

MIGRANT WORKERS

Malaysia mulls 'e-wages system'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Malaysia is planning to introduce e-wages system, which will alert the government in case foreign workers are not paid, as part of its new measures to protect the migrants.

"I have begun discussing with the home ministry to introduce this e-wages system. If an employer fails to pay the wages of their workers, we will be alerted through the system," Malaysia's Human Resources Minister Datuk M Saravanan said.

This will provide a form of guarantee to the foreign workers in accordance with international standards, he told reporters after a programme in Putrajaya on Thursday.

Malaysian government will also enforce Section 446 of the Workers' Minimum Standards of Housing and Amenities Act from September 1 to ensure that all employers provide housing, accommodation and that their workers' welfare is taken care of.

"If an employer is found not providing these, they are liable to a maximum of RM 50,000 fine for every offence," Saravanan said, adding that these measures were discussed during a meeting with the Bangladesh High Commission to Malaysia recently.

Malaysia is a popular destination for Bangladeshis. There are some eight lakh Bangladeshis working in the Southeast Asian country.

Malaysia suspended labour recruitment from Bangladesh since September 2018 as it found that a syndicate of agents used to charge up to Tk 4 lakh for recruitment of each worker and that the migrants were facing huge debt.

Amid the coronavirus pandemic,

majority of the foreign workers, including Bangladeshis, were jobless. With the reopening since mid-June, many are rejoining work but many others have no jobs with their factories shutting down or retrenching workers.

"Due to the economic slowdown, we expect to see a lot of foreign workers with permits who will lose jobs. Therefore, we need to do a redeployment exercise," Saravanan said.

"The Bangladesh government is very proactive and concerned about their workers. I have explained these measures to them and I believe they are satisfied with it," he said, adding that he will also engage with government representatives of other countries.

Saravanan said he also discussed Malaysia's freeze on the hiring of foreign workers due to the Covid-19 situation from July 1 to the end of the year.

He said the ministry will also propose that every foreign worker be given protection under the Social Security Organisation (Socso).

"Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, we have seen why it is important to ensure our foreign workers are given protection.

"The international standard is that all workers, regardless whether they are local or foreign, are given equal treatment," said Saravanan.

He said Malaysia no longer wants to be a dumping ground for migrant workers.

"Whenever an employer hires a foreign worker, we want to ensure that the employee is paid the wages as promised," said Saravanan.

World entering new military 'drone age': UN expert

AFP, Geneva

The world is entering a military "second drone age" with uncontrolled proliferation and no standards governing their use, a United Nations expert told the UN Human Rights Council on Thursday.

Agnes Callamard, the UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, said the global community needed to take stock of how armed drones have evolved, and examine the challenges they posed to compliance with international law.

"There are no robust standards governing drones' development,

proliferation, export, or capability for use of force. No transparency. No effective oversight. No accountability," she said.

"Drone strikes, it seems, are favoured by decision-makers and military alike for their relative efficiency, effectiveness, adaptability, acceptability, deniability, and political gain."

The independent rights expert does not speak for the United Nations but reports her findings to it.

Callamard presented a report into targeted killings through armed drones, in light of the proliferation in drone use and their expanding capability over the last five years.

Two-thirds run without licence

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stashes of fake Covid-19 test results. The hospital gave test results to patients without testing their samples.

"This [Regent Hospital] is the tip of the iceberg of irregularities at private clinics and diagnostic centres," said Prof Be-Nazir Ahmed, former director (disease control) at the DGHS.

"People involved in this sector are familiar with the term Bucket Test," he said. It means samples are collected and tossed into a bucket and then test results are given randomly, the former high official explained.

"This is a common practice.... For this, the patients lose money and the treatment gets misguided. The consequences are severe for the victims," he said.

Experts said the DGHS must not shrug off its responsibilities.

Prof Nazrul Islam, former vice-chancellor of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, said, "A thorough and detailed enquiry is needed to find out why the DGHS and the health

ministry failed to make private hospitals and clinics accountable. The ministry and DGHS officials should keep in mind that purchasing equipment is not their only task."

The DGHS has to be liable for the corruption done by unauthorised clinics and diagnostic centres in the name of treatment, he said.

"The unauthorised facilities are playing with the lives of innocent people."

Be-Nazir said that the licencing process should be decentralised with strict monitoring.

"For example, in upazilas, health and family planning officers will issue and renew licenses. Civil surgeons will do the same for facilities in the districts," he added.

Contacted, Moniruzzaman Bhuiyan, president of Bangladesh Private Clinics and Diagnostic Owners' Association, acknowledged that many of the facilities did not have licences.

"But they are in the process of renewal," he said.

