

It's nothing but trash

Says expatriates' welfare minister about media reports on recruiting syndicates for Malaysia

PORIMOL PALMA

"Media reports on recruiting syndicates for Malaysia are nothing but trash," remarked Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Minister Imran Ahmad, while talking to The Daily Star yesterday.

"The documents being circulated are fake," he said in reference to a report in the Malaysian newspaper Malaysiakini.

On January 10, the newspaper reported that it saw the document that mentions 25 Bangladeshi recruitment agencies (BRA) and 250 sub-agents who are expected to be involved in recruiting new workers bound for Malaysia, indicating manipulation of the process.

The issue surfaced after the minister and Malaysian Human Resources Minister Datuk Seri M Saravanan signed a memorandum of understanding on December 19.

Mentionable, this newspaper has obtained a copy of the document, which describes various stages of the recruitment process, starting from the application by employers to procedures upon arrival.

Under a section titled "Quota Auto Allocation to BRA and Engaging BRA", it states that workers to Malaysia will be recruited by 25 main BRAs that will be supported by 250 sub-BRAs. They will be automatically selected by the Foreign Workers Centralised Management System, an online application for managing recruitments.

In light of this, recruiting agents and labour migration activists said they're afraid that the syndicate will manipulate the recruitment process in a rehash of the 2016-18 period.

Back then, the Malaysian government allowed only 10 recruiting agencies from Bangladesh to send workers there, though Bangladesh government had sent a list of more than 700 recruiting agents.

Although the agreed migration cost was Tk 39,500, each Bangladeshi worker had to spend Tk four lakh on average due to malpractice.

Eventually, Malaysia froze recruitment from Bangladesh on September 1 in 2018, saying that the labour recruitment practices were leading to forced labour and debt bondage.

Speaking on the issue, Imran Ahmad said he was not the minister then and so he doesn't want to hear of the past.

"What I want is a system and policy through which our people can find jobs in Malaysia at a low cost," he said, without specifying what the cost could be and how it could be ensured.

He said he does not want to see visa trading -- a malpractice that increases the cost of recruitment, with a lot of agents and sub-agents competing to secure job demands from Malaysia.

According to sources in the recruitment industry, the process was manipulated through the online system in 2016-18, which allowed a Malaysian employer to select any one of the 10 agents for labour recruitment from Bangladesh.

Asked if the government knows any such online system, which would be applied this time too, he said this has not yet come to the table during discussions between the two countries.

He said he cannot deny it if such a system was proposed by the Malaysian government.

"Whatever system it is, it will be online, but it won't be like the previous one. We will also have a different system from our side," he said, adding that the specifics are yet to be finalised.

He also mentioned that Malaysian Home Minister Hamzah Zainudin is scheduled to visit later this month to discuss the recruitment process in detail.

Recruiting agents and labour migration activists said they're afraid that the syndicate will manipulate the recruitment process in a rehash of the 2016-18 period.




The government has issued an 11-point instruction to curb the spread of Omicron, yet another Covid variant. Under the new guidelines, one needs to show a vaccination certificate against Covid-19 to avail restaurant services. The photo was taken yesterday from the capital's Paltan area.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

87pc left without jobs during lockdowns

Finds BILS study on workers of transport, restaurant, retail sectors



FILE PHOTO

EFFECTS OF LOCKDOWN

- 95pc became unemployed in transport sector
- 83pc in retail and hotel-restaurant sectors
- Combined percentage drop in income 81pc
- Average income dropped from Tk 13,578 to Tk 2,524
- Part-time jobs increased by 215pc
- 20pc sold off properties, reduced meals, sent children to work
- 80pc workers' families took out loans, reduced savings

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The lockdowns were grim for workers of the transport, hotel-restaurant and retail sectors, as they saw their jobs, incomes and savings disappear.

The combined unemployment rate in the sectors during lockdown periods in 2020 and 2021 was 87 percent, found a study. Among the three sectors, the highest rate, 95 percent, was recorded in the transport sector, while it was 83 percent in retail and hotel-restaurant sectors.

The numbers were revealed at a press conference of Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies (BILS), held at the institute's premises in the capital.

BILS conducted the research titled "Study on the status of social protection and job security of private-sector workers; experiences amid Covid-19 pandemic and way forward" from April 5 to August 10, 2021.

"Among the unemployed workers, seven percent are yet to find a job," said Md Manirul Islam, deputy director (research) of BILS, who presented the findings.

The findings noted that the combined percentage drop in income in the three sectors was 81 percent. The highest, 96 percent, was witnessed in the transport sector, while it was 83 percent in

the other two sectors.

