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UK to provide better access to visas in Bangladesh

By Staff Correspondent

Britain will provide better access to visas in Bangladesh as part of its commitment to extend its services here, Britain's Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Office announced yesterday.

MP Keith Vaz made the announcement at a press conference at the Bangladesh Overseas Centre in Sylhet before heading to India.

The minister arrived in Dhaka on Sunday for a two-day visit. Although Vaz visited Bangladesh when he was an opposition MP, this was his first visit as a minister.

Vaz said the British government wanted to improve visa services in Bangladesh, since the number of applicants rose by about 10 per cent last year.

About 19,700 Bangladeshis applied for visa to enter the United Kingdom last year. About 14,700 applicants were successful.

"Of course people were refused visa but they were given clear reasons in terms of their application," said Vaz.

In addition to the speech, Vaz handed over passports to successful visa applicants, including Nasima Begum, the first Bangladeshi woman to receive a visa stamp from a British Minister.

BSS adds: Vaz dismissed newspaper reports stating Asians who wanted to visit the United Kingdom would have to post a 10,000 pound bond as "rubbish" and "nonsense".

"Britain's immigration policy under the Labour govern-

ment is non-discriminatory world wide," said Vaz.

However, Vaz admitted there was a possibility of introducing a "pilot scheme" for bonds to facilitate visa applications, as suggested by some relatives of people intending to visit Britain.

The scheme would not discriminate between regions and would only be implemented if the people who wanted visas supported it, said Vaz.

Vaz said Bangladesh and Britain are bound by historical ties that could benefit from more trade and economic interaction.

Bangladesh should renew its efforts to enter European Union markets, said Vaz. There are 275 million people in the EU and that number will likely grow to 500 million by the middle of the decade.

"Britain will argue for Bangladesh's greater entry into EU markets," said Vaz.

Vaz said there are "wonderful" opportunities that should be exploited by business communities in the two countries, since Bangladesh exports 275 million pounds worth of goods to the United Kingdom but only imports 80 million pounds.

Britain will continue to invest in Bangladesh, and there should be more joint ventures here and in the United Kingdom, said Vaz.

Before flying to New Delhi, the British minister also called on BNP Chairman Khaleda Zia at her Minto Road residence.



Khaleda Zia, Leader of the opposition in parliament and BNP chief, addresses striking non-government primary school teachers at Osmany Uddyan in the city yesterday. — Star photo

TSS in trouble

By Mustak Hossain

Telephone Shilpa Sangstha (TSS), the country's only telecommunications factory, is on the verge of collapse due to mismanagement and rapid advances in technology.

Sources said Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board's decision to adopt digital technology, forced the company to stop production.

"About 80 per cent of the plant's 233 machines are out-of-date or redundant," said a source. "It can't be used to manufacture other products."

The board switched from rotary phones to analogue and digital models in 1989. How-

ever, Siemens AG, a German telecommunications firm with an 8 per cent stake in Sangstha, made those models obsolete in 1991. This made it difficult to find spare parts and other components.

Bangladesh's switching system is 100 per cent dependent on imports, experts said.

The Ministry of Post and Telecommunication is considering a joint venture with a Chinese company to switch the factory over to modern industry.

Alcatel, a French company, submitted a similar proposal, but the plan was abandoned

when they couldn't agree on the terms and conditions of running the factory.

Originally known as the Telephone Industries Corporation, Telephone Shilpa Sangstha was established in 1967 by the government of Pakistan and Siemens AG to produce analogue switching equipment and rotary phones. The name was changed in 1973.

Sangstha employs 720 workers, including 108 officers. Most cannot be retrained or are unwilling to accept other factory jobs. Over 150 workers have already retired voluntarily.

at Khaleda's behest

By Staff Correspondent

The non-government primary school teachers broke their hunger strike and called off their sit-in programme in the city yesterday following an assurance by BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia that their demand would be met if her party is voted to power.

