



Sold as cyber slaves

Lured to Cambodia, Bangladeshi fortune seekers face heartbreaks, treachery and torture; hundreds feared held captive by transnational gangs

MOUJUD AHMED SUJAN

For unemployed 25-year-old Foyzal Hossain, the job of a receptionist at an overseas institution with a monthly pay package worth around Tk 80,000 was a godsend opportunity.

It was too good an offer to say no. After completing the required procedure, a jubilant Foyzal flew to Cambodia as a migrant worker on January 9, 2021.

Arriving at his workplace called The Crown College, an 18-storeyed luxury building in Cambodia's coastal city of Sihanoukville, he was amazed to see young people from different countries busy at their tiptop desks.

He even hugged the Bangladeshi brokers who escorted him there as a token of gratitude. Months before his flight, he paid Tk 2.47 lakh to another broker in his hometown Narsingdi for the job he thought would change his life.

The job did change his life, but not in the



A cyber-slave compound in Sihanoukville, Cambodia. The building's deceptively bright facade belies the dark secrets within. PHOTO: COLLECTED



- A syndicate of local brokers and manpower agencies allure young people with lucrative job offers through online advertisements
- They are sent to Cambodia, not a popular destination for Bangladeshis seeking jobs, taking advantage of compromised scrutiny at Dhaka airport
- The Bangladeshi brokers in Cambodia sell them to multinational cyber scam operators
- The victims allege non-cooperation from Bangladeshi Embassy in Thailand, which is responsible for dealing with the affairs in Cambodia, where our country is yet to have a mission

"It was a butcher house. I saw people beaten up and tased with electric batons often. Armed guards were there round-the-clock. Scared to death, I tried my best to comply with their commands."

Foyzal Hossain, a victim of cyber slavery



way he imagined.

Foyzal, who has a diploma in textile engineering, had no idea what he would endure in the following 11 months. He was sold as a cyber-slave by a ring of Bangladeshi criminals to cyber-scammers in the Southeast Asian country.

He was tasked with syphoning money off from US male citizens through scamming online, pretending to be a young and rich woman in Miami, US.

"Initially, I protested. But when they told me that I had been sold for \$4,000 and couldn't leave the compound without paying back, I felt devastated, helpless," Foyzal told The Daily Star.

He said that refusal to work resulted in tortures like beating, electric shocks and solitary confinement in a toilet for days inside

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Death penalty proposed for hoarding

Draft law includes provision of strict punishment

MAHABUB RAHMAN KHAN

The food ministry is going to be tougher on hoarding as it proposes capital punishment or life imprisonment against the offenders.

Seeking opinions from the stakeholders, the ministry recently uploaded on its website the draft of Production, Storage, Movement, Transportation, Supply, Distribution, and Marketing of Foodgrains (Prevention of Prejudicial Activity) Act-2022.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, Food Secretary Ismiel Hossain said, "We had a meeting with the stakeholders on Wednesday in this regard... The draft will be finalised within 10 days."

According to the proposed act, storing food beyond the limit fixed by the government or violating any directives relating to the stockpile will be considered a punishable offence. Therefore, offenders may face capital punishment or life imprisonment or rigorous imprisonment for 14 years and they will also be fined.

However, if a person can prove that he or she does not store food for financial benefits, he or she will get a maximum of three months' imprisonment with fine.

The ministry prepared the draft by merging the two existing laws - Foodgrains Supply (Prevention of Prejudicial Activity) Ordinance, 1979, and the Food (Special Courts) Act, 1956.

On April 18, 2022, the cabinet approved the draft act in principle and sent it back to the ministry for further scrutiny.

The food secretary said a provision of death penalty for hoarding foods is in the Special Powers Act, 1974. "It is now being incorporated in the proposed law."

The food ministry also proposes a maximum of five years' imprisonment or a fine Tk 10 lakh or both for marketing by product of a food without mentioning the source name, producing and marketing food after removing its natural ingredients partially or completely, and mixing harmful artificial ingredients.

There is a provision of a maximum of five years' imprisonment or a fine of Tk 10 lakh or both for

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Job well done

Patients doing fine after cadaveric transplantation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

All four patients, who received kidneys and corneas from Sara Islam, have been doing well, physicians said yesterday.

Twenty-year-old Sara's consent to donate her organs after her death has given new life to them, two with completely damaged kidneys and two without eyesight.

This was the country's first successful transplantation of organs from a brain dead patient.

Surgeons transplanted the kidneys into Shamima Akter and Hasina Akter at the BSMMU and the National Kidney Foundation. Both patients were in their 30s.

Similarly, surgeons transplanted Sara's eyes into Suzon, 30, and Ferdous Akter, 56, at the BSMMU and Sandhani Eye Hospital. One of them had acquired blindness while another had blindness since birth.

