

BANGLADESHI MIGRANTS Prince Salman grateful for their contributions to Saudi economy

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman expressed gratitude to the Bangladeshi migrants for their contributions to his country's economy during a meeting with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on the sidelines of the G20 summit in New Delhi yesterday.

"He mentioned with gratitude that nearly 2.8 million Bangladeshis are making significant contributions to the Saudi economy with their hard work and due diligence," according to a foreign ministry statement yesterday.

In 1976, Bangladesh formally allowed Bangladeshis to go to Saudi Arabia, which has now become the largest labour market for Bangladesh as well as a major source of remittances.

However, there were numerous reports of the migrants being subjected to abuses not only in Saudi Arabia but also in other countries of the Middle East and Southeast Asia, especially with the involvement of agents and sub-agents who charge high recruitment fees.

There was no mention of whether PM Hasina raised any such issue with the crown prince.

The foreign ministry statement mentioned that PM Hasina had a very fruitful meeting with Prince Salman and that he praised Hasina for her inspirational leadership in achieving remarkable socioeconomic development in Bangladesh over the recent years.

Bin Salman said that Bangladesh and Saudi Arabia would work together to enhance cooperation in all possible areas, and he assured his full support in this regard.

Prince Salman also expressed his satisfaction with the ongoing investment made by Saudi investors in various projects in Bangladesh, including the Patenga Terminal, Payra Port, and ACWA Renewable Energy Project.

He also thanked PM Hasina for supporting Saudi Arabia as the host of the Riyadh Expo 2023.

Hasina, in turn, congratulated the crown prince for embarking on and achieving a number of social reforms in Saudi Arabia and for attaining numerous diplomatic successes in recent times.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak kneels to have a candid conversation with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on the sidelines of the G20 summit in New Delhi yesterday.

BNP's associate bodies to go for 'road march' from Sept 16

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

The BNP is going to bring changes in the protest programmes to press home its one-point demand of election under a non-partisan administration.

Party sources said this strategy is to make successful its ongoing movement demanding resignation of the government and election under a caretaker government.

The party has already chalked out some court-centric protest programmes and the front and associate organisations – Chhatra Dal, Jubo Dal and Swachhchasebak Dal – are going for "youth road marches" from September 16, said party insiders.

Party sources said they want to start the final phase of the movement from Mid-

October.

"That's why the ongoing movement will see a change from mid-September. The party is thinking of tough programmes instead of mass processions," said a senior BNP leader, wishing not to be named.

The BNP in its standing committee meeting, the highest policymaking body of the party, on September 4 decided to hold court-centric events.

It might hold sit-ins and protest programmes on the lower and the supreme court premises as the party leaders alleged that the government is hatching conspiracy to implicate the important leaders in false cases before the next election.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir fears that he might be sent

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Suspension of Khaleda's jail sentence to be extended

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government is set to extend the suspension of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's jail sentence by six months.

"Her [Khaleda's] family has applied to the home ministry to extend the suspension of her jail sentence. I have given my opinion on the application for extending the suspension of her jail sentence by six months on previous conditions.

"I sent back the relevant file two days ago along with my opinion to the home ministry, which will now issue a notification to this effect," Law Minister Anisul Huq told The Daily Star yesterday.

According to the conditions, Khaleda would not be able to go

Khaleda landed in jail on February 8, 2017, after being sentenced to five years imprisonment by a special court in Dhaka in the Zia Orphanage Trust graft case.

abroad, and she has to take treatment at her residence.

The government released the BNP chief after suspending her jail sentence as per Section 401 (l) of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

Khaleda was freed from jail on March 25, 2020, after the government suspended her jail sentence for six months.

She walked out of jail at a time when the world was hit by the Covid pandemic.

Khaleda landed in jail on February 8, 2017, after being sentenced to five years imprisonment by a special court in Dhaka in the Zia Orphanage Trust graft case.

On October 30, the following year, the High Court enhanced her punishment to 10 years after dismissing her appeal in the case.

