

Bangladeshis with expired visas asked to leave KSA

Embassy urges departure by April 18

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladeshis in Saudi Arabia whose visit, Umrah or final exit visas expired on February 25 but have not left the kingdom nation yet have been asked to depart by April 18.

The Saudi authorities have provided this window without requiring visa extensions or imposing fines, according to an advisory issued yesterday by the Bangladesh embassy in Riyadh on its Facebook page.

The visitors can leave on any day before April 18 by booking a ticket and going directly to the airport.

The embassy also cautioned that those who fail to leave within the deadline may face legal complications.

Following the outbreak of war in the Middle East on February 28, flights have been disrupted, leaving many Bangladeshi nationals stranded or overstaying their visas.

Two Bangladeshi nationals have died so far from Iranian missile strikes.



First aid responders at the site of an Israeli airstrike on the southern Lebanese village of Kfar Roummane yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Liberation War was not fought to establish a religion-based state: Tuku

BSS, Sirajganj

Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Minister and freedom fighter Iqbal Hasan Mahmud Tuku yesterday said the Liberation War was not fought to establish a religion-based state.

"Bangladesh was not created through any conspiracy of any country. It was born to ensure people's rights and to build a progressive state. The Liberation War was not fought to establish a religion-based state."

The minister was addressing a reception accorded to freedom fighters, organised by Sirajganj district administration, marking Independence and National Day 2026 at the local Shilpakala Academy auditorium at 11:00am.

He said the Liberation War was a people's war. Referring to the events of March 25, 1971, he said the Pakistani forces carried out brutal killings that night, adding that people seeking freedom continued the struggle during the war.

Tuku also said freedom fighters had joined the war to protect the country, its soil and sovereignty, not for personal gains.

"But over the past years, the spirit of the War of Liberation has been misused as a tool to cling to power and for corruption."

Addressing the freedom fighters, he urged them to remain vigilant, saying the country was not liberated to establish a religion-based state, and warned that anti-

SEE PAGE 8 COL. 5

3-day weekend worsens supply to pumps

FROM PAGE 1

Arabia and the UAE have been deferred to mid-April due to shipping route disruptions, contract complications, and rising freight costs.

A deal with Abu Dhabi National Oil Company was also cancelled.

At least 1,00,000 tonnes of crude oil were supposed to be loaded into a tanker at Ras Tanura in Saudi Arabia. This shipment for Bangladesh is now being loaded at Yanbu, with an additional cost of \$0.25 per barrel.

Eastern Refinery Ltd (ERL), the country's lone refinery, is operating at reduced capacity.

Stocks are expected to last about two weeks, with daily refining cut to 3,500-4,000 tonnes against a capacity of 5,000 tonnes. The reduction in refining is aimed at conserving the stock.

Md Shihabul Islam, manager (purchase) of ERL, said the facility is configured to process crude from Saudi Arabia and Abu Dhabi, limiting alternative sourcing.

A vessel carrying 10,000 tonnes of diesel and 20,000 tonnes of jet fuel arrived yesterday under a contract with China's Unipac, offering temporary relief.

Octane has emerged as the most

vulnerable product, with stock estimated to last only a week. Local condensate -- a byproduct of gas -- has become the main source.

The 25,000 tonnes of octane imports planned for April also



Queue for fuel reaches BAF Shaheen College yesterday, 1.2km from Trust Filling Station at Bijoy Sarani in the capital.

PHOTO: MEHEDI HASAN

remain unconfirmed, according to BPC sources.

Although overall stock is considered "adequate" on paper, except for octane, the situation may worsen, particularly without smooth banking and logistics operations,

if shipment delays continue and disruptions persist, said a BPC official, requesting anonymity.

In a bid to ease the pressure, the government yesterday approved urgent diesel imports.



Queue for fuel reaches BAF Shaheen College yesterday, 1.2km from Trust Filling Station at Bijoy Sarani in the capital.

PHOTO: MEHEDI HASAN

remain unconfirmed, according to BPC sources.

