

Govt strings deposit cut with lower migration cost

RAFIQ HASAN

The government would consider withdrawal of the newly imposed Tk one crore mandatory security deposit by manpower exporters to Saudi Arabia if they reduce the present high cost of migration.

The government at a meeting with manpower exporters to Saudi Arabia yesterday gave them 15 days' time to come out with a suggestion to reduce the migration cost, which is three to four times the official rate.

At the meeting, the recruiters led by BAIRA President M A H Salim MP urged State Minister for Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment Mohammad Quamrul Islam to withdraw the government decision.

But he declined to withdraw the new provision for Tk one crore deposit unless manpower exporters agree to reduce the migration cost to a "tolerable position", according to sources.

The recruiters told the meeting that the new step would create a monopoly and seriously hamper manpower export to Saudi Arabia.

The state minister blamed the recruiters for charging money three to four times higher than the government-fixed rate in sending a worker to Saudi Arabia.

Recruiters charge more than Tk 1.20 lakh while the government-fixed rate is Tk 50,000 at the maximum.

"If they come up with a solution to reduce the migration cost we would consider withdrawal of the new rule," Quamrul Islam told The Daily Star last night.

Otherwise, the government would take stern action for fraudulence in sending workers abroad, he said.

The deposit has been increased to give compensation to the workers cheated by recruiters, he added.

The recruiters will also have to take the responsibility of workers who would come back home or become jobless abroad within the contract period, the state minister said.

When contacted, BAIRA Secretary General Ghulam Mustafa said that they will give written proposals to the government by January 31.

Meters must

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associations. The vehicle owner will preserve photograph of the driver and finger print of his left hand thumb.

The meter showing the fare rate will be installed at an easily visible place in the vehicle.

According to the guideline, a driver can not refuse to take a passenger from a designated stand and he can not wait on the road for long for passenger.

Any passenger can complain to DMP at mobile telephone nos. 0171-000990, 0171000991, 0171000992 and fixed telephone no 999-2627 if any auto-rickshaw in the DMP area refuses to take to his desired destination and if it demands contractual fare rather than the fixed fare, the guideline said.

The nearby traffic police officials will take legal action, it said.

EC request

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place tomorrow more than 16 years after the expiry of its five-year tenure.

Election had been withheld in the municipality due to legal complexities over the delimitation of two wards. The last election was on February 12, 1984 and the five-year tenure expired in 1989.

The EC had come up with an election schedule on December 14 last year.

A total of 81 candidates including five for the chairman post are contending. The chairman candidates are Alhaj Mohammad Murad Mia, Md. Abdus Shabbir Khan, Dr. Selina Hayat Ivy, Nurul Islam and Mahbubur Rahman Masud.

Fourteen candidates are vying for the three reserved wards for women while there are 62 candidates for the nine general wards.

About 1,27,021 are expected to exercise their franchise in tomorrow's polls.

CPD taskforces

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Chairman Professor Rehman Sobhan chaired the meeting.

"As the government has now entered its second year in office, it is being increasingly felt that the recommendations of the taskforces should be revisited in order to put under scrutiny to what extent those recommendations are being implemented by the incumbent government," a CPD release said.

The new initiative will also come up with policy recommendations for the government that the CPD hopes would help it in its preparation for the Aid Group meeting scheduled in May 2003.

Apart from a careful review of the outcomes of various public policies, the works of the taskforces will also be discussed in regional dialogues. The final reports of the taskforces will be presented at a National Forum to be held at the end of April this year.

The Daily Star and Prothom Alo will collaborate with the CPD in carrying out stakeholder consultations.

He claimed that at the meeting, the government agreed to defer effectiveness of its new decision till January 31.

According to sources, only 800 recruiters out of total 700 are active in manpower export to Saudi Arabia now.

The meeting held at the office of Bangladesh Manpower Export and Training (BMET) was also attended by some other government officials and executive committee members of BAIRA (Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies).

30 injured as AL, BNP clash in Magura

UNB, Magura

At least 30 people were injured in a clash between BNP and Awami League activists at Butugram village in Sadar upazila yesterday.