The hunger strikers took sarbat (a drink) offered by the BNP chief and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament and ended their strike at 2:40 pm at Osmany Uddyan in the city yesterday.

Before the hunger strike was called off, President of Non-government Primary School Teachers Association Shamsul Islam gave a February 26 deadline to the government to meet their demand.

If the demand is not met by

February 26, all non-government primary schools in the country will be "put under lock and key" from February 27 to March 10, he announced while addressing the teachers in presence of Khaleda Zia.

A "grand conference" of the teachers will be held at the Paltan Maidan in the city in the third week of April, where the next course of action will be announced, he said.

He requested chiefs of BNP, Jatiya Party, Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ) to attend the conference and to include the teachers' demand in the opposition's election manifesto.

Several thousand non-government primary school teachers began a sit-in at the Osmany Uddyan in the city on January

23 to press nationalisation of primary schools in the country. They observed a token hunger strike on January 26-28 and a good number of them began a fast unto death from Saturday evening.

"You support our (opposition's) one-point out-governments movement and join it and I will fulfil your (teachers) one-point demand if voted to power," Khaleda said addressing the teachers before they ended their hunger strike.

"Please note down the date and moment... I am giving you the commitment to meet your demand. I always keep my word."

The former prime minister

See page 11 col 6

Hasina leaves for Brussels

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina left Dhaka at midnight last night for Brussels at the invitation of her Belgian counterpart Guy Verhofstadt, reports UNB.

During the four-day tour, the Prime Minister will hold discussion with the European Union and Belgian leaders aiming at strengthening relationship with EU and also between the two countries.

The official talks will provide an opportunity for the Prime Minister to discuss bilateral, regional and international issues of common concern.

State Minister for Foreign Affairs Abul Hasan Chowdhury, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister Dr S A Samad, Foreign Secretary C M Shafi Sami, ERD Secretary Dr A K M Masihur Rahman and Press Secretary to the Prime Minister Jawadul Karim are accompanying the Prime Minister.

We Are Shifting

The offices of The Daily Star will be shifted to its new premises at the Karwan Bazar in a couple of days. Please direct all your letters and mails to the following address accordingly. Our new telephone numbers will be announced soon.

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Bangladesh



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Tender Notice for sale of Enterprises

International Tenders in the prescribed forms are hereby invited from local and foreign buyers (Individual, Company, Co-operative body, Employees' Association) for sale of the 02 following enterprises owned by the Government on as is where is basis. Intending buyers will have to submit prescribed tender form and other required papers duly filled in and supported by necessary documents for the enterprises.

Sl. No.	Name & Address of the Enterprises	Brief Information
1.	The Bawa Jute Mills Ltd. Madanganj, Narayanganj	Land area: 14.98 acres. Loom No: 284. It produces Hessian, Sacking and CBC Cloth. It is only 25 Kilometres from the capital.
2.	Satrang Textile Mills Ltd., Tongi, Gazipur.	Total land area : 8.96 acres. The mill will be sold with (more or less) 4.96 acres of land. It has 12400 spindles and it produces yarn.

Conditions:

- Tender forms and other related papers can be procured from the Secretary on all working days from 10-02-2000 to 09-03-2000 during office hours on cash payment of Tk. 5,000/- (Taka Five Thousand) or US\$ 125 (One Hundred Twenty Five) which is non-refundable.
- Interested foreigners, Bangladeshi citizens living abroad, overseas commercial firms etc., willing to procure the tender forms and obtain information regarding the enterprise may contact Bangladesh High Commissions/Embassies in London, Washington, Brussels, Kuala Lumpur, Riyadh, Abu Dhabi, Islamabad, New Delhi, Tokyo, Singapore and Seoul on or after 10-02-2000.
- The tender box will be closed at 12-00 noon on 12-03-2000 and will be opened at 12-30 p.m. on the same date in presence of any tenderers, if present.
- The Privatization Board reserves the right to accept or reject any or all tenders without assigning any reason whatsoever.

