

BANGLADESH  
UPDATE

**1,508**  
New cases in 24hrs

**3,64,987**  
Total cases

**5,272**  
Deaths

**2,77,078**  
Recoveries

GLOBAL  
UPDATE

**1,021,476**  
Deaths

**34,356,358**  
Total cases

## WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN WORKFORCE PM pledges to raise it to 50pc by 2041

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday pledged to increase women's participation in the workforce to 50-50 by 2041 and called for protecting their jobs in the context of Covid-19 pandemic.

She also urged the international community to renew its commitments and enhance efforts to ensure women's equality, empowerment and advancement.

"In the context of Covid-19, the jobs of female workers, including migrant workers, across the global supply chains and other major employment sectors, must be protected so that they are not further marginalised and financially excluded," she said while highlighting three issues at a high-level meeting at the United Nations headquarters in New York.

The High-Level Meeting on the 25th Anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women was held virtually on the sidelines of the 75th UN General Assembly.

Pointing out two other issues, Hasina said firstly, the world can benefit from every girl whose potential is realised, from every woman whose talent is tapped, and this can only be done through education.

"Secondly, empowerment comes with income and employment. Therefore, engaging women in income-generating activities should be a priority," the PM said.

She said the Covid-19 pandemic has particularly aggravated the vulnerability of women.

"During this pandemic, women are facing discrimination and increased domestic violence, and therefore, threatening to reverse our hard-earned achievements in women empowerment."

Talking about Bangladesh's tremendous development in women empowerment, Hasina said women are now becoming higher court judges, public university VCs, secretaries of the government ministries and so on. Gender budgeting, micro-finance and similar initiatives have ensured women's financial inclusion.

The premier said the government's investment in women was paying dividends with women thriving in every sector of the society.

"Today, 20 million women are engaged in agriculture, industry, and service sectors, while over 3.5 million are working in the readymade garments sector, our largest export-earning sector," she added.

## Remittance inflow defies

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time when the "hundi" -- an illegal cross-boundary financial transaction system -- has stalled pushing the inflow through the banking sector.

They also said expatriate Bangladeshis in North America and Europe now send in a robust amount of remittance as interest rates on deposits in those countries have dropped to almost zero in the wake of the ongoing coronavirus-driven economic slowdown.

The experts, however, warned against complacency and advocated for building on the rising trend of inward remittance flow to achieve a sustainable future growth target in the sector.

More than one crore Bangladeshis live in about 160 countries. Most of them are low-paid migrant workers in the Middle East and Southeast Asian countries, who contribute a bulk of foreign currency in the state coffers.

Beating forecasts, Bangladesh has received as high as \$1.83 billion in remittance in June, a record \$2.59 billion in July and \$1.96 billion in August, shows data from the central bank.

The World Bank in April had made a forecast that remittance flow to Bangladesh may plunge by as much as 22 percent in 2020 because of the fallout of the pandemic.

Each of the monthly remittance inflow was higher than that of any given month in recent years. The previous highest was \$1.74 billion in May 2019.

Between the months of July and September, remittance hit \$6.71 billion, up from 48.52 percent year-on-year.

### THE REASONS

"Travelling has almost come to a halt due to the ongoing pandemic and it has dealt a big blow to the hundi system," Zahid Hussain, former lead economist at the World Bank's Dhaka office, told The Daily Star.

The uptrend of export against the dwindling import and foreign loans, financial aids and grants has helped the financial sector enjoy a robust amount of foreign currency, he said.

Zahid, however, said that many migrants, who lost work opportunities in the host countries amid the pandemic, sent their last savings before returning home, which has given a boost to the remittance inflow.

Against the backdrop, the discrepancy in exchange rates of dollars between formal and informal sectors has declined significantly, encouraging remitters to send their hard-earned money through the legal banking system.

Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal echoed a similar view and said expats previously sent 49 percent of the total remittance using the non-banking channels.

But the two percent cash incentive and an increase in distribution channels of remittance in the country have discouraged remitters to send their money using the non-banking channel that ultimately registered a shining growth in recent times, he added.

Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh, said interest rates on deposits have almost become zero in the US and European countries, encouraging the Bangladeshi diaspora living there to send more money to the country.

The Bangladeshi banks now offer more than five percent interest rates, way higher than the rates offered by those host countries, he said.

"Besides, the Bangladeshi expats now try to invest their idle funds in the country. Many of them are purchasing land here to use their fund in a fruitful manner," he said.

Mansur, also a former top official of

the International Monetary Fund, thinks high remittance inflow from North American and European countries may continue in the years ahead as the nations would require more time to avoid the deadlock of zero percent interest rate.

**'CONCERN IS TO HOLD ON TO IT'**  
Prof Selim Raihan, executive director of South Asian Network on Economic Modeling, said the recent growth was a positive sign considering remittance's importance in the country's economy and also because it happened during the pandemic.

"But the concern is to hold on to it," he told this newspaper by phone.

Pointing to the remittance growth achieved at the end of the outgoing fiscal year, Prof Selim, a teacher of economics at Dhaka University, said it was important that it continued towards the end of the year or the fiscal year.

The country received a record \$18.20 billion in remittance in the last fiscal year, up from 11 percent year-on-year, shows BB data.

Saudi Arabia was the top remittance-generating country for Bangladesh in 2019-2020 with \$4 billion, followed by the United Arab Emirates (\$2.47 billion) and the USA (\$2.4 billion), shows the data.

Other top remittance-generating countries included Kuwait, UK, Oman, Malaysia, Qatar, Italy, and Singapore.

Prof Selim Raihan suggested introducing "privilege cards" for remitters to encourage them to send more.

Mohammad Shams-Ul Islam, managing director and chief executive officer of Agrani Bank, said they received about \$435 million in July and about \$235-\$240 million in August in remittance.

Agrani Bank is now the second highest remittance receiver after Islami Bank among all banks.

The bank usually received 10-11 percent of the total monthly remittance which increased to about 17 percent in July, he told The Daily Star by phone.

He termed the surge a "remarkable achievement" and said they have recently launched an app-based system in Singapore to reach Bangladeshi remitters.

Using the app, one can remit money staying at home, he said, adding the app would be launched in other countries as well.

Md Mahbub-ul-Alam, MD of Islami Bank, said both the government and the central bank should take initiatives to widen the volume of the remittance distribution channels so that the receivers get the fund easily.

The lender has received remittance worth \$756 million in September, up 147 percent year-on-year.

The government should continue to provide cash incentives to remitters in the years to come so that remittance maintains the upward trend, he said.

Shariful Islam, head of Brac Migration Programme, said about one lakh migrant workers returned to the country amid the pandemic.

"They tried to remit their last penny before returning home," he said.

Prof Tasneem Siddiqui, founding chair of Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU), said the high remittance inflow did not necessarily reflect that all migrants remitted their earnings during the pandemic.

Inward remittance could be higher by ensuring engagement of more migrants in the formal channel, she added.

"This is a lesson to learn," said Prof Tasneem, adding more government initiatives were needed to turn remitters from "the informal flow towards the formal flow".

**Floodwater devoured a culvert on Basail-Natiapara Road in Tangail's Basail upazila early yesterday, disrupting road communication among 30 villages of Basail and nearby two other upazilas. The photo was taken later in the afternoon.**

PHOTO: COLLECTED

## Amend it to curb cops' raid powers

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there are complaints that this is creating abuse of the law," the letter continued.

"You must be aware that legal manpower recruiting agencies are not at all involved in human trafficking or fraudulent activities like these. The Ministry of Home Affairs has received multiple complaints regarding harassment of recruiting agencies by law enforcers, but these instances of harassment have yet to stop.

"It needs to be mentioned that the former state minister of the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment sent a semi-official letter on June 25, 2019 seeking an end to the harassment of recruiting agencies by the police. I too have received multiple requests from the members of the recruiting agency association at different times, seeking a cancellation of the above-mentioned law.

