

FREEZE ON FOREIGN LABOUR RECRUITMENT Malaysian govt urged to review decision

STAR REPORT

Suffering a severe shortage of manpower, many Malaysian industries have been appealing to the government to review the freeze on foreign labour recruitment, a Malaysian minister said.

Datuk Seri Wee Ka Siong, minister in the Prime Minister's Department, said he had been gathering information from many groups, including furniture makers and those in the export-oriented industries, that they desperately needed workers.

"We understand their grievances. It's high time we conveyed their feelings to the authorities so they can review the decision," said Wee after attending the annual general meeting of the Kuala Lumpur and Selangor Fruit Farmers Association, The Star online of Malaysia reported yesterday.

In February, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi announced the government's decision to suspend the recruitment of all foreign workers to Malaysia.

The ban came a day after the Malaysian government had signed a memorandum of understanding to bring in 1.5 million Bangladeshi work-

ers over three years.

Wee said many parties who had opposed bringing in new foreign workers two months ago are now regretting the decision after being affected by the freeze.

The situation would be worse in June when the five-year permits for skilled workers under the 6P amnesty programme would expire and the workers would be sent home, he added.

The minister said he would raise the issue with Ahmad Zahid, also the home minister.

According to him, the farmers were facing a 30 percent manpower shortage and the situation was expected to worsen.

Wee said fruits needed to be handled with care and the packaging also required workers before the produce could be sold. "This is the biggest worry among farmers."

The low supply of local fruits due to drought and manpower shortage was a threat to the country's food security, he mentioned.

Fruit farmers, the minister said, had told him that the supply of papaya and other fruits would drop by 50 to 60 percent in two months.

"This will drive up prices and everyone will suffer."



In violation of the electoral code of conduct, a supporter carries live roosters, polls symbol of a ward-9 member candidate in the upcoming polls in Halsa union parishad of Natore, during an election campaign yesterday.

PHOTO:
BULBUL AHMED

'VAT EVASION' 11 Star Kabab outlets raided in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

VAT Intelligence officials yesterday raided 11 city outlets of Star Kabab and Restaurant simultaneously for alleged evasion of VAT.

The raids were conducted following complaints from people over the phone and online over a long period of time, said VAT Intelligence in a statement.

Officials said they seized business related documents of the famous eatery for scrutiny. Cases would be filed against the restaurant if evidence of VAT evasion is found.

This was the biggest ever raid by the VAT Intelligence in terms of involvement of officials. A total of 150 revenue officials conducted the search at the restaurant's outlets in Banani, Dhanmondi, Wari, Tikatuli, Elephant Road and Thatari Bazar areas, according to VAT officials.

"We conducted the raid simultaneously so that the restaurant authorities cannot pass information to other branches and hide documents," said a senior official of VAT Intelligence, a directorate under the National Board of Revenue (NBR).

According to the directorate, Star Kabab and Restaurant has one registration, but it uses two non-fiscal electronic cash registers (ECRs), the memory of which can be deleted or manipulated.

Officials said such drives against VAT evasion would continue. They requested people to get ECR receipts to make sure that their money paid as VAT goes to the state exchequer. They also welcomed complaints on the directorate's Facebook page about VAT dodging by any firm.

Contacted over the phone, one Shahidul Islam from Karwan Bazar branch of Star Kabab said someone from the eatery would return the call shortly. But nobody called back.

Fire again

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Zahir Uddin, conservator of forest in the Sundarbans, said they formed a three-member probe committee led by Belayet Hossain, assistant conservator of forest. The committee will submit its report within seven working days.

Five fire watch teams will be patrolling some strategic points in the forest, he added.

Asked why the forest department suspected yesterday's incident to be an act of sabotage, DFO Saidul said as they filed a case against six locals in connection with the April 13 fire incident, some aggrieved people might have been out for revenge.

The fire on April 13 engulfed trees on around 8.5 acres in Chandpai range of the mangrove forest.

