

H-1B VISA DEBATE

Trump sides with Musk

Says he’s always been in favour of the programme

REUTERS, West Palm Beach

President-elect Donald Trump on Saturday sided with key supporter and billionaire tech CEO Elon Musk in a public dispute over the use of the H-1B visa, saying he fully backs the programme for foreign tech workers opposed by some of his supporters.

Trump’s remarks followed a series of social media posts from Musk, the CEO of Tesla and SpaceX, who vowed late Friday to go to “war” to defend the visa programme for foreign tech workers.

Trump, who moved to limit the visas’ use during his first presidency, told The New York Post on Saturday he was likewise in favour of the visa programme.



“I have many H-1B visas on my properties. I’ve been a believer in H-1B. I have used it many times. It’s a great programme,” he was quoted as saying.

Musk, a naturalised US citizen born in South Africa, has held an H-1B visa, and his electric-car company Tesla obtained 724 of the visas this year. H-1B visas are typically for three-year periods, though holders can extend them or apply for green cards.

The altercation was set off earlier this week by far-right activists who criticized Trump’s selection of Sriram Krishnan, an Indian American venture capitalist, to be an adviser on artificial intelligence, saying he would have influence on the Trump administration’s immigration policies.

Musk’s tweet was directed at Trump’s supporters and immigration hard-liners who have increasingly pushed for the H-1B visa program to be scrapped amid a heated debate over immigration and the place of skilled immigrants and foreign workers brought into the country on work visas.



Palestinians carry a dead body at the site of an Israeli strike on Al-Wafaa Hospital in Gaza City yesterday. At least seven people were killed and several others injured in the strike, the Palestinian civil emergency service said.

PHOTO: REUTERS

CRACKDOWN ON ASSAD LOYALIST

300 arrested in Syria

AFP, Beirut

Syria’s new authorities have arrested nearly 300 people, including informants, pro-regime fighters and former soldiers, in a crackdown on loyalists to ousted former president Bashar al-Assad, a monitor said yesterday.

Since rebels led by the Islamist Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) group toppled Assad three weeks ago, ending more than five decades of family rule, the new authorities in Syria have intensified efforts to consolidate control.

The security forces of the new administration launched a large-scale operation on Thursday against Assad’s militias.

“In less than a week, nearly 300 people have been detained in Damascus and its suburbs, as well as in Homs, Hama, Tartus, Latakia and even Deir Ezzor,” said Rami Abdel Rahman, head of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor.

The official Syrian news agency SANA, also reported arrests this week targeting

“Assad militia members” in Hama and Latakia provinces, where weapons and ammunition were seized. It did not provide any figures.

Among those arrested, according to the Observatory, were former regime informants, pro-Iranian fighters and lower-ranking military officers accused of killings and torture, Abdel Rahman said.

The Observatory, which is based in Britain, relies on a network of sources across Syria.

Abdel Rahman said that “the campaign is ongoing, but no prominent figures have been arrested” except for General Mohammed Kanjo Hassan, the former head of military justice under Assad, who reportedly oversaw thousands of death sentences following summary trials at Saydnaya prison.

Referring to social media videos showing armed men abusing detainees and even carrying out summary executions, Abdel Rahman said: “Some individuals, including informants, were immediately executed after being detained,” he added.

3 migrants die attempting to cross Channel

AFP, Lille

Three migrants yesterday died in an attempt to cross the English Channel from France to Britain, a local mayor told AFP.

The deaths take this year’s casualty toll from failed clandestine crossings to a confirmed 76.

The boat that was to take the migrants yesterday ran into trouble near Bleriot Plage, a public beach in Sangatte close to the French Channel port of Calais, at around 6:00 am (0500 GMT), an emergency services source said.

Several people fell into the water trying to board the overcrowded vessel, French maritime services told AFP.

Around 50 people were given emergency help on the beach by government services or NGOs, with many in a state of hypothermia.

Journos

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and reassessment of the accreditation policy.”

