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Cheated workers forced to return from S'pore

PORIMOL PALMA

Several thousand Bangladeshi workers who went to Singapore with valid documents are being forced to return home in small groups as the Singaporean labour supplying companies allegedly cheated them by not arranging jobs for months.

Strong syndicates of manpower businesses in both Bangladesh and Singapore have been using sophisticated ways to swindle the workers for quite sometime resulting in such plight of the workers, said the returnees and other sources.

The government, however, said the joblessness has been created because of the global financial crisis, but knows no way to address it.

Returnees of a group of 26 workers who arrived in Dhaka Monday told The

Daily Star that many such groups had already come back home from Singapore for similar reasons and many others will be coming shortly.

Singapore blacklisted over 40 companies of the country for their inability to provide regular jobs and salaries to the Bangladeshi workers.

Bangladesh also set a rule in which the Bangladesh mission in Singapore must attest all the job demands of shipping sector to make sure that workers are not hired against fake demands.

"An official of our labour wing in Singapore informed a few days back that some agencies were hiring more workers than required," said an official at the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET).

The government therefore framed the

new rule two months back, he said.

"Hiring workers from Bangladesh and then sending them back after a few months by the manpower agencies is a huge business. We have to pay Tk 4 to Tk 5 lakh each to go to Singapore," said Abu Sayeed, one of the returnees, Monday night.

Promised by an agent a monthly salary equivalent to Tk 40,000 to Tk 50,000 for work in a shipping company, Sayeed went to Singapore on August 25 last year as a welder.

"After going there, I sat for a test and succeeded but I was not given any job for a single day," he said, adding that he along with around 350 Bangladeshi workers was kept in a dormitory in a shabby condition.

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PIROJPUR ROAD Graffiti on woman ban erased

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

After The Daily Star ran a self-proclaimed Pir who put graffiti on a wall by a Pirojpur road, prohibiting movement of women on that road, Mathbaria police removed the writings and are hunting for the Pir.

Officer-in-charge of the Mathbaria Police Station Matiuur Rahman erased the graffiti that read "Women are absolutely forbidden on this road" from Mathbaria Bara Masjid Road. They were also trying to arrest the so-called pir and former soldier

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The graffiti forbidding women to use the Bara Masjid Road in Mathbaria of Pirojpur being erased yesterday in presence of police (out of frame). Police are looking for the so-called pir who had enforced the ban.

PHOTO: STAR

Ex-BRTC boss Taimur jailed for not giving wealth report

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday sentenced former Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC) chairman Taimur Alam Khondaker to two years' simple imprisonment for failing to submit his wealth statement to the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC).

Taimur was earlier sentenced to 14 years' rigorous imprisonment (RI) on June 12 last year in two cases filed against him for accepting bribes during his tenure as the BRTC chief.

Judge Mohammad Ashraf Hossain of the Special Judge

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Ministers, MPs to give wealth reports in Feb

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance Minister AMA Muhith yesterday said as per their election pledges the ministers and lawmakers of Awami League (AL) will make public their wealth statements next month.

Wrapping up his first meeting with officials of National Board of Revenue (NBR), Muhith told reporters, "Of course it will be announced publicly. I consider this month a month of training for us. There are some emergency matters which will keep us busy. These include giving subsidy to fertiliser, lowering the price of diesel, etc."

Muhith said the ministers, AL lawmakers and their family members will make public their wealth statements every year and comply with the AL's election manifesto.

Asked whether the drive the caretaker government had launched against tax dodgers would continue, he said, "The drive and the cases filed against tax dodgers during the caretaker regime will continue during the rule of

this government. No guilty person will be spared even if he or she is a leader of Awami League. We are not a government of the party; we are government of the people."

He said, "In our country a number of very wealthy dragons have been created. They have huge amount of money but they do not pay taxes. They need to be punished."

The finance minister said there are two main challenges to collecting revenue. The global financial crisis is starting to have its impact on revenue collection and overcoming this is a challenge. Another problem is that they have assumed power with a large agenda. "We will have to mobilise resources for implementing those. We have sought cooperation of the revenue officials in this regard."

A big part of our tax comes from import tax and VAT (value added tax). Already revenue collection has dropped due to fall in prices of import goods.

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Pak envoy hopes BNP to help govt

UNB, Dhaka

Pakistan High Commissioner in Dhaka Alamgir Khan Babar hoped that BNP would fully cooperate with the present government for the welfare of the people.

"I think a good relation between a responsible political party and a democratic government is a must," the Pak envoy was learned to have told BNP Chairperson Khaleida Zia when he met her at the party's Gulshan office yesterday evening.

