

BANGLADESH UPDATE



1,788
New cases in 24hrs



4,62,407
Total cases



6,609
Deaths



3,78,172
Recoveries



1,463,155
Deaths



62,890,723
Total cases

ROHINGYA CRISIS

Keep supporting us

Bangladesh urges OIC members

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh has urged the OIC member states to continue political and humanitarian support to Bangladesh until dignified repatriation of Rohingyas to Myanmar is ensured.

Bangladesh's Permanent Representative to Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and Bangladesh Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Mohammad Javed Patwary made the call at the 47th session of the Islamic Council of Foreign Ministers in Niamey, Niger yesterday.

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen was supposed to lead the Bangladesh delegation at the meeting but his visit was cancelled as he had tested positive for Covid-19 hours before his departure.

Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen also missed the event as he also tested positive for the virus.

The meeting discussed various issues including ways for supporting the Rohingya case at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), according to Bangladesh Embassy in Riyadh.

Bangladesh is now hosting over 1.1 million Rohingyas in Cox's Bazar district.

The Gambia filed a more than 500-page Memorial, which also includes more than 5,000 pages of supporting material, in its lawsuit against Myanmar at the ICJ in The Hague, making its case for how the Government of Myanmar is responsible for genocide against Rohingyas.

In November 2019, The Gambia opened a case at the ICJ, also known as the World Court, against Myanmar for failing to prevent or punish genocide against Rohingya Muslims.

On January 23, 2020, the ICJ

unanimously indicated legally binding provisional measures, requiring the Government of Myanmar to take all steps within its power to prevent the commission of all acts of genocide, such as killing, causing serious mental or bodily harm, and other acts listed in the Genocide Convention.

The OIC CFM was opened on Friday by Mahamadou Issoufou, president of the Republic of Niger, who affirmed that the Organization of Islamic Cooperation is important to its member states, and that his country plays an active role in the organisation.

He also extended his appreciation to the Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Yousef Al-Othaimen for the work he did for the organisation.

On his part, Al-Othaimen said that the choice of the theme for the session, "United against Terrorism for Peace and Development", is a strong reminder that "terrorism is the single most serious threat to the region and the world, given its negative impact on growth rates and cooperation ties, in addition to worsening Human Development Indices (HDI) ranking."

He also valued the role assigned to the OIC Sawt al-Hikma (Voice of Wisdom) Center, which acts in coordination with the International Islamic Fiqh Academy to bring reason to bear and promote moderation and tolerance.

The secretary general offered his gratitude to His Excellency the President of the Republic of Niger for his gracious patronage of the meeting, and also thanked the people and government of the republic of Niger for the organisation of the meeting and the warm hospitality.

AFGHAN CAR BOMBING

30 security personnel killed

AFP, Ghazni

A suicide car bomber struck an army base in Afghanistan yesterday, killing at least 30 security personnel, officials said, in one of the bloodiest attacks targeting government forces in recent months.

The attack occurred on the outskirts of Ghazni city, capital of the eastern

province of Ghazni, which has seen regular fighting between the Taliban and government forces.

It came as the Afghan government and Taliban are engaged in peace talks, but a top official said such attacks have the potential to "harm the peace process" as violence continues to surge across the country.

Passing test without even appearing

FROM PAGE 1

The result, published at 2:30am Sunday, showed that the candidate bearing roll no-2,190 was among the 128 successful ones who passed the written test. But the candidate, Shamsunnahar from Bogura, did not even appear in the test.

"I was in Bogura. I did not go to Dhaka to sit for the test," she told The Daily Star last night.

A student of fisheries at Bangladesh Agricultural University of 2013-14 session, Shamsunnahar learnt from her friends that she had passed the test. What happened next made her worried.

Someone repeatedly called her and threatened her not to attend the viva-voce held yesterday.

"They kept telling me that if I take part in the viva they will file a case against me. I wanted to know how I passed without sitting for the test, and why they were calling me repeatedly, but did not get answers," said Shamsunnahar.

"We're in fear," she said.

Bringing allegations of irregularities, some of the candidates said they could not pass the test despite faring well. BFRI recruitment has always been tainted by allegations of corruption, they added.

