

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 residency.

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.

PHOTO: PID

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.

The new security package features

ammunition – including for the HIMARS precision rocket system that Ukrainian forces have used to devastating effect against Russian troops and supply dumps.

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 chief Yevgeny Prigozhin said Friday his fighters had “practically encircled” Bakhmut, which has seen some

of the fiercest fighting of the conflict.

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.

\$500m at best from WB this fiscal

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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 Washington-based multilateral lender has decided to make more funds available under the GRID programme.

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 WB-funded 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 June 2021, only \$48 million was used.

So, the WB has decided to leave \$100 million for the project and re-route the remaining amount to the GRID programme.

Similarly, the operation for 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 used.

Subsequently, the lender has decided to leave \$85 million for the 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 would 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 practices.

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

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 lead time (from invitation to contract award) to 50 days from 70 days at present.

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

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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.

She, however, opined that the countries 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 Rohingyas 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 the afternoon.

The foreign minister said Hasina in the meeting proposed to form an international forum involving the South-South countries to find the potentials and the things to be done for the welfare of the peoples as the developed nations do not help as per their promise.

She sought cooperation of the UNGA in holding an international conference on this issue for a day.

The UNGA president opined that the initiative should be taken before the next general assembly session.

Korosi also highly lauded the economic progress of Bangladesh under the leadership of Hasina, mentioning it as “just a miracle”.

The two leaders also held discussion on the issue of water management and 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 Institute for Global Change arrived in Dhaka on Friday night for a private visit. Blair apprised Hasina of his institute’s activities, PM’s Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim briefed the newsmen, reports BSS.

Sheikh Hasina and Tony Blair both reviewed Bangladesh-UK relations, while Hasina appreciated the Tony Blair Institute’s mission to enable leaders and governments for a global future.

They also talked about sports particularly cricket as England cricket team is touring Bangladesh right now.

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 empowerment.

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

A km away, yet a victim of the blast

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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”.

West Bengal pushes for two more canals

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

The Jalpaiguri district 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.

The 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 32km-long 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, it is certain to spark more anxiety in Dhaka over the availability of water downstream Teesta in the lean period.

A political observer pointed out that by extending the reach of the Teesta project, Mamata is trying to prove that north Bengal needs water 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 Telegraph.