

BANGLADESH UPDATE



1320
New cases in 24hrs



4,07,684
Total cases



5,923
Deaths



3,24,145
Recoveries



1,96,506
Deaths



46,082,374
Total cases

PM vows to wipe out poverty

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday vowed to eradicate poverty from the country through the combined efforts of all.

"If we all work together, there will be no poverty in the country," she said while addressing a programme virtually from the Gono Bhaban.

The event, titled "Gift of house to the homeless people in Mujib Borsho", was organised to hand over 160 homes to the homeless at the Bangabandhu International Conference Centre.

Senior secretaries and secretaries of the government took the initiative to provide homes to the homeless people.

Hasina said the government has already reduced the rate of poverty significantly and want to reduce it more.

"We pledged to declare the country free from poverty by 2021, but due to the coronavirus it could not be done. However, our efforts are underway and will be continued."

The premier said the people of the country are very courageous and they have snatched their independence from the Pakistani occupation forces under the leadership of father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

She urged the well-off people to come forward for helping the people of their respective areas. In doing so, the people of those areas would get a better life.

"Living a good life individually is not humanity at all," she said.

Hasina said the government was working relentlessly to provide home to the homeless people in the Mujib Borsho, the birth centenary of



Bangabandhu. "We will take an initiative to illuminate every house in the country during the Mujib Borsho. We have adopted a plan in this regard and we are working also as per the plan."

Talking about the government's success in ensuring food security in the country, she said the government is now taking steps to ensure nutrition for all and it has taken initiatives to increase the production of fish, meat, milk, and eggs.

She urged all not to leave one inch of land uncultivated for the better production of food grains.

The government has given special attention to the mechanisation of agriculture, the PM added.

Hasina said the government is setting up 100 economic zones across the country.

"We have also taken an initiative to establish food processing industries in different parts of the country."

She said many initiatives of the government for the welfare of people have been stalled due to the novel coronavirus, but the government is working to provide financial assistance to the rural areas.

Hasina said working for the people of the country is the prime task of her life as she has lost everything in her life on August 15, 1975.

"It would be the success of my life if I can do something for the people of this country. I never think of what I have gained or not. For me, the main thing is what can I give to the people," she added.

End of probe ever elusive

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supervising the investigation into the 22 cases filed last year.

Besides, delay in getting official confirmation from different banks abroad about laundered money is also affecting the investigation in some cases, said the official, wishing not to be named.

"We have information from the [foreign] sources and they gave us that information on condition of keeping it confidential. The information is genuine, but we can't use it in court. We need the official confirmation," the director said.

The official, however, expressed optimism that they would be able to submit the charge sheet in a case or two by next month.

Talking to The Daily Star, an ACC investigator said they have traced hundreds of crores of Taka in different foreign bank accounts of Samrat, online casino kingpins Selim Proshan and Enamul Huq Arman.

He, however, declined to disclose the details.

"Since we've got the confirmation, we're now making Mutual Legal Assistance Request [MLAR] to the countries concerned to get information on their assets in a formal way. We'll reveal more information to you [journalists] once we get the response," he said.

Anti-casino operations by law enforcement agencies started on September 18 last year when Rab arrested expelled Dhaka South Jubo League organising secretary Khaled Mahmud Bhuiyan.

Following Khaled's arrest, the law enforcement agency arrested businessman GK Shamim, Samrat, Selim, Arman and different other leaders of the Jubo League, the Krishak League and the AL in the capital.

Samrat was arrested by Rab on October 6 along with his close aide Arman in Cumilla.

Soon after their arrests for their alleged involvement in running illegal casinos, the ACC opened an enquiry into their illegal assets on September 30.

The anti-graft watchdog has so far found that Samrat laundered over Tk 200 crore, earned through casinos, to banks in Singapore and Malaysia. The ACC has made MLAR to those countries, said its sources.

