







The 815-metre Naujor flyover in Gazipur was opened to the public around 2:00pm yesterday. The government made three flyovers, including this one, and a portion of a bridge operational to help smoothen the journeys of home-goers ahead of Eid. Related story on www.thedailystar.net

PHOTO: SHEIKH ENAMUL HAQ

HAJJ PILGRIMS

Immigration to be done in Dhaka

People over 65 won't be allowed for pilgrimage

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Immigration of Bangladeshi hajj pilgrims flying from Dhaka will be completed at the Dhaka airport from this year, ending the need for waiting in long queues at Saudi Arabian airport.

The pilgrims will have no immigration procedure to complete once they reach the Gulf country.

However, those flying from Chattogram and Sylhet will have to pass through immigration in Saudi Arabia, said an official of the ministry of religious affairs.

The matter was discussed at a meeting at the ministry in the capital yesterday, with ministry Secretary Kazi Enamul Hassan in the chair. It also discussed this year's hajj preparations.

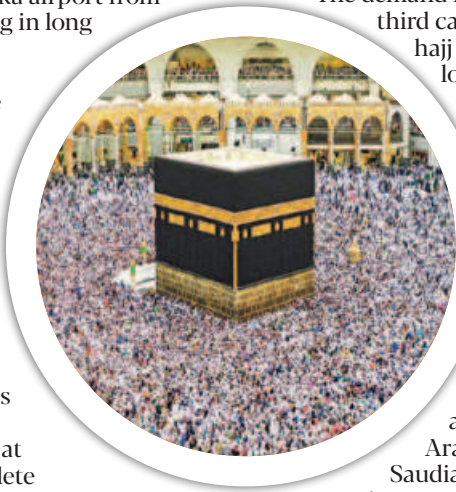
Bangladeshi pilgrims had to wait at the Saudi airport for hours to complete immigration, causing immense suffering to them.

In 2019, immigration of 62,000 out 127,000 Bangladeshi hajj pilgrims was completed at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport (HSIA).

So far, pilgrims from only two other countries, Malaysia and Indonesia, were allowed to complete immigration at their local airports, sources at the religious affairs ministry said.

Meanwhile, State Minister for Religious Affairs

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1



RASHIDUL HASAN

The demand for allowing a third carrier for operating hajj flights is getting louder as the existing system of ferrying the pilgrims to Saudi Arabia has been costing the hajjis more and is creating a duopoly.

National flag carrier Biman and its Saudi Arabian counterpart Saudia are the only two airlines transporting pilgrims from Dhaka since 2012 as per the hajj agreement signed between the two countries.

Since then, the two companies have enjoyed this duopoly over the hajj flights, charging exorbitant fares from the pilgrims, point out leaders of Hajj Agencies Association

of Bangladesh (HAAB) and Association of Travel Agents of Bangladesh (ATAB).

"We have been hostage to the duopoly of Biman and Saudia for years with regard to sending people to perform hajj. The two airlines make and change decisions almost arbitrarily without bothering about the problems of the pilgrims," M Shahadat Hossain Taslim, president of HAAB, told The Daily Star.

"The government must allow a third carrier to improve hajj management," he said, adding that it is allowed in different neighbouring countries, including India, Pakistan, Indonesia and Malaysia.

"These countries allow a third carrier to carry hajj passengers. Why can't our country do the same?" questioned the HAAB chief.

If one more airline is allowed, he said, HAAB could offer different types of packages including shorter ones, which would benefit the hajjis.

Both HAAB and ATAB leaders said every year uncertainty looms over sending pilgrims to Saudi Arabia in case of cancellation of slots of Biman on various grounds.

A slot means landing and take-off permission granted to a specific airline by any airport authorities.

Biman gets a specific number of slots to carry hajjis to Saudi Arabia.

"If a third carrier is allowed to operate hajj flights, there won't be any such uncertainty," said Taslim.

This year, a total of 57,585 Bangladeshis will perform hajj, a ritual must for able-bodied Muslims at least once in their lifetime. In 2019, around 1.27 lakh Bangladeshis were allowed to perform hajj.

However, due to the global Covid pandemic, the largest annual Muslim congregation was held on a limited scale in the last two years. The hajj typically packs millions of pilgrims into

SEE PAGE 6 COL 6

Carriers' duopoly over Hajj must end

Demand grows for introducing other airlines for pilgrims

Casino brothers to serve 7 years

CHAITANYA CHANDRA HALDER and EMRUL HASAN BAPPI

Organised crimes and money laundering are a serious threat to the rule of law and sustainable development of the country, said a Dhaka court in the verdict in a money laundering case.

