

Phone: (202) 244-0183
Fax : (202) 244-2771/7830
E-mail: bdoot_pwash@yahoo.com
Website : www.bdembassyusa.org



EMBASSY OF THE
PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH
3510 International Drive, NW
Washington, D.C. 20008

PRESS RELEASE

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Hunger Strike of Bangladeshi Detainees Ends at El Paso Detention Center in Texas

A six-day hunger strike by a total of 41 detainees including 35 Bangladeshis at El Paso detention center in Texas ended on October 20 after successful negotiations between the consular wing of the Bangladesh Embassy in Washington and the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

Md. Shamsul Alam Chowdhury, Minister (Consular) of the Bangladesh Embassy led the trouble-shooting mission and put an end to the hunger strike following hectic negotiations with representatives of the ICE/DHS authority on October 19-20.

Following decisions were agreed upon by the two sides at 3:30 pm (3:30 am BDT) on October 20.

1. Release of all 48 detainees will gradually take place from October 26 from El Paso detention Center and will be completed by November 15

However, there will be some legal issues concerning 17 detainees who have been already issued with the "final removal order" by the El Paso Immigration Judge.

2. All these 17 detainees will be given the opportunity to appeal against the decision of their "removal" order and they would be transferred to their preferred locations (like NY, Florida etc) to legally fight the removal order. Once they are allowed to move to other facilities, the Bangladesh Community members (relatives of the detainees) will hire the attorneys to try with the cases to revise the decisions of the El Paso Immigration judges.

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3. The release encompasses the following conditions which are to be met by October 23.

a. All the detainees must have some ID card/legal documents/passport duly authenticated by Bangladesh Embassy. It's already under process and will be done by October 22.

b. Each detainee must have a credible sponsor. Most of the detainees provided the names of their sponsors and the Minister (Consular) managed some sponsors from the Bangladesh community leaders from different locations on the spot through telephone. ICE will verify the status of the sponsors by October 23.

c. All detainees undergoing hunger strike must be physically fit before release.

The Minister (Consular) along with the representatives of ICE/DHS HQ and El Paso Detention Center Authority met the detainees undergoing hunger strikes and appraised them about the decisions. Mr. Chowdhury talked to them, emotionally motivated them and personally fed them to break their hunger strike. He also purchased cakes, sweets and cookies for them to feed them to break their hunger strike.

The six-day hunger strike was over at 6:20 pm (BDT 6:23 am) on October 20.

Earlier, the ICE authority during the meeting on October 20 at El Paso detention Center demanded the followings:

1. To issue the travel documents for all the detainees of El Paso including the persons not taking part in hunger strike. It may please be noted that there are total 48 detainees presently held at El Paso detention center.

2. The ICE and U.S. authority were pressing hard and demanded the "removal" of all these illegal Bangladeshis back to Bangladesh on a special chartered flight. They also threatened to bring special charges against the detainees if they continue with the hunger strike.

The Minister (Consular) insisted on the release of all the 48 Bangladeshis held in the El Paso detention center on "Bail Bond" and allowing them to take the legal support as other millions of illegal immigrants living in USA.

