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BANGLADESHIS IN KSA

4 lakh to turn legal workers

PORIMOL PALMA

Around four lakh Bangladeshi workers in Saudi Arabia will get their status legalised through taking advantage of a general amnesty granted to foreign workers.

The amnesty, declared on May 10, allows irregular foreign workers to have their status legalised or return home without facing any penalty.

"We estimate four to five lakh irregular Bangladeshi workers will make use of the amnesty," Bangladesh's ambassador to the Kingdom, Shahidul Islam, told The Daily Star over the phone on Thursday.

He said thousands of Bangladeshi workers were thronging the Bangladesh missions in Riyadh, Jeddah and four other temporary camps to obtain consular services that included getting their passports and other documents updated.

Eighteen additional staff from Bangladesh had joined the missions in Riyadh and Jeddah, and more would be joining soon, Shahidul Islam said, adding that 200 local volunteers had also been recruited to help the workers.

Until May 21, the Bangladesh envoy said, over 40,000 workers had secured their documents required for legalisation of their status for continuing in their jobs or returning home.

The amnesty also allowed foreigners who overstayed their Umrah or Hajj visas before July 3, 2008 to work as domestic workers or for private companies.

Thousands of Bangladeshi workers who could not change their employers due to restrictions on job transfer by Bangladeshis since early 2008, can also change jobs now.

"These are the opportunities that were highly expected by the Bangladeshis. But the biggest challenge is to reach all our people and explain how they could utilise the

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Lichi farmers harvest the summer fruit at their orchard in Birampur of Dinajpur. Lichis are usually available in the market for a short period, but this year early harvest has already made them available in the capital's markets. The prices of the fruit vary between Tk 200 and Tk 800 per 100 depending on variety.

