

71 Bangladeshis without valid papers held in Malaysia

AGENCIES

The Kuala Lumpur Immigration Department arrested 71 illegal immigrants, including 71 Bangladeshi nationals, during a raid in the Jalan Alor area of Bukit Bintang on Wednesday night, reports Malaysia's national news agency Bernama.

Kuala Lumpur Immigration Director Wan Mohammed Saupee Wan Yusoff said the operation, conducted in collaboration with Kuala Lumpur City Hall, began at 7:15pm (local time) following public complaints and investigations.

In addition to the Bangladeshis, the arrestees included 60 individuals from Myanmar, 24 from Indonesia, 16 from Nepal, three from Pakistan, and one each from Egypt and Sudan, Yusoff said.

The detainees are being investigated under Malaysian laws related to the absence of valid documentation and overstaying in the country, the report said.

All those arrested were taken to the Kuala Lumpur Immigration Headquarters, the immigration official told reporters after the operation.



Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus talks to UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk yesterday on the sidelines of World Economic Forum summit in Davos, Switzerland. Story on page 3.

PHOTO: PTD

Titas Gas sinks further in red on system loss

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Most of the pipelines of Titas were installed in 1968-69 and have leaks in many places, he told The Daily Star.

Titas Gas, which accounts for two-thirds of the gas distributed in Bangladesh, has prepared the tender documents to replace the pipelines in Dhaka and Narayanganj. The tender will be floated next month.

"We will need overground and underground detectors to identify the leakages in pipelines. Then we will replace those pipelines under small clusters through the tender process," he said, adding that the small leakages will

be resolved immediately.

However, it will not be possible to replace the pipelines that are below 6-7 meters underground.

"We will try to install new pipelines there."

Titas Gas has 35 vigilance teams that conduct drives regularly to remove illegal connections.

"We are trying as per our capacity. There are syndicates consisting of locals, contractors and some workers of Titas itself. We are identifying them."

Titas has ramped up its drive after the ministry of power, energy and mineral resources recently got its own executive magistrate.

"We have an area-wise routine for conducting drives. We are focusing

on the illegal pipelines connected to the industries as those consume much higher volumes of gas – sometimes 2,000 more than a household user," Parvez said.

Since September last year, Titas's vigilance teams have removed about 100 kilometres of illegal pipelines in Keraniganj, Kamrangirchar, Munshiganj, Narayanganj, Savar, Tongi, Gazipur, Dhanmondi, Mirpur, Gulshan, Mymensingh, Meghnaghat and Narsingdi.

Last fiscal year, about 2.5 lakh illegal connections were snapped, down from 3.27 lakh connections a year earlier, according to Titas's annual report.

About 420 km of illegal pipelines were removed, up from 390 km in fiscal 2022-23.

Connections to 110 industrial, 186 commercial, 54 captive and four CNG stations were disconnected in those drives.

Legalising the existing illegal connections would help reduce system loss and increase Titas's revenue, Parvez said.

"It's like whitening the black money."

For example, some households have legal connections for two to three burners but use the line for 10 to 12 connections.

"We couldn't charge for the extra use. If we legalise those connections, we could charge them,"

he said, adding that the policymakers have to make a call on this. The company has about 30 lakh customers at present.

To reduce gas theft, enforcement of the law should be strengthened.

For instance, the Gas Act has the provision to jail a person for illegal gas use. But this provision is never enforced.

"If we can set examples in some areas, illegal gas use may come down. Besides, we face obstacles from the locals. There have been some incidents where people attacked our staffers and officials. We only file regular cases against them but there are hardly any examples of due penalty," Parvez said.

Ijaz Hossain, former dean of engineering at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, said theft, with the help of Titas officials, is the main cause of system loss, although some leakages do take place due to old pipelines.

"Some set up pipelines at night – strict actions should be taken against them. Besides, we do not have proper metering systems in many places. Meters should be installed in the offtake points to identify the places where most of the losses take place."

Besides, replacing the old pipelines is one of the major ways to reduce system loss, Hossain added.

