



PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

## WORKERS MISSING DEADLINE Baira blames Malaysian govt, expat ministry

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Association for International Recruiting Agencies yesterday denied responsibility for the debacle involving approximately 17,000 aspiring migrant workers who missed the May 31 deadline to fly to Malaysia.

Instead, it attributed the mismanagement to the Malaysian government and Bangladesh's Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment.

The claims were made at a press conference held at the Bangamata Sheikh Fazilatunnessa Mujib Convention Hall on the capital's Minto Road.

Representatives from around a hundred private companies accused of irregularities in the recruitment process attended the event.

"The Malaysian government continued issuing visas even after the May 31 deadline. E-visas were issued on June 2, which is peculiar. Yet, our ministry granted clearances despite knowing that it was impossible to arrange flights for them," said Baira Secretary General Ali Haider Chowdhury.

Around 2-3 percent of BMET-certified workers fail to travel to their destination country, primarily because companies are blacklisted for misconduct or due to ticket unavailability, said Mohammad Ruhul Amin Swapan, former secretary general of Baira.

He said the number of Malaysia-bound workers missing the May 31 deadline was no more than 5,000-6,000, contrary to the expat ministry's figure of 16,970.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

# PLASTIC POLLUTION invades the Sundarbans

DIPANKAR ROY, KHULNA

A group of primates wrestled with a plastic bag caught in the tangled roots of a mangrove tree. Their screeches echoed through the dense forest as they tore at the flimsy material, desperate for the scraps of food trapped inside.

This wasn't natural, little did they know about the harmful impacts of plastic or polythene on wildlife, or the forest they live in.

In a recent visit to the forest (before cyclone Remal), this correspondent observed that single-use plastics, used in Khulna and other areas near the Sundarbans, have made their way into the forest.

Besides, plastic bottles were seen scattered along the banks of Bhairab river near the forest.

Researchers have found that fish in the rivers and seas had plastic in their stomachs. This plastic, eventually, makes its way into the human system.

Back in January 2020, the High Court directed a ban on single-use plastics in hotels, motels, and restaurants in coastal areas. But three years on, the plastic menace continues unabated. The lack of enforcement and public awareness has turned this issue into an environmental crisis.

The ease of use and ready availability of single-use plastics have made them a ubiquitous part of daily lives. But this convenience comes at a steep cost — the cost of a choked ecosystem, poisoned wildlife, and ultimately, public health.

Shamim Ahsan, a hotelier in Khulna city, started using single-use plastics due to customer demand and the ease of cleaning. Since the pandemic, many customers prefer plastic glasses and one-time plates, he said.

He said hotel, motel, and restaurant owners find these plastics convenient and cost-effective.

HM Alauddin, a resident in Tutpara area, said, "There are at least 15 to 16 plastic factories in Labonchhara, Tutpara, Rupsa and Phulbari Gate areas of Khulna city. These plastic factories operate late at night. And from here the plastic reaches the buyers through different hands.

The biggest destination for plastic is Borobazar of Khulna."

**Back in January 2020, the High Court directed a ban on single-use plastics in hotels, motels, and restaurants in coastal areas. But three years on, the plastic menace continues unabated.**

On March 29, 2023, the environment minister prohibited the use of single-use plastic in the Sundarbans.

Babul Howladar, Khulna coordinator of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolan, said despite occasional raids by law enforcers, their efforts lack consistency.

According to the KCC's Conservancy Office, Khulna city generates 1,200 to 1,600 tonnes of waste daily, including 25 to 30 tonnes of plastic waste, with 10 to 15 percent being single-use plastics.

Additionally, 5 to 6 lakh single-use plastic bags end up in drains and water bodies, said Anisur Rahman, KCC's chief conservancy officer.

Mahfuzur Rahman Mukul, Khulna divisional coordinator of BELA, said single-

use plastics from areas like Jashore's

Nowapara and Khulna's Borobazar

are polluting the rivers and canals of the Sundarbans, threatening coastal livelihoods and biodiversity.