The general average monthly income of a worker was Tk 13,578, which came down to Tk 2,524 during lockdown. After the lockdown, the income rose to Tk 12,529, said Manirul.

Part-time jobs increased by 215 percent during lockdown periods, he said.

Twenty percent of workers sold off their properties, reduced their meals and sent their children to work to cope with the financial crisis, he added. Besides, 80 percent of workers' families took out loans and reduced their savings after the lockdown period, the study found.

The three sectors were covered in the study as they were heavily affected due to two major country-wide restrictions on public movement in 2020 and 2021.

Speakers at the programme recommended preparing a complete database of private-sector workers and introducing an emergency humanitarian assistance programme for them.

They also suggested creating a policy provision to provide unemployment benefits to private-sector workers in emergencies.

Among others, BILS vice chairperson Amirul Haque Amin and directors Kohinoor Mahmood and Nazma Yesmin were present.

'Whom do you actually serve?' Shujan says EC depriving voters by not revealing candidates' wealth info

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) is "depriving voters from their rights" by not disclosing wealth information of candidates, claimed Shujan Secretary Badiul Alam Majumdar.

"We've seen that the [Election] Commission stopped disclosing wealth statements of candidates since the Dhaka City Corporation polls (held in 2020). A similar situation was observed in the Narayanganj City Corporation polls," he said.

Wealth disclosure can help a voter make informed choice when electing candidates, he said.

"The EC is a constitutional organisation. It is a free organisation. We want to ask the Election Commission whose interest is it serving?" he asked.

Shujan Treasurer Syed Abu Naser Bukhtear Ahmed said the rights organisation has observed over the past five years that wealth statements of public representatives have swelled four to five times.

"How is this possible? Information regarding this can help voters to choose the right candidate," he said.

"We've seen that the [Election] Commission stopped disclosing wealth statements of candidates since the Dhaka City Corporation polls (held in 2020). A similar situation was observed in the Narayanganj City Corporation polls."

SHUJAN SECRETARY
Badiul Alam Majumdar

They said this at a virtual press conference, centred on disclosing information of candidates for the Narayanganj City Corporation election and demanding free and fair polls.

According to Shujan, seven people are vying in the mayoral race, with 148 running for councillor posts and 34 in reserved seats.

Of them, 120 candidates have either passed SSC or failed to complete school education. Of the seven mayoral candidates, two are entrepreneurs, one lawyer, one physician and two are service holders. The other candidate didn't disclose his occupation.

Of them, three candidates are facing criminal cases, while 40 councillors are facing cases, eight of whom are facing charges in murder cases.

NCC's running mayor and a candidate for the upcoming polls Selina Hayat Ivy, who declared her profession as doctor, has the highest annual income -- Tk 19.38 lakh, earned through mayorship. Fifty-eight candidates have wealth less than Tk five lakh while 14 candidates have wealth over Tk one crore.

Meanwhile, Shujan's Badiul Alam Majumdar said there's allegation of violating election's code of conduct by AL lawmaker Shamim Osman.

He said violating the election code of conduct is a punishable offence. "CEC Nurul Huda's comment in this regard is not clear to us," he said.

Huda on Wednesday said, "He [the lawmaker] violated the electoral code of conduct, but he did not flout it to such an extent which would warrant issuing a notice, handing out punishment or bringing him to book."

QAWWALI EVENT AT DU

Police foil protest rally

DU CORRESPONDENT

Police yesterday foiled a protest rally against the attack, allegedly by Chhatra League activists, before a Qawwali performance at Dhaka University's TSC on Wednesday.

Peoples Activist Coalition (PAC) organised the rally in front of the National Museum at Shahbagh.

"Police charged us with batons while trying to stop our rally. At least five of our members have been injured," said PAC central unit secretary Shimul Chowdhury.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Chhatra Federation held another rally at Raju Memorial Sculpture. DU students also brought out a procession in protest of the attack.

Contacted, Officer-in-Charge of Shahbagh Police Station Moudut Hawlader said the protesters were asked not to hold the rally, considering the Covid situation.

"Allegations of baton-charging are not true," he claimed.

Silsila, a DU-based Qawwali band, organised a performance yesterday evening at the same venue, protesting Wednesday's attack.

Meanwhile, Ain O Salish Kendra yesterday demanded action against the perpetrators behind Wednesday's attack.



Walking on the capital's streets is turning into an ordeal with each passing day. Owing to encroachment by vendors, the footpaths are no longer pedestrian-friendly. With Covid cases on the rise once again, this has become even riskier as no social distancing can be maintained in this setup. The photo was taken from Green Road area yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON