

Vacation

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An official within the ministry, seeking anonymity, said, "As the opposition parties have threatened tougher agitation programmes after Eid-ul-Fitr, further political unrest is inevitable. This is another reason to shorten the vacation period."

The country witnessed 31 hartal days in total from January to July this year.

Usually the government shut schools and colleges at the beginning of Ramadan on request of the traffic department, which considers it an easy way to deal with the horrendous traffic situation during the holy month.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police said that the decision may have a negative impact on the traffic situation in the capital.

"Apart from maintaining the traffic management with two regular shifts, an additional special team will work from 2:00pm to 9:00pm to ease the traffic situation," said Khan Muhammed Rajowan, deputy commissioner (traffic-south) of DMP.

He said 200 members of community police will be deployed at different markets and shopping centres in the capital as well.

However, DMP Joint Commissioner Monirul Islam told The Daily Star no such decisions were taken yet, but the DMP would take proper measures after assessing the needs.

Factories

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Three weeks after the Rana Plaza collapse that left 1,132 workers dead in April.

In a statement yesterday, Jyrki Raina, general secretary of IndustriALL, said, "Our mission is clear: to ensure the safety of all workers in the Bangladesh garment industry. Direct involvement of workers in the factories is key to the success of this programme."

Major signatories to the accord include H&M, Carrefour, Marks & Spencer and PVH, the parent company of Calvin Klein and Tommy Hilfiger.

US retail giants Wal-Mart, Gap and Target didn't sign the accord, as they plan to carry out separate inspections in garment factories in Bangladesh.

However, a few American companies, including PVH, Abercrombie & Fitch and Sean John signed the accord. Loblaw, a Canadian retailer that produces the Joe Fresh clothing line, has also joined it.

According to the plan, an emergency protocol will ensure swift action to protect workers at any factory where existing inspection programmes or worker reports identify an immediate threat to life and limb, the statement said.

Any signatory company using the factory in question will be notified immediately and the factory owner will be told to cease operations pending further investigation or repairs.

With the involvement of local unions, factory workers will be informed of the potential danger and their right to refuse to enter a potentially unsafe building, it said.

A viable plan with renovations and repairs undertaken to address the hazards will be produced and workers will be paid while the factory remains closed, according to the statement.

Andy York, ethical trading manager of N Brown Group, said, "The signatories agree that this joint effort is a credible and effective programme with a genuine commitment from all parties to work together."

"This is the only way to bring about long-term, sustainable change in the garment industry in Bangladesh."

To allow for inspections, the Western retailers agreed to send in by July 15 the names and addresses of all Bangladeshi factories they use, according to a report of The New York Times.

"In an unusual move, the list of these factories, expected to total nearly 1,000, will be made public, as will the inspection reports. Companies often resist disclosing the names of their overseas suppliers for fear of competitors stealing them," said the report.

EU outlines action plan

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support for Bangladesh as well as sound a warning of what it could expect if the country failed to live up to expectations.

The agreement came following a high-level meeting with the EU trade commissioner, representatives from the International Labour Organisation (ILO), and major US retailers yesterday in Geneva. Foreign Minister Dipu Moni led the Bangladesh side in the meeting.

To safeguard EU trade benefits, Bangladesh yesterday pledged to immediately improve worker rights and recruit more factory inspectors to ensure safety standards.

Speaking at the agreement launching, EU Trade Commissioner Karel De Gucht said: "I realise that this will be a challenging task for Bangladesh. I am fully aware of the need for Bangladesh to receive support. Let me be clear: The EU is ready to help."

He, however, issued a warning: "I want to make it clear that Bangladesh - or for that matter any other Least Developed Country - cannot take for granted the trade preferences it currently enjoys."

"Under the Everything But Arms scheme, the EU may consider appropriate action should there be no, or insufficient, progress for Bangladeshi workers."

"Today's 'Compact' is a key step and we expect the Bangladesh government to continue working closely with the ILO, industry and trade unions to improve the day-to-day life for workers."

De Gucht said the initiative of convening the high-level meeting in Geneva was taken to reduce the risks of another Rana Plaza-type tragedy happening again in Bangladesh.

"All of us here today are committed to doing our utmost to prevent such a terrible loss of life in the future."

