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Prof Yunus, Ramos-Horta eye deeper ties

UNB, Dhaka

The maiden visit as president of Timor-Leste Dr José Ramos-Horta to Bangladesh “ushered in a new era” in the bilateral relations between the two countries, said a joint communique yesterday.

Both the leaders -- Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus and President José Ramos-Horta -- expressed optimism for a stronger and deeper partnership for mutual benefits of the two friendly nations.

Both the nations expressed concern over the agony of poverty, rising costs in the most impoverished countries.

They called for the global combined efforts of unlocking finance through writing off debt, streamlining international finance at lowest interest rates, and significantly increasing official development assistance to Small Island Developing

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Passengers had to wait for a long time at Kamalapur Railway Station in Dhaka yesterday, as all trains were delayed by over an hour. The disruption was caused by a blockade at the level crossing near FDC in the Karwan Bazar area, staged by temporary railway workers protesting for unpaid arrears, *inset*. PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

WOMEN EMPLOYMENT

Experts seek region-based solutions

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Authorities should prioritise district or region-based employment models to foster industry growth and create sustainable job opportunities for adolescent and young women, said experts at an event yesterday.

The session, titled “Reforms in Vocational Education, Employability and Market Readiness Agenda on Adolescent and Young Women”, was organised by the Centre for Policy Dialogue in partnership with Save the Children International, UCEP Bangladesh, and The Earth Society, held at a hotel in the capital.

The event was centred around findings from a survey titled “Labour Market Assessment 2024: Kishoreganj District”, which surveyed 1,728 respondents (845 adolescent girls and 883 young women) from 108 unions across 13 upazilas of Kishoreganj. The survey revealed several key insights and recommendations for improving employment prospects for young women in the region.

Syed Sultan Uddin Ahmmed, chairman of the Workers’ Rights Commission, highlighted the need to harness the unique characteristics of each district to create specialised job opportunities. He stressed the importance of moving beyond mere training to creating tangible employment prospects based on local traditions and industries.

The survey found that female employment in Kishoreganj is highest in the agricultural sector, with 75

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CICA MEETING

Bangladesh urges greater regional cooperation

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Adviser Md Touhid Hossain has called for enhanced collaboration among Asian countries to ensure regional peace, security, and stability.

Speaking at the 7th Ministerial Council Meeting of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) in Baku, Azerbaijan, via video link, he stressed the need for collective action to tackle the threats of war, conflict, climate change, and natural disasters.

Touhid emphasised the importance of dialogue grounded in compassion and solidarity, urging CICA members to work together for lasting peace and stability across Asia and beyond. He highlighted CICA’s role

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INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS DAY

Remittance hits record high, but workers remain neglected

MD ABBAS and MD ASADUZ ZAMAN

Despite a record increase in remittance this year, experts and migrant workers say the government has yet to take meaningful steps to alleviate their suffering or ensure their benefits and welfare.

Data from Bangladesh Bank shows that up to November of 2024, remittance stood at \$24.24 billion, an all-time high, and is expected to surpass \$26 billion by year-end. This is despite a decline in the number of migrant workers compared to the last two years.

In 2024, 9,06,355 Bangladeshis travelled abroad for work up to November, compared to 1.3 million in 2023 and 1.1 million in 2022.

During the pandemic, remittance reached \$22.77 billion in the 2020-21 fiscal year and US \$23.91 billion in the last fiscal year.

Mustafa K Mujeri, executive director of Institute for Inclusive Finance and Development, credited the rise in remittance to shifts in its sources.

“It is a good sign that remittance is now coming from non-traditional markets like the USA,” he said.

He explained that traditional markets usually recruit low-skilled workers, resulting in lower remittances despite higher outflows

EARNINGS OVER THREE YEARS

2024: \$24.24b [Till Nov]
FY 2023: \$23.91b
FY 2022: \$22.77b

“The government does not care about how we live, our health issues, or whether we are safe. Their only concern is how much money we send.”

FARHAD HOSSAIN
A worker in Oman

of workers.

Mujeri, a former chief economist of Bangladesh Bank, also said a reduced gap between formal and informal channels, such as hundi, has contributed to the higher remittance.

“To sustain this flow, the government must maintain the low gap and address inefficiencies,” he said.

He urged authorities to conduct studies

on foreign labour markets and prioritise upskilling workers.

However, migrant workers say while their contributions to the economy continue to grow, they receive little in return.

Farhad Hossain, a worker in Oman, said, “The government receives over US \$22 billion annually from us but makes no effort to ensure our basic needs. They don’t care about how we live, our health issues, or whether we are safe. Their only concern is how much money we send.”

“What will happen if we stop sending remittances? The government knows we are vital to the economy but refuses to treat us with dignity. Even the embassies do not respect us; they treat us like slaves,” he added.

At least 10 migrant workers from Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Oman, and several other Middle Eastern countries expressed similar frustrations.

Shariful Hasan, associate director of BRAC’s Migration and Youth Platform, said, “We haven’t seen any significant initiatives over the past four months to address their suffering. These fighters keep our economy afloat, yet they are denied the rights and respect they deserve.”

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CYBER PROTECTION

Draft of ordinance needs further review: TIB

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Transparency International Bangladesh has urged the interim government to allow at least a month for a thorough review and inclusive consultation process before implementing the draft Cyber Protection Ordinance, 2024.

TIB warned that issuing the ordinance without adequate analysis and input from relevant stakeholders could undermine its intended purpose. The organisation made this request in a letter to the government on Sunday, reads a press release provided yesterday.

TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman said the repeal of the controversial Cyber Security Act, which was criticised for stifling dissent and media freedom, had brought relief to citizens. The new ordinance, he hopes, will focus on ensuring cyber security, preventing cyber crimes, and facilitating

Issuing such an important ordinance without sufficient stakeholder feedback risks disrupting its core objectives.

IFTEKHARUZZAMAN
TIB Executive Director

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Revive info commission immediately

Demands Tathya Adhikar Forum

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Tathya Adhikar Forum (Rights to Information Forum) yesterday demanded that the interim government appoint the chief commissioner and other commissioners of the Information Commission immediately to resume its functions.

Shaheen Anam, convener of the platform, made the demand in a press statement.

She urged the government to form a five-member review committee in this regard under section 14(l) of the Right to Information Act, 2009.

Activities of the commission have been shelved since the resignation of three of its commissioners in September. This is hampering the fair use of the right to information act, said the statement.

There is no system now to hold officials of different government agencies accountable if they refuse or fail to provide information to the public. As a result, people’s applications go unheard, disputes remain unresolved, and no solutions are found, it also said.

Not just ensuring accountability of government officials, the right to information act also increases awareness among people, develops quality of services, and can help increase the proximity of the people with the government, it added.

The statement further said there is no alternative to the law to establish good governance.



A man transports a large bundle of iron rods on a shallow engine-run vehicle in Noakhali. The precariously placed rods pose a serious risk of falling on him during the bumpy ride along a dilapidated road in Subarnachar’s Char Katra area yesterday. PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

NASA’s chief astronaut inspires Bangladesh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

NASA’s Chief Astronaut, Joseph M. Acaba, has inspired Bangladeshi students to pursue careers in space science, robotics, and technology during his historic visit this week. Over four days, Acaba engaged with youth, academia, government officials, and media, highlighting space exploration’s role in addressing global challenges, including the climate crisis, said US embassy yesterday.

He discussed how Bangladesh can benefit from collaboration with NASA, particularly through the Artemis Accords, which aim to promote a safe, peaceful, and prosperous future in space. Acaba, a hydrogeologist and educator, has spent over 306 days in space across three missions.