

FIGHTING OVER NAGORNO-KARABAKH
Armenia, Azerbaijan trade accusations of breaking new truce
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The Daily Star



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"There is pressure on us. UNHCR and other agencies say that the Bhashan Char project should be tested before Rohingya relocation."
FOREIGN MINISTER AK ABDUL MOMEN



"Joe Biden is a criminal, he's committed crimes. He's a national security risk."
PRESIDENT TRUMP RAMPS UP ELECTION CAMPAIGN RHETORIC



"I think they were endorsing the work we've done ... and there are some areas we do want to crack on with."
NZ'S VICTORIOUS PM ARDERN VOWS TO DELIVER REFORM

New hurdle for fresh migrants

25,000 Saudi-bound workers spending additional money as they need to submit all papers again for reissuance of visa expired amid pandemic

JAMIL MAHMUD

Around 25,000 aspiring migrant workers are facing new hassles as Saudi Arabia asked them to resubmit documents for reissuing their visas, expired amid coronavirus pandemic.

Potential migrants who secured visas before the pandemic but could not travel because of the outbreak will again have to submit the medical reports and "police clearance" certificates along with fresh papers provided by their prospective Saudi employers, said industry insiders.

But a large number of the aspirants, who have already invested borrowed or hard-earned money for "lucrative" overseas jobs and facing financial crunch due to the Covid-19 fallout, now find it difficult to fulfil these requirements.

Take the case of Md Shahadat. The man in his late-20s from Chandpur got an employment visa for the job of a date farm labourer in Saudi Arabia. He already paid Tk 50,000 for the employment visa and agreed to pay another Tk 2.5 lakh

upon making the flight.

Besides, he spent Tk 20,000 on medical fees and other expenses.

He was due to fly on March 26 but all flights got suspended because of the global outbreak of Covid-19.

"It will be a burden if I have to spend Tk 20,000 again," Shahadat told The Daily Star.

Similar is the case of Kamrul Hassan, 30, of Tangail's Ghatail. He had to collect his "police clearance" certificate from the local police station by himself.

"Now I have to go through the same process again," he said.

The reissuance of visas will also put potential migrants at the mercy of Saudi employers who will decide whether they will hire the workers amid the Covid-19 downturn, though they earlier placed their demands for the workers and gave "power of attorney" to local recruiting agencies.

Shariful Hasan, head of Brac Migration Programme, said the new move by the Saudi government will increase the cost of

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This aerial view of Bhasan Char shows a portion of the housing facilities that has been built on the island to relocate the Rohingyas from Cox's Bazar. The authorities say that the housing is ready to host 1 lakh Rohingyas. Multiple international organisations, however, expressed doubt over the relocation plan.

PHOTO: STAR

DEBATE OVER GDP GROWTH

There is wide variation in the GDP growth projections made by multilateral lenders for the current fiscal year amid economic uncertainties. IMF lowered its growth forecast for Bangladesh to 4.4 per cent, while World Bank put it at 1.6 per cent and ADB at 6.8 per cent, though the government aims to pull off 8.2 per cent. Experts think it's natural that the numbers will differ, but all should learn to live with differences.

STORY ON B1

50 YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE Modi to join celebrations

Accepts invitation to be in Dhaka on March 26: FM

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Bangladesh on March 26 next year to attend the celebrations marking 50 years of the country's independence.

"We invited the Indian prime minister to visit Bangladesh on March 26 next year. It was accepted," Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen told journalists after a meeting with the new Indian High Commissioner, Vikram Doraiswami, at state guesthouse Padma in the city yesterday.

"We would love to see Indian PM Modi join our 50th anniversary [of independence] celebrations. Our victory means India's victory as well. India will also celebrate our anniversary of independence," he said.

Momen further said they discussed the upcoming virtual meeting between Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Modi. India proposed December 16 for the meeting, but Dhaka thinks it could take place a day later as all will be busy with

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POLLS CODE VIOLATION Nixon seeks anticipatory bail from HC

Section 144 imposed in Bhanga yesterday too

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Independent lawmaker Mujibur Rahman Chowdhury, known as Nixon Chowdhury, yesterday sought anticipatory bail from the High Court in a case over violations of the electoral code of conduct during by-polls in Faridpur's Charbhadrasan upazila.

