

India hands over travel passes

STAR REPORT

The Indian authorities yesterday started issuing travel passes to former enclave dwellers who opted to become Indian citizens.

Camps were set up at Jongra Union Parishad Complex in Pathgram upazila and Gotamari Union Parishad Complex in Hatibandha upazila of Lalmonirhat; near Kalirhat temporary police camp in Phulbari upazila and Bhurungamari upazila nirbahi officer's office in Kurigram and in Thakurgaon to issue travel passes.

Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Pankaj Saran inaugurated the distribution of travel passes among the prospective Indian nationals at the premises of Debiganj Dak Bungalow in Thakurgaon.

The two neighbours on July 31 midnight exchanged 162 enclaves between themselves, ending the stateless existence of around 52,000 people. Of them, 979 residing in former Indian enclaves inside Bangladesh decided to relocate to India.

Most of the 979 got their travel passes yesterday, while the rest will be

given passes today.

The diplomat said holders of travel passes will be able to travel between the two countries from November 1 to November 30 through the Chilahati-Holdibari border point after getting visa stamps on their travel documents from the Bangladesh authorities.

All the travel pass holders must have to complete relocation to India by November 30. In the mean time, they can sell their immovable assets after receiving permission from the local administration and carry the money to India as legal money. They can take with them their moveable assets, said Pankaj.

Golam Azam, additional district magistrate of Thakurgaon, and UNO Shafiqul Islam of Debiganj were present.

Binoy Chandra Roy, 65, of the former Indian enclave Gotamari in Hatibandha upazila and four other members of his family got their travel passes yesterday.

"We are happy to have the travel passes. We now feel that we are Indians," said Roy.

Our correspondents from Lalmonirhat, Kurigram and Thakurgaon contributed to this report.



A woman shows a travel pass issued by the Indian government at the former Indian enclave of Gotamari in Lalmonirhat's Hatibandha upazila. The Indian authorities yesterday began distributing travel passes to former enclave dwellers who opted to become Indian citizens.

PHOTO: S DILIP ROY

New pay scale gets final nod

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Briefing reporters after the meeting at the conference hall of Cabinet Division, Musharraf said that the new basic salary would be effective from July 1 this year, and the new bonus and increment from July 1 next year.

He, however, said government employees will start getting basic salary and arrears under the new pay scale as soon as a circular is issued in this regard.

A finance division official said it may take them at least a month to issue the circular, meaning the employees will be able to draw their increased salary from November.

Musharraf said the government will require an additional Tk 15,904 crore to implement the salary increase this fiscal year. In the next FY it will need an additional Tk 23,828 crore as the new bonus and increment will be given from next year.

The cabinet secretary said the government's revenue income has been increasing every year and hence the government won't be under any pressure to implement the new scale.

He also said the cabinet took another important decision that from now on there will be no classification between government employees of different classes e.g. class one, class

three. Their identity will be determined by their grade. In matters of attesting photos or documents, an employee will be designated by his/her grade.

EQUAL RANKS FOR 3 SERVICES' CHIEFS

Ranks of air and navy chiefs will be upgraded to the rank of the army chief. The salary of the chiefs of three forces would be Tk 86,000 (fixed), which is equal to the salary of the cabinet secretary and the principal secretary to the Prime Minister's Office, Musharraf said.

Currently, the ranks of navy and air chiefs are equivalent to the rank of a lieutenant general in the army and their salary is Tk 42,000. The chief of army staff gets Tk 45,000 with the rank of general, he said.

The navy chief's current vice-admiral rank would be made admiral while the air chief's air marshal rank would be air chief marshal.

NEW ALLOWANCE

Public servants will get 20 percent of their basic salary as an extra bonus for the Bangla New Year in addition to other festival bonuses.

The cabinet secretary said the existing festival bonuses are religion-based and employees receive it at different times. But the new bonus will be given for all at the same time.

MAJOR CHANGE IN INCREMENT

The cabinet has scrapped the time scale and the selection grade as per recommendations by the pay commission and the review committee.

Government employees are offered these increments when they do not get promotion in due time. But large-scale corruption takes place before these increments are given and hence a new system has been introduced to check such irregularities.

From the sixth to the 20th grade, the yearly increment will be five percent of the basic salary on incremental basis.

In the fifth grade, it will rise by 4.5 percent, in the third and fourth grades by four percent and in the second grade by 3.75 percent.

Currently, an increment is given on the basis of an employee's joining date and promotion. From now on, however, the increment will be given in July every year irrespective of one's joining or promotion.

The cabinet secretary said the time scale is discriminatory and some get it while some are deprived. The selection grade is more discriminatory.

He said all will benefit under the new increment system.

