

KL to change policy on foreign workers

Plans to reduce dependence on low-skilled migrant workers

STAR REPORT

Malaysia has planned policies to promote automation in its industries and impose higher levies to reduce its dependence on low-skilled foreign workers.

Such a plan contained in the 11th Malaysia Plan Mid-term Review 2016-2020 was tabled in the Dewan Rakyat, the Malaysia's House of Representatives in parliament, on Thursday, reports Free Malaysia Today.

The government would encourage automation and mechanisation, especially in the manufacturing and agricultural sectors, to reduce dependency on foreign workers in Malaysia, home to some one million Bangladeshi migrants.

"A gradual and progressive levy system, based on the number of foreign workers employed, will be implemented to reduce and regulate the number of foreign workers more stringently," the report states.

Earlier on October 16, an official of Malaysia's home ministry said they were planning to follow a Singapore model of charging higher levies for hiring foreign workers -- the more you hire, the more you pay.

"For instance, if an employer pays RM 1,850 for one migrant worker, and the employer wishes to bring in 150 workers, the first 50 migrant workers will be charged RM 1,850 [each] and the balance of 100 migrant workers will be charged a higher levy," Khairil Shah from the ministry's Foreign Workers Division told a panel discussion on migrant workers organised by the Bar Council on October 16.

He said the government was looking at ways to decrease a foreign worker's duration of employment to less than 10 years.

Currently, a foreign worker's employment period could be extended to 13 years, with an annual levy of RM 10,000 after the 10th year, he added.

Other proposals raised in the discussion included limiting the number of workers based on the requirements of the respective sectors.

The report says the Malaysian government will also amend the Employment Act, 1955.

"This will enable better management, prevent exploitation as well as monitor the remittance of money by foreign workers," the report observes.

RAJSHAHI DIVISION

AL has 150 aspirants against BNP's 130

STAR REPORT

They are archrivals but there is one thing in common for both the camps.

In almost all the 39 constituencies in Rajshahi division, multiple lawmaker aspirants from the Awami League and the BNP are trying to secure party tickets to contest the next national election.

Around 150 AL men are now in the race of getting party nominations, while BNP has around 130, according to our district correspondents.

Additionally, the BNP may face some problems over candidates backed by its ally Jamaat-e-Islami which is not registered with the Election Commission.

Although Jamaat wants seven seats

for its leaders in the division, BNP plans to leave out only two. These are Pabna-1 (Santhia-Bera) and Sirajganj-4 (Ullapara), said senior BNP leaders.

Out of six seats in Rajshahi, five now belong to AL lawmakers and one to Workers Party of Bangladesh (WPB). At least 35 AL men are in the race to win party tickets in the five seats. The ruling party may back WPB leader Fazle Hossain Badsha in the other constituency.

INTRA-PARTY RIVALRY

AL's intra-party rivalry has reached such a state that its district unit adviser Motiur Rahman in August filed a case against supporters of lawmaker Omar Faruk Chowdhury (Rajshahi-1) for allegedly attacking him and his

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AL in full swing

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For example, Pabna-2 lawmaker Khandakar Azizul Haque Arzu on September 15 arranged a public feast at his constituency in Bera upazila. It was joined by more than 10,000 people.

But for the BNP, electioneering is a tall order with its leaders and activists facing various obstacles -- cases, police action and attacks by pro-government activists. The opposition men who stand accused in cases are not willing to take the risk of campaigning in public.

Especially the cases, filed against them since 2013 following their violent street agitation demanding restoration of caretaker government system, appear to be their major setback.

Many were arrested in different

comfort. It won only 32 seats, and 13 of those were in Rajshahi division.

The AL performed poorly in three consecutive elections since 1991 in the division. In 2008, it fared well there for the first time -- with a win in 23 constituencies.

In 2014, the BNP and its allies boycotted the polls and the AL candidates won 32 of the 39 seats in the division. The boycott and cases filed against its grassroots contributed to the party's losing supremacy over the region.

"Police and administration appear to be our main opponent. They are working in such a way that they seem to be more active than Awami League activists in repressing the opponents," said BNP's Central Organising Secretary

Ruhul Quddus Talukder Dulu.

Isfa Khairul Haque Shimul, a BNP aspirant for Rajshahi-5 constituency, alleged, "Some people in civilian dress, introducing themselves as police, often ask me to leave the constituency immediately."

About two thirds of the BNP nomination seekers throughout the division, are accused in different cases, party leaders claim.

Some BNP leaders are planning to have their wives contest the election if they fail to run for it due to legal complications.

For example, wives of former state minister Iqbal Hasan Mahmud Tuku and deputy minister Ruhul Quddus Talukder, both convicted in criminal cases, are preparing to take part in the elections to Sirajganj-2 and Natore-2 constituencies respectively, according to their family sources and party's local leaders.

The ruling AL men, however, are free from such worries. Its overwhelming win in the 2014 one-sided election came as blessing for its grassroots in the electoral areas.

[Based on reports sent by our correspondents Anwar Ali, Ahmed Humayun Kabir Topu, Rabiul Hasan, Bulbul Ahmed and Mostafa Sabuj in Rajshahi division]



A smashed human haulier lies to its side by the railway tracks at Baliakandi in Rajbari. At least five workers of a jute mill were killed and many others injured as a train rammed the vehicle yesterday afternoon.

PHOTO: STAR

Five killed as train hits bus

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crossing in Baliakandi area, they said.

Three died on the spot while two others died from wounds at Faridpur Medical College Hospital in the evening.

The dead are Imran Sarder, 20; Sarwar Sheikh, 22; Shakil Sheikh, 22; Fazlu Mridha, 26; and Mohammad Shaker, 25. Imran was the driver of the vehicle, while the others were workers of Razzar Jute Mill in Madhukhali.

Contacted, AKM Azmal Hossain,

officer-in-charge of Baliakandi Police Station, said police recovered the bodies and sent those to Rajbari General Hospital morgue for autopsy.

The injured were receiving treatment at the Faridpur hospital, he added.

In Dinajpur, two schoolgirls, who were riding a motorbike, got killed as a heavily laden tractor hit the bike from behind on Biral-Bochaganj road in Dolimor area around 10:30am yesterday.

The victims are Farzana Aktar, 15,

from Dinajpur's Bochaganj, and Nipa Begum, 13, from Panchagarh's Kamalpara village.

Police said Rafiqul Islam, a relative of the two girls, was taking them to Farzana's house in Bochaganj from Biral by his motorbike.

Rafiqul was wounded and admitted to hospital.

The two bodies were sent to Bochaganj Upazila Health Complex for autopsy.

Meanwhile, a policeman was killed and two others were injured in a road

accident in Madaripur.

A Golden Line Paribahan bus collided head-on with a motorbike on the Dhaka-Barishal highway in Madaripur's Rajoir area around 10:00am.

Kamrul Islam, 36, assistant sub-inspector of Kalkini Police Station, who was riding the bike along with two others, died on the spot, Ziaul Morshed, officer-in-charge of Rajoir Police Station, told this newspaper.

The two pillion passengers suffered wounds, he added.

The curse of Agrabad

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All of its 28 roads reel under water during the high tide as water swells in the Bay twice a day and is injected into the locality by the Karnaphuli River through Mohesh Khal (canal).

Agrabad and its adjacent areas experience waist-deep water and even more due to higher tidal surge at least 12 days a month, centring the full moon and new moon, locals say.

The high tide is more damaging in the rainy season with water cascading down the hills.

"It is only the winter when we get temporary relief," a frustrated Monsur Ali, a resident of the area, told The Daily Star.

Thanks to gradual disappearance of vast water retention bodies and shrinking of canals, the high tide has been causing waterlogging in the area over the last seven years.

The town planners foresaw none of this while establishing the residential area covering over 82 acres of land, said a CDA official, citing the layout plan of 1959.

During a visit to the area around noon on September 25, one of these reporters came across people wading through water to get to their destinations and students returning from schools negotiating knee-deep water.

Sharmin Hosain, a teacher at a private school in the residential area, said, "I live on Road 17 and it was made higher than some other roads in the area. Yet it goes under water during the high tide."

"Students are dropping out of our school. Because, in the monsoon, the roads sometimes go under about four foot water and parents do not send their children to school fearing that the kids might get drowned."

The school often has to reschedule the classes as per the tide chart, she added.

But for Anwar Sadat, headmaster of Al Nahian Government Primary School, rescheduling of classes is not allowed.

"Every time the tidal water comes from the Karnaphuli through the Mahesh Khal, students have to sit on the high benches. We cannot reschedule the class time as it is a government school," he said.

Once a bustling hub, which consists of 1,000 plots and accommodates more than one lakh people, it is now increasingly becoming a neighbourhood of low-income group with the owners leaving the apartments to caretakers or renting their floors at cheap prices.

Abdullah, a vegetable vendor on Road 25, said his landlord has left his one-storey building and rented a house in another neighbourhood.

"Now I stay in his house as caretaker and I do not have to pay rent," he said, grinning.

Mudin Uddin, a garment worker at

the CEPZ, said, "I'm living in a three-bedroom flat and I pay Tk 7,000 a month. It would have cost Tk 20,000 in other residential areas of the port city."

Visiting the tax office in the area, it was seen that they have kept a boat on the ground floor.

"We had to buy the boat as the water usually reaches the knee during the monsoon and sometimes up to the chest. Without a boat, movement gets very difficult," said Sarwar Hossain, deputy commissioner, tax zone-4, Chattogram.

Besides, at least 10 locals have been found to own boats for personal use.

The Chattogram Port Authority built a temporary dam on Mohesh Khal in October 2015 to protect Agrabad and North Halishahar, another affected area.

The Tk 2.5 crore dam brought momentary relief to Agrabad and

water retention areas vanishing.

GOVT INITIATIVE

To alleviate the public sufferings caused by waterlogging, the government approved two mega projects worth TK 8,000 crore in August in 2016.

The CDA signed an MoU with Bangladesh Army for the project titled "Canal re-excavation, expansion, renovation and improvement of waterlogging in Chattogram city".

The Tk 55 billion work is in progress since April last year under 34 Engineering Construction Brigade of Bangladesh Army, who started with re-excavation of 16 canals deemed vital for the port city.

The project, scheduled to be completed by April 2020, includes re-excavation of 36 out of 57 recorded canals in the port city to ensure smooth water flow.

"If we can evict illegal structures



North Halishahar, but it was dismantled after 21 months following uproar from people living in some other places around it.

The reason is simple -- the tidal water obstructed by the dam made its way into new areas. Besides, the pocket, through which water used to be flushed out, was not big enough for this.

There are 17 active canals that flow through the port city into the Karnaphuli. And during the high tide, Chaktai Khal, Rajakhali Khal and Marium Bibi Khal put commercially important areas like Chaktai, Chawkbazar, Asadganj and Khatunganj under ankle-to-waist-deep water.

Town planners say filling up of wetlands is the key reason of the waterlogging.

"Water retention areas disappeared over the years causing the tidal surge overflow in residential areas," Shahenul Islam Khan, chief town planner of the CDA, told The Daily Star.

He also acknowledged that tidal surge started to penetrate new areas including Mohra, Chandgao, Chaktai, greater Bakolia, Halishahar, Chawkbazar, Dewanbazar, Khatunganj and Boxirhat two years back with the

from both banks of these canals, re-excavate and renovate the water bodies, three-fourths of the waterlogging can be solved," Abdus Salam, CDA chairman, told The Daily Star.

Under the project, at least 42 silt traps (that deposits sand rolling down the hills during monsoon) would be built, all the bridges and culverts heightened and water reservoirs created to contain the rain water.

"Besides, 1,000 kilometres of road drain will be built and the existing drains will be re-excavated," said the top CDA official.

He said the other project worth Tk 2,500 crore is earmarked for constructing an eight-and-a-half-kilometre road-cum-dam from the Chaktai canal's mouth to Kalurghat.

This too is scheduled to end by 2020.

"There are 12 canals along the stretch, and 12 sluice gates will be installed at the mouths of those canals to stave off the tidal surge. I hope those sluice gates will partly rid the port city of the tidal water," said the CDA boss.

He also hoped that once the whole work is completed, the port city would be largely free from the water-related sufferings.

JP gets nod

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As per the conditions, the BNP will have to install high-resolution CCTV cameras inside and outside the venue, set up archways and use metal detectors at all entry points, scan rally-bound vehicles with own scanners and arrange fire extinguishers in the venue, said the DMP documents.

The DMP also banned all activities that can hamper public safety. Those activities include carrying sticks, delivering speeches that hurt religious sentiments, and arriving at the venue in processions.

Police asked the party leaders to end the rally by 5:00pm.

"Dhaka Metropolitan Police didn't impose any condition on organising our rally," said Foysal Chisty, a JP presidium member.

Another JP top leader said they had a meeting with the DMP commissioner three days ago on how police could help the party hold the rally, especially in managing huge vehicles coming from different districts.

JP leaders said they have targeted a massive gathering for the rally. The party has asked all its district units adjacent to Dhaka to bring people to send a message in the political arena that the JP is a strong factor in the country's politics.

JP chief HM Ershad, also chairman of the JP-led 58-party United National Alliance (UNA), will come up with the party's election strategy, including further expansion of the combine, at the rally, party's Secretary General Ruhul Amin Hawlader told this newspaper.

He also said by ensuring a huge gathering at the rally, they want to prove that the JP is stronger than any time in the past.

"By holding a grand rally, we also want to gain people's confidence ahead of the upcoming election," Hawlader said, adding that the rally would be held under the banner of the UNA.

UNSC

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requested the meeting that could still be blocked by a procedural vote.

If there is no move to block the meeting, the council will hear from Marzuki Darusman, an Indonesian lawyer who was appointed last year by the UN Human Rights Council to chair the mission.

In its report, the mission said there were reasonable grounds to believe that the atrocities were committed with the intention of destroying the Rohingya, warranting the charges of "genocide."

Myanmar maintains that the violence in Rakhine was triggered by Rohingya extremists who attacked border posts in August 2017.