Since the answer script did not have names of the candidates, those involved in coding changed the roll number and got their preferred candidates passed in exchange for money, they said.

BFRI Director General Yahya Mahmud, however, refuted the allegations.

"It was a mistake. If that candidate came for the viva, we would have identified her," he told this newspaper last night.

Asked how they published the results so fast, he said, "Nine officials of our ministry and 60 officials of the institute examined the papers."

There is no question over their test, he claimed, adding, "But if there is any mistake, we will correct it."

The writer is a freelance journalist.

Recover 1.38 lakh acres

FROM PAGE 1

The ministry will write to all deputy commissioners across the country by January 31 to prepare eviction notices, mentioned the Awami League lawmaker.

Within February, the DCs will serve the notices to the 88,000 individuals and organisations who grabbed forestland, asking them to return the occupied land to the government agencies concerned, Saber said.

"From March, the deputy commissioners will start eviction drives to recover the forestland," he added.

Earlier in October, the ministry had informed the committee that 287,000 acres of forestland, including 138,000 acres of reserve forestland, are illegally occupied by individuals and organisations.

Of the 64 districts, Cox's Bazar has lost the highest area of forestland --

59,471 acres -- to grabbers, according to the ministry data.

The committee yesterday asked the ministry to publish the names of the grabbers of forestland on its website and also digitalise all the records and documents on forestland.

It also recommended that the ministry estimate the value of all forestland.

"We will not be able to protect our forestland if we don't estimate its value," Saber said.

The JS body also asked Bangladesh Economic Zone Authority to conduct an environmental study before setting up an economic zone anywhere in the country.

Committee members, including Environment Minister Md Shahab Uddin, independent lawmaker Rejaul Karim Lablu and AL MP Khodeza Nasreen Akhter Hossain, were present at the meeting.

Editors' Council concerned

FROM PAGE 1

case was filed against Matiur Rahman and others even though he was not present on the occasion.

While expressing its highest regard for the judiciary and rule of law, the parishad respectfully expressed concern about filing charges against someone who was not at the location of the incident.

The parishad hoped that no external factors will influence the due process of justice.

Parishad members also discussed the effect of the pandemic on the journalism industry, its uncertain

future, the decreasing flow of advertisements and falling subscription numbers.

Concern was expressed at the rising prosecution of media workers using the Digital Security Act and the harassment of editors and senior reporters.

The participants expressed deep sorrow at the death of the parishad's founding member Khandaker Muniruzzaman, editor of Sangbad, and conveyed their deepest condolences to the bereaved family. A decision was taken to organise a memorial webinar in remembrance of the veteran journalist.



Four people in Abdullahpur in the capital crossing the highway with little concern for their own safety as vehicles speed towards them. Such reckless disregard for safety leads to potentially fatal accidents. This photo was taken on Saturday.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Returnees see bleak future

FROM PAGE 1

"Had it not been for the pandemic, I would still be in Bahrain, working at the cosmetics shop where I used to work. Now, the future looks uncertain," said Masum.

Mostakim and Masum are among thousands of Bangladeshi migrant workers who returned home almost empty-handed in recent months after job losses in the host countries amid the pandemic.

According to Expatriates' Welfare Ministry data, about 2.72 lakh Bangladeshi expatriates returned home between April 1 and November 11 this year after coronavirus struck.

Stuck at home for months, most of them see a bleak future ahead with no prospect of a job anytime soon in the host countries. The government's various initiatives for their economic reintegration could not yield benefits to the bulk of the returnees, said migrant rights activists.

The initiative to provide the

lakh is high considering the financial condition of the returnees. Besides, the grace period against loan in most ventures is limited to one month only. Therefore, returnees have to start paying instalments almost immediately after taking the loan, they added.

"The government's reintegration initiatives should reach the returnees in their areas," said Shariful Hasan, head of Brac Migration Programme.

"Now, the migrants [who returned] have to rush to banks, and here and there," he said.

In a survey report published in May, Brac said about 87 percent of 558 returnees did not have income opportunities amid the pandemic.

The telephonic survey, conducted in 13 migration-prone districts in April, found 84 percent returnees were uncertain about their future plans.

Six percent wanted to go back to their workplaces abroad and others thought about small scale agro-based business or groceries at home, said the

districts were unemployed.

