

Foreigners to receive work permits from single office

Bol formulates draft policy

ZAHIDUL HAQUE

The government is going to introduce a new system of awarding permission to foreign companies to set up their branches and affiliates in Bangladesh and issuing work permits to foreign citizens from one single office.

Under the system, the Board of Investment (BoI) will be the sole authority to deal with the registration of such offices and issuance of work permit to foreigners engaged in private sector commercial and industrial ventures.

The BoI will also issue work permit to the foreign citizens who work with the industries in export processing zones (EPZs), according to a draft policy formulated by BoI following an inter-ministerial meeting held on September 18.

The meeting directed the BoI to prepare the draft for streamlining the system in order to make it 'has-

sle-free, easier and time-saving'. The BoI has already sent the draft to different ministries concerned seeking suggestions. The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) will finalise the report.

The inter-ministerial meeting observed that the government often faced problems in collecting income tax from the foreigners due to lack of information about them, including their salaries and incomes.

Besides, the meeting said, sometimes problems arise on maintaining state secrecy and security in absence of a proper database containing detailed information about the foreign citizens handled by different ministries.

The meeting also said it was unwanted and embarrassing for the government that different private organisations are recruiting foreign nationals in key posts although Bangladeshi citizens are competent enough to perform the jobs.

According to the draft guideline, a nine-member committee headed by BoI executive chairman will be formed to issue work permits to foreign nationals and renew the permits after reviewing their applications.

The committee will comprise joint-secretary level representatives from home and industries ministries, representative from foreign ministry, National Board of Revenue, Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (BEPZA), Bangladesh Bank, National Security Intelligence and a director of BoI.

"Once the committee is formed foreign citizens will be able to avail the work permit without any hassle from one place," a BoI official said.

BoI would receive and process applications from foreign commercial firms or educational institutions intending to set up their branch,

liaison or representatives' office, or buying house in Bangladesh and place them to the committee meeting for approval.

According to the draft policy, Department of Immigration and Passport will issue visas without security clearance to the foreigners just after receiving of work permit from BoI. The home ministry will give the security clearance within 45 days.

"If the home ministry finds anything wrong about a particular foreigner, BoI will withdraw the work permit," the draft said.

BoI will however issue permits to foreigners working at EPZs on the basis of recommendations from the BEPZA.

Besides, it will develop a database containing information of the foreigners and it will be reviewed time to time.



Visitors crowd a stall at the inaugural day of the three-day international exposition of medical equipment, products and services, Medexpo-2003, at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel in Dhaka yesterday.

BB starts same-day cheque clearing service today

Move to enable clients to encash Tk 5 lakh and above

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Bangladesh Bank today starts same day clearance of cheques amounting to Tk 5 lakh and above in order to ensure quicker service.

The system will allow bank clients to encash cheques within the day of submission. Presently, such withdrawal takes up to three days, as it requires clearance from the central bank.

As per recommendation of an inter-bank consultative group, 246 branches of nationalised, private and foreign banks in Dhaka are going to introduce 'same-day clearing' system, offering their clients a quicker service.

The Bangladesh Bank on September 17 issued a guideline for

introducing the system in line with recommendation of the consultative group, which was formed as per suggestion from central bank Governor Fakhruddin Ahmed.

Sources said 51 nationalised, private and foreign banks have already informed the central bank about their 246 branches that will introduce the system. The branches are in Paltan, Motijheel, Kakrail, Gulistan and Tikatuli areas.

Earlier, the Bangladesh Bank (BB) directed all commercial banks to send a list of their branches located within four kilometres of the central bank head office in Dhaka that can technically handle same-day clearance.

The BB suggested that all items under the system will have to be

endorsed with the 'same-day clearing' stamp by the bank concerned. It also asked the banks to keep the relevant data saved in computer.

The banks will transfer the data to clearing houses in floppy disks and the clients will be able to withdraw their money within hours of submission of cheques.

Other working procedure of the same-day clearing instrument will be similar to the present banking procedure.

From Saturday through Wednesday, the same-day clearing will start at 11 am and close at 12 noon while return clearing will start at 2pm. On Thursdays, it will start at 10am and close at 11am. The return clearing will start at 12 noon.

Amex economist arrives in Dhaka



Michael Straughan, economist of American Express Bank Limited, London, arrived in Dhaka yesterday.

Straughan will conduct a conference titled 'Global and Bangladesh Economic Outlook' in Dhaka, says a press release.

