

DISCONTENT OVER NEW BCL COMMITTEE

Hasina wants ouster of those with tainted image

DU CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister and Awami League President Sheikh Hasina yesterday gave instructions for probing the allegations against the “controversial” leaders in the newly formed BCL central committee, say party insiders.

She gave the directives to BCL President Rezwanul Haque Chowdhury Shovon and AL Joint General Secretary Jahangir Kabir Nanak at a meeting at the Gono Bhavan from 3:00pm to 4:30pm.

Hasina asked Shovon to drop the “controversial” leaders from the committee if the allegations against them are found true, Gono Bhavan sources told this newspaper.

Nanak and another Joint General Secretary of the party, Abdur Rahman, were entrusted with the responsibility for forming the full-fledged BCL committee of the pro-AL student body.

Chhatra League General Secretary Golam Rabbani at a press conference at AL President’s Dhanmondi office at about 12:15am today said they would investigate the allegations.

“We will drop the leaders from the committee if the allegations against them are found true,” he added.

Meanwhile, at a human chain on the Dhaka University campus yesterday, the “deprived” BCL leaders criticised AL acting general secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif’s remark on Sunday’s incident at Madhur Canteen.

Hanif on Tuesday termed the scuffle between two BCL factions a “trifling” matter.

“With due respect to top Awami League leaders, I would like to ask how far the Madhur Canteen incident should have gone to make them consider it a big incident,” asked Nipo Tonne, a deputy cultural affairs secretary of the newly formed BCL committee.

“How badly should we have been harassed to make them think that the female BCL activists were tortured? Will the fact come to light after we die?”

“When will we get statements from the Awami League’s top leadership that female BCL leaders were attacked?” she asked while speaking at the human chain.

The BCL leaders also raised question about the neutrality of the probe body formed over Monday’s incident, alleging that none of the committee members contacted them yet.

The BCL on Monday announced its 301-member full-fledged central committee, touching off controversy and demonstrations by some of those who could not make it to the new committee.

It was formed a year after the BCL’s 29th national council on May 11-12 last year.

On July 31, the AL chief nominated Shovon as BCL president and Golam Rabbani as general secretary.

Names surface



In a selfie, Abdul Aziz, Ahmed, and Liton, all relatives, are seen in front of a mall in Sylhet city. All three of them are from Kotulpur of Sylhet’s Fenchuganj. A brother of Aziz, who survived the shipwreck in the Mediterranean on Friday, told the family over phone that the three perished in the accident.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

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Of the rest 39 victims, at least 17 are from Sylhet. Others are from Madaripur, Shariatpur, Kishoreganj, Moulvibazar, Sunamganj, Narsingdi, Habiganj and Noakhali.

At a press briefing in the capital yesterday, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen released the identities of the victims feared dead. He also disclosed the names of the 14 survivors.

He said there were around 130 migrants, who included about 100 Bangladeshis. Others were Egyptians and other African nationals in the ship that left the Libyan port city of Zuwara for Italy on the evening of May 9.

In the middle of the sea, they were transferred to two boats. One boat had some 50 migrants and the other around 80. The one with more migrants was overcrowded and capsized. There is information that the other boat reached Italy, the minister said.

Of the 14 Bangladeshi survivors, four are undergoing treatment at a Tunisian hospital, while the rest was taken to a shelter camp of the Tunisian Red Crescent, he added.

Momen said the Bangladeshis had been taken to the Libyan capital Tripoli via Dubai and Sharjah of the United Arab Emirates and Alexandria of Egypt.

“Once in Tripoli, the human trafficking gangs had confined the Bangladeshis. They were also tortured for ransom from their families back home,” he said.

The government has identified three brothers from Noakhali and two others from Madaripur who are involved in human trafficking. Family members of the victims who are from Sylhet also identified some others involved in human trafficking, he said.

“We’ll try to take tough action against the human traffickers,” Momen said.

SC lawyer sent to jail

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told the court that his client was granted bail by the High Court till the submission of the probe report in the case. Possibly the HC order did not reach the Khagrachhari court and that was why the court issued the arrest warrant and police arrested him.