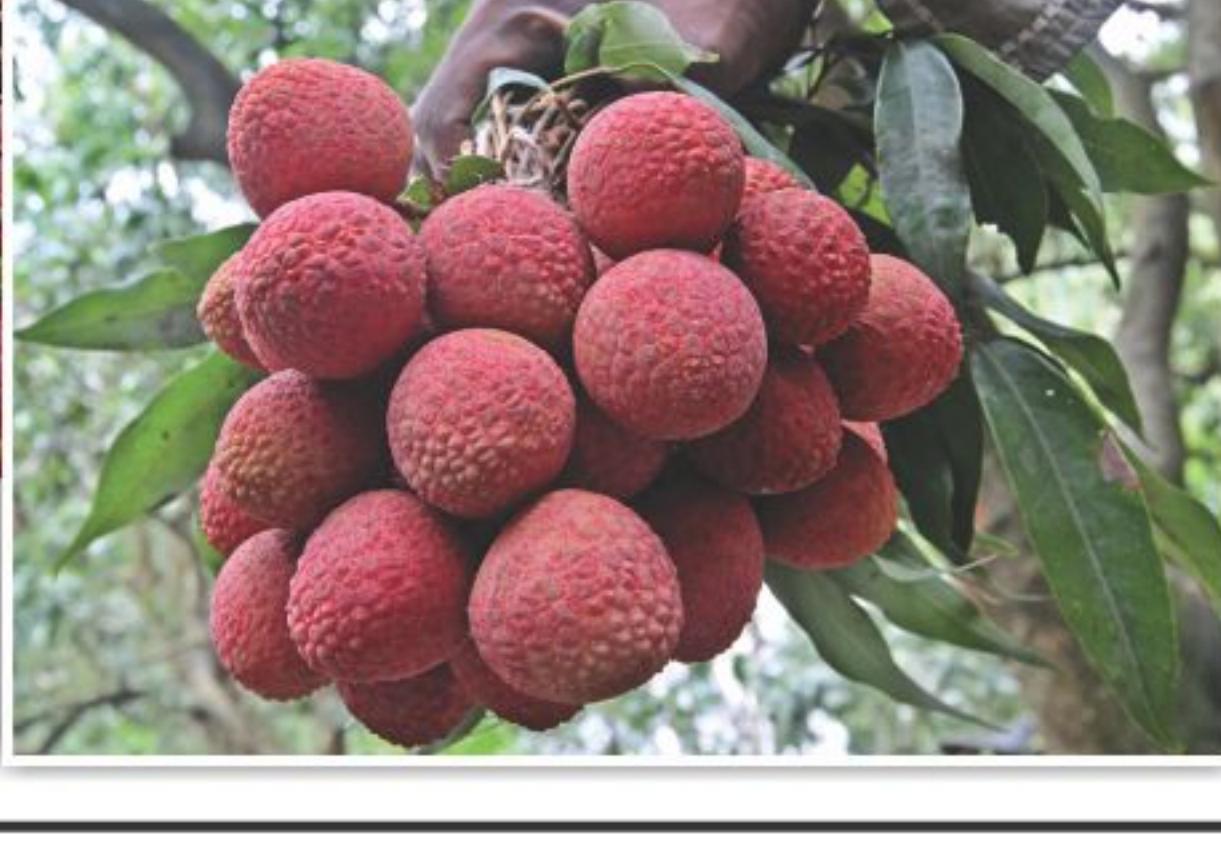


PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Red revolution started 60 years back

KONGKON KARMAKER,
Dinajpur

Lichi, one of Bangladesh's most popular seasonal fruits – sweet and succulent – grows abundantly in many northern districts, especially in Dinajpur.

With much higher financial returns than from cultivating crops such as sugarcane, farmers are turning in large numbers to the fruit and using more land to grow it. Lichi comes in different names such as bedana, madraji and bombai.

By far, bedana is the most expensive and in the highest demand, farmers and local agriculture officials say.

According to them, while annual income from cultivating one hectare of land for sugarcane or rice yields Tk 20,000, using the same land for cultivating lichis would give the grower as much as Tk 200,000.

Lichis made their advent in the Dinajpur area about 60 years ago before

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Threat to revoke GSP unjust
Says Muhith

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance Minister AMA Muhith yesterday termed "unjust" the West's threat to withdraw the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) facility for Bangladesh.

"The discrimination against Bangladesh is utterly illogical, unjust and unfair," said Muhith while talking to an International Business Forum of Bangladesh (IBFB) delegation at the finance ministry.

He said the USA charged France 5 percent tax whereas Bangladesh paid 24 percent duty on goods exported to the US market. They said if they gave similar facility to Bangladesh, other least developed countries would suffer.

Muhith asked the IBFB representatives to raise the issue in different international forums and use all available means in

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US retailers should sign safe RMG deal

Observes visiting Congressman Miller; plans to visit factories to see workplace safety

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

US Congressman George Miller yesterday promised to urge large retailers Wal-Mart, Gap and Target to sign the building and fire safety accord for garment factories in Bangladesh.

So far, only two American firms -- Abercrombie and Fitch and PVH, which own the Calvin Klein and Tommy Hilfiger brands -- have signed the deal initiated by global trade union IndustriALL.

Miller was speaking at a meeting with labour leaders of four federations of garment sector at the American Centre for International Labour Solidarity in Dhaka. Miller did not speak to the media.

"Safety in work places is a prime concern for the garment workers, so Wal-Mart, now the second

largest outsourcing company after Swedish retailer H&M, and other US companies should also sign the accord," said a leader of a federation requesting anonymity.

A leader who was present in the meeting said Miller mainly talked about two things, one of them being trade union in the garment sector.

Miller wanted to know from the labour leaders whether the government was allowing registration of trade unions in the garment sector and whether the proposed amendment to labour laws was favourable to the workers, he said.

Another leader said, "We told Miller that the tragedy at Rana Plaza would not have had happened if there was a trade union, which could have

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Ultimate privacy

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Have you ever dreamed of having a home in the middle of nowhere to escape to every now and then? At least, some people have. And this house built straight in the middle of the Drina River in Serbia fits the bill perfectly.