Although overall stock is considered "adequate" on paper, except for octane, the situation may worsen, particularly without smooth banking and logistics operations,

Under the approved deals, AP Energy Investments Limited will supply 1 lakh tonnes and Superstar International (Group) Limited 2 lakh tonnes through direct international purchase, according to a finance ministry statement.

US will be Iran's 'worst nightmare'

FROM PAGE 1

nightmare. In the meantime, we'll just keep blowing them away."

Oil jumped to \$105 a barrel yesterday, and stock markets fell on renewed pessimism over ceasefire prospects as global plastics, technology, retail and tourism struggled with the impact.

HORMUZ: A CRUCIAL ISSUE

Trump suggested yesterday that Iran let 10 oil tankers transit the Strait of Hormuz as a goodwill gesture in negotiations, including some Pakistan-flagged vessels, elaborating on what he had described as a "present" from Iran.

The president, who is expected to send thousands of troops to the Middle East, driving expectations of a ground invasion, also said taking control of Iran's oil was an option but gave no further details.

A note seen by Reuters on Tuesday to the United Nations from Iran said "non-hostile vessels" could transit the strait if they coordinated with Iranian authorities.

A Thai oil tanker has passed through the strait following diplomatic coordination with Iran, and Malaysia said its vessels were also being allowed to transit in a sign that restrictions were loosening for some countries. Iran would be receptive to any request from Spain related to the strait, its embassy in Madrid said, in the first such offer to an EU state.

US Special Envoy Steve Witkoff confirmed that the US had sent a "15-point action list" as a basis for negotiations to end the war.

Pakistan's foreign minister said "indirect talks" between the US and Iran were taking place through messages relayed by Islamabad, with other states including Turkey and Egypt also supporting mediation efforts.

Any talks, were they to happen, would likely prove very difficult given the positions laid out by both sides.

According to sources and reports, the 15-point proposal includes demands ranging from dismantling Iran's nuclear programme and curbing its missiles to effectively handing over control of the strait.

Iran has hardened its stance since the war began, demanding guarantees against future military action,

compensation for losses, and formal control of the strait, Iranian sources say.

It also told intermediaries that Lebanon must be included in any ceasefire deal, regional sources said.

Trump has not identified who the US is negotiating with in Iran, with many high-ranking officials among the thousands of people killed in the war across the Middle East.

Israel removed Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi and Parliamentary Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf from its hit list after Pakistan urged Washington to press Israel not to target them, a Pakistani source with knowledge of the discussions told Reuters. An Israeli military spokesperson declined to comment.

A Western diplomat said the US had taken a "maximalist" position, and it was not clear if Washington was seeking to end the war or to calm markets before a potential ground operation.

GROUND INVASION

Iran's parliament speaker warned on Wednesday about the possible invasion of an Iranian island with the support of an unnamed regional country.

"Based on some intelligence reports, Iran's enemies are preparing to occupy one of the Iranian islands with support from one of the regional states," Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf wrote in an X post written in both Persian and Arabic.

"Our forces are monitoring all enemy movements, and if they take any step, all the vital infrastructure of that regional state will be targeted with relentless, unceasing attacks."

Meanwhile, Iran has been laying traps and moving additional military personnel and air defences to Kharg Island in recent weeks in preparation for a possible US operation to take control of the island, according to multiple people familiar with US intelligence reporting on the issue.

A dramatic military escalation will grow more likely if no progress is made in diplomatic talks and, in particular, if the Strait of Hormuz remains closed.

Some US officials think a crushing show of force to conclude the fighting would create more leverage in peace talks or simply give Trump something

to point to and declare victory.

The Pentagon is reportedly preparing to send several thousand troops from the army's 82nd Airborne Division to the Middle East, alongside Marine Expeditionary Units, to assist military operations in Iran.

Military experts said that the number of additional troops being deployed to the region appears to be consistent with plans for discrete and time-limited operations -- rather than a sustained ground campaign.

WAVES OF MISSILES

Gulf nations carried on fending off attacks as regional strikes continued.

The United Arab Emirates said it intercepted drones and missiles from Iran, assuring the public that "the sounds heard" are the country's air defences in action.

