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He saw death so close

A survivor of the Mediterranean tragedy in May narrates how manpower brokers treated fortune seekers in Libya, and the horrific experiences of his trip to Europe

PINAKI ROY

It is called "body contract" under which you do not need to pay a dime before reaching your destination. But as soon as you are there, your family members have to make the payment.

Billal Ahmed was assured by his travel agent that he would safely make it to Italy. "There would be no risk at all," the agent had said.

Billal along with 15 others were rescued in the Mediterranean in May after a boat carrying 86 people to Italy from Libya capsized off the Tunisian coast. As many as 71 people, including Billal's three nephews, died on that perilous journey.

A resident of Mohidpur village in Sylhet's Fenchuganj upazila, Billal, 31, is the youngest among nine siblings and has not married yet. He dropped out of school after class five.

He was doing well with fish farming and paddy cultivation until a devastating flash flood hit him hard in 2017.

"I could not earn anything that year. So, I thought, I should try my luck aboard. I was looking for an opportunity," he told this correspondent at his village home recently.

In September 2018, he met Enamul Haque at a wedding party of one of his relatives at a nearby village.

Enamul told him that he had a travel agency in Sylhet and sent many people to Europe. And Billal would have to pay him Tk 9 lakh once he



Billal Ahmed

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CELEBRATING LIFE 2019

Seated from left, Standard Chartered Bank Bangladesh CEO Naser Ezaz Bijoy, singer Syed Abdul Hadi, actor Sarah Kabori, theatre personality Syed Jamil Ahmed, MP Asaduzzaman Noor, and Editor and Publisher of The Daily Star Mahfuz Anam pose with the winners of the Standard Chartered-The Daily Star Celebrating Life Awards-2019 at the capital's International Convention City Bashundhara yesterday. Hadi, Kabori and Jamil received lifetime achievement awards at the event.

PHOTO: STAR

TRIP TO EUROPE



Govt to provide security to Nusrat's family

Says law minister as family alleges threat

STAR REPORT

The government will provide security to the family of Nusrat Jahan Rafi, the madrasa student who was burnt to death for protesting sexual abuse in Feni, for as long as it is necessary, said Law Minister Anisul Huq.



He made the remarks while attending a press briefing at his residence in Dhaka's Gulshan area yesterday, one day after a Feni court handed down death sentence to all the 16 accused in the case.

If any vested quarter threatens Nusrat's family, the government will take lawful action against them, he warned.

Documents relevant to Nusrat murder case will reach the High Court as death reference within seven days, he added.

"We hope that the case will be settled at the High Court within a very short time," he said.

Terming the verdict of Nusrat murder case as a milestone, he said justice had been served as all the offenders, who were involved in the murder, got capital punishment.

The verdict of Nusrat murder case was delivered within the shortest possible time through all the legal procedures, he said.

Responding to a query, the law minister said that the number of road accidents would be reduced after the Road Transport Act-2018 comes into force. SEE PAGE 10 COL 3

TWO BOEING 777 LEASED FROM EGYPT AIR

Biman returns last one after huge loss

RASHIDUL HASAN

Biman has finally got rid of the last of its two leased Boeing 777-200ER airplanes that have been causing the national flag carrier to incur huge losses for several years.

Leased from Egypt Air in 2014 for five years with stringent conditions that went against Biman's interests, the extended range planes remained grounded since 2017 due to engine defects. One was returned to Egypt Air in July and the other on Tuesday.

Officials of Biman Bangladesh Airlines said the spare parts needed to repair the engines were unavailable.

The Tk-1,223 crore spent on these age-old planes is more than the price of a brand-new plane, they added.

Biman had to pay Tk 56 crore to Egypt Air for breaching the terms of lease, Tk 600 crore for lease, Tk 310 crore for leasing four engines, around Tk 250 crore to United Airlines for repairs, and around Tk 7 crore to Vietnam Airlines Engineering Company for using its Bay, officials added.

The amount of loss would have been greater if the civil aviation ministry had

not engaged the foreign affairs ministry to negotiate with Egypt. Finally, the Egypt Air agreed to take back the planes and relax some of the conditions, Mohibul Haque, secretary at the civil aviation ministry, said.

As per the lease agreement, Biman was to pay Tk 10 crore a month to Egypt Air even if the planes remained grounded.

A probe by the Civil Aviation and Tourism Ministry in March concluded that the terms and conditions of the "non-transparent" lease agreement clearly went against Biman's interests.

For instance, Biman was not allowed to void the agreement before five years, and once the deal expired, the carrier was supposed to return the planes exactly in the state in which they were received, the report said.

The probe body found that a section of Biman officials inked the non-transparent deal for personal gains, said a top civil aviation ministry official, quoting the probe report.

"The Biman officials involved in the agreement signing didn't want the planes to fly. They apparently benefited while the planes remained grounded," Mohibul said. SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



3 cultural luminaries honoured

SHARMIN JOYA

Rain and gloomy weather could not dampen the air of festivity and splendour that fenced the capital's International Convention City Bashundhara yesterday for the award ceremony of Standard Chartered-The Daily Star Celebrating Life's 12th edition.

This year's theme was "Folk Heritage of Bangladesh", which evokes a special appeal in terms of lyrics, philosophies and heart-touching melody in Bengali culture.

The competition brought in thousands

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

Voluntary return of Rohingyas to Myanmar only solution

PM tells NAM leaders; Rouhani, Mahathir assure Bangladesh of help in resolving the refugee crisis

UNB, Baku, Azerbaijan

Calling upon the world community to address the Rohingya crisis, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said voluntary return of the Rohingyas to their homes in safety, security and dignity was the only solution to the crisis.

The crisis not only destabilises Bangladesh but also territories beyond the country, she said at the plenary session of the 18th Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in Baku.

"We're currently hosting over 1.1 million Rohingyas. It has the potential to destabilise our country and beyond. We're constrained to seek support of the international community in resolving the crisis. Voluntary return of the Rohingyas to their homes in the Rakhine State in safety, security and dignity is the only solution to the crisis," said Hasina.

The session titled "Upholding the Bandung Principles to ensure concerted and adequate response to the challenges of contemporary world" was held at Baku Congress



Centre.

Hasina said the Rohingya crisis is a political one deeply rooted in Myanmar. "Thus, its solution has to be found inside Myanmar."

Despite the socio-economic successes, Bangladesh is currently dealing with two challenges -- Rohingya crisis and adverse impacts of climate change, she said.

Meanwhile, during meetings with Hasina at Baku Congress Centre, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and Malaysian PM Mahathir Mohamad assured her of help in resolving the

Rohingya crisis.

About impacts of the climate change, Hasina at the plenary session said although Bangladesh has little responsibility for global warming, it is suffering heavily from its devastating impacts.

"The international response to climate change, particularly that of developed countries, must, therefore, fully respect the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change," she said.

The PM said Bangladesh has been making unprecedented socio-economic progress. "Our GDP growth has now reached 8.13 percent. We're making continuous efforts in strengthening democracy and justice by empowering people, especially women."

She pointed out that Bangladesh's successes in poverty reduction, primary healthcare, women's empowerment, gender equality and gender parity in education have been widely acclaimed by the international community.

Hasina said Bangladesh is a country

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