

## UNDOCUMENTED WORKERS 4 Bangladeshis detained in Malaysia

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Malaysian authorities yesterday detained four Bangladeshis in a raid in Petaling Jaya, as part of its operation against undocumented migrant workers.

The Bangladeshis were among 155 foreigners detained by the local immigration department, reports Malaysian newspaper The Star.

The Malaysian home ministry had set a target of arresting at least 70,000 illegal immigrants this year following an amnesty under the Back-for-Good (B4G) programme, which ended on December 31 last year, according to media reports.

Earlier on January 4, the Malaysian Immigration Department announced that they detained 78 Bangladeshis during its nationwide raid against illegal workers.

They were among 474 illegal immigrants and four employers, according to The Star's report.

Khairul Dzamee Daud, director general of the Malaysian Immigration Department, said Indonesians made up the most of yesterday's 130 detainees.

They were followed by eight Nepalese, nine Indian nationals, four Myanmar nationals and four Bangladeshis.

"Most of the foreigners detained did not have valid personal and travel documents.

"Some of them had overstayed and even married among their countrymen," he told a press conference at the site of the raid.

After the January 4 announcement, Khairul Dzamee said a total of 190,471 illegal immigrants had registered for the B4G programme.

"Those who failed to sign up will be rounded up," he had said.

As many as 52,000 Bangladeshis returned from Malaysia under the B4G programme, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen told the National Parliament on January 26.

Zahirul Islam, labour welfare counsellor in the Bangladesh mission in Kula Lumpur, yesterday said detention of undocumented migrant workers is a regular process in Malaysia.

He said sending Bangladeshis through illegal means have appeared as a big problem as it is narrowing down Malaysia's job market for Bangladeshis. "The problem is those who give false assurance while sending workers to Malaysia," he told this newspaper over phone.

Unscrupulous agents send people under student or short-term tourist visas telling the workers that they will be able to find and continue work under such visas, he said.

"There is no scope to work illegally there," he added.

At present, Malaysia's job market remains suspended for Bangladesh.

The two countries are scheduled to hold a meeting in Dhaka on February 24 regarding the reopening of the market.

## Bumble bee numbers tumble with climate change: study

AFP, Paris

Climate change has contributed to a sharp drop in bumble bee populations across North America and Europe in recent decades, scientists said Friday.

Compared to the period 1900-1974, bumble bee numbers across dozens of distinct species dropped, on average, 46 percent during the first 15 years of the 21st century in Canada and the United States.

In Europe, the corresponding decline of the pollinators was 17 percent, they reported in the journal *Science*.

Many species of bees and other insects are in a downward spiral, previous research has shown.

Nearly half of all insect species worldwide are in decline and a third could disappear altogether by century's end, scientists concluded last year in a landmark study, warning about dire consequences for crop pollination and natural food chains.

But the main drivers of extinction are thought to be habitat loss and pesticide use, and teasing out the possible impact of climate change -- a more recent threat -- "has proven exceptionally challenging," researchers led by Peter Soroye, a biologist at the University of Ottawa, said in the new study.

To get around that problem, the scientists analysed more than half-a-million geo-localised bumble bee sightings mapped onto a 100-km2 grid in each continent.

They analysed population changes over time in each grid and matched those to average increases or decreases in temperature, as well as heat peaks beyond the threshold of bumble bee tolerance.

As expected, areas most affected by global warming showed the most acute declines in bumble bee density, while populations rose in regions that had previously been too cool for the bees to thrive.

But the numbers did not offset each other -- even after taking into account the new bee colonies in cooler climates, total population were way down.



This makeshift kitchen market in the capital's Karwan Bazar has been built merely months after the authorities in a massive eviction drive cleared the area of illegal structures. The photo was taken on Friday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

## 86 die in a single day in China

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ministry said, adding that it was "difficult" to confirm if he had the illness.

The only fatalities outside the mainland were a Chinese man in the Philippines and a 39-year-old man in Hong Kong.

Nearly 35,000 people have been infected by the new strain, which is believed to have emerged in a market selling wild animals in Wuhan last year before spreading across China.

The epidemic has prompted the government to lock down cities home to tens of millions of people, as anger mounts over its handling of the crisis, especially after a whistleblowing doctor fell victim to the virus.

Vice Premier Sun Chunlan, on a visit to quarantined Wuhan this week, instructed officials to take a "wartime" approach as they implement drastic measures that include combing the city for feverish residents.

With panic spiralling around the globe -- more than 320 cases have

emerged in nearly 30 other countries -- researchers are racing to find treatments and a vaccine to fight the virus.

While the World Health Organization is set to give the disease a name within days, China's National Health Commission said it would temporarily call it "novel coronavirus pneumonia," or NCP.

Hong Kong began enforcing a two-week quarantine for anyone arriving from mainland China, under threat of both fines and jail terms.

Most people will be able to be quarantined at home or in hotels but they will face daily phone calls and spot checks.

The financial hub has 25 confirmed cases with one patient who died earlier this week.

