



Speakers at the special plenary of the WIPO High-Level Forum held in Geneva on Wednesday. From right are Belete Degefa, state minister for capacity building of Ethiopia; Madicke Niang, minister for mines and industry of Senegal; Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya, Bangladesh's permanent representative to the United Nations office in Geneva; Kamil Idriss, director general of WIPO; Mpeo Miola, minister for law, justice and human Rights of Lesotho; and Mamady Traore, minister for industries and commerce of Guinea. (Story on Page 16)

## RETURNNEES FROM MALAYSIA

# Workers won't go home without receiving refund

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

More than 50 Bangladeshi workers who returned from Malaysia recently in the wake of harassment by recruiting agents yesterday decided not to go back to their homes until they receive a refund of Tk 1.75 lakh per person from the recruiting agency.

The workers have been staying at different places in the city -- on the footbridges, High Court Mazar mosques at night and in front of the National Press Club, Dhaka Reporters' Unity and Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training at Kakrail for the last three days.

This group is part of 80 workers who staged hunger strike on the premises of Bangladesh High Commission in Kuala Lumpur from September 10 to 15 in protest against their unemployment, non-payment of wages and confinement in congested rooms by a Malaysian company there for around six months.

Later, the government brought them back to the country and assured them of steps to pay back the money they spent on migration.

On Thursday, the expatriates' welfare and overseas employment ministry sent a notice asking the Golden Arrow, the recruiting

agency which took them to Malaysia, to refund Tk 1.75 lakh to each worker.

Earlier, the Golden Arrow paid back Tk 84,000 to each worker and some additional money to 22 others in compensation. The recruiting agency will now have to pay the remaining amount to the workers.

The government in the notice also warned the Golden Arrow that

the security money of the recruiting agency will be confiscated and its licence cancelled if it fails to refund the money to the workers by December 17.

Joynal Abedin, one of the returnees, said, "We have been struggling since our arrival in the country in September and October to get our money back. We won't go back home until we get the money in our hand."



PHOTO: STAR

A group of workers who returned from Malaysia recently in the wake of harassment by recruiting agents sit on the footpath near the National Press Club yesterday. They decided not to go back to their homes until they receive a refund of Tk 1.75 lakh per person from the recruiting agency.

## Rajuk flouted demolition code

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the owners of each potentially affected adjoining plot, building or structure at least a week in advance of the commencement of demolition.

The Daily Star's interviews with the neighbours of Rangs Bhaban yesterday revealed that Rajuk served no notice to the owners of the adjacent buildings or plots.

"It is only on December 10 that Tejgaon police served us a notice requesting us to remain at a certain distance from Rangs Bhaban, saying that the building after the partial collapse has become unstable. Other than that we received no other notice before or during the demolition," said Mosammat Beauty, resident of an adjacent building east of Rangs Bhaban.

Moinuddin, 12, was seriously injured in the head when at midnight in early November a large chunk of concrete slab fell from Rangs Bhaban on the tin shed house located at 115/3 Tejkunipara, where he was sleeping.

"The concrete was so heavy that the corrugated tin roof could not bear the weight. My son is lucky that the concrete fell a foot away from where he was sleeping," said Haider Ali, father of Moinuddin.

The corrugated tin roof of the house was damaged in several places due to falling concrete slabs and a sledge hammer from Rangs Bhaban quite a few times during the demolition work, said Arab Ali, owner of the house.

BNBC stipulates that demolition of any building must not commence until required pedestrian protection structures have been built. But the reality was that, not only the pedestrians, vehicles were not also safe during the demolition work in Rangs Bhaban.

A falling chunk of concrete from the upper floors of Rangs Bhaban damaged a car about a month back, admitted Nasir Majhi, a demolition sub-contractor who got the job from the original contractor Six Star, hired by Rajuk to demolish the upper floors of the 22-storey building. "Six Star however compensated the car owner," Nasir said.

While BNBC specifies that safe distances must be clearly marked, signs should be prominently posted, and every sidewalk and road

adjacent to the demolition site must be either protected or closed off -- no such protection was provided during the demolition work.

The code also says a demolition shall proceed in descending order storey by storey from top to the bottom, and all work on an upper floor must be completed and approved by the engineer prior to moving to a lower floor.

"Demolition of the structure in sections may be permitted in exceptional cases only if necessary precautions are ensured," BNBC says, adding that no person should be allowed to work in an area underneath a floor being demolished, and such areas should be barricaded.

Demolition workers engaged in the job said demolition was going on the 19th and 17th floors on the fateful night of August 8, as many of their colleagues were sleeping on the 8th and 9th floors, while BNBC restricted demolition at night, during bodies of the dead on time.

Rajuk Chief Engineer Shah Alam and its Chairman KAM Haroon could not be reached for their comments despite repeated attempts.

"If demolition has to be done at night, precautions in the form of red warning signals, sirens, working

lights, and watchmen shall be provided," says BNBC.

Six Star's Site Engineer Ziaur Rahman however told The Daily Star earlier that no engineer from Rajuk or the demolition contractors stayed at the site during demolition at night. An expert engineer, Jamilur Reza Chowdhury, said the code of demolition work was totally ignored in demolishing the floors of Rangs Bhaban.

"It shows the lack of awareness about the code among the officials who were entrusted with the responsibilities of enforcing it," Chowdhury, also the vice-chancellor of Brac University, said.

"Neither proper planning nor supervision was ensured by Rajuk," said architect Iqbal Habib adding that the government agency even failed miserably in rescuing the trapped men and in recovering the bodies of the dead on time.

The three-day celebrations include a Tattoo and military band display, a cultural programme and Bari Khana with the Indian Army troops that were scheduled for yesterday and today.

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