

blaze horror

Labour camp victims are mourned

MINISTER of Human Rights Affairs expressed his condolences to the families of 13 Asian workers, who died in a labour camp blaze in Mukharqa area in Manama on Friday.

Dr Salah bin Ali Abdul Rahman stressed the need to take legal steps to ensure such tragedies don't reoccur.

"Bahrain is keen to preserve workers' rights as they represent a vital part of the kingdom's population," he said.

"Respecting the rights of expatriate workers, appreciating their role and dealing with them out of human brotherhood is also considered a moral and legal duty under Islamic Law."

The minister blamed the owners of the building and said "accommodating more than 160 workers in 26 rooms revealed that the owners neglected human rights for the sake of money."

He called on officials to exert more legislative efforts to boost the rights of labourers, adding, "the latest mishaps demand a quick move from the government and the parliament on the best national legislations."

He praised the Public Prosecution for referring the owners of the building for an immediate trial.

Meanwhile, Dr. Abdul Rahman praised the contributions of expatriate workers in various economic, urban and development projects.

He also expressed confidence in the efforts of a specialised committee – constituted under the chairmanship of the Interior Minister – that has been tasked to study workers' housing conditions and suggest appropriate measures.

'Safe accommodation' condition for recruiting

By SANDEEP SINGH GREWAL

EMPLOYERS will now have to prove they can provide proper accommodation before being allowed to recruit staff from Bangladesh.

The rule change follows a fire in Manama last Friday, which killed 13 Bangladeshi citizens.

Authorities confirmed yesterday that all the victims came from Bangladesh.

The Bangladesh Embassy now plans to scrutinise applica-

tions to hire its citizens, having already lost 10 of its nationals in another labour camp blaze in East Riffa last May.

Bahraini companies that fail to provide safe accommodation for their Bangladeshi workers will be prevented from hiring others from the same country until they improve the living conditions.

"I am personally applying this rule and have already blocked an employer from hiring workers until he proves

there is safe living accommodation for them," embassy labour counsellor Muhammed Islam told the *GDN*.

"If they do not provide safe accommodation, then we will block their application until they make necessary changes."

The *GDN* yesterday reported that a Bahraini landlord had been arrested and charged with manslaughter following the blaze in the three-storey building.

He has been remanded in custody for seven days and his

brother – who is also said to be responsible for the building but is believed to be out of the country – is also wanted for questioning. Prosecutors claim the property had not undergone proper maintenance work in decades.

The 13 Bangladeshis who died were among 135 people who lived in the build-



■ Mr Islam

ing, which consisted of 27 rooms. "This is the second big tragedy in less than a year that has affected the Bangladesh community, following the death of 10 workers in East Riffa in May last year," said Mr Islam.

He added the embassy was prepared to support efforts by Bahraini authorities to take action against any landlord who rented out unsafe properties to low-paid Asian workers.

However, Mr Islam acknowledged that many workers were prepared to live in dilapidated buildings to save money.

"They are illiterate and want to save money so that they can send it back to their families," he said.

"In the process, they are ready to take risks by living in old buildings."

He explained that Asian employees at small and medium sized firms were most likely to use such accommodation, since they are given housing allowances instead of being provided with company living quarters.

Meanwhile, he said the embassy was also planning an outreach programme to encourage more than 80,000 Bangladeshis living in Muharraq and Manama to live in safe, registered accommodation.

Families and friends identify workers

THIRTEEN Bangladeshi workers killed in Friday's blaze have been identified with the help of family and friends.

The Bangladesh Embassy said the bodies of the victims would soon be repatriated to Dhaka.

"We have spoken with Gulf Air to make necessary arrangements to send the bodies together to Bangladesh," said embassy labour counsellor Muhammed Islam.

He added that all 13 victims were living and working in Bahrain with proper documentation, which meant each man's family would qualify for BD1,000 compensation



■ Mr Ahmed



■ Mr Chand Miah



■ Mr Rahim



■ Mr Shohid Miah

Shohid Miah, Sayful Islam Shohid Miah, Mahbub Alam Haji Rahid Ahmed, Mohammed Jamal Abdulaziz, Shahadat Hossain Shah Alam, Teatu Ahmed Shah Alam, Anowar Hossain Abdul Bashar, Mohammed Osman Gani Abdul Rahim, Jaru Miah Late Chand Miah, Shaheen Khan Late Abdur Satter Khan and Mofizul Islam Joynal

Abdin. "The workers had legal documents and we identified some of them based on smart cards or passport photocopies found on them," said Mr Islam.

Their bodies are currently at the King Hamad University Hospital morgue.

under a scheme operated by the Bangladeshi government.

"In addition to this, we will send some money collected through donations when their bodies are repatriated," he said.

They are identified as Nazir Ahmed Sagir Ahmed, Jasem Late Abu Naser Miah, Supan Late

BD10 a month for a bed!

By SANDEEP SINGH GREWAL

TENANTS living in the three-storey building gutted by fire on Friday paid as little as BD10 a month for a bed in the overcrowded property.

People would move in and out of the building so frequently that tenants didn't even know who they were sleeping next to, according to one resident

who survived the blaze.

Thirteen Bangladeshis died in the fire that gutted the 27-room property, which housed 135 Asian workers.

"I had no information about my own roommates or even those living in other rooms," a Pakistani survivor told the *GDN*.

"This is because people used to live there for a month and move on."

"They only came to sleep there after work."

More than 70 Bangladeshis and over 35 Pakistani workers had to find alternative accommodation after the blaze, which also destroyed much of their belongings.

The survivor said the BD10 basic rent did not include electricity charges, which were divided equally between roommates.

He also described how he could hear the sound of gas cylinders exploding inside the building as he ran for his life.

"All of those who are alive heard explosion noises as we tried to escape from the building to save our lives," he recalled.

The *GDN* visited the charred ruins of the property yesterday to find gas cylinders lying on the ground outside adjoining buildings.

Some workers could be seen carrying cylinders with them as they moved into another building where they had already rented bed space.

Fireman relives staircase ordeal

By ANIQA HAIDER

A FIREMAN who was injured while searching for survivors during Friday's blaze, described how a gutted staircase collapsed on him.

Abdulla Isa Al Saffar, 33, fractured his right leg and is still receiving treatment at Salmaniya Medical Complex (SMC).

He was the first to enter the burning house and was stuck under concrete rubble before he was pulled to safety by his colleagues.

"We were assigned to put out a fire in an old house located in a narrow alley," he said.

"We went in two groups – one to put out the fire and the other to look for survivors."

"I was in the second group and looking for people on the ground floor when the stairs collapsed on me."

"My colleagues rushed to rescue me and removed me from the wreckage within seconds."

"If they took longer, I am sure



■ Mr Al Saffar

my right leg would have been amputated because of the weight of the heavy concrete.

"An ambulance brought me to SMC, where I underwent an operation on my leg the same night. I am feeling better now, but doctors say I need to stay in the hospital for another week."

"I will walk again in a few days, but won't be able to work for some time."

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