The IAB in the statement said the building rules made in 1984 and 1996 lacked the vision for Dhaka's rapid urbanisation, with changes to physical, infrastructural, environmental, and cultural landscape.

For example, the 1984 rules lacked provision for leaving open space on two sides of a building. It made emergency exits mandatory only in buildings taller than seven storeys.

The 2006 rules for the first time made it mandatory to have measures for fire safety, environmental conservation, and universal access to a building, the IAB said.

Apart from the building rules and the national building code, fire safety is also enforced by the fire department. A building over 10 storeys needs approval from the fire and electricity departments, the IAB said, adding that sloppy electrical design is considered the foremost reason behind fires.

The laws of multiple authorities are often conflicting and greedy quarters take advantage of this and make unsafe buildings, it said.

To ensure coordination among authorities, the 2006 rules had provision for a "One Window Cell" comprising representatives of all authorities. But it had to be scrapped in the

face of opposition by some vested quarters, the IAB said.

The 2006 building rules made occupancy certificates, given after inspection, mandatory for newly constructed buildings to get water, electricity, and gas connections. Only 165 building owners obtained the certificates.

In 2008, the strict rule regarding occupancy certificates was relaxed, allowing buildings to be constructed in deviation of approved design.

The Nagar Unnayan Committee, made to ensure accountability in building construction, has been ineffective for the last two years, the IAB claimed.

Even though the building rules were updated, structures continued to be made deviating from the approved plans due to slack monitoring and poor enforcement of laws by the authorities, it said.

IAB RECOMMENDATIONS

As short-term measures, the IAB recommended retrofitting buildings to reduce fire risks, approving the updated national building code and enforcing it, making building occupancy certificates mandatory again, and enhancing Rajuk's regulatory role.

Better training of inspectors, fire safety officials, and firemen, and ending corruption in agencies responsible for fire safety were mentioned as long-term recommendations.

Former IAB president Mubasshar Hussain, among other IAB office bearers, was present while its Vice-President Mamnoon Murshed Chowdhury

Surrender has little impact

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transboundary river marking the border of Bangladesh and Myanmar.

Osman has dry fish business but his sons are not interested in it. Jubayer's younger brother Iman, 21, now oversees his illegal trade.

Sources claim that Iman had earlier worked as an accomplice while his brother was in charge of the drug business.

Iman is hardly seen in public and some six armed bodyguards accompany him when he moves from one place to another, said a source who knows about his activities.

Talking to this newspaper on March 26, the source said Md Selim is the chief agent of Iman and looks after the trade at field level along with two close aides -- Mohammad Ullah, 28, and Jamal Hossain, 55.

The two, both residents of South Jaliapara, mainly supply the crazy pills to different buyers as per the directives of Selim.

Iman's gang members often apply unique and desperate ways to smuggle yaba from Myanmar to Bangladesh. They cross the Naf swimming with yaba pills inside poly bags, said a number of sources linked to the trade.

Nurul Bashar, secretary of Teknaf upazila Awami League, also came up with the observations that match with the findings of these correspondents.

"The godfathers may have surrendered to police but their family members are taking care of the business despite action by the law enforcers against yaba smuggling," said Bashar on March 27.

"In Teknaf, any one gets Tk 5,000 to 10,000 a day delivering pills to Cox's Bazar or Chattogram," he added.

"We are trying to improve the situation by holding awareness meetings with the locals."

Regarding the new people in yaba business, ABM Masud Hossain, superintendent of police in Cox's Bazar, said they have got some information about those running the show now.

"We have got the names of some 636 people after the surrender of 102 top godfathers and dealers. We are now verifying their roles in the smuggling, and action will be taken soon," Masud told The Daily Star on March 28.

THE SHOW MUST GO ON?

The surrender programme in February

did not make any difference for Nurul Bashar, like many others.

Nurul is in jail now but Myanmar-based yaba suppliers still deliver the pink tablets to his residence just crossing the Naf. His house is on the river bank.

Md Rafiq, his 28-year-old son, is now taking care of the business, according to a source close to the family.

Law enforcement sources say Rafiq is wanted in a case filed over arms and narcotics with Teknaf Police Station last year. The Border Guard Bangladesh filed the case after Mostaq Ahmed Moshu, a drug dealer, was killed in a "gunfight".

Rafiq has been staying in Chattogram most of the time since then.

Once the yaba consignments arrive in their house, Rafiq delivers those to different destinations. He mainly uses public transports for the delivery and often carries the pills himself.

The business of Md Didar, son of former Teknaf upazila chairman Jafor Ahmed, is now run by his cousin Soheli Mia, 29, who earlier worked as a carrier.

Soheli also involved his close relatives Md Dalim, 45, and Md Selim, 43, in the racket.

Ziaur Rahman, wanted in nine cases, and his brother Abdur Rahman, wanted in seven cases, are in jail after surrender. But their business did not stop for a single day, said sources.

