

More women go abroad for jobs

SAJJADUR RAHMAN

Despite low wages, female workers are increasingly migrating to Middle East countries with a dream of a better future.

The trend of female workers going overseas is very high this year because some new markets such as Hong Kong, Singapore and Jordan are being explored, said Begum Shamsun Nahar, director general of Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET).

BMET gives a 21-day training to the intended female workers going for house-keeping, she told The Daily Star yesterday.

Nahar, however, said female workers are supposed to go abroad at employers' costs, but private recruiting agencies are charging fees from them.

"We have inspected some recruiting agencies and found that they take money

from the workers unlawfully," the BMET boss said.

A total of 46,230 Bangladeshi women went abroad for jobs till October this year, up by nearly 24 percent from the same period a year ago, according to BMET.

The number is 13.50 percent of the total workers -- 342,219 -- who went to foreign countries till October.

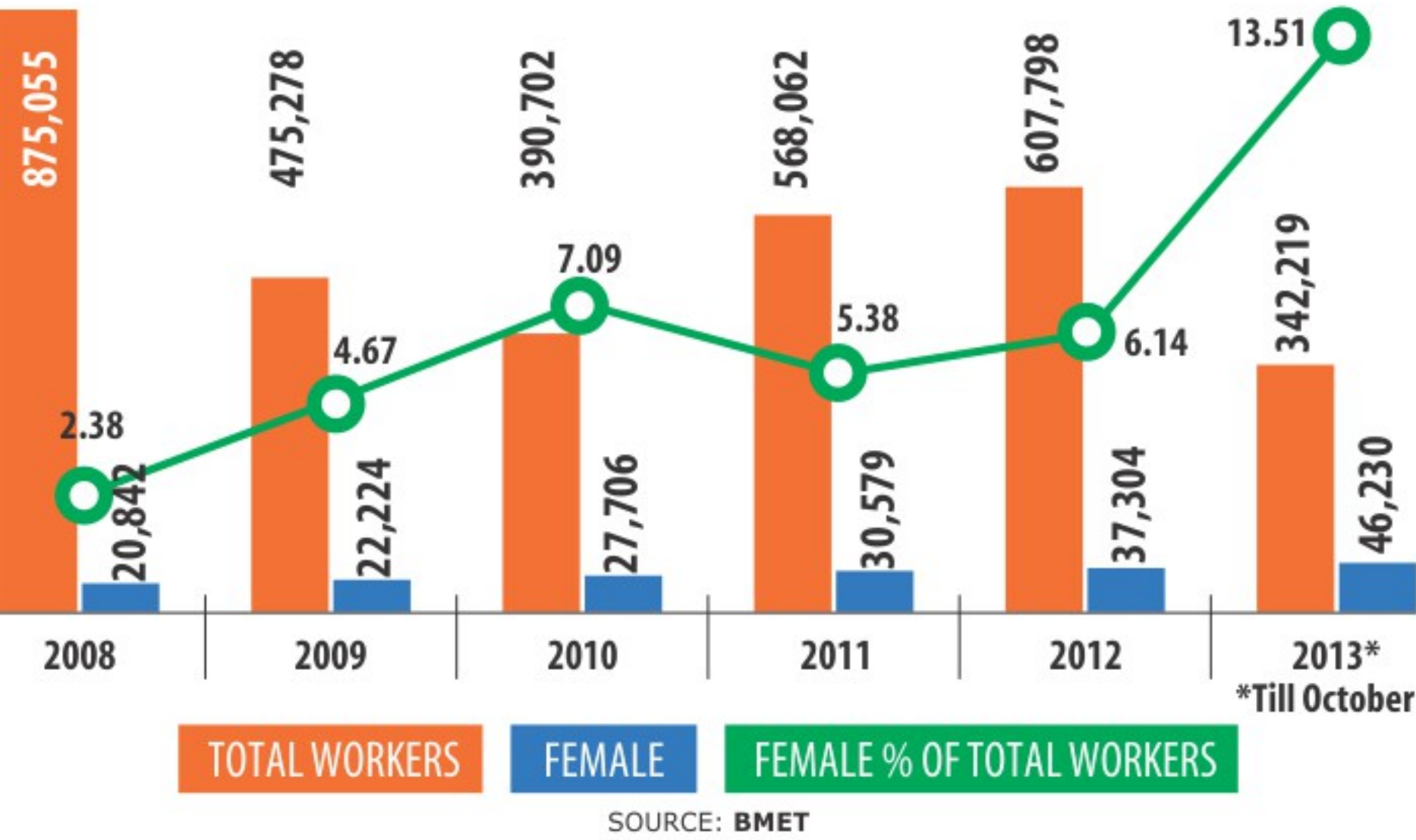
Some 30,579 female workers went abroad in 2011 and 37,304 in 2012 out of the total 568,062 and 607,798 respectively.