Explaining their decision about the restriction, Nahid said that using the names of name-only newspapers, some individuals have gained access to the Secretariat with accreditation cards.

This issue needs thorough evaluation and examination, which will require some time, he added.

The adviser also mentioned plans to introduce permanent passes for journalists based on new applications. “Until then, a limited number of temporary passes will be issued. All previous passes will be invalidated, and changes will be made to the accreditation policy.”

Asked about the criteria for getting temporary passes, he stated, “We will consult with journalist associations and media offices in this regard.”

Responding to a query from journalists regarding accreditation cards, Azad Mazumder, chief adviser’s deputy press secretary, yesterday said, “All the existing cards remain valid. No card has been cancelled. Until new cards are issued, these cards will remain valid.”

Talking to reporters in front of state guesthouse Jumna, he said that around 2,900 cards are currently active. However, the government is not entirely sure who are using the cards. It is believed that, apart from genuine journalists, many are using the cards for lobbying and other activities within the Secretariat. Besides,

many political activists who are not journalists also hold these cards, Azad added.

For this, the government has decided that only genuine journalists should hold these cards so that they can carry out their work, he said.

It is necessary to make decisions regarding those who falsely claim to be journalists, Azad said, adding that this is the reason behind the decision to review the cards.

Meanwhile, the Press Information Department (PID) yesterday said that it was clarified that entry to the Secretariat was restricted after a devastating fire broke out in Building-7. Visitors and journalists were temporarily barred from entry to facilitate the fire probe.

The information and broadcasting ministry is now reassessing the old accreditation cards, and new permanent or temporary passes will be issued shortly, PID said in a press release.

In another development, a 21-member delegation of the Bangladesh Secretariat Reporters Forum (BSRF), led by its President Fosh Uddin Mahtab and General Secretary Masudul Haque, yesterday met Home Adviser Lt Gen (ret’d) Jahangir Alam Chowdhury at his ministry office.

During the meeting, the adviser confirmed that journalists covering the Secretariat beat, including BSRF members, would be granted temporary passes from today, said a statement of BSRF.

On Friday night, the home ministry announced that access to the Secretariat was barred for journalists and other non-government visitors.

India unlikely

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Rafiqul Alam said Dhaka would remind New Delhi about the issue in writing after waiting for a “certain period” if there was no reply.

While speaking about the request for Hasina’s extradition, Bangladesh officials have cited a 2013 treaty, which was later amended in 2016, providing a legal framework for such requests.

In July 2016, Bangladesh and India amended Article 10 (3) of the treaty to facilitate the swift extradition of fugitive criminals between the two nations.

Hasina is facing over 100 cases with a wide range of charges, including murder, genocide, and crimes against humanity over killings during the July uprising that led to her ouster and flight to India on August 5.

On December 8, Chief Adviser’s Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam said they would formally approach India seeking Hasina’s extradition after completing the required legal procedures.

“Our government’s position on the extradition of Sheikh Hasina is very clear. We want to bring Sheikh Hasina back to the country to face the law,” he said.

BPL 11 kicks off in Mirpur today

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bottles on match days as the BCB, along with Pusti, will set up six counters around the stadiums for the spectators.

The board has also painted the stadium galleries and premises with graffiti, highlighting the July Uprising.

The build-up to the event has been marked by three concerts in Dhaka, Sylhet and Chattogram between December 23 and 28 and as part of Music Fest to reach out to the fans of the host divisions.

However, not everyone was convinced that the concerts were absolutely necessary, with so much scope for improvement in other sectors of the tournament.

Tamim Iqbal, captain of defending champions Fortune Barishal, felt that more investments should have been made on cricketers and cricket infrastructure than on concerts.

“I feel that if we want to arrange a different type of BPL, we need to invest in cricket. That’s the most important thing. We need to invest in the tournament, not in the concerts or anything else. If we invest in cricket and also in the tournament, we can say that it’s a new type of BPL,” the dashing batter said in a press briefing ahead of the tournament opener.