The Compact commits the Government of Bangladesh, the EU and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) to a number of time-bound actions, according to documents available on the website of the European Commission.

Under the agreement, Bangladesh will have to reform its labour law to strengthen workers' rights -- in particular regarding freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, and to improve occupational health and safety.

"New rules must be in place as soon as possible after the adoption of the new labour law. The ILO will monitor the effective enforcement of the new legislation," the EU trade commissioner said.

He said Bangladesh would have to improve building and fire safety, especially structural safety of buildings and fire safety in ready-made garment factories by June 2014. The ILO will help to coordinate efforts and mobilise technical resources.

Bangladesh will have to recruit 200 additional inspectors by the end of 2013, as part of efforts to ensure regular visits to factories and assess them in terms of working conditions, including occupational safety and health, and compliance with labour laws.

"What happened in Bangladesh just over two months ago is simply unacceptable. It is our duty to change this situation and quickly," said Gucht.

He said EU lawmakers and European consumers expected reassurances that Bangladesh is moving in the right direction.

De Gucht said the first true test of Bangladesh's commitment would be the adoption by its parliament of a revised labour law at the end of this week or early next week.

"The objective is to beef up crucial aspects of the labour law - notably freedom of association, the right to collective bargaining as well as improved occupational safety and health."

The EU commissioner expects the revised labour law to apply to all workers, including those in export processing zones.

"It is essential that the workers in such zones enjoy the same rights and working conditions as workers in other parts of Bangladesh."

Bangladesh enjoys an extremely favourable trade regime under the EU's "Everything But Arms" initiative.

This is of particular importance for ready-made garments, which represent about 90 per cent of Bangladesh's exports to the EU. These enter the EU market with no restriction: duty-free and quota-free. These exports to the EU account for about 2.5 million jobs - mostly for women.

Gucht noted that the EU had discussed the "Compact" with its American partners.

"They are still in the decision-making process on joining the initiative."

BANGLADESH'S PLEDGES
To implement the National Tripartite Plan of Action on Fire Safety and Structural Integrity in the RMG, in accordance with the established milestones and timelines, as stipulated in the Programme of Action.

To assess the structural building safety and fire safety of all active export-oriented RMG and knitwear factories in Bangladesh by June 2014 - with the most populated factories assessed

by the end of 2013 - and initiate remedial actions, including relocation of unsafe factories.

To develop the publicly accessible database described in paragraph 1.h, to record: the dates of labour, fire and building safety inspections; identification of inspectors, violations identified, fines and sanctions administered; factories ordered closed and actually closed; factories ordered relocated and actually relocated; violations remediated; and information on management and worker fire and building safety training activities subject to relevant national legislation.

The ILO, with the help of other development partners, will monitor and assist in mobilising technical resources required to undertake the measures.

In a joint statement to launch the new EU Compact, EU Trade Commissioner Gucht, ILO Director General Guy Ryder, and Bangladesh Foreign Minister Dipu Moni said they welcomed the fact that over 70 major fashion and retail brands sourcing RMG from Bangladesh had signed an Accord on Fire and Building Safety to coordinate their efforts to help improve safety in Bangladesh's factories which supplied them.

In this context, they encourage other companies, including SMEs, to join the Accord expeditiously within their respective capacities.

Blast kills 6 in Pakistan

AP, Peshawar

Police say a bomb blast targeting a pro-government tribal elder has killed six people in northwest Pakistan.

Police officer Fazal Naeem Khan says it's unclear whether the elder, Malik Habibullah Khan, is among those killed in the attack yesterday, but his vehicle was damaged. The explosion in Hangu district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province also wounded 10 people.

No one has claimed responsibility for the attack, but suspicion likely will fall on the Pakistani Taliban.

The Pakistani government has encouraged tribesmen in the northwest to form militias to fight against the Taliban. The militants have carried out many retaliatory attacks against these groups. PATNA: One person was detained by the NIA today in connection with the terror attack on Buddhism's holiest shrine here even as authorities released the CCTV footage of the serial blasts at the historic Mahabodhi temple and adjoining areas.

It's psychological

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illness," said IEDCR Director Prof Mahmudur Rahman yesterday while speaking at a workshop for media at the institute's auditorium in Mohakhali.

