

Oman visa suspension temporary

Says its embassy in Dhaka

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Oman temporarily suspended recruiting Bangladeshis as an increasing number of laid-off workers were illegally working there without the full legal protection of their rights, said its embassy in Dhaka yesterday.

In a statement, the embassy said Oman is conducting a comprehensive review to maintain foreign labour market stability, and to protect the rights of expatriate workers and their employers.

Oman suspended issuing visas for Bangladeshis across all categories from Tuesday.

The relevant authorities are exerting all possible efforts to complete the review process as quickly as possible, after which the issuance of visas will resume in accordance with the guidelines and instructions that will be concluded from the review process," the embassy said.

Oman wants to ensure that companies and individuals who seek visas for foreign workers actually employ them in licenced work and do not exploit them by forcing them into illegal work or activities, the embassy said.

The review will also address "cumbersome, lengthy and costly" recruitment conditions and procedures that some states have imposed, read the statement.

Oman highly values and appreciates the contributions of the expatriate Bangladeshi labour force in the development and economic growth of the country and is keen on maintaining and enhancing its close relations with Bangladesh in a way that serves the mutual interests of both the countries, it said.

Asked, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen yesterday warned recruiting agencies and brokers of resorting to illegal means to send people abroad. He also cautioned aspirant migrants about dishonest manpower brokers.

"The decision came suddenly. It could be a very temporary measure. We have talked to our ambassador. Hopefully, it would be resolved very soon through discussion," he said at a briefing at the foreign ministry.

Jail Killing Day today

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party's central office on Bangabandhu Avenue, Bangabandhu Bhaban and its offices across the country today, reports BSS.

AL leaders will place wreaths at the portrait of Bangabandhu on Dhamondi 32 at 7:00am. Wreaths will be laid at the graves of Nazrul, Tajuddin and Mansur at Banani graveyard around 7:30am. Prayers will also be offered there.

Floral wreaths will be placed at the grave of Quamruzzaman in Rajshahi. A mild mahfil will be held there.

The AL will arrange a discussion at the capital's Bangabandhu International Conference Centre at 3:00pm. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, also the party president, will preside over the meeting.

President Mohammed Shahabuddin and PM Hasina yesterday issued separate messages on the occasion of the Jail Killing Day.

In his message, the president said when Bangabandhu was imprisoned in Pakistan jail during the Liberation War, the four national leaders made outstanding contribution in forming the Mujibnagar government, devising war strategy and tactics, carrying out administrative activities, conducting the war, and keeping an eye on refugees to turn the Liberation War into a people's war in 1971.

He said the nation will always remember the contributions of the four national leaders with due respect.

Hasina in her message said the killing of the four national leaders were the sequel to the assassination of the Father of the Nation and most of his family members.

"The purpose of the killers was to break the state structure of the non-communal democratic Bangladesh and undermine our independence achieved at a huge cost," she said.

India overwhelm SL on way to semis

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and humid day at the Wankhede Stadium.

But it was all India from then on as Virat Kohli (88) and Shubman Gill (92) combined in a second-wicket stand of 189 while Shreyas Iyer quickfired a 56-ball 82 to help the hosts post 357 for eight.



Fishermen prepare to go fishing in the Meghna in Bhola's Shibpur yesterday, hours before the 22-day ban on hilsa fishing and trading was set to expire midnight last night. The ban was imposed to ensure proper breeding.

PHOTO: STAR

HOUSING PROJECTS IN CAPITAL Produce reports on approval process Supreme Court asks government

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Appellate Division of the Supreme Court yesterday asked the government authorities to produce detailed reports on how various housing projects in Uttarkhan and Dakkhinkhan areas of the capital received government approval.

In a verbal order, the five-member bench led by Chief Justice Obaidul Hassan also wanted to know the timeline of the approval that allowed various housing companies to go ahead with their projects.

Other members of the bench were Justice Borhan Uddin, Justice M Enayetur Rahim, Justice Md Ashfaqul Islam and Justice Md Abu Zafar Siddique.

The order came during a hearing of two separate Civil Appeals filed by the government and Bangladesh Environment Lawyers Association (Bela) as well as several other rights organisations in relation to the legality of the Ashiyani City

project in the same area.

The SC will hold the next hearing on Tuesday, Additional Attorney General Sk Md Golam Morshed said.