So he should be granted bail, the lawyer argued.

The magistrate said Intiaz had been on bail till the submission of the probe report. Earlier, police pressed charges against him and the district court issued an arrest warrant against him as he did not appear before it.

In the charge sheet, police mentioned that Intiaz used his Facebook account to misguide people through spreading false information and rumour with an ill motive to tarnish the country’s image, hurt religious sentiments and deteriorate law and order.

Citing the first information report, police earlier told this newspaper that Shafiqul had accused Intiaz of making several posts on Facebook from July 1-10 in 2017 regarding some fake incidents in the CHT region.

The plaintiff alleged that Intiaz had tried to instigate communal violence in the CHT by making those posts, police said.

The Daily Star could not verify independently what actually the lawyer wrote in his Facebook posts about two years ago.

Following widespread criticism over the misuse of section 57 of the Information and Communication Technology Act, the government repealed the section last year.

However, it allegedly incorporated the content of the section in the

Digital Security Act, 2018.

The government had said trials of cases already filed under section 57 would continue.

HENRY DENIED BAIL

A bail prayer of poet and journalist Henry Swapan was rejected by a Barishal court yesterday in a case filed under Digital Security Act, 2018, reports our Barishal correspondent.

Henry’s lawyer Syed Obaidullah Sajju, also president of District Bar Association, told journalists that the court of Barishal Metropolitan Magistrate rejected the bail prayer as holding a hearing on it was beyond its jurisdiction.

He also said they would file an appeal with the district judge’s court today seeking bail for the accused.

Meanwhile, Barishal Mayor Semiabat Sadiq Abdullah yesterday said they were trying to settle the matter.

Speaking at a meeting with journalists and cultural activists at Barishal Union of Journalists, he expressed optimism that they would be successful in this regard.

In another development, a delegation of journalists and cultural activists met Henry at Barishal Central Jail yesterday.

Lackabaly Gomes, father of a Catholic church, filed the case with Kotwali Model Police Station on Tuesday against Henry on charges of hurting religious sentiments through making posts on social media. Police picked him up from his home in the city’s Bolpukur area on the same day.

Protesting his arrest, different socio-cultural and journalist organisations demanded his unconditional release and withdrawal of the case.



Shops on the ground floor of Wahed Mansion, ground zero of the Chawkbazar inferno, is being mended for reopening even though the building itself is at risk. The fire had left 70 dead and scores injured on February 20.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Pursuit of dream ends in tragedy

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sea, he along with others was shifted to a small boat.

“Bangladesh embassy officials are asking me if I would return home. But tell me how can I return home now? My parents are heavily in debt,” he said.

ASM Ashraful Islam, labour counsellor of Bangladesh Embassy in Libya, last week said they relocated some 300 Bangladeshis to safe places from the risky suburbs of Tripoli as violence escalated in the Libyan capital and its surroundings early April.

The embassy announced arrangements of voluntary repatriation but only 50 of them accepted the offer.

“Others said they don’t want to return home because they spent huge sums to reach there,” he told The Daily Star.

Though in debt, Alamin and other survivors can still consider themselves lucky as they escaped death in what has become one of the world’s most dangerous seas for migrants.

Abdul Aziz, 25, and his cousins Ahmed Hossain, 24, and Liton Miah, 24, of Fenchuganj in Sylhet are among those who drowned in the Mediterranean on Friday.

Aziz was confused about his future after dropping out of undergraduate studies early last year, said his elder brother Mofizur Rahman.

That was when he came in contact with a travel agent -- Enamul Haque of New Yeahia Overseas -- who promised the three cousins and their uncle Belal Ahmed a safe passage to Italy.

Enamul, a distant relative who also comes from Fenchuganj, said the four would be sent to Italy on a ship straight from India, Mofiz told The Daily Star at his residence on Monday.

Aziz was stubborn though his another elder brother, who stays in Spain, advised him not to take the risk.