The survey for the report titled "Rapid Assessment of Needs and Vulnerabilities of Internal and International Return Migrants in Bangladesh" was conducted in May and July. The migrants came home between February and June.

About 75 percent respondents wanted to re-migrate and 97 percent of them wished to go back to their host countries, it said, adding returnees experienced reintegration challenges, including difficulties in securing employment, financial problems, and health-related issues.

Shariful Hasan said the government needs to consider whether the returnees intend to re-migrate anytime soon.

It was seen in the past that many returnees did not feel comfortable doing something at home. Instead, they intended to re-migrate, the Brac official added.

Opportunities should be there so that returnees intending for re-migration can get involved in ventures for the short term with the option that they will be able to hand it over to family members before going abroad, Shariful added.

Meanwhile, Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit, a migrant rights group, in a report portrayed the picture of migrant workers' condition by comparing their household expenditures.

The report published in July found that the average monthly household expenditure of migrant workers' families dropped to Tk 7,300 during the pandemic from Tk 17,000 previously.

The report titled "Impact of Covid-19 on International Migrant Households", which was based on telephonic interview of respondents in 21 districts, said for 57 percent of 200 households surveyed, remittance was the only source of income.

Shakirul Islam, chairperson of Ovbashi Karmi Unnayan Program (OKUP), a migrant rights organisation, said the government's support mechanism for the returnees -- like how one should prepare a proposal to get a loan from the Tk 200 crore special fund -- was unavailable at the upazila level.

He said different NGO initiatives like OKUP have been sensitising returnees to the Covid-19 situation. However, these are limited to a few districts.

He stressed the need for a wider government mechanism to this end, and said this could be the government's lone initiative or in partnership with different NGOs working on migration.

Shakirul said the government's Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) that aims at certifying returnees based on their skills gathered abroad is a good initiative.

However, the government should ensure that this kind of initiative benefits returnees at the district and upazila levels, he added.

Contacted, Ahmed Munirul Saleheen, secretary of the expatriates' welfare ministry, said they have been trying to motivate the returnees for including them in various initiatives.

"We are ready to provide [opportunities] to those who will approach," he told this newspaper by phone recently.

The returnees' response to the government initiatives was not "overwhelming" so far, he said, adding that one reason could be they were yet to understand the benefits the government is providing.

RETURNEES FOR DIFFERENT COUNTRIES (April 1-November 11)		
COUNTRY	NUMBER OF RETURNEES	REASONS OF RETURN
Saudi Arabia	76,922	Served jail term and returned with "out pass", many returned after job loss or on vacation.
United Arab Emirates	71,903	Many workers were sent back by their companies on assurance that they will be rehired once situation turns normal.
Qatar	29,655	There was no prospect of job.
Oman	16,095	Served jail term and returned with "out pass".
Maldives	13,244	Employers or companies sent them back as there was prospect of job.
Malaysia	12,368	There was no prospect of job.
Kuwait	11,952	Returned under amnesty programme after they became undocumented, served jail term and returned with "out pass".
Turkey	10,453	There was no prospect of job.
Iraq	10,169	There was no prospect of job.
Lebanon	7,169	There was no prospect of job; many returned with "out pass".
Singapore	5,311	Returned after expiry of job contracts.
Jordan	2,204	Returned after expiry of job contracts.
Bahrain	2,023	Served jail term and returned with "out pass"; some with sickness, and job loss.

SOURCE: EXPATRIATES' WELFARE MINISTRY

returnees with a special loan under a Tk 200-crore fund saw poor response.

Between its launch on September 21 and until mid-October, a little over Tk 1 crore from the Tk 200 crore special fund was disbursed.

About 60 applicants received the money, according to Probashi Kallyan Bank.

As reasons behind the poor response, migrant workers and rights activists found some terms and conditions for getting the loan tough to fulfil. They said the four percent interest rate for a loan up to Tk 5

report titled "The Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on the Life and Livelihoods of Returnee Migrants".

Shariful said services like training or enterprise offers could be taken to those areas under a comprehensive initiative. This will make it easier for the returnees to pick the right opportunity.

He said the bulk of the Covid-19 affected returnees are from 10 to 12 districts.

