

158 illegal migrants rescued off Libyan coast

Bangladeshis among them

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Libyan Coast Guard rescued 158 illegal migrants, including Bangladeshis, in two operations in the Mediterranean off the country's western coast on Sunday.

In the first operation, a patrol boat found 73 migrants, including 25 women and eight children, and recovered bodies of a woman and a kid after their rubber boat capsized 14 miles north of Qarabulli town, east of Tripoli, reported The Libyan Observer yesterday, quoting the Libyan Navy as saying.

Around 25 migrants were still missing. The migrants on board the rubber boat were from Sudan, Kenya, Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire.

In the second operation, the Coast Guard rescued 85 migrants, including five women and five children, after the motor of their boat broke down off Khoms city.

The migrants were from Sudan, Chad, Bangladesh, Egypt, Niger, Somalia, Burkina Faso, and Libya.

In a boat capsized on May 9, some 65 migrants, including 40 Bangladeshis, went missing in the Mediterranean.

According to the UN Migration Agency, as many as 443 migrants either died or went missing in the Mediterranean while trying to reach Europe by boats as of May 8 this year. The figures were 2,299 in 2018 and 3,139 in 2017.

Chinese warships cause surprise in Sydney Harbour

AFP, Sydney

Australians enjoying a sunny winter morning were shocked by the sight of three Chinese warships steaming into Sydney Harbour yesterday, forcing the prime minister to reassure jittery residents.

Amid heightened concern about Beijing's growing clout and military muscle-flexing, the appearance of a Chinese flagged task group and around 700 sailors came as a surprise.

It also came as Prime Minister Scott Morrison was away on a visit to the Solomon Islands, a key player in the South Pacific that China is hoping to woo away from its recognition of Taiwan.

"It may have been a surprise to others, but it certainly wasn't a surprise to the government," Morrison told reporters in the Solomons capital Honiara when asked about the Chinese naval visit. "We have known about that for some time."

Morrison described the port call as a "reciprocal visit, because Australian naval vessels have visited China".

"They were returning after a counter drug trafficking operation in the Middle East."

The vessels appeared to be the Kunlun Shan, an amphibious landing ship; the Luoma Lake, a replenishment ship; and the Xuchang, a modern frigate that is believed to be fitted with surface-to-air and anti-submarine missile systems.

Tigers gearing up

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Chandrasekaran would be working through the night to arm the team with all the relevant data about their next opponents.

Team manager Khaled Mahmud informed reporters yesterday that the pitch for the day-nighter against New Zealand (starting at 6:30 pm Bangladesh time on Tuesday) would be a fresh one and two days before the match had a greenish tinge, which is unlikely to persist till Wednesday but a fresh pitch would still be a difficult proposition for the Tigers against Kiwi seamers Trent Boult, Matt Henry and Lockie Ferguson, who shot Sri Lanka out for 136 in their first World Cup match, which the Black Caps won by 10 wickets.

It may also bring about some changes to Bangladesh's lineup. They may think about an extra seamer in Rubel Hossain, but that would mean benching off-spinner Mehedi Hasan Miraz, their most economical bowler against South Africa. There may also be a case for including Sabbir Rahman, who hit a century in Bangladesh's last match against the Kiwis in February in similar conditions, in place of Mosaddek Hossain. That would also be a brave move as Mosaddek impressed with a 20-ball 26 against South Africa and also lends an extra bowling option with his part-time off-spin.

Although it was still early stages as far as planning is concerned, unless the conditions are drastically different from their first match, changes to a winning team seem unlikely.

New Zealand are in form and in the opinion of many, one of the odds-on candidates to make the semifinals. However, Bangladesh have shown time and again that they have the squad depth to challenge anyone and will be hoping to give the nation an Eid present come Wednesday.



Many, including a girl, climb the roof an already-packed train at Kamalapur Railway Station in the capital yesterday. They left the capital this way in a desperate bid to celebrate Eid with their loved ones back home.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Going home, mostly happy

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last day in office.

People going to the northern and western districts were subjected to long delays at the station yesterday, as at least six trains ran behind schedule by 1-5 hours. Two trains for Chattogram and Mymensingh were also delayed.

A total of 56 trains, including four special ones added to cope with the rush, were scheduled to leave the station yesterday.

The Rangpur-bound Rangpur Express and the Khulna-bound Sundarbans Express were delayed by one hour and 40 minutes, while the Lalmonirhat-bound Lalmoni Special was delayed by two hours and 45 minutes.