Finally, under a contract of Tk 8 lakh each, they left home for Italy on December 7 last year. They were first taken to India and Sri Lanka before being flown to Libya.

“In Libya, they lived a life like that

in a prison. The camp was hell for them. They spent days without water and food. Eighty-six people lived in a single room. They had only one toilet,” said Mofiz.

“We sent some money to Libya for them to buy food, but they seldom got it. Often they had to starve.”

As Aziz managed to share the situation with his family over phone, Mofiz requested the travel agent to send them all back but in vain.

On Friday night, after hearing the news of the tragedy in Tunisia, he called Enamul, who said his relatives were not in that ship.

On Saturday, uncle Belal, who survived in the sea, called Mofiz in Sylhet to inform him of the tragic death of the three cousins.

“Uncle said that in the middle of the sea they were forced at gunpoint to board a boat from the big ship. Within five minutes, the rubber boat sank.

“They had no life jackets.”

Travel agent Enamul by now locked his office in Sylhet city. He has been absconding since Saturday with his mobile phones switched off.

According to Shakirul Islam, executive director of Ovivashi Karmi Unnayan Programme (OKUP), which conducted a research on the migrants who reached Italy via Libya, said Bangladesh had stopped sending workers to the North African country in 2014.

Yet thousands of Bangladeshis were lured to go to Libya over the following years with the promise of a safe journey to Europe.

Libya has become a major route for human smuggling to Europe amid lawlessness in the country.

Transnational gangs operate in war-torn or poverty-stricken African and Middle Eastern countries like Sudan, Egypt, Eritrea, Chad, Syria and Iraq to smuggle the nationals of those countries to Europe.

They also target unemployed Bangladeshi youths who have fantasy about Europe.

According to Zaid Bakht, former research director of Bangladesh

Institute of Development Studies, some two million youths join the labour force in Bangladesh every year.

But only about 60 percent of them are absorbed into domestic and foreign labour markets. The rest remain either unemployed or underemployed and often become desperate to find jobs abroad.

Shakirul Islam said human smugglers use a variety of techniques. They manage tourist visas of the United Arab Emirates or Turkey or work visas of Sudan or Egypt and then take the jobseekers to Libya either by land or air.

“Our research found some Bangladeshis were first taken to Sudan and then to Libya through the desert,” he said.

After families pay big amounts of ransom, the migrants are put in the ships for Europe. Those being lucky reach their dream destination and others drown.

Many of the Bangladeshis, who had remained in Libya even after the 2011 war, also opted to take the voyage to Europe, finding it difficult to work in the North African country, Shakirul told The Daily Star.

From January to May 22 in 2017, 5,650 Bangladeshis arrived in Italy, accounting for 11 percent of all arrivals of undocumented migrants in the country, according to the Italian Ministry of the Interior.

In 2016, the number was 7,578, says the Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF).

According to the European Union, nearly one lakh undocumented Bangladeshis live in the EU, which has now tightened immigration policies. In 2017, it funded a project for return of the undocumented Bangladeshi migrants.

While the number of migrants arriving in Europe can be known, it’s totally unknown how many died in the Mediterranean, said Ashraful Islam of Bangladesh Embassy in Libya.

In a major boat accident in the sea, 24 Bangladeshis died in August 2015.

“It’s high time we took some serious actions to stop such illegal migration,” he told The Daily Star.

Eyes in distress, eyes of hope

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multi-disciplined, reaffirmed their headmaster, Mohammad Rahmat Ullah, at Kisholoy Girl’s School and College in Mohammadpur. “They’re doing well both in education and extra-curricular activities,” he told The Daily Star last week.

At homes in Mohammadpur or in rural Bangladesh, these children are also exposed to different trainings and modern technologies. “I try to make available to these children what my daughters get in America. Any of these girls can beat a veteran computer operator in typing speed,” said Ehsan with tinge of pride in his voice.

For 23 years now, since Ehsan launched the initiative in 1996, children continue to weave together stories of help and hope. Children, however, would have no story to create had not a child reacted differently to bullying over the blurry-glass he wore after surgeries half a century back.