Bela Executive Director Syed Rizwana Hasan said they will present their arguments that day.

During yesterday's hearing, lawyers for the Ashiyani City said that their client has all the required approval from all relevant authorities.

They also said that various government and non-government housing projects, including those by Swadeshi, Neptune, Basundhara, Jalshiri, Pink City, Lake City, Concord, Police Administration Housing Project, BCS Cadre Association Housing and Judicial Officers' Housing are located in the area.

But the writ petitioners singled out the Ashiyani City project, the lawyers said.

The SC said if the Ashiyani City's

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Govt reduces hajj cost by Tk 92,450

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday announced hajj packages for next year, reducing the cost by Tk 92,450.

Pilgrims will have to pay Tk 5.78 lakh under the general package, and Tk 9.36 lakh under the special package, Faridul Haque Khan, state minister for religious affairs, told a press briefing at the Secretariat.

Around 1.27 lakh pilgrims can perform hajj in 2024, like this year. Of them, 10,198 people will be able to make it under government management while the rest can go to Saudi Arabia through hajj agencies.

Hajj is likely to take place on June 16 depending on moon sighting. The issuance of visas will start from March 1, while hajj flights will start from May 9.

This year, the government had set Tk 6.71 lakh as the minimum cost for hajj pilgrims under government management and Tk 6.60 lakh as the minimum under private management.

Around 90 percent of the pilgrims perform hajj under private management.

LPG price hiked by Tk 18 per 12kg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission yesterday set the price of a kg Liquefied Petroleum Gas at Tk 115.09, up from Tk 113.61.

The new price was put in effect at 6:00pm yesterday.

Including VAT, a 12kg LPG cylinder now costs Tk 1,381, which is Tk 18 more than the previous price, BERC Chairman Nurul Amin told a press briefing at the BERC office.

The price of LPG used for vehicles also increased to Tk 63.36 per litre from Tk 62.54.

BERC officials said the LPG price hike was due to the increase in prices in Saudi Arabia.

LPG price reached a record high, Tk 1,498 (12kg cylinder), in February this year.

PATUAKHALI-1 BY-POLLS AL candidate set to be elected MP unopposed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Awami League Organising Secretary Advocate Afzal Hossain is set to be elected in Patuakhali-1 by-polls unopposed as no other candidate filed nomination papers.

Patuakhali Deputy Commissioner and Returning Officer Md Noor Qutubul Alam declared his nomination letter valid after scrutinising it.

The constituency became vacant after the death of Advocate Shahjahan Mia on October 21. He was 83 years old.

According to the schedule announced by the Election Commission, November 1 was the last day for filing nomination papers. The by-polls is scheduled to be held on November 26.

UN PEACEKEEPING MISSIONS Armed Forces earned Tk 27,941cr in 23 yrs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Armed Forces have earned a total Tk 27,941 crore by participating in different UN peacekeeping missions abroad in the 23 fiscal years since 2000-01.

Law Minister Anisul Huq, who is in charge of the defence ministry in parliament, gave the figures in the House yesterday while replying to a tabled question of ruling Awami League MP Habibur Rahman from Bogura-5.

Habibur Rahman wanted to know about the amount of foreign currencies the Armed Forces of Bangladesh have earned so far through participating in the peacekeeping missions and how much foreign remittances the government has received.

Structured to fall through?

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BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi from an undisclosed location told The Daily Star, "Who will join [the dialogue]? All [BNP leaders] are either in jail or on the run ... If your hands and legs are tied and good food is served, would you be able to eat? Can this Election Commission go beyond the directives of Sheikh Hasina?"

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia is in hospital, party Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir is in jail, and Rizvi himself is on the run.

Several cases have been filed against the BNP top brass following clashes and incidents over the BNP rally on October 28.

The EC courier yesterday could not even find a leader at the BNP headquarters in Nayapaltan and Khaleda's Gulshan office to hand over the invitation for the talks.

The courier went to the Nayapaltan headquarters, which was locked and heavily guarded by police, in the morning. Unable to find anyone to give the invitation letter, he went to Khaleda's office.

Failing to find anyone there, he returned to Nayapaltan in the afternoon, hung the letter from an empty chair kept inside the collapsible gate of the BNP office and left.

Law enforcers said the courier hung the letter through the gaps of the collapsible gate.