Locals said the clash ensued at noon between the supporters of local BNP leader Shohrab Hossain and AL leader Mohon Member over tearing posters of the coming UP elections.

Of the injured, 14 were admitted to the Sadar Hospital while others released after first aid.

IGP brushes

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meeting, moderated by Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Syed. Election Commissioners Safur Rahman, MM Munsef Ali and AK Mohammad Ali, and several hundred officials who would hold the UP polls attended the meeting.

"The less the deployment of force is the better the election festivity would be," said Siddiqui. He also informed the meeting that the government would take whatever steps are necessary for polls.

Some election officials, however, expressed concern over the prevailing situation, adding that, after the army pullout from the upazila headquarters, the situation has been worsening once again.

"It's essential to ensure security during elections and from this imperative, the election commission proposed deployment of army during the polls," Brigadier General Ibrahim Khali, deputy director general of the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) told the meeting.

Describing the post anti-crime drive, Azizul Alam, upazila nirbahi officer of Jhenaidah, said there has been a qualitative change in law and order after the army pullout.

As he demanded re-deployment of army for polls, other election officials supported him by clapping hands.

IGP Modabbir however claimed the joint drive is still on. Only the Operation Clean Heart has been closed and troops have been re-deployed in divisional headquarters.

He said the government has also initiated several steps to maintain law and order.

The CEC, however, did not make any comment on the law and order. He cautioned the election officials to go by the laws or face punitive actions.

Meantime, Prime Minister's Political Secretary Harris Chowdhury termed the election officials' statement about law and order untrue and said the grassroots people do not feel like them. "There is no such situation for them to feel insecure," he told the BBC Radio last night.

N'ganj elections

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No poll violence has so far been reported. But the listed criminals of the town are back, and they may play a role in the election.

The local administration has taken some security measures to prevent terrorist activities on the election day. A total of 1500 police and Ansar have been deployed on election duty. Five platoons of the BDR also reached the town on Tuesday.

AL candidate Dr Selina Hayat Ivy has alleged that terrorists are threatening the minority voters in some parts of the town. She demanded deployment of the army on the election day. On the other hand, BNP candidate Nurul Islam Sarder said he wanted a free and fair election.

Some listed terrorists have returned following the withdrawal of the army. And at least four of them are participating in the commissioner election. The people are scared about these candidates of four wards (3,4,5 and 6). The 'masthan' candidates even reportedly threatened the ruling party candidates.

Election of Narayanjan Poursabha is taking place after 18 years. The last election was held in 1984. Since then legal barriers have prevented holding of election. The long awaited election has created great enthusiasm among the voters, but they are feeling uneasy with the participation of some known criminals in the election.

Vulgarity in Muktijoddha Sangsad fair

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Visitors to a month-long fair, organised by the Ramna thana unit of the Muktijoddha Sangsad at the Ramna Park, are finding the goings-on a bit too vulgar, particularly the special shows.

Four companies are performing variety shows, puppet shows, obscene dances, and at least three gambling counters have been opened at the fair.

The shows start from 3.00pm and continue till midnight everyday. They are attracting a huge number of people. Long queues of visitors are seen in front of the gates. The promoters are using loudspeakers to describe the features of the shows. The tickets are sold at Tk 20 to 40.

However, some people were not happy with the sleazy performance. They were shouting at the promoters for cheating them.

An employee of the organisers of the shows told this correspondent that they were running a losing business. "We have to pay Tk. 2000 per night to the fair committee," he added.

When asked whether they have the permission to hold such shows, he said that the fair organisers had managed to obtain the permission from the higher authorities.

When contacted, Mohammad Humayun Kabir, president of the organising committee, said that they had only rented the space to the companies, and the companies managed to get the permission for holding the shows.

When his attention was drawn to gambling, Humayun Kabir said that it was included in the fair to raise earnings.

He further said that only 32 stalls out of 117 had been rented, and that fell well short of the organisers' target.

The month-long fair was opened on December 22 last year to raise funds for poor freedom fighters. Minister for Liberation War Affairs, Redwan Ahmed inaugurated the fair as the chief guest.

