

UK Channel migrant arrivals top 25,000 in 2024

AFP, London

The number of migrants arriving in Britain by crossing the Channel in small boats has topped 25,000 since the start of the year, provisional figures showed yesterday.

The figures come as the new Labour government -- like the last Conservative administration -- struggles to reduce the cross-Channel arrivals.

Some 717 migrants crossed the Channel from northern France on Sunday, taking the cumulative number of arrivals so far in 2024 to 25,052, according to the interior ministry.

A similar number, 707, also made the crossing on Saturday.

The total represents a four percent rise on the equivalent figure at this point last year, but a 21 percent drop on 2022.

Stopping the small boat arrivals on England's southern coast was a key issue in Britain's general election in July.



Two battery-powered illegal autorickshaws, one going the right way and the other against the traffic, transport passengers across the Second Buriganga Bridge in Badamtali yesterday. These vehicles aren't permitted to operate on the bridge as they are considered risky and prone to accidents.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Farhad Mazhar questions legality of constitution reform commission

STAFF CORRESPONDENT



Poet and writer Farhad Mazhar yesterday questioned how the interim government could form a commission for reforming the very constitution under which it took oath of office.

"The entire state is being run under the constitution of Sheikh Hasina and her President Mohammed Shahabuddin. Why did you [Yunus-led interim government] take the oath of office under this constitution? You betrayed the people by taking the oath under this charter....," he said.

Farhad also expressed wonder at the formation of a commission, led by Prof Ali Riaz, by the chief adviser to amend the constitution.

"You said that you would uphold the constitution, and now you are forming a commission to amend it. Who gave you this right?"

Farhad was speaking at a discussion titled "Constitutional Debate after Mass Uprising: Search for Origins and Destination."

July Ganaparishar, a platform for reviewing the uprising, organised the event at the Bangla Academy.

According to Farhad, the idea of a constitution is a colonial concept from academic, historical, and critical perspectives.

"Those who believe in the constitutional concept think that it is a tool of colonial power needed to rule the people ..."

He said the crisis arising after the mass uprising is a political crisis and it is not a constitutional crisis.

Released top criminals

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According to the Department of Prisons, Helal is among 43 top criminals and militants, who secured bail in different cases after the fall of the Awami League government on August 5.

Among these criminals are Abbas Ali alias Killer Abbas of Mirpur, Sheikh Mohammad Aslam alias Sweden Aslam of Tejgaon, Sanjidul Islam alias Emon of Hazaribagh, Khandaker Nayeem Ahmed alias Tipton and Khorshed Alam alias Rasu alias Freedom Rasu.

On December 26, 2001, the home ministry released the names of 23 top terrorists, including Abbas, Helal, Tipton, and Freedom Rasu. The four were accused in many cases, including for murder and attempted murder.

Brig Gen Syed Muhammad, inspector general of prisons, said they freed some top criminals after receiving release orders from courts.

"The law enforcement agencies might be able to give further details regarding the bails," he told this newspaper recently.

Tawohidul Haque, associate professor at Dhaka University's Institute of Social Welfare and Research, said notorious criminals used to control criminal activities from within jails.

He warned that their release on bail could lead to a rise in criminal activities.

"The authorities must closely monitor whether those freed are reviving their old criminal networks. If they are found doing so, they should be arrested again as soon as possible."

Sources in police said top criminal Ibrahim Khalil alias Killer Ibrahim, who had been hiding abroad, returned home after mid-August and resumed his criminal activities.

A leader of Bhashantek Slum, requesting anonymity, said Ibrahim's associates locked several rickshaw garages in the area for tolls.

"They [Ibrahim's men] unlock the garages only if the owners pay at least Tk 70,000. Sometimes, their demands go up to Tk 2 lakh."

The leader also said that Ibrahim's men collected tolls from building owners in Bhashantek, and recently extorted Tk 2 lakh to Tk 3 lakh each from landlords by threatening to set fire to or vandalise buildings if they were not paid the money.

Shah Md Foyzal Ahmed, OC of Bhashantek Police Station, said they were yet to receive any specific complaints regarding Ibrahim's criminal activities. "We will definitely take action once we receive specific information."