He said that nothing significant was found after water samples collected from the factories were tested in the environmental microbiology lab at the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Diseases Research, Bangladesh. "Although the aerobic bacterial count in the water samples was higher than the World Health Organization recommended count, bacterial contamination would take days to develop and the affected person would end up contracting diarrhoea."

IEDCR recommended that the sick workers be isolated and provided with immediate medical attention and as long term measures, a friendly environment and improved ventilation systems must always be maintained.

Renowned psychiatrist Dr Mohit Kamal and Director General of Health Services Md Shefyetullah were also present at the workshop.

Dr Kamal said counselling systems were non-existent in the garment factories and needed to be reinforced immediately.

Shefyetullah said, "The Ministry of Labour, BGMEA and BKMEA must ensure that all the garment factories follow the Occupational Health guidelines of labour ministry which requires one doctor for every 500 workers," as he pointed out that doctors, nurses and paramedics at most garment factories existed only on paper.

Next polls to follow other parliamentary democracies

Says Hasina

UNB, London

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday reiterated that the next general elections in Bangladesh would follow the other parliamentary democracies across the world.

"The next general elections in Bangladesh will be held the way elections are being held in other parliamentary democracies," she said during a meeting with peers and British MPs at her hotel on the last day of her UK visit.

Hasina claimed that all the elections held during the tenure of the present government were free, fair and credible.

In this regard, she referred to the recently held four city corporation elections in Rajshahi, Khulna, Sylhet and Barisal, and freshly in Gazipur where the Awami League-backed candidates were defeated.

"Of the five city corporations, some were the strongholds of Awami League, but its candidates had to concede defeats.

"This means the elections could be held in free, fair and neutral manner under this government," she said.

Mughal era

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He, however, said the committee at a meeting recently agreed to demolish the structure that is housing the Islamic research centre.

Regional Director of the Department of Archaeology Ataur Rahman, which is carrying out the restoration job, said removal of the illegal structures around the Eidgah is a big challenge for the department.

"We shall restore the Mughal legacy in its original look but this will be meaningless without some sort of beautification of the site," he told The Daily Star.

Contacted, lawmaker from the area Fazole Noor Tapash said he would help ensure removal of all the illegal structures from the historic site and make it a place for the younger generations to learn about the nation's rich heritage.

"I have already talked to people who have encroached upon the area, and they have promised to remove the structures soon," Tapash said.

Fresh agitation for caretaker after Eid: Khaleda

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia last night said the opposition alliance will announce fresh agitation programmes after Eid-ul-Fitr to realise their demand for the restoration of non-party caretaker government system.

While exchanging greetings with the newly elected mayor of Khulna city, Moniruzzaman Moni, at her Gulshan office, Khaleda also said the government had become isolated.

People have sent the ruling Awami League a message through recent polls to the five city corporations that they no more want to see the party in power, she added.

Congratulating Moni, Khaleda urged the 18-party leaders and activists to retain unity to achieve a landslide victory in the next national election like that of recent city corporation polls.

"People have defeated the government by 5-0 goals in the city corporation elections. We'll be able to defeat it by more goals if we can maintain our unity."

Referring to the Awami League leader Tofail Ahmed's remark that Gazipur is their second stronghold after Gopalganj, Khaleda said people have showed red card to the ruling party in the city. "Try to realise what will happen in Gopalganj in the next polls."



BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia

5 labourers kidnapped in Rangamati

STAR REPORT

Five labourers of a contractor working at the Teletalk base station were kidnapped by unidentified criminals from Baribindughat in Baghaichhari upazila of Rangamati yesterday evening.

Baghaichhari police have only confirmed the names of two of the labourers - Akhter Hossain and Suja Miah, reports our local correspondent.

Shah Alam, general manager (planning) of state-run mobile phone operator Teletalk, told The Daily Star that the kidnapped people were not their staff but labourers working for a contractor.

Men of the contractor had rushed to Rangamati to discuss the issue with the local administration, he added.

Amena Begum, superintendent of police in Rangamati, said she had heard that five people were abducted by unknown people on their way back from a Teletalk tower near Baribindughat around 6:00pm yesterday.

The Daily Star was yet to reach the contractor.

