

HAJJ UNDER PVT MANAGEMENT

Tk 3.05 lakh to be minimum cost

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Each Hajj pilgrim will have to pay minimum Tk 3.05 lakh for performing the holy ritual under private management this year, announces the Hajj Agencies Association of Bangladesh (Haab).

Mentioning that the Hajj might take place on September 10, Haab President Mohammad Ibrahim Bahar yesterday said they had fixed the minimum cost, but the Hajj agents could set different Hajj packages based on their facilities.

"All the fixed money of a pilgrim must be deposited with the religious affairs ministry or the Haab-approved banks or the Hajj agents by June 30," he told a press conference in a city hotel.

The minimum package includes costs for airfare Tk 1.27 lakh, accommodation Tk 82,740, food Tk 33,600, Muallem fee Tk 22,869 and the rest for other charges, said Bahar.

The minimum costs have been fixed for 40 day's stay in Saudi Arabia, he said, adding that the pilgrims will have to pay extra if their stay is delayed there.

Last year, the Haab fixed Tk 2,96,206 as minimum costs for the

Hajj.

However, the government on Monday announced two Hajj packages -- Tk 3,05,000 as minimum cost and Tk 3,60,000 as maximum cost -- for performing the Hajj under the government management.

The interested pilgrims have to register their names through online after paying the government's fixed fees to Sonali Bank.

Online registration for the private arrangement will begin on January 17 and continue till May 30, he said.

He added that the Hajj pilgrims will have to pay for registration, but the amount is yet to be decided.

Around 1,13,868 Hajj pilgrims will perform the Hajj this year. Of them, 5,000 pilgrims will go to Hajj under the government management, while the rest under the private management, according to the Haab.

The Haab president also demanded that the government allow all airlines along with Bangladesh Biman and Saudi Arabian Airlines to carry the pilgrims.

Haab Secretary General Sheikh Abdullah, among others, was present at the press conference.



A student at Chittagong University is seen studying after he came to take a pre-scheduled test only to find the exam hall totally empty. There have been no academic activities as teachers of the university, like other public universities, have gone on a work stoppage protesting 'disparities' in the new pay scale. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

Police for ending political push

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rejecting the fit, intelligent and honest candidates," said an SP, preferring to remain unnamed.

"If anyone dares to ignore the leaders' recommendations, he is branded as dishonest, anti-government and even anti-liberalism," said the police official.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal said the whole process of constable recruitment is under the jurisdiction of the police headquarters and the inspector general of police. "What they need to do is to inform us about the new system."

Asked whether he appreciated the move, the minister said he welcomed any move against corruption.

Talking to a good number of SP-ranked police officials and recently recruited constables, it is learnt that it takes Tk 3 lakh to Tk 6 lakh to get the job of a constable.

Most of the money goes to politi-

cal leaders. In some cases, the SPs also recruit candidates in exchange for money, they alleged.

"Apart from some exceptions, it is not possible to get the job of a police constable without local MP's recommendations. Though the SPs are the key persons to recruit candidates, they in fact implement the recommendations of ministers, MPs and party leaders," said an official of the rank of SP.

Such recruits lack moral courage and remain busy in taking bribes as they manage jobs by bribing officials, according to the police official.

A central committee member of the ruling Awami League admitted that the process of hiring constables is mired in corruption. The AL leader, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said corruption takes place through collusion between political leaders and SPs.

"During the last recruitment [last

year] in my district, only one relative of a top district Awami League leader managed a job without giving bribes. All other had to give money," added the AL leader.

At the moment, the police force has 1.63 lakh members -- some 1.13 lakh of them constables. The government plans to recruit around 50,000 more, mostly constables, by 2020.

Between 2009 and 2014, the AL government recruited around 23,000 police members in different positions, most of them constables, police sources said.

In the previous pay scale, an entry-level constable used to draw a monthly pay of around Tk 8,500 with a basic salary of Tk 4,100. In the new pay scale effective from July last year, the salary almost doubled with a basic of Tk 8,250.

Asked about the fresh recruitment process, Assistant Inspector General (Recruitment and Career Planning)

of police Monirul Islam said, "The move is at the discussion stage."

The inspector general of police, who holds the ultimate authority on the matter, has the mandate to allow the changes. The IGP, however, is yet to make a decision, sources said.

The Daily Star tried to reach IGP AKM Shahidul Hoque over the phone last week, but he did not pick up the call.

At present, there is a 60-mark recruitment test -- 40 for written test and 20 for viva-voce. The SP-led committees make primary selection through physical tests in the districts concerned, prepare question papers for written examinations and evaluate those. It also conducts the viva-voce of the candidates selected through the written test.

Under the new system, officials at the police HQ will prepare different sets of question papers for various police ranges for a 40-mark written

test. Five officials will evaluate each answer sheet and then send those to the SPs.

The SP-led committees will make the initial selection and hold viva-voce as they do now.

Many police officials believe the new system will check corruption in the recruitment process, and the force will be able to hire efficient people.

Talking to The Daily Star, Transparency International Bangladesh Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman said recruitment through political influence has been institutionalised in all government organisations.

