

BANGLADESH UPDATE



540
New cases in 24hrs



5,49,724
Total cases



8,451
Deaths



5,01,966
Recoveries



2,595,975
Deaths



116,913,676
Total cases

Pandemic risks undoing gains for women: Merkel

AFP, Berlin

German Chancellor Angela Merkel yesterday warned that the pandemic risked rolling back progress made on gender equality, as women take on the lion's share of childcare in lockdown and are more likely to work in at-risk jobs.

"We have to make sure that the pandemic does not lead us to fall back into old gender patterns we thought we had overcome," Merkel said in a video message ahead of International Women's Day on March 8.

Women have been disproportionately affected by the health crisis, she said, while being underrepresented in decision-making positions.

"Once again it's more often women who have to master the balancing act

between homeschooling, childcare and their own jobs," said the veteran leader.

Women also outnumber men in care professions at a time when those jobs are "particularly challenging".

"More than 75 percent of those working in the health sector are women, from doctor's offices and hospitals, to labs and pharmacies," Merkel said -- yet women account for barely 30 percent of management positions in those areas.

"It cannot be that women are to a large extent carrying our society yet at the same time are not equally involved in important political, economic and societal decisions," she added.

Merkel welcomed recent legislation requiring listed German companies to include more women on their executive boards.

50,000 female migrants

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"However, coordinated efforts from both the government and non-government organisations are required to ensure rehabilitation of the large number of female migrants who returned home amid the pandemic and also to mitigate the crises facing those who are abroad," he added.

Shariful said there were cases where women were "sold" in the name of employment abroad while there were also incidents in which women became trafficking victims.

According to Brac data, of the women who returned amid the pandemic, 21,230 returned from Saudi Arabia, 11,602 from the United Arab Emirates, 4,826 from Qatar, 3,209 from Oman, 2,910 from Lebanon, and 2,259 from Jordan. Besides, bodies arrived from 11 countries with the highest 198 from Saudi Arabia, 88 from Jordan, 71 from Lebanon, 53 from Oman, 39 from UAE and 38 from different other countries. Of these corpses, 57 arrived in 2016, 102 in 2017, 112 in 2018, and 139 in 2019. Also, 77 bodies of female migrant workers arrived home amid the pandemic when global air communications largely remained suspended, it added.

Of the deceased, 86 female migrants reportedly died by suicide, 167 died of "stroke", 71 died in accidents, 115 died "naturally", two were murdered, and 46 died due to other reasons.

Recently, a criminal court in Saudi Arabia sentenced a Saudi national in connection with the killing of

Bangladeshi female migrant worker Abiron Begum.

Citing government data, Brac said according to cases filed under the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act, at least 1,791 women fell victim to human trafficking between 2012 and 2020.

Besides their male counterparts, female migrant workers have also been contributing to the country's economy by sending remittance home, the NGO said.

However, the country lacks data regarding how many female migrant workers have returned home after completing their work contracts or after facing torture and abuse abroad, it said.

Brac recommended implementing "female migration policy" effectively to ensure their rights and uphold dignity. And emphasis has to be put on creating skilled female workers and sending them abroad, it said.

It stressed providing SIM cards to female migrant workers before they reach the host countries in order to ensure communication with family members.

It is essential to bring recruiting agencies under a monitoring mechanism and ensure accountability of the agencies in question, it added.

It further demanded ensuring punishment of employers accused of torturing female migrant workers as per law of their own countries and quick disposal of cases filed under the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act, 2012.



Syed Ali's will power more than compensates for his physical challenges. He travels across the capital on his custom-designed trike and sells medicinal herbs to people on the streets. The photo was taken near Moghbazar Wireless intersection recently.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Regrouping by stealth

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Police have traced a number of financial transactions involving Ansar al-Islam and found that it received around \$900 to \$1,100 from abroad through PayPal on several occasions.

The official, however, refused to disclose the countries of origin for the sake of investigation.

