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TRAFFICKING

BANGLADESH

UNDER SPOTLIGHT

More than half of these migrants are from Bangladesh, said Chris Lewa, an aid worker whose reports first brought international attention to the crisis.

The International Organisation for Migration estimates that at least 1,000 migrants have died in these crossings between October 2014 and May this year.

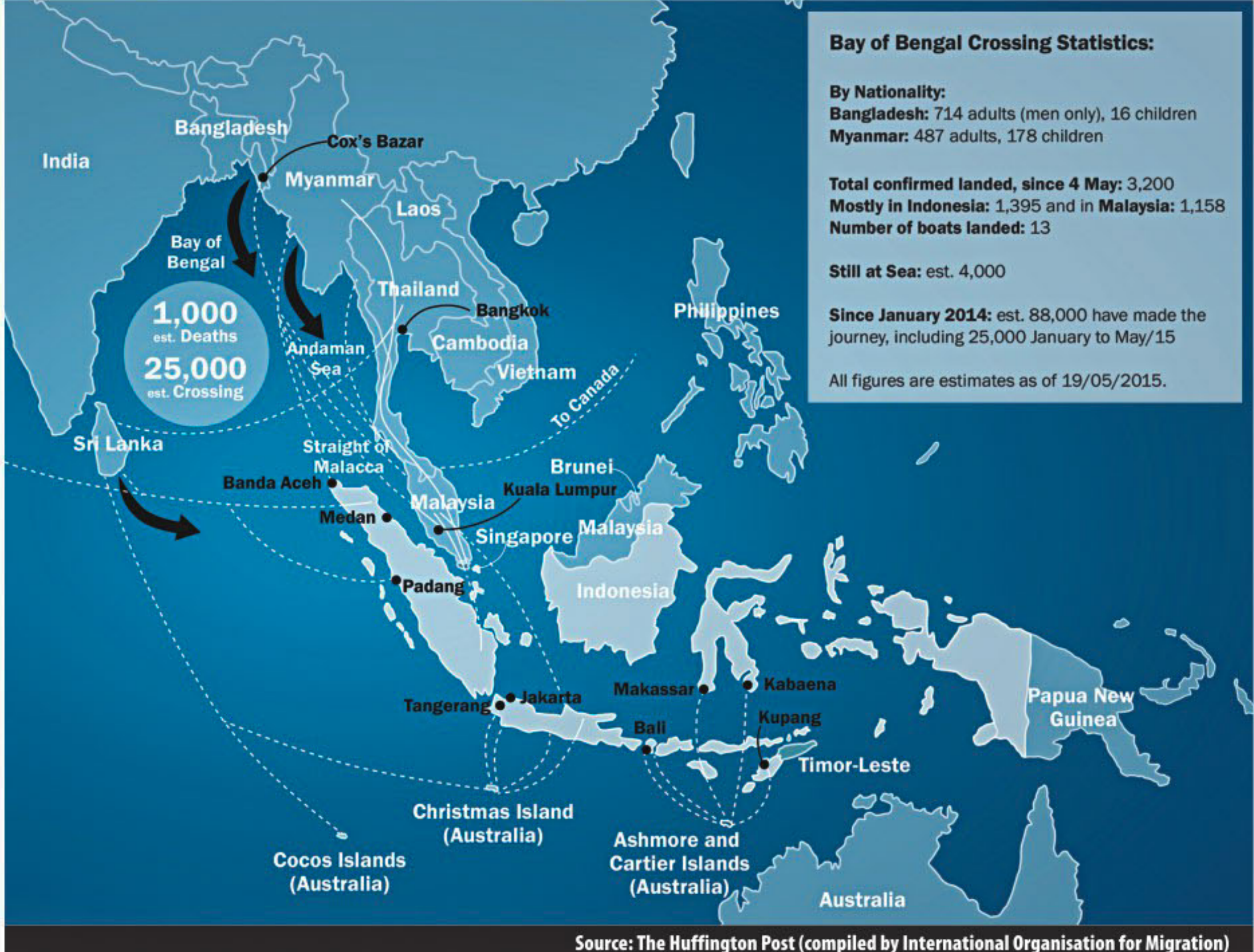
Aid groups say that the Bangladesh government needs to be doing more to counter this boat exodus. For one thing, the lack -- and sometimes complicity -- of law enforcement as well as corruption among government officials has allowed smuggling and trafficking rings to act with impunity.