This dialogue will not bear any fruit and will not be meaningful, he told The Daily Star.

The experts said the EC has to ensure the BNP is at the table for a meaningful dialogue. As an independent and constitutional body, it can ask the government to ensure an environment so that talks can be held with the BNP and other parties waging a movement to restore the caretaker government system.

According to the EC schedule for tomorrow, it will sit with 22 parties, including the Awami League, at

10:30am. It will sit with 22 more, including the BNP and Jatiya Party, at 3:00pm.

If 44 representatives from 44 political parties talk for 10 minutes, how much time is required? There will be arguments and counterarguments during the talks. Is it possible to have a meaningful dialogue with so many parties in such a limited time?" said former cabinet secretary Ali Imam Majumder.

Many have doubts about how much the EC can do since the problem is a political one and the EC has all along been saying that it has nothing to do with political matters.

The commission also did not implement important recommendations made by eminent citizens and political parties during talks.

At Dhaka University professor, wishing anonymity, said there is a strong possibility the EC's initiative will fail like it did before.

After taking over in February last year, this EC, led by Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibul Awal, invited all registered parties for talks twice but on both occasions the BNP refused to join.

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This EC assumed office around two years ago but since then did not take any meaningful initiative to create a level playing field, he said, adding, "... The EC should take initiatives so that a meaningful talk with BNP is ensured."

Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik Secretary Badiul Alam Majumder said, "It's a dialogue game by the Election Commission, not a real dialogue. It is just an eyewash."

Badiul said the EC alone cannot hold a credible election but it can prevent an election that will not be participatory and credible. He too criticised the EC for its failure to ensure a level playing field for all parties.

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At Mirpur-II intersection, a woman worker of Apollo Garments said, "We are protesting because the ruling party men assaulted us for demanding better wages."

On Tuesday, unidentified men -- at least one with a firearm -- assaulted workers abstaining from work in Mirpur.

The incident happened in front of Epyllion Garments. Security guards at the factory said when the workers ran inside the factory, the men followed them and assaulted them again.

Officials of Islami Bank Hospital, where most of these injured workers were treated, said they received two workers with critical injuries. Twenty others received injuries to the head and spine.

The government yesterday deployed Border Guard Bangladesh in Ashulia and Mirpur.

JS passes labour law

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Labour leaders also asked the factories to ensure the workers' right to strike, which they claimed was overlooked.

EU Ambassador to Bangladesh Charles Whiteley, the European Parliament and European Commission, along with parts of the EU had said early last month that the EU will see whether Bangladesh's labour laws conform to international standards to provide preferential trade benefits under a proposed Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP) Plus -- a special incentive for developing countries to pursue sustainable development and good governance.

Bangladesh is supposed to lose its current trade scheme of wholly duty-free trade access to the EU from 2029, when the country will graduate from a least-developed country to a developing country.

After 2029, Bangladesh has to be eligible for the much-needed GSP Plus.

Since 2001, Bangladesh exports duty-free to different EU countries under its Everything but Arms (EBA) scheme.

Around 50 percent of Bangladesh's export earnings come from the EU bloc.

At the US Bangladesh Trade and

Investment Cooperation Forum (Iicfa) Council held in Dhaka in mid September, the US said that workers' rights, especially freedom of association and collective bargaining, are a top priority for the Biden-Harris administration.

It urged Bangladesh to allow freedom of association and collective bargaining in the EPZs.

Jatiya Party MPs yesterday in parliament raised their voices for protecting the rights of garments workers and increasing their monthly wages.

Participating in the discussion on the amendment bill, they said the country will not be stable if the workers are not in a pleasant situation.

JP MP Shameem Haider Patwary said some quarters argue that if garment workers' salaries are increased by a large margin, some factories may be forced to shut down.

"You [RMG factory owners] have been profiting for the past 25 years, but you can't take this risk for two years? They [the owners] already have 3-5 houses each and send their children abroad to study ... Meanwhile, the price per unit should be increased through negotiations with foreign buyers."

A World Cup of top-order

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and it cannot all be about carnage. Teams have looked to contend with the swing for at least the first six to seven overs before the batters start playing their shots. Once a team manages to build partnerships and keep wickets in hand, the score can only rise -- seemingly the natural order of things at this World Cup.

To be precise, the first 30 overs is where teams have done the bulk