

EXPATRIATE BANGLADESHIS Trying to find ways for them to invest in country: minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government is trying to find ways for expatriate Bangladeshis to invest in the country, said Expatriates' Welfare Minister Imran Ahmad yesterday.

"We are trying to work on a system so that they can have an investment opportunity or possibility that they need," he said.

The minister was addressing a discussion marking the award-giving ceremony of "Migration Media Award-2019" at Brac Centre Inn in the capital.

Handing over crests to the winners as chief guest, the minister said media along with NGOs and CSOs are the main driving force by whom the government will be able to make people aware about migration.

He urged journalists to present information and news with more responsibility and cover more news on migration.

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DoE official faces lawmaker's wrath

Cumilla MP Bahar threatens deputy director for action against hill cutting

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cg

AKM Bahauddin Bahar, lawmaker of Cumilla-6 constituency, has threatened an official of the Department of Environment (DoE) with dire consequences after she inspected a hill-cutting project by Roads and Highways Department (RHD) and prepared a damage assessment report.

Shawkat Ara Koli, deputy director of DoE Cumilla office, inspected the spot at Sadar (south) upazila where two contracting firms -- M/S Hasan Techno Builders and M/S Haque Enterprise -- that reportedly have close ties with MP Bahar, were found flattening around 11,400 cubic feet of hill to expand the existing road under a project of RHD.

MP Bahar called Koli over phone on Wednesday, asking how she dared to prepare the inspection report without consulting him, even though the inspection was conducted in presence of representatives from the contracting firms.

"You have seen the good side of me and yet to see the bad. I will look up the DoE office. Nonsense! Have you got so much power? How dare you prepare inspection report without me, as I am part of it? Come to my office within ten minutes!" MP Bahar was heard saying in the recorded phone call, a copy of which was obtained by The Daily Star.

He also continued to charge her about why she chose to issue notice to him instead of issuing it to the RHD.

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ROHINGYA REPATRIATION

Want it to begin next year: Japanese envoy

UNB, Dhaka

Japanese Ambassador to Bangladesh Ito Naoki yesterday said his country supports repatriation of Rohingyas and wants to see the process start next year.

Japan will continue to help on the "important issue", he told diplomatic correspondents at an event at Jatiya Press Club. Naoki said Japan will continue to cooperate with Bangladeshi government and will spare no efforts to see a lasting solution to the Rohingya crisis.

Diplomatic Correspondents Association, Bangladesh (DCAB) hosted the programme "DCAB Talk" with its president Angur Nahar Monty in the chair. DCAB General Secretary Touhidur Rahman also spoke.

Asked about Japan's role in the UN forum, he said they are communicating directly with Myanmar's top military officials and at government level regarding the crisis, as Japan sees it as a proper channel to play a role.

He said Japan has a strong connection with the highest level of Myanmar's military and civilian government. "Japan is communicating directly on what Myanmar could do and what Myanmar should do in terms of addressing accountability, as well as focusing on the repatriation process."

Asked about Japan's investment in Myanmar, Ambassador Naoki said Japan and Myanmar are both part of Asia. "Like Bangladesh, Myanmar is also traditionally a very friendly country to Japan. So, there's a good reason for us to continue making investment in a country which is under the process of democratisation."

ABDUCTED FROM ROHINGYA CAMP

Volunteer of Red Crescent rescued after 10hrs by APBn

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Members of Armed Police Battalion (APBn) rescued a volunteer of Cyclone Preparedness Programme (CPP) of Bangladesh Red Crescent Society early yesterday, 10 hours after he was abducted from a Cox's Bazar Rohingya refugee camp.

Hossain Ali (45) was abducted allegedly by some Rohingya miscreants around 3pm on Wednesday while he was on duty at block A/1 in Shafulah Kata Rohingya camp in Ukhiya upazila, said CPP Cox's Bazar Deputy Director Hafiz Ahmad.

