



Recipients of Independence Award-2008 pose with Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed at the award giving ceremony at Osmani Memorial Auditorium in the city yesterday. From left are Dhaka University Vice Chancellor Prof SMA Faiz, Sabina Zoha Khan, Prof Rehman Sobhan, Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed, Director General of BDR Maj Gen Shakil Ahmed and Havildar Md Zahirul Islam. Sabina received the award on behalf of her father Shaheed Dr Shamsuzzoha while Prof SMA Faiz received it on behalf of Dr Gobinda Chandra Dev. (Story on Page 1)

Brokers make visas costlier

FROM PAGE 16
Ghulam Mostafa, former secretary general of Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies, at a recent seminar expressed the apprehension Bangladesh might lose the major labour markets if authorities fail to correct the flawed system and hold immediate dialogues with these countries.

In the 1980s when Bangladesh officially started sending workers abroad, employers charged the workers not a single penny for visas. Moreover, monthly salaries also ranged from Saudi riyals (SR) 800 to SR 1,000 for jobs in Saudi Arabia.

In contrast, the workers, especially the unskilled section, now have to pay the agents Tk 2-3 lakh for an overseas job and end up in getting low salaries. Workers' salary has now come down to 300-400 riyals in the Kingdom, officials and industry

Appeal for help

Anusha Malik, 5, is suffering from leukemia, says a press release. She is now under the treatment of Prof. Aqilul Islam of Bangladesh Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Medical University.

Her treatment involves a huge amount of money which her father, a teacher, cannot afford.

So, he has made a fervent appeal for financial assistance from the well-off people of the society to save the life of her daughter.

Contributions can be sent to Savings Account No 34039337, Agrani Bank, Sonargaon Road Branch, Dhaka.

Interested persons can also call at 01715-124175.

insiders say. This is the result of unholy competition among the middlemen in buying visas from the employers and competition in offering workers low salaries, they observe.

Taking advantage of such competition, many employers in the Middle Eastern countries also indulge in selling visas to earn huge amounts out of no investment, agents and studies say.

Some foreign employers even secure more employment visas than their actual need. They sell these visas to foreign workers but cannot employ them, leaving the helpless workers on their own, according to industry insiders and studies.

"These extra visas are popularly known as free visas," said a recruiting agent.

He cited an example, saying if a company needs 200 workers, Bangladeshi manpower broker persuades it to make it 300. The broker offers 5,000 riyals for each visa and assures the employer that they would take care of the workers, he added.

"The employer finds the offer very lucrative and acts accordingly. But the manpower broker neither takes care of these extra workers nor helps them manage jobs."

According to a Human Rights Watch (HRW) report, the migrants who arrive in the Kingdom with 'free visas' must find their own work and remit monthly payments to the Saudi sponsor named on their visas.

It is impossible to estimate how many times the same employment visa is sold in schemes designed to dupe vulnerable migrant workers, the report notes.

Quoting the Arab News, it says in the Eastern Province alone, there are dozens of companies, which exist only on papers. On the basis of their registration and licence, they apply for visas only to sell those.

The report also says quoting an official who worked in Kuwait, "Most of the Kuwaiti companies issue work permits for excess workers to make money out of visa trading. Individual Kuwaitis are no exception to this ill practice."

Adnan Al-Naeim, a business leader in Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, told the Saudi Gazette on February 15 this year: "There is a trail of visa trading, which is hurting legitimate Saudi employers... visas are being traded on the black market by big interest groups."

A research by a Malaysian migrants' rights organisation, Tenaganita, finds that job approvals were issued against demands of companies that are existent only on papers, resulting in unemployment of hundreds of Bangladeshi workers in the country.

"Some genuine companies also hired extra workers that benefited only the agents and the employers," said Tenaganita official Harun Al Rashid. Bangladesh High Commission in Kuala Lumpur also did not verify the process correctly, he said.

The cost for each worker for going to Malaysia was fixed at Tk 84,000 but they paid Tk 2 lakh to Tk 2.5 lakh.

Such flaws in the recruitment process seriously irritated Malaysian government that led to the imposition of the restrictions, he added.

Obituary

Zerina Mohsin, wife of Prof Dr KM Mohsin, former UGC member, passed away due to cancer at a city hospital yesterday at the age of 65, says a press release.

She left behind her husband, one son and a host of admirers to mourn her death.

Her qulqhwani will be held after Asr prayers at the Azad Mosque, Gulshan in the city on Friday.

War heroes, pro-liberation parties to boycott reception

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leaders of pro-liberation political and social organisations and the Sector Commanders Forum (SCF) have decided to boycott today's Independence Day reception at Bangabhaban in protest against the anti-liberation elements being invited to the programme.