"Transplanted kidney from a dead patient require around a week to start functioning. But in the case of Shamima, the kidney started working just after we finished the transplantation. We are highly optimistic to get the same result for Hasina soon," Prof Habibur Rahman Dulal who headed the kidney transplantation team at the BSMMU, told The Daily Star yesterday.

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SOARING PRICES OF ESSENTIALS

Low-income people hit hard

SHAHEEN MOLLAH with MOSTAFA YOUSUF

Riazul Haque, manager of a wholesale rice shop in the capital's Mirpur, usually goes to Kachukhet kitchen market with Tk 500 every Friday.

The amount was enough for buying essentials for his five-member family until last week. But it is not enough anymore as prices of essentials have gone up further this week. Yesterday, he had to cut items from his purchase list.

"I am shocked at the high prices of essentials. Prices of ginger and garlic have gone up. Ginger now sells for Tk 300 per kg, up from Tk 150 per kg last week. The same goes with garlic which now costs Tk 180 a kg, a rise by Tk 60 from last week," he said, expressing frustration.

Even vegetables have become costlier than the previous week. There is no vegetable that can be bought for less than Tk 30 a kg. Most of the vegetables are selling for Tk 50 or above per kg, Riazul said.

He bought only 250 grams of ginger and 250 grams of garlic. He couldn't buy vegetables and spinach.

"This week I will have to eat potato as the only vegetable. My



wife works at a garment factory. Our sufferings are growing despite the fact that we both earn," he added.

Mohammad Waliullah, a resident of Tejuri Bazar, who works for a gas company, said he earns Tk 50,000 a month.

"Once I was able to run my four-member family with a much less income. But I am currently struggling to bear my family

expenses due to the rising prices of essentials. The prices have gone up significantly in the last six months and that's why I need to compromise on my shopping budget," he told The Daily Star at Karwan Bazar.

Jamal Uddin, a temporary employee at a government office at Karwan Bazar, said he stopped visiting his village home in Laxmipur for the last few months to cope with the rising living costs in Dhaka.

"This price hike is just too much for a person like me who gets a monthly salary of Tk 16,000. Be it vegetable, fish or grocery, there is no item whose price has not gone up. Last month, I could send Tk 7,000 to my wife living at village. But this month the amount has come down to Tk 6,000."

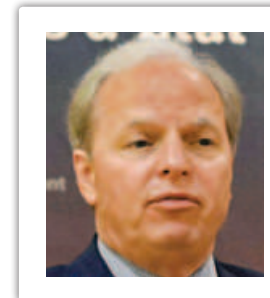
Visiting five kitchen markets in the capital's Karwan Bazar, Kachukhet, Farmgate, Sheorapara and Ibrahimpur, this newspaper found that the slight relief which people had at the beginning of the

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World Bank MD due today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

World Bank Managing Director of Operations Axel van Trotsenburg will arrive in Bangladesh today on his first official visit here.



During his three-day visit, Trotsenburg will join a public event in Dhaka tomorrow to mark 50 years of the partnership between Bangladesh and the World Bank Group and celebrate the country's remarkable development achievements. "Bangladesh has shown the world what can be done to dramatically reduce poverty through successful innovations in human development, women's empowerment, and climate adaptation," said Trotsenburg in a WB press release yesterday.

"The World Bank is proud of its 50-year partnership with Bangladesh and being part of the country's remarkable development journey. I look forward to my visit and to seeing these achievements firsthand."

Trotsenburg will meet with the prime minister, finance minister, and other senior government officials, civil society representatives, and development partners, and visit the WB-supported projects. He will be accompanied by Martin Raiser, WB vice-president for the South Asia region.

The WB was among the first development partners to support Bangladesh after its independence. Since then, it has committed about \$39 billion, mostly in grants or concessional credits to Bangladesh.

Bangladesh currently has the largest ongoing programme supported by the World Bank Group's International Development Association (IDA).



In droves, devotees enter the Biswa Ijtema ground on the Turag in Tongi yesterday, the first day of the second phase of the religious congregation. The Ijtema, known as the largest annual Islamic event after the Hajj, is expected to end after the Akheri Munajat tomorrow.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

IMMORTAL MEMORY WITH DEEPEST LOVE



Mahabub Alam Mridul
(1997-2021)
Director, Walton Group

Today, 21 January is the second death anniversary of Mr. Mahabub Alam Mridul, the Honorable Director of Walton Group. On this day, 2021 at the tender age of only 24, he left us for heavenly abode. With his sudden demise, we have lost a promising young entrepreneur. It was his dream to work on new innovations in the development of the Automobiles industry and devote himself to the welfare of the country and the people.

We pray from the bottom of our hearts that his departed soul be granted Jannah where it finds eternal peace, Ameen.

