

ASSAM CITIZENSHIP ROW

Wrongful detentions in the search for illegals

REUTERS, Bishunpur

Three years ago, police in India's northeastern state of Assam were looking for a woman named Madhumala Das, who had been declared an illegal immigrant by a local tribunal.

When they reached the village of Bishunpur, they picked up 59-year-old Madhubala Mandal, who was lighting a fire outside her bamboo hut one morning in November 2016.

Mandal, a frail, Bengali-speaking woman who is just over four feet tall, spent over two-and-a-half years in a detention centre until she was freed last month following a probe conducted by a new police chief in the area.

In a recent interview in her hut, Mandal said she told the police she was not the person they were looking for, that she was Indian and had documents to prove it. But they did not listen.

Local activists and lawyers say such cases are not uncommon in Assam, where a long-simmering movement against illegal immigrants, particularly Bengali-speaking Muslims, has been fanned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist government. His ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) also governs Assam.

At the end of next month, Assam plans to publish the final version of a register of citizens it has been preparing

since 2015. Hundreds of thousands – perhaps millions – are likely to be left off the list – meaning they will have to prove their citizenship, or risk detention like Mandal.

This is unlikely to lead to immediate mass arrests because detention centres are full, and Bangladesh has not agreed to accept the people identified as "foreigners".

But being a non-citizen carries many penalties, including loss of access to government payments, voting rights, healthcare and state education. People could be quickly marginalised.

And this isn't only an Assam issue. Last week, Modi's top lieutenant, Home (Interior) Minister Amit Shah, who has described Assam's illegal immigrants as "termites", said the government intends to go nationwide in identifying and deporting those who don't have the right to stay.

At the same time, the government has been welcoming Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist migrants, making Muslims feel targeted. Shah said this month that the government wanted to "stop infiltration and push every single infiltrator out of the country", but would welcome Hindu refugees.

WORSE THAN CONVICTS

When she was arrested, Mandal, a Hindu, was taken to a detention centre in the town of Kokrajhar, in western Assam.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 2



A woman rows a boat carrying rice straw, to be used for cooking, to her makeshift home on a dyke in Gaibandha's Fulchhari upazila. All seven upazilas of the district were hit by flood two weeks ago. The photo was taken in Katlamari village of the upazila yesterday.

PHOTO: MOSTAFA SHABUJ

Caravan of corpses

DEATHS OF FEMALE MIGRANT WORKERS IN SAUDI ARABIA, JORDAN, LEBANON, OMAN AND UAE					
REASON OF DEATHS	2016	2017	2018	2019 UP TO JUNE	TOTAL DEATH
Suicide	1	12	23	17	53
Accident	12	19	15	10	56
Stroke	20	37	43	20	120
Normal	20	22	16	5	63
Others	4	12	15	8	39
YEAR-WISE TOTAL	57	102	112	60	331

FROM PAGE 1

"We don't know why and how my mother died," he told this correspondent just before getting on the ambulance.

According to the death certificate, Monoara died by suicide on May 11 last year, only a month after moving to Saudi Arabia as a domestic worker. She was employed by Laafi Waqqaf Haifan Al Rwiili in Al Jawf region of the oil-rich country.

"Why would my mother commit suicide?" said a shocked Imran after this correspondent saw the death report and asked him about it.

Shamim Mia, 33, wants an answer to the same question.

His sister Johura Begum, 35, of Munshiganj died by suicide in a Saudi employer's residence in Jeddah in March last year, three months after her joining work there, documents show.

He said Johura's employer called Shamim two days after the death and informed him about her passing. Later, Tipu Sultan, the broker who had arranged her visa, told Shamim Johura died of a stroke.

"My sister once told me by phone that she wanted to return home because she was facing some problems," Shamim said.

"She had no sickness. It's difficult to accept such death at this age. I request the authorities to probe these deaths."

A survey by the BRAC Migration Programme has found questionable deaths of female migrant workers have been rising in the recent years.

exploitation there. They cannot go outside and must do whatever their employers demand of them," she said.

Shariful Hasan, head of BRAC Migration Programme, said they had been observing for about two years that hundreds of female migrants were returning every month, having suffered various forms of abuses. Some were physically and sexually abused. Others became pregnant and mentally imbalanced.