Although there had been at least 20 fire incidents along the Mora Bhola river in East Sundarbans over the last 16 years, this was the first time the forest department filed a case with a local court against some people, said sources in the department.

Earlier, the department had only assessed the damages and tried to find out the causes of fire incidents. Probe reports mentioned that fire might have originated from a cigarette or stove or torch left in the forest by honey collectors.

Meanwhile, a Bagerhat court on Sunday issued arrest warrants for the six accused.

Fully online by year-end

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cabinet committee on purchase, the highest authority over approval of public procurement, said sources at the CPTU.

This means, procurement-related files will be electronically sent to different officials and decision makers for review before the purchase committee meets to approve procurement.

The committee usually sits once a week and the line ministries send it around 30 sets of documents with 100 to 2,000 pages for each proposal.

The annual public spending now stands around \$10 billion a year.

The new initiative is based on five years of successful limited-scale electronic tendering introduced at four government agencies in 2011. They are local government and engineering department, roads and highways department, Bangladesh Rural Electrification Board and Bangladesh Water Development Board.

Later, other government agencies started procuring goods and services worth below Tk 50 crore under the new

**E-GP
FROM 2011
TILL DATE**

19,342 registered bidders

43,223 tenders floated
under e-GP25,748 contracts involving
Tk 30,000cr awarded2,000 branches of 40
banks linked to e-GP

to receive registration

method. Now one-fifth of all procurements is done electronically.

"The e-GP is an integrated and comprehensive system that accommo-

dates the entire cycle of public procurement -- from planning to execution," said CPTU Director General Faruque Hossain.

By December, the websites of all procurement offices would be linked with the central e-GP portal where tender notices will be published, he added.

Bidders registered with the e-GP would be able to keep track of tender advertisements, evaluation results and the contract award process. They would no longer need to submit physical documents to the procurement authorities.

Instead of publishing a detailed tender notice in newspapers, bidding authorities will run a brief notice in newspapers on the floating of tenders online. This would slash the government spending on newspaper advertisements, said CPTU officials.

They, however, could not give any figure.

The World Bank has been providing financial and technical assistance for digitising the entire procurement

process, and it has resulted in wider participation of bidders.

According to a recent WB study, the number of bidders per tender rose to seven in 2015 from four in 2007. The processing time -- from floating of tenders to awarding those -- dropped to 29 days last year from 51 days in 2012.

"Bangladesh has been gradually transforming its public procurement with innovations, and introduced electronic procurement and online performance measurement system," said Zafrul Islam, lead procurement specialist and Task Team leader of the WB's Public Procurement Reform Project II.

And it contributed significantly to the enhancement of efficiency and transparency of the public procurement system, he said.

This system is helping the government implement the national budget more efficiently, Zafrul added.

The WB has been assisting the government in this regard from 2002 through three back-to-back projects.

SHADY CONSTRUCTION ACC sues contractor, engineer

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

The Anti-Corruption Commission yesterday filed a case against a contractor and a sub-assistant engineer of the public health engineering department for allegedly using bamboo sticks instead of iron rod in the construction of Meghdom Govt Primary School in the district.

Md Zakaria, assistant director of ACC in Rangpur, filed the case with Gaibandha Sadar Police Station.

AKM Mehdi Hasan, OC of Gaibandha Sadar Police Station, said the ACC conducted a probe into the allegation and found it to be true. The commission later picked up the two and handed them over to police.

On Monday, the Department of Public Health Engineering suspended the official.

Police on Wednesday produced contractor Abdul Khaleque and engineer Arif Billah Dakua before a local court, showing them arrested under Section-54 of Bangladesh Penal Code. The court sent the two to jail.

Meanwhile, local contractors at a press conference at Gaibandha Press Club yesterday demanded unconditional release of the contractor and engineer.

They claimed the two were "victims of a conspiracy as there had been a dispute between two rival groups over the construction work".

20 foreign

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money, he said provisions of the money laundering act would allow Bangladesh to bring back the money, and the agents, who transferred the money to those accounts without following the rules, would have to pay double the amount.

