

Businesses ask

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a result of economic recession," the FBCCI president said.

"Already the ministries concerned have been directed to identify the problems that might be created following the world economic recession. After identifying the problems, government will chalk out plans and offer package programmes for the business sectors," the PM said, adds UNB.

Under the package programmes, the prime minister said, the business sectors will be given various facilities and incentives to keep the country's economy vibrant increasing the flow of export and import.

About the recent cancellation of Malaysian visas for Bangladeshi workers, she said the labour and foreign ministers would go to Kuala Lumpur to find out a solution to the problem.

If necessary, Hasina said, she herself would go to Malaysia and other countries to resolve the issues.

Assuring all of taking every possible measure in this regard, she said the government, at the same time, is focusing on creating new labour markets in the foreign countries.

The PM also informed the business leaders about some of her government's plans for the country's development.

She said the government is planning to activate Bhola power plant and special economic zone in the country's comparatively "poor and neglected" districts to expedite trade and business to create more employment opportunities.

Hasina further informed that the government has a plan to set up hydropower plants in areas around with rivers and haors.

To popularize the solar energy system, taxes on the solar system equipment have already been withdrawn, she added.

The prime minister suggested the industrialists to set up small power stations at their own factories saying that it will help to reduce the scarcity of electricity in the industries and even in the adjacent localities.

To increase navigability of the country's waterways, rivers will be dredged gradually, she said adding that the govern-

ment will dredge the Mongla port to fully reactivate it.

She also asked the business leaders to invest in the proposed economic zones of the country.

Hasina said Bangladesh can capture huge market abroad for organic foods and vegetables. "Try to exploit the potentials."

She thanked the businessmen for reducing the price of edible oil and requested them, if possible, to reduce the prices of other daily essentials as well.

The government attaches equal importance to both public and private sectors for overall development of the country, the PM said.

Hasina also thanked the business leaders for their role in holding the December 29 polls in free and fair manner and for standing beside the government to resolve the February 25-26 Palkhaha carnage in a peaceful manner.

The FBCCI leaders highly praised the PM's "wise and farsighted" steps to resolve the BDR carnage quickly and peacefully.

The leaders observed that the prime minister's February 26 speech to the nation had played an outstanding role to disarm the "killers" which saved lives of many army officers and their family members.

Hasina mourned the death of "well educated and talented" army officers and civilians in the BDR carnage.

The prime minister categorically said she does not want to see any more conflicting situation, which is immensely harmful to the country's image as well as trade and investment.

Recognising the achievements of armed forces and police department's in the UN peacekeeping missions, she said that if any more conflicting situation takes place in the country, the fame earned by the armed forces and police will be harmed.

PM's Secretary Mollah Wahiduzzaman, Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad and Deputy Press Secretary Mahbubul Hoque Shakil were present at the meeting.

Later, the government tabled Code of Criminal Procedure (Amendment) Bill 2009 to enact laws necessary for continuation of the separation.

Last week, a High Court bench ordered the government to explain by March 19 under what legal authority the judicial magistrates are functioning now that the ordinances separating the judiciary are not in force.

In a suo moto rule, it also asked the government to explain why it did not have the ordinances ratified.

OTHER EXTENSIONS
The bill seeking revival of the Upazila Parishad Act 1998 will take two more weeks to be approved by the legislature.

The House yesterday extended by two weeks the time for the parliamentary standing committee on the LGRD ministry to place report on the bill.

The upazila parishads constituted through January 22 polls have yet to begin functioning due to absence of the laws required.

The upazila ordinance promulgated by the caretaker government lost effect on February 25 as parliament did not ratify it by that day.

The House yesterday gave the standing committee on the law ministry two more weeks also for submitting reports on Human Rights Commission Bill, Money Loan Court (amendment) Bill and the Supreme Court's Judges (remuneration and privileges) Bill.

On proposal of Rashed Khan Menon, chief of the parliamentary standing committee on the education ministry, parliament stretched by two weeks the time to place reports on Bangladesh University of Professionals Bill and Begum Rokeya University Bill.

He afterwards went to Bangkok for treatment and has been there since. The government had earlier extended Koko's parole several times.

Security

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over the last couple of weeks with a cautionary message that the local people are likely to attack the power stations after experiencing load-shedding, officials said.