"Eventually, we discovered a rising number of them returning in coffins and many of them died reportedly by suicide," he told The Daily Star.

It is a mystery why the poor women going to work abroad would commit suicide, he said.

"Some of the families we talked to said their relatives were abused while in the Middle East."

The other two major factors are stroke and accident. "Women going to the Middle East are mostly aged between 20 and 40. Why would they suffer stroke?" asked Shariful.

Also, female migrants work indoors, and it is surprising that so many of them would die in accidents, he added.

"It was high time Bangladesh government investigated the cases seriously and identified why such unnatural deaths are happening in large numbers and took remedial actions."

However, Mehedi Hasan, labour counsellor of Bangladesh embassy in Riyadh, said there was no scope for the Bangladesh authorities to investigate

MIGRATION OF FEMALE WORKERS

YEAR	2016	2017	2018	2019 UP TO JUNE
Saudi Arabia	68,286	83,354	73,713	41,287
Lebanon	2,450	1,642	1,207	861
Oman	12,897	9,199	11,034	6,395
Jordan	22,689	19,872	9,100	9,322
UAE	5,151	3,272	2,427	1,436

between 2016 and June this year, bodies of 311 women migrants were sent from the Middle East, mostly from Saudi Arabia.

Of them, 53 died by suicide, 120 due to stroke and 56 in accidents.

Over the years, deaths by suicide have seen an alarming rise – from 1 in 2016 to 17 so far this year. This year, one in every three deaths is a suicide.

Sheepa Hafiza, executive director of Ain o Salish Kendra, said such high number of reported suicides and deaths in strokes raise a lot of suspicions and it called for an investigation.

"Employers in the Arab countries, especially in Saudi Arabia, consider these female domestic workers as slaves. So they behave however they please," she said by phone last night.

In recent years, her organisation has helped rescue a number of female domestic workers from troubled situation in the Middle East.

"We've learnt they faced inhuman

the matters in the Kingdom.

"The major issue is capacity development of the female migrants. Most problems arise out of the workers not being able to adjust to the environment, food and culture," Mehedi told The Daily Star by phone.

Ahmed Munir Salehin, additional secretary at the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, said they were unaware that some female migrants died by suicides or due to strokes and road accidents.

"If that is the case, it should be investigated. We will look into the matter," he said by phone recently.

While the authorities talk of actions, relatives of the migrants continue to suffer the trauma caused by such untimely losses.

Shamim Mia said his sister Johura had gone abroad to earn so she could educate her 11-year old son. "I am worried about the orphan. Who will take care of him?"

Climate change the culprit?

FROM PAGE 1

Dr SM Munjurul Hannan Khan, additional secretary of the environment, forest and climate change ministry, said climate change creates a favourable condition for many vector-borne diseases, including dengue.

"As weather pattern is changing in Bangladesh, the prevalence of vector-borne diseases is increasing. Besides dengue, many such diseases may become more common in the country," he said.

Several global studies also talked about the link between global warming and dengue.

A study, published in US-based Public Library of Science (PLOS) in May, said global warming places up to 1 billion people worldwide at risk of exposure to disease-carrying mosquitoes over the next 50 years.

The two most common disease-transmitting mosquitoes – *Aedes aegypti* and *Aedes albopictus* – carry viruses such as dengue, Zika and chikungunya, plus more than a dozen others that could become larger threats in the next half-century, the study report said.

Another study published in journal Nature Microbiology and reported by The New York Times on June 10 said climate change would exacerbate the spread of dengue fever.

Warming temperatures help expand dengue's range because as it gets warmer, mosquitoes can thrive in more places where they could not previously.

Warming temperatures also shorten the time it takes a mosquito to become a biting adult and accelerate the time between when a mosquito picks up a disease and is able to pass it on, according to the study.

Md Mahfuzul Hoque, professor at Dhaka University's microbiology department said, "Usually, dengue situation does not remain so acute during this time of the year. However, the risk increases when temperature rises and weather becomes unpredictable."

The common symptoms of dengue, a viral disease spread by *Aedes* mosquitoes, include fever, severe joint pain and internal bleeding.