On November 12 last year, the ACC filed a case against Samrat for amassing wealth worth Tk 2.94 crore through illegal means.

Talking to this correspondent, an ACC official shed light on the progress in investigating Selim Proshan. The official said they have detected shady transactions involving Selim's savings account with a private bank's Motijheel branch.

Analysing the account's data, investigators found transactions of Tk 61 crore in 11 months in 2013. "The money came from an illegal source and most of the amount was laundered to Thailand," said the ACC official.

ACC sources said the graft watchdog had sent letters the authorities in Japan, Singapore, Thailand and the USA to find out where the money was laundered. In response, they got information on transactions made to Thailand and the USA.

Selim had illegal transactions of over Tk 20 crore with Bangkok Bank and Siam Commercial Bank in Thailand, said the sources.

The Daily Star could not contact the

authorities of the banks for comments.

Sources also said Selim used to play at the casinos on a regular basis at Park MGM, formerly Monte Carlo Resort and Casino, in Las Vegas in the USA and had suspicious transactions with JP Morgan Chase Bank in the same country.

Selim also bought casino chips and equipment spending several crores from Park MGM, the sources added.

ACC Deputy Director Gulshan Anwar Proshan has recently made Mutual Legal Assistance Request [MLAR] to the authorities in Thailand and the USA, seeking official documents containing this information. Once he receives them, the ACC would be able to prove their case in court, said officials.

The officials said they would submit a supplementary charge sheet in the case against Selim soon. "We will submit it once we get those documents from Thailand and the USA," said an ACC official.

The graft watchdog had filed the case against Selim on October 27 last year over amassing wealth worth Tk 12.27 crore beyond his known sources of income.

Rab arrested Selim at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport on September 28 last year while he was attempting to flee the country.

On September 24 this year, the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) submitted a charge-sheet in another case against Selim and five others over laundering around Tk 13.28 crore they made from an online casino trade.

TIB CRITICISES ACC

When his attention was drawn to the delay in completing the investigation, Executive Director of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) Iftekharuzzaman criticised the ACC.

"Given some benefit of doubt in favour of its visibly overwhelmed state due to the enormity of alleged instances of reported corruption that are thrust upon it, the ACC has not yet shown any credible evidence of prioritising its tasks, especially in terms of setting examples of successes against the proverbial big fish," he said, in an email yesterday.

Long delays are likely to be linked with this lack of prioritisation on the one hand and deficits of 3 Cs on the other -- capacity, courage and commitment to deliver its mandate, he said.

Iftekharuzzaman said the ACC has agreeably been recently going after some politically linked persons, including a few public representatives, and even a handful of MPs.

"But in hardly any of these cases has the ACC demonstrated that it has been able to dig deep and wide enough to succeed in holding to account either those directly alleged or their cohorts and colluders, not to speak of the godfathers operating from behind."

"Either for perceived political pressure or for its own choice, the ACC seems to have drawn a self-imposed upper limit beyond which it dares not to go lest it burns its fingers."

"As a result, many of the much-hyped inquiries or investigations which are subjected to long delays on the stated grounds of either lack of progress on MLARs with countries where illicit transfers of corrupt money and wealth have taken place or due to coronavirus related constraints, may eventually end up serving nothing more than a fruitless purpose of communication value to salvage some semblance of public trust."



The body of 13-year-old Nodi being taken to Khilgaon Talata graveyard in the capital for burial yesterday. Her family claims that she was either killed or forced to die by suicide after torture in Saudi Arabia. PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

That grim caravan just won't stop

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"Who do I ask for justice?" she asked. Nodi was buried in a Khilgaon graveyard after Zuh prayers yesterday.

This tragic incident is not an isolated one.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic this year, there have been complications over sending dead bodies to Bangladesh. A few were however able to make it to their motherland for burial.

According to the Expatriate Welfare Desk at Shahjalal Airport, bodies of at least 63 female migrants were sent to the country from January to September this year. Of them, 22 lost their lives in Saudi Arabia alone while 14 died in Lebanon, 11 in Jordan, seven in Oman, and four in the UAE.