Government may cut gas supply from fertiliser factories for use in power generation while maintaining power supply for rural irrigation. The government may also fix 7:00 pm instead of existing 8:00 pm for shutting down shops.

Tuku said the government already has decided to ensure uninterrupted power supply from 11:00 pm to 7:00 am every day for irrigation.

Replying to a query, he gave assurance of developing the power sector within a year to deal with the power crisis.

"We can't make any major improvement overnight. But the government would make every efforts to improve the power sector at the earliest possible time," he said blaming the BNP-Jamaat alliance government for the situation.

There are now around 2 lakh Bangladeshis in Kuwait, which used to recruit monthly around 3,000 workers, but hired only 319 Bangladeshis throughout last year.

On the other hand, by partial ban, Bahrain also recruited not more than 1,100 workers monthly last year, while the number was around 1,300 earlier.

Businesses say when international racketeers dominate the recruitment process workers get exploited and engaged in crime that annoys the host countries.

"Recruitment bans by the three Gulf countries were surely linked to such reasons and negligence of our foreign missions," a recruiting agent observes.

"As buy-and-sale of job approvals brings huge profit, agents (unlicensed brokers) buy more job approvals or visas for more profit," says a manpower broker in Malaysia.

The cancellation of 55,000 visas by Malaysia is not only for economic reason, he adds. Many Bangladeshis were left

unemployed and they stayed in the open, while many others were kept in 'go-downs' in Malaysia. These annoyed the Malaysian government, he notes.

About unemployment of Bangladeshis in Singapore, a Singaporean rights activist said, "It is not for recession, but because they were brought as extra workers."

When Malaysia froze intake of Bangladeshis on October 3 in 2007, the country's then home minister Datuk Seri Mohd Radzi Sheikh Ahmad commented, "The presence of too many agents from Bangladesh in Malaysia, who used Malaysians as sub-agents, and the huge amount of money involved, is not a healthy sign, it is not good for the country."

Kuwait's Labour Minister Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al Sabah in an occasion in 2007 expressed annoyance over unscrupulous agencies and said they were facing problems in recruiting labour from Bangladesh.

Nasser al-Abdali, head of the Kuwait Society for the Development of Democracy, said visa trading in Kuwait was worth about three billion dollars annually and charged that officials facilitated the illegal trade, reported the Arab Times on August 24 last year.

"We are concerned over recruiting workers, but not making sure that they get good salaries and are not exploited," says Sakil Millat Morshed, a migration expert.

They challenged the government's 'inaction' in arranging fire-fighting equipment necessary to save the lives of people as well as property.

The petitioners are Asaduzzaman Siddique, Sarwar Ahad Chowdhury and Md Aklas Uddin Bhuiyan.

Home secretary, finance secretary, food and disaster management secretary and director general and director of the Fire Service have been made respondents in the petition.

The petitioners stated, quoting some news items published in the daily newspapers, that due to absence of such equipment to fight fires, authorities failed to control the fire at Bashundhara shopping complex's upper levels from the 14th floor to 20th floor.

Consequently seven people died and property worth millions of taka was destroyed.

The petition also stated that a few years ago a fire at the Ntv Bahaban at Karwan Bazar caused huge damage and at that time also the fire service authority did not have sufficient equipment to reach the top storeys of the building.

The authorities concerned are not aware of the problem and have limitations in terms of manpower and fire fighting equipment, it said, adding that under these circumstances it is very important to arrange sufficient fire fighting equipment for the fire service.

After hearing a brief submission from the petitioners' counsel Manzill Murshid, the HC bench of Justice ABM Khairul Haque and Justice Md Abdul Hye fixed Sunday next for further hearing of the petition.

Malaysia

FROM PAGE 1
stringent vetting process by the authorities, a Home Ministry official told the Star newspaper.

"Those requesting for foreign labour have to prove that they have made the effort to employ locals," the ministry's senior deputy secretary-general Raja Azahar Raja Abdul Manap was quoted as saying.

"If you can prove it, then they will get the clearance," he said.

A ministry spokesman was not immediately available to confirm the report.

In January, Malaysia banned the hiring of new foreigners in the manufacturing and services sectors after a report forecast 45,000 Malaysians would lose their jobs in the next few months.

