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Fate of 800 cheated workers in Malaysia uncertain

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The exploited Bangladeshi workers, around 800 in total, are living in uncertainty as the authorities in Malaysia have yet to arrange alternative employment for them.

On October 8, the disgruntled workers went to Bangladesh high commission to Kuala Lumpur for redress of exploitation by their employers in Batu Pahat of Johor, Malaysia.

The workers alleged that they had arrived in Malaysia between January and April this year and were employed at four textile factories with the promise of a monthly salary of Malaysian Ringgit (RM) 1,200 each. However, each worker wound up receiving only RM 200 or less a month.

One of the workers, Shahjahan, 25, told The Star, a Malaysian newspaper, not only they were underpaid, but their living conditions were horrible as well.

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LOCAL GOVT REPRESENTATIVES EC wants restriction on their party posts

SHIAKHAWAT LITON

The Election Commission (EC) is planning to impose restriction on elected local government representatives' holding party posts to free the local government institutions from the grip of partisan politics.

If the proposal is made a law, incumbent mayors, chairmen and ward commissioners of the city corporations and municipalities will not be allowed to hold posts of any political party, EC sources said. The law might also be applicable for the zilla and upazila parishads if these local government bodies are formed through elections, they added.

"We are considering the idea in order to give the local government institutions a neutral character, freeing them from partisan politics because these institutions are non-

political," Election Commissioner Brig Gen (retd) M Sakhawati Hussain told The Daily Star yesterday.

"Elected representatives to the local government institutions should not hold party posts, but they can be members of any political party," he said.

Election Commissioner Muhammed Sohul Hussain told The Daily Star, "If we finally decide to include the provision in the election laws, we will send the proposal to the government to make it a law by amending the local government laws."

The EC observes that elected representatives to local government bodies, who are also leaders of political parties, cannot avoid party politics and the non-political local government bodies are used for partisan politics, which largely hampers the aims of those institu-

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Constitution does not support concept of consensus govt Says Delwar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain yesterday opposed the idea of a consensus government, saying there is no provision in the constitution for a government of 10-year tenure.

"The proposal is not clear to me and I believe only parliament can decide on it after elections," he told reporters at his Nam flat in the capital.

He also raised questions about the constitutional validity of such a government, saying constitutional endorsement and people's support is a must for it.

"The people are the source of all power in democracy and they will decide everything about it. It's not a matter of imposing something on them; rather they'll choose what kind of government they want."

Former president Badruddoza Chowdhury at an after party on

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Babar sued for taking Tk 21cr bribe

The deal was to save Bashundhara Group chief's son from murder charges

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) has filed a case against former state minister for home affairs Lutfuzzaman Babar and five others for taking Tk 21 crore as bribes to save the Bashundhara Group chairman's son from murder charges.

Babar realised the bribe in cash, pay orders and cheques at different times between August 7 and September 13 last year in a way he had planned to keep the matter a secret and beyond anyone's notice.

A large part of the sum was carried in sacks to the former state minister's government residence on Bailey Road.

According to the first information report (FIR), Babar struck a deal of Tk 50 crore with

Bashundhara Group Chairman Ahmed Akbar Sobhan alias Shaha Alam for dropping the name of his son Shafiat Sobhan Sanvir from the charge sheet of a case in connection with the murder of Humayun Kabir Sabbir.

Sabbir, a director of Bashundhara Group, was murdered on July 5, 2006.

Babar was also charged with misappropriating power and cause obstacles to the investigation of the murder case filed with Gulshan Police Station on July 7. The case suffered a major setback during the tenure of the BNP-led four-party alliance government when Babar was in charge of the home ministry, the FIR said.

Sobhan stopped paying the bribe immediately before the expiry of the alliance government's

tenure. The other accused in the case are Sobhan, his sons Shafiat and Sadat Sobhan, Director of East West Property Development Pvt Ltd, a sister concern of Bashundhara, Abu Sufian, and Mia Nur Uddin Apu.

ACC Deputy Assistant Director Abul Kashem filed the case. The ACC has not appointed any investigation officer of the case as the FIR is yet to reach the commission's investigation section.

THE CASE STATEMENT According to the FIR, on the day Sabbir's murder took place, suspected killer Sanvir fled to London taking clearance from immigration, a department under home ministry's supervision, fearing arrest as evidence was found

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Mad rush for home Tight security at railway stations, bus, launch terminals days ahead of Eid

WASIM BIN HABIB and SHAIHEEN MOLLAH

Thousands of people, some having a four-day holiday, started leaving the capital yesterday and head for their homes outside Dhaka to spend their Eid holidays with relatives, withstanding the difficulties of transportations.

People of the Hindu community are also leaving the city to observe Durga Puja with their relatives as the festival starts a few days after Eid.

The bustling metropolis was showing signs of tranquillity in the coming days. The pace of people leaving Dhaka is gaining momentum as bus terminals, launch terminal and railway stations were crowded with homebound people yesterday. The mad rush to go home would reach its peak two days before Eid (likely to be today).

