## BOAT CAPSIZE
# 8 Bangladeshis killed in Tunisia identified

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eight migrants found dead after a boat sank off the Tunisian coast were Bangladeshis and one was a Pakistani, said the foreign ministry yesterday.

Of the Bangladeshis, Nayan Biswas, Sajal, Mamun Sheikh, Kazi Sajib, and Kaisar were from Rajoir upazila of Madaripur while Rifat, Rasel, and Imrul Kayes Apon were from Muksudpur upazila of Gopalganj, said a ministry statement.

Twenty-seven other Bangladeshis, including one in critical condition, were rescued after the boat with 52 migrants and an Egyptian boatman sank around 4:30am on February 15, nearly five hours after it left for Europe from the coast of the Libyan city of Zuwara, according to the statement.

Seven of the rescued Bangladeshis did not have passports, it added.

The boatman and 43 migrants, including eight Pakistanis, five Syrians, and three Egyptians, were rescued alive.

A team from Bangladesh Embassy in Libya headed by the mission's First Secretary (labour) Rasel Miah is now in the Zarzis city to ensure the rescued Bangladeshis' wellbeing.



A Palestinian child receives food cooked by a charity kitchen amid shortages of food supplies in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday.

PHOTO: **REUTERS**

## CUSTODIAL DEATH
# 16 cops, jail officials sued

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Ctg*

In connection with the death of an inmate under the custody of Chattogram Central Jail, 16 individuals, including the jail superintendent and Boalkhali police OC, were sued yesterday.

Purabi Palit, 35, wife of victim Rubel Dey, 38, filed the case with the court of Metropolitan Session Judge Dr Jebunnesa under the Custodial Death (Prevention) Act, according to the plaintiff's lawyer, Advocate Ajoy Dhar.

"The court accepted the case and will issue an order in this regard during a hearing on February 28," Ajay said.

Nine of the accused are Boalkhali police station officers, while the remaining accused are jail officials.

The accused officers from Boalkhali Police Station are: Officer-in-Charge (OC) Ashab Uddin, Inspector Md Saiful Islam, Sub-Inspector (SI) SM Abu Musa, Assistant Sub-Inspector (ASI) Main Uddin, ASI Saiful Islam, Constables Kamal and Asadullah, and Duty Officer Riazul Jabbar.

The accused officials from Chattogram Central Jail are: Senior Jail Superintendent Manjur Hossain, Jailer Emran Hossain Miah, Deputy Jailers Nowshad Mia, Akherul Islam, Sumaiya Khatun, Ibrahim, and the ward master of Padma Ward-15.

On February 5, the 38-year-old Rubel Dey was taken to Chattogram Medical College Hospital by

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# Suspicious transaction

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1,112 STRs and SARs related to loans. The number of such reports increased sharply in the last two years.

There were 520 reports regarding loans in the 2022-23 fiscal year, 341 in 2021-22, 94 in 2019-20, and 59 in 2018-19.

These reports have become frequent because of issues with repayment or source of repayment funds, loans obtained through fraudulence, deliberate default on loan repayment, and fund diversions.

The BFIU sent 133 financial intelligence reports to the Criminal Investigation Department, Anti-Corruption Commission, National Board of Revenue and other agencies.

Capital account is not convertible in our country, but the current account is only convertible and around 85 percent of the money laundering is conducted through export and import business, said the BFIU chief.

Trade-based money laundering is not being reduced substantially because banks are reluctant to check the pricing anomalies.

The central bank monitoring has somewhat reduced trade-based money laundering recently, he added.

Asked how a former minister acquired significant assets abroad bypassing the anti-money laundering agency, he said, "We filed cases through the Anti-Corruption Commission against some individuals who syphoned money off and the process of collecting information about some people from different countries is going on."

The people laundering money do not use the banking channel directly because capital account is not convertible, he added

The anti-money laundering agency has so far only brought back the money laundered by BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's younger son Arafat Rahman Koko.

