

1,075 'forged' passports seized in capital

Rab suspects many of those belong to Rohingyas; two travel agents arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rab yesterday seized 1,075 "forged" passports from two travel agency offices at the capital's Fakirapool.

The elite force arrested Atiqur Rahman and Din Islam, proprietors of the travel agencies, Azizia International and UCKSEL Private Limited.

A Rab-2 team launched the raid around 4:00pm and continued until

11:30pm, Company Commander Muhammad Mohiuddin Faruqi told The Daily Star.

Of the passports, 175 were issued for individuals in Cox's Bazar, he said, adding that there were allegations that some people were forging the passports to help Rohingya refugees travel to Malaysia with Bangladeshi passports.

The arrestees would be produced before a court today.

CHITTAGONG UNIVERSITY

BCL man beats up visually impaired student

CU CORRESPONDENT

A visually impaired student of Chittagong University was beaten up by a Chhatra League activist on Sunday night over a trivial matter.

Shukkur Alam, a third-year student of philosophy, came under attack from BCL activist Morshedul Alam Rifat, an honour's student of management, over allegedly elbowing the latter at a shop outside Suhrawardy Hall, said witnesses.

Protesting the incident, students under the banner of Disable Students Society of Chittagong University staged a demonstration in front of the dormitory that night demanding the university authorities bring Morshedul to book.

They called off their protest around 11:00pm after receiving assurance from the CU authorities of taking action against the assaulter.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, Shukkur said Morshedul picked a quarrel with him around 8:30pm on Sunday when he went to the shop to buy bread.

The BCL man asked the victim why he elbowed him. At one stage, he started beating up Shukkur indiscriminately.

"I told him that I am visually impaired and I had a surgery on my left eye about eight months ago. I apologised to him for any unintentional inconvenience caused, but he didn't stop beating me. He punched me in my eyes too," the victim said.

The assaulter soon left the spot, leaving Shukkur injured. Some fellow students took him to the CU medical centre.

Dr Subhasish Chowdhury of the medical centre said they gave primary treatment to Shukkur and advised him to go to Chattogram Medical College Hospital for examining his eyes.

The victim, who uses a cane to move from one place to another, lodged a written complaint with the CU proctor's office yesterday, seeking justice.

Despite repeated attempts, this correspondent could not reach Morshedul over phone for comments.

Rejaul Haque Rubel, president of CU Chhatra League, said they told the university authorities to bring the accused to justice as early as possible.

Terming the attack inhuman, CU acting proctor Pranab Mitra Chowdhury said they issued a show-cause notice to Morshedul yesterday and asked him to give an explanation about the incident within three working days.

If his explanation is not found satisfactory, he will be expelled from the university, the acting proctor added.

He said they have also asked Hathazari police to detain the accused.

Alhaz Uddin, president of Disable Students Society of Chittagong University, said despite having enough evidence, the university authorities were delaying taking steps against the accused. He said they would go for a tougher movement if the accused was not detained within three days.

DEATH OF AGRICULTURAL UNIVERSITY STUDENT

Probe negligence of hall authorities

Demand students, place nine-point demand

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Students of Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU) yesterday demonstrated on the campus protesting the death of a fellow student allegedly due to the negligence of the authorities.

The dead, Harrani Janaki Raman, 20, was from Malaysia and a second-year student at the Faculty of Veterinary Science.

Raman, a resident student of Begum Rokeya Hall, started having breathing difficulties on Friday evening and was taken to the BAU Health Centre where she was given primary treatment.

When her condition deteriorated around 9:00pm, doctors referred her to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital (MMCH), but she could not be shifted immediately as no ambulance was available at that time.

Students then took her to MMCH around 9:30pm and doctors declared her dead around 1:15am on Saturday. Prof Abdul Hannan Mia, head of the medicine department at MMCH, told The Daily Star that the girl had long been suffering from respiratory problems and was brought in a critical condition.

"We tried to shift her to the Intensive Care Unit, but could not do so as there was no seat available," the doctor said.

Students yesterday held a sit-in programme in front of the residence of BAU vice-chancellor, demanding

the removal of Dean of Faculty of Veterinary Science Prof Nazim Uddin Ahmed, Begum Rokeya Hall provost Prof Mohammad Ziaul Haque and university health centre's Chief Medical Officer Fayed Ahmed for their alleged negligence in failing to shift the girl to MMCH immediately.