Straughan specialises in investment issues and country risk with particular focus on East Asia.

Basic Bank, Phoenix Leasing sign loan deal

Basic Bank Ltd signed a term loan agreement for Tk 100 million with Phoenix Leasing Company Ltd, says a press release.

Managing Director of Basic Bank Salehuddin Quasem and Managing Director of Phoenix Leasing Company A Quadir Choudhury signed the agreement on behalf of their organisations at a ceremony held in Dhaka on Wednesday.

Md Mosaddiqur Rahman, general manager of Basic Bank, Lutful Karim, deputy general manager, Abdul Quayum Mohammad Kibriya, company secretary, and Kazi Emdadul Hoque, executive vice-president of Phoenix Leasing Company, Mahmud Hasan, assistant vice-president, were present at the function.

ADB approves \$33.4m loans to Nepal, Bhutan

AFP, Manila

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) said Friday it has approved 33.4 million dollars in loans to Nepal and Bhutan.

Nepal will get a 24 million-dollar soft loan to provide tap water and sanitation to a remote western region, the Philippines-based lender said in a statement.

Bhutan obtained a 9.4 million-dollar concessional loan and two technical assistance grants worth 900,000 dollars to bring electricity to the districts of Chukha, Lhuentse, Mongar, Pemagatshel, Punakha, Samtse, Sarpang and Trashihang.

Both loans mature in 32 years and carry minimal interest rates.

Commerce minister seeks more investment in health sector

Int'l medical exposition begins

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury yesterday called for more investment in health sector for setting up modern private hospitals to prevent patients from going abroad for treatment.

Health sector is very much potential for investment, but no one is investing in this sector, the commerce minister said while inaugurating the first ever three-day international exposition of medical equipment, products and services, Medexpo-2003, at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel in Dhaka.

He also called the private clinic and diagnostic centre owners and doctors to put their resources together to set up good hospitals.

Citing the example of Bumrungrat Hospital in Thailand, Khosru said by providing better health care service, lots of foreign exchanges can be saved every year.

If better treatment is ensured,

people will not go to neighbouring countries, he said.

He also said although the private sector health service has some good initiatives, there are lots of complaints about the diagnostic centres.

He asked the private clinic and diagnostic owners to take initiatives for self-regulation.

Regarding the demand to reduce taxes and duties on medical equipment, the minister said duties imposed on all the medical equipment are very low excepting ambulance.

President of Bangladesh Private Clinic and Diagnostic Owners Association Maniruzzaman Bhuiyan said initiatives have been taken up to improve health care services.

At present, there are 705 registered private hospitals and clinics and 1500 private diagnostic centres in Bangladesh, Bhuiyan told the inauguration function.

Siemens Bangladesh Managing

Director Peter E Albrich, DHL Manager (Marketing and Planning) Kazi Sayeed Faruqi and Novo Cargo Limited Managing Director SM Rahman also spoke.

Kazi Wahidul Alam, chairman of the organising committee of Medexpo-2003 and CEO of Truine Exhibition and Event Management Services (TEEMS), said the main objectives of the exposition is to make the health care service providers aware of the latest development in this arena and also to let people know what facilities are available in Bangladesh.

Apart from Bangladesh, companies and organisations from six foreign countries including India, Thailand, Singapore, Germany, Japan and the UK, are taking part in the fair.

A number of medical equipment providers, local and foreign hospitals, pharmaceutical companies, banks, insurance firms, air express and cargo handling companies are displaying their products in the 46

stalls of the exhibition, which ends on Sunday.

Medical equipment including surgical equipment, equipment for ETT, ultra-sonography, radiography, physiotherapy, infusion set, needles, and operation tables are put on display.

The exhibition is co-sponsored by Siemens, Bangladesh Private Clinic and Diagnostic Owners' Association, DHL and Novo Cargo Services Limited.

With a view to making it an annual event, the date of the next exhibition has already been announced which will be held from October 7 to 9 next year, said the CEO of TEEMS, the organiser of the exposition.

The three-day fair is open from 10am to noon only to medical professionals and trade delegates and it is open to all from noon to 8pm every day.

US trade deals hurting Pak exports: Jamali

REUTERS, Washington

Pakistan's prime minister complained Thursday that a rising number of US trade agreements and preference programmes have put his country at a "severe disadvantage" in trade with the United States.

