

UNDOCUMENTED WORKERS HRW details sorry state of detainees in Malaysia

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Human Rights Watch report has detailed the damning state of immigration detention centres in Malaysia that house thousands of refugees and asylum seekers, listing claims of human rights violations and abuse.

The Malaysian government is detaining about 12,000 migrants and refugees, including 1,400 children, in conditions that put them at serious risk of physical abuse and psychological harm, HRW said in the report released yesterday.

The 60-page report, "We Can't See the Sun: Malaysia's Arbitrary Detention of Migrants and Refugees", documents Malaysian authorities' punitive and abusive treatment of migrants and refugees in 20 immigration detention centres across the country.

Immigration detainees can spend months or years in overcrowded, unhygienic conditions, subject to harassment and violence by guards, without domestic or international monitoring.

"Malaysian authorities are treating migrants as criminals, arbitrarily holding them for prolonged periods in immigration centres with almost no access to the outside world," said Shayna Baubner, Asia researcher at HRW.

Malaysia's degrading and abusive immigration detention system denies migrants and refugees rights to liberty, health and due process, she said.

HRW interviewed more than 40 people, including former immigration detainees, family members, lawyers, humanitarian aid staff and former immigration officials, for the report.

Malaysian law makes all irregular entry and stays in the country a criminal offence, with no distinction among refugees, asylum seekers, trafficking victims and undocumented migrants.

There is also no legal limit on the length of immigration detention, leaving migrants at risk of being detained indefinitely. Authorities have detained more than 45,000 irregular migrants since May 2020.

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Palestinians react at al-Aqsa hospital in Deir el-Balah as people mourn over the bodies of loved ones killed during Israeli bombardment, in the central Gaza Strip yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Trump, Biden storm towards rematch as Haley drops out

AFP, Washington

Donald Trump marched yesterday towards a bitter rematch against President Joe Biden in November as his final Republican rival Nikki Haley threw in the towel after a thumping defeat in the "Super Tuesday" primaries.

Pointedly declining to endorse the man she has portrayed as chaotic and mentally incompetent, former UN ambassador Haley said Trump would have to earn the support of moderates who backed her longshot campaign.

Her withdrawal leaves America facing a battle for the White House between two elderly men that many voters say they don't want, with Trump brushing aside multiple criminal indictments and the scandal over his attempt to overthrow the 2020 election in his pursuit of a comeback.

"We must turn away from the darkness

of hatred and division," the 52-year-old Haley said in Charleston in her home state of South Carolina.

About Trump, she said only that "I wish him well" as he seeks a return to the world's most powerful office.

She also lamented the US "retreat" on world issues including Ukraine, as Trump and his hard-right Republican allies block aid for Kyiv's fight against the Russian invasion.

Biden meanwhile swept his Democratic "Super Tuesday" primaries but he must now gear up for Thursday's State of the Union address, a defining moment as the unpopular 81-year-old seeks to allay voter concerns over his age, the economy and the war in Gaza.

Both men swiftly made their pitch for Haley's bloc of mainly affluent, moderate Republican voters.

After proclaiming that he had

"TRUNCED" Haley, Trump invited them to "join the greatest movement in the history of our nation." Biden hailed her courage for telling the "truth about Trump" and said there was a place for her supporters in his campaign.

This year's Super Tuesday was sapped of suspense as Biden and Trump had effectively secured their parties' nominations before a ballot was cast.

Former president Trump, 77, swept 14 out of 15 states up for grabs on the biggest day of the 2024 race so far, with Haley denying him only in the northeastern state of Vermont.

"They call it 'Super Tuesday' for a reason," Trump told cheering supporters at his Mar-a-Lago beach club in Florida. "They tell me, the pundits and otherwise, that there has never been one like this, never been anything so conclusive."

Gaza ceasefire talks deadlocked

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"We are showing the required flexibility in order to reach a comprehensive cessation of aggression against our people, but the occupation is still evading the entitlements of this agreement," Hamas said in a statement.

A source had earlier said Israel was staying away from the Cairo talks because Hamas refused to provide a list of hostages who are still alive. Hamas says this is impossible without a ceasefire as hostages are scattered across the war zone.