Kuwait issued a similar message, saying "any explosions that may be heard are the result of air defence systems intercepting hostile targets." It did not specify where the ongoing "missile and drone threats" were coming from.

Bahrain warned that sirens have been sounded and instructed its residents to take shelter in "the nearest safe place".

Iran also launched multiple waves of missiles at Israel, triggering air raid sirens in Tel Aviv and other areas and injuring at least five people.

In Iran, strikes hit a residential zone in the southern city of Bandar Abbas and a village on the outskirts of the southern city of Shiraz, where two teenage brothers were killed, Iran's Tasnim news agency said. A university building in Isfahan was reported to have been hit.

US and Israeli officials said Israel had killed Alireza Tangsiri, the Iranian navy chief overseeing what is a near-total blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, and that it had many more targets left as it degraded Iranian capabilities. Iran has not yet commented.

Still, Israel took Araqchi and Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf off its hit list after Pakistan urged Washington to press Israel not to target people who could be negotiating partners, a Pakistani source with knowledge of the discussion told Reuters. An Israeli military spokesperson declined to comment.

Nation pays solemn tribute to war heroes

FROM PAGE 1

at 9:57am, escorted by a ceremonial motorcade of military police.

Liberation War Affairs Minister Ahmed Azam Khan, State Minister Ishraq Hossain, Defence Adviser Brigadier General (Retd) AKM Shamsul Islam, chiefs of the three services, the principal staff officer of the Armed Forces Division, and the liberation war affairs secretary received Tarique.

He later joined other officials in receiving the president.

Then, President Shahabuddin, accompanied by Major General SM Asadul Haque, parade commander and General Officer Commanding of the 9th Infantry Division and Area Commander of Savar, inspected the parade from an open jeep and took the salute as the chief guest.

Contingents from Muktijuddha Sangsad, Bangladesh Army, Navy, Air Force, Bangladesh Police, Coast Guard, Ansar and Village Defence Party, Border Guard Bangladesh, Bangladesh National Cadet Corps, Bangladesh Jail, and combined female contingents participated in the parade.

Shahabuddin, Tarique and Zaima also witnessed flag-bearing skydives, armory displays by different regiments, spectacular fly-pasts, and aerobic performances.

Before departing, the president and PM exchanged pleasantries with the contingent commanders.

March 26 recalls the tragic events of March 25, 1971, which began a nine-month war culminating in the country's independence on December 16, 1971.

Prayers were also offered for martyred president Ziaur Rahman and former prime minister Khaleda Zia at their graves in Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, as well as for the welfare of the country and the success of the present government under Prime Minister Tarique Rahman.

Special prayers were offered seeking forgiveness for the martyrs of the 1971 Liberation War, the 1990 Anti-autocracy Movement, and the 2024 July Uprising.

After visiting the graves, IGRD and Cooperatives Minister and BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir expressed optimism that Bangladesh would become a democratic and prosperous country under Tarique Rahman's leadership.

Meanwhile, British King Charles III extended greetings to the president and people of Bangladesh, highlighting the enduring partnership between the two nations and the contribution of the Bangladeshi diaspora in the UK.

The United States and Russia also conveyed greetings. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said the occasion marks a new chapter following the recent election and reaffirmed his country's commitment to strengthening economic and security

ties.

Russian Ambassador Alexander G Khozin said independence united the people of Bangladesh and marked the start of a national movement rooted in love for language and culture.

He highlighted Bangladesh's achievements in industrial growth and its global standing, adding that the Soviet Union recognised Bangladesh on January 25, 1972, and supported post-war recovery efforts, including mine-clearing operations in Chittagong.

He expressed hope for enhanced cooperation between Russia and Bangladesh under the new government.

The day was observed as a public holiday, with elaborate programmes nationwide. The president and the prime minister also issued separate messages marking the occasion.

Throughout the day, television and radio channels broadcast Liberation War programmes, while films were screened in cinema halls across districts.

Museums remained open to the public, government and private entertainment centres to children, while sports events, cultural programmes, special munazats and prayers at places of worship, and feasts at hospitals, prisons, children's homes, rehabilitation centres and welfare institutions were arranged nationwide.