They placed a nine-point demand that includes a fair investigation into the negligence of the hall authorities and modernisation of facilities at the health centre.

No classes and exams were held yesterday.

The protesters also alleged the hall Provost Ziaul Haque was informed but he did not come to the scene immediately. Denying the allegation, Ziaul, however, said he rushed to the spot soon after hearing the news.

Talking to this correspondent, university's Proctor Prof Md Azharul Haque said they could not shift the student to MMCH immediately as the lone ambulance of the health centre was out of the campus.

Students returned to their dormitories after VC Prof Lutful Hassan assured them that the authorities would conduct a fair investigation into the allegations.

The body was handed over to the father of the girl on Sunday, said the proctor, adding that the family had no complaint to file regarding the death.

Sundarbans

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Officials of 63 camps in the forest have already started working to assess the damages caused by the cyclone, he said.

Some pontoons, jetties and walkways of the forest department were damaged, he said, adding that no massive destruction of trees and animals in the forest were reported.

Visiting the eastern part of the Sundarbans yesterday, our Khulna correspondent found a large number of fallen trees at different places.

TIB CALLS FOR SUNDARBANS PROTECTION

Meanwhile, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) yesterday called for highest efforts from the government to protect the Sundarbans as it acts like a shield to safeguard the country from various natural calamities.

The anti-graft watchdog also urged the government to stop all kinds of industrialisation, including the Rampal Power Plant, around the

Sundarbans.

TIB came up with the demand at a press statement issued yesterday.

The role of the Sundarbans in protecting the region from different natural calamities is unquestionable, the statement read.

"The 6,170 square kilometer forest has been protecting the lives and resources in Bangladesh since many years," said TIB Executive Director Dr Iftekharuzzaman.

The contribution of the forest has been recognised by all, including the government, the statement said.

The process of constructing a coal-based power plant at the expense of the Sundarbans is still going on despite local and global concerns, it also said.

Such an industrialisation, which poses threat to the Sundarbans, goes against the government's commitment to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina poses for a photo with dignitaries and organisers during the inauguration of the three-day "Dhaka Global Dialogue-2019" at a hotel in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: BSS

Rohingyas are a threat to regional security: PM

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poverty is their common enemy.

She said Bangladesh is geographically located on the shore of the Bay of Bengal and as such on the shore of the Indian Ocean. "This ocean has huge significance for various reasons. Indian Ocean consists of a number of vital maritime routes, which contribute significantly to the largest economies of Asia."

Half of the global container shipment and 80 percent of global fuel trade pass through the Indian Ocean, the PM said, adding that 16.8 percent of the global reserve of oil and 27.9 percent of natural gas is situated in this ocean. Besides, 28 percent of the total fisheries are collected from the Indian Ocean.

Indian Ocean, being the source of immense resources and the part of strategically important seaways, is thus considered very important, Hasina said.

In the area of maritime boundary and maritime economy, Bangladesh believes that strong competition among each other will not be helpful in flourishing the Blue Economy of the Bay of Bengal or the Indian Ocean. It will rather act as a stumbling block in ensuring security and stability of the region, the PM mentioned.

She said Bangladesh is always active in enhancing peaceful and cooperative relations in the region of the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean.

"Bangladesh has resolved its maritime boundary disputes in a peaceful manner with its neighbours India and Myanmar. I think this can be an example for the world. Such cooperative approach and efforts by us in resolving crises can be a lesson for other regions."

The PM said different threats like piracy, armed robbery, and terrorist attacks in coastal and maritime

areas, human trafficking, arms and drug smuggling, exist in the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal region. These unconventional risks should be addressed collectively.

Hasina said pollution and excessive extraction of marine resources were destroying the ecologies in the sea, damaging the overall environment of the world. "As a result, threats are being created for human health and livelihood. But I believe that it is not possible for a single country to resolve these crises."

The premier said there are a total of 40 developing countries surrounding the Indian Ocean, where 35 percent of the global population lives. There are six countries surrounding the Bay of Bengal, and few more countries like Nepal, Bhutan, the Maldives, Malaysia and Singapore have important impact of the Bay on their economies despite not being at the coast.

"The economies of the countries ashore of or dependent on the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal, and the lives of their people are hugely influenced by the ocean and the sea. The resources, environment, ecology and security of the ocean and the sea directly affect the economy and the security of these nations."