# Three new apps

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and properly spoken Bengali words into text in clear environments. Future updates of the software will include major Bengali punctuation marks. Android mobile users will also be able to use the project's keyboard app.

The Optical Character Recognition software, Borno, facilitates the conversion of Bengali uneditable text into editable text, particularly in PDF or JPEG files. Its OCR feature renders Bengali text into a composed format.

Borno OCR also recognises various elements like tables, common English words, institution names and logos in government documents. Accessible via ocr.bangla.gov.bd, it can be used from any browser.

The Bangla Unicode font "Purno" addresses font-related challenges, encompassing essential typographic elements for Bengali publications.

According to the BCC, it can accurately represent Bengali linguistic nuances and suit both institutional and digital platforms.

"Despite numerous Bengali fonts, the absence of a standard one usually creates glyph set inconsistencies. To address this, we crafted a unified font suitable for public, private, print, publishing and web platforms," said Mamun Or Rashid, a consultant on the project.

Unique features of this font include comprehensive glyphs, consistent visual form, varied allographs and balanced sizing, ensuring seamless representation of Bengali across mediums, said Rashid, who is also an assistant professor at the Jahangirnagar University's department of Bangla.

Meanwhile, under the project, the BCC has initiated efforts to preserve and digitise 40 ethnic languages, including 14 endangered ones.

Already 12,000 minutes of predefined and spontaneous data have been collected with an average of 300 minutes per language, said Rashad Kabir, managing director of Dream71 Bangladesh, which partnered with the BCC for the initiative.

Their team went to the remotest part of Bangladesh, including the three hill tracts, Sylhet, Sreemangal, Rajshahi, Dinajpur and the Mymensingh region to collect data on the dialects.

Fonts and keyboards of six languages have also been developed along with a language portal to make the digitised resources accessible to a global audience.

"These portals allow users to learn, research and appreciate the diverse ethnic linguistic Bangladesh," Kabir added.

# Israeli action

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territory, including East Jerusalem".

Bangladesh argued that the fundamental question posed by the UN General Assembly regarding the legality of the Israeli occupation is grounded in established international norms and legal principles.

The occupation, characterised by persecution, racial discriminations, and apartheid, stands in clear violation of three peremptory norms of international law: the right to self-determination, the prohibition of acquiring territory by force, and the prohibition of racial discrimination and apartheid, he said.

Bangladesh further argued that Israel's prolonged occupation, coupled with its policies of colonisation and annexation, underscores its illegality under international law.

"These actions not only contravene the UN Charter but also violate general international law, including the peremptory norm prohibiting the acquisition of territory by force."

The ongoing war in Gaza represents one of the most shameful catastrophes in the history of the modern era. The killing of thousands of innocent civilians, particularly children, the destruction of their homes, the occupation of their ancestral lands, and the deliberate obstruction of their access to food and water all constitute blatant violations of international law and serve as textbook examples of ethnic cleansing, Bangladesh said.

# Languages we may lose soon

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Though linguists say that recorded documentation is essential for preserving languages, Prof Mohammad Ashaduzzaman, chairman and professor of DU's linguistics department, believes that not many visible steps are being taken right now to preserve and revitalise the disappearing languages.

"The IMLI should gather linguists and others concerned to prepare a detailed plan for the preservation and revitalisation of the languages but we have not seen that."

The IMLI is legally bound to take steps to preserve the languages of ethnic minorities through its written forms.

However, five years after recognising the 14 endangered languages, no such steps have been visible.

IMLI officials said when the survey was conducted, researchers collected 300 words of each of the country's languages, including the endangered ones, with translations.

The survey began in 2013 and there was a plan to publish the research in 10 parts. So far, only one has been published.

Prof Shourav said a language is considered endangered when it has less than 10,000 speakers.

"From our position I can say we have submitted the report. I am not aware what the International Mother Language Institute has done with it so far."

On the other hand, the ICT division had undertaken a three-year project titled "Enhancement of Bangla Language in ICT through Research and Development", under which there was a component to digitise the ethnic languages for preservation.