Between 2016 and September this year, 473 bodies of female migrants, including the 63, were sent from different countries. Of them, 175 came from the Saudi Arabia.

Of the 175, 51 of them died by suicide. An analysis reveals that at least 81 female migrants working in different countries died by suicide in the last four years. Of them, three died in 2016, 12 in 2017, 23 in 2018, 29 in 2019 and 14 this year.

Nodi was born on December 1, 2007, according to her family and birth certificate, but the date of birth mentioned in the passport was September 3, 1993. Although her family lives in Cumilla, the passport was issued from Mymensingh.

Nodi's father is almost identical to the other horrific tales of abuse of female migrants by their employers in the Middle East.

Her tragedy began after she reached Saudi Arabia last year, according to Nodi's mother Beauty and father Dulal Sheikh.

"The employer started torturing my daughter after she reached there. Even no salary was paid," said Beauty.

Nodi's father Dulal said they informed A Rahman Lalon, the owner of recruiting agency Dhaka Export (RL-275), time and again, but Dulal was threatened in various ways instead.

By the end of August, they learned that Nodi died by suicide after giving in to the torture, he said.

An official letter sent from the Bangladesh Embassy in Saudi Arabia to Dhaka on August 26 said that the embassy received information that Nodi had died by suicide in Medina on August 14.

The letter sought the family's opinion

about her burial in Saudi Arabia. Nodi's family did not agree.

The embassy contacted Mansour al-Magamisi, owner of the Saudi recruiting agency, and informed him that Nodi had died by hanging herself.

A letter sent from the Wage Earners' Welfare Board to Saudi Arabia on September 2 said the family did not give permission for her burial there and they wanted her body sent back.

The family filed a case in this regard and Kalabagan police already arrested three people including A Rahman Lalon, the owner of the recruiting agency, on October 18.

Another 14-year-old, Kulsum, died on August 9 this year while undergoing treatment at the King Faisal Hospital in Saudi Arabia.

Like Nodi, her passport mentioned her age to be 25.

She was badly beaten by her employer, alleged her mother Nasima Begum, adding that her legs, arms and waist were broken and one of her eyes was damaged.

DEATHS IN QUESTION

Families of the dead migrant workers and experts say every death is a mystery.

Abirun Begum is a prime example. She went to Saudi Arabia in July 2017 and was found dead at the employer's house.

Her family got the news of her death 51 days later. Her family members alleged her employer brutally tortured and killed Abirun.

The family never got due justice. Similarly, Nazma went to Saudi Arabia through a local broker in December 2018. She was allegedly tortured and her dead body was sent to the country 53 days after her death.

Her family members alleged that she was promised a job in a hospital, but she was sent to a home instead. She was both tortured and sexually abused, they claimed.

Mosammat Begum went to Saudi Arabia in April 2019 through a recruiting agency and was found dead in Egypt.

According to the Bangladesh embassy in Egypt, Begum, a domestic help, died after falling from the rooftop of a five-storey building on May 29, 2019.

Her husband Abdul Aziz said he learnt that someone named Begum died in Egypt, but he did not take the matter seriously as his wife was in Saudi Arabia. Later, he got a call from Egypt and was told it was his wife.

Kamaluddin Ahmed Chowdhury, a

teacher of clinical psychology department of Dhaka University, told The Daily Star, "A person never commits suicide under normal circumstances. What we see in Saudi Arabia is that most women were oppressed or faced a situation in which they thought suicide was the only way out."

"In fact, those who died by suicide found no other choice," he said. The ordeals that the migrant workers, who somehow manage to survive even after the torture, are no less distressful.

In some cases, families of such victims do not want to accept them while many undergo severe mental trauma.

Runu Begum of Khulna is one of them.

She returned from Saudi Arabia on October 10 after suffering from a mental condition.