Meanwhile, the Faridpur district administration imposed section-144 in Bhanga upazila for the second consecutive day, banning public gatherings from 10:00 am to 5:00pm yesterday as two groups announced rallies for and against Nixon in the same area.

Nixon, an independent MP from Faridpur-4, filed a petition with the HC, seeking anticipatory bail in the case filed by the Election Commission, Monjurul Alam, a counsel for the lawmaker, told The

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BHASAN CHAR

All set to take in Rohingyas

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA, BACK FROM BHASAN CHAR

When one thinks of a char, the idea of swaths of land -- barren or cultivable -- comes to the mind. Bhasan Char, a remote island in Hatiya, however, is completely different.

It now looks like a planned modern township with rows of white multi-storey buildings. Equipped with electricity, water supply, common kitchens and playgrounds, Bhasan Char seems well prepared to welcome the Rohingyas.

"With 120 cluster villages that are capable of accommodating one lakh people, the housing project in Bhasan Char is ready. We are waiting for the Rohingyas to come and start living here," Project Director Abdullah Al Mamun Chowdhury told this correspondent who visited the place recently.

mobile phone networks might take them by surprise.

The houses have been built four feet above the ground with concrete blocks. The entire housing site is protected by a 13-km-long flood embankment.

A family of four will live in each room in the new township which the Bangladesh government built for over Tk 3,000 crore over three years. Each building will house 16 families in its 16 rooms providing more than the UN stipulated 37 square feet per head, said project officials.

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Star LIVE

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TO USE QR CODE ON YOUR SMARTPHONE, INSTALL FREE QR READER SOFTWARE FROM GOOGLE PLAYSTORE OR APPLE STORE. TURN ON THE SOFTWARE AND HOLD THE PHONE CAMERA OVER THE QR CODE TO GET THE VIDEO LINK.

From the mainland in Chattogram, it takes two hours to reach Bhasan Char -- around 40 kilometres off Noakhali -- by boat. Once one arrives in the island in the Bay of Bengal, buildings equipped with electricity and solar panels as well as biogas plants and functioning

14 more die, 1,274 infected with Covid-19

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Fourteen more people have died from Covid-19 in the 24 hours ending at 8:00am yesterday, said a press release issued by the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

With this, the total number of deaths has now reached 5,660 and the death rate stands at 1.46 percent.

