Romania to take in 17,000 migrants

An 8-member consular mission arrives today

PORIMOL PALMA

An eight-member Romanian consular mission is arriving in Dhaka today for a six-month stay during which they will issue around 17,000 visas to Bangladeshis seeking employment in the East European nation.

The move comes after Bangladesh requested the Romanian government to send a consular mission here as the latter currently operated its consular services from its embassy in New Delhi.

Last year, a Romanian consular mission came to Bangladesh and stayed for three months.

"Some 17,000 work permits have been pending and more applications are in the pipeline. So, the number of visas to be issued by the consular mission maybe even more during its six to seven months of stay, Bangladeshi Ambassador to Romania Daud Ali told The Daily Star yesterday.

They are recruited mostly in the construction, restaurant, logistics, factories, and shipbuilding sectors.

"Undoubtedly, this is a good scope for Bangladeshi jobseekers as well as for businesses in Romania. The country needs foreign workers for its thriving economy," he said.

According to foreign ministry officials, Bangladesh opened its embassy in Romania in 2020 when the recruitment formally started.

In that year, less than 500 Bangladeshis migrated to Romania for jobs, which increased to some 2,500 in 2021 and 14,500 in 2022.

The monthly salary range for foreign workers is equivalent to Tk 70,000 to Tk 100,000 depending on the skill level, while accommodation and food allowance are provided by the employers.

Migration to the east European nation costs Tk 4.22 lakh.

The good thing for Romania is that when foreign workers work for four years they can apply for permanent

However, violation of immigration rules, arbitrarily changing employers, and leaving for other countries are punishable offences, ambassador Daud Ali said.

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Former UK prime minister and Executive Chairman of the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change Sir Tony Blair meets Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the Gono Bhaban yesterday.

US sends \$400m ignoring Moscow's warning on arms

Russian defence minister inspects front, asks Zelensky to abandon Bakhmut

AFP, Washington

Russia's defence minister has inspected the frontline in east Ukraine, after the United States offered more military support to Kyiv, whose forces are struggling in eastern Bakhmut.

US President Joe Biden on Friday hosted German Chancellor Olaf Scholz for his first visit since the offensive, in a display of partnership after friction over supplying tanks to Ukraine.

Ahead of the meeting, the Kremlin warned weapon deliveries would only "prolong the conflict and have sad

consequences for the Ukrainian people". The United States responded to Moscow's warning against further arming Ukraine by offering another \$400 million

in security assistance.

ammunition -- including for the HIMARS of the fiercest fighting of the conflict. precision rocket system that Ukrainian forces have used to devastating effect against Russian troops and supply

Yesterday, the Russian minister Sergei Shoigu "inspected a command post on the front" in the direction of the southern Donetsk region, the defence ministry said, without specifying exactly where or when.

It put out a rare video of Shoigu travelling in a helicopter and talking to a soldier in front of damaged buildings.

The visit came with fighting ongoing around Bakhmut, in the longest battle of the invasion that has revealed rivalries between the conventional army and the

Wagner paramilitary group.

Wagner chef Yevgeny Prigozhin said Friday his fighters had "practically Prigozhin The new security package features encircled" Bakhmut, which has seen some

Well-versed in social media, Prigozhin

has for weeks been publicising the advances of his men towards the eastern city, whose symbolic importance outstrips any military significance. Prigozhin regularly posts videos of

himself alongside mercenaries, on the ground or even in a fighter jet, in contrast with Russian generals criticised for shirking the frontline.

In the latest video Friday, Prigozhin directly called on Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to abandon Bakhmut, which Russia is determined to seize as part of the wider aim of capturing the entire Donetsk region.

Zelensky has pledged to defend "fortress Bakhmut" for as long as possible, and called on allies to whip up their support to help his men do so.

Woman's body hanging from tree recovered

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bagerhat

Police recovered the body of a woman hanging from a tree in Bagerhat's Morrelganj on Friday night.