A representative for the Bangladesh chapter of the IOM told The Huffington Post that the agency is working with the government to strengthen counter-trafficking initiatives, such as providing training to law enforcement officials, raising awareness through grassroots campaigns and initiating programmes to increase the skill set of potential migrants, thus reducing their vulnerability.

Bangladesh, however, may have to dig even deeper to solve this crisis.

"Illegal migration will continue in some form until Bangladesh can create a condition in which disincentives outweigh the incentives," said

[FROM HUFFPOST ARTICLE
"WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT
BANGLADESH", PUBLISHED ON JUNE 30, 2015]



Will it ever end?

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seven Bangladeshis who left home mostly in March-April bears out reports that the dark trade is still on.

It had seemed the days of human traffickers were numbered after Thailand and Malaysia began to clamp down on them early May. The Thai authorities arrested some 60 suspects, including politicians and a top-ranked military officer.

Fearing arrest, trafficking gangs started to abandon boats full of Rohingyas and Bangladeshis. Initially, none of the countries agreed to allow the migrants on their shores and the boats kept drifting in the sea for weeks.

Following global outcry, around 5,000 victims were later rescued off the coasts of Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, and Thailand.

But families say that at least 400 Bangladeshis are still confined to the jungle camps. They are being tortured and forced to call home to ask their families to pay traffickers through mobile banking numbers.

One such victim is Redwan Ahmed. He left his Panjair village home at Nabiganj in Habiganj on April 20 and later informed the family that he was going to Malaysia on a ship with the help of Sumon alias Mohon, a broker from Alitala village of the district.

After a month, Sumon, living in Malaysia, called Redwan's uncle Gulzar Hossain and demanded Tk 2.2

lakh be paid to his father Mohammad Farbat.

"To ensure Redwan's safety, his [Redwan's] mother sold a piece of land and paid Tk 2.1 lakh to Sumon's father. But he is still in confinement," Redwan's aunt Rehana Begum told The Daily Star over the phone on Monday.

"On Sunday night [June 28] Redwan again called us and said the brokers would torture him if we did not send another Tk 1.5 lakh to a certain phone number [mobile banking number]," she said.

"This is very sad. His mother almost went insane. Please help us," she said, adding that according to Redwan, there are "many others" in the jungle where he is kept.

Mohammad Muhid, 30, another victim from Sadarghat village in Nabiganj, told his brother Sayedul Ali over the phone that there were around 300-350 hostages in the Thai camps.

Referring to a phone conversation with his brother on June 26, Sayedul said brokers were demanding Tk 1.5 lakh for his release.

"I am now taking care of Muhid's four children in his absence in addition to my own family. This is becoming almost impossible for me. How can I manage the money for his release?" he said.

Nazma Begum, mother of Nasir Hossain of Arahazar, said they had sent Tk 2.1 lakh to a broker's mobile

banking number as her son called for help from Thailand.

"The broker said he would take my son to Malaysia, but he is still in Thailand," Nazma said, adding that there were 31 Bangladeshis with her son.

Others who have called from the Thai camps include Abu Bakkar, Munir Hossain and Shoyeb Ahmed Chowdhury of Habiganj and Emdadul Hossain of Sunamganj, this newspaper has learnt.

Three other families also reported the same to CARAMASIA, a Malaysia-based regional NGO that started a hotline in association with its partner NGOs in Bangladesh.

The organisation had earlier submitted a list of more than 500 Bangladeshis, who went missing since they began a sea journey for Malaysia early this year.

Al-Amin Noyon, a CARAMASIA volunteer in Dhaka, told this correspondent that reports from the families suggest many other victims are in captivity in Thai jungles.

"The real number would be higher and traffickers keep forcing victims to call back home for ransom," he said, adding the victims are also getting life threats.

Some families sent the ransoms in late May and last month but the victims have neither been passed into Malaysia nor released, Al-Amin told this newspaper on Monday.

Asean launches fund to share cost of hosting trafficking victims

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Southeast Asian countries yesterday launched a fund to share the cost of hosting human trafficking victims, after a regional migrant crisis saw victims ping-ponged between countries reluctant to accept them.