International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in a report published in August found about 70 percent of 1,486 returnees in 12 migration-prone

due to social gatherings during winter, he added.

"Different types of diseases spread during winter. Covid-19 transmission may rise due to these diseases. Besides, different events take place in winter... Hundreds of thousands of people are traveling to Cox's Bazar. Transmission is increasing from there."

About the Covid-19 vaccine deployment in Bangladesh, he said, "We will get the vaccine for the first phase once the World Health

Organization approves it. If vaccines are given at the government hospitals, they will also be arranged for private medical college hospitals."

Speaking at the event, Prof ABM Khurshid Alam urged private hospital authorities to reduce the Covid-19 testing fees in the meantime.

Md Ali Noor, secretary of medical education, MA Matin Khan, president of Bangladesh Private Medical College Association, and Dr Anwar Hossain, general secretary of BPMCA, spoke at the event among others.

Would remove all sculptures if I could

Says Mamunul of Hefajat

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Hefajat-e-Islam leader Maulana Mamunul Haque yesterday said he would remove all the sculptures in the country if he had the legal, moral and political capacity.

Mamunul, joint secretary general of the Qawmi madrasa-based platform, further said his stance was against sculptures, not against Bangabandhu in any way.

"I fully respect Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the great leader of the country's Liberation War, and pray for the salvation of his departed soul. I never in any way oppose such a national leader and I don't think it is appropriate to do so," Mamunul, also secretary general of Bangladesh Khelafat Majlish, told reporters at the Majlish office in the capital.

The Hefajat leader further said he would continue to oppose installation of any sculptures in the country.

"I don't want to get involved in any fight with the state or the government but it [the government] should not take any step that is reckless and can endanger the lives of people as well as their property," he added.

Earlier this month, Mamunul had sparked outrage by reportedly speaking against installation of Bangabandhu's sculpture. He skipped a Hefajat programme in Chattogram on November 27 amid demonstrations by ruling party activists.

Hefajat once again came under the spotlight after Junayed Babunagari became its new Amir following the death of Shah Ahmed Shafi in September.

Under the new leadership, Hefajat became vocal on various issues including installation of Bangabandhu's sculpture in the capital's Jurain.

The government has been arguing that sculptures and idols are not the same as many Muslim countries have those.

In reply to a question, Mamunul yesterday said, "I did not say the sculpture of Bangabandhu will be dumped into the Buriganga. From my ideological stance, I said installation of any sculpture will not be allowed in the country."

"I have said unequivocally that I am against all sculptures no matter whose those are of. It doesn't matter if it is of Ziaur Rahman or anyone else. I have been demanding removal of all the sculptures."

"We will move to remove all the sculptures including that of Ziaur Rahman from this Muslim land if we have the legal, moral and political capacity."

Mamunul said his aim is to achieve the goal through a transparent political process in the light of the Quran and the Sunnah followed by his predecessors.

He further said they do not have any programme or scheme against the government or the state.

The Hefajat leader mentioned that though Bangladesh Khelafat Majlish had allied itself with the BNP and the Awami League in the past, it is not part of any political alliance now.

He alleged that a vested quarter is conspiring to put him on a collision course with the government.

Hefajat first appeared on the scene in 2009 by protesting a draft national women development policy that provided equal inheritance rights to women.

It grabbed the spotlight in 2013 when it emerged as a force countering the Shabbagh movement initiated by bloggers and online activists demanding death penalty for war criminal Abdul Quader Mollah.

On May 5 the same year, Hefajat activists kept Motiheel in the city occupied for nearly 12 hours after a rally there. Law enforcers swung into action after midnight and drove them away.

Sculpture, idol

FROM PAGE 1

who want to ruin the beautiful atmosphere of communal harmony for their petty interests.

"But the government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has been able to create a beautiful atmosphere of communal harmony in the country by cracking down on those circles."

"Secularism is one of the principles in our constitution. Bearing the spirit of secularism, the government led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has been working tirelessly to ensure the equal rights of [people of] all religions."

He also said people of all communities of this country have been living in harmony for a long time.

"We will continue to work relentlessly with utmost sincerity on behalf of the Ministry of Religious Affairs to build a moral, non-communal Bangladesh under the dynamic and strong leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina."