

50 Bangladeshi workers stuck

FROM PAGE 16 and cigarettes. Afterwards, he made repeated phone calls to the Bangladesh High Commission in Kuala Lumpur, but nobody attended it.

He said he telephoned the Bangladesh High Commission in Kula Lumpur after arriving in Dhaka and requested the consular, Talat Khan, to take steps to protect the stranded workers.

"I wonder how citizens of a country are subject to such negligence," he said.

Since last October, around 400 workers have been denied entry to Malaysia and sent back home, following fingerprints mismatches at the Kuala Lumpur immigration.

The Bangladesh government however has been unable to identify the reasons behind such mismatches in the biometric system.

The government has also failed in its efforts to convince the Malaysian government to allow those workers into the country.

"We asked the Malaysian gov-

ernment to consider the issue of the workers, but it took a strong position against our proposal and said it will in no way allow entry of the workers with fingerprint mismatches," Abdul Matin Chowdhury, secretary to the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, earlier told The Daily Star.

Matching fingerprints through biometric system is recognised as the best technology to detect fraud during migrations. According to the new system, workers intending to go to Malaysia must first submit their fingerprints to the office of the Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (Baira) in Dhaka.

Once the workers reach Kuala Lumpur Airport immigration after all necessary formalities, they are permitted to enter the country only if their fingerprints match with the recorded ones.

According to experts, the fingerprint is a biological feature that does not change. Therefore, several countries use the biometric system

to prevent fraud in migrations from one country to another.

But surprisingly, more than 400 workers' fingerprints have not matched during checks at immigration in Kuala Lumpur since the resumption of manpower export to Malaysia in October last year.

Carlson visits Ctg, Cox's Bazar

USAID Mission Director Roger Carlson recently visited Chittagong and Cox's Bazar districts to observe different USAID funded activities, including SHOUHARDO programme of CARE-Bangladesh, says a press release.

SHOUHRADO is USAID's largest food security programme that CARE-Bangladesh is implementing in the char, haor and coastal areas in 18 districts in collaboration with the government.

Massive plan to improve traffic

FROM PAGE 1 (ret'd) MA Matin is currently reviewing STP.

Dhaka is a mega city lacking an organised, properly scheduled bus system or any type of mass rapid transport system. Only seven percent of the city's land is used for roads while any modern city requires 25 percent of its land to be used for the purpose.

STP's estimated cost is \$5.5 billion without taking into account the cost of acquiring land and other properties.

The six projects that are slated to be completed by 2010 comprise construction of roads between Zia Colony and Mirpur, and between Panthapath and Rampura, construction of a tunnel at Tejgaon Airport, and roads between Merul Badda and Golakandial, between Tongi and Ghorashal, and between Malibagh and Janapath; and implementation of Lines 1 and 2 of a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system.

**BRT** The proposed BRT system, which will be the first of its kind in the country, has been identified as a practical solution to the chronic traffic congestion in Dhaka city. Express buses, which will have capacities to carry 200 passengers per vehicle with low consumption of fuel and high speed, are already very popular in South American countries.

Dr KM Maniruzzaman, associate professor of the urban and regional planning department of the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet), said in Bogotá, BRT has become so popular that the city's commuters are insisting on banning personal automobiles on roads during rush hours.

The Bangladesh government will dedicate some lanes on roads for uninterrupted movement of BRT and it is considering dedicating three lanes for the purpose. BRT line 1 will begin at Uttara and end at Saidabad Bus Terminal, Line 2 will start from Gabtoli Bus Terminal and end at Saidabad Bus Terminal, and Line 3 will connect Zia International Airport and the Ramna area.

BRT will go through College Road, Phoenix Road and Nazrul

2 killed

FROM PAGE 16 Sadullapur upazila of Gaibandha, and Zinnat Ali, former chief of outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) Jessore unit.

Our Gaibandha correspondent reported that a team of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested the notorious robber, Hira, 42, at his house at Khodabux village at 3:00pm on Tuesday and took him to Joypurhat Rab camp.

On his confessional statement, the Rab men along with Hira set out for Bishnupur under Sadullapur upazila at 2:00am yesterday to arrest Hira's cohorts and recover the hidden firearms.

When they reached the village at around 3:00am, Hira's accomplices opened fire, prompting the elite force to retaliate.

Rab sources said Hira received bullets during the shootout and died on way to Gaibandha Sadar Hospital.

They said Hira was wanted in murder, robbery, rape and extortion cases filed with different police stations of the district.

Rab personnel recovered a revolver and two bullets from the spot.

In Jhenidah, police arrested PBCP leader Zinnat at Makimpur village under Harinakundu upazila at about 8:00pm on Tuesday, reports UNB.

On his statement, police took him to Andulbaria village in Sadar upazila at around 3:00am yesterday to arrest his accomplices.