Therefore, peace and stability in the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal is essential for the economic progress and security of these countries, she mentioned.

Hasina said the sea plays an extremely important role in Bangladesh's economy as it is an offshore country, and for many reasons Bangladesh gives high priority to the Indian Ocean as well as to the Bay of Bengal.

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen and ORF President Samir Saran also spoke at the programme.

26 die as Bulbul batters coasts

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"As part of the immediate response, for the first time in the country's history more than 21.6 lakh people were successfully evacuated and moved to 5,587 cyclone shelters in coastal districts," he said during a briefing on the cyclone's fallout.

Bulbul was initially categorised as a "very severe cyclone", but it lost strength when it entered Bangladesh through the Sundarbans in Khulna around midnight on Saturday. The cyclone had earlier made landfall at Sagar Island in the southern tip of India's West Bengal. It crossed the Bangladesh territory around yesterday midnight, exiting through Feni towards Tripura, India.

The full scale of the destruction, however, cannot be measured yet as electricity supply and telephone connections have not resumed in the southern districts hit by the calamity.

"Due to disruptions to power supply, we couldn't collect complete data on the damage yet. We are working on it. Hopefully, we will publish a complete report by 3:00pm tomorrow [today]," Enamur Rahman said.

About the official death toll, he said, "Two people who died in Shariatpur were out of the disaster area. So, the actual death toll is nine."

The unofficial toll, however, is higher.

26 DEAD, 51 MISSING
Twenty-six people died in different storm-related accidents in nine districts, while two died at shelters of natural causes during the cyclone.

Five people died in Barishal, three in Khulna, two each in Bagerhat, Shariatpur and Gopalganj, and one each in Patuakhali, Pirojpur, Madaripur and Satkhira districts.

The government will provide Tk 25,000 in assistance to the families of each victim.

In Khulna, three people were killed when they were crushed under

falling trees on Sunday. They were identified as Promila Mandal, 52, of Dacope upazila, Alamgir Hossain, 35, of Digholia upazila, and Rahman Sheikh, 78, of Rupsha upazila.

According to the district relief office, around 47,275 houses were damaged: 37,820 partially and 9,455 completely.

In Bagerhat, two died when trees uprooted by strong winds fell on them in Fakirhat and Rampal upazilas. They are Hira Begum, wife of Masum Sheikh of Fakirhat upazila, and Samia Khatun, daughter of Babul Sheikh of Rampal upazila.

According to the district administration, 44,563 houses, 35,529 hectares of cropland and 7,234 fish enclosures were damaged by the storm. Besides, 18.35 kilometres of dams were collapsed.

Five people were killed during the storm and two died in cyclone shelters in five coastal districts of Barishal division.

Ashalata Mazumder, 60, was killed by a falling tree in Ujirpur municipality around 2:00pm during the cyclone. Mostaine Billah, deputy commissioner (DC) of Barishal, told The Daily Star.

According to the DC, at least 12,235 houses and 278 schools, along with around 2.79 lakh hectares of Aman and 7.5 thousand hectares of vegetable fields, were damaged. Some 528 fish enclosures and 721.8kms of an embankment were also damaged in the cyclone.

In Patuakhali, Abdul Hamid, 65, was killed by a falling tree in Mirzaganj upazila, while Bellal, 35, was killed in the same way in Kalapara upazila. Sufia Khatun, 60, died at one of the district's cyclone shelters due to health complications.

In Barguna, Halima Khatun, 65, of the upazila's Banai village, died at a cyclone centre, our local correspondent reports quoting Anisur Rahman, the upazila nirbahi officer

THE NIGHTMARE OF CYCLONE BULBUL

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(UNO).

In Pirojpur, Nani Gopal Mandal, 55, was killed at Nazirpur.

In Gopalganj, two people died as trees fell on them during the storm in Kotalipara and Sadar upazilas of the district. They were identified as Mazu Bibi, 67, of Khatiyagor village under Sadar upazila, and Sekel Hawladar, 70, of Bandabari village under Kotalipara upazila, our Faridpur correspondent reports, quoting the UNOs of the two upazilas.

In Shariatpur, two people were killed as trees fell on them in Naria and Damudya upazilas. They are Ali Box Chaiyal, 68, of Naria upazila and Aleya Begum, 45, of Damudya upazila.

