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ZERO-COST MIGRATION OF WORKERS

Dhaka sits on Malaysian offer

Malaysian minister says they are ready to sign a deal; officials in Dhaka wait for joint working group meeting next month

PORIMOL PALMA

Bangladesh has been sitting on a zero-cost labour recruitment offer that Malaysia made more than a year ago.

According to the offer, Malaysian employers will pay visa fees, airfares, medical screening costs, recruitment agency commissions and levies for Bangladeshi job seekers -- a system that falls under the UN convention on migrant workers.

Following a zero-cost labour recruitment pact with Nepal in October, 2018, Malaysia said it would sign a similar deal with Bangladesh.

But since then, Dhaka has not taken any concrete steps to secure the deal with Malaysia, home to some eight lakh Bangladeshis, several officials of the expatriates' welfare and overseas employment ministry told The Daily Star.

Dhaka and Kuala Lumpur held talks several times since Malaysia suspended labour recruitment from Bangladesh in September 2018. The suspension came following allegations that a syndicate of 10

Bangladeshi agents -- with support from Malaysia -- controlled labour recruitment in 2016-18 when recruitment cost went up to Tk 4 lakh.

But Dhaka did not raise the issue of zero-cost labour recruitment in those talks, according to the ministry officials.

On several occasions, the Malaysian authorities said high recruitment cost was responsible for forced labour and debt bondage of Bangladeshi migrants.

Against this backdrop, Malaysian Human Resources Minister M Kulasegaran on January 15 this year said they would soon finalise a zero-cost labour recruitment deal with Bangladesh.

He also mentioned that Malaysia didn't want to face US sanctions for not doing enough to combat human trafficking.

"I'm sending the Malaysia-Bangladesh Joint Working Group to Dhaka, Bangladesh, soon to iron out the remaining issues on the zero-cost recruitment agreement," Kulasegaran told the Malaysian media.

Seeking anonymity, an official of

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6



Rickshaws, human hauliers and other vehicles, seized by police, are gathering rust in a field in Kanchpur area of Narayanganj as there is no proper storage facilities. Many of these vehicles are to be used as evidence in different cases. The photo was taken on Thursday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Pressure mounts on Myanmar

UN chief to notify UNSC about ICJ genocide ruling



PORIMOL PALMA

Myanmar and its ally China will face mounting pressure after the World Court asked Naypyidaw to stop genocidal acts in Rakhine State, analysts said.

The ruling is a slap on Myanmar and its allies, Prof Imtiaz Ahmed, director of the Centre for Genocide Studies at Dhaka University, told The Daily Star yesterday.

The most important aspect of the ruling is that Myanmar has to submit a report to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) within four months on the measures taken to prevent the genocidal acts. Similar reports will have to be submitted every six months, he said.

The Gambia has to approve of the reports that will be submitted by Myanmar, he added.

The ICJ on Thursday ordered Myanmar not to destroy the evidence of crimes committed against the ethnic minority in Rakhine State.

"A big victory in the ruling is that the ICJ has recognised the ethnic community as Rohingya. So, Myanmar cannot deny this identity and say they are illegal migrants from Bangladesh," said Imtiaz.

SEE PAGE 10 COL 5

War crimes, not genocide

Myanmar govt says after ICJ order

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Myanmar has rejected Rohingya genocide claims after the World Court on Tuesday ordered the country to prevent the genocidal acts in Rakhine State.

In a statement Thursday night, Myanmar Ministry of Foreign Affairs also blamed different human rights bodies, saying they presented a distorted picture of the situation.

It said Myanmar took note of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) decision on provisional measures as requested by The Gambia which lodged the case in November last year accusing Myanmar of genocide against Rohingyas. The hearing was held from December 10-12.

ICJ ordered Myanmar to prevent destruction of evidence of any crimes since August 2017 when some 750,000 Rohingyas fled a brutal military crackdown.

UN independent investigators concluded

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

Docking bad loans has now become critical

Says former finance minister AMA Muhith in an interview with Star

REJAUUL KARIM BYRON and ZINA TASREEN

Age is the price of wisdom, it is often said. And an audience with the immediate past finance minister, AMA Muhith, calls to mind that saying.