In May, a Thai crackdown on the lucrative smuggling industry prompted the traffickers to abandon their human cargo at sea, sparking a crisis that saw more than 3,500 Bangladeshi economic migrants and stateless Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar land in Malaysia and Indonesia.

Malaysia's Home Minister Zahid Hamidi told reporters after a day-long meeting that all 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) and some international organisations would contribute to the fund, which would be managed by the Jakarta-based Asean secretariat.

"The meeting supports the establishment of a trust fund ... to support the humanitarian and relief efforts involved in dealing with challenges resulting from irregular movement of persons in Southeast Asia," the groupingsaid in a statement.

Representatives of the US State Department and the UN Refugee Agency also participated in the closed-

door meeting.

Malaysia has proposed that each Asean member country make an initial US\$100,000 contribution towards the fund, the minister said, adding that Singapore has pledged \$200,000.

As the migrant crisis unfolded in Southeast Asia, Indonesia and Malaysia were initially reluctant to allow the boatpeople to land on their shores, but relented under heavy international pressure.

They have now taken in the majority of the victims, many of whom had spent months adrift in cramped and barely seaworthy boats.

Zahid singled out Myanmar, which previously snubbed invitations to attend regional meetings to address the migrants issue, saying the country had given assurances that it would "work with other Asean countries" to fight human trafficking syndicates.

The regional bloc also agreed to beef up intelligence sharing among law enforcement agencies in an attempt to track down the traffickers, he said.

Richard Towle, the UN refugee agency's representative in Malaysia, hailed the measures by the Southeast Asian nations and urged coordinated regional response to combat the traffickers.

Abed honoured

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country recover from the 1970 typhoon that killed about 500,000 people and the subsequent war fought in 1971 to win independence from Pakistan.

Brac has grown into one of the world's largest nongovernmental organisations focused on alleviating poverty -- estimated to have helped more than 150 million people out of poverty in Africa and Asia and is expanding efforts to 10 additional countries.

US Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced the prize on Wednesday at the State Department in Washington, according to AP.

"Being selected to receive the World Food Prize is a great honour. I thank the World Food Prize Foundation for its recognition of the work of Brac, which I have had the privilege to lead over the last 43 years," Sir Abed said in a statement.

"The real heroes in our story are the poor themselves and, in particular, women struggling with poverty. In situations of extreme poverty, it is usually the women in the family who have to make do with scarce resources. When we saw this at Brac, we realised that women needed to be the agents of change in our development effort."

The World Food Prize was created by Nobel laureate Norman Borlaug in 1986 to recognise scientists and others who have improved the quality and availability of food. The foundation that awards the \$250,000 prize is based in Des Moines, Iowa.

World Food Prize President Kenneth Quinn said the ability of Abed, who was knighted in London in February 2010, to successfully transition Brac into a global relief organisation was key to his win.

"What distinguishes him is the incredibly difficult environment in which he has built now the largest, and some would say, the most effective and far reaching non-profit organisation anywhere in the world with more than 100,000 employees," Quinn said. "It's

his emphasis on reaching to the very poor those who have great food insecurity and who face the most difficult path out of poverty."

The initial focus of Brac was on alleviating high child and infant mortality rates by providing social services including healthcare, AP quoted Abed as saying.

He also saw the need to empower women and get them to see they could also contribute to the national economy, so he helped teach them to farm efficiently and grow surplus crops to sell.

"Sir Fazle's and his organisation's recognition that engaging women in STEAM fields -- science, technology, engineering, agriculture, and math -- benefits our local and global communities is a vision that we share at United States Department of Agriculture," Vilsack said.

Brac estimates more than a billion people live at a poverty level of less than \$1.25 a day but hundreds of millions of others live on less than half that amount and are considered in extreme poverty.

The organisation also has created a pilot programme that helps those in extreme poverty work their way out; it'll be used in eight other countries to see if results can be replicated.

Participants receive a weekly stipend so they have enough money to eliminate the need to beg or work at menial labour to survive. A savings account and financial literacy training help teach them to manage money, and a one-time grant provides a productive asset -- such as a cow, goats or chickens -- as a means to work toward self-sufficiency.

The United Nations Development Programme reports Bangladesh has reduced poverty from 56.7 percent in 1991-1992 to 31.5 percent in 2010, the latest year data available.

Abed will receive the World Food Prize at a ceremony in October at Des Moines.