GD-91

Secretary

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Gangrape at Howrah station Indian SC orders compensation to Bangladeshi woman

NEW DELHI, Jan 31: The Indian Supreme Court today asked the central government to pay Rs 10 lakh as damage to a Bangladeshi woman, who was gangraped at the Yatri Niwas (retiring room) at the Howrah Railway Station in Calcutta on Feb 2 and 3, 1998, reports BSS.

The court comprising Justice Saghir Ahmed and Justice RP Sethi directed the central government to hand over the money within three months to the Bangladesh High Commissioner for payment to the victim. The Bangladeshi woman is a member of a union parishad.

The court delivered the judgement dismissing an appeal by the chairman, Railway Board and others against a judgement of the Calcutta High Court.

The High Court verdict came on a petition filed by a lawyer of Calcutta Mrs Chandrima Das. It was alleged in the petition that the victim had come to Howrah from Bangladesh on her way to Ajmeer Sharif and stayed at the railway Yatri Niwas to arrange for her reservation in the train.

She was gangraped by many, including employees of the Indian railways. A case was registered the next day with the General Railway Police Station (GRPS) there. While awarding the damages to the victim, the High Court observed that the rape was committed at the Yatri Niwas, belonging to the railway and was perpetrated by the railway employees.

"In the instant case, it is not a mere matter of violation of an ordinary right of a person but the violation of fundamental rights which is involved. This court has already held rape as an offence which is violative of the fundamental right of a person of the Constitution, observed Justice Saghir Ahmed, and thus

turned down the contention of the appellants that the petition was not maintainable under the public law.

"If any of such employees commits such an act, the union government, of which they are the employees, can, subject to other legal requirements being satisfied, be held vicariously liable in damages to the person wronged by those employees," Justice Saghir Ahmed observed.

Young man knifed to death in Old City

By Staff Correspondent

A young man was knifed to death by a gang of miscreants near the water tank of Siddik-bazaar in the Old City on Sunday night.

The dead identified as Shah Alam, 19, son of Shaju Mian was a resident of Hosni Dalan. Police and hospital sources said that Alam was called out by a gang of miscreants from his residence at about 9:30 pm. The gang took Alam near the water tank and stabbed him indiscriminately.

Local people rescued Alam lying in a pool of blood and sent him to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) where he died at about 11:30 pm. The body was sent for autopsy.

The victim's father filed a case with Kotwali thana accusing nine people for killing his son. Kotwali police arrested Asif for his alleged involvement with the killing yesterday.

Opposition's rallies, torch processions today

By Staff Correspondent

The BNP-led opposition alliance has called a 36-hour hartal across the country beginning 6 am tomorrow to protest passage of what they said, "anti-people, repressive and black law" in the name of public safety.

In support of the hartal the BNP, Jatiya Party, Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oikya Jote will bring out separate torch processions in all cities, district and thana headquarters today.

In capital Dhaka, the BNP will simultaneously bring out a torch procession from 11 places of the city. Main torch procession of the party will be brought out from BNP central office at Naya Paltan while others from New Market, Khilgaon, Mohakhali, Badda, Farmgate, Mohammadpur, Mirpur, Shampur, Uttara and Rampura.

JP will organise a rally at Muktangan and bring out a torch procession.

Jamaat and IOJ will hold separate rallies and bring out processions in support of the hartal from the North Gate of Baitul Mukarram and Purana Paltan respectively.

Meanwhile, a joint meeting of BNP and its front organisations yesterday called upon the countrymen to observe the 36-hour hartal spontaneously.

Chaired by BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan at 29 Minto Road, the meeting urged all to launch an all-out movement against the 'black' law.

The meeting also called upon all political parties, professional bodies, students and conscious section of the society to join the movement to resist the repressive law.



ANNOUNCE

Due to unavoidable proposed visit of Jos President and CEO of Association (PATA) from is postponed.

All functions and even are called off.

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