A life cut short

FROM PAGE 1

On campus, grief has taken many forms -- words, memories, and quiet disbelief.

"Rest in peace and strength. What more can I say? What helplessness defines our existence!" wrote Mridha Md Shiblee Noman, assistant professor and chairman of the journalism and media studies department.

For Riddha Anindya Ganguly, former general secretary of the university unit of the Chhatra Union, Rayan's social media now feels like a cruel archive.

"We will meet again, Rayan," he wrote. "Next time, we won't take a bus, we will board the Hogwarts Express, far away from this world, into some wizarding world."

Rayan was the former general secretary of the Jahangirnagar University Debate Organisation.

Citing the incident as a "structural killing," former JU professor Anu Muhammad argued that such tragedies are not mere accidents. "The reasons behind these repeated losses are known and solvable," he wrote on his social media profile.

JU Vice-Chancellor Prof Mohammad Kamrul Ahsan also expressed deep sorrow. In a

condolence message, he said the university had lost a promising student, and the loss to his family was irreparable.

Till filing the report last evening, at least 26 bodies were recovered following the accident. Among the deceased were 11 women, eight men and seven children.

Survivors are haunted by the trauma, while victims' families are reeling from shock and grief.

Md Rajib Sardar, a resident of Dadchi village in Rajbari Sadar, was returning to Dhaka for work after the Eid holidays. He boarded the bus from the Jamtala area in Goalanda.

Contacted by The Daily Star yesterday, he said, "I saw death from very close.... As the bus was sinking, a few people grabbed onto me. It felt like the end. I don't know how I managed to get out and float to the surface."

Md Nasir Uddin, a resident of Ashulia, lost his daughter Ayesha Akter Suma, 30, and seven-month-old grandson, Ayman. "My daughter and her child were coming from Jhenaidah's Shaikupa to my home. But she will never come home to me now."

Nasir Sheikh of the Belgachhi area

in Rajbari Sadar lost his pregnant sister-in-law Nazmira and six-year-old nephew Abdur Rahman.

"My nephew used to speak like a parrot. He used to stay close to me all the time. He has now been silenced forever," Nasir said with grief heavy in his voice.

26 bodies

FROM PAGE 1

At least 40 passengers were on board when the bus plunged into the Padma river.

Meanwhile, the district administration has formed a five-member committee to investigate the cause of the accident.

The panel is headed by Uchen Mey, additional district magistrate, and includes Rana; Md Shamsul Haque, additional superintendent of police (Crime and Operations); Mohammad Salah Uddin, assistant general manager of the BIWTC Daulatdia office; and Sathi Das, upazila nirbahi officer of Goalanda, who will serve as the member secretary.

The committee has been asked to submit its report to the deputy commissioner within three working days, according to the office order.

Bangladeshi ships may use the Strait of Hormuz

FROM PAGE 1

we consider friendly, or in cases where we have decided to do so for other reasons, our armed forces have provided safe passage," Araghchi said while talking to Iranian state TV.

"You have seen on the news: China, Russia, Pakistan, Iraq, and India. Two of its ships passed through a few nights ago, and some other countries, and even Bangladesh, I believe. These are countries that spoke with us and coordinated with us, and this will continue in the future as well, even after the war," he added.

Contacted, a foreign ministry official told The Daily Star yesterday that Bangladesh has received no official communication from Iran in this regard.

The official, however, said Iran has issued no order since the war began that bars Bangladeshi ships from using the Strait of Hormuz.

"We are not an enemy country. So, there is no question of not allowing our ships," the official said.

He also said Bangladesh has not chartered any ship scheduled to pass through the Strait of Hormuz over

the next two months.

Bangladesh is importing fuel from various sources, and there should not be worries about the matter, the official said.

Meanwhile, Araghchi said that the countries that are involved in the ongoing war will not be allowed passage.

"We are in a state of war. The region is a war zone, and there is no reason to allow the ships of our enemies and their allies to pass through. But it remains open to others," he said.