Israeli forces are incessantly bombarding the Palestinian enclave since October 7 last year killing more than 30,700.

Health officials in Gaza reported 86 deaths in the past 24 hours and witnesses said the Israeli bombardments continued in Khan Younis, the southern city of Rafah and areas in central Gaza.

The talks began in Cairo on Sunday, and the dire humanitarian situation in the densely populated coastal strip has deteriorated further.

The Gaza health ministry said two Palestinians, aged 15 and 72, died of dehydration and malnutrition in Al Shifa and Kamal Adwan hospitals yesterday, raising the toll of such deaths in just over a week to 20. Reuters could not verify the deaths.

A ceasefire is being sought before Ramadan because Palestinian-Israeli violence in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories often rises during the fasting month, as does hostility towards Israel in the Arab and Muslim world.

The deal presented to Hamas for Gaza would free some of the 253 hostages it still holds following the Oct 7 attack.

Aid to Gaza would be increased to try to avert famine as hospitals treat acutely malnourished children, and Hamas would provide a list of all the hostages.

Hamas says any exchange of prisoners cannot take place until after a ceasefire. Israel wants merely a pause in fighting to get hostages out of Gaza and more aid in, and says it will not end the conflict before Hamas is "eliminated".

Huge interchange to keep traffic flowing

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Sabuj Uddin Khan, additional chief engineer (Dhaka zone) of Roads and Highways Department, said the recommendation to build an interchange was made because the design was incomplete.

Project Director Shahabuddin Khan said the interchange at Baipail will ensure seamless traffic movement in all three directions.

He said the interchange would be built one layer over the elevated expressway.

Currently, a vehicle from a northern district can enter Dhaka either through Baipail-Nabinagar-Savar-Gabtolli Road or the Baipail-Ashulia-Abdullahpur-Uttara Road.

Secretaries of both the bridges

division and the road transport and highways division recently approved in principle the design of the interchange, Shahabuddin said.

Engineers are still working on the details of the design and its possible cost is being estimated, he told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said the authorities were supposed to build two flyovers at Nabinagar at a cost of Tk 370 crore under the project, but dropped the plan following the RHD's request.

Shahabuddin said the interchange may increase the project cost.

Once the design of the interchange is complete, a revision of the project will be sought, he added.

CHALLENGES AHEAD
When this correspondent visited the project site in October last year,

officials of SMC, the contractor, said the whole project was affected by the utility lines over and underground.

Delays are also resulting from resettlement of residents of the project site.

Asked, PD Shahabuddin said the project area is an industrial area and the authorities shift power lines, halting the supply only one day a week. He added that around 80 percent of the lines have been relocated.

As per a progress report, 1,417 out of 3,091 persons affected by the project have received compensation.

Around 85 percent of the land required for the project has been acquired, Shahabuddin said, adding that he was hopeful of completing the project within 2026.

Thus spoke Mujib

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taxes; government servants should take orders only from him; the secretariat, government and semi-government offices and courts in East Pakistan should observe strikes; with necessary exemptions announced from time to time, only local and inter-district telephone lines should function; railways and ports could continue to function, but their workers should not co-operate if they were used to repress the people of East Pakistan.

In his speech, Bangabandhu refuted Yahya's charge (Yahya's 6th March speech) that the Awami League was primarily responsible for the present situation.

He said that he had placed a call to Yahya the previous week, urging him to visit East Pakistan in order to see personally how military bullets were killing Bangalee civilians.

Bangabandhu laid down his terms for attending the National Assembly session, which Yahya had on the previous day called on March 25: 1) Withdrawal of army to barracks, 2) An end to martial law, 3) The transfer of power to the people.

He also demanded an inquiry into the army killings and an end to reinforcement of army in East Pakistan.

East Pakistan police intelligence estimated that there were 12 lakh people present in the public meeting. (East Pakistan Police Abstract of Intelligence, March 13, 1971)

MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATORS' REACTION
The general reaction of the martial law authorities to the 7th March

speech was that of relief.

