

Migrant workers

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strong overseas recruitment policy amending the existing regulations.

The minister said the government is actively working to establish a bank for the expatriates to provide them with loans that will facilitate migration, and will provide investment opportunities for workers who will return home from abroad.

A gangway will be built connecting Zia International Airport and the airport train station, so returning migrants may go to the station directly on arrival, without any harassment from taxicabs or microbuses drivers and others, Musharraf Hossain said.

For the welfare of female migrant workers, the government will set up reception centres in different countries under the supervision of Bangladesh missions, he promised.

Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Ministry Anisul Islam Mahmud said the government has almost no contribution in around \$10 billion remittance sent by expatriate Bangladeshis.

The migrants' earning is around 2.5 times the foreign exchange earning of \$4 billion from the readymade garments sector, he said.

He said the recruiting agencies send money overseas illegally to buy job demands, and the government and Bangladesh Bank know it, but they did nothing to provide legal ways for the agencies to send money abroad, although the recruiting agencies are the ones who created the large overseas market for Bangladeshi labourers.

He suggested 'economic diplomacy' for Bangladesh and said officials appointed to Bangladesh missions must have labour related orientation.

State Minister for Foreign Affairs Dr Hasan Mahmud said protecting migrant workers' rights is a shared responsibility of both the receiving and sending countries. International organisations like IOM could help in a great way in that regard, he added.

At the dialogue, IOM Regional Representative for South Asia Rabab Fatima said labour migration growth seen over the past few years might not sustain, because many countries including Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand already announced that no more visas will be issued, and in the case of unavoidable retrenchment, foreign workers will be laid off.

The outflow of Bangladeshi workers to Gulf countries, where more than 80 percent of them are employed, declined by 16 percent, she said.

Measures are also taken in South Korea and Europe to prioritise local employment, Fatima said, adding that the measures may result in workers returning home and fewer of them going abroad to work.

According to official statistics, this year 2 lakh workers went abroad and 27,000 returned. The number of returnees is around double the number of last year's corresponding period.

Fatima suggested maintaining a database of returnees, and taking measures to reintegrate them in the local economy through micro-credit programmes, and small and medium enterprises schemes.

Referring to the still upward trend of remittance from abroad, Centre for Policy Dialogue's Distinguished Fellow Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya said, "The worst is yet to come. We should not be complacent."

On layoffs of migrant workers, the eminent economist

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said there is no early warning system in the country, and so it is difficult to predict on the subject.

"We need a good database and regular monitoring. Otherwise the debate will be unending," Bhattacharya said, emphasising on exploring new markets and initiatives to protect migrant workers' rights.

Warbe Development Foundation Chairman Syed Saiful Haque said they have reports that say many migrant workers are returning empty handed, but the authorities are not analysing the situation. "We are waiting for a tsunami," he added.

Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industries (FBCCI) President Annisul Huq said expatriate workers are not the only ones losing jobs, a several thousand garment workers at home will also lose jobs in the next few months.

He however said if a proper database is maintained, ways can surely be found for their employment. Exploring new job markets is a must for the government, he said.

Expatriate workers are the golden goose. With a minimum investment, we can change the scenario," said The Daily Star Editor and Publisher Mahfuz Anam who moderated the dialogue.

The sector must be recognised as an industry, and a strong legal framework that supports the recruiting agencies and the workers is imperative for that, he added.

Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies Joint Secretary Shameem Ahmed Chowdhury, Bangladesh Bank Executive Director Chowdhury Mohidul Haque, Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training Director General Masud Ahmed also spoke, while

Asif Munir of IOM presented the keynote paper.

Khoka, Abbas

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"I told him [Abbas] that we all should work together to make the chairperson's programme successful," Khoka said while talking to The Daily Star before the meeting.

Asked if he can convene any party meeting since he is no longer a designated leader of the party's city committee, Khoka said, "The chairperson has asked me to organise the party in the city and as a party worker we are working to make Saturday's rally a success."

Mirza Abbas said the party office already informed him about the meeting. "I will do anything and I will go to any place to make the chairperson's programme successful," he told The Daily Star.

Jatiyatabdali Sramik Dal, labourers' wing of the main opposition BNP, will hold the rally on the occasion of May Day.

Earlier, organisers of such a preparatory meeting did not invite Khoka and his followers and this annoyed him.

On Monday night, Khaleda held an exclusive meeting with Khoka and asked him to work to reorganise the party's city unit, the most important unit of the party.

Khaleda also called Mirza Abbas to her Gulshan office on Tuesday night and discussed the next city unit committee. She asked Abbas to work together with Khoka.

Abbas said meetings between him and the chairperson was nothing new. "I met her a hundred times in the last 30 years... But a game is going on against me," said Abbas.

A number of leaders including Sramik Dal President Nazrul Islam Khan, former city unit general secretary Abdus Salam and a few ward councilors attended yesterday's meeting.

BNP fails to submit

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up the December 29 parliamentary election, told The Daily Star.

BNP Office Secretary Rizvi Ahmed also said he knows nothing about it. "Nazrul Islam Khan knows well about this as he handled the party's election fund," he said.

Senior officials at the EC Secretariat said none of BNP leaders communicated with them to know the details of the procedure for submitting the election expenditure report.

However, leaders of a few other political parties communicated with the commission officials as it is the first time political parties are submitting their electoral expenditures to the EC for scrutiny, the EC Secretariat officials said.

They said Jatiya Party leaders came up with an election expenditure report on Tuesday but took it back when they were told the report was

incomplete. The JP leaders said they would come back on Wednesday with a complete report. But they did not submit the report as of 5:00pm yesterday.

The Workers Party of Bangladesh, Muslim League and National People's Party earlier submitted brief expenditure reports.

The EC has decided to appoint chartered accountants to audit the election expenditures of political parties and candidates that contested in the December 29 parliamentary election and to post the documents submitted by the parties on its website.

Thirty-eight registered political parties contested the ninth parliamentary elections. According to the Representation of the People Order, they were required to submit the expenditure reports by March 31.

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