No scope to become complacent

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apprehend that the situation might be worse if the government fails to take proper measures before the Eid-ul-Azha.

"If you see the data, the number of new cases against daily tests remained between 20 percent and 23 percent. It means if you double the test, there is a chance that the number of new cases would be double," said Prof Be-Nazir Ahmed, former director of disease control at the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

Bangladesh remains the 17th worst affected country in the world in terms of the total number of coronavirus cases.

In the last 24 hours until 2:30pm yesterday, 2,949 people tested positive for Covid-19, taking the total number of infection to 1,78,443, said Dr Nasima Sultana, additional director general (administration) of DGHS.

During this time, 13,488 samples were tested in 77 labs across the country. The rate of infection stood at 21.86 percent yesterday.

Record shows, the rate was 20.19 percent on June 26.

Prof Mozaherul Huq, former regional advisor of WHO South East Asia region and founder of the Public Health Foundation of Bangladesh, suggested that the government tackle the situation skillfully.

"We need to find out actual information about infection and increase the testing facilities," he said.

Pointing out that the country has a weak tracing system, he said the government needs to strengthen its contact tracing system. "Otherwise, the coronavirus will continue to spread among us," he added.

BRIEFING

A total of 37 people died from coronavirus infections in the last 24 hours, taking the death toll to 2,275, Nasima said.

The position is one step ahead of France and one step behind Germany, according to worldometer.info.

Among the deceased, 29 were male and eight were female while 12 were from Dhaka, 17 from Chattogram, two from Rajshahi, two from Sylhet, one from Barishal, one from Mymensingh and two others were from Rangpur division.

Of them, one was between 21-30 years old, one between 31-40, seven between 41-50, nine between 51-60, 15 between 61-70 and four between 71-80 years old, Dr Nasima also said. Meanwhile, 1,862 Covid-19 patients recovered, according to DGHS.

The total number of recoveries has reached 86,406.

A total of 893 people were put under isolation during this time.



An overcrowded launch carries passengers to Kathalbari of Madaripur from Shimulia of Munshiganj, putting them in harm's way. Hardly anybody on board is maintaining social distancing, which is required to curb the spread of Covid-19.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Half of dist admins ignore govt order

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But visiting the portal, this correspondent found no information in this regard.

The site's notice board is flooded with testimonials for local ruling party leaders and businessmen who made contributions during the crisis period.

Earlier, the Local Government Division (LGD) suspended 94 union parishad (UP) chairmen and members for their alleged involvement in misappropriation of rice and other aids meant for distribution among the poor.

Speaking to this correspondent recently, LGD Joint Secretary (UP division) Mustakim Billah Faruqui said they suspended the local government representatives on the basis of reports from local administrations.

According to the Department of Disaster Management (DDM), the government till June 4 allocated to 64 districts about 2.01 lakh tonnes rice and Tk 116.68 crore for providing financial aid and procurement of baby food.

Atiqul Huq, director general of DDM, said they have asked the DCs to publish the relief allocation information on their respective websites to ensure transparency, but many DCs are not complying with the order.

The 30 districts, whose web portals contain information on relief redistribution, were allocated 83,472 tonnes of rice, Tk 38.58 crore for financial aid and Tk 11.16 crore for procurement of baby food.

The districts are Brahmanbaria, Rangamati, Noakhali, Chandpur, Bogura, Joypurhat, Chapainawabganj, Sathkira, Narail, Chuadanga, Jhenidah, Jhalakathi, Pirojpur, Barguna, Moulvibazar, Narayanganj,

Kishoreganj, Munshiganj, Madaripur, Gopalganj, Faridpur, Panchagarh, Dinajpur, Lalmonirhat, Nilphamari, Gaibandha, Rangpur, Kurigram, Sherpur and Jamalpur.

Portals of eight of them -- Brahmanbaria, Rangamati, Moulvibazar, Munshiganj, Madaripur, Gopalganj, Faridpur and Panchagarh -- contain detailed information on redistribution of relief among upazilas.

Contacted, Rangamati DC AKM Mamunur Rashid said he followed the order accordingly to ensure transparency in relief distribution.

"I've not only published the information on the portal, but also uploaded it on social media from time to time to ensure my accountability to the public," he said.

The DC portals of eight districts -- Cox's Bazar, Sirajganj, Rajshahi, Patuakhali, Barishal, Manikganj, Rajbari and Thakurgaon -- have partial information on relief distribution.

The contributions of private donors are displayed well on the website of Manikganj DC whereas the Rajshahi DC's portal has published a list of beneficiaries who have received Tk 2,500 each as cash assistance from the prime minister.

The relief-related information has not been updated on the DC portals of Rajbari and Thakurgaon after April 25 and March 26 respectively.

