

## BANGLADESHI WORKERS IN MIDDLE EAST Diplomatic efforts on to stop repatriation

PM tells parliament; says authorities corrected list of poor families for cash assistance amid pandemic

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said her government made diplomatic efforts to stop different Middle Eastern countries sending Bangladeshi migrant workers home.

Responding to a query from ruling Awami League lawmaker Benjir Ahmed from Dhaka-20, she informed parliament that Bangladesh was under diplomatic pressure following the novel coronavirus outbreak over repatriation of Bangladeshi migrant workers from those countries.

But the government made diplomatic efforts to ease the pressure, the leader of the House said.

Hasina said different countries were sending back migrant workers who went to the host countries through illegal means and those involved in crimes.

She said she has already sent letters to several heads of state or government of the Middle Eastern countries as part of her government's diplomatic efforts.

The foreign and expatriates welfare ministries have taken necessary measures, including contacting different Middle Eastern countries, in this regard, the PM added.

She said her government has sent medical equipment and pharmaceutical items to different countries as part of its "food and medical diplomacy".

Different Middle Eastern countries have sent back over two lakh migrant workers to India, but only 22,000 Bangladeshi expatriate workers have returned home so far, the premier told the House.

"The number of the returnee Bangladeshi migrant workers is still low due to timely diplomatic initiatives taken by the government."

Hasina said her government continued diplomatic efforts so that expatriate Bangladeshis could continue in jobs in their respective host countries.

She asked the manpower recruiting agencies to send Bangladeshi workers abroad after proper verification of their jobs and employers.

Referring to measures taken for the expatriate workers, the PM said Bangladesh has proposed at the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) to set up a fund for the expatriates.

Besides, the government has taken measures to provide incentives and loans to the returnees, she added.

About the recent killing of several Bangladeshis in Libya, Hasina said the government was taking appropriate actions against the recruiting agencies who had sent them to Libya.

"Bangladeshi migrant workers will not be in danger abroad if the recruiting agencies export manpower by following proper rules."

The PM said the people of the country should be aware of illegal migration.

She told the House that her government was taking stern actions against the recruiting agencies responsible for illegal migration.

Replying to another query from AL MP AKM Rahmatullah from Dhaka-11, the PM said the role of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in the Language Movement was erased from the history.

"Many people, including intellectuals, used to forget to mention in their writings about the role of the Father of the Nation in the Language Movement," she said.

"Attempts were made to completely erase the name of the Father of the

## JS seat will be vacant

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arrested by Kuwait CID on June 6 and sent to jail after interrogation.

Papul, managing director and chief executive officer of Marafie Kuwaitia Group, is accused of human trafficking, money laundering and bribing.

During the quizzing by Kuwait's Public Prosecution, he confessed bribing Kuwaiti officials millions of dollars for getting job contracts and job demands for recruiting foreign workers, mostly Bangladeshis.

Workers alleged they had to pay Tk 7-9 lakh each for jobs in Kuwait but were paid lower than that was contracted for and even left jobless. Some Kuwaiti officials have also been detained in connection with the case.

In her brief speech at the parliament, Hasina informed the House that the government also launched investigation against Papul in the country.

The premier mentioned that Papul in the last parliamentary election in 2018 had sought nomination from Awami League, but she did not give him nomination for Laxmipur-2 constituency.

"We had left the seat to Jatiya Party. But Jatiya Party's Noman [Mohammad Noman] didn't participate in the election and that man [Papul] won in the national polls as an independent MP," Sheikh Hasina said.

She also said Papul somehow made his wife MP from a seat reserved for women. "But we didn't do that."

Jatiya Party has recently expelled Mohammad Noman, a former MP of Laxmipur-2, allegedly for remaining inactive in the party as he supported Papul of his constituency in the 2018 election in exchange of a huge amount of money.

Hanunur Rashid cited newspapers quoting Foreign Minister AK Abdul

Nation from the history and propaganda was carried out against Bangabandhu after assassinating him in 1975."

Hasina said she has already initiated the process to publish a book on the secret reports of the Pakistani intelligence agency on Bangabandhu so that the country's people can know the true history of Bangladesh.

Responding to a supplementary question from Jatiya Party lawmaker Mujibur Haque Chunnun from Kishoreganj-3, she said Bangabandhu had never shared his experience of suffering in Pakistan jail with his family members.

**'NAMES DROPPED FROM LIST'**  
Taking part in an unscheduled debate on alleged irregularities and corruption in preparation of the list of poor people for government cash assistance, Hasina said the government dropped "all other" names from the list.