However, many visitors expressed their dissatisfaction over indecent activities at the fair.

Journalists, teachers, civil society leaders visit Shahriar & Muntasir at hospital

UNB, Dhaka

A number of journalists, teachers and civil society leaders yesterday visited Shahriar Kabir and Muntasir Mamun at the Dhaka Community Hospital.

Among them were Prof Khan Sarwar Murshid, Dr Zillur Rahman Siddiqui, Prof Kabir Chowdhury, Prof Salahuddin Ahmed, Daily Star Editor Mahfuz Anam and Weekly Jai Jai Din Editor Shafiq Rehman.

Journalist Shahriar Kabir and Prof Muntasir Mamun are undergoing treatment at the hospital.

Shahriar Kabir was released from Chittagong jail on January 7 while Muntasir Mamun from Dinajpur jail on January 9. Later, they were admitted to the Dhaka Community Hospital with various complications.

Mimi's death shatters family

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The death of Monica Afroz Mimi has left the members of her family in a state of trauma and shock.

The third-year student of Ahsanullah University died at a hospital in the city Monday morning, after fighting for life for long nine days. Her boyfriend, a cricketer, had reportedly set her afire.

Her mother Munira Begum and two brothers AS Masud Parvez and Maruf Hossain Mamun -- did everything possible to save their beloved Mimi.

Her brothers still refuse to believe that their only sister has died. Words are clearly not enough to console the bereaved members of the family.

The body of Mimi was taken to Savar on Monday evening. She was buried there yesterday.

The members of her family have, however, expressed their frustration as the police have failed to arrest the criminals so far. They have said that either the CID or the DB should take up the case.

Detention: HC

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Mymensingh AL leader Principal Motiur Rahman was declared illegal yesterday by a division bench of the High Court comprising Justice Tafazzul Islam and Justice Anwarul Haque.

Motiur Rahman, president of the AL district unit, was arrested on December 9, 2002 in connection with cinema blasts in the town on December 7.

Advocate Abdul Matin Khasru appeared for Motiur Rahman.



People of the lower-income group while away their time at the National Eidgah in front of the High Court. The cold wave lost its bite to a great extent as the sun shone yesterday after days of hibernation.

PHOTO: STAR

DCs, police supers to face

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All civil servants must go by the service rules and maintain discipline at their workplaces."

The government, she said, has been relentless on its pursuit for a neutral and corruption-free administration.

The prime minister spelled out incentives for officials who would be transferred to the capital. "They will be given government quarters or double house rent. Special facilities should also be extended for schooling of their children."

In this regard, she told the DCs that no one would be transferred on short notices or before completion of his or her tenure.

Khaleda identified poverty alleviation, tree plantation, pisciculture, goat rearing, primary and women education, information and communication technology, development of library, child rights, vocational and technical education, housing for the distressed, etc as her government's priority issues.

Construction of roads, bridges and educational institutions and power supply are also on the list, she said.

The principal secretary to the

prime minister is regularly monitoring implementation of programmes, would soon visit the districts to see for himself progress of different programmes and submit a report to her, she said.

The PM advised the DCs to extend all-out support and play the coordinator in all government functions - criminal justice, revenue collection, civil administration, civil defence, public relations, relief and rehabilitation, strengthening of local government and so on.

She said instruction has already been given to fill vacant posts in ministries and different divisions and departments under their wings.

Khaleda termed the DCs the "crisis managers" and asked them to work as the bridge between the government and the grassroots people.

Dhaka and Chittagong divisional commissioners Abul Kashem and Katibur Rahman and a total of 23 DCs took part in the open discussion with the PM. Cabinet Secretary Dr Saadat Husain delivered the opening remarks.

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman, LGRD and Cooperatives

Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Health Minister Dr Khandaker Mosharrar Hossain, Law Minister Moudud Ahmed and Agriculture Minister Matiur Rahman Nazami also spoke on the occasion. Political secretaries to the PM MA Harris Chowdhury and Mosaddak Ali were also present.

Meeting sources said most DCs lauded the government's poverty alleviation and development programmes. They also thanked the PM for the army-led joint drive.