Enquired about the bail of notorious criminals, a top police official said that they had been busy with addressing the force's internal issues and maintaining law and order after August 5 and that they were waiting for the interim government's decision in this regard.

He said many top criminals and militants have been freed recently as their jail terms ended.

"The interim government also recently directed the police to adopt a zero-tolerance policy against top criminals and militants. We have stepped up our vigilance across the country and action will be taken against anyone carrying out criminal activities ... no criminal will be spared," the official told this newspaper.

On September 10, Inspector General of Police Mainul Islam instructed all police units to adopt a "zero tolerance" policy against militancy and criminal activities.

Dhaka protests

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a neighbouring country, undermine the spirit of mutual respect and understanding between two friendly countries.

Amit Shah on Friday said at a rally in Jharkhand that if the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party returns to power in the state, it will chase Rohingya and Bangladeshi infiltrators out of Jharkhand.

Draft proposes banning political parties

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The law ministry's Senior Assistant Secretary Ashfaqur Rahman yesterday presented the draft of the proposed amendments at a meeting at the Judicial Administration Training Institute in Dhaka and sought opinions and suggestions from legal experts and protest leaders who steered the movement against the Hasina-led regime.

Amendments were proposed for eight sections of the act, which was originally formulated in 1973 to try the perpetrators of the crimes committed during the Liberation War in 1971. The law was later amended twice -- once in 2009 and again in 2013.

Opinions and suggestions will be solicited from stakeholders before finalising the amendments, said Asif Nazrul, the law adviser to the interim government, who presided over the meeting.

"The trial of these murders must be acceptable to everyone. We don't want to take revenge. We want to ensure justice."

"The prosecution and investigation teams of the International Crimes Tribunal have already been formed to facilitate the activities of the tribunal. Now the important challenge for us is to reconstitute the tribunal."

A WELCOME MOVE

The participants at the meeting supported and welcomed the proposed amendments and gave suggestions.

IGRD Adviser AF Hassan Arif and Industries Adviser Adilur Rahman Khan said more discussions will be held and opinions will be solicited from relevant persons for finalising the amendments of the ICT Act to make it stronger and better so that justice is delivered to those seeking it.

Attorney General Md Asaduzzaman said the interests of the accused persons have also been protected in the proposed amendments to the law.

He also suggested a provision allowing the victim families to engage their lawyer in the trial proceedings.

ICT's Chief Prosecutor Md Tajul Islam said, "The ICT Act will be amended in such a manner so that both the prosecution and defence can be satisfied knowing that justice has been ensured."

Welcoming the initiative to amend the ICT Act, Sara Hossain said a provision should be made to involve an international judge in the tribunal to ensure the trial proceedings are of international standard.

Badiul Alam Majumder, chief of the Election Commission Reforms Commission, said, "Those who have undermined democracy and the electoral system, committed financial crimes, including money laundering, and are responsible for the killing of more than 1,000 people in July this year must be brought to justice."

A total of 32 cases have been filed with the investigation agency of the ICT against Awami League President and former prime minister Sheikh Hasina.

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

The law ministry proposes amending three sections -- 3(2)(a), 4(2), and 19 -- as well as introducing three new sections -- 4(A), 13(A), and 20(A) -- and two new sub-sections -- sub-section (3) under section 3 and sub-section (2) under section 12.

It proposed changing the definition of crimes against humanity in section 3(2)(a).

As per the existing law, crimes against humanity include murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation, imprisonment, abduction, confinement, torture, rape or other inhumane acts committed against any civilian population or persecutions on political, racial, ethnic or religious grounds, whether or not in violation of the domestic law of the country where perpetrated.

The proposed amendment states that crimes against humanity would involve murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation, imprisonment, abduction, confinement, enforced disappearance, torture, rape, gender based violence, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilisation or other inhumane acts committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack against any civilian population or persecutions on political, racial, ethnic, gender, cultural or religious grounds, whether or not in violation of the domestic law of the country where perpetrated.

Section 4(2) of the existing act, which deals with command responsibility, states that any commander or superior officer who orders, permits, acquiesces or participates in the commission of any of the crimes specified in section 3 or is connected with any plans and activities involving the commission of such crimes or who fails or omits to discharge his duty to maintain discipline or to control or supervise the actions of the persons under his command or his subordinates, whereby such persons or subordinates or any of them commit any such crimes, or who fails to take necessary measures to prevent the commission of such crimes, is guilty of such crimes.