"We have developed a system in Bangladesh Bank. After getting the list of the beneficiaries, we called the phone numbers and checked the registration numbers of those enlisted so that only the eligible persons get the government stimulus assistance either through their mobile phone account or bank account.

"After completing the verification process, all other names have been dropped from the list. That's why preparing the list of beneficiaries took more time," the PM said.

Earlier, speaking on a point of order, opposition BNP lawmaker Harunur Rashid alleged that the AL-backed public representatives of union and upazila parishads were involved in widespread irregularities in preparing the list of beneficiaries as fake names were included in it.

He demanded the PM take measures to ensure transparency in preparation of the list and take stern actions against those involved in irregularities.

The leader of the House said the list of 50 lakh families for distribution of money was prepared by scrutinising it thrice.

"We didn't prepare the list only based on names sent by the union parishad members or chairmen. We prepared it through checking NID cards, voter list and other relates issues at the same time," she said.

## Infection rate

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Nasima said. "The death toll now stands at 2,197 and the death rate at 1.28 percent."

Two-third of the people who died in those 24 hours were between 50 and 70 years old.

Among the deceased, 12 were from Dhaka, 14 from Chattogram, nine from Khulna, three from Rajshahi, four from Sylhet, one from Rangpur and three others were from Barishal division.

Overall, 79 percent of the deaths occurred among male patients.

## 144 Bangladeshi

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Hundreds of thousands of migrants and refugees fleeing conflict and poverty countries used Greece as a springboard to European countries in 2015 and 2016, when an EU-brokered accord with Turkey all but halted the flow, trapping many in Greece.

At least 5,200 migrant children from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and Africa currently live in Greece, many of them in harsh conditions.

Momen that Kuwaiti authorities arrested Papul as a "local resident" of Kuwait as he was on a visit there without using diplomatic or official passport of Bangladesh.

He said according to the Article 66 of the Constitution, if anyone accepts citizenship of any foreign country or express loyalty to any foreign nation, he won't be able to participate in the national election.

Meanwhile, Arab Times on Tuesday reported that Kuwait's Central Agency for Public Tenders canceled the extension of the contract for cleaning services at Kuwait International Airport and its facilities, as the contract was concluded with the company of the Bangladeshi MP accused of money laundering and visa trading.

Quoting sources, Arab Times reports the Central Agency for Public Tenders explained that the decision to cancel the extension of the contract with the Directorate General of Civil Aviation has been taken due to the suspension of the company's file in the Public Authority for Manpower based on criminal investigations and charges against one of the owners of the company.

In the same context, sources confirmed that one of four companies owned by Papul has many cleaning contracts with government agencies that are still valid.

Sources stressed the need to quickly address the problems related to contracts of the Bangladeshi MP before they exacerbate, given that the companies' accounts were seized by the Public Prosecution and it is not possible to liquidate them, it said.

They said the failure to pay the salaries of ordinary cleaning workers might prompt them to go on strike and this could harm the work of government agencies, the newspaper reported.



A man sleeping under a tree in Gulistan park in the capital as the city suffered the scorching heat yesterday afternoon. Many low-income people have slid into poverty and lost their shelter during the shutdown of the economy.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

## They allowed it, now out to disown it

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also warned them about charging extra [for the test] last month [June]. But they paid no heed."

Speaking on the issue, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said it was her government that unearthed the irregularities and arrested the suspects.

"We would have been happy, had a parliament member informed us in advance about the irregularities in this matter. Nobody informed ... we, the government found the irregularities and took appropriate actions. Rab went there and took proper measures after identifying the persons responsible," she said.

On Monday, the mobile court of Rab, led by its Executive Magistrate Sarwoer Alam, raided Regent Hospital's Uttara branch and sealed it off in connection with issuing fake Covid-19 test certificates and collecting money from patients.

The same team sealed off the hospital's Mirpur branch yesterday.

The hospital had no permission to run RT-PCR tests.

Inspector Zulhas Mia of Rab-1 filed a case against Regent Group Chairman Md Shahed and 16 others with Uttara West Police Station on Tuesday night.

The other accused include Regent's Managing Director Masud Parvez; its Project Officer Rakibul Islam; Human Resources Officer Amit Banik; IT officers Mahbub, Shaikat, Palash; health technologists Ahsan Habib

## Public health, country's image abroad at stake

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Earlier, law enforcers tracked down several gangs involved in making and issuing fake Covid-19 test certificates.