In response to Yahya Khan's call, a senior officer reported, "This is the best speech under the circumstances." (Siddiq Salik, Witness to Surrender, UPL 1997, pg. 54)

Khadim Hussain Raja, the then general officer commanding in East Pakistan, termed Sheikh Mujib's speech, in comparison with Yahya Khan's 6th March speech, "remarkably conciliatory".

He further wrote, "credit goes to Sheikh Mujib for averting an immediate crisis and for preventing a lot of Bengali blood being split on the streets of Dhaka." (Khadim Hussain Raja, A Stranger in my own country, UPL 2012, pg. 63)

"WHAT DOES MUJIB NOW INTEND?": AMERICAN ASSESSMENT

American observers were in general agreement that a showdown of force had been averted but the crisis situation remain unchanged.

Dhaka's American Consulate was optimistic.

Archer K Blood, the then American consul general, wrote in his memoir: "The situation remains confused as two sides jockey for position and wait for other to force issue. Mujib has, we believe, defused the immediate crisis. ... Little by little the Sheikh and the Awami League become the de facto authority in East Pakistan. Meanwhile the concept of Pakistan continues to erode. The Sheikh's tactics, if successful, reduce the chances of open confrontation by exposing only a fuzzy target for the MLA [Martial Law Administration]. At the same

time, he keeps the initiative and maintains control of the situation."

The American Embassy in Islamabad was more pessimistic in their assessment: "Thus, events of March 6-7 have deferred showdown, but have not altered basic elements. Bengalis appear bent on degree of autonomy which Pak military [and probably Bhutto] are unable to swallow. Question now is whether Yahya or Mujib will blink first - or whether neither will blink. Showdown cannot be put off much longer."

In their assessment of what Mujib now intends, the US Embassy wrote: "His goal remains unchanged - 'Emancipation' of Bangla Desh from West Pakistan domination. This could mean 'full provincial autonomy' as under six points. It could also mean Mujib has come to believe that the freedom he seeks is attainable only by outright independence."

25 eminent personalities

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the influential people. The state and civil society need to ensure a proper and impartial investigation, as well as justice in this case."

Former caretaker government advisers, Sultana Kamal, and Rasheda K Chowdhury; Sammilito Samajik Andolan Presidium Member Ramendu Majumdar, and its president Prof Sayed Anwar Hossain; Liberation War Museum trustee Sarwar Ali; and Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Oikya Parishad General Secretary Rana Dasgupta are among the signatories to the statement.

COMBATING DENGUE City corporations to get Tk 40cr: LGRD minister

UNB, Dhaka

City corporations have been allocated Tk 40 crore under the Annual Development Programme to tackle dengue in this fiscal year, Md Tazul Islam, local government, rural development, and cooperatives minister, said yesterday.

Of the money, Tk 32 crore has been kept for combating dengue and strengthening cleanliness activities, and Tk 8 crore for publicity and advertisement expenses, he said while talking to reporters after a session of the deputy commissioners' conference in Dhaka.

At the same time, he said the DCs have been instructed to raise public awareness against dengue. "Ninety percent of the measures to prevent dengue depend on awareness; the other 10 percent can be done by technology or using insecticide."

TIB report on transport based on assumption

Says BRTA

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Road Transport Authority and Bangladesh Road Transport Owners' Association yesterday rejected the report of Transparency International Bangladesh, which said bus operators pay at least Tk 1,059 crore in illegal tolls and bribes annually.

The BRTA held a press conference at its headquarters in the capital's Banani to protest the report while the association issued a statement.

At the briefing, BRTA Chairman Nur Mohammad Mazumder said the TIB report was based on assumption. "We strongly protest the report and reject it."

He claimed that all their services are now available online, and no one needs to come to BRTA offices in person. For this, there is no scope for corruption and harassment.

The TIB report tarnished the image of the BRTA and the government, he said and asked the TIB not to publish such reports on the "basis of assumption".

The BRTA chairman, however, said they would work on some TIB's constructive and realistic recommendations.

The transport association said there is no similarity between the reality and the "untrue report". The report tarnished the image of the bus owners and workers and created confusion among the people.

