

No time for becoming voters

A large number of garment factory workers may be left out of list

DURDANA GHAS

With the clock ticking away to one in the afternoon, thousands of garment factory workers start pouring into the busy thoroughfares of the city. It is their precious one-hour lunchtime.

Rubina, a garment worker, was crossing the Nabisco inter-

section like a busy bee zooming towards its hive.

"I am sorry I can't talk with you. I have to go home, down something into my gullet and will have to be back to the factory before it is two," she said while walking with long quick steps.

When this correspondent asked her about the voter registration process, she stopped for

a moment and said, "I have heard this time voter ID cards will be given with photographs. But I don't know what I will have to do for that."

"I don't know whether I will get time to visit the registration centres to get snaps or filling in forms or whether I will be given breaks from my work because my owners are yet to say any-

ries are not prepared to give them leaves to become voters.

But all are not the same. Shilpi, working at a pant-making factory, said her owner has told them that they will get leaves to become voters.

However, leave of one or two hours, or even a full day, may not work at all if the leaves are not coordinated with the time of

registration forms at the centre, which they were supposed to do before. Besides, it takes several hours to take photographs," the factory official said.

"We cannot give them leaves frequently because it hampers the production in our factory. Giving leaves by rotation is also difficult because if we grant leave to 10 machine operators then the 100-worker production team cannot utilise their full capacity," he explained.

"We were requested to give the workers leave after 5:00pm so that the registration staff can go to their [workers] places and distribute forms at night. Following that suggestion we let the workers go at 5:00pm for two days but that also did not work because the data collectors could not cover most workers who live in different parts of the area."

"We tried our best and still we are doing meetings to solve the problem. We want our workers to be enlisted but at the same time we don't want our production to get hampered. We need coordination between both sides," he added.

Ferdous Parvez Jibon, vice president, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), said that if the government or the Election Commission (EC) comes forward then it would be easier for them to solve the problem.

"We have heard that the EC will sit with us soon. If it happens then things will be much easier," he said.

Asked what can be done to solve the problem, Jibon said, "If separate camps can be set up only for garment workers in areas where garment factories are concentrated then it will take less time to get them enlisted. At present it usually takes one day for filling in forms and another day to take photographs. It can be done in one day."

"Garment factories have area-based weekly holidays like Thursday for Mirpur-based factories and Monday for Moghbazar-based ones. These holidays can be utilised. Coordination is needed between both sides to make it happen. The best thing will be if the voter registration people can visit the garment factories and get the workers enlisted right there," he said.

Asked, Election Commissioner Md Sohel Hossain said the EC is thinking about sitting with the BGMEA to find out ways.

"We are aware of the problem and we are thinking about it because garment workers are an important part of our population. We will sit with the BGMEA within a week," he said.

"We are considering the problems of both employers and employees. We will have to find ways so that the workers get enlisted and at the same time production is not hampered," he added.

A large number of garment workers in Dhaka and on the outskirts of the city are facing difficulties in getting enlisted as voters as many garment factories are not prepared to give them leaves to become voters.

thing about it."

Rubina works at a shirt-making factory near Nabisco intersection from 8:00am to 7:00pm for seven days a week. Every day she gets a one-hour break to have lunch. Within that time she has to go to her home in Nakhla para on foot and back to work after eating.

"In fact I have no time to even think about this voter listing," she said.

A large number of garment workers in Dhaka and on the outskirts of the city are facing difficulties in getting enlisted as voters as many garment facto-

voter registration staff.

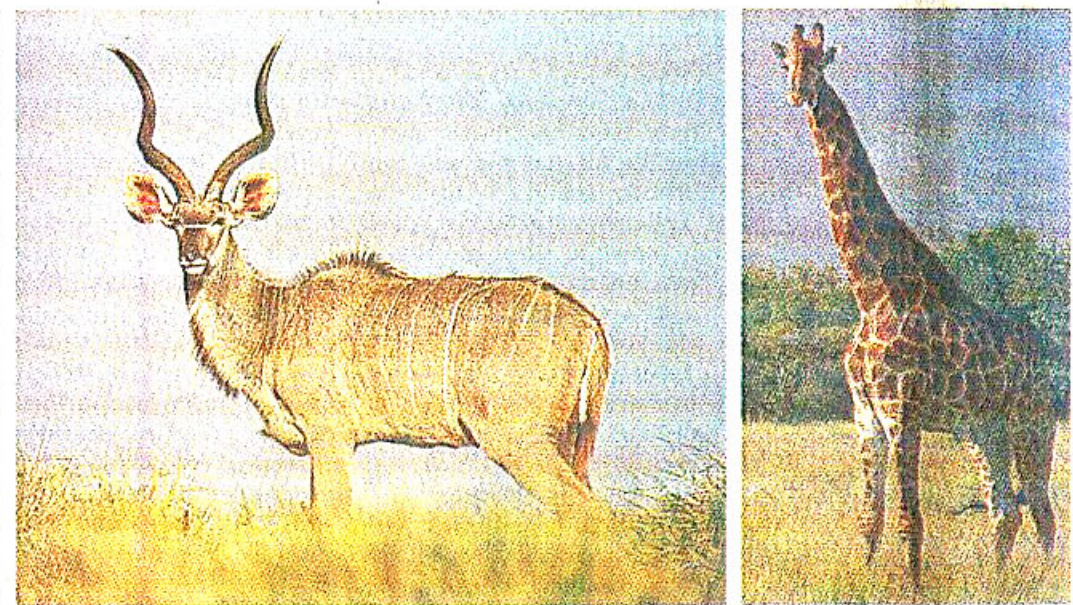
Agarment factory official working at a unit in Savar shares his experience of giving leave to the workers, which did not work at all.