The former prime minister was convicted by another special court in Dhaka in the Zia Charitable Trust corruption case on October 29, 2018.

She was sentenced to seven years imprisonment by the court.

AL leader stabbed to death in broad daylight

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Chattogram

A local Awami League leader was stabbed to death in broad daylight at Saraipara in the Pahartali area of Chattogram city yesterday afternoon.

Md Hossain Manna, 43, was a member of the convening committee of Saraipara Ward unit AL.

Manna was stabbed by his acquaintance and local Jubo League activist Jasim Uddin, as seen in a video clip of the incident that went viral on social media.

Jahir Uddin, officer-in-charge of Pahartali Police Station, the murder took place over personal feud between them.

Right after stabbing Mannan, Jasim fled the scene. Locals took Manna to Chattogram Medical College and Hospital where doctors declared him dead. His body was sent to the hospital morgue for autopsy. A case was filed in this connection.

Skeleton unearthed at construction site

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

The skeletal remains of a person were found while digging a pit at a construction site at Dharanji village in Joypurhat's Panchbibi upazila on Saturday.

Police recovered the skull and bones that most likely belonged to a man from the site around 9:00pm and sent them to Joypurhat Modern District Hospital for autopsy, said Zahidul Haque the officer in charge of Panchbibi Police Station.

Locals suspect it could be the remains of Nayeem Hossain, 22, a local youth who went missing around five months ago.

Landowner Shamsul Islam is in police custody for questioning, while his tenants have been missing since the recovery of the remains.

Fresher tortured by IU students again

UNB, Islamic University

A first-year student of the human resource management department of Islamic University in Kusthia yesterday lodged a written complaint with the university administration seeking punishment for those involved in torturing him near Birshreshtha Hamidur Rahman Auditorium on the campus.

In his complaint, Tahmin Osman said a group of students from the 2021-22 academic session brought the victim to the Birshreshtha Hamidur Rahman Auditorium area after his orientation class held at the IU business administration faculty building on September 2.

The students misbehaved with the victim and also later bullied him on several occasions, the complaint said.

IU Proctor Prof M Shahadat Hossain Azad told UNB that they formed a five-member probe body and asked it to submit a report within seven working days.

Israeli forces kill teen in West Bank

AFP, Ramallah

Israeli forces shot dead a Palestinian teenager Saturday at a refugee camp in the West Bank, the Palestinian health ministry said, the latest violence to rock the occupied territory.

The ministry identified the teenager as 16-year-old Milad Munther al Raee. He was killed at the entrance to Al-Arroub refugee camp near the city of Hebron, it said.

He was "shot in the back by the occupation [Israeli] bullets", the ministry said in a statement.

The Israeli military said "terrorists hurled molotov cocktails" at soldiers who were at a military post adjacent to the camp.

Eating less only way to get by

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Imported garlic price increased to Tk 240 from Tk 220 a kg. Home-grown ones are Tk 250 a kg, up by Tk 10 from a month ago.

Fish and chicken prices have also gone up.

A two-kilogram ruhi fish was selling for Tk 350 to Tk 380 per kg. It was Tk 320 to Tk 360 a kg a month before.

The price of pangas fish, a cheaper option, increased to at least Tk 220 per kg from Tk 180. Tilapia prices went up to at least Tk 250 per kg from Tk 220.

Broiler chicken is now Tk 175 to Tk 180 a kg, up from Tk 165 to Tk 176.

The prices of most vegetables have also gone up.

"My income has not increased, but the prices of almost everything are rising," said Halima Khatun, a house help in the Hatirpool area.

She and a coworker went to Karwan Bazar to buy essentials yesterday, hoping that the prices would be lower there.

"I was wrong. The prices of essentials here are just as high as in the Hatirpool market," Halima told The Daily Star.

"Last month, I bought five kg of potatoes, but this time I decided to buy only two kg because the prices are high," she said.