One DC admitted that there is a gulf between the DCs and the SPs, saying such a lack of coordination hampered many activities.

Criminal activities are still on, he said, but the joint drive has kept crime and violence in check.

Another DC said allocation for poverty alleviation programmes does not always go to the poor because of discriminatory distribution by elected representatives.

He suggested introduction of cash, instead of wheat, in food for work programmes.

Sari against Cholera

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"They can use old saris. The biggest advantage is it is readily available in each and every household in Bangladesh."

Tests covering 133,000 people in 65 Bangladesh villages showed that when women were taught to use a folded sari to filter drinking water, incidences of cholera dropped by 48 per cent. The researchers now plan a large-scale education campaign.

Cholera is a deadly disease carried by bacteria that infect organisms in the water, from plankton to shellfish. It causes severe diarrhoea that can be easily treated by modern medicine -- but it killed nearly 3,000 people in 2001, according to the World Health Organization.

These numbers probably only represent the tip of the iceberg, the scientists said, because the poorest people are usually the victims and the cause of their deaths is often not reported.

The team has been working on the idea of filtering drinking water for years. In 1996, they carried out a small study that showed a folded sari could filter out much of the cholera-carrying plankton. The most recent report is the result of testing the idea across much of Bangladesh.

"This is our first complete analysis," Huq said.

Folding a sari to give eight layers filters out virtually all the cholera, but women -- who gather the water in Bangladeshi society -- did not tend

to do this, Huq said.

"The flow of water becomes very slow. We could not implement it in the village because women collecting water were not ready to spend five to seven minutes to wait for the water to collect," he said.

"With four layers it was a zip." Bangladeshi villagers often filter water through a piece of cloth, but they do not usually fold it. Folding the thin sari cloth greatly increased its filtering power, the researchers found.

Once the cloth dries out, the bacteria die.

Now the team wants to find out if other items of clothing used in other countries will work as well.

SAFF soccer

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the two teams opted not to take chances in the first half of the match that was marked with rough tackling and scuffles.

Sri Lanka however could have gone ahead in the very second minute of the match when midfielder Azmeer got the ball inside the danger area from a long throw. But his powerful shot ricocheted off the crosspiece.

The match came to life when Ashim sprang to tap the ball home after Lankan custodian Devinda could only parry a 30-yard drive from IM Vijayan into the path of the opportunistic striker from Kolkata.

But two minutes before the final whistle substitute Abeysekera started a brilliant run down the left flank before unleashing an angular shot that sank the spirit of the Indians.

The fate of the other semifinalists from Group B hinges on the result of the match between Nepal and Maldives today. Bangladesh will play their inconsequential last league match against Bhutan, also today.

Yellow cards: Ashim Biswas, Debjit Ghosh, Sameer Naik (India) and Weerasinghe, Jayasiriya, Mohideen (Sri Lanka).

TEAMS

India: Rajat (Virender), Renedy Singh (Subhash), Jo Paul Ancheri, Ashim Biswas, Debjit Ghosh, Alvoti (Abhishek), Fernandes, Sameer Naik, IM Vijayan and Climax Lawrence.

Sri Lanka: Devinda, Steinwall, Azmeer, Fuard, Prabath (Perera), Weerasinghe (Abeysekera), Channa, Jayasiriya, S Silva, Mohideen and Hamsa.

Referee: Tayeb Hasan (Bangladesh).

Opposition: UP polls

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obliges the EC, he said. Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad expressed his firm conviction that the polls would not be fair without army deployment.

"Army must be there. Our party strongly feels that deployment of army is necessary for fair polls, as the Chief Election Commissioner has already asserted," the former president said.

Anwar Hossain Manju, chairman of the other faction of Jatiya Party said, "I think army should be deployed for the polls as the Chief Election Commissioner wants it."

People think that the government might take advantage of army withdrawal in the polls, Manju said. "It (government) has not withdrawn all

the forces. It kept striking forces in major cities, withdrawing army from the areas where the polls will be held."

