



**WIRES HAYWIRE...** The ubiquity of cables and wires hanging above Dhaka streets have desensitised residents of the danger they possess, not to mention the sheer eyesore. In this photo taken from Gulistan yesterday, loose cables and unprotected light holders can be seen dangling above footpaths. How they got there is another story of irregularity -- they were put up by a "syndicate" that illegally occupies the pavement and rents it out to streetside vendors. PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

# KSA planning to abolish kafala system

JAMIL MAHMUD

Saudi Arabia is planning to abolish its controversial sponsorship system, known as kafala, amid economic reforms and frequent allegations of labour exploitation in the Gulf country.

The much-anticipated decision to abolish the system is imminent, English-language daily Saudi Gazette reported recently, citing sources.

The news report says the abolition will give expatriate workers the freedom to secure exit and re-entry visas as well as take up new employment without previous employers' restriction or approval.

International labour rights groups and activists have been blaming the kafala system for limiting migrant workers' job opportunities in the Gulf.

They have long been demanding its complete abolition in the six Gulf countries and in the Arab states of Jordan and Lebanon.

Shariful Hasan, head of Brac Migration Programme, said Saudi Arabia's abolition of the kafala system will benefit Bangladeshi migrant workers greatly because they are subject to exploitation under the present system.

The system limits a migrant worker's movement because it authorises one single person instead of an organisation or company to monitor a foreign worker's daily activities, Shariful said.

"It is a form of modern-day slavery," he added.

Under the current sponsorship system in Saudi Arabia, migrant workers need an employer's approval to enter the country. They also need such approval for residence permit renewal, employment termination, changing their place of employment, and for exit from the country, according to International Labour Organization (ILO).

Taking advantage of the system, errant employers exploit migrant workers by applying various means such as confiscating workers' passports to be "assured" that the migrant worker stays for the duration of their contract and does not "abscond".

Such dependency on employers increase chances of impeding "fair migration", says a whitepaper published by the ILO Regional Office for Arab States in 2017.

The paper cites the benefits of reforming the sponsorship system -- particularly the economic benefits and worker protection.

"The possibility of migrant workers moving into better paid employment may act as an incentive for workers to acquire new skills -- benefiting the national economy as a whole by gradually increasing the overall skill level of the

migrant workforce," it notes. "Allowing migrant workers to change employers would contribute to better functioning and more dynamic national labour markets and would help ensure that the skills of migrant workers are better matched with industry and employer needs," the paper also states.

Other Gulf countries have made reforms to the kafala system, to different extents, in recent years.

Of these, Bahrain established the Labour Market Regulatory Authority in 2006 with the responsibility of sponsoring migrant workers, and declared that it would abolish the kafala system in 2009. However, migrant workers still require individual sponsors to enter the country, according to the ILO paper.

Around 20 lakh Bangladeshi workers are currently in Saudi Arabia.

Around 24,000 workers were deported from there last year. Of whom, many

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Shariful Hasan  
Head of Brac Migration Programme

women said they were subjected to physical violence, while both men and women said their salaries were not paid regularly and they had to work in unfavourable conditions.

As per Saudi Arabia's current rules, a royal decree has to be issued to bring the abolition of kafala into effect, an official at Bangladesh embassy in Riyadh recently told The Daily Star over phone.

It will be a massive step if the new abolition law is passed, because almost everything regarding foreign labour recruitment in Saudi Arabia is linked to the kafala system, the official said, seeking anonymity.

The kafala system was introduced in the region in the 1950s, after the discovery of oil there. Following that, countries began hiring expatriate workers to speed up development activities.

The Saudi Gazette report says the move by the Kingdom comes in light of a series of economic reforms in the country since the launch of its "Vision 2030".

The reforms envision a plan to reduce the Gulf country's dependency on revenue generated from the oil sector.

NUSRAT MURDER

## CJ for quick disposal of case

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain has recently assigned a High Court bench for hearing and disposing of the death reference and appeals in the sensational Nusrat Jahan Rafi murder case.