The Rajshahi-bound Silkcity Express was supposed to leave the station at 2:40pm but the train did not reach the station until 3:40pm, forcing the authority to defer the departure time to 4:30pm. Another Rajshahi-bound Dhumketu Express ran half hour behind schedule.

A Chapainawabganj-bound Rajshahi Express was also delayed by three hours and 15 minutes.

The Chattogram-bound Chottola Express was around 50 minutes late while the Mymensingh-bound Isha Khan Express was two hours and 40 minutes late.

Asked about the reason for the delays, Aminul Hoque, Kamalapur Railway Station manager, said

holidaymakers, who are in large numbers, usually take a long time to embark and disembark the trains at their respective stations, resulting in such delays.

It may not be possible to mitigate the situation before Eid, he told reporters.

Meanwhile, the rail authorities were able to prevent people from risking their lives by travelling on the top of trains. However, they failed to do so in the afternoon when the rush hit its peak.

On the other hand, a mobile court of the Bangladesh Railway, in a drive, fined 26 passengers for travelling without tickets yesterday.

Special Magistrate Noor-e-Alam Siddique, also a deputy secretary of the railway's ministry, realised Tk 4,600 as fine from the passengers, said Supair Rahman, an administrative officer of the ministry.

He said the mobile court conducts drives on a regular basis. However, yesterday was the first time it conducted the drive during the Eid rush, which began on Friday.

BUS JOURNEY RELATIVELY SMOOTH

Despite the increasing number of holidaymakers at city's Gabtoli bus terminal yesterday, passengers started journey for their respective homes almost hassle-free.

Most of the buses left Gabtoli bus terminal, one of the main exit points

to travel to the country's southern and western regions, on time, said several passengers and staffers of different bus counters at the terminal.

The long queue of waiting passengers, which is a common sight, was not seen as of yesterday noon.

Some passengers however alleged that bus operators were charging extra.

While visiting the terminal for around three hours since 10:00am, a correspondent saw the flow of passengers increase gradually.

"I am happy this year as the situation seems almost normal and there was no delay," said Ishfaq Ahmed, who was travelling to Khulna on a Shohagh Paribahan bus.

Mohammad Murad, counter master of Seba Green Line bus counter, however, feared that passengers might have to suffer in the late evening as the number of home-goers will keep increasing.

Faruk Talukder Soheli, managing director of Shohagh Paribahan, said in the past two-three years, this was the first time people will enjoy their Eid almost hassle-free.

A long vacation, the opening of several major bridges and flyovers on the Dhaka-Chattogram and Dhaka-Tangail highways and better management of ferry terminals are the reasons behind smooth journeys, said Soheli, also former chairman of Bangladesh Bus-Truck Owners' Association.

SADARGHAT SEES RUSH

The Sadarghat Launch Terminal, which links 22 southern and western districts, was abuzz with thousands of passengers from the morning.

Many launches were seen overloaded and some of them were taking passengers on the top deck, violating government decisions.

Mainuddin, a private company official who came to the terminal along with his wife and son, said they were supposed to leave Sadarghat by 2:00pm but their launch did not reach the terminal till 3:00pm.

It may be 6:00pm by the time it leaves the terminal, said Mainuddin who was waiting to board the Tashrif-4, a Bhola-bound launch.

Alamgir Kabir, joint director of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA), said around 60 launches left the Sadarghat terminal till 3:00pm and 100 to 110 more launches may leave.

It was 105 on Sunday.

About the excessive number of passengers, he said though launches were taking additional passengers, it was still under their load-carrying capacity.

About passengers on the top deck, Alamgir said they would collect the names of the launches that carried passengers there and would file cases against those with the marine court after Eid.

Crisis talks as Merkel's coalition suffers new blow

AFP, Berlin

Parties in German Chancellor Angela Merkel's government were locked in separate crisis talks yesterday, after her fragile coalition suffered a fresh body blow as the leader of junior partner SPD quit.

In a shock announcement, Social

Democratic Party (SPD) leader Andrea Nahles said Sunday she was stepping down from her party's top jobs following the European election drubbing late last month.

The 48-year-old's decision left the SPD in disarray, and raised questions over the survival of Merkel's coalition.