Remittance

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Bangladesh received \$1.43 billion remittance in June alone, up by \$109.98 million from that of the previous month, according to the central bank.

While proposing the budget for the 2015-16 FY in parliament on June 4, Finance Minister AMA Muhiith said Saudi Arabia had reopened its labour market to Bangladeshi workers after a six-year hiatus, indicating future growth prospects for manpower export.

Remittance sent by more than eight million migrant workers plays a crucial role in the country's economy, helping reduce the overall incidence of poverty as well as maintaining a healthy balance of payments.

According to a recent study by the World Bank, remittance has helped reduce the poverty level in Bangladesh by 1.5 percent. It also accounts for about 66 percent of the country's foreign currency reserves, providing Bangladesh with a strong and stable external position.

Yemen's Aden rocked by deadly clashes

AFP, Aden

Fighting raged in Yemen's battle-ground southern port of Aden yesterday, a day after the United Nations declared its highest level of humanitarian emergency in the war-torn country.

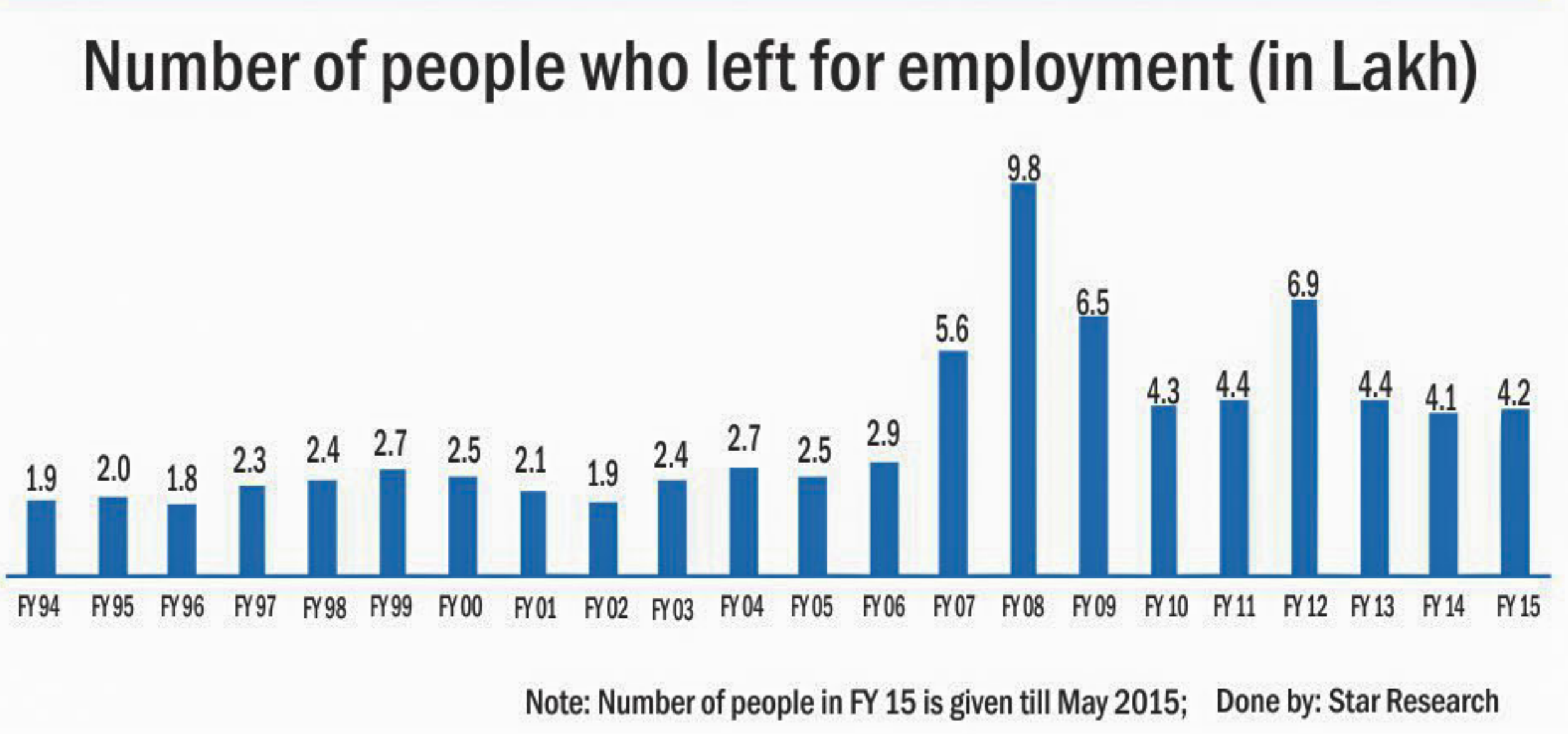
The clashes killed seven rebels and five pro-government fighters, a military official said.