After beginning the Tk 158 crore project in 2017, the division requested a four-year extension saying it would be completed by June 2024.

However, now project officials say they would need another two-year extension as some of the work remains unfinished.

Project Director Mahbub Karim said, "We've collected the recordings of 12,000 minutes of speeches [in each language] and formed a trilingual glossary. We're now analysing those. We'll be able to make it public soon."

Meanwhile, though the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) has been distributing textbooks among pre-primary to class-three students in five ethnic languages – Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Garo, and Sadri – since 2017, the endangered languages remain largely ignored.

NCTB member (curriculum) Prof Moshiuzzaman said most of the ethnic languages do not have alphabets.

"So right now, we don't have any plan to publish textbooks in all languages other than the five."

He, however, added that the free textbooks will not be distributed to students after class three.

"If we do that, they will be disconnected from the mainstream. They can learn their own language till class three, after that they have to learn the language used in the mainstream."

**CHALLENGES APLENTY**

Dhaka University Professor Emeritus Serajul Islam Choudhury said that in this era of capitalism, many languages have become extinct.

"The people who use these [dying] languages don't have the power to keep them alive.... The education system in the country is centered on the state language, and those who aren't educated in it will fall behind."

Focusing on the youth population, Prof Ashaduzzaman said, "In some cases, the population sizes of ethnic minorities increase, but their languages remain in danger as the younger generation don't use them."

He added that languages disappear due to different reasons,

> **"A language disappears when its speakers disappear."** -- UNESCO.

including social, economic, political and cultural obligations.

"Many leave behind their mother language due to the pressure of speaking the language of the majority, and when they think they will get no benefit from speaking their native language."

According to Prof Shourav Sikder, a language dies when the youth refuse to speak it.

"It gets lost when the new generations don't want to use it, especially because there is no opportunity for primary education in their mother tongue."

This newspaper approached members of at least five separate ethnic minority groups from the hilly districts and Moulvibazar. Most of them said though they love to, they refrain from speaking in their language as they face ridicule.

Joyanta Tripura, of Khagrachhari, said, "Bangla is the language in which we study. So, we need to know Bangla to get jobs."

During a visit to Dayal Chandra Para Government Primary School in Bandarban's Alikadam upazila yesterday, it was found that though there are about 30 Marma students in the school, none of the teachers know the language.

The situation was similar in Doluchhara Government Primary School in Sreemangal upazila of Moulvibazar district.

"There are students from Tripura community but we don't have any teacher who can read or write in their language," said Arun Chandra Datta, headteacher of the school.

This goes to show that even the non-endangered languages, in which NTCB has published textbooks, are in a crisis.

Meanwhile, Prof Hakim Arif, director general of the IMLI, said one of the major reasons they are not being able to move forward with the preservation of endangered languages is a "severe crisis of researchers who know those languages".

"We are trying to find people who know the languages and do research accordingly. If we find such people, we'll be able to take necessary steps."

**WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE**

Sanjeeb Drong, general secretary of Bangladesh Indigenous People's Forum, said, "All our languages must be preserved. Indigenous languages are not getting due importance.... They'll all disappear."

He said that as a nation that made the supreme sacrifice for language, it is the country's responsibility to protect the languages of all.

Prof Ashaduzzaman suggested that primary education in a student's mother language is an excellent way of keeping it alive.

He also said the IMLI should establish a separate cell with language experts from all ethnic communities.

Prof Serajul said the government should encourage and give incentives to revive the endangered languages.

"A language policy ensuring the dignity of all languages can be framed. However, a policy is not enough; its implementation must be ensured."

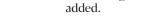(Our Moulvibazar and Bandarban correspondents contributed to this report.)

# President, PM

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chiefs of three services, diplomats, senior Awami League leaders, top civil and military officials were present.

Flanked by cabinet members and senior AL leaders, Hasina, also the party president, placed another wreath on behalf of the party.

Jatiya Sangsad Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury paid homage to the martyrs of Language Movement by giving a wreath at the Shaheed Minar.