"At first we talked with the army authorities and requested them to get our workers enlisted on a certain date. They agreed. We sent them to the centre on that day giving all of them a day's leave but it did not work because they could not deal with around two thousand workers within a day when they had to enlist other eligible candidates," he said.

"One reason was that the workers had to fill in the voter



Garment workers at work at a factory, top. Will they have the chance to visit a voter registration centre? above.



Some of the would-be inmates of Dhaka Zoo, clockwise from top left, are kudu, giraffe, chimpanzee and lemur.

MOVE FOR NEW INMATES DELAYED

Dhaka Zoo now looks for 'suitable' importer

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

The Dhaka Zoo will not be able to add more animals to its display quite soon due to unavailability of local importers specialised and experienced in wild animal import, said zoo officials.

Finding no competent participant in the tender on November 25 for the import of animals for the zoo at a cost of Tk 6 crore, the authorities decided to cancel it and invite a fresh tender on December 31.

"According to Public Procurement Rules 2003, candidates [of a tender] must have experience in wild animal transportation. Those who responded to the tender on November 25 hardly match this criteria," a high official of the zoo said.

"The responsibility includes transportation of wild animals from different continents including Africa, but the interested parties do not have the experience needed for handling wild animals," he added.

The zoo official said the bidders in the last tender were so inexperienced that they could not even quote proper

pricing for the animals. "In case we cannot find any suitable candidate, the only option that would be left for us is to hire foreign companies. However, hiring a foreign company means we have to pay them in foreign currency -- which we cannot afford."

The Dhaka Zoo authorities initially planned to procure the animals in March, but the plan was unsuccessful due to similar reasons.

The last time Dhaka Zoo procured animals was in 2002 when around Tk 50 lakh was spent on two cheetahs, two zebras, three greater flamingos and two golden pheasants.

Under the present procurement plan, the zoo intends to add around a hundred animals from 11 species including giraffe, zebra, chimpanzee, impala, kudu, elan, lemur, horse, donkey and several species of monkey. Birds have been excluded from the plan to avoid possible spreading of bird flu.

At least four giraffe would be bought for the Dhaka Zoo that lacks the splendid long-necked animal since 1998.

Also on the list are impala,

kudu, elan and lemur -- that are to be introduced to the visitors of Dhaka Zoo for the first time.

Impala is a reddish African antelope that makes spectacular leaps when alarmed. Male impala has ridged, curved horns.

Kudu is a large African antelope with a brownish coat and narrow white vertical stripes. The male has long, spirally curved horns.

Elan is a species of moose found in Alaska, Canada, the United States and the northern part of Europe.

Lemur is a primate with a long snout, large ears, a long tail and a strong sense of smell. It is commonly found in Madagascar and the neighbouring Comoros Islands. Lemur varies in colour from reddish brown to grey and come in different sizes. The smallest lemur is called pygmy mouse lemur that weighs only one ounce.

Established in 1974, the 186-acre Dhaka Zoo is currently home to nearly 165 species of 1,823 animals. Of them, 55 are mammals, 72 birds and 32 fish.

This largest zoo of the country attracts around 10,000 visitors every day.

LOCAL, NRB EXPERTS' QUEST FOR SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS IN CITY

'Stop unplanned growth, take pro-people steps'



Transportation expert M Rahmat Ullah speaks at a seminar on development of sustainable transportation systems for Dhaka city at Sheraton hotel. The seminar was organised by Scholars Bangladesh.

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Development of sustainable transportation systems for Dhaka largely depends on undertaking well-planned and feasible projects and decentralisation of facilities, said both local experts and non-resident Bangladeshi professionals yesterday.

Speaking at a seminar of the three-day first non-resident Bangladeshi (NRB) conference organised by Scholars Bangladesh at a city hotel, they also underscored the need for efficient management of transportation system, control over land use and mass migration to free the capital city from perennial traffic congestion.

The session focused on development of Dhaka's transportation system.

Transport expert and former secretary Quamrul Islam Siddiqi

said that physical mess in today's Dhaka are due to unplanned growth and institutional problems.

"It is too much of politics and vested interests that have foiled the improvement of Dhaka's transport system," he said. "Dhaka Transport Coordination Board or DTCB itself was a political product."

Siddiqi further said that it is the present government that can undertake a pro-people initiative to develop Dhaka's transport system.

Md Shoaib Chowdhury, a senior transport consultant in New York, said in his presentation at the seminar that sustainability of transportation implies social, economic and environmental dimensions.

He said that physical realities of Dhaka city call for comprehensive planning on transportation

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22

BRISK BUSINESS ON BOATS



INNOVATIVE: Scores of floating shops built on boats near Sadarghat Launch Terminal sell 'emergency items' including fruits, food and beverages for homebound passengers mostly at higher prices taking advantage of rush hours. In the process they also add to the pollution of the Buriganga River.