Standing on an exposed rock bang in the center of the river, near the town of Bajina Basta, this tiny house has been getting a lot of attention on the internet ever since it was captured on camera last

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Dhaka to let New Delhi tranship foodgrains

STAR REPORT

Dhaka has agreed to allow New Delhi to use its water and land territory for transporting foodgrains to the mountainous northern states of India.

"India is being allowed to ferry 10,000 tonnes of rice on humanitarian ground," Commerce Secretary Mahbub Ahmed told The Daily Star last night, adding a decision in this regard has already been made by the shipping ministry and his ministry just given a no objection certificate to it.

According to shipping ministry sources,

the decision to allow India to tranship foodgrains was taken at a meeting at the ministry on April 29 with prime minister's economic adviser Mashiur Rahman in the chair.

Different Indian media reported about it yesterday.

"Initially, the Bangladesh government has agreed to transport 10,000 tonnes of foodgrains for Tripura through its territory," Tripura Food and Civil Supplies Minister Bhanul Saha told IANS.

"After some security-related clearance,

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Police lied about day of arrest

Family demands judicial probe

STAR REPORT

Clues suggest that Shamim Reza, who died in custody on Wednesday, was arrested on May 14, not on May 19 as claimed by Sonargaon Police Station Inspector Arup Tarafdar, said the head of a probe committee yesterday.

"Keeping somebody in police custody for six days without producing him in court falls under no law," Dhaka Range Additional DIG (Crime) Golam Faruq told journalists after talking to the victim's family members and locals in Sonargaon upazila of Narayanganj.



Shamim Reza

His statement also corroborates The Daily Star's findings.

Faruq leads a three-member probe committee formed by Dhaka Range Deputy Inspector General Mahfuzul Haque Nuruzzaman on Friday.

Two other members of the committee are Additional Superintendent of Police (Administration) of Narayanganj and Additional SP of Narsingdi Subrata Kumar.

Earlier on Thursday, the SP of Narayanganj formed another three-member probe body headed by Additional

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RANA PLAZA VICTIMS
Two more succumb to injuries

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two survivors from the Rana Plaza collapse died yesterday while under treatment at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital and Square Hospital, bringing the death toll to 1,129.

Ashraful Islam, 18, died

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| PRAYER TIMING | |
|---------------|------------|
| May 26 | |
| Azan | Jamaat |
| Fajr | 4:05 4:40 |
| Zohr | 12:45 1:15 |
| Asr | 5:00 5:15 |
| Maghrib | 6:40 6:45 |
| Esha | 8:00 8:30 |

Source: Islamic Foundation

China dominates new 'atheist map'

MAIL ONLINE

China has the highest amount of atheists living in a single country with nearly 50 per cent of its population describing themselves as non-believers, a new survey has revealed.

Around 47 per cent of people living in China describe themselves as atheists compared to an average of 13 per cent across the world.

A 2012 poll by WIN/Gallup International surveyed more than 50,000 people across 40 countries whether they considered themselves "religious", "not religious" or "convinced atheist".

It is perhaps not surprising that China has the highest amount of atheists as its republic government was officially atheist when it formed in 1949.

All temples and religious relics were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution of 1967 to 1977.

But the country did relax its religious policy with the 1978 Constitution of the People's Republic of China

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The Daily Star



ONLINE POLL

Do you think that the government's decision to install a filter in the internet gateways of the country would hamper free flow of information?

Yes (84%)

No (16%)

TOTAL VOTES: 220

TODAY'S POLL

Do you think AL Joint Secretary General Mahbubul Alam Hanif's allegation that the demand for caretaker government was not BNP's main agenda is justified?

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To Text

School bus fire kills 16 kids in Pakistan
BBC ONLINE

At least 16 children and their teacher have been killed when their school bus caught fire in eastern Pakistan, police say.

At least seven more children were taken to hospital after the incident on the outskirts of the city of Gujrat.

It's not clear how the fire broke out. Early reports that a gas cylinder

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According to shipping ministry sources,

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