In Sri Lanka, payment of \$20 million was stopped by the bank concerned, he added.

ACC nets

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Al Amin, Ekramul Haque, Asaduzzaman and Mosharraf Hossain -- from different parts of the country for misappropriating Tk 14.2 lakh in different periods.

Rafiqul, secretary of a government project in Tangail, allegedly misappropriated Tk 83,219 without reconstructing a road in 2012-13.

Rashid, superintendent of Shahjalal Sunniya Dakhil Madrasa, in collaboration with several others pocketed about Tk 5 lakh. The money was meant to pay salaries and allowances of teachers between 2012 and 2015.

Al Amin, a member of managing committee of Belgharia High School in Bogra, took about Tk 2.2 lakh from various people promising them teaching jobs.

Former general managers of Bhaluka Branch of Sonali Bank Ekramul and Asaduzzaman were arrested for drawing about Tk 4.43 lakh using fake vouchers.

Mosharraf, Union Parishad Secretary of Nababganj of Dinajpur, drew Tk 2.24 lakh forging signatures of the UP chairman and members.

In addition, the ACC arrested a former employee of a land office, Bhubotosh Bhoomik, over fraudulence of around Tk 2.42 crore, according to ACC sources.

Bhoomik and three others forged a deed and grabbed 2.42 acres of land in Bhatara area. The land was worth Tk 2.42 crore.

Their names came up in the US

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The PM also came down heavily on those who have condemned the arrest of Shafiq Rehman and Mahmudur Rahman, saying a person accused of a crime cannot escape legal action on human rights grounds, reports BSS.

"I don't know what kind of journalism and press freedom they believe in. They criticise the arrest but say nothing about the big conspiracy of those journalists, unearthed by FBI," she said.

Amar Desh Editor Mahmudur Rahman, a pro-BNP journalist and a former energy adviser, has been behind bars since April 2013. He is likely to be shown arrested in the case filed for the alleged plot to abduct and murder Joy, a top DB official told The Daily Star on Monday.

In the same case, senior journalist and pro-BNP intellectual Shafiq Rehman is on a five-day remand following his arrest from his house in the capital on Saturday morning.

Regarding the arrest, Joy, also ICT adviser to the prime minister, in a Facebook post said, "The US Department of Justice discovered Shafiq Rehman's direct involvement in the plot to kidnap and kill me."

He also said, "They provided this

evidence to our government. He was arrested based on this evidence. I cannot disclose more, but the evidence is direct and irrefutable."

Addressing the programme yesterday, Hasina said, "The accused persons should feel ashamed when their names come up in connection with a conspiracy in a foreign country and in the court of law."

And the critics should condemn the offenders instead of criticising the government, she said.

"I think they don't like to consider an offender as an offender and perhaps they will not feel any necessity of their trial for this terrible conspiracy. How did they turn a blind eye on a journalist's misdeed?"

She added, "None had raised the question of our human rights when the killers responsible for destroying my family were given impunity."

Hasina suggested the critics deal with the FBI instead of slamming her government as the US agency has found those names during probe.

Referring to an FBI report on involvement of a number of BNP leaders in the alleged plot to abduct and kill Joy, she said BNP leaders siphoned off crores of money abroad during their rule, reports BSS.

With that money, she said, they now hire FBI officers to cause damage to the Awami League.

"Our government always takes measures wherever it finds any injustice. We never indulge in any injustice and we will not do so in future," the prime minister said.

Meanwhile, a Dhaka court yesterday fixed April 25 to hear the prayer submitted by detectives seeking arrest of Mahmudur Rahman in the case.

In the presence of Mahmudur, the court is likely to hear the prayer the same day.

Hassan Arafat, assistant commissioner of Detective Branch of police and also investigation officer of the case, submitted the prayer before the court of Metropolitan Magistrate Md Nurunnabi.

The IO also sought a 10-day remand to quiz Mahmudur in the case.