"We have seen open outbursts from political leaders whenever recruitment was done ignoring political influence."

The new hiring process would improve the situation a bit, but it would not uproot corruption in police recruitment, he added.

Teachers now

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from January 11. Talking to this newspaper, CU Teacher's Association President Abul Manchor said, "We are fighting for prestige."

"We will continue with our strike until our demand for revision of pay scale is met."

Since May last year, public university teachers have been agitating for a four-point demand that includes removing disparity in the new pay scale.

Finance Minister AMA Mubith has repeatedly dubbed their movement "illogical" while Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is critical of it as well.

The teachers sat with the education minister several times, but to no avail.

Go by rules

CJ to lawyers, judges, police

UNB, Laxmipur

Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha yesterday called on lawyers, judges and members of the police to abide by their respective rules.

Addressing the first tri-monthly judicial conference at Laxmipur Circuit House, the Chief Justice also observed that the judiciary cannot be maintained if the protectors become the predators.

About the backlog of cases, he asked the judges to ensure speedy disposal of all the cases that go as far back as five years before 2011, no matter whether the lawyer attends the hearing or not.

He also expressed his dissatisfaction over the lawyers' walkout of Laxmipur court without informing him.

Two 'JMB men'

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ZH Sikder Women's Medical College around 11:30pm.

As they were carrying out a search, militants on two motorbikes threw handmade grenades at the DB team, prompting the detectives to open fire.

Two of the militants were wounded, and two more fled the scene on a bike, said Sanwar.

The injured were taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where doctors pronounced them dead around 12:45am.

Police said they recovered two firearms, a motorbike, and shards of grenades.

Sanwar claimed the militants went to Hazaribagh to carry out a militant attack.

Hiran was one of the two JMB militants who slipped through police fingers during a raid on a JMB "bomb and ammunition factory" in the city's Mirpur on December 25 last year, according to DB police sources.

Dhaka protests

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the Bangladesh High Commission in Islamabad, foreign ministry sources said.

However, it could not yet be known who will be sent.

The post remains vacant as Maushumi Rahman was transferred to join the Bangladesh embassy in Lisbon, Portugal as its counsellor.

Earlier, Pakistan "requested" Bangladesh to withdraw Maushumi from Islamabad without showing any valid reason.

On December 23, Fareena Arshad, second secretary (political) at Pakistan High Commission in Dhaka, who was reportedly involved in financing militancy, left for Islamabad following her withdrawal.

Time for new assignments

FROM PAGE 1

Shringla succeeds Pankaj Saran, who served in Bangladesh for four years and has been appointed India's Ambassador to Russia.

Shringla, who served as Indian Ambassador to Thailand for less than a year, had been appointed as the next Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh on November 18 last year.

He is coming from Bangkok by a Thai Airways flight today, diplomatic sources said.

A member of the Indian Foreign Service of 1984 batch, Shringla was at the Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in Delhi between 2011 and 2013 and is considered a key official who made significant contribution to the strengthening of India-Bangladesh bilateral ties, particularly with regard to trade and the implementation of the

Land Boundary Agreement (LBA).

He is credited with finalising contours of the LBA and its protocol with Bangladesh as Joint Secretary (JS) in headquarters. As the JS of Bangladesh-Sri Lanka-Myanmar-Maldives division in the MEA, he also sorted out hitches in power transfer, duty-free regime in textiles, overseeing maritime arbitration and general elections in 2014 in Bangladesh.

In the course of his diplomatic career spanning 30 years, Shringla has held a variety of positions in New Delhi and in Indian missions in Paris, Hanoi and Tel Aviv. He has also served as councillor in the permanent mission of India to the United Nations in New York and as Consul General in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam and Durban, South Africa.

British envoy Alison Blake joined the British Civil Service in 1989 and

the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in 1996. She served a number of diplomatic postings at home and overseas. Her last posting was in Islamabad as the deputy British high commissioner.

On her appointment as the British representative to Bangladesh, Alison said: "I am delighted and deeply honoured to be taking up my new position as British high commissioner in Dhaka. The United Kingdom has strong cultural, political and commercial ties with Bangladesh and works closely with the government and people of Bangladesh on our many shared interests, including trade, investment, development and security."

"I am committed to strengthening the long and friendly bilateral relationship and look forward to further developing our extensive cooperation between the two countries."

BRAHMANBARIA MAYHEM

1,200 sued, no one held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Accusing 1,200 unnamed people, a case was filed with Akhaura railway police yesterday in connection with Tuesday's vandalism at Brahmanbaria Railway Station.

Abdus Sattar, officer-in-charge of Akhaura Railway Police Station, said Station Master Muhidur Rahman filed the case.

The police could not arrest anyone as of yesterday evening, the OC said.

Enraged students of Jamiah Islamia Yunusia Madrasa vandalised several establishments in Brahmanbaria town on Tuesday following the death of a fellow student.

Armed with bamboo sticks and iron rods, they vandalised the railway station, removed fishplates of rail lines and broke a signal panel, disrupting rail link on Dhaka,

Chittagong and Sylhet routes for hours.