They think that except certain incidents of human rights violation during the army-led anti-crime joint drive, the overall law and order situation marked improvement, he said.

General Secretary of Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) Mujahidul Islam Selim said it is "very unfortunate" that the government is negating the EC's decision to deploy army during the UP polls.

"I'm afraid that the government would try to manipulate the polls in its favour by using power," said Selim, who is also a senior leader of the left leaning 11-Party Alliance.

It amounts to curbing EC's constitutional authority, he said.

JSD President Hasanul Haq Inu said the Chief Election Commissioner's decision to deploy army was justified. "This (army deployment) is necessary for holding the polls in free and fair manner."

Inu hoped that good sense would prevail upon the government and it would finally agree to deploy army during the polls.

3 held after shootout with cops

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two alleged criminals were shot in a shootout between police and the criminals at Banagram in the city's Sutrapur area yesterday afternoon.

Police arrested Shahidul Islam alias Kabutor Babu, 30, Chanchal, 20 and Mohammad Selim, 25 after the shootout.

Police said Shahidul has at least 20 cases, mostly extortion related, filed against him while Chanchal and Selim, his accomplices, are also involved in many criminals cases with the Sutrapur Police Station.

A police team rushed at Banagram area on a tip off to arrest Kana Babu and his gang members. Seeing the police, the gang members started running off and fired gunshots at police men.

The police fired back in self-defense leaving the two injured.

Police arrested Shahidul, Chanchal and Selim from the spot. Shahidul and Chanchal were admitted to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital with bullet injuries in their legs.

A case has been filed with Sutrapur Police Station in this regard.

Acid attack on teenage girl in Sirajganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sirajganj

Miscreants threw acid on a teenage girl at village Baniagati in Kamarkhand upazila of the district at midnight on Sunday.

Police quoted neighbours of the victim as saying that a gang of miscreants entered the house of Bulbul Khatun, 14, and threw acid on her while she was asleep in a room.

Hearing scream of the victim, neighbours rushed to the spot and sent her to Sirajganj General Hospital with serious burn injuries.

Sedition case

HC extends

Shahriar's bail again

UNB, Dhaka

The High Court yesterday extended bail of Shahriar Kabir in sedition case till disposal of the case filed against him in November 2001.

A division bench comprising Justice Syed Amirul Islam and Justice Mirza Hossain Haider passed the order upon a petition as the extended six months' bail to Shahriar ended yesterday.

China trade talks

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extremely critical of supplier's credit. The Chinese delegation, said the sources, was taken aback by Dhaka's position and wondered, if renegotiations were the solution, what the two countries had done in 11 months since Zhu's visit.

The meeting eventually ended inconclusively. According to sources, China has decided not to show interest in these projects.

The government's policy on supplier's credit discourages any project under such a financial arrangement. The World Bank and other donors have criticised supplier's credit of having scopes for wide range of corruption.

The policy only allows supplier's credit when the government has no alternative source of funding for a project that must be pursued.

However, the project ought to fulfil certain obligations - including clearance by the Planning Commission, the ERD and the finance ministry.

The sewerage treatment plant at Pagla and the power plant in Khulna were processed along these guidelines.

The Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA) has marked out the Pagla project as a priority scheme. A tender has been floated and three Chinese companies participated in it. The lowest bid was 10 per cent lower than the estimated project cost of around

\$108 million.

As the government did not find any alternative source of fund, the Planning Commission and the ERD cleared it several months ago.

The power plant at Khulna, cleared by the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC) in 2000, went through a more rigorous process.

Only one Chinese company, CMEC, submitted a turnkey proposal although 19 companies had participated in the international tender.

The CMEC proposal was negotiated and the project cost set at \$129 million. The government had raised objections about the machinery of a standard Chinese plant and the Chinese company given Bangladesh the option to select machinery from any Chinese company.

The Planning Commission cleared the project in July but the finance division took some time as it weighed other options.

The government negotiated with the Chinese government for a switch from supplier's credit to soft loan. However, China declined.

At this point, the government started the process to clear the project. Accordingly, the ERD cleared the project on November 25 and it went to the finance division for final clearance prior to the PM's China