Prof Muzaherul Huq, former regional advisor of WHO South East Asia region, said this would increase the risk of further transmission in the country and beyond.

"This would create a bad image of Bangladesh and its health system in other countries," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

"As a result, expatriates, who would want to return to their workplace, may face problems and even may not get permission."

If a real Covid-19 patient gets a fake negative certificate, they would spread the virus unwillingly among family members and others, he said.

If a patient was given a fake positive certificate and was forced to get admitted to a hospital, they may get infected at the hospital, not to mention the hassles they faced, Muzaherul Huq said.

Former Ambassador Humayun Kabir said such an incident would tarnish the image of the country and other nations would get the message that Bangladesh is not behaving responsibly.

"It may be done by some people, but the whole country has to face its consequences," he told The Daily Star

## Borrowing from banks doubles

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revenue collection forced it to increase the ceiling to Tk 82,421 crore to meet the deficit financing.

The National Board of Revenue (NBR) logged Tk 188,500 crore in the July-May period of last fiscal year, down 2 percent from Tk 193,202 crore a year ago.

The NBR is yet to release the revenue generation data of FY20, but it is likely that the collection would be less than the previous year's receipt of Tk 223,892 crore.

The high borrowing will persistently continue this fiscal year as the government will be unable to fulfill the gigantic revenue target given the ongoing economic fallout, said Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh.

The government should have taken required measures, including reforming the tax administration, process of tax collection, strengthening the automation system and amending the required laws, he said.

"The government is getting into a sinkhole due to its negligence in taking the timely initiatives," he said.

and Hatim Ali.

The chairman, managing director and seven others are on the run. Rab arrested eight staffers during their drive in Uttara branch on Monday.

A virtual court in Dhaka yesterday placed seven of the officials and employees on a five-day remand each.

**"SHAHED A FRAUDSTER"**  
Whenever Md Shahed met someone, he introduced himself as Shahed Karim or sometimes Karim, sometimes as a major of the army or sometimes lieutenant colonel or sometimes colonel, said Rab's Intelligence Chief Lt Col Sarwar-Bin-Quasem at a press briefing at its headquarter in Uttara yesterday.

Shahed was a fraud and master of bluffs. He cheated others of a huge amount of money.

"We came to know that he had a multi-level marketing business where he embezzled a lot of money from people. Later, he landed in jail. After serving two years, he came out in 2011. He didn't stop. He continued with his fraudulence.

"He had photos with many high-ups in Bangladesh. He used the pictures as leverage and to get benefits and favours from others," he said.

Asked about media reports of Shahed being a member of the Awami League's foreign affairs sub-committee, he said, "Fraudsters don't have any political identity. They use names as leverage. He gave fake

identities at different times. He has actually no political identity."

**COMPUTER OPERATORS MADE COVID-19 REPORTS**

Computer operators at Regent Hospital used to make fake Covid-19 certificates, Rab said, adding that Shahed himself forced his employees to do so.

They found around 4,500 Covid-19 test reports out of the 10,000 so-called tests the hospital had done. The hospital gave patients 5,500 reports without testing. The government accredited laboratories said that they didn't make the 4,500 reports Rab found.

Rab said that they first started investigating the quick test reports after sample collection from home.

"... what we got is really astonishing ... something that we did not expect," he said.

For the first test, they took Tk 3,500-4,000. If tested positive, he or she would come for the next test. They charged Tk 1,000-1,500 for the second.

Shahed made around Tk two to three crore illegally in the last three months, Rab said. But he didn't even pay many of his staffers salaries, he added.

"We will investigate where this money went. We may file a money laundering case in this connection," said Sarwar.

[Muntakim Saad contributed to this report]

certificates to at least 37 people.

The following day, the Directorate General of Health Services revoked the permission to JKG Health Care for collecting COVID-19 samples.

On June 15, Rapid Action Battalion raided a photocopy shop in the capital's Mugda area and recovered a stash of fake Covid-19 certificates.

They also arrested four people on charges of being involved in making and selling illegal certificates.

Rab said individuals without visible symptoms of coronavirus are buying fake negative certificates for traveling and attending offices and courts. Meanwhile, many are collecting fake positive certificates to avail public holidays and various benefits.

On June 4, two youths were arrested in Savar for selling fake Covid-19 certificates.

Law enforcers last month claimed to have detected around a dozen syndicates, who are selling fake certificates during the pandemic.