It said the transport owners' association does not collect any money except management fees. The association takes action if anyone or any organisation collects money beyond the fixed fees.

Rajuk must be made accountable

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to approve buildings, who they are reporting to about their work, or whether the process is fruitful."

He said Rajuk, entrusted with enforcing building laws and monitoring development in the capital, has to regularly review designs of all buildings in Dhaka to ensure compliance and identify loopholes.

Fire safety in the capital's buildings have once again come under the spotlight after the deadly fire at the Green Cozy Cottage Shopping Mall on February 29. The building on Bailey Road housed multiple restaurants, and there has since been a series of drives conducted by Rajuk and the city corporations to fine and close restaurants not complying with fire safety regulations and building laws.

He suggested that the government form a committee of experts - comprising professionals like engineers, architects and planners from outside the regulatory body - to monitor Rajuk's activities and make it accountable.

Tanwir, a former deputy chief of the physical planning, housing and infrastructure division of the first Planning Commission of Bangladesh, said such a committee would also help Rajuk do its job better.

"Rajuk will be accountable to this team and this team will be accountable to the people," said Tanwir.

Tanwir said many building owners get approval from Rajuk for a certain purpose, but later use the building for something else, often setting up restaurants or other establishments that seriously complicate safety issues.

"As building owners change it without any permission from the authorities concerned, safety measures are ignored," Tanwir added.

But Rajuk does not have the skilled manpower to monitor such a large number of buildings and check their fire safety issues, said Tanwir, who worked under renowned architect Louis I Kahn in the mid 1960s.

While giving approval to a building, Rajuk will have to ensure that proper fire safety measures are in place and they will also have to monitor those after construction, he said.

It is essential that a building over six storeys has stairways with fire doors, both dry and wet sprinklers (based on its occupancy), smoke detectors, fire alarms, fire extinguishers and hose-reel cabinets, he said.

A fire door is a door with a fire-resistance rating used as part of a passive fire protection system to reduce the spread of fire and smoke between separate compartments of a structure and to enable safe egress.

This is important not just for the building's occupants to exit safely during the fire, but also to reduce the risk of the fire spreading from one floor to the other.

However, most buildings in Dhaka

do not have these fire-rated doors and stairwells, Tanwir said.

Most buildings over six storeys keep doors to stairs open, turning them into a funnel for the fire to go up through the stairwell very fast, spreading smoke everywhere and increasing the number of casualties, said Tanwir.

About the use of gas cylinders Tanwir said in many areas there is no regular gas supply through pipelines, and as a result cylinders are used. Many restaurants keep those cylinders on the stairs due to a lack of storage spaces.

"As they keep it on stairways, it not only reduces the space of the staircase but can also explode during a fire incident. We saw this during the fire incident at a restaurant at Baily Road," said Tanwir, who held positions as a senior architect of Department of Urban Affairs in the Canadian province of Saskatchewan, as well as a project planner for the city of Toronto Housing Department.

Given the shortcomings of buildings in Dhaka, he said drastic changes of these structures are necessary to ensure safety, adding that all new buildings will definitely have to comply with the fire safety plan if fire disasters are to be avoided.

PM asks Rab

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Talking about the economic advancement during the Awami League government, the premier said it will grow further when the law and order will be under control and all law enforcement agencies will be vigilant. "I know that there are some problems, we have to solve those ourselves."

She mentioned that Ukraine-Russia war along with sanctions and counter sanctions and the Covid-19 pandemic caused inflation across the globe.

"As a result, the prices of items we import from the international market have increased. Transport costs have also gone up."

In this connection, Hasina reiterated her call to create self-dependency through producing the items in the country.

"That's why I have urged all to utilise every inch of land and increase food production," she said.

The PM added that for more investment in the special economic zones, security and skilled workforce will be needed. "So, we have to build a modern technology-based skilled manpower and work with that in mind."

On her arrival at the venue, the premier was given a guard of honour.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan and Rab Director General M Khurshid Hossain also spoke at the event where a documentary on recent activities of Rab was screened.