BCB’s ticketing system, too, came under scrutiny from fans as a large number of them protested in front of the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium’s

Gate-1 yesterday after failing to secure match tickets.

Initially, the BCB had agreed in principle to introduce a full-fledged e-ticket system for the BPL, aiming to streamline the ticketing process but later changed the idea. Only 30-35% tickets went for sale online while rest will be sold through Modhumoti Bank PLC branches and their ticketing booths. This announcement, though, was made at the eleventh hour, after things had already gotten out of hand.

Away from the controversies, the teams will be eyeing to showcase good performances and Tamim expects his side to defend the title.

“We are defending champions and of course

we will try to defend the title. Individually, I will try to do my best. It’s a long tournament and tomorrow I hope to start well like any other batsman. But at the moment, team always comes first,” said Tamim.

Barishal are the most balanced team on paper, with a bunch of good local and international players, but Tamim didn’t rule out the other team’s chances. “This year there are few teams who might not have big names but they are well balanced teams. When the tournament will start, we will understand which team is in which condition. It’s difficult to predict. After the first round, everybody will understand which are teams will be challenging,” Tamim opined.

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conducted by the Obhibashi Karmi Unnayan Program (Okup).

The study indicated that over 53 percent of the returnees afflicted with mental health issues are male, and 47 percent are female.

Of those suffering from physical health problems, over 56 percent are male and 44 are female.

The study also found that over 19 percent of those suffering from severe mental health issues were domestic workers, followed by construction and agriculture workers.

Over 55 percent of returnees came from Saudi Arabia, followed by 10 percent from Oman, seven percent from Jordan, five percent from the UAE, four percent from Qatar, and 19 percent from other countries.

The study further revealed that returnees who had stayed abroad for two to four years often returned with severe health issues.

The most common ailments included back pain (25 percent), tumours (12 percent), cardiac and injury-related complications (11 percent), and other severe conditions such as cancer (nine percent), kidney issues

(eight percent), uterine infections (eight percent) and hypertension (six percent).

The study also pointed out policy gaps and a lack of efforts by the Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment Ministry and Wage Earners Welfare Board to provide health services to migrants.

The study surveyed 1,096 returnees from seven migrant-heavy districts – Cumilla, Dhaka, Faridpur, Narsingdi, Narayanganj, Manikganj, and Munshiganj – between 2021 and 2023, all of whom received health and mental support from Okup during this period.

Of the respondents, 39 percent were male, and 61 percent were female.

At the event, three victims who went to Saudi Arabia in good health but returned with physical and mental health issues shared their experiences.

Shefali Begum, a resident of Narsingdi, went to the middle eastern country as a domestic worker. She returned in just 48 days with physical illnesses.

“A broker lured me with promises of good pay. For a better future for my three daughters, I went to Saudi Arabia, paying a hefty amount to the broker. I was

provided only one meal a day for lunch. The male members of the employer’s family used to harass me. Whenever I complained or asked for food, they would beat me. They burned my hand with acid and kept me locked in a room.”

She demanded reimbursement for her treatment costs, but the employer refused. Later, she was forced to return home.

Md Hanif, a resident of Narayanganj’s Araihaazar upazila, spent Tk 4 lakh to go to Saudi Arabia. Once he was there, he was kept in a room with 20 to 25 others.

“I was not given a job for a month, had no access to food, and was kept in an unhygienic environment with no drinking water or toilet facilities. This led to me developing type-2 diabetes and urinary problems.”

Eventually, he managed to return to the country.

Speaking to The Daily Star, migration expert Prof CR Abrar noted that the health issues of migrant workers have long been neglected.

“The insurance we currently have for migrants has no value, as it doesn’t cover most health issues. Those who work under private employers are in

the worst condition, as they do not have access to healthcare, which is a glaring example of gross unfairness.”

He highlighted the key problem: “We don’t address this issue at the global forum, either individually or collectively, to find solutions.”

Prof Abrar emphasised that the responsibility of bearing the healthcare costs of migrant workers must be taken by the employer or the state. “Otherwise, this critical issue will remain unaddressed.”

