

Cost of female migration falls: study

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Cost of female migration has decreased while that of male migration marked a rise, reflecting that demand for domestic workers is high, according to a study released yesterday.

The survey, conducted by Drishti Research Centre (DRC) and The Research and Policy Integration for Development (RAPID), said Bangladesh's female migrant workers were present in 22 countries and Saudi Arabia accounts for 37 per cent of the total female workers.

Female workers' migration abroad began to rise since 2004 and the spiralling trend continued until 2017. Later the outflow declined but remained over 100,000 until 2019. The number of women workers going abroad for jobs dipped in 2020 amidst the devastation done by the pandemic.

The bilateral agreement that the

Bangladesh government signed with Saudi Arabia in February 2015 opened a new area. Visas for women became plentiful and migration was declared free of costs, according to a paper presented at a virtual discussion jointly organised by Economic Reporters' Forum (ERF), RAPID and Drishti Research Centre (DRC).

Occupations prior to migration show that if 55.8 per cent of the women were home makers, 16 per cent were factory workers.

Regarding the findings of the survey, Abdur Razzaque, chairman of the RAPID, said in some cases the migration cost for a male was 16 times higher than the female migrant workers.

For instance, the number of female workers also declined in the garment sector, the highest employment generating sector inside of the country.

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Number of voters soars ahead of BGMEA polls

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

The number of voters in the election of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) has risen to 2,313.

The trade body published the preliminary list of the voters for the biennial election for the tenure of 2021-23. The election will be held on April 4.

The number of voters during the election of 2019 was 1,956.

"The number of voters rose mainly for the renewal of the membership ahead of the election," said M A Rahim, head of the membership committee of the association.

The number of new voters is not that much as the number of new factories is low, he said.

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Sreemangal tourism on the mend

Hotels, resorts getting increasing number of guests



MINTU DESHWARA

Tourists like to visit various spots such as the Tea Research Institute, Wildlife Service Foundation, Hail Haor, Bird Park and numerous other attractions in Sreemangal.

MINTU DESHWARA

Tourism in Sreemangal upazila of Moulvibazar has started to bounce back after suffering massive losses from the coronavirus pandemic that has affected almost all sectors of the economy.

Traders in the area are very pleased with the increasing number of tourists and believe that business in the sector will continue to improve if people follow the health regulations to steer clear of infections.

Even though the unprecedented pandemic lingers, almost every nook and cranny of the upazila is already crowded with tourists.

The arrival of a large number of vacationers has increased the workload on photographers and auto rickshaw drivers in the tea garden area.

At the same time, retailers at Manipuri market are enjoying benefits as well due to a huge turnout of shoppers.

The hotels, motels and resorts in Sreemangal are already packed to the rafters with guests but hope that even more tourists will arrive in the days ahead.

Arman Khan, assistant general manager of Grand Sultan Tea Resort, said their hotel was closed for about nine months due to Covid-19.

"But now customers' queries are increasing every day. Our business is getting back to normalcy. We are now receiving more guests than before," Khan said.

Motaher Ahmed, a retired government official, said that the rows of tea gardens in the area are what attract tourists.

Both domestic and foreign tourists visit the various tourist centres, such as the Tea Research

Institute, Wildlife Service Foundation, Hail Haor, Bird Park and numerous other attractions.

Nipa Singha, a trader in the Monipuri clothes market in Sreemangal's Radhanagar area, said sales are booming thanks to the large volume of tourists.

"We incurred huge losses due to Covid-19 but we are now recovering thanks to the return of tourists," Singha added.

Sadek Mia, a tomtom driver in the area, echoed the same, adding that the daily fare has increased ten times with the return of tourists.

Rajon Hazra, a tea trader in Sreemangal, said thousands of families that are involved in tea selling are now busy with tourist arrivals.

There are at least 200 tea leaf shops in Sreemangal, where tourists are the main buyers, he added.