He emphasised the importance of using clay cups or other alternatives.

Abdullah Harun Chowdhury, professor of Environmental Science at Khulna University, emphasised the need for an "Environment Protection Police Force" to

enforce the law banning 55-micron thick polythene bags.

He explained that plastic in coastal areas is entering the food chain through fish, affecting their reproductive process and growth. This plastic pollution also impacts other aquatic animals, he added.

Dr Abu Naser Mohsin Hossain, divisional forest officer, Sundarbans West, said they have informed all tour operators

that single-use plastics are completely banned in the Sundarbans.

"Recently, we have fined a trawler Tk 30,000 for using plastics," he said.

He said the main challenge is that plastic is entering the Sundarbans through rivers and canals of the city. "We can't control the use of plastics in city areas. The authorities concerned should be more proactive in this regard," he said.



## 4TH PHASE 57 upazilas go to polls today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The fourth phase of the upazila parishad election will be held in 57 upazilas today, with 229 chairman candidates participating.

Among them, 160 are businessmen, and 126 candidates have wealth exceeding Tk 1 crore, according to Shujan.

In an online press briefing yesterday, Shujan disclosed its analysis of 1,874 chairman candidates across 459 upazilas, covering income, education, profession, legal cases, and income tax information.

Shujan Secretary Badiul Alam Majumder said, "There is a lack of voter participation, competition, and party involvement. This situation has arisen because people have lost trust in the institutions responsible for conducting the elections."

In the first three phases, voter turnout was 36.1, 37.57 and 36.24 percent, respectively.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7

## Automobile repair shops to come under regulations

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The authority is going to bring automobile repair shops under a regulation to ensure quality.

Such shops have increased in recent years with the rise in the number of vehicles.

Bangladesh Road Transport Authority has already formed a committee to give recommendations on how those workshops could be given licence following the rules of the Road Transport Act.

BRTA Chairman Nur Mohammad Mazumder yesterday revealed the information while exchanging views with the members of Reporters for Rail and Road, an organisation of reporters working on rail, road and transport related issues, at BRTA headquarters.

As per section 64 of the Road Transport Act-2018, no person or organisation will be allowed to open or operate a workshop without receiving a licence from the authority and paying a certain amount of fine.

The workshops, which were established even before the enforcement of the act, have to take licence, it said.

A person or organisation may face fines up to Tk 1 lakh and the authority may seal off the workshop in violation of the act.

BRTA officials said thousands of workshops mushroomed in the country to repair vehicles or building bodies for automobiles.

But many of those workshops use sub-standard materials compromising the standard of the vehicles, which is ultimately posing serious risk for road safety, they said.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7



Large heaps of trash like plastic wastes, tree branches and clothes are being burned near the Baliarpur Bridge in Savar. The toxic fumes not only impact the health of passersby but also reduces visibility on the road. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

"Ask For Our Planet" is a collaboration between The Daily Star and the UNDP in Bangladesh, launched for Environment Day 2024. Our goal is to connect readers with national climate champions, allowing them to ask questions about pressing environmental issues such as pollution, climate change, waste management, declining groundwater levels, and sustainability. Here, we connect readers with Professor Emeritus of BRAC University and water resource and climate change specialist Dr Ainun Nishat.

## 'We should push for renewables'

**Question:** What practical and effective measures can be implemented to mitigate the effects of urban heat islands and improve thermal comfort for residents in Dhaka, considering the increasing frequency and intensity of heat waves?

Asked by: Mehnaz Lameesha Rahman (Dhaka University)

**Ainun Nishat:** We have to understand the intensity and frequency of heatwaves in the coming years. To improve thermal comfort, the best possible way would be massive tree plantation



and afforestation. If we can cover the whole country with large trees, which might take a few years, that is the best way to make all the urban areas much cooler. The heatwaves are coming from possibly Western Asia and this is a result of changes in global air circulation patterns. As such, the circulation of atmospheric air is going to change and more hot days will be coming.

**What role do you envision renewable energy sources playing in Bangladesh's future, and**

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4