Children and adults alike would have invariably asked Ehsan then one of these questions: “Say, how many fingers (I’m showing)?”, “Oh, God! Glass is so frosty” or “Don’t (you) have any eyes?”

“They never asked me my name or tried to know how intelligent I was. Neither did they enquire how I always ended up first all through my school examinations,” he said.

The constant teasing and insensitive curiosity pushed the only son of a Rajshahi University professor to lie low, away from people-who-can-hurt to people-who-need-help.

Soon, even before he passed his school, Ehsan was seen lecturing expecting mothers in rural Rajshahi: “I’m like this because my mother didn’t eat vegetable and vitamin when I was in her belly (womb).”

He didn’t stop there. Collecting

donations from aunts or elders on the campus, he, along with a few volunteers, would show up at doors of expecting mothers with supplies of vegetables. Quite unknowingly, he was building a network of sponsors, volunteers and needy people that came in handy decades later when he launched an organisation at Yale University to help underprivileged children and prevent child blindness.

By then, in 2003 when he founded Distressed Children & Infants International with eye surgeon Dr Brian DeBroff, his colleague at Yale, and Dr Nina Haque, his wife, the 39-year-old Ehsan was a transformed personality: confident, connected and more committed to social work. And behind this transformation was people’s insensitivity and discrimination directed at him.

The boy, who was advised by doctors after surgeries not to strain his eyes with rigours of studies, became a doctor himself, did his PhD and post-doctoral fellowships in Japan and Canada.

After graduating from the Rajshahi Medical College, the young paediatrician joined the Dhaka Shishu Hospital in 1987. But, in no time, he started to feel the pull in his heart for social work. Soon, he was appearing in an interview of an NGO.

“S-o-o-o thick glass! Who would you help? You would require help at work in rural areas.” Interviewee’s insensitive remark snapped his spell!

In a daze, Dr Ehsan rode a public bus to Kamalapur, boarded a train to Chittagong and ended up at a friend’s house there. A soul-searching for two-three days helped him understand what he wanted to do with his life. He decided to run away from the insensitive curiosity and discriminatory attitude to safety abroad.

“I’d realised that if I want to do the social work I must go abroad. I have to make myself capable, build network and come back home to live my dream,” he said in a trance. And it is exactly what Dr Ehsan did in the next 30 years.

With prestigious Monbusho Scholarship he went to Japan first, worked in Canada and then settled in US. In all the places he moved, he continuously talked with people, shared his passion and built network. His social work did never stop. With help of volunteers from student days, Dr Ehsan continued supplying vegetable to expecting mothers with his own fund.

“That core group of volunteers are now taking care of DCI,” he said with a smile.

Like all good initiatives, his was also lonely at the beginning. But it’s not lonely anymore.

Ministry of Social Welfare, reputed hospitals (Birdem, Shishu Hospital and Islamia Eye Hospital), Faraz Hossain Foundation, personalities (Sabina Yasmin, Babita), professionals (doctors from home and abroad) and philanthropists are now his partners in the cause.

Encouraged, Dr Ehsan has taken up more projects -- child blindness prevention programme, free-eye camp, emergency medical care, children’s family support project, assistance to government-run orphanages, telemedicine service from American doctors for 10,000 people at Kalyanpur slum etc. He is supporting these projects with funds from zakat and donations.

“This is the way we can change our society, country,” said Dr Ehsan.

His eyes one can’t see clearly, his emotions one can feel.

BSTI cancels

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their licences back if they can prove their ability to maintain the standards, he said.

The BSTI also suspended the licences of 18 food products of different companies, a statement issued by the BSTI said yesterday.

It recently collected 406 samples of food items from the market from across the country, which were tested at its laboratory. The results showed 52 food items are substandard.

Later, the government agency served a show-cause notice to the companies of the 52 brands.

The BSTI has taken the steps as the companies did not respond to the notice by the stipulated time.