They provided a printed "Covid-19 negative/positive" certificate or an email, for Tk 5,000 to Tk 9,000.

In cooperation with some hospital staffers, these syndicates mainly target those in need of a Covid-19 negative certificate to go abroad, said officials of police and Rab.

through a tough time due to the pandemic, so banks have adopted a go-slow policy to disburse loans to the arena, said Mansur.

The high government's bank borrowing has given a scope to invest their fund in the securities, which are highly risk-free, according to him.

Talking on the issue, Zahid Hussain, former lead economist of the World Bank's Dhaka office, said the public debt to GDP ratio has been on the rise in recent months, which will have a negative impact on the country's sovereign credit rating.

The ratio now stands at 40 percent, up 34 percent two years ago, he said.

If the government continues the high borrowing, the country's macroeconomic management rating of the global competitiveness index will be weaker in the days to come, he said.

The World Economic Forum prepares the report every year.

"Credit demand from private sector was also low last fiscal year. Despite the fact that banks had not lowered the interest rate on their lending products before April when

## Russia tells US to 'mind own business' over media freedom

AFP, Moscow

Moscow has angrily told the US embassy to "mind your own business" after Washington's diplomatic mission raised concern about curbs on media freedom in Russia.

Rebecca Ross, the spokeswoman for the US embassy, on Tuesday expressed concern about a clampdown on journalists in Russia.

"Watching arrest after arrest of Russian journalists - it's starting to look like a concerted campaign against #MediaFreedom," she tweeted.

"Mind your own business," the Russian foreign ministry tweeted late Tuesday.

Earlier that day the FSB security agency, the successor to the Soviet-era KGB, arrested a respected former journalist, Ivan Safronov, 30, on suspicion of state treason.

His detention sparked an uproar among supporters and journalists who say his arrest is punishment for his coverage of Russia's defence sector.

## ACC quizzes

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Directorate General of Drug Administration over importing substandard KN-95 masks, did not appear before the graft watchdog citing illness.

Aminal sought time to appear before the commission, said ACC Public Relations Officer Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya.

Wishing anonymity, an ACC director said they recorded statements of Razzak and Motiur yesterday. After completing quizzing of all the people concerned, the commission would cross-check the statements to identify those behind the corruption.

Today, the ACC will grill the director of Meditech Imaging, Humayun Kabir, and Dhaka Central International Medical College and Hospital Chairman Motazzur Islam Mithu, also the owner of Lexicon Merchandise and Technocrat.

The controversy over the mask supply came to the fore in early April when health professionals in various hospitals were questioning the quality of respirators, with some resorting to social media to vent their frustration.

With the complaints over poor quality respirators surfacing, the Central Medical Store Depot (CMSD), the government body that sources medical supplies, withdrew the masks received from JMI Hospital Requisite MFG Ltd.

It also served a show-cause notice to the company.

In an official statement, the JMI then said it was a packaging mistake.

Later, a government probe body found that JMI supplied "research-stage N95 masks" manufactured with "unapproved imported raw materials" against the demand for regular ones.

But the committee did not say what steps should be taken against the supplier.

Earlier, ruling party lawmaker Ekramul Karim Chowdhury, also a member of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, urged Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to abolish "Mithu Syndicate" of the health sector. He blamed the syndicate for the mismanagement in the sector.

On a Facebook Live video from his verified account on June 22, the lawmaker said the "Mithu Syndicate" has brought the whole health ministry under their control. And that's why people were not getting proper health care services.

On June 18, the ACC formed a committee to probe into the allegations of corruption in the procurement N-95 mask, PPE, and other safety gears.

After formation of the probe committee, ACC Chairman Iqbal Mahmood said anyone found involved in corruption would be brought to book.

the government imposed an interest rate cap of nine percent," Hussain said.

The government had also taken several initiatives last fiscal year to curb the high investment in savings certificates, which forced it to borrow more fund from the banking sources, according to him.

Meanwhile, Syed Mahbubur Rahman, managing director of Mutual Trust Bank, said the economy may blast off after the second half of this fiscal year, which would create a huge credit demand for the private sector.

"The government should borrow major portion of its target from the central bank in order to give a breathing space to banks, such that they will provide the required loans to businesses," he said.

Last fiscal year, the government borrowed Tk 10,441.45 crore from the central bank and Tk 61,805 crore from commercial banks.

The outstanding government borrowing from the banking sources stood at 180,342 crore after the end of last fiscal year.