In Madaripur, Saleha Begum, 40, wife of Abdul Aziz Kha of Ghatmajhi village, suffered injuries after her house was ravaged by strong winds in the Sadar upazila. She was taken to Madaripur General Hospital in critical condition, where doctor declared her dead around 3:00pm yesterday, Saifuddin Gias, the UNO said.

According to news reports, another person died in Satkhira, but the disaster ministry claims it was not cyclone-related, as it had happened outside the designated "disaster target zone".

The bodies of nine fishermen were recovered from the Meghna

at Bahadurpur-Elisha point. Rescue operations were on when the report was filed last night.

Md Saiful Islam, superintendent of police in Barishal, told The Daily Star that a fishing trawler, with 24 fishermen on board, was returning from Chandpur on Sunday when it capsized in the river's Elisha point around noon. Fourteen managed to swim ashore.

In Barguna and Bhola, 51 fishermen remain traceless after they had gone to sea despite the storm warning.

Meanwhile, around one thousand tourists, who were trapped on St Martin's Island since the cyclone began to form, returned to the mainland of Teknaf in Cox's Bazar yesterday under the arrangement of Bangladesh Navy, said Lt Md Hasan.

NO ELECTRICITY

Twenty-seven hours after the cyclone struck, the power supply had not resumed in the district towns hit worst. Officials said uprooted trees had snapped electricity connections.

The disruption has also hampered communications as the storm knocked down many cell phone towers.

Monohor Kumar Biswas, general manager at Patuakhali Rural Electrification Board, said at least 100 electric poles had been damaged by high intensity winds in different places, affecting over 3.50 lakh consumers.

"We are trying to resume connections and have around 800 staffers engaged in the work round the clock," he said.

Muhammad Yamin Chowdhury, divisional commissioner, Barishal, confirmed to The Daily Star that till 4:00pm yesterday, phone and internet connections had not been properly restored.

(Our correspondents from Barishal, Jhalakathi, Patuakhali, Bagerhat, Khulna and Faridpur contributed for the report.)

Merkel's coalition avoids crisis

AFP, Berlin

The German coalition parties on Sunday reached a deal on pension reform, thus avoiding a political crisis which threatened to collapse the government of Chancellor Angela Merkel.

After difficult talks, Merkel's conservative CDU and its Bavarian partner the CSU agreed with the centre-left Social Democrats (SPD) on a deal on topping up the basic pension for low-income recipients who have worked all their lives.

Markus Soder, leader of the CSU in Bavaria, hailed the deal saying "there is no longer any reason to question the continuation of the coalition government".

"We have found a good and

defendable solution for the CDU on this difficult subject," CDU president Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer told a joint news conference with the CSU and SPD leaders.

Interim SPD leader Malu Dreyer spoke of the compromise deal as "an important socio-political step".

The two camps in the ruling coalition have been at loggerheads over the pensions issue in a country confronted by an ageing population.

A major political crisis had loomed among the government partners who also face internal party problems.

Germany on Saturday marked 30 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall that ushered in the end of communism and national reunification.

Australian citizen jailed in Vietnam for 'terrorism'

AFP, Hanoi

Vietnam yesterday jailed a dissident with Australian citizenship for 12 years on terrorism charges, his lawyer told AFP, in the one-party state where anti-government criticism is routinely quashed.

Chau Van Kham, who fought against the communists during the Vietnam War, belongs to the outlawed Viet Tan group and was in Vietnam for a fact-finding mission when he was arrested in January.

He was jailed yesterday for 12 years for "terrorism against the People's Administration" and will be deported after he serves his sentence, his lawyer Trinh Vinh Phuc told AFP.

Kham was jailed alongside Nguyen Van Vien, who got 11 years, and Tran Van Quyen who was sentenced to 10 years, both on the same charges.

"In court Kham said he did not conduct any terrorist acts, his activities were peaceful," Phuc told AFP after the one-day trial in Ho Chi Minh City.

"Twelve years is too high," Phuc said, adding that Kham had hoped for a sentence of less than 10 years.

His son told AFP he was "shocked" by the verdict, which could see his father remain in jail until he is over 80 if his appeal is not successful.

"It's the worst possible outcome," Dennis Chau told AFP from Britain, where he lives.

Kham and Vien were arrested on January 13 in Ho Chi Minh City, two days after Kham entered Vietnam overland via Cambodia.

He was in the country to conduct human rights research and meet with activist and civil society contacts, Viet Tan told AFP.