The BSTI suspended productions of Teer Sarishar (Mustard) Tel (Oil) of City Oil Mill (Konapara, Gazipur), GB Sarishar Tel of Green Blessing Vegetables Oil Industries Limited, Pusa Mustard Oil of Shabnam Vegetables Oil Industries Limited, Rupchanda Mustard Oil of Bangladesh Edible Oil Limited, Arra Drinking Water of Arra Food and Beverage Limited, Duncan Natural Mineral Water of Duncan Products Limited, Dighee Drinking Water of Dighee Drinking Water, Pran Lachchha Seemai (vermicelli) of Pran Agro Limited; Danish Holuder Gura of Danish Food Limited, Pran Holuder Gura of Pran Agro Limited; Fresh Holuder Gura of Tanvir Food Limited, Mollah Solt Aydinjuka Laban of Mollah Salt Industries, Pran Curry Powder of Pran Agro Limited, Danish Curry Powder of Danish Food Limited; ACI Pure Dhanian Gura of ACI Food Limited, Doodles Noodles (Stick) of New Zealand Dairy Products BD Limited (Rupganj, Narayanganj), Sun Chips of Kashem Food Products Limited (Konapara, Gazipur) and ACI Aydinjuka Laban of ACI Salt Limited (Rupganj, Narayanganj).

From the clutches

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boat capsized that claimed around 65 lives.

At least 37 of those feared dead have been confirmed to be Bangladeshis.

It was since the defeat of Muammar Gaddafi that Libya plunged into civil war and became a transit for African, Middle Eastern and some South Asian countries, including Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Pakistan nationals’ human trafficking.

Alamin, 25, of Agailjhara, Barishal, went to Libya last year in May, but had to face various forms of physical and mental torture by “mafias”. He said he had to pay around Tk 11 lakh, including ransom to the mafias in Libya, in different phases when he and dozens of others were held hostage in different parts of the country before leaving for Italy.

Finally, on Thursday evening they boarded a big ship from the Libyan port city of Zuwara. After a few hours of sailing, it stopped in the middle of the sea around 11:00pm and the migrants were transferred to two smaller boats to make sure they were not spotted by the Italian coastguard.

One boat left for Italy, the other one was overcrowded, Alamin said.

“There were around 85 people, mostly Bangladeshis. We had sensed the boat would capsize in minutes. By then, the big ship had left us,” he continued. It was windy and the waves were picking up on the sea. Minutes after the ship left, the crowded boat overturned. In the moderately rough weather, it was hard for the migrants to keep afloat without any lifejacket.

“I tried hard to cling to the boat. Those who failed to, drowned in front of me,” Alamin said, letting out a helpless sigh.

“Allah saved us.”

Around 8:00am on Saturday, some fishing boats appeared and rescued and picked the survivors up on their boat. The migrants were then taken care of by the Tunisian coastguard and were brought to the shelter of Tunisian Red Crescent.

“I had no idea I would face such a difficult situation in my life. I have got out of the clutches of death,” said Alamin, who was student of a private university in Dhaka. He opted to go to Italy after being unable to find a good option for livelihood in Bangladesh. “I wanted to stand on my own two feet.”

At his home in Agailjhara, Barishal, he has his parents, two sisters and a brother.

“It would be great to go back home to them. But, there’s a lot of debt. How do I repay that if I go home?”

1 killed, 5 hurt

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“I saw huge flames and a loud bang before I lost consciousness,” Mamunul told reporters at the hospital.

He added that the management had told the workers there was no risk in working at the engine room.

The ship-breaking yard owner Manik refuted the allegation and said he provided safety gears to his workers.

Polash Kumar Das, labour inspector of factories inspection department, said the vessel was an oil tanker and dismantling it would require many precautionary measures.

“A spark could have led to the explosion,” he said, adding that the work that should have been done slowly and cautiously was attempted in a rush apparently at the instruction of the management.

After visiting the scene, Ferdoush Anwar, deputy director of the environment department in Chatogram, said, “We came to know that they did not ensure workplace safety. We will take steps in this regard.”

Explosives department officials said oil tanker MT Kellena-4 was beached at the yard on December 26 last year.