And last week, the government cancelled work visas issued to 55,000 Bangladeshi workers after unions said the situation for Malaysians was bleak enough without additional foreign manpower being brought in.

Malaysia is one of Asia's largest importers of labour and has an estimated 2.2 million foreign workers, who are the mainstay of the plantation and manufacturing sectors.

However, the government has become concerned about the ramifications of having such a large migrant workforce and periodically tries to reduce it.

Manpower sector

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Bangladeshi workers. These bans had no link with current financial downturn," says a recruiting agent.

Saudi Arabia, which is home to around 20 lakh Bangladeshis, significantly reduced recruitment from Bangladesh in March. It used to recruit 5,000 to 7,000 workers a month in the previous years, but the number has come down to 1,000-1,500 now.

There are now around 2 lakh Bangladeshis in Kuwait, which used to recruit monthly around 3,000 workers, but hired only 319 Bangladeshis throughout last year.

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BDR MUTINY 2 more jawans held in Ctg

STAR REPORT

The Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested two more BDR members yesterday at Satkania Bangladesh Rifles Training School (RTS) in Chittagong on suspicion of their involvement in the mutiny and massacre at the RTS on February 26.

Meanwhile, on the information from the intelligence department, Indian Border Security Force (BSF) launched combing operations and imposed curfew along the border areas. They suspect that BDR mutineers had been escaping to India for hideouts.

Our correspondent from Bandarban reports: The arrested BDR members, sepoy Samedul and sepoy Yunus, were taken for interrogation to Rab-7 headquarters in Chittagong.

Rab sources said in the primary interrogation, they found involvement of the suspects in the mutiny and massacre at RTS.

A total of 11 BDR members were arrested at RTS on March 11. The sepoys arrested include Dulal, Ferdous, Saiful, Sarwar, Ata Ullah, Atiquzzaman, Ziaur Rahman and Abu Ferdous.

A correspondent from Benapole reports: The BSF members are executing search operations in their territory and imposed curfew in the bordering areas from 6:00pm to 5:00am.

Sources said after the arrest of the two mutineers from Satkhira, the BSF at 24-Parganas (north) intensified their vigilance. Moreover, the security and intelligence activities have also been beefed up along the border areas.

Earlier on Friday, sporadic clashes between BCL and ICS men on RU campus left ICS leader Noman killed and 100 people injured.

All higher educational institutions in the city, including RU, have been closed for an indefinite period one after another following the RU clash.

Eden College

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"We demanded 300 seats as ruling political party quota. A source of the college principal assured us of it but the admission committee chairman refused our demand," said Tania Sultana Happy, organising secretary of BCL Eden college unit.

A number of BCL leaders went up to the college office and threatened the admission committee not to continue the admission process until their demand is met, sources said.

However, College Vice-Principal Prof Saiyada Khairunnesa said that they would resume the admission process in couple of days.

The military says it has surrounded the Tiger rebels in a narrow strip of land and expects to soon end the guerrillas' decades-long armed struggle for an independent Tamil homeland.

Meanwhile, all surgeries have stopped at a makeshift hospital in Sri Lanka's war zone because of a lack of basic supplies such as anesthetic and blood bags, the top government health official there said Sunday.

Dr. Thurairaja Varatharajah said the situation was so bad that bed sheets were being used for bandages, while sticks were being used to brace fractured limbs.

"We don't have bandages or gauze, we tear up bed sheets to bind the wounds and use palm sticks to support fractures. We are in need of a quick supply," Varatharajah said.

Four civilians died in the hospital Saturday from injuries, while 48 others were awaiting treatment, he said.

Varatharajah said he sent a report to the government pleading for supplies.

The fate of tens of thousands of civilians caught in the war zone has become a matter of international concern. The UN high commissioner for human rights said Friday that she believed 2,800 have died since Jan. 20, a number the government says is unsubstantiated and based on figures given by the Tamil rebels.

The government says the rebels, who are fighting for a

separate state in the north and east of the island, are using the civilians as human shields in a desperate attempt to avoid defeat.

The rebels could not be reached for comment, and it was not possible to verify the reports independently because reporters are barred from the coastal war zone.

UN human rights chief Navi Pillay warned Friday that civilian casualties could reach "catastrophic" proportions if the two sides do not suspend fighting. She said 150,000 to 180,000 people remain trapped in the rebel area estimated at 13.5 square miles (35 square kilometres) on Sri Lanka's northeast coast.