The deceased was identified as Hawa Begum, 60, whose body was found hanging from a tree in the garden of Mizanur Rahman, former councilor of Morrelganj Municipality.

Police yesterday sent the body to Bagerhat District Hospital for autopsy.

Hawa was the only daughter of Hamid Uddin, of Badurtala village in the upazila.

According to family sources, she had taken up a job as domestic help in house of Mizanur, who

works in Japan, for a monthly salary of Tk 2,000. Saidur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Morrelganj Police Station, said Hawa had been suffering from many physical and mental health complications, including high blood pressure and depression, adding that her cause of death will be found after

18-yr-old killed in mob beating

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

An 18-year-old boy was killed allegedly in a mob beating in Kishorganj's Kularchar upazila on

The deceased was identified as Rabbi Mia, son of Mirjali Mia of Bajitpur upazila.

Quoting locals, Mohammad Gulam Mustafa, officer-in-charge of Kuliarchar Police Station, when Rabbi was waiting near a motorcycle on the Jam-e Masjid road around 11:30pm, a group suspecting he was a motorcycle thief began beating him indiscriminately. He was left critically injured.

The attackers took him to Kuliarchar Upazila Health Complex, where doctors declared him dead. No case was filed or arrest made in this regard till the filing of the report at 6:40pm yesterday.

Earthquake caused direct damage of \$5.1b in Syria Says World Bank

AFP, Washington

A massive earthquake and aftershocks in February caused an estimated \$5.1 billion in direct physical damage in Syria, the World Bank has said.

The earthquake that struck on February 6 hit Turkey and Syria, devastating scores of cities and killing more than 50,000 people in both

Millions have been left needing urgent help with accommodation and medical care.

\$500m at best from WB this fiscal

to make sure the buildings are safe against disasters and emergencies.

Now, to accommodate the government's budget support needs for this fiscal year, the Washingtonbased multilateral lender has decided

Subsequently, at a tripartite meeting on March 2 involving the Economic Relations Division and the line ministries, it was decided that funds would be diverted from the WBfunded slow-moving projects to the GRID programme.

The implementation status of six projects was discussed, and it was decided that most of the funds for the GRID programme would be made available from two projects: operation for supporting rural bridges and investment promotion and financing facilities II project (IPFF II).

As is practice, when the WB sanctions amount for projects, that gets added to the foreign aid pipeline. Only when the implementing agencies furnish invoices against the projects do the lender release the funds.

The implementing agencies of the two projects have been able to present invoices amounting to only a fraction of the sanctioned amount.

The IPFF II is a \$356 million-project that was taken up in April 2017 for completion by June last year. As of

\$100 million for the project and reroute the remaining amount to the

June 2021, only \$48 million was used. So, the WB has decided to leave

supporting rural bridges is a \$425 million project taken up in April 2017 for completion by August this year. As of June 2021, less than \$15 million was

to make more funds available under decided to leave \$85 million for the award) to 50 days from 70 days at project and channel the rest to GRID.

The proposal will be sent to WB board for final approval, according to officials involved with the proceedings.

As for the DPC programme, the government was hoping to meet the 12 conditions for the programme by January this year.

But it is unlikely that the conditions vould be met before September.

One of the conditions is amendments to the Bank Company Act to strengthen the supervisory framework in line with good international practice, which is also a condition under the International Monetary Fund's \$4.7 billion loan programme.

The WB has called for a recovery plan for undercapitalised banks and strengthening corporate governance in state banks in line with global best

Another condition is getting the cabinet to approve the National Tariff Policy, which would bring down the tariffs and simplify the tariff structure.

The commerce ministry has approved the framework for the policy, including institutional responsibilities and implementation arrangements.

Rolling out the automated challan system for deducting income tax at-source in all tax zones across the

West Bengal push for two more canals

Similarly, the operation for country by fiscal 2023-24 is another condition put forth by the WB.