Shariful Hasan, associate director of the BRAC Migration Programme, opined that if the government becomes a little cordial about migrant workers’ health and prioritises the issue, the problem can be solved.

“The income of migrant workers in the Gulf countries is so low that they cannot afford access to healthcare. Additionally, the language barrier is another significant challenge. To address this, embassies can conduct special campaigns in areas with high numbers of migrant workers. When they return home, the government can provide them with treatment at specialised, dedicated hospitals. This would greatly help solve the problem.”

Suspension of accreditation cards

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access. In a statement, it said that, considering the security of the Secretariat, the administrative hub, journalists’ entry using the current accreditation cards had been limited along with all other non-government passes.

The government also announced plans to review the existing press accreditation cards soon, it added.

Yesterday, a press note from the Department of Information stated that the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting is reassessing the accreditation cards.

The note further mentioned that permanent and temporary accreditation cards/passess will be reissued soon, and temporary passes for journalists will be provided

starting today.

While welcoming the initiative to reassess and review the accreditation cards, the Editors’ Council said that there is room for collaboration, if necessary, to identify unprofessional journalists.

However, it emphasised that imposing a blanket restriction on journalists’ access is perceived globally as an attack on independent journalism, the statement said.

“Such tendencies were also evident during the fascist rule of the Awami League. When financial irregularities were rampant, journalists’ access to regulatory institutions like Bangladesh Bank was restricted. During that time, journalists’ stance on such activities was clear and unequivocal, as seen

during the pre-uprising era leading to the downfall of the Sheikh Hasina government on August 5,” the statement said.

The statement further added that after the interim government took office, demands arose for the reform or repeal of the Cyber Security Act.

On November 7, the interim government made a policy decision to repeal the act, and subsequently, on December 24, the advisory council of the interim government approved the draft of the Cyber Protection Ordinance, 2024.

“The new ordinance retains the same powers for the police as before, particularly outlined in Sections 35 and 36. Notably, the repealed Cyber Security Act also granted similar powers to

the police, which was one of the major concerns raised by the Editors’ Council regarding the misuse of police authority under the law,” the statement read.

The Editors’ Council said that the unwarranted cancellation of journalists’ accreditation cards and access to the Secretariat is unjustified.

Moreover, it noted that the unilateral adoption of the ordinance without consultation with relevant stakeholders is disappointing and reflects an authoritarian mindset.

“Alongside protesting the cancellation of access, the council called for appropriate steps to address the concerns raised about the provisions in the draft Cyber Protection Ordinance, 2024, based on the opinions of all relevant stakeholders,” it stated.

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Mymensingh road in Sherpur’s sadar upazila around 12:00pm, it collided head-on with a bus coming from the opposite direction.”

Five people died on the spot while Nina succumbed to her injuries on the way to a hospital, he said.

The police, on information, rushed to the spot and recovered the bodies.

The bus was seized, but the driver managed to flee after the incident.

Mahbubul Alam Shaheen, a relative of the deceased siblings, said Mim, an honours student, and her brother Emon were going to Sherpur Government College to collect Mim’s admit card for their final exams.

Their father, Mohammad Shahjahan, is a farmer of Ganipaddi village in Nakla upazila.

“Shahjahan toiled from

dawn to dusk so that he could provide a good education for his children. His daughter [Mim] dreamed of getting a good job to lift the family out of poverty.

“But Shahjahan lost his young daughter and son. His whole life has been ruined,” Shaheen told The Daily Star.

Shahjahan has an older daughter who lives with her in laws.

Family members of

Moklesur said he and his wife Umme Kulsum were on their way to Sreebodi upazila to attend the namaz-e-janaza of one of their relatives.

“Now, we’re having to prepare for their namaz-e-janaza,” Moklesur’s son-in-law Nazmul Haque told this correspondent.

Meanwhile, Md Jobaidul Alam, officer-in-charge of Sherpur Sadar Police Station, said a case was being filed in this regard.

6 lives lost as bus hits autorickshaw