"This time I will have to reduce the quantities of items I buy, but I will still be without money for transport. If this continues, we don't know how we will survive," she said.

Food inflation highest in 12 years

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rate. That expectation is now baked in the system, so the inflation pressure is sustained."

Then there are major problems with market management at home.

"We see sudden price hikes of food items every other day and the spike seems deliberate and targeted. It shows that the market is being manipulated but all of the government's steps so far in addressing it has been surface level," Hussain said.

Mustafizur Rahman, a distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue, also blamed the poor market management by the authorities for the spiralling food prices.

"Prices of commodities have fallen in the global market but we see no reflection of that in our local

market and that is because market management is found wanting."

From the import point and the producers' end to the consumers' end, there is a big difference in prices. The authorities should have worked to narrow this difference.

Ever so often attempts are being made to influence the market but the government's efforts to this end have not been successful, Rahman added.

"Those responsible for market manipulation – those business groups are left untouched. It is hard to believe that the commerce ministry, the NBR, the Tariff Commission, the Competition Commission do not know who manipulates the market and how they do it," Hussain added.

Meanwhile, non-food inflation dropped 152 basis points to 7.95

percent in August, with the drop more pronounced in rural areas.

"This is just a base effect – non-food inflation is already high as it is from the leap in the first round," Rahman said.

In urban areas though, non-food inflation is higher (8.48 percent), but the headline inflation is lower than in rural areas and overall: 9.63 percent.

"The purchasing power and the quality of life of people from the low-income segment have eroded much and it is a vicious cycle. To compound matters, their salary is increasing at a lower rate than inflation," Rahman said.

In August, the wage rate increased by 7.58 percent, whereas in Dhaka, it increased by just 5.8 percent – the lowest among all the divisions.

Macron flies in to cement relations

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They enjoyed a cultural show by performers featured by Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy and Bangladesh Academy of Fine Arts, and dances by Chakma, Marma and Tripura communities.

President Macron and PM Hasina then delivered short speeches.

As per his schedule, President Macron would then take a walk along the Dhanmondi Lake and meet folk band Joler Gaan.

This morning, President Macron will pay homage to Bangabandhu on Dhanmondi 32 and visit the Bangabandhu Memorial Museum.

PM Hasina and President Macron will then hold a bilateral meeting at the Prime Minister's Office and address a joint press briefing.

He is scheduled to leave after lunch today.

According to the French embassy in Dhaka, bilateral trade has gone from € 210 million in 1990 to € 4.9 billion now.

France is Bangladesh's fifth-largest export destination and French firms are involved in engineering, energy and aerospace in Bangladesh.

"We are thrilled to see a growing interest from both sides to enhance business, in particular, to build on French technology and know-how to support the move from Digital Bangladesh to Smart Bangladesh," said the embassy in a statement.

AL upbeat about ties with US

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new US visa policy about those who would obstruct a fair election had caused "anxiety" among the AL activists.

However, since several images of Biden, Hasina, and Putin in one frame were posted on social media, a sense of relief has prevailed among the party's rank and files, said party sources.

Activists of AL and its associate organisations have been sharing images of Hasina's informal talks with Biden and British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak.

Talking about the premier's India visit, Awami League Presidium Member Abdur Rahman said, "Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's participation in the G20 summit was an immense success for us. The way global leaders lauded her and expressed their interest to see continuous development of Bangladesh under her leadership only proves how successful she is in leading the country towards progress."

Hasina, also the AL president, held a meeting with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday, within hours of landing in Delhi. The AL leadership considers the meeting to be highly significant.

"In the last three terms, India supported the Awami League

government. This time Delhi has given Dhaka a platform to forge relations with important and economically prosperous countries of the world, including the United States, just three months before the polls," a joint general secretary of the AL told this newspaper, wishing anonymity.