These eight districts were allocated 25,849 tonnes of rice and Tk 11.89 crore for financial aid. Another Tk 3.36 crore was allocated to the DCs for purchasing baby food.

However, no relief distribution-related information was found on the DC websites of 26 other districts. They were given 92,098 tonnes of rice and

Tk 40.65 crore for providing cash aid. For purchasing baby food, DCs were also given another Tk 11.02 crore.

Asked, Shariatpur DC Kazi Abu Taher on Wednesday said, "The information should be on the website. Have you checked it?"

"If it's not there, it will be uploaded. I'm asking my subordinate colleagues to do it," he added.

The DC's portal was not updated until yesterday afternoon.

Speaking on the issue, TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman said this is a clear example of non-compliance to a government directive by such a large number of government officials, who should be brought to account.

Given the state of digitalisation of such public offices already achieved all over the country, no potential defence in the name of lack of capacity would be acceptable, he said.

State Minister for Disaster Management and Relief Enamur Rahman on Wednesday said, "I've already directed the ministry secretary to direct the DCs to upload relief information on websites."

He said people need to know what the government allocated for them.

Md Mohsin, secretary of the disaster management ministry, said he would give specific directives to the DCs and divisional commissioners in this regard within a day or two.

"I don't know what is there to hide and why they are not uploading the information. You'll find all information regarding relief within a couple of days," he added.

Despite repeated attempts, this newspaper could not reach State Minister for Public Administration Farhad Hossain over phone for comments.

Cops yet to track down Shahed

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for the crime he allegedly committed. He said it did not matter which party or group Shahed belonged to.

"Of course he will be brought to book," the home minister said adding that both police and Rab were looking for him.

He said they would soon be able to give information about Shahed.

Asaduzzaman also said Shahed had called him over phone while Rab was raiding the private hospital on Monday.

"I referred some patients to the hospital. He called me over that matter. He said the hospital was being sealed off."

"I told him 'you must have done something wrong'. They don't seal off anything without a reason. He then asked me what he should do."

"I told him either you face it or go to court if you have something to say. That's all I said."

Meanwhile, a Dhaka court yesterday placed Regent Group Public Relations Officer Tariqul Islam alias Tareq Shibli on a five-day remand in connection with a case filed over the matter.

Metropolitan Magistrate Morshed Al Mamun Bhuiyan passed the order after Uttara West Police Station Inspector Md Alamgir Gazi, also the investigation officer of the case, produced him before the court with a seven-day remand prayer.

No lawyer appeared to defend Shahed. Responding to a question, Shibli told the court that the accused works at the PR department, but he was aware about the hospital issuing fake Covid-19 certificates, court sources said.

With Tariqul, Rab so far has arrested nine people in this connection.

Seven of the eight others, all staffers of the hospitals, were arrested during the drive. They also have been placed on a five-day remand each. The other arrestee is underage.

Shahed, who is the chairman of Regent Hospital, managing director and six other accused in the case were on the run.

In another development, Shahed's father Sirajul Karim died of coronavirus infection at the capital's Universal Medical College Hospital on Thursday night.

The hospital authorities said they informed if Shahed's wife over phone, but no relatives showed up to take the body. Later, two persons nominated by the family took it.

Rab on Tuesday night filed the case against Shahed and 16 staffers of Regent Group and Regent Hospital after the mobile court found proof that the hospital authorities issued fake Covid-19 certificates and charged patients for tests and treatment, violating an agreement with the government.

The mobile court sealed off Regent

Group head office and two branches of Regent Hospital in Uttara and Mirpur.

The hospital's licence expired in 2014 and was never renewed.

According to Rab, the hospital authorities so far issued more than 10,000 Covid-19 test reports. Around 4,200 of the samples were tested at different government labs. They threw away rest, prepared fake reports and gave those to patients without testing, Rab said.

The hospital authorities took Tk 3,500 for each test, meaning they embezzled more than Tk 3.5 crore, despite having agreement with the government to conduct tests and provide Covid-19 treatment for free, said Executive Magistrate Sarwoer Alam, who led the drive.

After the Rab's raid, many other information started surfacing.

About Shahed, a home ministry letter sent to the inspector general of police back in 2016 mentioned: "He is a man of dangerous fraudulent nature."

At a briefing on Wednesday, Rab's Intelligence Chief Lt Col Sarwar-Bin-Quasem also said Shahed was a fraud and master of bluffs.

He is facing around 32 cases, including for murder, money laundering and embezzlement of public money. He has already served in jail for embezzling money. Most of the cases were filed under Section 420 of the Penal Code.

Sahara

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capital's Banani graveyard today.