The United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and war-torn Lebanon are the main markets.

These workers, mostly housekeepers, earn on an average Tk 10,000-Tk 16,000 (\$120-\$200) a month and those who go for work in garment factories receive up to \$400, according to Nahar.

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NUMBER OF WORKERS WHO WENT ABROAD IN SIX YEARS



HARTAL IMPACT

Import costs mount as transporters cash in on delivery rush at Ctg port

DWAIPAYAN BARUA, Ctg

Importers are rushing to receive their imports from Chittagong port, with the end of the 84-hour country-wide shutdown. But they are counting additional transport costs as vehicle owners charge almost double due to the rush.

The delivery of import goods from the port came down sharply since the latest round of hartals began on Sunday. After the shutdown that ended on Wednesday, the port saw a record rise.

When only 533 TEUs (twenty feet equivalent units) of import containers could be delivered from the port in the 24 hours to 8am Wednesday, the number rose to 3,514 TEUs in the same period ending yesterday, according to Chittagong Port Authority.

Around 23,000 TEUs of import containers remained at the port yards until yesterday afternoon, waiting to be delivered.

Clearing and forwarding agents spent much of the day on their cell phones, arranging vehicles to carry goods on behalf of the importers.

The C&F agents alleged that vehicle owners were charging Tk 38,000 to Tk 40,000 as truck fare on the Chittagong-Dhaka route, against the usual fare of Tk 15,000; covered vans for Tk 45,000 against the usual of Tk 20,000; and container trailers for Tk 55,000 to Tk 60,000 against Tk 30,000.

Shihab Chowdhury Biplob, proprietor of Paramount Trade International, a C&F firm, said he received a delivery of 22 TEUs of import containers at an additional transport cost of Tk 5 lakh.

It also had to pay Tk 42,000 to the port authority as demurrage for overstaying as they could not arrange timely delivery for the shutdown, even though all the procedures for delivery were completed before the hartal.

Khurram Nayeem, another C&F agent who organised delivery of eight TEUs containers of goods brought in by two importers in Gazipur and Dhaka, said he hired 3 container trailers at Tk 55,000 each and 7 covered vans at Tk 45,000 each to carry the goods.

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Hasina green-lights separate pay scale for BB, state banks

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday approved the separate pay scale for employees of Bangladesh Bank and the four state-owned commercial banks.

The premier also increased the basic salaries for the employees of Bangladesh Bank, Sonali, Agrani, Janata and Rupali banks as opposed to the recommendation made by a government panel.

Under the new 11-grade pay scale, which will replace the existing 20-grade pay structure, the basic salary for those in the lowest grade will be Tk 6,000 and Tk 55,000 for the highest.

The Finance Division might issue an order next week to this effect, Finance Minister AMA Muhith told The Daily Star after a meeting of the cabinet division at the secretariat in Dhaka.

The approval separated the pay scale of the central bank and the state-run commer-

cial banks from the national pay scale, which Bangladesh Bank Governor Atiur Rahman has termed as an achievement.

He would take the issue to the central bank's board after the government issues an order.

The government committee led by Cabinet Secretary Musharraf Hossain Bhuiyan submitted the proposal for a separate pay scale to the prime minister a few days ago.

Despite the latest pay hike, employees would continue enjoying the existing benefits as per bank rules, a finance ministry official said.

The pay hike came in order to recruit and retain meritorious bankers as the pay scale in the central bank and state-controlled commercial banks are lower than in the private banks. As a result, the state banks struggle to recruit and retain meritorious and efficient officials, said a member of the committee earlier.

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Unrest in Ashulia: 100 factories shut

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Garment workers clashed with the police in Ashulia on the outskirts of Dhaka yesterday to demand a minimum wage of Tk 8,114, leaving at least 40 injured.

Production at 100 factories was suspended following the clashes, said Md Shahidullah, senior deputy director of Industrial Police.

Protesters threw stones at Constable Jyoti Akhter, leaving her with head injuries. She was shifted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital. Jyoti was among the five law enforcers injured by the workers.

Traffic on the Dhaka-Tangail highway remained suspended for about two hours from 9am, when around 5,000 workers of over 100 factories began demonstrations, Shahidullah said.

Law enforcers charged batons and fired several rounds of rubber bullets and teargas canisters, leaving 35 workers injured, witnesses said. The injured workers were given first-aid at local health complexes.

Following the clashes, factory owners suspended production at the units in the area for the day, said Abdus Salam Murshedy, former president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

"The workers continued demonstrations as they were most probably unaware of Wednesday night's decision," Murshedy said.

The labour ministry raised worker wage by 77 percent to Tk 5,300 a month to be effective from December 1, after owners agreed to a pay recommendation by a government-appointed panel.

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