She was found aimlessly wandering the airport. Airport Armed Police Battalion sent her to a non-government organisation.

The actual number of female migrant workers returning home from KSA is hard to calculate but it could surpass 10,000 in the last five years, according to embassies and various media reports.

According to a report of the expatriates' welfare and overseas employment ministry prepared on 110 female returnees from Saudi Arabia, 35 percent of them returned after being physically and sexually abused. Forty-four percent of them were not paid regularly.

The ministry sent the report to the parliamentary standing committee in August last year.

Contacted, Mohammad Shamsul Alam, director general of Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET), said the ministry and BMET had issued a 12-point directive in December last year to ensure the safety of women workers and they are more careful about the issue.

Shamim Ahmed Chowdhury, secretary-general of the Association of International Recruiting Agencies (AIRA), said yesterday that fingers are often pointed at the agencies for the incidents of repression or death of any worker in Saudi Arabia.

"But the crisis will not be solved unless measures are taken against the Saudis who persecute them. A mechanism should be developed to bring an end to the problem," he said.

The writer is a freelance journalist. Log onto www.thedailystar.net for the full report.

US daily cases break

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by AFP at 11:00 GMT yesterday. At least 45,650,850 cases of coronavirus have been registered.

On Friday, 7,365 new deaths and 558,737 new cases were recorded worldwide. Based on latest reports, the countries with the most new deaths were United States with 919 new deaths, followed by India with 551 and France with 545.

The daily caseload of 100,233 in US is also a world record for the global pandemic, surpassing the 97,894 cases reported by India on a single day in September. On Thursday the country reported more than 91,000 cases. The United States is the worst-affected country with 229,710 deaths from 9,048,177 cases.

Hospitals across the country were bracing as cases soar in nearly every state and winter flu season looms.

In Europe, Belgium became the latest European country to tighten restrictions as virus numbers surge across the continent, which recorded 41 percent more cases this week than the previous seven days, according to an AFP tally.

Europe is now recording 241,000 new cases a day -- compared to 15,000 at the start of July -- and represented roughly half of last week's global infections.

Some 14 European countries meanwhile registered a record number of hospitalizations linked to the virus this week.

Italy posted its own daily infection record on Friday, fueling debate about whether it should follow France into a national lockdown.

Belgium, which has the most Covid-19 cases per capita in the world, said it would impose tighter lockdown rules from tomorrow, closing non-essential businesses and restricting household visits.

France's 65 million people woke on Friday to a new lockdown, largely confined to their homes and needing written statements to leave.

Remittance likely

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remittance to Bangladesh would expand by about 8 percent to \$19.8 billion this year.

Bangladesh is forecast to have posted the highest year-on-year remittance growth of 53.5 percent among the world's top 49 recipient-countries in the third quarter of 2020.

Mexico, Pakistan, and Bangladesh stand out as exceptions to the pattern as these countries escaped a decline in the second quarter and seem to register increases in the third, the World Bank said.

In 2020, Bangladesh would retain its position as the world's eighth top remittance recipient country, behind India, China, Mexico, the Philippines, Egypt, Pakistan and Nigeria. Bangladesh received \$18.3 billion in remittance in 2019.

"In Bangladesh, the impact of the Covid-19-induced global economic slowdown has been somewhat countered by the diversion of remittances from informal to formal channels due to the difficulty of carrying money by hand under travel restrictions as well as the incentives to transfer remittances," the WB said.

In India, remittances are projected to fall by about 9 percent in 2020, to \$76 billion. In Pakistan, remittances would grow by about 9 percent, totalling about \$24 billion.

Egypt may see a contraction of 9 percent and the Philippines by 5 percent. Nigeria would also witness negative growth.

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

Remittance is an important pillar of Bangladesh's economy and the second-largest source foreign currency after exports, accounting for 5.8 percent of gross domestic product last year.

18 more die

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percent which indicates, according to experts, the transmission is still not under control.