The virus has revived memories of the SARS outbreak that killed 299 in the semi-autonomous city, leaving profound psychological scars and saddling residents with a deep distrust of authorities in Beijing who initially

covered up the outbreak.

In the last week, Hong Kong has been hit by a wave of panic-buying with supermarket shelves frequently emptied of staple goods such as toilet paper, hand sanitiser, rice and pasta.

Similar scenes were seen in Singapore on Saturday as shoppers cleared grocery store shelves after the city-state, which has 33 confirmed cases, raised its alert level over the virus.

China has expanded its own measures far from the epicentre, with cities hundreds of kilometres from Hubei telling residents that only one person per household can leave the house every two days to buy supplies.

Yesterday, Shanghai became the latest jurisdiction to order residents to wear masks in public places, warning that those who don't cooperate will be "seriously" dealt with according to the law.

Anger over the government's handling of the health emergency erupted on social media on Friday after

the death of a Wuhan doctor who was silenced by police after he had raised the alarm about the emerging virus threat in December.

The government responded by sending its anti-graft body to Wuhan to launch an investigation after the death of Li Wenliang, an ophthalmologist who contracted the disease while treating a patient.

Other governments around the world have hardened their defences, with several countries banning arrivals from China while major airlines have suspended flights.

New cases emerged abroad, with five British nationals, including a child, testing positive for the virus after staying at the same ski chalet in France.

Asian cruise ships have become a focal point.

Sixty-four people on board the Diamond Princess off Japan's coast have tested positive and passengers aboard the ship have been asked to stay inside their cabins to prevent new infections.

## Pouring in unchecked

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and reopened, they said. It is now Tk 28,000 to Tk 30,000 for one hundred bottles.

"We do not know the exact locations of the factories but the bottles are now mainly coming to Bangladesh from North 24 Parganas, Murshidabad and Malda of India," said one of the dealers.

"Most probably, this Phensedyl was not produced in any of these districts in West Bengal as we have found 'Made in Bihar' written on the labels."

According to Bangladeshi intelligence agencies, around 38 Indian nationals of Maldah and Murshidabad are now involved in Phensedyl trafficking.

They gather the bottles in some houses near the border. Once the order is confirmed, they push those into Bangladesh, sources added.

AFM Masum Rabbani, director (operation) of the Department of Narcotics Control (DNC), said the smuggling of the codeine-based syrup recently increased but they have already taken necessary steps to combat the menace.

A DNC report says phensedyl and other drugs are entering the country through 58 border points.

Jamal Uddin Ahmed, director general of the DNC, told The Daily Star on January 16 that there have been signs of rise in phensedyl smuggling in recent years.

"We have already informed this to the Indian authorities and requested them to take necessary measures."

Asked about the reasons behind the rise in Phensedyl flow, he said they have found that the majority of narcotics users in Bangladesh are habituated to taking multiple drugs.

## 'Commission business' of another kind

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business", he said. The Daily Star managed to reach him with the help of two villagers.

These shipments mostly come from the villages of Shoshani, Mohotpur and Goshtola in the Indian state of West Bengal.

Usually farmers, day labourers and cowboys act as the carriers. A group of three go to the border points at a time to collect a consignment, which is not less than 300 bottles.

Several dozen inhabitants in Azmatpur and neighbouring Telkupi village are involved with the nexus.

HOW CARRIERS OPERATE

In Azmatpur, which is close to the Bangladesh-India border, people don't accept unknown faces easily. They take strangers as police informants, said a number of locals.

"If you are not a known face, villagers may surround you and start asking questions," said one of them.

This correspondent got acquainted

with two villagers with the help of a local newspaper reporter and travelled with them on a microbus from Chapainawabganj town to Azmatpur.

After a two-hour journey on the 38km road, starting around 9:30am on November 18, they reached a small local bazaar on the bank of a narrow river locally called the Pagla. The other side is Indian territory.

A group of villagers started following them but went away after the two travelling with the correspondent gestured assuring them that it's alright.

The two convinced a farmer, who also works as Phensedyl carrier, to talk to the correspondent.

Over a cup of tea at a tea stall on the river bank, he said they bring in Phensedyl round the year.

"The smugglers give the details about a scheduled delivery of the bottles by Indian counterparts. The Indian smugglers throw the cases of plastic bottles across the border fence.

"We do not bring any consignment

below 300 bottles. Usually it's a group of three who collect a consignment."

If the consignments are big, like 3,000 or 5,000 bottles, then dozens of people are assigned.

About the payments, he said they take a commission of Tk 3,000 for 100 bottles. "The team leader will get Tk 1,400 and the two other associates will get Tk 800 each."

Talking about the sale, he said, "You will get Tk 1,000 extra, every time you cross one kilometre road from the border. For example, the price of 100 bottles of Phensedyl is Tk 28,000 in Azmatpur but in Shibganj, which is around 11 kilometres away from the village, it is Tk 38,000.

"Similarly, the price of 100 bottles is Tk 48,000 in Chapainawabganj."

According to sources, a consignment of the same size costs almost double after it reaches Dhaka. A package of 100 bottles of Phensedyl is priced at Tk 70,000 to Tk 80,000 in the capital.

year.