The agitators also carried out vandalism at Sur Samrat Ustad Alauddin Sangitangon, Dhirendanath Datta Bhasha Chatter, an Awami League office and set fire to a police van, said witnesses.

They took to the street as fellow student Masudur Rahman, 20, succumbed to his injuries, which, the students claim, he had received in an overnight clash with traders and Bangladesh Chhatra League activists in Zilla Parishad Market area.

The clash ensued on Monday evening when some students went there to buy a mobile phone. At least 30 people were injured in the clash, according to police.

Doctors at Brahmanbaria Sadar Hospital said Masudur with bruises in his body was brought dead to the hospital around 3:00am on Tuesday.

Hello Mayor...

FROM PAGE 1

Visiting the SCB headquarters near Gulshan-1 intersection yesterday morning, The Daily Star found a huge pile of waste right in front of the office, sending a strong stench to the whole area.

Pedestrians using the walkway near the office were seen covering their nose as they walked past the spot.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, Bitopi said, "We contacted Dhaka North City Corporation today during office hours regarding removal of the garbage. They have helped by sending trucks to remove the garbage. The removal process has been in progress since 4pm today."

She said the bank's authorities were thankful to the city corporation for sending workers to clean up the garbage.

Contacted, Bipon Kumar Saha, chief waste management officer of DNCC, said they did not know who had dumped it but they would clean it up shortly.

He said the DNCC would take strict action if they found out the persons responsible for this.

Reject politics of fear and tribalism

FROM PAGE 1

In a primetime address that bubbled with 2016 election politics, Obama assailed Republicans for talking up the threat posed by the Islamic State group and talking down the American economy.

A self-assured and optimistic Obama cast himself as the foil of foes who warn the country is going in the wrong direction because of his seven years in office.

Hailing an epoch of "extraordinary change" laden with risk and opportunity, Obama called for a new "moonshot" to cure cancer, a shift away from dirty energy to power the world's biggest economy and for a thaw in the last remnants of the Cold War by ending the embargo on Cuba.

Obama insisted "America has been through big changes before," as he took thinly veiled shots at Donald Trump, Ted Cruz and other leading Republican presidential candidates.

"Each time, there have been those who told us to fear the future, who claimed we could slam the brakes on change, promising to restore past glory if we just got some group or idea that was threatening America under control. And each time, we overcame those fears."

With less than three weeks until the Iowa caucuses -- the first votes cast in the process to replace him -- Obama berated Republican economic rhetoric, saying "anyone claiming that America's economy is in decline is peddling fiction."

But some of his toughest words were for Republican statements over the rise of the Islamic State group.

He painted the jihadists as "masses of fighters on the back of pickup trucks, twisted souls plotting in apartments or garages."

He admitted that the extremists, who have overrun large areas of Syria and Iraq, pose an "enormous danger," but made clear: "They do not threaten our national existence."

"Our answer needs to be more than tough talk or calls to carpet-bomb civilians. That may work as a TV sound bite, but it doesn't pass muster on the world's stage," he said pointedly.

"Over-the-top claims that this is World War III just play into their hands."

And in a volley clearly aimed at Trump, Obama warned that "when politicians insult Muslims... that's not telling it like it is. It's just wrong. It diminishes us in the eyes of the world." The Republican frontrunner Trump

was not impressed, describing the speech on Twitter as "really boring, slow, lethargic - very hard to watch!"

Tuesday's address was arguably Obama's last big opportunity to sway a national audience and frame the 2016 White House race, reports AFP.

Around 30 million viewers were expected to watch live, a nationwide audience that may only be matched in political terms during the Democratic nominating convention later this year.

Overall, it was an unorthodox speech that eschewed the typical laundry list of legislative priorities as Obama tried to lift the country's gaze beyond the next year, and beyond his presidency.

But he also tacitly, and explicitly, admitted mistakes. There was no mention of the racial tensions that have dogged the tenure of the first black president.

There was only a fleeting reference, and a symbolic empty seat in the chamber, to gun control and the awful toll of American gun violence. Obama did take some blame for Washington's hyperpartisan politics.

"It's one of the few regrets of my presidency -- that the rancour and suspicion between the parties has

gotten worse instead of better," he said in a moment of personal candour.

"There's no doubt a president with the gifts of Lincoln or Roosevelt might have better bridged the divide, and I guarantee I'll keep trying to be better so long as I hold this office."

South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley said in the traditional Republican rebuttal of Obama's address that "the president's record has often fallen far short of his soaring words."

"As he enters his final year in office, many Americans are still feeling the squeeze of an economy too weak to raise income levels."

She also cited "chaotic unrest in many of our cities" and "the most dangerous terrorist threat our nation has seen since September 11."

But Haley, the daughter of Indian immigrants, also jabbed at Trump over his views on immigration.

"During anxious times, it can be tempting to follow the siren call of the angriest voices," she said.

"We must resist that temptation. No one who is willing to work hard, abide by our laws, and love our traditions should ever feel unwelcome in this country."