In Bangladesh, the number of dengue cases has increased around nine times in the last 10 years. In 2008, there were only 1,153 identified

dengue patients in the country with no causality reported. Last year, the number rose to 10,148 with 26 deaths.

Data from the DGHS show that 9,256 people have been infected with dengue until yesterday this year. And eight people have died of dengue so far.

More specifically, 295 dengue cases were reported in June last year. This year, the number rose to almost five times to 1,753 for the month. For July last year the number was 946, whereas a total of 7,513 dengue cases have already been reported until yesterday during this month.

Like Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Philippines, Singapore and Vietnam are also experiencing increased number of dengue cases, according to the data from Euro-pean Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC).

As of July 15, Malaysia has reported 69,700 cases, compared to 36,000 cases in the same period last year.

Singapore had 5,620 dengue patients as of June 22 against 1,200 for the same period last year.

In Thailand, the number of dengue cases was 40,402 as of July 2, from 18,100 for the same period last year. The most affected provinces include Trat, Ubun Ratchathani and Samut Sakhon.

Due to the intense circulation of the virus throughout the country, Thailand has declared a state of emergency and is forecasting approximately 90,000 cases for this year.

According to World Health Organisation, over 2.5 billion people – over 40 percent of the world's population – are now at risk from dengue.

WHO estimates there may be 50–100 million dengue infections worldwide every year and also said the disease is now endemic in more than 100 countries with South-east Asia and the Western Pacific regions are the most seriously affected.

WAY OUT
The DGHS has written to Oxford University about Oxitec's "Friendly Mosqui-toes" that are proven, safe, targeted vector control solution to combat mosquitoes that transmit disease.

"We are yet to get any response.

Global experience is that Oxitec's Friendly Mosquitoes gives result within four to five months. After getting reply from the authorities, we will see whether it is feasible for the country, whether it has any health impact," Abul Kalam Azad, DG of the DGHS, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Oxitec is a British biotechnology company which develops genetically modified insects to assist in insect control.

According to the company, their "friendly" mosquito strains are designed to significantly reduce the population of a targeted mosquito species in the wild without impact on human or environmental health.

Upon release into the environment, Oxitec's second generation male-selecting strains mate with females, and only male offspring with a self-limiting gene survive to adulthood.

The surviving non-biting males subsequently seek out and mate with more wild females and pass along the self-limiting trait for up to 10 generations before being extinct, according to Oxitec.

The government is also thinking of introducing *Wolbachia* in the country to prevent dengue.

Prof Mahmudur Rahman, former director of Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR), said *Wolbachia*-infected mosquito-toes could be one of the most effective ways to bring the situation under control.

When an infected female mosquito mates with an uninfected male, they will produce *Wolbachia*-infected mosquitoes. It is the same when both infected mosquitoes mate. But when a *Wolbachia*-infected male mosquito mates with an uninfected female, the eggs won't hatch. The bacteria does not pose any danger to humans, he said.

The Nature, a British multidisciplinary scientific journal, in an article on July 17 said two islands in the Chinese city of Guangzhou have reduced the *Aedes albopictus*, or Asian tiger mosquito, by up to 94 percent using the method.

"We are exploring all the possibilities. We have talked to the World Health Organisation. Probably they will send an entomologist soon to see the situation in the country," Azad said.

Tigers fall short

FROM PAGE 1

score on 39 for four. Sabbir Rahman and Mushfiqur Rahim then tried to hold the ship together with a 111-run fifth-wicket stand. But both Sabbir and Mushfiqur departed for sixties as the writing on the wall became clearer for Bangladesh.

Earlier, taking first guard Sri Lanka made a flying start riding on some serious hitting by Perera as the left-hander registered his fifth ODI ton in just 82 balls. The home side were at one point cruising on 200 for 2 in 31 overs.

Shafiqul Islam, making a comeback to the ODI side after three years, provided the first breakthrough for the Tigers by dismissing Avishka Fernando with an edge to first slip. But skipper Dimuth Karunaratne and Perera added 97 runs for the second wicket at a high scoring rate with a flurry of boundaries.

Karunaratne however was dismissed for 36 by Mehedi Hasan Miraz, but Perera was joined by Kusal Mendis and the pair continued to punish the toothless Bangladesh bowling attack.