Uprising leaders, BNP at odds

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fascism had emerged. His [Fakhrul] statement indicates the possibility of another 1/11-style government, a continuation of parliamentary majoritarianism, submissive foreign policy, absence of justice for enforced disappearances, murders, and the July massacre," the post read.

This is for the first time that any July uprising student leader has directly addressed any comments of a BNP leader by name.

In an interview with BBC Bangla published on Wednesday, Fakhrul said, "If the interim government fails to remain neutral, it cannot hold the election. In that case, a neutral government would be needed."

He added that questions of neutrality might arise given some student leaders' plan to set up a political party.

"If representatives of

these students are part of this government, neutrality cannot be maintained. If they think they can hold elections keeping their representatives in the government, political parties will not accept it," Fakhrul said.

Asif Mahmud Sajib Bhuiyan, youth and sports adviser, shared Nahid's post with a short caption: "There are many things I cannot say being a part of the government. However, it is also right to keep people in the dark."

In his own Facebook post, Asif also said that if any adviser engages in politics, they will do so after they have quit office.

"At the same time, it is inappropriate for political parties to interfere in government activities. Lobbying or putting pressure for appointments to various important government or constitutional positions is also unacceptable," he

added.

Hasnat Abdullah, convener of the Student Against Discrimination (SAD), Abdul Hannan Masud, chief organiser of the SAD, and Sarjis Alam, chief organiser of Jatiya Nagorik Committee, also shared Nahid's post.

In a separate post, Hasnat said the BNP is willing to allow the Awami League to regain its foothold, but it refuses to accept the formation of a new political party by students.

FAKHRUL DOUBLES DOWN

Fakhrul yesterday reiterated his earlier comment about the neutrality of the government.

"In an interview yesterday [Wednesday], I said that if the interim government can't remain impartial, a neutral government will be required during the elections. There is a reason why I said this. We can see that the interim

government is unable to maintain neutrality on several issues," he told a discussion at the Jatiya Press Club.

Fakhrul added that the government should make arrangement for the election as soon as possible after carrying out the minimum necessary reforms.

The BNP leader said his party is demanding elections not to go to power, merely, but also out of fear that evil forces may exploit the situation if the election is unnecessarily delayed.

Fakhrul said some people want elections only after reforms. "But, should we wait four to five years or until the reforms are done? In that case, people would be deprived of their voting rights for another long period."

'BUSY IN CANTONMENT'

In his long Facebook post, Nahid also said there is a plan to sideline student

leaders since August 5.

"While students and the mass people were fighting on the streets and police were shooting them, many national leaders were busy in the cantonment planning a new government, excluding the people (although some of them spoke about the students)," he said.

"Since August 3, we have been saying that we will not accept any form of military rule or emergency. Although we were repeatedly asked to go to the cantonment, we refused to do so. Eventually, through discussions and negotiation at Bangabhaban, the decision to form an interim government led by Dr Yunus was made."

He said students are the only factor that distinguishes the current government from the 1/11 government.

"Although the BNP has been talking about a

"Minus Two" formula, they are now proposing another 1/11-style government under the guise of a neutral government to pave their way to power," Nahid wrote.

"At various levels, pro-BNP individuals hold positions from top to bottom of the government. When you are speaking of neutrality of election, this reality should be kept in mind."

Nahid also said that the BNP took stance against the removal of the president, reforms, drafting a new constitution, and the July proclamation.

"None of these were partisan demands of the students. Yet, for the sake of national stability, greater interests, and unity, students have repeatedly backtracked from their positions. But that does not mean we will compromise even a bit if there is a move that is anti-democratic or if it goes against the desires of the uprising."

From jail to loving embrace of family

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Jannat Ul Forhad, assistant inspector general (development and media) of the Prison Directorate, told The Daily Star that 41 ex-BDR members were freed from Dhaka Central Jail, 26 from Kashimpur Central Jail-1, 89 from Kashimpur Central Jail-2, and 12 from Kashimpur High Security Central Jail.

As the men got out of the jails, there were sighs of relief and frustration.