Take, for instance, his views on the much-debated government move to impose single-digit bank interest rate from April 1, which effectively breaks down the market mechanism for funds.

Muhith, who turns 86 today, feels the move will not yield any benefit.

"Well, the government can impose and banks will have to oblige, but there will not be any big impact on the banking sector," he told The Daily Star in an interview last week at his home in Dhaka.



MUHITH TURNS 86 TODAY.

The reason being, the move is not addressing the root cause of banking sector's problems: the high defaulted loans.

The need of the hour, in his opinion, is banking sector reforms geared towards reducing the sourced loans.

As per the central bank's latest data, which is until September of last year, defaulted loans in the banking sector stood at a record Tk 116,288 crore, which is 11.99 per cent of total outstanding loans.

"In our to reduce default loans we have increased it enormously. This was wrong."

He was referring to the central bank's most recent loan scheduling package, which allowed defaulters to reschedule loans by footing just 2 per cent down payment.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK IN CHINA

13 cities shut down, death toll hits 26

AFP, Wuhan

Chinese authorities yesterday expanded a mammoth quarantine effort aimed at containing a deadly contagion to 13 cities and a staggering 41 million people, as nervous residents were checked for fevers and the death toll climbed to 26.

While the World Health Organization (WHO) held off on declaring a global emergency despite confirmed cases in half a dozen other countries, China expanded its lockdown to cover an area with a total population greater than Canada's.

A range of Lunar New Year festivities have been cancelled, while temporary

closures of Beijing's Forbidden City, Shanghai's Disneyland and a section of the Great Wall were announced to prevent the disease from spreading further.

The previously unknown virus has caused alarm because of its similarity to SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome), which killed hundreds across mainland China and Hong Kong in 2002-2003.

The WHO said China faced a national emergency but stopped short of making a declaration that would have prompted greater global cooperation, including possible trade and travel restrictions.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

Rice prices go up by Tk 2-5 a kg in a week

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Although it is the peak season of harvesting rice, prices of the staple food are going up both in the capital's retail and wholesale markets, dealing a blow to the people with limited income who are already struggling to make their ends meet.

Within a week, prices of fine rice have increased by Tk 2 to 5 per kilogram in retail markets and Tk 100 to 150 per sack [50 kg] in wholesale markets.

SEE PAGE 10 COL 2



Rookie opener Mohammad Naim top-scored with 43 as Bangladesh reached 141 for five, but it was not enough as Pakistan won the first T20I by five wickets at the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Tigers lose first T20I by 5 wickets

SPORTS REPORTER

Playing in Pakistan after a gap of 12 years was a historic moment for Bangladesh as cricket finally took centre stage with the first T20I yesterday after

security concerns grabbed headlines before the series.

Despite posting a modest target of 142, Bangladesh managed to take the game till the last over but eventually it was not enough for the Tigers

to avoid a five-wicket defeat to Pakistan at the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore.

The second T20I will take place at the same venue from 3:00pm (Bangladesh time) today.

SEE PAGE 10 COL 5



CLARIFICATION

We refer to recent media reports about loans given by BRAC Bank Limited to its Directors.

We would like to clarify that all directors of BRAC Bank Limited are either nominated by BRAC or are independent Directors.

The loan amount of Taka 362 Crore reported in the media as 'Loans to Directors of BRAC Bank' comprises of:

- Taka 73 Crore to BRAC EPL Investments Limited, a merchant bank and a wholly owned subsidiary of BRAC Bank Limited.
- Taka 21 Crore to BRAC Saajan Limited, a remittance company registered in United Kingdom, which is owned by BRAC Bank.
- Taka 268 Crore to Sajida Foundation, a NGO registered under the Societies Registration Act 1860, for on lending to micro-finance customers.

All of the above loans were approved by the relevant regulatory authority. BRAC Bank exercises the highest levels of Corporate Governance and Transparency in the Banking Sector.

Company Secretary
BRAC Bank Limited