Whether the unhappy partnership

between Merkel's centre-right CDU-CSU alliance and the centre-left SPD can go on until the end of its term in 2021 could now hinge on Nahles' successor.

Anxious to calm the jitters over her government, Merkel said on Sunday that it would press on and fulfil its mandate.

"What I want to say for the government is that we will continue

with our work with all seriousness and with great responsibility," the veteran leader said in a statement.

The leadership crisis at the SPD could not have come at a worse time for Merkel's CDU, which was itself struggling to halt a haemorrhage of voters as the younger generation shuns it in droves for the Greens.

Extortion on rise ahead of Eid

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points, Feni's Lalpur, Mirsarai and Fouzderhat in Chattogram, Joydebpur and Tongi of Gazipur and Elenga of Tangail.

"We have visited the highways and found different workers' associations are mainly collecting tolls, but police always get the blame," said Atiqul Islam, deputy inspector general of highway police, adding that police were not involved in any toll collection.

"If any policeman is seen collecting tolls, please take a snap and file specific complaints with us. But don't make any general statements against police."

Asked, Osman Ali, general secretary of Bangladesh Road Transport Workers Federation, refuted the allegation of collecting tolls.

"We have to pay tolls to metropolitan, district, and highway police," he alleged.

"Some workers' associations might collect tolls, but we already requested the law enforcers to take action against them."

On May 26, Inspector General of Police Mohammad Javed Patwary through a video conference from the Police Headquarters (PHQ) instructed all police units to show zero tolerance against extortion on roads and highways across the country ahead of Eid.

Soheli Rana, assistant inspector general at PHQ, said a racket always tries to collect tolls ahead of Eid.

"Special instructions have already been given to different police units so that it does not happen and they are

working on it."

FOOTPATH EXTORTION

A 45-year-old woman, who sells seasonal fruits on footpath near the Pragati Insurance Bhavan at Kawran Bazar, said she pays Tk 150 daily to "linemen", who collect tolls, to run her business on the footpath, but it is Tk 280 in Ramadan.

This has become common at all points in the capital. On the footpaths of Mirpur-1 and -10, a hawkker pays "linemen" Tk 200 to Tk 600 ahead of Eid. It was Tk 100 to Tk 300 before the Ramadan.

A hawkker has to pay Tk 300 to Tk 800 in Farmgate area, while a hawkker in Motijheel area pays Tk 200 to Tk 400. The amount was half before the Ramadan.

This newspaper got the picture after talking to dozens of hawkkers in the last couple of days.

Hawkers and influential locals employed the "linemen".

Arif Chowdhury, executive president of Bangladesh Hawkers Federation, said around three lakh hawkkers are now in the capital.

"We give money to extortionists, police and city corporation employees through linemen round the year to do business, but the tolls become double just before Eid," he alleged.

Masudur Rahman, deputy commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, said they did not receive any specific allegations of extortion. "If any specific allegations were made, they would take action against it."

Price support still eludes rice farmers

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of marginal and small famers depend on rice for food security and their livelihoods, according to Bangladesh Integrated Household Survey 2015 done by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI).

In the 1980s, the government mostly bought paddy from farmers to provide them price support. But it later moved to buy rice from millers instead to build public food stock, and to give incentive to producers, said some former officials of the food directorate.

Before 1989-90, most of the grain procured was in the form of paddy. But since 1989-90, the bulk of the purchase by the government has been in the form of rice, said the IFPRI study published in March 1993.

In the 1990s, farmers could sell paddy at rice mill gate for

the government-fixed price in the presence of food directorate officials. This system was stopped in 1992, said Ilahi Dad Khan, former director of procurement of the DG Food.

Food ministry officials say storing paddy requires more space than rice. Also, a significant amount of paddy does not have any grain inside. Then there is the risk of paddy being damaged if left in warehouses for long. These are some of the reasons why the government prefers buying rice.

Between 1992 and 2019, government's annual procurement of paddy has crossed 2 lakh tonnes only in 2016.

The amount of paddy and rice to be purchased every year is decided by a government committee, headed by the food minister.

But there is no guideline to determine the ratio of paddy and rice

to be procured in a particular season, said Zulfikar Rahman, director procurement at the Directorate of Food.

The quantity is often determined based on the stock of food grains in the state storages, and distribution requirements under various social safety net and public food distribution schemes. And building of public stocks turns out to be the prime goal in practice, officials said.

"In reality, purchase of paddy is only symbolic," he added.