Commenting on the matter, Professor Delwar Hossain of Dhaka University's International Relations said, "Before the elections, the prime minister's participation as an honoured guest in the G20 Summit, her meetings with the heads of the world's influential countries, the recent visit of the Russian foreign minister and France's President Emmanuel Macron's visit to Bangladesh – all these undoubtedly contribute to creating a favourable environment for the Awami League government."

All these have created a stronger position for the prime minister to face any global pressure regarding the election issue, he noted.

"Superpowers have increased activities regarding Bangladesh due to the country's geopolitical importance. Despite the US pressure on the government, bilateral relations between the two countries remain dynamic. Therefore, the government should keep this momentum till the next elections," he added.

France has big investment plans

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"Bangladesh has the capacity to become one of the 30 largest economies in the world by 2030 and is looking to the rest of the world," the source said.

It is against this backdrop that France wants to be part of the development and have a partnership with Bangladesh in sectors where France is strong.

French company Thales is already working on setting up a radar system at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport. The same company manufactured Bangladesh's first satellite – Bangabandhu-1 – that was launched in 2018.

Today, Airbus and Bangladesh Satellite Company Ltd are scheduled to sign a letter of intent to buy another satellite. An MoU on buying 10 aircraft from Airbus may also be signed.

During Hasina's visit to France in 2021, the two countries signed a letter of intent on defence cooperation.

Apart from aeronautics, France is also eager to expand its cooperation in the energy sector in Bangladesh, which is still very carbon-intensive, and help in the green transition.

"We want this visit to accelerate discussions on Bangladesh's energy needs. Then there will be meetings at

various levels to identify the needs," the diplomatic source in Paris said.

Among the options are nuclear power, solar power, and hydroelectricity. Hydroelectricity has high potential. There are also prospects for solar energy, the source said, referring to the Elysée Palace briefing.

As part of the French initiative to support climate change adaptation and mitigation, the source said, Agence Française de Développement (AFD)'s commitment multiplied in recent years to €2 billion. An additional €1 billion is now in the pipeline for AFD projects over the next three years.

France also wants to increase humanitarian support for the Rohingyas as well as work with Bangladesh at the global stage on the Rohingya and other issues, the source added.

The diplomat in Paris claimed that France is now focusing on South Asia as part of its greater Indo-Pacific vision. At the same time, the countries in South Asia are also looking towards France amid pressures from the US, China, and even Russia.

"There really is a strong political will to commit to an area with very high potential in the region."

Filing of false cases

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government secrecy an offence.

The bill states the tribunal can accept written complaints concerning false cases and begin prosecution accordingly.

The standing committee also recommended changing the language of a section of the bill that criminalised propaganda about the Father of the Nation, the national anthem, or the national flag. It changed the term "propaganda" with "hate speech, derogatory speech that spreads confusion".

The bill, however, still allows arrests without warrant, but the committee recommended that the arresting officer be of an inspector rank, instead of sub-inspector. It also recommended minor changes in the wording of section 8, which provides for the blocking of content based on perceptions of law enforcers – it has been changed to "evidence-driven perceptions".

The bill was placed in parliament last Tuesday to be reviewed by the committee before it is voted upon for passing.

Dhaka Reporters Unity sent a statement decrying the retention of the provision that allows arrests without warrant. It said that if a law contrary to international legal standards is passed, it will never be acceptable to the journalist community.

Harun transferred, not before assault

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Saturday when the woman officer's husband, a government official himself, went there with Naem and Sharif and engaged in an argument with Harun.

A police team then reached the scene at Harun's order and took Naem and Sharif to Shahbagh Police Station where they tortured the duo, said the BCL man, requesting anonymity.

Two Dhaka University dorm units of BCL yesterday condemned the ADC Harun's actions.

BCL General Secretary Sheikh Wali Asif Enan said he and several others had met the home minister over the matter.

He added that he had not thought about filing a case.

A reporter yesterday asked Home Minister Asaduzzaman whether previous allegations of battery against Harun would be investigated as well.

"Yesterday's incident is the first significant one. We are working on it. He will be punished for the wrong deeds," the minister replied.