But the government has rejected the calls for a ceasefire in its drive to capture the shrinking rebel enclave and end the island's 25-year-old civil war.

Human Rights Minister Mahinda Samarasinghe said Pillay's report failed to tell the rebels to let civilians in the area leave.

"If the high commissioner for human rights is concerned about these civilians, then the high commissioner must call on the LTTE to let them go," he told reporters Saturday.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam countered Sunday with a statement that called on the United Nations to investigate the military's treatment of civilians. The statement, posted on the pro-rebel Web site TamilNet, did not comment on charges by Pillay that the rebels may have committed war crimes.

The government has said repeatedly that it does not target civilians.

The rebels have fought since 1983 for an independent state for the Tamil minority, which suffered decades of marginalisation at the hands of governments dominated by the Sinhalese majority.

More than 70,000 people have been killed in the fighting.

Sharif defies 'arrest'

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Sharif denounced the order as illegal and later left the house in a convoy of vehicles packed with chanting, flag-waving supporters, headed for a downtown rally that had already turned violent.

Mobs accompanying the swelling convoy smashed the windows of buses parked along the route. Others torched tires, sending plumes of black smoke into the blue sky over a usually bustling boulevard littered with stones and empty tear gas shells.

"These are the decisive moments," Sharif told supporters before he climbed into his car. "I tell every Pakistani youth that this is not the time to stay home; Pakistan is calling you to come and save me."

Rao Iftikhar, a senior government official, said authorities considered the restrictions on Sharif to allow him to address the rally and return home afterward.

Earlier Punjab Police also placed under house arrest Jamat-e-Islami (JI) chief Qazi Hussain Ahmed and the leader of Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf Imran Khan, Geo News reported.

According to informed sources, overnight orders included names of other political leaders like Shahbaz Sharif, Hamza Shahbaz, Zulfiqar Khosa, Qazi Hussain Ahmed and Liaquat Baloch.

Washington worries that the crisis will further destabilize the shaky the year-old government and prevent it from being an effective ally in the fight against insurgents in Afghanistan.

Suspected militants attacked a transport terminal in northwestern Pakistan used to supply Nato troops in Afghanistan before dawn on Sunday and torched dozens of containers and military vehicles, police said.

Lawyers and opposition party supporters had planned to gather near Lahore's main court complex before heading toward Islamabad to stage a mass sit-in front of Parliament, in defiance of a government ban.

To thwart them, authorities parked trucks across major roads on the edge of the city, and riot police took up positions outside the railway station and government buildings.

Still, several thousands flag-waving demonstrators pushed past police barricades to reach the courts.

Sharif's party welcomed the move but stuck by its demand for a shake-up of the judiciary.

Zardari refuses to reinstate a group of independent-minded judges fired by Musharraf.

Many observers suspect Zardari fears the judges could challenge a pact signed by Musharraf that quashed long-standing corruption charges against him and his wife, slain former leader Benazir Bhutto.

Sceptics suspect Sharif of hoping to force early elections, from which he and Islamist parties would likely profit.

Lankan troops kill

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and international observers from entering the conflict zone.

However the UN human rights chief Navi Pillay on Friday said some 2,800 civilians had been killed in the fighting since January 20, adding that both sides may be guilty of war crimes.

Sri Lankan leaders rejected the charges as "unsubstantiated."

The military says it has surrounded the Tiger rebels in a narrow strip of land and expects to soon end the guerrillas' decades-long armed struggle for an independent Tamil homeland.

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Govt plans

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returned home from Malaysia yesterday as they were not employed and paid, said an official at Zia International Airport.

Meanwhile, labour wings of both Awami League and BNP yesterday requested Malaysia Trade Union Congress to take immediate steps to protect the rights and interest of Bangladeshi workers in that country.

Replying to a query, Khandaker Mosharrar Hossain said the allegations against high commission officials concerned in Kuala Lumpur will be investigated and actions would be taken accordingly.

He said the government is also considering compensation to unemployed workers who have returned home.

Foreign Minister Dr Dipu Moni and Mosharrar are likely to visit Malaysia on March 29-30 to thrash out the current labour problems there.