Nothing seemed to go in favour of Bangladesh as stand-in captain Tamim Iqbal, on his debut as Bangladesh ODI skipper, looked helpless as the poor fielding only added to the visitors' misery.

However, the Tigers managed to bounce back in the game after part-time medium-pace Soumya Sarkar removed Perera for 111 off 99 balls, which featured 17 fours and a six.

Mendis showed great sportsmanship as he walked off despite the umpire being unmoved when the right-hander got a thin outside edge to Rubel Hossain when he was on 48, after Mahmudullah had dropped a rather simple chance with the batsman on 28.

Since then, Sri Lanka were unable to cash in on the blistering start. While at one point they seemed to be in line for a 350-plus score, the hosts ended up adding just 69 runs in the last 10 overs, losing four wickets with Lahiru Thirimanne adding 25 runs at the end to help post 314 for eight in 50 overs.

Shafiqul remained the pick of the bowlers for Bangladesh and ended up picking three for 62 from his nine overs, while Mustafizur Rahman took two wickets, but he too was expensive, conceding 75 runs from his 10 overs.

7 lakh yaba

FROM PAGE 1

this connection, he said. Meanwhile, police yesterday arrested Teknaf Union Parishad Chairman Sahjahan Mia while he was travelling to India through Beanpole land border.

Sahjahan is accused in multiple drugs cases filed with Teknaf Police Station in Cox's Bazar, said Khairul Islam, Sub-Inspector of Beanpole Immigration Police.

"He was banned from travelling abroad and detained while traveling to India via Beanpole Immigration," the official said, adding that they had handed him over to Beanpole Port Police Station.

Our Cox's Bazar and Beanpole correspondents contributed to this report.

TIB concerned

FROM PAGE 1

a press release yesterday. In the statement, TIB also expressed concern over police failure in providing necessary security to victims, their family members and key witnesses.

Noting that there is little opportunity to consider such allegations as "stray incidents", TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman said, "There is no scope for denying the allegations, and the time for confining these allegations to 'departmental steps' alone is over."

If these allegations are overlooked, justice and rule of law guaranteed by the constitution will be at risk.

No fund for mosquito control activities

FROM PAGE 1

Tapon Chandra Das, a resident of Demra's Dogair, said people in his neighbourhood were yet to see any benefit of being a part of the city corporation.

"We are living in fear of the disease," Tapon said.

Contacted, DSCC Mayor Sayeed Khokon said, "We have not even started collecting taxes in the areas. We are now developing roads and the drainage systems there."

On the other hand, DNCC Mayor

Atiqul Islam said, "A tender for purchasing fumigation machines and sprays for the new wards is under way."

Both the mayors said they would allocate funds for mosquito control and garbage management in their next budget.

LOCAL LEADER CHIPS IN
Councillor of ward-61 Jumman Miah said he purchased five sprays and a fumigation machine with his own money.

The DSCC will soon hand

out aerosol sprays at educational institutions for free, Moyer Khokon said yesterday.

However, the mayor could not specify when his officials would be able to do that.

MENON SLAMS MAYOR
Lawmaker Rashed Khan Menon yesterday said the DSCC Mayor was trying to hide corruption in insecticide procurement and incompetency of his officials by terming the dengue outbreak a rumour.

US Senate panel advances Saudi sanctions measure

REUTERS, Washington

The US Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Thursday backed legislation that would impose sanctions on the Saudi royal family and block some weapons sales, pushing back against President Donald Trump's close ties to the kingdom.

The vote was 13-9 for the legislation, as three Republicans

joined Democrats in backing the measure despite expected opposition from Trump.

Many members of Congress have been agitating to hold Riyadh accountable for human rights abuses, including the murder of journalist Jamal Khakhoggi at a Saudi consulate in Turkey and a humanitarian catastrophe in Yemen, where Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are fighting Iran-backed Houthi rebels.

Lawmakers are also unhappy with the Trump administration's decision in May to push ahead with more than \$8 billion in military sales, sidestepping the congressional review process by declaring an "emergency" over tensions with Iran.

The Senate and House of Representatives passed three resolutions disapproving of those sales. Trump vetoed the legislation on Wednesday.