To this section, the draft amendment adds "leader of an organisation, association, entity, or organised group" in the act along with any commander or superior leader.

Section 19(1) of the existing act states that the tribunal shall not be bound by technical rules of evidence and may admit any evidence, including reports and photographs published in newspapers, periodicals and magazines, films and tape recordings and other materials as may be tendered before it, which it deems to have probative value.

The draft adds that data or information generated, prepared, sent, received, or stored in magnetic, electromagnetic, optical, or computer memory; audio and video recordings; Digital Versatile Disc (DVD), Digital Video Disc (DVD); records from mobile phones; hardware, software, or any other digital device may also be tendered before it,

which it deems to have probative value.

The draft added sub-section (3) under section 3 that states, "For the purpose of determining liability under sub-section (2), the Tribunal shall have regard to the Elements of Crime of the International Criminal Court (ICC), as adopted pursuant to Article 9 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, to the extent that they are not inconsistent with the provisions of this act."

It also proposed to add sub-section (2) under section 12 that states, "Notwithstanding anything contained in the Bangladesh Legal Practitioners and Bar Council Order, 1972 (President's Order) (President's Order No. 46 of 1972), the Tribunal may allow foreign counsel to appear before it, subject to its satisfaction that such counsel has at least 10 years' experience in the practice of international criminal law."

The draft introduces section 4(A) which states, "The Tribunal may decide to make an audio-visual recording of a hearing or part thereof. The Tribunal may decide to make available an audio or video broadcast of a hearing, or part thereof, via the Internet or other means, in accordance with any conditions set by the court to protect the safety, privacy, and dignity of participants."

Another proposed section 13(A) states, "Representatives from foreign governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and international bodies may attend public hearings, trials, and other proceedings of the Tribunal, subject to its prior approval and accreditation."

The draft amendment also proposed section 20(A) which deals with the prohibition of political organisations engaged in international crimes and states, "Notwithstanding anything contained in any other law for the time being in force, if any political organisation is found to have committed, aided, abetted, or facilitated the commission of any of the crimes under section 3 of this act, such organisation shall be subject to a ban for a period not exceeding 10 years."

It also says the ban imposed under this section shall include all activities of the organisation, including but not limited to: (a) participation in elections; (b) organising meetings, rallies, or any form of public gathering; (c) use of media and digital platforms for propaganda or communication; and (d) collection of funds and conducting any financial transactions.

Any person acting in contravention of the ban imposed under this section shall be liable to penalties as determined by the Tribunal, the section states.

The Tribunal, however, may, at its discretion, reduce the period of the ban upon an application filed by the organisation concerned, provided that it can demonstrate substantial reforms and compliance with the principles of international humanitarian law and human rights, it added.

they also want safety to be restored in the sector.

Tapan Chowdhury, managing director of Square Pharmaceuticals, said the unrest began in the pharmaceuticals industry, which he said is "the most organised sector" with most factories giving five bonuses and sharing profits, apart from other benefits.

AK Azad, chairman and managing director of Ha Meem Group, said many small and medium enterprises are in "big trouble" because of the unrest, and many factories would not be able to pay salaries timely as they could not continue production.

BGMEA President Khandoker Rafiqul Islam said 260 factories were closed as they could not implement the new wage structure that came into effect in December last year. He also said the unrest has been continuing even after meeting the workers' demands.

Govt looks to strengthen

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Bangladesh is important for the US and Prof Yunus has a global standing," said Obaidul Haque, associate professor at Dhaka University's International Relations Department.

He said the US has been trying to deepen the engagement with Bangladesh over the last few years, but it was not going very well. Now that the interim government has taken up initiatives for widespread reforms, and promised democratic elections and good governance, Washington is showing increasing interest.

The US suspended the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) facility for Bangladesh in the aftermath of Rana Plaza collapse in 2013, citing poor labour conditions. In 2021, it imposed sanctions against Rab and seven of its top officials over human rights violations and in May last year announced visa restrictions for those undermining democratic elections.