They also decided not to attend any other state functions on the occasion of the Independence Day if any anti-liberation elements are invited to those programmes.

The organisations include Awami League and its partners in the 14-party alliance, Jatiya Samantantrik Dal, Workers Party, Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh, Forum for Secular Bangladesh and South Asian People's Union against Fundamentalism and Communism.

Leaders of the Jatiya Party (Ershad) and Bangladesh Welfare Party said they would also skip the reception at Bangabhaban if the war criminals are invited.

Ruhul Kabir Rizvi, acting office secretary of BNP told The Daily Star that they have decided not to join the reception because Bangabhaban did not properly invite Khaleda-backed BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain.

On December 16 last year, leaders of a number of political parties and war heroes boycotted the Victory Day reception at the Bangabhaban to protest invitation to the anti-liberation forces.

"We will boycott the reception at Bangabhaban if any anti-liberation elements join it," SCF President Air Vice Marshal (ret'd) AK Khandker told The Daily Star yesterday.

Awami League presidium member Suranjit Sengupta said it is his party's decision that the party leaders would not attend the reception at Bangabhaban if war criminals are invited.

JSD President Hasanul Haq Inu and Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon also said they would skip the reception if war criminals are invited.

Jamaat-e-Islami Assistant Secretary General Muhammad Kamaruzzaman said they have received about 10 invitation cards for the Independence Day reception to be hosted by President Iajuddin Ahmed.

Qulqhwani

Qulqhwani of Alhaj Zahid Hossain Babu (Haji Babu), a businessman and social worker, will be held at his residence at 65 West Agargaon in the city at 4:30pm today, says a press release.

Babu, son of former Bangladesh Sarak Paribahan Samity president late Alhaj AK Zainul Abedin, passed away due to a cardiac arrest at NICVD in the city on March 21 at the age of 38.

CA hands over Independence Award

FROM PAGE 1

and democracy are not synonymous, but introduction of democratic process begins through election.

The head of the caretaker government made the remarks while addressing the Independence Award 2008 giving ceremony at Osmani Memorial Auditorium in the capital.

"It is unfortunate but true that a democratic and exploitation-free society for which people from all walks of life of this country joined Liberation War in 1971 has not yet been achieved," he told his audience.

The CA said the present caretaker government took the responsibility of governing the country against the backdrop of a critical and unstable situation. And since then, they have invested all-out strength in the matters of holding a free, fair and neutral election to consolidate the democratic process in the country.

At the same time, he said, the government has taken a number of steps to establish good governance and to create a congenial atmosphere for election.

The CA noted that the Election Commission has taken a long way forward the activities of preparing voter list with photograph and ID card to hold a fair and neutral election.

He mentioned in this regard that discussion between the Election Commission and civil society, and political parties on electoral rules and reforms has set up a firm foundation.

This year the government decided to give the Independence Award to Bangladesh Rifles (BDR), Shaheed Dr Mohammad Shamsuzzoha and Shaheed Dr Gobinda Chandra Dev in recognition of their contributions to the independence and the Liberation War while to Prof Rehman Sobhan for his glorious and excellent contribution to research and training.

The CA distributed the award to the recipient, representatives and family member of the recipients at the function organised by the Cabinet Division.

Sabina Zoha Khan, daughter of Shaheed Dr Shamsuzzoha, received the award on behalf of her father, Dhaka University Vice-Chancellor Prof ASMA Faiz received the award for Dr GC Dev on behalf of the university while Director General of BDR Maj Gen Shakil Ahmed and gallantry award holder Havildar Md Zahirul Islam received the award on behalf of the BDR from the chief adviser.

Each award carries a gold medal, Tk 1 lakh and a certificate.

Cabinet Secretary Ali Imam Majumdar conducted the programme.

Addressing the function on behalf of the award recipients, Prof Rehman Sobhan stressed the need for establishing a moderate, democratic and equitable society dreamt by the people when they joined the War of Independence.

Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar, the deputy speaker, advisers to the caretaker government, special assistants to the chief adviser, judges, chiefs of the three services, diplomats, high civil and military officials, dignitaries and cultural personalities were present at the function.

The CA in his address mentioned some of the reforms and steps taken by the caretaker government, including separation of the judiciary from the executive, reform and strengthening of the Election Commission, Anti-Corruption Commission, Public Service Commission and University Grants Commission.

He said the government has taken initiative to strengthen the local government system and informed that an independent local government commission would be formed soon.