Judge Md Iqbal Hossain of the Special Judge's Court-5 made the observation as he read out the verdict, sentencing five casino brothers, including Enamul Haque Enu and Rupon Bhuiyan, and six others to seven years in prison and fined them a total of Tk 4 crore.

The convicts will have to proportionately pay the fine in favour of the state in 60 days. Failure to pay the fine will result in an additional year of imprisonment.

Organised crimes like the illegal casinos and gambling lead to money laundering, which can destabilise the financial system and undermine the development efforts, the judge observed.

Enu, Rupon and their brothers Shahidul Haque Bhuiyan, Rashidul Haque Bhuiyan and Merajul Haque Bhuiyan made large sums of money from their illegal casino inside Wanderers' Club in the capital's Motijheel. Their six associates helped them acquire and launder the money, said the verdict.

The convicts in collaboration with each other were actively involved in illegal gambling in the form of casino games and laundered Tk 2 crore, it said, adding that they had committed an organised crime.

Enu is a former vice-president of Gendaria unit Awami League, Rupon is a former joint general secretary of the same unit, and Joy Gopal Sarkar

SEE PAGE 6 COL 5

MEDIA WORKERS' BILL

There's room for revision

Says info minister, promises to talk to journo, media outlet owners

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Information Minister Hasan Mahmud yesterday said he will sit with journalist union leaders and owners of media houses because there is room for revising the Mass Media Employees (Services Conditions) Bill 2022.

"I'm told that journalist unions will submit a written proposal for revising some sections of the proposed bill. We'll then talk with the owners because they will be the ones implementing it," he told reporters at his office.

The parliamentary committee will look into it afterwards, a press release quoted him as saying.

He also said that statements from different organisations on the proposed bill were damaging "the congenial atmosphere".

"Is it necessary to issue statements after we have agreed to revise the act?" he asked.

Hasan Mahmud said the initiative of formulating the act was taken amid demands from journalists.

The bill was placed before parliament after the vetting from the law ministry and cabinet's approval.

The parliamentary committee is now examining how the interest of journalists can be protected.

If the act is passed, journalists won't be dismissed from jobs any moment or hired

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1

Russia 'failed' in war aims

Says US, pledges more military aid to Ukraine

REUTERS, Kyiv

The United States will reopen its embassy in Ukraine soon, its top diplomat said yesterday after he and the US defense secretary visited Kyiv, promising more military aid and hailing the fight against Russia's invasion.

Both Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said the fact were able to come to Ukraine's capital was proof of its tenacity in forcing Moscow to abandon an assault on Kyiv last month.

"What you've done in repelling the Russians in the battle of Kyiv is extraordinary and inspiring quite frankly to the rest of the world," Austin told President Volodymyr Zelensky at a meeting overnight after a train journey from Poland. "We are here to support you in any way possible."

Blinken hailed Ukraine's success

"in pushing back this horrific Russian aggression."

"In terms of Russia's war aims, Russia has already failed and Ukraine has already succeeded," Blinken told a briefing in Poland on their way back.

Austin said: "We want to see Russia weakened to the degree that it can't do the kinds of things that it has done in invading Ukraine."

US officials said Austin and Blinken pledged new assistance worth \$713 million for Ukraine and other countries in the region. An extra \$322 million in military aid for Ukraine would take the total US security assistance since the invasion to about \$3.7 billion, one official said.

It would help Ukraine's armed forces transition to more advanced weapons and air defence systems that were essentially Nato-compatible, the official added.

Russia's ambassador in Washington

SEE PAGE 6 COL 2



This aerial photograph taken on Sunday shows a destroyed residential area in Irpin, northwest of Kyiv, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

PHOTO: AFP

TIB report on Covid baseless

Says health minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Health Minister Zahid Maleque yesterday rejected Transparency International Bangladesh's recent report on the Covid crisis, terming it "completely baseless".

Claiming that the government's vaccination programme is transparent, he said the report was "done on purpose".

The minister was speaking at a press conference on the TIB report at the Secretariat.

Zahid said the government is going to run a booster dose campaign as there is a risk of spike in novel coronavirus cases.

On April 12, the graft

SEE PAGE 6 COL 6