



Miles, one of Bangladesh's most prominent bands, celebrated their 40th anniversary by rocking out with their fans at a concert yesterday at International Convention City Bashundhara.

PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

5.5 lakh migrant workers deported in last 10 years

Hotline service for them formally launched

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Nearly 5.5 lakh Bangladeshi migrant workers were deported from different countries in the last 10 years, Shariful Hasan, head of Brac Migration Programme, said at a workshop yesterday.

Almost all of these migrant workers had become undocumented in those countries and travel passes were required for their return, he added.

He said the data was prepared based on statistics maintained by Prabashi Kalyan Desk -- set up at airports by Wage Earners Welfare Board -- and other government agencies, as accurate data on returning migrant workers is not available.

Shariful said in most cases, migrant workers returned because their visas expired and due to lack of job opportunities, physical and mental abuse, not getting promised job, illness, employing companies shutting down or going bankrupt, and failing to adapt to new environment.

"If we want to make their reintegration in society sustainable, we have to focus on their mental health and the skills that they have accumulated," he said.

Brac Migration Programme and International Organization for Migration (IOM) Bangladesh held the workshop as

part of a project called "Protasha" at Brac Centre Inn in the capital.

Addressing the programme, IOM Bangladesh official Phineas Jasi said reintegration is an integral part of migration cycle and essential element for migrants returning to Bangladesh after years of absence from their families and society.

Ahmed Munir Saleheen, additional secretary to Expatriates' Welfare Ministry, said the government with help from IOM Bangladesh is preparing a database of returning migrant workers.

It will enable the government to provide better services to the returnees, he said, adding that they now have data on migrant workers going abroad.

"We don't have information on how many of them returned," he added.

Under the "Protasha" project, a hotline service for migrant workers was launched at the programme.

Migrant workers will be able to get information by dialing +08000102030 (toll free) and +09610102030 (long code) from 7am to 11pm every day.

The "Protasha" project is led by the government. IOM Bangladesh is implementing it in partnership with Brac, funded by the European Union.

CHECKING VEHICLE OVERLOADING

Guidelines yet to be implemented

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With overloading causing huge damages to roads and bridges, Roads and Highways Department (RHD) is not sure when it will be able to control axle load following approved guideline and international standards.

Speaking at a public hearing, RHD officials said the government in November 2017 increased the maximum weight limit for goods-laden vehicles for an "interim period" but they do not know when they will start following the original guideline.

Besides overloading, RHD officials including its Chief Engineer Mohammad Jawed Alam faced questions related to poor development project proposals (DPPs), dues of contractors and

several other issues.

RHD organised the hearing at its headquarters in Tejgaon as part of its implementation of National Integrity Strategy.

In May 2005, the then communication ministry (now road transport and bridges ministry) through a gazette notification had set a maximum permissible axle load limit for vehicles for the first time.

It fixed 13 to 15 tonnes for two axles, 22 to 25 tonnes for three axles, 25 to 33 tonnes for four axles and 35 to 38 tonnes for five axles, which were consistent with international standards.

In June 2012, the ministry prepared a guideline on Axle Load Control Centre.

In August 2016, the authorities

tried to impose fines for overloading under the guideline, but transport owners and workers damaged weighbridges in Manikganj and Chattogram on the very first day of their protest.

The government increased the maximum weight limit through a November 2017 order, which states that two-axle vehicle can carry maximum 22 tonnes, three-axle maximum 30 tonnes and four-axle maximum 40 tonnes.

Out of the three axle control centres, two are now in operation. Only five percent overloading can reduce road longevity by 18 percent, said an expert.

Yesterday, Md Amanullah, a superintending engineer (administration and establishment) of RHD, said the "interim decision"

was taken following "consensus of all stakeholders" including transport leaders.

"It was decided that the rate would be reduced after further consultation and finally the guideline would be followed," he said, adding, "Although it [the decision] cannot be termed scientific, it was taken following discussion."

Asked when they will be able to follow the original guideline, Amanullah said a project has been taken to install 21 weighbridges on major highways to check overloading.

"Once those are set up within one and a half years, we hope the [road transport and bridges] ministry and other stakeholders will take the decision," he said.

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Indian govt trying to divert attention from economic crisis: Prof Serajul on NRC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC) are not just India's "internal issue" any more, and Bangladesh government should take a clear stance regarding them, speakers at a discussion said yesterday.

The developing "crisis" in India could badly affect Bangladesh like the Rohingya issue of Myanmar did. Considering this, Bangladesh should take precautionary measures, they said at the roundtable at Dhaka Reporter's Unity.

Ganosamhati Andolon, a left-leaning political party, organised the event titled "CAA and NRC in India: Impact on South Asia and what Bangladesh can do".

"[Bangladesh] government has been saying it [CAA and NRC] is India's internal

issue; this is objectionable. It is a global problem," Dhaka University Professor Emeritus Serajul Islam Choudhury said. "If the neighbour's house catches fire, ours will too at some point," he added.

Explaining the strike on the multi-cultural character of Indian subcontinent through the partition in 1947 under British rule, he said, "India is turning into a jail for communities."

He also said, "India is going through an 'extreme economic crisis' and the [Indian] government is trying to divert people's attention from it."

Terming Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi "second Hitler", Gonoshasthaya Kendra founder Dr Zafrullah Chowdhury predicted that the NRC issue could spark the third world war.

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Amend law to stop 'punishment' at schools: speakers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) yesterday demanded an amendment to the Children Act, 2013, incorporating a provision to protect children from physical and mental torture they face -- especially in educational institutions -- in the name of punishment.