The bench of Justice Soumendra Sarker and Justice Shahed Nuruddin may now fix a date for starting hearing the death reference and appeals in the case, Supreme Court Spokesman Md Saifur Rahman told The Daily Star yesterday.

Attorney General Mahbubey Alam told this correspondent that his office will conduct the case on behalf of the state before the HC bench after it includes the matter in its cause list and fixes a date for hearing.

Nusrat Jahan Rafi, a 19-year-old madrasa student in Feni, lost her battle for life on April 10 last year, four days after she was set afire. She was sexually harassed by the

## Delhi violence condemned

Hindu Buddhist Christian Oikya Parishad urges India to maintain peace

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Oikya Parishad has expressed its concern and condemnation over the recent violence in New Delhi, India.

The condemnation came during the council's standing committee meeting at its office, said a press release yesterday.

The participants urged the government of India and its people to maintain peace, harmony and security of the minority groups in line with the

## An ominous sign

Mahbub Talukdar on people's indifference to voting

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Election Commissioner Mahbub Talukdar yesterday expressed grave concern over the present voting system and underscored the need for reformation of the electoral process.

"Public indifference to voting is now being noticed. It is an ominous sign for democracy," Mahbub Talukdar said while addressing a programme in Dhaka on the occasion of National Voters' Day.

The lack of trust in the voting system will have to be addressed at any cost, the commissioner said.

While addressing the same programme, Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda said the number of voters in the country at present is around 100 million.

Of them, 5,54,82,530 are male while 5,43,36,222 are female voters, he said.

Some 360 transgender people were added to the voter list for the first time, he added.

According to an EC official, 55,79,030 new voters were

## All that remains are memories

A family lost to Eskaton fire

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Another person died in the fire that broke out at a building in Eskaton on Thursday, taking the death toll to five.

Shahidul Kirmani Rony (40), who lost his wife and son in the fire, breathed his last while undergoing treatment at the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) of Sheikh Hasina National Burn and Plastic Surgery Institute around 6:30am yesterday, said Dr Samanta Lal Sen, national coordinator of the burn institute.

Earlier, buying house staffer Abdul Kader Liton (40) and Vigarunnisa Noon School and College student Afrin Jahan Juthi (17) died in the fire that started around 4am at building no 45/A on Dilu Road.

Rony's four-year-old son AKM Rushdi also died that very day. Rushdi's mother Jannatul Fardous (38) passed away on Sunday, after suffering from 95 percent burn injuries.

Rony tried to escape the building through the stairs, carrying Rushdi in his arms. But unable to see in the dark, Rony stumbled down the stairs and Rushdi fell



PHOTO: COLLECTED

out of his arms.

Rony had then tried to crawl back up the stairs [for his son], but lost consciousness, Rony's sister Nasrin Akhter told The Daily Star earlier.

The family had big plans for their future. Jannatul had set up her own online business and the young family was planning to expand it. Rushdi was recently enrolled in a school.

A five-member committee headed by Abul Hosen, deputy director of Mymensingh Fire Service and Civil Defence, was formed to probe the incident. The committee has been asked to submit a report within 15 days.

## Tabith files lawsuit for cancellation of DNCC polls

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Tabith Awal, who contested Dhaka North City Corporation polls for mayor post from BNP, filed a lawsuit with an election tribunal in the capital yesterday, demanding cancellation of the February 1 election.

Judge Utpal Bhattacharya accepted the suit and will pass an order today whether to summon the defendants, Advocate Masud Ahmed Talukdar confirmed to The Daily Star.

The chief election commissioner, commission's secretary, winner candidate Atiqul Islam and five others have been made defendants to contest the suit.