"Some concerns about US trade policy mar an otherwise excellent commercial relationship," Pakistani Prime Minister Zafarullah Khan Jamali said in a speech to the US Chamber of Commerce, a leading business group.

"Large portions of imports enter the United States under special trade arrangements. This leaves countries such as Pakistan at a severe disadvantage... This should be corrected," Jamali said.

Since taking office in January 2001, the Bush administration has concluded free trade agreements with Chile and Singapore and launched negotiations with five Central American countries, members of the Southern African Customs Union, Morocco and Australia.

The United States also has unilateral trade preference programmes for countries in sub-Saharan Africa, Central America and the Caribbean and the Andean region of South America.

The trade deals give participating countries an advantage in the US market by eliminating tariffs on their imports.

Pakistan, an ally in the US war on terror, has been in the waiting line of a free trade pact. A US trade official

said it could be some time before that happens.

"It's not imminent. We're talking an indefinite point in the future," Assistant US Trade Representative for South Asia Ashley Wills told Reuters. "We have some others we want to do first. We'll see how they go."

US officials have indicated Sri Lanka could beat Pakistan as the first country in South Asia to begin free trade talks with the United States.

Pakistan's exports to the United States totaled \$2.30 billion in 2002, up only slightly from 2001. About half of the shipments were cotton apparel products.

Deadline looms for France in EU budget row

AFP, Brussels

France was on collision course with its EU partners what it intends to do about its refusal to heed the budget rules governing the 12-nation euro zone.

The clock was ticking down to a midnight deadline for France to tell its EU partners what it intends to do about its swollen budget deficit if it wants to escape the threat of fines.

The deadline loomed after EU member states on June 3 gave France three months to come up with measures to get its deficit below a euro-zone limit of 3.0 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP).

But France has unveiled a tax-cutting budget for 2004 that projects its deficit to stand next year at 3.6 per cent of GDP, against a forecast

4.0 per cent this year.

And with no indication that Paris intends to reverse course, the European Commission is under pressure to force France in line with the euro area's Stability and Growth Pact.

The 1997 pact was designed to enforce budget discipline on the members of the common currency. But ironically Germany, which insisted on the deficit ceiling in the first place, has breached the pact along with France.

But while Germany, and Portugal, have embarked on tough deficit-battling measures to comply with the rules, France insists that its priority must be growth rather than belt-tightening.

Finance ministers from the 12 euro nations are due to meet for

what looks likely to be a stormy session of monthly talks in Luxembourg on Monday evening, with the EU's full Economy and Finance (Ecofin) council convening on Tuesday.

Austrian Finance Minister Karl-Heinz Grasser said he was "absolutely certain" that the European Commission would recommend further action against France when the EU's executive arm meets on Wednesday.

In an interview with the Financial Times, Grasser said: "What France is doing is simply a provocation towards all the other euro zone countries."

"I see no opportunity for a compromise," he said.

New office bearers of Feni chamber

UNB, Feni

Twenty-three members and associate members were elected in the election to Feni Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FCCI) on Thursday.

According to results announced late Thursday night, seven members and 10 associate members were elected under the panel of the chamber's incumbent president Sheikh Nurul Alam.

The elected members of the panel are Sheikh Nurul Alam, M Iqbal Alam, Mosharaf Hossain, Yar Ahmed Bachchu, Mainuddin Ahmed Chowdhury Kamran, Enamul Haq and Ainul Kabir Shamim.

The associate members are Alhaj Alauddin, Shawkat Haider Tipu, Giasuddin, Golam Faruq, Jasimuddin, Atiqul Alam Pintu, Maniruddin Selim, Majibul Haq, Shaheduddin Millat and Shah Newaz Mintu.

Besides, three members and three associate members were elected under the panel of Faruq Harun, secretary of Feni Town Traders' Association.

The elected members of his panel are Nurul Absar Bachchu, Enamul Haq and Abdullah Hil Baki. The associate members are Alauddin, Aminur Rahman and Abul Kalam Azad.

Concerned sources said the members and associate members would elect the president of the chamber either on October 9 or 10.

The overdue election to the FCCI was held with much enthusiasm after 17 years.



Managing Director of Basic Bank Salehuddin Quasem and Managing Director of Phoenix Leasing Company A Quadir Choudhury shake hands after signing a Tk 100 million term loan agreement on behalf of their organisations at a ceremony held in Dhaka on Wednesday.

PHOTO: STAR