For nearly a month, the daily positivity rate has remained around 12 percent.

"The daily positivity rate reflects that the transmission neither increasing nor decreasing. If it rises again, we will see further rise of the transmission, not second wave. Second wave means rise of transmission again after it was under control," Prof Nazul Islam, member of the National Technical Advisory Committee (NTAC) told the Daily Star last week.

With this, the overall positivity rate is 17.45 percent.

Meanwhile, 1,442 Covid-19 patients have recovered in the 24 hours, raising the total number of recoveries to 3,24,145.

This is more than 80 percent of all confirmed cases. Among the 18 deceased, 12 were males.

All of them died in hospitals, according to the press release.

Four of them were aged between 41 and 50 years, three between 51 and 60, and 11 others were above 60 years old, added the release.

One was from Sylhet division, two each was from Khulna and Chattogram divisions, and the rest 13 were from Dhaka division.

First-time Florida voters seek change

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She is one of the 12 students, mostly first time voters, who shared their views in an interaction with a group of journalists virtually participating at the 2020 US Presidential Election Reporting Seminar organised by the Hawaii-based East-West Centre.

Samantha said she is worried over the frequent climatic events like the hurricanes in Florida and the wildfire in California.

According to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, series of wildfires as of October 27 this year have burned nearly 44 lakh acres of California's 100 million acres of land, making 2020 the largest wildfire season recorded in California's modern history.

Trump withdrew from the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change mitigation in 2017.

The young voters wary of climate change said they have mostly voted early for Joe Biden, the Democratic candidate, considering that his policies towards environment, coronavirus pandemic, immigration and foreign relations would be better than that of Trump.

This notion is significant given the fact that Florida has been a determining factor in the victory of the presidents. Florida was responsible for the victory of Republican George W Bush (Jr) over

his Democratic rival Al-Gore in 1992 and ensured President Trump's success in 2016.

This year, Biden is ahead of Trump in the opinion polls. In Florida, most polls found 50-52 percent support for Biden and highest 47 percent support for Trump.

Liz Dom, a political scientist and program coordinator at the East-West Centre, said Florida has 29 of the total 538 electoral votes of the 50 US states. A candidate will need a minimum of 270 votes to the president in the elections to be held on November 3.

Analysts say immigrants and minority groups in the upcoming US elections will play an important role.

Many of the African Americans, who vote for the Democrats, did not cast ballots in 2016 elections, making a difference that led to the victory of Trump.

This year seems different with large voter turnouts, including the African-Americans.

"If Trump remains president, he wouldn't do better," said Samantha.

She is worried over Trump's foreign policy too. She said she recently visited London and found people there looking down America because of Trump -- something that hurt her. She thinks Biden can help improve foreign relations.

Alexis King, a first time voter, who

Gap narrows in key swing states

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to the coronavirus pandemic, notably in Florida and Pennsylvania.

But Trump -- who has dismissed Obama's rallies as much smaller than his own -- will himself head to Pennsylvania, where he will host three rallies, a sign of how key the state is to his own path to 270 votes.

Biden will follow suit there both Sunday and Monday in a clear sign that his campaign also sees the Keystone State as absolutely crucial to victory.

On Friday the two candidates battled over the American Midwest, barnstorming three heartland states each as they chased every last vote in a region that propelled the Republican to victory in 2016.

But the race was overshadowed by the coronavirus pandemic, with infections spiking across the country. More than 100,000 new infections were recorded Friday -- a new high for the second day running -- and total cases passed nine million.

Nevertheless Trump, who has long said the virus will "disappear," remained defiant at rallies in Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota. "We just want normal," he told supporters -- many of them unmasked -- at an outdoor rally near Detroit as he pushed states to relax public health restrictions and resume daily life.

The virus has killed nearly 230,000 Americans.

The outbreak has ravaged the economy, and while there have been signs of recovery, millions remain jobless.