Food Secretary Shahabuddin Ahmed defended the procurement policy, although he could not say why the government was increasingly buying more rice instead of paddy.

Prices of paddy would drop further if the government does not fix the price, he said.

The government warehouses have a capacity to store only 21 lakh tonnes of food grain, and none of them are paddy silo, he added.

"We are now planning to set up paddy silos with 10 lakh tonne capacity across the country. If we can do it, the government will be able to buy more paddy and more farmers will be benefited," he said.

The ministry is now planning to place a project proposal before the cabinet.

Prof Jahangir Alam of Bangladesh Agriculture University said government's rice procurement from millers indirectly affects paddy prices.

"We have found farmers benefit from government procurement from the domestic market. But farmers will benefit more if the government buys more paddy from them," he said.

Bangladeshi shot dead in South Africa

UNB, Chattogram

A Bangladeshi youth was gunned down by "robbers" at East Rand Diepsloot of Johannesburg in South Africa on Sunday.

Shahadat Hossain, 24, was son of Estefaz Uddin from Chattogram's Lohagara upazila.

Mohammad Rubel, elder brother of Shahadat, said a gang of armed robbers looted valuables from a shop at 6:00pm and shot Shahadat while leaving the shop.

Rubel and other Bangladeshis there took the victim to a hospital where doctors pronounced him dead.

Shahadat went to South Africa in January this year, said his family sources.

'GUNFIGHT' WITH COPS

'Drug dealer' killed in Teknaf

UNB, Cox's Bazar

A suspected drug peddler was killed in a "gunfight" with police in Teknaf upazila early yesterday, police said.

The dead, Mufizur Rahman, 40, was a resident of Katakali area in the upazila.

According to information given by Mufizur, a police team conducted a drive somewhere in the upazila to recover arms and drugs around 4:00am, said Pradip Kumar Das, officer-in-charge of Teknaf Police Station.

When the team reached the spot, Mufizur's cohorts opened fire on the law enforcers forcing them to fire back in self-defence that triggered a "gunfight".

Mufizur was shot during the incident and taken to Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital where doctors declared him dead.

Mercurial Pakistan

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Pakistan, however, failed to defend a score of 340 against England -- the world's top-ranked ODI side -- at Trent Bridge last month.

"I think self-belief is the key," said Hafeez during the break between innings. "We all know we can handle any situation but we played a couple of bad shots against (the West Indies)."

"The pitch is holding up a bit and the spinners are getting turn and stoppage and there is a little for the seamers as well, so I think 348 is a good score," he added.

Pakistan were undone by a barrage of bouncers against the West Indies and England, unsurprisingly, deployed similar tactics after captain Eoin Morgan won the toss, with their attack featuring recalled fast bowler Mark Wood.

But Pakistan coped well on a ground where England have twice set a world record for the highest one-day international total -- 444 for three against Pakistan in 2016 and last year's 481 for six against Australia.

For all the talk about England's quicks, it was off-spinner Moeen Ali who took the first three wickets Monday on his way to figures of three for 50.

By contrast, fast bowler Jofra Archer's 10 wicketless overs cost 79 runs while Woakes, who equalled the record of four catches by an outfielder in a World Cup innings, took an expensive three for 71 in eight overs.

Rejoinder

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that go against the content of the reports and substantiate the rejoinder.

On receipt of the rejoinder, the company's Managing Director Tofayel Kabir Khan was contacted over phone.

Contrary to what the rejoinder claimed, the MD said that they, as of May 29, had not obtained the final contract of licence from the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) to occupy Meghna foreshore and build the dockyard and slipways.

It only proves the veracity of our reports that they had completed building two dockyard slipways occupying Meghna foreshore before they obtained final licence. This prompted this paper to run the report headlined "Meghna grabber defies govt order", one of the three mentioned in the rejoinder.

The final licence contract, obtainable after paying the government revenue, entitles one to occupy and use a river foreshore in compliance with the terms and conditions outlined in the licence with a view to protect the river.

Even though MD Tofayel had made commitments that he would provide this paper with copies of other supplementary approvals the company claims to have, he did not do so until yesterday.

The two other reports headlined "Freeing the Meghna from grabbers: act or get sued", and "Meghna grabbers: BIWTA drive stops halfway" are based on documents, official versions, findings, and an eviction drive carried out by the BIWTA.

We stand by our reports.