Their driver Md Javed, 27, who used to work closely with the two, is now taking care of the trade, they added.

Similarly, business is also good for narcotics dealer and hundi trader Mong Mong Sen, a cousin of former lawmaker Abdur Rahman Bodi.

His manager Omar Faruq, 55, now oversees the trade along with Hossen Ahmed, 53, a brother-in-law of Bodi and a resident of Chowdhurypara area of Teknaf.

Both of them had earlier worked just as the paid staff of Mong before his surrender, sources added.

After Kamrul Islam, a top narco and another cousin of Bodi, went to jail, his elder brother Md Abdullah, 32, emerged as the kingpin of his syndicate.

Abdullah is now operating the illegal business through some agents, sources added.

The Daily Star tried to contact the persons in question but they were not available as they were either hiding or

staying out of Teknaf. These correspondents got some phone numbers which were found switched off.

2ND PHASE OF SURRENDER

Meanwhile, police are now drawing up a fresh list of people involved in the yaba trade for a second surrender programme.

"We have instructed the police to take initiatives for a second surrender programme in Cox's Bazar..." Habibur Rahman, deputy inspector general at the Police Headquarters, told The Daily Star earlier.

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

Mir Md Akram Hossain, a reporter of Channel 24, told The Daily Star that he believes the illegal trade will come to an end with the surrender of all the drug kingpins.

Some top narcotics in November last year first expressed to him their willingness to surrender. He forwarded the proposal to the district police and the 102 yaba lords surrendered in the first phase.

"Once again, I started to communicate with narcotics traders after police gave approval for the second-phase surrender," he said.

"In this phase, I am working to bring in 300 to 500 narcotics traders and I have already been able to communicate with around 300 of them," Akram said, adding that the surrender ceremony is likely to take place at the end of this month.

In October last year, some 43 bandits of six gangs in Kutubdia and Moheshkhali surrendered to law enforcers through mediation by Akram.

The journalist said he used to visit the bandits in jail after the surrender. During one such visit, some arrested narcotics traders and their family members said they too want a normal life.

He then started working with narcotics traders and sent a proposal to the district police officials.

Later, the Police Headquarters analysed related legal issues and bounced the proposal with the government high-ups. Getting the nod from higher authorities, the district police took initiatives for the surrender ceremony.

Biman aircraft forced to make emergency landing in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A Dhaka-bound aircraft of Biman Bangladesh Airlines from Singapore made an emergency landing at Chattogram Shah Amanat International Airport yesterday evening, as the pilot suspected a technical fault in one of the engines.

Khairul Kabir, acting manager of the airport, said the Biman Bangladesh flight BG-085, carrying 99 passengers, was scheduled to land at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka at around 6:30pm. However, it landed in Chattogram at around 5:50pm.

"The pilot of the aircraft suddenly suspected that there was some technical fault in one of the two engines of the plane and informed the control room of the Shah Amanat Airport," he said.

The aircraft made the emergency landing around 5:50pm, 40 minutes before its scheduled landing at the Dhaka airport, he said, adding that all emergency steps were taken, including keeping the fire brigade ready.

"There was no casualty or any accident at the airport as the plane landed safely," he added.

Shakil Meraj, general manager (public relation) of Biman Bangladesh Airlines, told The Daily Star that they have sent an alternative aircraft from Dhaka for the passengers.

Fire drill, system upkeep needed to save lives

Architect Jalal Ahmed tells The Daily Star

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Administrating fire drills and regular maintenance of fire detection and protection systems are of utmost necessity to save lives during a fire tragedy, said Architect Jalal Ahmed, president of the Institute of Architects Bangladesh.

Speaking to The Daily Star, he said there were many buildings in the city that had fire detection or protection systems, but they did not work during fire incidents due to lack of regular maintenance.

"In many cases, many residents of a building do not know what to do during a fire incident due to lack of fire drills," he said.

Citing an example, Jalal said though there was a fire incident at Suhrawardy Hospital this year, it ended without any casualty as hospital authorities conducted a fire drill in the hospital just around two months before the incident.

Most of fire incidents, according to



Jalal, start from short circuits in electrical appliances or wirings.

"Even if a building is constructed properly, it may be under the risk of fire due to the setting up of electrical lines by unskilled electricians," he said.

He added that electrical maintenance and repair work would have to be done through ABC licence holders (electrical supervisor licence holders), which was provided by the Power Development Board or Dhaka Electric Supply Authority.

"These licence holders can work as qualified electricians."

Ctg power plant

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rushed to the spot and brought the blaze under control around 8:40pm, he added.

He said the 210 MW unit might remain shut for up to 72 hours.

Prabir Kumar Seen, chief engineer of Power Development Board in Chattogram, said a small fire incident occurred at the power plant.