"I built my resort keeping foreign clientele in mind but they stopped coming during the peak pandemic period. Now though, they have started to return," Shamsul Haque, owner of the Nishorgo Eco Resort, told The Daily Star.

From small drink shops to automated rickshaw pullers, everyone is benefitting from the return of tourists.

Abu Siddique Musa, president of Sreemangal Tourism Services, said there are 75 hotel and resorts in Sreemangal upazila.

"Tourist arrival is on the rise. Hopefully there will be even more tourists after the pandemic ends," he added.

ASM Yahia, president of the Sreemangal Traders Association, said that if they can overcome the situation in a timely manner by complying with health rules, they will be able to

keep the economic wheel turning.

Ashrafuzzaman, Moulvibazar's senior assistant superintendent of police (Sreemangal and Kamalganj), said that police have been deployed at various tourist spots to ensure their safety.

"We are working to ensure that tourists can visit without hindrance," he said.

Nazrul Islam, upazila nirbahi officer (UNO) of Sreemangal, said that they conducted a survey and found that 5,000 tourists visit Sreemangal every day.

"That's why the economy of Sreemangal is dependent on these tourists," Islam added.

If for some reasons, tourists do not come here for six months, then 40 per cent of the agricultural products will remain unsold. The local industry directly employs about 15,000 people. There are many businesses, including tea leaf and handicraft shops, whose 99 per cent customers are tourists.

"Now our plan is rural development through tourism," Islam said.

"We are working on a plan so that tourists can buy goods directly from farmers without any intermediaries," he added.

They also plan to bring a variety of authentic products directly into the hands of customers, which will bring the traders economic prosperity.

"And although now they are benefitting in different ways, we want to make that field a little bigger," Islam said.

Meer Nahid Ahsan, deputy commissioner of Moulvibazar, said that as a tourist area, Sreemangal plays a vital role in the country's economy.

GLOBAL BUSINESS

Phones, consoles could get pricier as chip crisis bites

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Prices of popular gadgets such as PlayStations and iPhones could rise because of microchip shortages caused by a "perfect storm" of coronavirus-driven demand, supply chain disruptions and trade war stockpiling, experts warn.

In the months after the pandemic hit, people stuck at home went on a spending spree to buy items including extra monitors, new computers and tablets -- each of which runs on all-important chips.

Compounding the crisis are US-China tensions -- Huawei stockpiled semiconductors last year before American sanctions aimed at cutting the tech giant off from global chipmakers kicked in, adding further pressure to supplies.

The squeeze in the market was highlighted when automakers, enjoying a pick-up in car-buying, tried to source specialised semiconductors, only to find manufacturers had prioritised consumer electronics and could not fill orders.

The auto sector is the highest-profile victim so far, with giants including Ford and Volkswagen forced to cut production, but shortages appear to be spreading to a wide range of electronic items. "A perfect storm of coronavirus chaos, trade-war stockpiling, and a paradigm shift in work-from-home devices is causing the chip squeeze," Neil Mawston, executive director at consultancy Strategy Analytics, told AFP. "Anything with a chip is affected -- cars, smartphones, games consoles, tablets and laptops. Electronic gadgets and



REUTERS/FILE

Customers wait in line outside an Apple Store to pick up Apple's new 5G iPhone 12 in Brooklyn, New York.

cars will be in shorter supply or more expensive throughout 2021.

Sales of certain iPhone models have reportedly been limited because particular components were not available, while some have pointed to chip shortages for problems in getting hold of Sony's new PlayStation 5 and Microsoft's latest Xbox. A growing number of major chipmakers have voiced concern at the brewing crisis, including US firm Qualcomm, the world's biggest mobile chipmaker, and rival AMD, both of which supply to major consumer electronics companies.

The microchip supply chain is complex and the US giants design

the semiconductors but do not for the most part make them. The production is mostly outsourced to Asian companies such as Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) and South Korea's Samsung. However, Samsung supplies are now threatened after it was forced to halt production at its Texas factory owing to power outages caused by a severe winter storm. Manufacturers have faced challenges in meeting strong consumer electronics demand and then having to pivot their operations to car chips -- shifting production processes can take months.