In the suit, Tabith claimed that the February 1 election was held



Sitting on the edge of Tongi-Abdullahpur bridge, a woman waits for customers with her baskets of betel nuts on display. Like her, many occupy the bridge in the afternoon to sell produce. This photo was taken recently. PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## DHAKA TODAY

- PROTEST**  
Protesting the recent violence in Delhi  
Organiser: Alliance for Resistance of Terrorism and Communalism  
Venue: Shahbagh  
Time: 11am
- RALLY**  
Marking the World Hearing Day  
Venue: Block-A of BSMMU  
Time: 9am
- EXHIBITION**  
Innovation Exhibition by Abu Sayeed  
Venue: Central Public Library  
Time: 11am
- CELEBRATION**  
Marking International Women's Day  
Organiser: ActionAid Bangladesh  
Venue: Central Public Library, Shahbagh  
Time: 10am
- SESSION**  
EMK Book Club: Book for Encouragement  
Venue: EMK Center  
Time: 5pm

**EMK Book Club**  
Books for Encouragement  
March 3, 2020  
5:00 PM to 7:00 PM  
EMK Center

## Set up public toilets in each ward

Activists demand at discussion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The two Dhaka city mayors should establish adequate public toilets in each ward in a bid to avert environmental pollution and health risk, said activists at a discussion yesterday.

They said the capital has only 62 public toilets run by two city corporations.

The people -- including day labourers, street children and those who have to stay outdoor for work -- suffer from various health problems as they often have to hold excreta for a long time due to limited facility of toilets.

People's Health Movement and PHM Bangladesh jointly organised the discussion titled "Public toilet crisis in the city, health risks and way forward" at an auditorium of Gonoshasthaya Nagar Hospital in the capital.

Addressing the programme, architect and environment activist Iqbal Habib said open urination by workers of various informal sectors -- including rickshaw-pullers -- causes environmental pollution, putting city dwellers at health risk.

Before setting up public toilets, he recommended, the authorities should design a proper map after discussing the issue with different stakeholders.

He demanded that public sanitation issue be included in the agenda of ward-based standing committees under the city corporations.

Doctors for Health and Environment President Abu Sayeed said cleanliness of the environment can be ensured by building adequate public toilets.

Gonoshasthaya Kendra founder Dr Zafrullah Chowdhury urged the government to ensure use of public toilets for free.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6

## 9PC INTEREST RATE ON LOANS HC refuses to hear petition challenging BB decision

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A High Court bench yesterday refused to hold hearing on a writ petition that challenged the legality of Bangladesh Bank's decision which instructed the scheduled banks to set a maximum nine percent interest rate on all loans except credit cards.

The bench of Justice Tariq ul Hakim and Justice Md Iqbal Kabir also dropped the petition from its cause-list, saying that this bench has no jurisdiction to hear such a matter involving bank related issues.

The judges, however, said the petitioner has liberty to move the same petition before another HC bench having jurisdiction to hear the matters.

After this bench passed the order, petitioner's counsel Syed Sayedqul Haque Suman placed the petition before another HC bench of Justice Abu Taher Md Saifur Rahman and Justice Md Zakir Hossain for its hearing.

The bench led by Justice Abu Taher Md Saifur Rahman said the writ petition will

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

## 'CASINO BROTHERS' Enamul, Rupon on 6-day remand

STAR REPORT

A Dhaka court yesterday placed brothers Enamul Haque Enu and Rupon Bhuiyan on six-day remand each in a case filed under the Special Powers Act.

Enamul is former vice-president of Gendaria unit of Awami League while Rupon is the unit's joint general secretary.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Mohammad Jasim passed the order after police produced them before the court with a 10-day remand prayer. Both brothers are now in jail after being arrested on January 13 for allegedly running a casino.

On February 25, a Rab team launched a drive at their house on Wari's Lalmohon Saha Street and recovered Tk 26.55 crore in cash and fixed deposit receipts worth Tk 5.15 crore.

They also recovered around one kg of gold, 9,300 USD, 174 Malaysian ringgit, 5,350 Indian rupees, 1,195 Chinese yuan, 11,560 Thai baht, 100 UAE dirhams and some gambling chips from the same flat.

Rab suspected that the money was collected from their illegal casino business. Enamul and Rupon were the directors of a casino at the Wanderer's Club in Motijheel.

On February 27, Rab filed a case against Enamul and Rupon with Wari Police Station under the Special Powers Act in connection with the recovery of cash and deposit money, gold, foreign currencies and gambling chips.