Sensing the presence of the cops, Zinnat's accomplices fired on the law enforcers, forcing them to retaliate.

Police said Zinnat received bullets during the encounter and died on the spot. Police said the outlaw was an accused in ten murder cases. They (police) recovered one pistol and one shotgun from the scene.

Islam Sarani in an anti-clockwise loop, which might be extended to the old part of the city also.

Sensing that BRT might not be able to accommodate 36 million people by 2024, the government is also reviewing an option of establishing a metro train system.

**METRO TRAINS** The first of the proposed three metro lines will begin at Uttara and end at Saidabad Bus Terminal, the second one will provide two east-west connections among densely populated residential areas of Gulshan, Dhanmondi and Mirpur, and the third one will connect the developing areas west of the cantonment and the central city, which will start at Pallabi and end at Saidabad Bus Terminal.

According to the plan, the metro lines will be completed in the fourth and the final five-year phases.

"The blend of BRT and metro, which was termed as a mass rapid transit system by the experts in the field, will create enormous opportunities for new developments and the junctions have been considered as viable sites for major new commercial developments", Director of Bangladesh Consultants Ltd Rafiqul Islam told The Daily Star.

**ELEVATED EXPRESSWAYS** The proposed three elevated expressways will include the Gulistan-Jatrabari flyover. The two others, to be constructed in the second five-year phase of STP, will run from Mogbazar via Mouchak to Rampura, and from Gulistan to Mahakhali.

During the immediate past four-party alliance government's regime, the erstwhile communications minister Nazmul Huda was tilted towards

investment intensive elevated expressway projects, with an estimated \$614 million expenditure.

According to sources, the expert committee however put high emphasis on setting up a mass rapid transit system saying that toll based elevated expressways will not be viable even in 20 years.

"Construction of the elevated expressways demands a staggering budget of Tk 100 crore per 1 km. Those would be operated on the basis of collecting tolls from vehicle drivers," said Dr Rahmatullah, a transport expert and project director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue.

The alliance government had the tendency to award large-scale construction projects to particular companies, like the notorious Orion, in exchange for huge amounts of bribes. Sources said the nefarious practice affected all development work in the country in the last five years.

In order to obtain the resources to make STP successful, the expert committee asked the government to increase the budget allocation for the transport system in Dhaka area, to increase the number of applications for funds from donors, to aggressively pursue private sector funding sources, and to introduce a special levy in the form of a government surcharge for collecting fund.

Dr Salehuddin, additional executive director of DTCB, said the recommended expressways should be built to coordinate the total transport system. He however admitted that they did not think through the issue of financial viability of constructing the expressways.

IMF presses for gas price hike

FROM PAGE 1

natural gas has been sent to the chief adviser for approval," he said.

Zaid Bakht, research director of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, said it is very difficult for the government to bear such a huge amount of subsidy for the state-owned enterprises (SOE) for an unlimited time.

Referring to the increasing trend of inflation rate Bakht said rise of prices of natural gas, electricity, fertiliser and other petroleum products may have a negative impact on the macro economy.

The IMF report said pricing of natural gas in Bangladesh is considerably below the international levels, resulting in the forfeiture of a significant source of government revenue. It also creates substantial market distortions by encouraging conversion to CNG as a source of fuel.

The report said price adjustments and financial restructuring of loss-incurring SOEs are also needed.

"BPC [Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation] alone accounts for about two-thirds of accumulated SOE losses, with the state airline, fertiliser, and power companies accounting for the remainder," the IMF report said.

The IMF also suggested that the government continue the process of privatising the loss-making SOEs.

Earlier, the advisory committee on economic affairs in separate meetings sent back proposals for increasing prices of electricity and fertiliser asking the ministries concerned for more reviews in the

proposals.

The present caretaker government, which took office in January, has increased the price of power the decision of which was taken by the BNP-led coalition government.

Prices of petroleum products were also increased in April and Finance Adviser Mirza Azizul Islam in his budget speech announced that the government would introduce pricing formula for the petroleum products from the current fiscal year.

A committee headed by the BPC chairman will sit shortly to fix how much price increase of petroleum products is needed to minimise losses.

Sources said the government's move to adjust prices of fuel, electricity and fertiliser are in line with the reform agenda of the IMF and World Bank. "The government is expecting new poverty reduction growth facility [PRGF] loans from the IMF and budgetary support from the World Bank," a government official said.

"Adjustment of fuel prices as well as fertiliser and power are part of the donors' conditions," he added.

Zaid Bakht criticised the IMF's economic policy saying donors are concerned only about the impact of huge subsidy on the budget. "But we have to keep it in mind that there will be an adverse effect on the agriculture while inflation may increase further if the government withdraws the subsidies," he observed.

Bakht suggested that the government cut Annual Development Programme to continue subsidy.