The fighting comes a day after rebel rocket fire hit a residential district of Aden, killing 31 civilians and wounding more than 100.

Early Thursday, rebel shelling of a western district damaged several homes and left casualties, residents said.

Meanwhile, a port near the Aden oil refinery came under rebel artillery fire for a fifth consecutive day, as a fire continued in the area, said Aden Refinery Co spokesman Naser al-Shayef.

Remittance in Bangladesh



Getting ready to become a middle income country

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As a middle income country gains in wages, as we have and will further in future, we face the challenge of remaining competitive with the cheap products of the low income countries. We must not forget Bangladesh had once snatched the jobs of countries like Korea, Thailand and Singapore when they geared up to the higher ground.

While we will face the possibility of not competing with low income countries, we will also not be able to compete with the high-tech products of developed countries.

So we have to consider upscaling

our productivity by infusing it with better technology and also by training our workers. Slow transformation of our agricultural workforce into an industrial one will lead to unemployment and low wage as has happened in countries like India and Thailand, leading to increase in poverty. So we must focus on this job at hand before we soon reach the middle income category.

We are already suffering in productivity because of the sudden spurt in small and medium enterprises which because of their economy of scale cannot integrate modern technology. This factor needs to be

resolved quickly.

Egypt and Nigeria are such cases which saw wage increases that adversely affected productivity. But then there is the bright case of South Korea which was one of the poorest countries in the 1960s with about \$100 per capita income and soon became a middle income country with attention to productivity through its policies and institutions.

The other challenge we will face is how to keep rising inequality in check and how to make basic services accessible to the poor. It will need proper policy, institutions and

financing.

As countries open themselves up to trade in goods and capital, they also face risks of vulnerabilities to different global crises. We have seen how the South-east Asian countries were flooded by the financial crisis of the 1990s. So we need to reform our financial sector as we integrate more and more with the global financial markets.

We need to have the proper institutions for industrial policy and trade. We need to think of relating export policies to growth. Here the biggest issue at stake is the zero duty access of our garments to the

European Union not least because the EU is our largest export market for apparels.

We can still get GSP Plus facility but that would depend on fulfilling a number of stringent conditions on human rights, labour rights and environmental issues. Bangladesh already has poor records on all these counts and fulfilling them would need sincere effort on the government's part.

In the end, we can say that while we celebrate our achievement we also need to get ready for tackling the next level of tough challenges looming ahead.

They must take responsibility

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Around 95 people were killed and 1,417 others injured across the country due to violence, vandalism and arson attacks during hartals and blockades enforced by the BNP-led 20-party alliance this year.

When Fakhru's lawyer Khandker Mahbub Hossain was placing arguments yesterday, the Appellate Division told him there was no vio-

lence or arson attack in the country now, since there was no agitation programmes.

As vandalism and subversive activities took place during their agitation programmes, those who called the programmes couldn't avoid the responsibility, said the four-member bench of the apex court headed by Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha.

Khandker Mahbub, also a BNP leader, told the court that the BNP chairperson had several times claimed that their movements had been run peacefully, and Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir had not made any provoking statement.

Killings and disappearances were happening in the country, and the government had to take the responsibility for such incidents, he argued.

Attorney General Mahbubey Alam opposed Fakhru's bail, saying that people were killed and injured and properties damaged after the political programmes had been enforced.

The political leaders who called such programmes couldn't be exempted, he argued.

After concluding the hearing, the SC fixed July 5 for passing orders on

the petitions filed by the government, seeking stays on the HC orders that granted bail to Fakhru.

Investigation into the charges might be hampered if Fakhru got bail, the government argued in the petitions.

On June 21, the HC granted him bail in the cases filed with Paltan police on January 4, 5 and 7 under the Explosive Substances Act.