"I have no words to explain my feelings after 16 years behind bars," said Shawakat Ali, a former sepoy, as he left Kashimpur High Security Central Jail.

"This is the most significant and joyous day of my life."

With tears in his eyes, Shawakat said, "During all these years, I only saw my son from a distance

when he visited the jail. But today, I can finally touch my son and my wife.

"I was proven innocent in the murder case, and now I have been granted bail in the explosives case. I want my job back and compensation for the 16 years I lost in prison."

His wife, Monira Parveen, shared the struggles she endured during his days in prison.

"I lived an inhuman life with a one-year-old son after my husband was sent to jail. We lived in our village home in Faridpur, and it was nearly impossible for me to gather the money to visit him in jail. I could only see my husband once every two years," she said.

Mostafizur Rahman, another released BDR member, said, "We were imprisoned for no crime of our own and purely for

political reasons."

Enamul, a former sepoy, said, "The previous government falsely implicated us and imprisoned us. We, the innocent ones, were wrongfully imprisoned by the fascist Hasina government. Those responsible for the mutiny must be punished, not us. We demand our reinstatement."

At the prison gates, emotional reunions unfolded as family members, many of whom had been waiting since morning with flowers, embraced their loved ones.

Seventeen-year-old Tahsin Akhtar, who also had never seen her father in person, ran towards to welcome him with flowers.

Her father, Mohammad Dulal Mia, had been imprisoned just eight

months after her birth.

"I can't believe this moment has finally come," Tahsin said, holding Dulal tight as if someone could take Dulal away again.

Al Amin, another released BDR member, said, "Sixteen years of our lives were stolen. We committed no crime, yet we were kept behind bars. Now that we are free, we hope the government takes steps to release our brothers who remain in prison without reason."

The 2009 Pilkhana carnage shocked the nation. It left 74 people, including 57 army officers, killed at the BDR headquarters. On November 5, 2013, a Dhaka court sentenced 150 BDR members and two civilians to death, and 160 others to life imprisonment.

Additionally, 256 people,

mostly BDR soldiers, were sentenced to various jail terms. The court acquitted 278, but the prosecution appealed against the acquittal of 69.

In January 2015, the High Court started hearing the appeals of the convicts and delivered its verdict on November 27, 2017, confirming the death penalty for 139. It commuted the death sentences of eight to life imprisonment and acquitted five others. The court also upheld life imprisonment for 146 and acquitted 14.

On January 19 this year, 178 ex-BDR personnel were granted bail in a case filed under the Explosive Substances Act in connection with the Pilkhana carnage.

Many families demanded justice, compensation, and

the reinstatement of the former soldiers.

Shahjahan Ali, brother of released BDR member Rabikul Islam, said, "We spent nearly everything we had to support my brother in prison – his food, clothing, and legal battles. It drained us financially. We demand compensation for the suffering we endured and his reinstatement."

Rabikul's uncle, Rezaul Karim, highlighted the emotional toll on the family.

"His father, Abdur Rahman, died last October after fighting for his son's release. He could not see this day," he said.

[Our Gazipur correspondent contributed to this report.]

10 eminent writers to get Bangla Academy awards

UNB, Dhaka

Recipients of the Bangla Academy Literary Award 2024 have been announced, honouring 10 individuals for their notable contributions to various genres of Bangla literature.

Bangla Academy announced the names of the winners yesterday, according to a press release.

Salimullah Khan has been honoured for essay writing, Masud Khan for poetry, Selim Morshed for fiction, Subhasish Sinha for drama, Faruk Newaz in the children's literature category, and GH Habib has been recognised as the best transcript writer.

Muhammad Shahjahan Mia was recognised in research category, Rezaur Rahman in Science category, Mohamamd Hannan in Liberation War category and Syed Jamil Ahmed in folklore category.

Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus is expected to hand over the awards during the inauguration of Amar Ekushey Book Fair-2025.

JULY UPRISING Dreams dented by joblessness

AFP, Dhaka

Bangladeshi students braved bullets to overthrow an autocratic government, but six months after the uprising, many say finding a job is proving a harder task than manning the barricades.