"The cabinet thinks a universal benefit system is more logical than the one reserved for a handful of people, posts

and organisations", said Musharraf.

MPO TEACHERS

The cabinet secretary said teachers under the MPO will get salary from July 1 as per the new scale.

However, the finance division will make a separate review to determine who are eligible to get MPO as per the existing criteria, he said.

Both the pay commission and the review committee have recommended that teachers under MPO should be given enhanced salary six months after the pay hike for government employees is implemented.

UNIVERSITY TEACHERS

Musharraf said the cabinet has discussed university teachers' demand for salary increase but instant decision cannot be taken in this regard. So, decisions will be taken later as per the cabinet committee's recommendations.

However, until a decision is reached, university teachers will get salary under the new scale.

CHANGES IN ALLOWANCE SYSTEM

Currently, government employees including defence staffs, police and Rab get 12 to 70 percent of their basic salary as special allowance.

But under the new scale, special allowance has been fixed. Their allowance will not decrease due to the sys-

tem; it will rather increase in some cases.

If this change was not brought in the system, this allowance would be close to the basic pay in many instances, Musharraf said, explaining.

However, house rent allowance will continue to be paid under the present system, he said.

EXPERT OPINION

Prof Mustafizur Rahman, executive director of Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), said the new pay scale for the government employees is justified given the size of the economy, revenue and inflation.

"The hike will not contribute to any significant inflationary pressure," Prof Rahman told The Daily Star yesterday.

"But the government has to be careful so that house owners cannot hike rents illogically."

The CPD boss is also unhappy to see that the government did not take any initiative, particularly reforms of the public institutions, to increase productivity of its employees.

"I expected that the government would enact Public Service Act and take other institutional reforms in parallel with the new pay scale. But it did nothing like that," Prof Mustafizur said.

According to him, reforms are needed to make public servants productive, accountable and transparent.

Young girl among dead as toll hits 61

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysian authorities have found the bodies of 11 more Indonesian migrants including a young girl, taking the toll from last week's boat tragedy to 61, a coastguard official said yesterday.

The 11 bodies were fished out from the sea late Sunday, Mohamad Aliyas Hamdan, a Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency official, told AFP.

Thirty-seven of the victims were men, plus 23 women and a three-year-old girl.

Twenty Indonesians who have been rescued are in good health and are being detained by the coastguard, he added.

Officials have said the overcrowded wooden boat capsized and sank in rough seas about 16 kilometres (10 miles) off central Malaysia's Selangor state before dawn on Thursday.

Aliyas said the group were leaving Malaysia to return to Sumatra in Indonesia, across the Malacca Strait.



The arrested Jamaat-Shibir men, including former lawmakers Mujibur Rahman, third from right, and Golam Parwar, fourth from right, being paraded before the media at the Detective Branch of police headquarters on Minto Road.

PHOTO: STAR

HC rejects petition on state religion

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Alam Sarkar passed the order after hearing arguments from Additional Attorney General Murad Reza and the petitioner, Supreme Court lawyer SM Goswami.

Goswami argued that article 2A violated the constitution's basic structure regarding the principles of secularism and equality.

He referred to article 12 of the constitution that says the principle of secularism shall be realised by the elimination of communalism in all its forms; the granting by the State of political status in favour of any religion; the abuse of religion for political purposes; any discrimination against, or persecution of, persons practising a particular religion.

The additional attorney general opposed the petition saying that the constitutional provision that states that "the state religion of the Republic is Islam" is not contrary to any other provisions, since article 2A of the con-

stitution also ensures equal rights and dignity of people of other religions.

He maintained that the same article of the charter says that "the state religion of the Republic is Islam, but the State shall ensure equal status and equal right in the practice of the Hindu, Buddhist, Christian and other religions".

Islam had been given the status of state religion through the constitution's 8th amendment in 1988 during the regime of military ruler HM Ershad.

The 15th amendment in 2011, however, expanded the article by including the phrases "the State shall ensure equal status and equal right in the practice of the Hindu, Buddhist, Christian and other religions."

Additional Attorney General Reza said article 2A is not a law, but a statement; so it can't be contrary to the other articles of the constitution.

The petitioner said a referendum has to be held for bringing any amendment to the constitution to change any

of its basic structures.

Reza told the court that there is no constitutional provision for organising a referendum following the passage of the 15th amendment to the charter.

Article 12 didn't exist in 1988 when Islam was given the status of state religion. The martial law regime after the brutal assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on August 15, 1975, dropped article 12 as a whole.

This article was restored in the constitution in 2011 through the 15th amendment.

The petitioner also referred to article 27 in defence of his petition. According to the article, all citizens are equal before law and are entitled to have equal protection of law, said Goswami.