The WB also called for full implementation of the e-Government Procurement system, which would bring down the average procurement Subsequently, the lender has lead time (from invitation to contract

> For that to happen, the Bangladesh Public Procurement Authority (BPPA) Act must be enacted to consolidate the responsibilities and authorities of

> the BPPA. The Department of National Savings must adopt an automated system to link the issuance of the General Provident Fund and the Contributory Provident Fund

> instruments to national identity cards. Modernising the financial system infrastructure to global standards by adopting the Payment and Settlement Systems Act 2021 and the Secured Transactions Act are the other triggers for the loan.

> One of the conditions for budget support is expanding cash transfer programmes this fiscal year by more than five times to cushion the poor from the brunt of the elevated price

levels at home and abroad. Cash transfers of Tk 24,040 crore must be made to the mobile financial service accounts of the reclassified list of beneficiaries by the ministry of social welfare.

Another condition is the use of the National Household Database for beneficiary identification by major social protection programmes.

PM in Qatar for country's last LDC summit

After the meeting, Foreign Minister AK

Abdul Momen briefed the newsmen. Hasina said that the UN secretary general can take special initiative to end the ongoing Ukraine-Russia as soon as possible.

ountries making profit from the war should help other countries lessen their sufferings. While discussing the Rohingya

issue, the prime minister urged the UN secretary general for undertaking special steps so that the Myanmar nationals can return to their homeland. Referring to her government's

steps of relocating 30,000 Rohingvas to Bhashan Char, she requested the UN secretary general to cooperate in moving more Rohingyas there. During the meeting, Guterres

highly appreciated Hasina for her unprecedented successes in development, diplomacy and in tackling Covid pandemic.

Hasina also held talks with President of UNGA Csaba Korosi separately at

Qatar National Convention Center in Tony Blair Institute for Global Change the afternoon.

The foreign minister said Hasina in the meeting proposed to form an and the things to be done for the welfare

UNGA in holding an international

initiative should be taken before the next general assembly session.

economic progress of Bangladesh under the leadership of Hasina, mentioning it as "just a miracle".

impact of climate change. Tony Blair meets PM

Before leaving for Doha, Hasina had a breakfast meeting with former UK prime minister Sir Tony Blair at the Gono Bhaban.

The executive chairman of the

Tony Blair also paid homage to Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at the Bangabandhu Memorial Museum at Dhanmondi 32. He paid a courtesy call on Jatiya Sangsad Speaker Dr Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury at her office. They discussed the UK's contribution to

the Liberation War, the country's

development and democracy, women's

arrived in Dhaka on Friday night for

a private visit. Blair apprised Hasina

while Hasina appreciated the Tony Blair

Institute's mission to enable leaders

team is touring Bangladesh right now.

They also talked about sports

and governments for a global future.

He lauded Bangladesh's graduation into a developing country and the Padma Bridge construction.

A km away, yet a victim of the blast

FROM PAGE 1

kilometre away, was felt in the area. And within moments, a projectile fell on his head, knocking him out. By the time his children took

him to Chattogram Medical College Hospital, he was dead.

"A piece of iron fell on his head and killed him," his daughter Bibi Mariam told this correspondent at the hospital.

Pieces of metal and projectiles were found in neighbourhoods around the plant.

Shamsul had three daughters and a son. He had no earnings and his children and sons-in-law used to help him get by, said Mariam as she broke down in tears.

Belarus jails Nobel winner Bialiatski for 10 years

AFP, Moscow

Belarus handed a 10-year jail term to Nobel Prize winning activist Ales Bialiatski on Friday, drawing sweeping international condemnation.

Bialiatski, who founded the authoritarian nation's most prominent rights group, has repeatedly run into trouble with security forces in Belarus, which is often described as "Europe's last dictatorship".

6 killed as blast rips thru oxygen plant

A fire broke out after the explosion and it took nine fire engines to douse the flames, said Nurul Alam Dulal. senior station officer at Sitakunda fire service, adding that three bodies were recovered from the factory by

the Dhaka-Chattogram Highway. "Many houses in the area, including mine, have been damaged. Glass windows were shattered and sunshades have fallen off in my building. Everyone is traumatised," said a resident of the area named Lokman.