Ali was tortured by the abductors, he said, adding that he is now undergoing treatment at a local hospital.

Md Hemayetul Islam, commanding officer of APBn-16, said some Rohingyas abducted Ali from the camp following an altercation. He was rescued around 1am yesterday after his family members informed APBn members. A drive is on to arrest the abductors, he added.



On Christmas Eve, devotees were busy decorating their churches with colourful flowers, pictures and banners, ahead of the big day. Due to the pandemic, priests have decided celebrations should not be too flamboyant. This photo was taken from Rani Jopmala church at the capital's Tejgaon.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

A unique Christmas celebration

Churches opt for simpler festivities amid pandemic

MATHEWS CHIRAN

Christmas, the biggest religious festival of the Christian community, is back again after a year-long wait, with the same exuberance among the community. Billions across the globe will observe the day, and Bangladeshi Christians will join in on the celebration as well.

However, as the pandemic persists, and the vaccine is yet to arrive, churches will be celebrating a bit differently.

Church priests are taking safety issues into account such as wearing masks, maintaining distance and using hand sanitiser, and at the same time, trying their best to spread the happiness and colour of the festivities.

Decorated churches are one of the most attractive features of Christmas, but this year, the decorations will be minimal, according to the priests and Archbishop office.

While visiting different churches of Dhaka, it was seen that religious institutions were already decorated, keeping simplicity in mind. Although the inner prayer halls were

decorated with lights, balloons and different types of Christmas art, the outer courtyards were not decorated accordingly.

According to Christian leaders, there are around seven lakh Christians of different sects, including Catholics and Baptists, in Bangladesh. Catholics are the majority, with around five lakh followers, and they will be celebrating the day following their own rituals.

St Mary's Cathedral at Archbishop's House area in the capital's Kakrail was founded in 1956. Usually, around 400 people attend the church every Christmas, but this year, about 200 are expected to visit, according to Christian Communication Centre Convener Father Bulbul Augustine Rebeiro of Dhaka Archdiocese.

Christmas prayers at the church were scheduled to be held yesterday at 8:30pm and 10pm, and today at 8:30am.

"This year, we are not celebrating Christmas in a flamboyant manner. Decorations are limited, but we will celebrate to the fullest, maintaining proper safety requirements," he said.

Catholic Christian community's highest religious leader in Bangladesh, Archbishop Bejoy D'Cruze, said, "This year, we are ensuring 'no mask no entry', social distancing and use of hand sanitiser for believers' safety. We are also discouraging unnecessary gatherings and praying that all Christians may celebrate with full joy and blessings of Christ."

At De Mazenod Church, a catholic church founded in 1986 at Baridhara, usually 500 people offer prayers during Christmas, according to its priest Father Sagor Louise Rozario.

"This time, we are expecting 300 visitors due to the pandemic," he said.

Christmas prayers at the church were scheduled at 6pm and 9pm yesterday, and 7:30am and 10am today.

"Inside the prayer room, we will have chairs arranged, maintaining proper distance. Usually, we lay carpets for the crowd to sit on, but since the pandemic started, we are being more cautious," he said.

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Hand over Lakingme Chakma's body to family: rights bodies

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Nari Pragati Sangha, Jano Udyog and Human Rights Forum Bangladesh in a joint statement yesterday demanded that the body of 14-year-old deceased Lakingme Chakma be handed over to her family members immediately.

They in the statement also demanded exemplary punishment of the culprits be ensured, after bringing the case under Child Marriage Prevention Act, says a press release.

Lakingme Chakma was a seventh grader. According to her birth certificate, she was 14 years and 10 months old on January 5 when she was abducted from her home.

After 11 months and six days, police called in her father to identify his daughter's body in Cox's Bazar hospital morgue. They, however, did not hand over her body saying the girl was married to one of her abductors who managed a birth certificate that says she was 18.