In the prayer, Hassan said Mohammad Ullah Mamun, vice-president of BNP's cultural wing Jatiyatabadi Samajik Sangkritik Sangstha (Jasas), and top leaders of the BNP and different components in the BNP-led alliance started hatching the conspiracy in September 2011.

Hasan Arafat also mentioned that the accused persons met in the UK, the

US and in Dhaka's Paltan and other parts of the country.

He added that the conspirators gave responsibility to Mamun and provided money to materialise their plan.

It was also mentioned in the prayer that Rizvi Ahmed, son of Mamun, was awarded 42 months' imprisonment by a US court in connection with the conspiracy.

The IO said Rizvi during his trial in the US admitted that he got \$30,000 from a Bangladeshi journalist, a political ally and a private detective in exchange for information on Joy.

According to the IO, Rizvi collected the information on Joy after bribing an FBI agent.

The IO said their investigation into the case has got primary evidence that the political ally was Mahmudur Rahman, energy adviser to a past BNP government.

'DIRTY TRICK'

Senior BNP leader Nazrul Islam Khan yesterday slammed the law enforcers for arresting veteran journalist Shafiq Rehman by playing a "dirty trick".

"Law enforcers cannot arrest anyone in plainclothes. But plainclothes policemen, posing as journalists, picked up Shafiq Rehman from his house," he said at a programme in Dhaka.

3 abducted

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the Tripura community in connection with the incident. They were identified as John Tripura, 23, Robert Tripura, 24, Joshin Tripura, 25, and Jibon Tripura, 27, of the upazila.

Police recovered the bodies from remote Rombet Para in Thanchi upazila yesterday afternoon.

The bodies were blindfolded and their limbs tied, police said.

Kaw Hla Ching Marma, chairman of Thanchi upazila, said the group had been involved in criminal activities, including killing and abduction, in the area for one and a half years.

The gang comprised of some 15-18 members of the Tripura community of the district is active in Ruma, Thanchi and Alikadom upazilas in Bandarban.

On March 21, it killed a union parishad chairman aspirant of Bandarban's Ruma upazila.

Two Jubo Dal men killed in Feni, Noakhali

STAR REPORT

Two activists of pro-BNP youth body Jubo Dal were killed in Feni and Noakhali on Sunday and early yesterday.

In one of the incidents, Noor Hossain alias Sabuj, 28, a Jubo Dal activist of Char Darbesh union in Feni's Sonagazi upazila, was beaten to death by Saiful Islam alias Jewel, vice-president of local Chhatra League, and his cohorts on Sunday night at Keramatia Bazar where Sabuj ran a tea shop.

That evening Saiful and his friends beat up Sabuj's younger brother Arif, a student of class-10, saying that buttons of his shirt were open, police and witnesses said.

Hearing about the incident, Sabuj

rushed to the scene and engaged in a scuffle with Saiful.

Saiful along with seven to eight activists of the ruling Awami League's student body Chhatra League then attacked Sabuj and beat him up in front of bystanders, leaving him severely injured.

Locals rushed Sabuj to Sonagazi Upazila Health Complex. From there he was sent to Feni Sadar Hospital. As his condition deteriorated, his family attempted to take him to Chittagong Medical College Hospital, but he died on the way.

The victim's father Sahab Uddin said Sabuj's wife gave birth to a son only 22 days ago.

Nurul Islam Bhutto, Sonagazi Jubo

League general secretary, said the incident did not have any political links.

Meanwhile, in Noakhali's Companyganj upazila, Md Shaker, 28, of local Jubo Dal, was hacked and shot to death by unidentified assailants early yesterday.

The victim, general secretary of Jubo Dal ward-5 unit, left home around 12:30am after several youths called him out, said locals and police.

The assailants then hacked him and shot him and fled the scene.

Doctors declared him dead when taken to Noakhali General Hospital.

Officer-in-charge of Companyganj Police Station Sajedur Rahman said political rivalry might be the reason behind the murder.