UK, US face

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agencies. The organisation hopes for a public hearing and early rulings because of the seriousness of the situation.

The group was prompted into legal action by the US whistleblower Edward Snowden and the leak of top secret papers he gave to the Guardian. This led to a series of stories about the extent of modern-day surveillance and the disclosure of activities that have provoked a worldwide debate about the behaviour of western intelligence agencies.

In a 22-page statement of grounds, Privacy International refers to the Prism programme, which allows the NSA to intercept the communications of non-US citizens living outside America from global

internet companies such as Google, Facebook and Yahoo.

The Guardian revealed that some of this information has been shared with GCHQ. So far the government has refused to say under what legal authority this has been done - if GCHQ had wanted to get this material for itself in the UK, it would have to apply under the Regulatory of Investigatory Powers act (RIPA) for a warrant from a minister.

Campaigners fear Britain is circumventing its own rules to make it easier to get intelligence, and that the emails and calls of Britons are almost certainly being swept up by the NSA.

In modern communications, emails and phone calls made in the UK pass

electronically through the US and can be intercepted by the NSA.

The second ground focuses on Tempora, a system that stores for up to 30 days vast quantities of data drawn from undersea internet cables.

The Guardian revealed this programme is part of an over-arching project at GCHQ called "Mastering the Internet". The data is shared with NSA and by last year 550 analysts from both countries were filtering through the contents.

The civil rights group Liberty has also made a complaint to the IPT. It believes that its own electronic communications and those of its staff may have been unlawfully intercepted by the security services and GCHQ.

Friend testifies for SQ Chy

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April 4 to September 2 during the Liberation War.

Defending himself as the first defence witness, SQ Chowdhury was trying to establish his alibi during the war.

Nizam said he was introduced to SQ Chowdhury by one of his maternal cousins Qayum Reza Chowdhury at Notre Dame College. They were student of the 1967-68 batch of the institution.

He was also introduced with SQ Chowdhury's another cousin Salman Fazlur Rahman.

They enrolled at Dhaka University in the 1968-69 session.

The defence witness said SQ Chowdhury had lived at his Dhanmondi house at that time and all of them had taken part in the 1969's Mass Movement.

Nizam said on the evening of March 25, 1971 Bangladesh Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's press secretary Aminul Haque Badsha had gone to Hotel Intercontinental to give a press release.

The witness said he had accompanied Badsha.

Around 10:30pm on March 25, Pakistani army ordered everyone at the hotel not to go out.

"We were stuck at the hotel until March 27," he said, adding, British journalist Simon Dring, French photographer Michelle and Barrister Moudud Ahmed were also with them.

Defying the order, Dring and Michelle collected news and shot photos of mass killings by the Pakistani army on March 25, said the defence witness.

After withdrawal of curfew on March 27, Nizam went to his Dhanmondi house and Qayum went to his Moghbazar house, while Badsha went into hiding.

The witness said he and Qayum had taken shelter at the residence of a Swedish family in Dhanmondi. "As Qayum could speak Urdu, he moved out on a jeep," he said, adding, Sheikh Kamal also

took shelter at that house.

"While staying at that house, Qayum told me that he had driven Salauddin Quader Chowdhury to the airport and managed a taxi-cab for Kamal to Aricha," said the defence witness.

Nizam said he had left the Swedish family after four days as the Pakistani army ordered foreigners to leave Dhaka.

The defence witness said he had planned to go to Germany through Karachi.

"On April 7-8, Salman, Qayum and I left for Karachi from Dhaka. We stayed at Salman's house in Karachi. One or two days later Salauddin came to visit us," he said, adding that Qayum was arrested on the way from Karachi to Islamabad.

Prosecutor Zead Al Malum yesterday started cross-examining the defence witness. The prosecutor however sought an adjournment for two days saying the defence did not provide particulars of the witness' testimony earlier.

The three-member tribunal led by Justice ATM Fazle Kabir adjourned the proceeding until today.

Meanwhile, the defence of war crimes accused Motiur Rahman Nizami yesterday completed cross-examining the 12th prosecution witness.

ICT-2 The International Crimes Tribunal-2 yesterday fixed July 11 for recording testimony of the investigation officer of the case against war crimes accused BNP leader Abdul Alim after completing recording of testimonies of the prosecution's public witnesses.