Even though the public holiday for Eid starts Friday, many people working at government and non-government offices left for their respective homes yesterday after taking leave on Thursday. Yesterday (Wednesday) was a public holiday for Lalailul Qadr.

Around two million people are

expected to leave the capital on the eve of Eid, traveling sufferings in their journey to be home.

Homebound people who started leaving on buses, launches and on trains Monday and Tuesday had to face immense sufferings due to inclement weather.

People of southern and southwestern regions of the country were the worst sufferers, as they could not reach their homes on time due to suspension of ferry services.

Moreover, suspension of launch services on inland and coastal routes for 18 hours since Monday evening, due to the depression, stranded thousands of people heading for their homes.

Visiting different bus terminals, launch terminal and train stations in the city, The Daily Star correspondents saw thousands heading home in procession.

Passengers at different bus terminals yesterday alleged that the bus service operators are charging extra while the bus service employees claimed they are not charging more than they are supposed to charge.

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PHOTO: STAR

Vessel operators cram people heading home for Eid holidays onto the upper decks of launches at Sadarghat Launch Terminal yesterday. Despite heavy monitoring and the risk of accidents, launches overloaded with people operate during the Eid rush every year.

Finance adviser for review of power, fuel, fertiliser prices

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance Adviser Mirza Azizul Islam yesterday said that it is not possible for the government to maintain the budgetary discipline for long if it continues to provide subsidy for keeping low the prices of power, petroleum, gas and fertiliser.

"We must review the administered price, not only of power but also of other products," the adviser said after a meeting with visiting Vice President of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) Lijun Jin. He arrived in Dhaka yesterday on a three-day visit.

If the ongoing subsidy trend continues, current budget deficit of Tk 29,836 crore will reach Tk 36,468 crore, according to a finance division estimation.

When production or import cost is high, the government provides subsidy so that the prices of products remain within people's reach, which is called "administered price."

"It is not possible for the government to continue subsidy-based financing for long," the adviser said while talking to the reporters after the meeting with ADB vice presi-

dent at the Planning Commission. Different issues relating to power sector, aid for flood rehabilitation and governance were main topics of discussion at the meeting.

The ADB is providing Bangladesh government \$465 million loan for development in the power sector. The first instalment has already been given and the second is expected by December.

Replying to journalists' query whether the ADB had placed any condition to hike the power price, the adviser said, "They haven't placed any such condition, nor have given any specific date for raising the price," adding "but personally, I think we should adjust the price because it ultimately harms efficiency (of the sector)."

Asked about the possibility of review of administered prices by December, Azizul declined to comment, saying, "Let's see."

The finance division has already submitted a report to the finance adviser about different ministries' demands for additional finances as the ministries are providing subsidies on different products, and its

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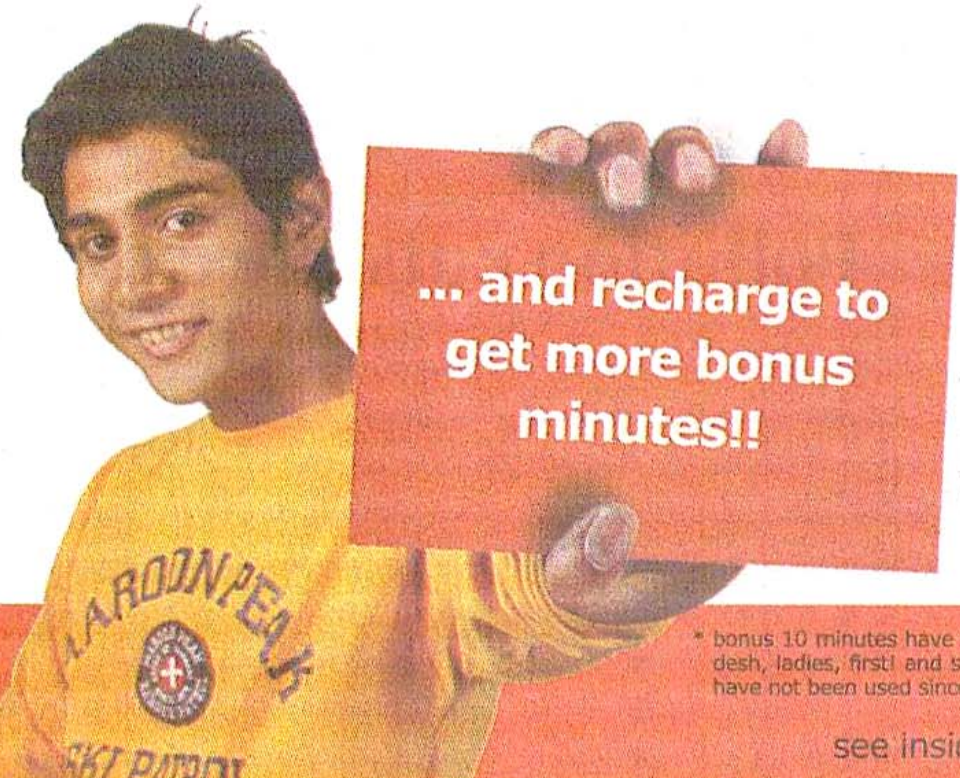
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