Her body will be flown back to Dhaka in the early hours.

The 77-year-old lawmaker from Dhaka-18 passed away at Bumrungrad International Hospital in Bangkok at 11:25pm (local time).

She was taken to Bangkok on Monday by an air ambulance.

On June 2, the three-time MP was admitted to the United Hospital with fever and complications associated with old age. She was later taken to the ICU of the hospital as her condition deteriorated.

President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in separate messages expressed profound shock at her death.

Abdul Hamid said Sahara's death was an irreparable loss as she was a tested AL leader at its tough time.

Sheikh Hasina in her condolence message said Sahara dedicated her life for reestablishing democracy and realising people's rights as a combatant of Bangabandhu's principle.

"Sahara Khatun always remained beside the party's leaders and workers and provided all support, including legal aid services during the crisis," said the PM.

"The country and nation have lost a competent and honest woman leader. And I have lost a tested and trusted co-fighter."

Sahara Khatun was born in Dhaka's Kurmitola on March 1, 1943. Her parents were Abdul Aziz and Turjan Nesa.

She completed Bachelor of Arts and LLB degrees and became a lawyer.

Sahara engaged in politics in her student life. She was the former law secretary of the AL.

She entered national politics in 1991, when she contested in the fifth parliamentary election as an Awami League candidate. She was defeated by BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia.

In the 2008 parliamentary election, she came to the limelight following the arrest of then opposition leader Sheikh Hasina.

Sahara was one of the forefront fighters as a lawyer involved in the legal battle and also on the streets to free Sheikh Hasina.

She became the victim of the military-backed 1/11 government.

In the 2008 national election, Sahara became an MP for the first time from Dhaka-18 constituency.

Giving surprise to many, Sheikh Hasina included Sahara in her cabinet as minister for home affairs.

In a cabinet reshuffle of 2012, she was relieved of her duties as the home minister and made the minister of posts and telecommunications.

Sahara's tenure as minister of home affairs has been marred by different incidents including the BDR mutiny.

She was criticised for the extrajudicial killings done by Police and Rab.

In January, 2011, Sahara Khatun had questioned whether human rights organisations were "siding with the criminals" killed in "encounters" with law enforcers.

She was also widely criticised for her pledges about the 48-hour timeframe, announced to catch the killers of journalist couple, Sagar Sarowar and Meherun Runi.

Apart from being the presidium member of AL, she was founding president of Bangladesh Awami Ainjibi Parishad and General Secretary of Bangladesh Mahila Samity, chairman of Aziz Master Academy, member of International Women Lawyers Federation, the International Women's Alliance and former member of Bangladesh Bar Council, according to biography, published by the parliament secretariat.

Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, AL General secretary Obaidul Quader, ministers including Agriculture Minister Abdur Razzaque and Home Minister Ashaduzzaman Khan, Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain, Law Minister Anisul Huq and Attorney General Mahbubey Alam, top leaders of different political, social and cultural organizations, among others, expressed deep shock at her death.

15,000 stranded at home, face uncertain future

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Bangladesh will be allowed to enter Italy. No airlines can bring passengers from Covid-19-hit country due to the risk of further Covid-19 spread. Passengers who came from Bangladesh cannot be brought on transit flights either.

Different foreign airlines, including Qatar Airways, already sent letters to travel agencies after getting the directives.

On July 7, the Italian government imposed a travel restriction for one week after a significant number of passengers of a special flight of Biman Bangladesh Airlines tested Covid-19 positive once they landed at the airport in Rome.

The passengers had certificates that they tested negative for Covid-19 and

were safe to travel.

Following this, Italy denied entry of around 146 Bangladeshi passengers -- on board two transit flight of Qatar Airways -- into the country on Wednesday.

Qatar Airways, which along with a few other foreign airlines got ahead last month to operate transit flights on different destinations from Dhaka, carried back the Bangladeshis to Dhaka early yesterday.

In a statement on Thursday, Qatar Airways said, "Upon request of the Italian health ministry, all flights/passengers from Bangladesh with final destination to Italy are forbidden."

"Effective from July 8 and valid till October 5, passengers are not

allowed to travel to Italy from Bangladesh irrespective of any nationality and irrespective of any routing involved where flight originates from Bangladesh," read the statement.

Arfanul Haque, labour welfare counsellor at Bangladesh embassy in Rome, yesterday said they got a notice regarding a one-week travel ban for Bangladeshis and that they learnt about the travel ban till October 5 via other sources.

Earlier in June, Japan, South Korea, and China put restrictions on operating flights in their countries from Dhaka after several passengers who had travelled from Bangladesh tested Covid-19 positive after they landed in those countries.