Babar is the first envoy who met Khaleida Zia after the ninth parliament elections on December 29.

After the 40-minute discussion between Begum Zia and

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EC appointments under law to avoid controversy

EC to propose enactment of the law

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) will send a proposal to the new government to enact a law on appointment of chief election commissioner (CC) and election commissioners to end the long-standing controversy over formation of the EC, an election commissioner said yesterday.

If the law is made as proposed, a high-level search committee and the Business Advisory Committee (Bac) of the Jatiya Sangsad (JS) will find out efficient and neutral persons for the jobs in the constitutional body.

Sources noted that this would block the way for the government to constitute the EC unilaterally.

"We will send the proposal (for a law) to the newly elected government immediately

after the ninth parliament goes into inaugural session," Election Commissioner Muhammed Sohul Hussain told reporters yesterday.

None of the successive governments in the 36 years enacted such a law although the country's constitution provided for this. And all these governments constituted the EC by appointing persons of their choice unilaterally without considering qualifications or competence of the appointees.

In most cases, this triggered widespread controversies as the opposition parties, which were never consulted in this regard, rejected the appointments.

Meanwhile, the EC already drafted a law specifying qualifications and disqualifications

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Info minister pledges free media

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Information Minister Abul Kalam Azad yesterday assured editors and senior journalists that his government would ensure the free flow of information and freethinking of journalists in the country.

He also said that he was sincerely considering the proposition to make the state run radio and TV autonomous.

In his first meeting with the country's senior journalists after assuming office, the information minister said his

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Tigers must win today

SPORTS REPORTER

Rubel Hossain will make his international debut when Bangladesh play the last league match of the Grameenphone tri-nation tournament against Sri Lanka at the Mirpur Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur today.

The young pacesman has been included in the side in place of Nazmul Hossain as the Tigers made two changes to the team from the first match against Zimbabwe which they lost by 38 runs to jeopardise their chance of playing in Friday's final.

Left-handed Mehrab Hossain was dropped to make way for all-rounder

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An explosion is seen after an Israeli air strike in the southern Gaza Strip town of Rafah near the border with Egypt yesterday. Israeli troops and Hamas fighters fought fierce battles in the streets of Gaza's main city as Israel's war on Hamas entered its 18th day and the death toll went above 900.

PHOTO: AFP

India may snap its business, transport links with Pakistan

Delhi's dossier contains info, not evidence: Gilani

PTI, AFP, London/ Islamabad/ New Delhi

India may break off business, transport and tourist links with Pakistan if it fails to help to investigate the Mumbai attacks, Home Minister P Chidambaram has warned, pressing Islamabad to "cooperate soon."

"There are many, many links between India and Pakistan, and if Pakistan does not cooperate and does not help to bring the perpetrators to heel, those ties will become weaker and weaker and one day snap," Chidambaram told

The Times' daily.

"Why would we entertain Pakistani business people? Why would we entertain tourists in India? Why would we send tourists there?" Chidambaram refused to discuss when such measures might be introduced, but said: "We need cooperation soon." Accusing Islamabad of doing nothing to bring to justice the perpetrators of the Mumbai attacks blamed on the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Toiba,

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Four arrested for Tk 27 lakh cheque fraud

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police have arrested four of a cheque fraud gang for conning a garment factory in Tongi out of over Tk 27 lakh.

The suspected fraudsters drew the amount from Vielatex Ltd's accounts with Uttara and Gulshan branches of HSBC Bank and Uttara branch of AB Bank in between

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Padma Bridge work to start in 2011, end in 3 years

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Construction of the proposed Padma Bridge will start in 2011 and be completed in three years to connect the southwest region with Dhaka, Communications Minister Syed Abul Hossain said yesterday.

He said the process to appoint a consultant to finalise the design of the bridge will be completed by this month and then the tender will be floated. After the bridge is constructed, the gross domestic product of the southwest will increase by 2 percent, he added.

"We hope that the construction work will start in 2011 and the government is determined to finish it in three years," he told reporters after a meeting with the officials of Bangladesh Bridge Authority at the Shetu Bhaban.

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One held for mugging at IFIC Bank

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) made little headway in the efforts to recover the money -- Tk 2.73 lakh -- snatched from a client inside Dhanmondi branch of IFIC bank on Monday.

The bank authorities are also trying to shirk their responsibility in this regard saying that they were not sure

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Prayer Timing		
January 14		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-30	6-05
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-00	4-15
Maghrib	5-36	5-40
Esha	7-00	7-30

Source: Islamic Foundation