He said Better Business Forum and Regulatory Reforms Commission have already been constituted to improve the business environment as well as to ensure good governance.

He further said the government has also taken initiative to introduce the culture of consultation with common people and civil society in the process of adopting decision.

On prices of essential commodities, the CA said despite all-out efforts of the government against the backdrop of adverse impact of international market to contain the prices of food items, the sufferings of the people of limited-income-group are undeniable.

He said the government has launched OMS operation since January 9 last in each town of the country to keep the prices of food items stable.

Besides, he mentioned sale of food items at fair price by BDR in Dhaka, introduction of six lakh VGF cards for those who live below poverty line in poverty-prone districts apart from 26 lakh VGF cards in cyclone Sdhir hit areas as well as necessary allocation for food-for-work programme and test relief.

The CA noted that there is no

alternative to increasing agricultural production to keep the prices of food items stable. And so the government is giving priority to the agriculture sector.

He saluted the courageous sons of the soil who presented the nation an independent and sovereign country in 1971.

"The responsibility of the present generation of us is to invest all their strength in accelerating the advancement of the nation and implement the dream of martyrs by completing their unfinished tasks," he said.

MESSAGES OF PRESIDENT, CA In separate messages issued on the occasion of the Independence and National Day, President Iajuddin Ahmed and Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed greeted all citizens of the country and urged them to work together for building a forward-looking developed Bangladesh based on an equitable society.

In his message, the president paid profound respect and gratitude to the valiant freedom fighters, organisers of the Liberation War and people from all walks of life who had rendered their dedicated efforts and extended support that expedited the achievement of the long-cherished independence.

He also paid homage to the martyrs of the Liberation War. "One of the prime objectives of our hard-earned independence was to build a happy, prosperous and self-reliant Bangladesh. Keeping that in mind, our untiring efforts have been advancing to that direction," the president said.

The chief adviser in his message hoped that a benevolent government and a meaningful democratic system would be established through a free, fair, impartial and acceptable national election.

"To fulfil this aspiration, I urge all citizens irrespective of their affiliation to any group and opinion for united and committed effort," he said.

The head of caretaker government stressed the need for establishing social justice and good governance and improving the living conditions of the people.

He further said establishing a modern, progressive and exploitation-free democratic country is the demand of the day. "To achieve this, we should play due role from our respective positions with dedication, sincerity and honesty, imbued with the spirit of the Liberation War and patriotism."

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Call to declare Mar 25 as mass killing day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Different socio-political organisations yesterday demanded that March 25 be declared as 'mass killing day'.

They also demanded trial of the war criminals immediately. Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee, Bangladesh Kalyan Party (BKP), Freedom Fighters Peoples Council, Bangladesh Muktiyoddha Oikya Parishad, Democratic Left Alliance and Bangladesh Students Union urged the government to declare March 25, 1971 as 'mass killing day'.

BKP President Maj Gen (Retd) Syed Muhammad Ibrahim yesterday placed wreaths at the Razarbagh Police Lines memorial.

Urging the government to declare March 25 as 'mass killing day', BKP president said this is the night of murder and mayhem, the beginning of genocide of millions of unarmed Bangladeshis by the Pakistani occupation forces in 1971.

Freedom Fighters People's Council places wreath at the altar of martyred freedom fighters at Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) where Pakistani occupation forces started crackdown on the then East Pakistan Rifles members on March 25.

Language movement veteran Abdul Matin, Maj Gen (Retd) Amin Ahmed Chowdhury and Ishiaq Aziz Ulfat were present.

They observed one-minute's silence there to pay tribute to the martyred freedom fighters of Liberation War.

20 suspected drug peddlers, users arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested 20 suspected drug peddlers and users, including three women, at Agargaon BNP Bazar slum in the city yesterday.

They also recovered two firearms, four bullets and 1400 puria of heroin during the raid.

A top Rab official said they raided the slum to nab infamous heroin peddler Laloni but did not find him.

Locals said the Rab members cordoned off the area at 9:30am and conducted the drive for an hour.

Keep pvt bodies out of RTI act purview

FROM PAGE 1

MCCI President Latifur Rahman said the intent and purpose of such a law should be ensuring transparency and accountability of actions of public authorities by allowing access to information which is under their control and possession.

"No dilution of the focus on the right to information on the actions of public authorities should be permitted by inclusion of private bodies within the ambit of this law," the MCCI said in a statement on the draft Right to Information Ordinance 2008, signed by its president Latifur Rahman.

The MCCI sent a three-page observation on the draft ordinance to the joint secretary (development) of information ministry, Kamal Uddin Ahmed, who headed an eight-member committee that prepared it.