In the petition filed on August 1, the lawyer prayed to the HC to issue a rule upon the law secretary to explain as to why the provision that recognised Islam as state religion should not be declared unconstitutional.

2 ex-Jamaat MPs

FROM PAGE 1

Jamaat in a statement, however, said the arrests and seizure of the bombs was just a well-orchestrated police play and that their leaders were framed.

Following a tip off, detectives and Pallabi police in a joint drive arrested them and also seized 20 to 25 bamboo sticks and Jamaat books on extremism from the second-floor flat in a building on Road-10 in Mirpur-11.

Beginning around 10:30am, the drive lasted five and a half hours.

Briefing newsmen at the DMP Media Centre, Deputy Commissioner (west) of Detective Branch (DB) Sajjadur Rahman said the Jamaat leaders and activists gathered at the flat to carry out subversive activities in the garment sector ahead of Eid.

The flat is owned by Harunur Rashid, president of Sramik Kallyan Federation, Jamaat's labour front, he said, adding that Harun played a key

role in arranging the meeting.

Sajjadur claimed that specially made bamboo sticks were shipped in from Chittagong.

Replying to a query, Sajjadur said the bombs were made locally.

The other arrestees were Kafrul Thana unit Jamaat President Md Taslim, and activists Abul Kalam Azad, Mansur Rahman, Zakir Hossain, Jahangir Alam, ABM Nurullah alias Mohammad Ullah, Abul Hashem, Md Sabbir, Mujibur Rahman Bhuiyan and Ashrafur Alam Iqbal.

The Jamaat statement claimed that the way police arrested its leaders from an indoor programme was unjust in the eyes of the law. Police staged a drama of seizing 20 bombs from them, it said.

The party yesterday announced peaceful demonstrations across the country today to protest the arrest and to demand the arrestees' unconditional release.

What can our mayors do?

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take drastic measures to free us from water logging. More than a dozen agencies are involved in maintaining the drainage system and the mayors have no control over them.

The mayors also have no control over more than four dozen organisations providing civic service in the capital. The government retains full control over them.

For example, our mayors have no control over Dhaka Metropolitan Police, Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa), Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha and authorities that supply power, gas, etc.

These single-purpose organisations have been set up under different acts and they belong to different ministries.

Many experts have been arguing for long that this lack of coordination between these bodies has made the situation worse.

This is an old issue. A demand for a metropolitan government to bring all the civic service providers under one authority has been made two decades ago.

Dhaka's first elected mayor in 1994, Mohammad Hanif had proposed first for a metropolitan government to improve city governance.

His son, Sayeed Khokon, who was elected mayor of Dhaka South City Corporation, is now speaking for setting up of the city government.

Annisul, a successful businessman turned public representative, has also spoken for a coordinated system like a city government to handle the problems.

It is interesting that successive governments were aware of the crisis long ago and had taken some half-hearted efforts without trying to empower the mayors.

Consider the Dhaka City Corporation Ordinance enacted in 1983 during Ershad regime as an example first.

In the ordinance, chiefs of the service organisations—Rajuk, WASA, DESA and DPHE were made ex-officio ward commissioners of the city corporation. The reason was better coordination among the core service providers.

But the move fizzled out as most

of the senior officials who lead those organisations never turned up in the coordination meetings. Some point at bureaucratic vanity or departmental jealousy behind this failure.

In another attempt, a coordination committee for Dhaka city was formed in 1996 during the AL-led government with the then minister for LGRD as chairman and the then mayor as the co-chairman. Chiefs of various civic service providers and MPs elected from the city had been made members of the committee. Its goal was to ensure better management of services.

The committee held about a dozen meetings until October 1998 and 'some progress' in waterlogged areas and mosquito control were the only outcomes, says an authoritative book: "Megacity Governance in South Asia: A comparative Study" by Kamal Siddiqui and others.

That move failed, according to the book, as the minister was too busy. He was there to exercise his control and not out of any genuine commitment to solve the problems of Dhaka city.

The Minister-led committee ceased to exist when the new Mayor Sadek Hossain Khoka took office in April 2002. The then BNP-led government formed Dhaka good governance committee headed by the principal secretary to the then prime minister. That committee could not make any breakthrough.

In the latest effort, the AL-led government split the Dhaka City Corporation into North and South without even trying to empower the corporations.

The September 1 downpour had once again exposed the vulnerability of the city.

In a positive note, the people's outburst against the mayors should be considered as their high expectations from their representatives.

To meet people's expectations, the city corporations, its mayors, and its councilors must be empowered.

The city corporations should have jurisdictions over the entire governance in the city as it is an effective practice in many democratic countries.

Half-hearted efforts are welcome no more.