Former prime minister Sheikh Hasina made critical remarks of the US that was vocal about human rights, media freedom, and free and fair election ahead of the national polls on January 7 this year.

With the changed political landscape, the Dhaka-Washington relations appeared to take a new trajectory.

A six-member US delegation, led by Treasury Department's Assistant Secretary Brent Nieman, visited Dhaka in mid-September, the first foreign delegation's tour after the interim government was formed.

The delegation said Washington would be happy to support Prof Yunus' reform agenda and expressed eagerness to offer technical and financial assistance for reforms.

According to foreign policy analysts, Bangladesh's main challenge is now the economy, and the reforms agenda being taken up will be successful if the economic challenge can be addressed. Things may be different otherwise.

With better political understanding, Bangladesh may secure greater economic benefits and have access to new avenues for much-needed external funds, at favourable conditions, said Mohammad Sufiur Rahman, a senior research fellow at the South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance at North South University.

Even with about 18 percent duty, Bangladesh's export to the US is close to \$8 billion and it can be easily increased by a few billion if there is a duty-free quota-free facility, and non-tariff barriers are addressed.

"The US administration may, if felt imperative to do so, consider flexible ways and special vehicles to offer GSP facility to Bangladesh in the changed circumstances," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

With Washington's support, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the Asian Development Bank may favour allocating funds for Bangladesh. Such support will have positive impacts on the overall economy because the funding will lead to economic stabilisation, employment generation, and increased wages, he said.

These in turn can embolden the interim government's resolve and capacity to secure improved governance, higher labour standards, and better human rights. Such a positive spiral can also encourage greater economic interaction and quality investments from other Western countries.

"If the US companies can be encouraged to invest in the IT sector of Bangladesh and the Bangladeshi IT experts in the US can be connected to our IT industry, it can significantly increase Bangladesh's IT-related services export. The same can happen with other cutting edge technologies if the US shows keenness only with deeper political understanding, trust, and confidence," said Sufiur, Bangladesh's former permanent representative to the UN offices and international organisations in Geneva.

Sufiur said over the last years of the Awami League government, Bangladesh had to depend more on China for its failure to bridge gaps with the US and the West, and there is a real chance of striking a balance now.

DU teacher Obaidul said Washington can also provide budgetary support, which is much needed in Bangladesh.

He said the export of Bangladeshi readymade garments saw a decline amid recent demonstrations and subsequent unrest, and US support towards this end will be extremely helpful.

Washington can also support Bangladesh's reform process, including in financial and security sectors.

"If Bangladesh improves in human rights, labour rights, and governance sectors, and eventually the sanction against Rab is withdrawn, this will have positive impacts on Bangladesh's export to the Western countries," Obaidul added.

Analysts said Prof Yunus, who has earned US trust, is expected to discuss these aspects and take forward the US-Bangladesh relations to a new level.

Dhaka needs to ensure that it maintains a balanced foreign policy, they added.

Israeli airstrikes

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In New York, Iranian President Masoud Peshkian said Israel wanted to drag the Middle East into a full-blown war by provoking Iran to join the Israel-Hezbollah conflict.

"It is Israel that seeks to create this all-out conflict," he told journalists after his arrival in New York to attend the UN General Assembly, saying the consequences of such instability would be irreversible.

Media reforms

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But some newspapers were in favour of the fascist government and those who played such roles during the uprising would have to be brought to book.

About the money government owes to newspapers for running ads, Nahid said the government is trying to digitalise the payment system to provide hassle-free service.

Daily Jugantar Editor Saiful Alam, daily Manabzamin Editor Matiuur Rahman Chowdhury, Daily Kaler Kantha Editor Hasan Hafiz, Daily Sun Editor Rezaul Karim, Prothom Alo Executive Editor Sajjad Sharif, Daily Naya Diganta Executive Editor Salauddin Babor, The Daily Star's head of operation Mizanur Rahman, Daily Ajker Pathrika Managing Editor Kamrul Hasan, Daily Ittefaq News Editor Ashok Kumar Singha, Daily Sangram Managing Editor Nurunnabi, Daily Sangbad Chief Reporter Shahriar Karim, Daily Inqilab Executive Editor Fahima Bahauddin Shama, and Daily Azadi Managing Editor Wahid Malek also spoke at the meeting.