The leaders of the human rights organisations in the statement said they are observing with deep concern that the dead body of Lakingme Chakma is under the custody of Cox's Bazar Police for the last 10 days due to an unresolved issue concerning her religion and birthdate.

This is a violation of human rights, they said, adding that they are protesting and condemning the incident.

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Kaikaus to remain PM's principal secy

Bss, Dhaka

The government has reappointed Prime Minister's Principal Secretary Dr Ahmad Kaikaus to his current post on contract for two more years, postponing his post-retirement leave (PRL) and related facilities.

The Ministry of Public Administration on Wednesday issued a gazette notification in this regard.

The contractual appointment of Kaikaus, who was due to retire at the end of this month, will be effective from January 1 or from the date of his joining.

Kaikaus was appointed as the PM's principal secretary on December 29, 2019.



Progga slams govt for letting tobacco firm set up plant

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Anti-tobacco group Knowledge for Progress yesterday condemned the government decision that allowed a tobacco company to set up new manufacturing plant in the country.

In a statement, the group, also known as Progga, said Asian Tobacco Ltd has started setting up a new cigarette manufacturing plant against the promise of the government to build a tobacco-free Bangladesh by 2040.

The company reportedly signed a MoU with the Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authority (BEPZA) on Wednesday in this regard. They are to set up the new factory on the premises of Iswardi Export Processing Zone, it said.

It is an alarming fact that such traders are given opportunities for expanding their business where public health is at stake, Progga said, mentioning about 1.26 lakh people in Bangladesh die each year due to tobacco consumption and millions of people are crippled by it.

In order to safeguard the people from the deadly clutches of tobacco and make way for tobacco-free Bangladesh, such initiatives must be withdrawn, it added.

Promoting tobacco companies can never aid in achieving tobacco-free Bangladesh, said ABM Zubair, executive director of Progga.

TRANSPORT STRIKE IN SYLHET

People's sufferings end after 62 hours

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

With 10 hours remaining in the clock, the 72-hour transport strike in Sylhet demanding permission to resume stone extraction was called off at around 8pm yesterday.

The strike, enforced from Tuesday 6am, was called by Greater Sylhet Stone-related Traders-Workers Union and was supposed to end at 6am today (Friday).

With the decision to end it earlier, the inconvenience caused to commuters of Sylhet division came to an end.

Abu Sarkar, president of Sylhet District Truck, Pickup-Covered Van Workers union, said, "The administration did not meet our demand. But considering the sufferings of people who are about to come to the Shrine of Hazrat Shahjalal tomorrow, we called off the strike hours early."

Earlier on Wednesday, ten noted citizens issued a statement terming the transport strike a "Contempt of Court".

The strike was called with the demand

that the authorities open stone quarries in four upazilas of Sylhet. These have been closed following several orders of High Court and the government's decision to protect the environment of Sylhet.

In the statement, the noted citizens said that arranging, participating and supporting any programme against any court directive and judgement is tantamount to contempt of court and the reluctance of responsible authorities against such contempt is a matter of grave concern.

The citizens also expressed grave concern over the administration's ineffective measures against the transport strike.

They also urged government and political high-ups to take necessary steps to protect environment and public interest.

The signatories of the statement include: Advocate Shah Shaheda Akhter, divisional coordinator of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (Bela); Faruque Mahmud Chowdhury, president of

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A bomb squad member, dressed in a full blast suit, brings out a carry-on luggage from an aircraft while uniformed officers are in position on the ground. A serious atmosphere presided over Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport as a drill for airport security exercise 2020 was organised by Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

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The Editorial Department of *The Daily Star*, the largest English-language newspaper in Bangladesh, is a platform that publishes articles, editorials and interviews providing a broad spectrum of opinions on current issues. We're currently looking for an Editorial Assistant who will work as part of our dynamic team. The ideal candidate will have excellent writing and editing skills in English and help bring out daily pages as well as special supplements.

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