"Due to an ambiguity in section 70 of the exiting act, taking legal action against culprits involved in physical and mental torture on children are being obstructed in most cases," claimed advocate Tajul Islam, adviser of advocacy and capacity building of BLAST.

He was presenting a keynote on "Legal protection initiative to end physical and mental torture on children", at a views-exchange meeting at The Daily Star Centre.

Arguing the importance of the amendment to the act, Tajul said 54 countries in the world have already introduced laws or amended their respective children's acts to end mental or physical torture.

"In 2015, the United Nations' Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended



Discussants at the views-exchange meeting at The Daily Star Centre yesterday.

Bangladesh to enact laws to stop physical and mental torture on children in the name of punishment," he added.

In his speech, lawmaker Israfil Alam said many children in remote parts of the country are still being physically or mentally tortured by their parents and teachers.

"Various programmes should be taken

to raise awareness among guardians and teachers, aside from laws, to stop such torture," Israfil, also a member of parliamentary caucus for child rights, recommended.

Priorities should be given to protect children's rights if the government wants to fulfil SDGs, he added.

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'Money and muscle cannot be route to elective office'

Says Prof Rehman Sobhan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Centre for Policy Dialogue Chairman Prof Rehman Sobhan yesterday said in an opposition-free political landscape -- where the government is exposed to little accountability, the quality of governance tends to deteriorate.

"A free media and strong civil society could partially compensate for a weak political opposition," the eminent economist said while delivering a lecture on "Sustaining democracy in Bangladesh: The political legacy of Tajuddin Ahmad," in the capital.

Asiatic Society of Bangladesh organised the lecture.

"A democratic order, which is responsive to the needs of our people over the next half century, would need to ensure that it would be truly representative of all the people," said Rehman Sobhan, a member of the first Planning Commission in Bangladesh.

"We would need to ensure that money and muscle power would no longer serve as the most effective route to elective office," he added.

"We would, at the same time, need to make provisions for ensuring that candidates from similar social backgrounds [Sheikh Mujibur Rahman] and Tajuddin, with modest

means, who commanded public respect and were incorruptible, are provided with opportunities to enter the parliament," he said.

He also said it should be ensured that the executive remains fully accountable to such a parliament.

The parliament is, however, only one pillar of democratic process, Prof Sobhan said, adding, "We would need to restore freedom of the media, not just by permitting a proliferation of outlets, but by providing them with freedom to express themselves on all issues without fear of intimidation, legal harassment or incarceration."

He also said civil society organisations should be strengthened and encouraged to express themselves on public issues, once again without fear of harassment or abuse.

Rehman Sobhan said Tajuddin, the first prime minister of Bangladesh, was an unsung hero of Bangladesh's history, who used to practice politics for the interests of people.

Tajuddin was by temperament a worker and an activist; his political intelligence, commitment and organisational skills were exceptional but he never aspired to use those to seek elevation to the highest rank of public office, said Prof Sobhan,

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Sixth JS session from Jan 9

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Jatiya Sangsad will go into the sixth session on January 9.

It will also be the first JS session of the New Year 2020 where the President is scheduled to deliver his speech approved by the cabinet.

The speech consists of the government's development activities, said sources at the parliament secretariat.

President Abdul Hamid yesterday convened the session according to the power bestowed upon him by article 72 (1) of the constitution, according to a press release of the parliament secretariat.

The parliamentary business advisory committee headed by Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury will finalise the duration of the session before the House that will go into sitting around 4pm.

No air polluter will be spared: DNCC mayor

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A mobile court of Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) yesterday fined four contractors -- including a DNCC contractor -- Tk 80,000, for keeping construction materials on footpaths and polluting air at Niketan.

The mobile court, led by executive magistrates Md Abdul Hamid Miah and Mir Nahid Ahsan, also pulled down illegal billboards from road medians at Gulshan-1 and Gulshan-2.

"All development work will have to be done in a compliant manner, otherwise no one will be spared from punishment," said DNCC mayor Atiqul Islam while inaugurating the drive against air pollution at Niketan.

He said many people consider themselves "powerful enough" to do anything they wish, and do not follow rules. "They will have to understand that no one is more powerful than the government," he added.

It is not acceptable that anyone will come and set up billboards, festoons, banners on footpaths, medians or electric poles, the mayor said. There is a provision of taking permission from city corporation

before doing these, and anyone wishing to do so will have to follow the law, he said.

"We are only removing the illegal billboards this time, but we will take legal action against the offenders if anyone does it again," the mayor said.

Atiqul also distributed leaflets to locals to raise awareness about air pollution.

The drive comes at a time when residents of Dhaka city have been facing severe air pollution.

Since the beginning of winter, air pollution levels in Dhaka have turned severe mainly due to brick kilns, vehicles run on fuel with higher level of sulfur, road digging and construction work done without taking necessary steps to spray water, say experts.

Bangladesh, one of the most densely-populated countries in the world, has been struggling with air pollution for a long time. In the last year, Dhaka has regularly found its place among the most polluted cities in the world.

"At a country level, weighted by population, Bangladesh emerges as the most polluted country," said the 2018 World Air Quality Report released on March 5.

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Protesting the attack on Ducus VP Nurul Haque Nur and his supporters, concerned guardians and civil society members formed a human chain in front of Aparajeyo Bangla on Dhaka University campus yesterday. They also criticised the vice chancellor for not taking strict measures against the attackers.

PHOTO: STA