"As soon as the firefighters are done with their work, the unit will resume operation," he added.

In Cumilla, a fire broke out at a spinning mills in Cumilla Export Processing Zone last night, which badly damaged the factory.

Warehouse and production floor of

RN Spinning Mills were burnt in the fire that broke out around 9:30pm, said Syed Nurul Islam, superintendent of Cumilla police.

No casualties were reported, he said, adding that 10 fire engines were working on to douse the flames as of 1:45am today.

Md Imran, a worker of the factory, said all workers were safely taken away from the factory after the fire had originated from the warehouse.

The fire later spread to the production floor, he said.

A staff correspondent in Chattogram and our Cumilla correspondent contributed to this report.

HSC exams on 13 subjects

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of the holy Shab-e-Barat to be observed across the country on April 21," Tapan Kumar Sarker, secretary of Dhaka Education Board, told The Daily Star.

The first paper tests on Arabic, Sanskrit and Pali will be held on May 9 at 2:00pm instead of April 17, while

the second paper exams on these subjects will be on May 11 at 2:00pm instead of April 18.

The first paper exams on Home Economics will be held on May 4 at 2:00pm, while the second paper tests on the subject will take place on May 6 at 2:00pm, according to the new schedule.

Sohel dies a hero

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sister Selina Akter asked this correspondent over phone yesterday afternoon.

Her voice was almost drowned by the cries of her family members in the background. Selina said her parents had not stopped crying since they came to know of Soheli's death.

Sohel was hailed as a hero for his courageous efforts to save people from the FR Tower fire that claimed 26 lives and left around 100 injured.

The president, prime minister and many others expressed their shock at his death.

On the day of the fire, Soheli, along with his colleagues, was taking those trapped by the blaze to safety using a hydraulic ladder.

At one point, he got stuck in the ladder and his leg was broken as the ladder was being folded. His stomach was punctured and he was severely injured, his colleague Rubel said.

He was rescued and taken to

Combined Military Hospital where doctors performed two surgeries and put Soheli on life support until he was taken on his final journey to Singapore on last Saturday.

Soheli's struggles had begun when he was just a school boy.

He used to do all types of laborious tasks to support his family. He also bore the educational expenses of his three younger brothers as his father Noor Islam, an ultra poor farmer in Itna upazila, could not work due to ill-health.

"Alongside his studies, he used to work the land belonging to others. He also worked as a porter in the local market until he got his job in 2015 after completing the HSC examination," said Selina.

"He was very caring.... Whenever we asked him about his marriage, he used to say he would tie the knot only after all of his bothers are established," she said in between pauses.

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The exams began on April 1 and will continue until May 11. The practical tests will be from May 12 to 21.

Some 11, 38,747 candidates are taking part in the exams under the eight general education boards.

"My brother used to send the lion's share of his salary to my mother....He never even bought a costly shirt or a pair of pants for himself..."

Soheli was second among five siblings. His younger brothers Rubel is a student of Bangladesh Open University, Uzzal, a college student and Delwar, a tenth grader. His sister Selina is a homemaker.

President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina expressed deep shock and sorrow at his death.

In a condolence message, the president prayed for eternal peace of the departed soul and conveyed deep sympathy to the bereaved family.

In another message, the PM said Soheli Rana would remain as a "bright example" of sacrificing one's life for others.

Hasina prayed conveyed profound sympathy to the bereaved family.

The US embassy in Dhaka also offered condolences to his family, friends and colleagues.

Dr Samanta Lal Sen, national coordinator of the burn unit, said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina called him around 5:00pm yesterday and inquired about the madrasa girl's condition. She asked him to send the patient to Singapore at the earliest if her medical condition permitted.

The DMCH has formed a nine-member medical board for the victim's treatment.

CASE FILED IN FENI

A case was filed with Sonagazi Police Station by the victim's brother yesterday, accusing four unidentified female madrasa students and their associates, reports a correspondent from Feni.

Police have already arrested two people and detained five others in connection with the incident.

The arrestees are Afsar Uddin, 33, a lecturer of English, and Ariful Islam, 22, an Alim examinee of the madrasa.

A local court yesterday sent the two to jail after they were produced before it.

The five detainees are madrasa night guard Md Mostofa, 38, and office staffers Amin, 50, Alauddin, 25, Saidul Islam, 21, and Jashim Uddin, 30.

Earlier on March 27, the victim's mother filed a case with Sonagazi Police Station, accusing the madrasa principal of sexually harassing her daughter. The principal is now behind bars in the case.

Visiting the DMCH burn unit yesterday, PM's Special Assistant Biplab Barua told newsmen that the premier directed him to inquire about the madrasa girl's treatment.

He said the government would bear the costs of her treatment.

Meanwhile, Naripakkha, a women's activist organisation, in a statement yesterday condemned the heinous attack on the madrasa girl and demanded exemplary punishment for the culprits.