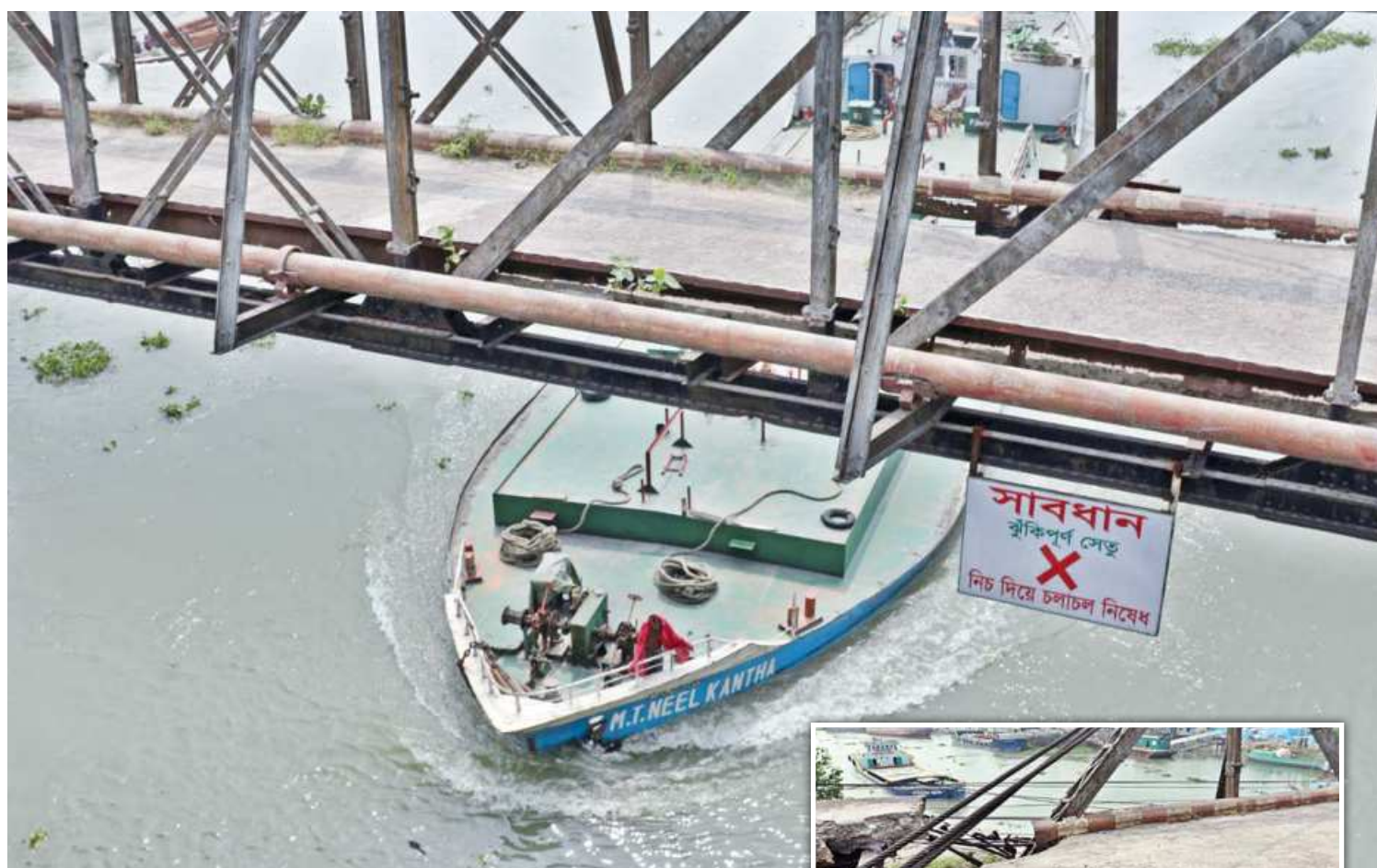
During the same period, at least 1,274 new infections were recorded after 11,866 samples were tested, taking the total number of Covid-19 patients to 3,88,569, added the release.

Meanwhile, a total of 1,674 patients have recovered from the virus, taking the total number of recoveries to 3,03,972.

The current recovery rate stands at 78.23 percent, the release reads.

Bangladesh is currently 17th on the list of worst affected countries in the world in terms of the

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A vessel goes under a bridge over the Turag in the capital's Gabtoli yesterday. The bridge is seriously damaged, inset, and fearing a collapse the authorities placed a sign asking vessels to pass under the other end of the bridge. The warning is largely ignored.



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

PANDEMIC FALLOUT

Child marriage risks skyrocket

Reports Save the Children

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An estimated 5,00,000 more girls are at a risk of being forced into child marriage and as many as one million more are expected to become pregnant this year as a result of the economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The estimation was revealed in new report by Save the Children titled "Global Girlhood 2020: COVID-19 and progress in peril".

South Asia is expected to be hardest hit, with nearly 200,000 more girls at risk of child marriage in 2020, mentioned the report that analysed the impact of Covid-19 on gender equality, revealing its devastating effects.

The practice is also expected to rise in East Asia and the Pacific (61,000), Europe and Central Asia (37,000) and the Middle East and North Africa (14,400).

The increase comes on top of the previously estimated rates of child marriage, which already anticipated 12 million girls being forced into marriage this year. While this increase represents a conservative estimate, it marks a significant surge in child marriage rates with an expected spike in teenage pregnancies and school dropouts to follow.

The increase is set to reverse 25 years of progress, which saw child marriage rates decline, it said.

According to the report, 16-year-old Sunita of India's Bihar state was forced to marry and leave school at the age of 12. She now advocates against child marriage in her village, participating in community events to raise awareness of girls' rights.

Sunita said she felt terrible because she was still very young.

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