Dhaka University student Mohammad Rizwan Chowdhury's dreams of ample opportunities for youth have been badly dented, saying he had seen little action from the caretaker government of Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus.

"I can't see any fruitful initiatives taken by the government so far," Rizwan grumbled, a 25-year-old student who took part in the protests that drove autocratic ex-leader Sheikh Hasina into exile on August 5.

Unemployment was a key driver of protests last year. Since the uprising, it has only grown worse.

At the end of September 2024, the number of people seeking employment in the country of 170 million hit 2.66 million, a six-percent increase from 2.49 million the year before, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS).

Educated Bangladeshis make up 87 percent of those without work, according to the BBS data.

The International Monetary Fund warned in September that economic activity had "slowed markedly, while inflation remains at double-digit levels", with tax revenues down while spending pressures had increased.

For many, the euphoria of Hasina's ouster is fading. "Although our representatives are part of the administration, I'm not sure whether our voices are being heard," said Rizwan, a political science graduate.

High growth

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Hasina, who had ruled Bangladesh since 2009, is being investigated there on suspicion of crimes against humanity, genocide, murder, corruption and money laundering and Dhaka has asked New Delhi to extradite her.

Hasina and her party deny wrongdoing, while New Delhi has not responded to the extradition request.

"She was in Davos telling everybody how to run a country. Nobody questioned that," Yunus told Reuters in an interview on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum's annual meeting in the Swiss Alpine resort. "That's not a good world system at all."

"The whole world is responsible for making that happen. So that's a good lesson for the world," he said. "She said, our growth rate surpasses everybody else. Fake growth rate, completely."

Yunus did not elaborate on why he thought that growth was fake, but went on to stress the importance of broad-based and inclusive growth, and the need to reduce wealth inequality.

Annual growth in Bangladesh accelerated to nearly 8% in the financial year 2017/18, compared with about 5% when Hasina took over in 2009, before the impact of Covid-19 and the war in Ukraine pulled it down.

In 2023, the World Bank described Bangladesh as one of the world's fastest-growing economies.

"Since its independence in 1971, Bangladesh has transformed from one of the poorest countries to achieving lower-middle income status in 2015," it said.

HURT BY STRAINED INDIA TIES

The student-led movement in Bangladesh grew out of protests against quotas in government jobs that

spiralled in July, provoking a violent crackdown that drew global criticism, although Hasina's government denied using excessive force.

The student protesters recommended Yunus as the chief adviser in the interim government tasked with holding fresh elections.

Yunus, who has promised to hold elections by the end of 2025 or early 2026, said he was not interested in running.

Known as the "banker to the poor", Yunus and the Grameen Bank he founded won the Nobel for helping lift millions from poverty with tiny loans of less than \$100 offered to the rural poor, too poor to gain attention from traditional banks.

"For me, personally, I'm not very driven by growth rates," Yunus said. "I'm driven by the quality of life of the people at the very bottom level. So I would rather bring an economy which avoids the whole idea of wealth concentration."

Ties between Bangladesh and India, who have strong trade and cultural links, have become fraught since Hasina was ousted and she took refuge in New Delhi.

Yunus has demanded that India send Hasina back to Bangladesh so she can face trial for what it says are crimes against protesters and her opponents, and crimes she is accused of committing during her tenure.

Calling India's rival China a long-term friend of Bangladesh at this difficult time, Yunus said the strained relationship with New Delhi "hurts me a lot personally."

"Bangladesh-India relationship should be the strongest possible. You know, you cannot draw the map of India without drawing the map of Bangladesh," he said, referring to how Bangladesh's land border runs almost entirely alongside India's.

Polls likely by year end

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Local elections are not our priority at this moment," he said at a discussion meeting at the district election office in Patuakhali town yesterday.

The Election Commission wants to give the nation a fair and impartial election, he said.

"There is no scope of any interference. The election will be held within the timeframe announced by the chief adviser and a smooth voting environment will be created," he said.

The discussion meeting was held on voter list update with Senior Election Officer Khan Abi Shahanur Khan in chair.