Ripon Marak, 40, a mechanic at the oxygen plant, was admitted to the orthopaedics ward at Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH) with injuries to his back. He is one of the 17 people admitted there with serious injuries.

"I was walking to the plant from the maintenance department when I heard the bang. Suddenly, everything turned black and I thought I was lifted off the ground and sucked into a void. After a few minutes, I began to see again. Then I stood up and walked back to the maintenance and saw Foreman Narayan Das lying on the ground. He told me something fell on his head. I helped him walk to the gate, from where a pickup took us to the hospital," he said.

Ripon said he was not wearing a helmet at the time.

One of the deceased, Shamsul

Alam, 60, was at a shop in Kadamarsul

Ambulances with the seriously injured people began to arrive at the CMCH in the evening. Director of the hospital Brig Gen Shamim Ahsan told The Daily Star that most of the injured were hit by metal objects.

Bazar, about a kilometre away from the factory, when a metal projectile fell on his head. The other deceased are Salah Uddin, 33, Farid Uddin, 36, Ratan Lokhret, 45, and Abdul Quader, 58.

The body of a man in his mid-30s could not be identified yet. Tofazzel Ahmed, officer-in-charge of Sitakunda Police Station, said a police team rushed to the spot and cordoned off the area right after the

PROBE BODY FORMED

Chattogram Deputy Commissioner Bashar Mohammad Fakhruzzaman told The Daily Star that a seven-member probe body was formed to investigate the incident.

The committee, headed by Additional District Magistrate Rakib Hasan, has been asked to submit the probe report in five working days.

GRID programme.

Bengal, is aimed at helping bring more farms under irrigation in Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar districts, reported out New Delhi correspondent.

Jalpaiguri administration on Friday transferred documents of 1,000 acres of land for the canals to the irrigation department in the presence of West Bengal Irrigation Minister Partha Bhowmik, reported Indian news

outlet The Telegraph. land will help the administration create two canals on the left bank of the Teesta, an official of the state irrigation department told the Telegraph. Water from the Jaldhaka, another river which flows through the Jalpaiguri district, will be also diverted to the canals for irrigation.

According to the official, a 32kmlong canal to draw water from the

Teesta and the Jaldhaka will be dug till Changrabandha of Cooch Behar district. Another canal, which will have a length of 15km, will be built on the left bank of the Teesta, said The Telegraph citing a source in the irrigation department, he added.

The Teesta Barrage Project was launched in 1975 with a plan to irrigate 9.22 lakh hectares of agricultural land in north Bengal. The plan was to route water from the Teesta through canals on either bank of the river. On the way, the canals would be fed by other rivers which flow through the region.

The proposed two canals would be a big political message from the Mamata government to the northern part of West Bengal, our correspondent said.

Mamata's Trinamool Congress is desperately trying to make a greater inroad politically by showing it cares

for the farmers of the region ahead of the panchayat and parliamentary elections due in early 2024, he added. If the proposed canals are built,

in Dhaka over the availability of water downstream Teesta in the lean A political observer pointed out that by extending the reach of the Teesta project, Mamata is trying to

prove that north Bengal needs water

it is certain to spark more anxiety

from the river. "Now that her government plans to extend the irrigation network, it is evident that more water from the Teesta will be routed through the new canals. This means less water will be available for Bangladesh during lean months," a faculty member of the geography department at North Bengal University in Siliguri told The

of his institute's activities, PM's Press international forum involving the South-Secretary Ihsanul Karim briefed the South countries to find the potentials newsmen, reports BSS. Sheikh Hasina and Tony Blair both

She, however, opined that the of the peoples as the developed nations reviewed Bangladesh-UK relations, She sought cooperation of the

conference on this issue for a day. The UNGA president opined that the particularly cricket as England cricket

Korosi also highly lauded the

The two leaders also held discussion on the issue of water management and