Last month, the BGB recovered 40,741 bottles across the country, says a press release of the paramilitary force.

On the other hand, around 25 lakh yaba tablets were recovered by all law enforcement agencies in 2018. It was six lakh pills in the first six months of last year.

Sources say the yaba tablets are available in different areas of Dhaka but the open sale of the mad drugs mostly stopped after law enforcers started an anti-narcotics crackdown in May 2018.

Yaba syndicates are adopting different strategies that include operating online and using mobile phones for sale and delivery.

[Our Chapainawabganj correspondent Rabiul Hasan Dollar contributed to this report]

POLICE KNOW EVERYTHING

The Daily Star managed to collect a list of Phensedyl smugglers of the villages. Prepared by Shibganj Police Station, the list mentions around 27 people.

There are another 27 people in the list but they are mentioned as "collectors". A local source told this newspaper that these people mainly worked as "toll collectors" on behalf of police.

"They visit the houses of narcotics smugglers every month and collect around Tk 10,000 to Tk 30,000 from each," the source added.

However, Shamsul Alam, officer-in-charge of Shibganj Police Station, refuted the allegation and said he joined the station two months back and didn't know anything about the list.

"We are on high alert and nobody would be spared if found involved in narcotics smuggling," OC Shamsul Alam told The Daily Star on January 16.

## 2 cops suspended for letting drug peddler escape

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Two policemen were suspended in Joypurhat yesterday for releasing a drug peddler after allegedly taking bribe from him.

They are Sub-inspector Aminur Rahman and Assistant Sub-inspector Rabiul Awal of Panchbibi Police Station.

Muktar Hossain, a constable and radio operator of Joypurhat police, was also closed in connection with the incident, said Salam Kabir, superintendent of police in the district.

Monsur Rahman, officer-in-charge of the police station, said the three law enforcers arrested a notorious drug peddler named Amjad Hossain in an area of Dinajpur on Thursday afternoon. They also recovered around 1,000 yaba tablets from his possession.

The three, however, released the criminal after they were allegedly paid Tk 2 lakh in bribe, he said.

The OC also said the area where the arrest was made was not within the jurisdiction of Joypurhat police.

After the incident came to light, the SP tasked Additional SP in Joypurhat Sajjad Hossain with investigating the matter.

As the investigation found evidence in support of the allegation, the SP suspended the three yesterday afternoon.

"They committed offences. They carried out a raid outside their jurisdiction without permission and released a criminal after taking money from him. They violated the discipline of the force," the SP told The Daily Star.

He also said he asked the police headquarters to take action against Muktar.

Departmental action will be taken against the three after further investigation, he added.

## US sanctions on Venezuela 'illegal': Russia

AFP, Caracas

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Friday slammed US sanctions against Venezuela as "illegal" during an official visit to Caracas.

"These sanctions are illegal and are the main cause of the crisis in the Venezuelan economy," said Lavrov after meeting his Venezuelan counterpart Jorge Arreaza.

Russia is one of the main backers of Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro, along with China and Cuba.

US President Donald Trump has launched a new wave of sanctions against Venezuela's economy, which has been in crisis for years, as well as against Maduro and his ministers.

Among those measures, Washington imposed sanctions on Venezuela's oil industry last year, targeting the country's main source of hard currency, and on Friday it hit its flag airline, Conviasa.

## Young Tigers

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interesting battle when they lock horns.

Bangladesh reached their maiden final by beating New Zealand in the semifinal by six wickets, courtesy of a magnificent hundred from Mahmudul Hasan Joy.

On the other hand, India, led by skipper Priyam Garg who has marshalled his troops with great authority, will be looking to retain the title and register a record fifth Under-19 World Cup win.

The last time the sides met at the Under-19 World Cup was in 2018, with India defeating Bangladesh in the quarterfinal. In fact, the Bangladesh U-19s have won just one game in their past seven encounters against their Indian counterparts since the previous World Cup while India have registered four wins. The other two matches were abandoned.

Bangladesh will also have to overcome a mental block as the young Tigers lost two close encounters in the 2018 and 2019 Asia Cup finals against India by two and five runs respectively.

Meanwhile the weather in South Africa is not in the best of moods and the forecast suggest heavy rain today and also on the reserve day tomorrow. According to the tournament by-laws, the World Cup will be shared if both days are eventually washed out.

"The government wanted to bring the Bangladeshis back from Wuhan in a chartered flight when they expressed their willingness to return home," he said.

Around 171 Bangladeshis are still in Wuhan, he said.

He said if the Bangladeshis managed a chartered flight to come home, the government would pay for it.

Momen dismissed allegations that the stranded Bangladeshis were enduring a food crisis.

The minister said Bangladeshi pilots were unwilling to fly to Wuhan as other countries do not allow them entry afterwards.

Earlier, 312 Bangladeshis were brought back from Wuhan on a special flight spending \$130,000, he said.

But after their return, the crew members were facing trouble as they were not being allowed to operate flights into any other country.