"Under these circumstances, I would like to especially request you to partially amend Section 20(1) and (2) of The Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act 2012 to stop the unnecessary harassment of recruiting agencies by police in the name of preventing human trafficking."

The letter was also forwarded to the home minister, overseas employment minister, and the chairman of Female Worker Recruiting Agencies Association and Abdul Alim, the chairman of Female Worker Recruiting Agencies Association of Bangladesh.

Contacted, Law Minister Anisul Huq said, "We will examine the laws and scrutinise the request. I cannot make any comments about this now." The Daily Star called Foreign Minister Momen several times in the last two days, but he informed thrice that he was busy and would talk later. Expatriates' Welfare Minister Imran Ahmad could not be reached.

Abdul Alim, the chairman of the recruiting agency association, said he complained to the government several times about the anti-trafficking law being "unfair" on agencies.

"This law is hurting us. An anti-trafficking law should be for traffickers. Trafficking involves coercion, abduction, and clandestine operations. Migration is not trafficking because it involves two governments, and several layers of validation," said Alim, who is also the managing director of SA Trading.

"This law was formulated by foreign-funded NGOs to implicate us," he claimed.

The United States Department of State publishes a Trafficking in Persons Report each year. The 2020 report on

Bangladesh stated "Because a number of government officials, including parliamentarians, maintained close ties to foreign employment agencies, there were concerns such officials had conflicts of interest in approving migrant-friendly practices, such as prosecution of abusive recruitment agencies and increasing protections for migrant workers."

In September 2019, Bangladesh ratified the "Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children", a protocol under an international treaty called United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

Among other forms of trafficking, the protocol states that "trafficking in persons" include recruitment, transportation and harbouring of persons through fraud, deception, abuse of power, for the purpose of exploitation. According to the protocol, exploitation includes forced labour, servitude and conditions similar to slavery.

The protocol also states that "The consent of a victim of trafficking in persons to the intended exploitation set forth [above] shall be irrelevant where any of the means set forth [above] has been used."

Shameem Ahmed Chowdhury Noman, secretary general of Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (BAIRA), said, "How is it that a recruiting agency can be prosecuted based on the words of a worker, without proof? Their offices are raided publicly, and media trials are held. A recruiting agent was arrested for sending a 14-year-old girl to Saudi Arabia who died of torture. Her passport said she was 26 -- why not hold the passport giving agency responsible? The embassies are not functional either."

His comment referred to the case of Umme Kulsum who died of torture in Saudi Arabia and whose body came back on September 9. On September 17, Rapid Action Battalion-3 raided the office of MH Trade International, the recruiting agent that sent her to Saudi Arabia.

During the raid, members of recruiting agencies protested in front of the office, under the banner of Recruiting Agency Oikyo Parishad. Their chairperson Tipu Sultan told this newspaper, "We can't be culpable for crimes of employers. We want the law repealed."

A further investigation by The Daily Star revealed that the agency was responsible for sending at least four more female workers into conditions

where they were raped, thrown off the roof, starved, and beaten. The workers claimed to this correspondent that they had all contacted the proprietor of MH Trade International, Mokbul Hossain.

According to standard contracts of manpower export, once an employer has paid for a worker, if the worker chooses to leave the employment for whatever reason, the Bangladeshi manpower agency must pay \$2,000 or provide a replacement worker to the employer. In the case of MH Trade International, at least four women said they came back before completing their employment.

So Mokbul Hossain was asked by this newspaper whether he sent women as replacement or he paid the money.

"If a woman came back without completing her contract, we paid back \$2,000 that the employer had given for her. The local office in Saudi Arabia either found another worker, or paid on our behalf, and that money was adjusted from our account," he had claimed.

Asked if he had receipts to prove that he paid \$2,000 for every abused woman who came back without completing their contracts, he had said he had no receipts.

Assistant Inspector General (media) Sohel Rana of Police Headquarters and the Additional Deputy Inspector General Sheikh Rezaul Haider of Criminal Investigation Department said that they only raided and arrested people from recruiting agencies when there was clear evidence. Police sources claimed they found the involvement of at least 30 recruiting agencies in trafficking.