Taiwan, home to some of

the world's biggest and most advanced foundries, and its manufacturers have come under growing pressure from carmakers and governments because of the shortages.

The island vowed last month to ramp up production of car chips while TSMC said the auto industry was a "top priority" -- but warned its factories were already at full capacity.

The rollout of 5G technology has added to pressure because of the need for myriad chips to build a new generation of phones, wireless infrastructure and other equipment, said GlobalFoundries, a US-headquartered chipmaker

with factories in Singapore.

Washington has been increasing pressure on Huawei, which it accuses of stealing American trade secrets, last year unveiling sanctions that ban the smartphone maker from using semiconductor designs developed with US technology.

When the tech giant began stockpiling semiconductors before the sanctions, other companies followed their lead, adding to the global shortage. "Hoarding has been causing more hoarding," said Mawston of Strategy Analytics. "As Huawei has stockpiled phone chips, other rival brands have sought (to a lesser degree) to hoard their own stocks to help guard future supply. "Chip shortages could delay production of nearly one million vehicles in the first quarter of this year, according to market research firm IHS Markit, although analysts say it is too early to assess the impact on other industries.

Shortages are expected to ease later this year as vaccines are rolled out -- allowing factories to work at full capacity without workers social distancing -- and new plants begin operating. But there could be supply problems in future as chip demand grows, and analysts say the latest crisis is a wake-up call for governments to strengthen domestic industries and reduce reliance on a few players. "Semiconductors are at the heart of the global economy," GlobalFoundries said in a statement.

The company said it is urging governments to invest in semiconductor manufacturing, and to do their part in helping address the clear mismatch in semiconductor supply and demand.

India approves \$1.68b plan to boost local telecoms gear production

REUTERS, New Delhi

India's federal cabinet on Wednesday approved a 121.95 billion rupee (\$1.68 billion) plan to promote local manufacturing and export of telecoms and networking gear, the country's telecoms minister said.

The scheme will offer gearmakers annual cash incentives of between 4 per cent and 7 per cent on any increase in sales of locally-made equipment over the next five years, compared with 2019-20 levels.

The plan is part of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's efforts to make India an electronics production hub and to create jobs. It is also aimed at cutting imports, especially from China.

"I would appeal to all telecoms' equipment manufacturers, come on India is waiting for you with this scheme, we'll give you all the help," India's telecoms minister Ravi Shankar Prasad told a news conference.

Last year, India launched a \$6.65 billion incentive plan to deepen smartphone manufacturing in the country.

Foxconn, Wistron and Pegatron, three of Apple Inc's top contract manufacturers plan to invest a total of almost \$900 million in India over five years to tap into that plan, Reuters has previously reported.

Draghi sets out plan to rebuild virus-hit Italy

AFP, Rome

Prime Minister Mario Draghi pledged Wednesday to use "all means" to fight the coronavirus pandemic that has devastated Italy, and said it presented an opportunity for the country to rebuild as it did after World War II.

In his first speech since taking office, the former European Central Bank chief listed the pandemic as his top priority of a long list of issues requiring urgent attention.

"The government will carry out reforms but will also tackle the emergency," he told the Senate, the upper house of parliament, where he has almost unanimous support for his new government of national unity.

The 73-year-old, parachuted in after the previous centre-left government collapsed, has been dubbed "Super Mario" since promising to do "whatever it takes" to save the euro during the 2012 debt crisis.

On Wednesday he promised to fight "with all means" the pandemic that has left more than 94,000 Italians dead and sparked a deep recession, with the economy contracting almost nine percent last year. "Today we have, as did the governments of the immediate post-war period, the possibility -- or rather the responsibility -- to start a new reconstruction," Draghi said in his almost hour-long address.