The draft has 27 articles on the objective of the ordinance, methods of information dissemination, how to seek or disclose information, exemptions from disclosure, formation of the information commission and punishment for not disclosing information.

The MCCI observations The draft Right to Information Ordinance 2008 (RTIO) aims to provide the right to information in the hands of public authorities as well as private bodies.

The definition of "Authority" in Section 2 (ga) (ii) of the draft RTIO includes any company, corporation, trust, firm, society, co-operative society, non-governmental organisation, association which is registered under any law for the time being in force.

The accepted philosophy behind and demand for a right to information law stems from the need of members of the public to obtain information about how public authorities are carrying out their responsibilities, and hold them accountable for their activities.

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 of the UK recognises that members of the public have the right to know how public services are organised and run, how much they cost and how the decisions are made. The only companies covered by this law are companies wholly owned by the state.

The US Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) is a law ensuring public access to US government records. FOIA carries a presumption of disclosure; the burden is on the govern-

ment--not the public--to substantiate why information may not be released. Upon written request, agencies of the United States government are required to disclose those records, unless they can be lawfully withheld from disclosure under one of nine specific exemptions in the FOIA. This right of access is ultimately enforceable in federal court.

The Right to Information Act 2005 of India states that it is an "Act to provide for setting out the practical regime of right to information for citizens to secure access to information under the control of public authorities, in order to promote transparency and accountability in the working of every public authority."

The draft RTIO has not highlighted this fundamental aspect of a right to information law in its preamble, which leads us to believe that the basic purpose behind the demand of the citizens for this law has not been kept in focus while preparing this

draft. The Constitution, in Article 7 states that "All powers in the Republic belong to the people, and their exercise on behalf of the people shall be effected only under, and by the authority of, this Constitution". Public authorities expend public funds and exercise over members of the public authority granted by or under Acts of Parliament. This is the fundamental difference between public authorities and private bodies.

While a series of laws exist requiring private bodies to comply with set standards and provide information to regulatory agencies and government departments, no such law exists to compel private bodies to disclose information about their activities, even when these have an immediate impact on the day-to-day lives of citizens.

An example may be that a citizen filing an application for a passport may have to wait for several months

for the application whether to be accepted or rejected, and in the meanwhile has no access to any information about the state of progress of his application, or what, if any, problems there might be with it. He goes from door to door, and most doors are closed to him.

Each of the laws, applicable to private bodies/enterprises, e.g. the Companies Act, 1994, Trust Act 1872, Societies Registration Act, 1860 etc. requires regular periodic disclosure of fundamental information about these organisations. Such information is publicly available from various public registries such as the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies and Firms, which also acts as the Registrar of Societies.

There are other regulatory and oversight bodies such as the Securities and Exchange Commission, the Directorate of Labour, the Department of Environment, the Directorate of Health and Safety, which are mandated by law to exercise oversight over and obtain relevant information from these private organisations.

It is often argued that these public bodies do not carry out their functions properly for various reasons. It is all the more reason to have a law which will require these public bodies to disclose how they are carrying out their oversight obligations, by being made to respond to information inquiries.

For example, if a factory is polluting the environment, the Factories Inspectorate and the Department of Environment should be held accountable, upon receipt of complaints, to exercise their oversight functions and provide information to the citizens concerned about how and what they are doing in this regard. The overwhelming public interest lies there.

An earlier draft prepared by the Manusher Jonno Foundation has a definition of the authorities which should fall under this law, and that definition may be used as a starting point. Laws of other countries should also be looked at. It will become clear what the intent and purpose of such a law should be transparency and accountability in the actions of public authorities, by obtaining access to information under the control and in possession of public authorities.

WEATHER TODAY

Dry weather likely

UNB, Dhaka

Weather is likely to remain mainly dry with partly cloudy sky over the country in the next 12 hours until 6:00pm today.

Rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty wind is also likely at one or two places over Rajshahi, Dhaka and Sylhet divisions.

Slight rise in day temperature is expected over the country during the period, Met Office said.

Highest temperature 36.0 degrees Celsius was recorded yesterday at Rajshahi and lowest 18.8 degrees Celsius at Jessore and Srimongal.

The sun sets in the capital at 6:12pm today and rises at 5:56am tomorrow.

Highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature in Celsius	Humidity in percentage
	Max	Min
Dhaka	32.7	21.3
Chittagong	31.7	23.8
Rajshahi	36.0	21.1
Khulna	33.0	21.0
Barisal	33.0	21.3
Sylhet	31.8	20.5
Cox's Bazar	34.5	25.7

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