Rab Media Wing Director Lt Col Ashiq Billah said, "The anti-trafficking law is very realistic. Meanwhile, we are also creating awareness about trafficking."

Between October 2019 and September of this year, Rab-3 raided offices of 10 recruiting agencies. Three cases were filed last month, one related to labour trafficking in Brunei, and two related to labour trafficking in Saudi Arabia, and six people were arrested.

"I truly hope that good businessmen are not harassed, but let not something be done that will allow traffickers to get away. Migration and trafficking become cross-cutting issues when someone is sent abroad and his or her rights are violated, when a worker is exploited. Trafficking in the name of migration should be recognised," said Shariful Hasan, programme head of BRAC Migration Programme.

## Dhaka, Beijing

FROM PAGE 1

nations even closer on bilateral, regional, and international issues of common interests, according to the Chinese embassy in Dhaka.

With the vision to explore new avenues of further cooperation to realise the full potentials of China-Bangladesh relations, Hasina wished Xi Jinping good health, long life and happiness as well as continued peace, progress and prosperity to the friendly people of China.

She has also sent another congratulatory message to Li Keqiang, premier of the State Council of China. In the message, she emphasised that the friendly relations between the two countries exist on the basis of shared values, similar national objectives and mutual respect.

Hasina highlighted the Strategic Partnership of Cooperation between China and Bangladesh established in 2016 with common aspirations towards peace, progress and prosperity of the two peoples.

She recalled her visit to China last year when the two countries reached broad consensus on various issues.

The PM expressed optimism that the two countries can further fortify their relations through exploring new avenues of cooperation. She wished her Chinese counterpart good health and happiness.

## Closure of edn

FROM PAGE 1

On March 17, the government closed educational institutions to contain the spread of coronavirus.

The closure was extended till October 3 in several phases. The long closure has led to the cancellation of exams and left academic calendars in disarray.

After the closure extension till October 31, all educational institutions will remain close for almost seven and a half month.

Meanwhile, the introduction to the new curriculum by National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) has been delayed by a year from January 2021 due to Covid-19 outbreak.

Introduction to technical and vocational courses at all general stream schools and madrasas for developing skilled and efficient human resources was also delayed by one year.

The government started tele education through Sangsad TV for primary and secondary students as well as for technical and madrasa students.

Many public universities are in fear of session jams caused by the closure of universities.

Public universities are taking online classes but many cannot join the classes due to scarcity of digital devices.

Most private universities are conducting online classes.

## Taqsem Khan

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The decision of his reappointment was made in the Wasa board's 97th special meeting held virtually on September 19.

Following this, a writ petition was filed with the High Court on September 24 challenging the legality of the MD's reappointment process.

The reappointment comes at a time when the hearing of the petition is pending with the court.

Taqsem has been the Dhaka Wasa MD for the last 11 years. He was appointed for four consecutive terms of varying lengths. His current term will expire on October 14.

When he took office in 2009, most parts of the capital used to be waterlogged after heavy rains. The situation remains unchanged.

Residents still complain of getting dirty and foul-smelling water from Wasa.

There is no proper sewer system in about 80 percent of the capital, like it was 11 years ago.

A Transparency International Bangladesh report published on April 17 last year said 91 percent of Wasa subscribers had to boil the water to make it drinkable and, in the process, burned natural gas worth Tk 332 crore a year.

The TIB findings also showed that nearly 45 percent of the subscribers got inadequate supply of water, while about 35 percent complained of being supplied poor-quality water throughout the year.

Allegations of massive irregularities and corruption in the small and large projects of Wasa were raised in the TIB research.

Taqsem was widely criticised last year for claiming that Dhaka Wasa water was 100 percent safe at source.

He also told reporters on various occasions that water-related issues can be attributed to technical problems, and often denied reports of corruption and mismanagement in Wasa.

Meanwhile, the government yesterday also reappointed Chattogram Wasa Managing Director AKM Fazlullah for three more years.

According to another circular issued by the LGRD and cooperatives ministry, the reappointment will be effective from November 1.