

MANPOWER EXPORT

Flight shortage jeopardises jobs of thousands in Malaysia

PORIMOL PALMA

Shortage of flights and procedural bungling are greatly hampering manpower export to Malaysia but their departure is being delayed for long just because the flights cannot carry more than 700 passengers to Malaysia daily, said an official of Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET).

A total of 43,478 workers left for Malaysia from October last year to

April 24. And more than 60,000 have been granted calling visas, and fingerprints of about 80,000 have been sent to that country for visa processing.

Presently Dhaka-Kuala Lumpur flights include once a day direct flight of Malaysian Airline with a carrying capacity of 350 passengers, twice a week flights of GMR Airlines capable of carrying 140 passengers each and three flights of Bangladesh Biman a week with a capacity of carrying 300 passengers each.

There are also some indirect flights to Malaysia but, in all, the airlines cannot carry more than 700

passengers daily, the BMET official mentioned.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (Baira), which is entrusted with taking fingerprints of Malaysia-bound workers, can take those of around 1,400 workers a day.

"All the 1400 fingerprints cannot be sent to Malaysia for visa processing every day as some recruiting agencies need to change a number of workers who have already given their fingerprints," said a Baira official requesting anonymity.

Baira allows recruiting agencies

to change only five percent of the workers who have given their fingerprints, a manpower agent said. "For various reasons, a recruiting agency might need to change more such workers."

He said there are several thousand workers whose fingerprints are not being sent to Malaysia as their agents want to change more than five percent of them. "Baira is not a regulatory body but it is trying to regulate agencies," he added.

Another agent said Baira is also not allowing recruiting agencies to submit scanned photographs, passports and medical certificates

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Huge number of SIM, scratch cards seized for evading Tk 90 cr VAT

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In a sudden drive on Thursday, officials of value added tax (VAT) Tejgaon zone recovered huge number of SIM cards and scratch cards of mobile phone operator Banglalink from its two sister concerns at Gulshan.

The illegal business evaded VAT of Tk 90 crore.

M/s Oras Invest Bangladesh Ltd and M/s Ring Distribution Pvt Ltd were conducting the illegal business dodging VAT, tax office sources said.

None of the companies has VAT registration for conducting the business.

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PHOTO: STAR

Collapse of a wall at Malibagh Chowdhuripara in the capital during Thursday night's nor'wester caused death of three persons as the concrete chunks fell on the adjacent tin-shed structure.

Hawking's zero gravity flight without wheelchair

AFP, Cape Canaveral

Cosmologist Stephen Hawking soared into weightlessness Thursday on a zero gravity flight that allowed the leading expert on gravity to escape his wheelchair for a brief period of time.

"It was amazing ... I could have gone on and on," Hawking, 65, said after riding for two hours on a modified jet that flew a rollercoaster trajectory to create the impression of microgravity.

"Space, here I come" he said at Nasa's Kennedy Space Centre in Florida. The British professor, who has spent most of his career studying black holes and gravity, hopes the

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PHOTO: AFP/ZERO G

British cosmologist Stephen Hawking, 65, experiences zero gravity during a two-hour flight on a modified jet that flew a rollercoaster trajectory over the Atlantic Ocean on Thursday.

Mother saves her son, dies from fire injury

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Khorsheda Begum was able to save her seven-month-old son during a fire at her home in Jatrabari in the capital Thursday night but she herself succumbed to her injuries yesterday morning.

Khorsheda, 20, sustained serious burn injuries around 8:00pm Thursday night while trying to light a kerosene lamp as the power supply failed during Thursday night's storm in the city.

As the fire broke out, she tried to get out of the house with her son Yasin Mishor but her clothes caught fire.

Khorsheda in her desperate attempt to save her child threw her son in a corner of the house where the flames had not reached. Hearing her cry for help, locals rescued her and her son from the burning house. Her son was retrieved without a scratch.

Khorsheda was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital with severe burn injuries. She died after a 14-hour battle for life.

Khorsheda's husband Hossain Miah, a rickshaw puller, was lost for words. He was seen staring at his wife's face at the DMCH with his son on his lap. He was not at home during the fire.

Lanka shuts airport fearing Tiger attack

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka was on high alert yesterday over the threat of another Tamil Tiger air attack, the morning after a suspicious aircraft forced the closure of the island's only international airport.

"We are on alert. In fact, every day we are on alert now and we have beefed up our measures," air force spokesman Ajantha Silva said.

Overnight Thursday, the sky over the Katunayake international airport near Colombo -- where government warplanes are also stationed, sharing a runway with civilian passenger jets -- was lit up with anti-aircraft gunfire.

Authorities also switched off electricity to the capital so that potential targets would not be illuminated.

"Sri Lanka's air force engaged its air defence weapons at a suspicious aircraft observed in the Katunayake sky," the defence ministry said during the night.

It said the "suspicious air move" was also detected by radar, but there was no rebel attack using the aircraft.

However, military bases south of the front-line dividing rebel-held territory from the rest of the island opened fire on Thursday night to prevent any air attack, military sources said.

The rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), who have been fighting the government for 35 years and run a mini-state in the north of the island, bombed the Katunayake air base a month ago in their first ever airstrike.

The separatist rebels also

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Myanmar to step up fight against Ulfa

AFP, Guwahati

Myanmar has promised to step up military action against all Indian separatist rebels operating from its territory, an Indian official said yesterday following security talks between the neighbours.

Myanmar made the promise after a series of meetings between visiting Brigadier General Tin Maung Ohn and senior Indian army officers, the official said.

"The Myanmar army has assured us (they will) step up the fight against militants from the northeastern states," said the Indian army commander, who asked not to be named.

The meetings were held in Guwahati, the main city in India's state of Assam.

Another officer, Lieutenant General Paramjit Singh, described

Yangon's decision as "a breakthrough" as in the past, Myanmar has acted against just one group -- the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland's Khaplang faction.

The group says it is fighting for an independent tribal homeland in India's Nagaland state and says its general headquarters is situated in Myanmar.

India and Myanmar share a 1,640 kilometre (1,000 mile) unfenced border, allowing militants from the northeast to use the adjoining country as a springboard to carry out hit-and-run guerrilla strikes on Indian troops.

New Delhi has been asking Myanmar to flush out all the rebels, including the outlawed United Liberation Front of Asom (Ulfa), regarded as the most powerful among the 30-odd separatist

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Nor'wester death toll rises to 3 at Malibagh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Death toll in Thursday night's nor'wester rose to three as police confirmed death of another person yesterday.

Aftab Uddin, 40, was found buried under the rubble of the roof of a shop that collapsed in the nor'wester at Malibagh Chowdhury Para. Locals rescued Aftab at 10:30pm on Thursday and took him to Birdem Hospital where doctors declared him dead.

The police yesterday sent the dead body to Dhaka Medical College Morgue for autopsy.

Police sources said Aftab, who was heading for his residence at Nikunja in Uttara, might have taken shelter nearby the shop before its roof collapsed.

Two young men were killed while three others were injured as a nor'wester with thunderbolts lashed the city on Thursday night.

FIRST PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE Democrats blast Bush over Iraq policy

AP, Orangeburg

Democratic presidential hopefuls flashed their anti-war credentials Thursday night, heaping criticism on President Bush's Iraq policy in the first debate of the 2008 campaign.

"The first day I would get us out of Iraq by diplomacy," said New Mexico Gov Bill Richardson, one of eight rivals on the debate stage.

"If this president does not get us out of Iraq, when I am president, I will," pledged Sen Hillary Rodham Clinton of New York.

But Clinton found herself on the receiving end of criticism moments later when former North Carolina Sen John Edwards said she or anyone else who voted to authorise the war should "search their conscience."

Edwards, in the Senate at the time, also cast his vote for the invasion, but he has since apologised for it.

Of the eight foes participating in

the debate at South Carolina State University, four voted earlier in the day to support legislation that cleared Congress and requires the beginning of a troop withdrawal by Oct. 1. The legislation sets a goal of a complete withdrawal by April 1, 2008.

"We are one signature away from ending this war," said Sen Barack Obama, D-Illinois. He said if Bush won't change his mind about vetoing the bill, Democrats need to work on rounding up enough Republican votes to override him.

In addition to Obama and Clinton, Sens Joe Biden of Delaware and Chris Dodd of Connecticut also cast votes in favour of the legislation.

Former Alaska Sen Mike Gravel and Rep Dennis Kucinich of Ohio also participated in the debate, lesser-funded contenders who seemed most eager to challenge their rivals.

Bush is barred by the Constitution from running for re-

election next fall, and the result is an extraordinarily early start to the campaign to succeed him.

The debate nine months before the kickoff Iowa caucuses was 90 minutes long without opening or closing statements from the candidates. A similar format awaits GOP candidate next Thursday.

A ground rule limiting answers to 60 seconds made for a rapid-fire debate but prevented follow-up questions when any of the eight sidestepped as when Clinton and Biden avoided saying whether they agreed with Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid's assessment that the Iraq war is lost.

Republicans rebutted from a distance.

"On every issue, from the war on terror to keeping our taxes low and our economy strong, Democrats like Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, John Edwards, and others are out of touch with the values of the people."

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Two murdered in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A housewife and a labourer were murdered in the city's Kamrangirchar area late Thursday night.

The deceased were identified as Nurunnahar Rupa, 19, and Delwar Hossain, 26.

Rupa's family members alleged that her husband Mohammad Babu alias Hira and her in-laws strangled Rupa to death after failing to get dowry of Tk 50,000 from Rupa's parents.

"Babu had sent Rupa to her father Golam Mohammad's house with a demand of Tk 50,000, but he could not provide the money," Rupa's brother Raju told reporters at Mitford Hospital in the city. Kamrangirchar police will get an

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Prayer Timing		
April 28		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-20	4-55
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-45	5-00
Maghrib	6-29	6-34
Esha	8-00	8-30
Source: Islamic Foundation		