Earlier in the day, the three-member tribunal led by Justice Obaidul Hassan with members Justice Md Mozibur Rahman Miah and Judge Md Shahinur Islam completed recording the testimonies of the 33rd and 34th prosecution witnesses.

Anisur Rahman, a librarian of the investigation agency designated to probe war crimes, exhibited some

documents, while Nabibur Rahman, commander of Bangladesh Muktiyoddha Sangsad, Akkelpur Upazila Command, exhibited a book titled "Muktijuddhe Joypurhat", which was seized by the investigation officer.

After their testimonies, prosecutor Rana Dasgupta told the tribunal that the next witness was investigation officer ZM Altafur Rahman.

Thirty-four prosecution witnesses including eight seizure-list witnesses have testified in the case against Alim, who was indicted on 17 charges including murder and genocide committed during the war.

Rana Dasgupta yesterday told The Daily Star that among the 17 charges, the prosecution could have tendered witnesses in 15 charges except the third and fourth charges.

"We believe that the witnesses, who have testified, are enough to prove the [15] charges framed against Alim," he said.

RMG official

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when he was coming to it.

Farid also alleged that Mahadi had been demanding jhut of the factory instead of the owner selling these to others for the last six months.

Mahadi had beaten up a security guard of the factory four months ago, and also blasted cocktails in front of the factory, he said.

A general diary had then been filed with Mirpur Police Station in this connection, Farid added.

Mirpur police said they had heard of yesterday's incident.

Coast guards

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(BGB) detained 14 people including an alleged trafficker from the Whykang check post in Teknaf upazila on July 6.

The BGB members also detained nine other people including three alleged traffickers from the same check post on July 5.

What sort of mind

women, built by their money and run by them efficiently, he said.

"Now the government says they are going to take it over. They will split it into 19 pieces. My God! How dare they say that? What kind of government is it?" he asked.

"What sort of a mind works behind this? I could not understand. So, I thought I must let people know."

It will be destroying the most prestigious and efficient organisation in this country, he said. "We are in a hostile environment in the last two and a half years."

The Nobel laureate made the remarks at a monthly luncheon meeting of American Chamber of Commerce in Bangladesh (AmCham) at Ruposhi Bangla Hotel.

Yunus also highlighted the concept of social business and shared his experiences on social business in Glasgow, London and Sweden.

In London, where many people were starving, he said the real issue was not feeding the hungry. "The real issue was creating the ability to find food for themselves."

"Giving free food means you aren't solving the problem, you are nourishing the problem. I am not

saying that the benefit should be stopped. I am asking to build the capability to find food on their own."

He said the idea of social business is finding a permanent solution to a problem, instead of a temporary solution. "The social business is a problem solving company. The challenge for us is to get ideas to solve a problem."

"We are not robots, we are human beings. We are not only moneymaking people, we are problem-solving people. We are not only selfish people, we are selfless people, and with this selflessness we will bring about change," he added.

He urged the audience to come up with ideas on social business. "You have a lot of ideas. Send it to us, we will find investors or entrepreneurs, if you don't have investment."

In response to a query, Yunus said making money is happiness, but making other people happy is super happiness. "It is a competition between the two types of happiness."

He said a higher per capita income or reaching the middle-income country status does not mean anything to him or to the people. "Unless I can solve the problems of poverty, the problems of unemployment, the problems of

health care and the problems of environment, it does not mean anything to the hungry people."

The Nobel laureate said the Rana Plaza tragedy was a trauma for the nation. "It is our national duty to solve the problem. It is not that the US or others want it. We cannot walk away from it."

He also said foreign brands walking away from the country do not answer to the problem. "You are businessmen and businessmen don't walk away, they take the challenge and solve it."

"Come back to Bangladesh, solve the problem and make the country the best garment sector in the world. We will work together."

Meanwhile, at a meeting with a delegation from Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal in Yunus Centre, the Nobel laureate vowed to protect Grameen Bank until death.

He said the bank's 84 lakh members would not sit idle if the government tried to snatch it from them.

"I have already reminded that these people are not only the owner of the bank, but also citizens and voters," he said referring to the upcoming general elections due early next year.

In response, ASM Abdur Rab said they would try their best to protect Grameen Bank.