"We have also got details of some local businessmen who are working for the outfit. We are now analysing the details for further action," added the official.

It is the Ansar al-Islam, previously called Ansarullah Bangla Team, whose members were involved in brutal murders of bloggers, free thinkers and secular activists that shook the nation from 2013 to 2016.

All the victims were hacked to death in a similar manner, with four of them killed within just seven months in 2015. It started with the killing of blogger Ahmed Rajib Haider near his house in Mirpur on February 15, 2013.

On February 16 this year, the Anti-Terrorism Special Tribunal sentenced five members of the organisation to death and another to life in jail for killing writer-blogger Avijit Roy in 2015.

Before this on February 10, the court sentenced eight members of the outfit to death for killing publisher Faisal Arefin Dipan the same year.

Delivering the verdict in the Avijit murder case, the court said the writer was killed to gag freedom of expression so that no one in the country can write or express themselves freely.

On July 28, 2019, police pressed charges against eight Ansar al-Islam members in the case over the killing of Xulhaz Mannan, also a former USAID official, who was hacked to death at his Kalabagan home along with his friend Mahbub Rabbi Tonoy in April 2016.

The case is now under trial at the Anti-Terrorism Special Tribunal of Dhaka, which recorded statements of 15 prosecution witnesses in the case so far.

NEW COMMUNICATION STRATEGY
Ansar al-Islam operates through several wings like recruitment, media, IT, intelligence, and operation. It also has sleeper cells -- each containing not more than five members.

To dodge the law enforcers, the outfit has started using a portable operating system, which can be carried in a pen drive and operated from any device

without keeping any digital evidence.

It takes maximum 10 minutes to boot and all the files are removed soon after the portable drive is unplugged from the device.

The top leadership uses it to communicate with a sleeper cell chief, according to several top officials who have been monitoring militant activities for more than a decade.

The outfit members also use a secret platform called jabber.net for communication.

These details and documents about the outfit's activities were found after intercepting correspondences over "Tutanota", an email service which Ansarullah members earlier used, said the officials.

Ahmedul Islam, additional deputy commissioner of CTC unit, told The Daily Star, "We have got some information about their latest communication and are now analysing the details to trace their hideouts."

According to available documents, the outfit has stopped carrying out any assassination after the Holy Artisan café attack perpetrated by IS-inspired "Neo JMB" in July 2016 as it believes everything drastically changed and went against them after this.

After the café siege, law enforcers carried out many high-risk anti-militancy operations in which around 79 militants were killed. Besides, more than 250 militants have been arrested since then.

Another reason for not launching attacks is that the government has a proper database of all the tenants in Dhaka and the outfit members cannot stay safe for long in a rented house.

Thirdly, the outfit wants to gain popularity in the Qawmi madrasas and among different communities and it is now focusing more on this, read the documents.

Monirul Islam, chief of CTC unit, told The Daily Star yesterday that the outfit is now more concentrating on dawah (invitation) on online platforms than operations.

"It has been trying to inspire people to carry out lone-wolf attacks since 2019 but they did not see any success," said Monirul, also the additional commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police.

ORGANISATIONAL HIERARCHY
The organisation has at least 56 sleeper cells.



Thus spoke Mujib

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Khan's 6th March speech, "remarkably conciliatory". He further writes, "Credit goes to Sheikh Mujib for averting an immediate crisis and for preventing a lot of Bengali blood being split on the streets of Dhaka." [Khadim Hussain Raja, a stranger in my own country, UPL 2012, pg. 63]

"WHAT DOES MUJIB NOW INTEND?": AMERICAN ASSESSMENT
American observers were in general agreement that a showdown of force had been averted but the crisis remains unchanged. Dhaka's American Consulate was optimistic. Archer K Blood, then American Consul General writes in his memoir: "The situation remains confused as two sides jockey for position and wait for others to force the issue. Mujib has, we believe, defused the immediate crisis. ... Little by little the Sheikh and the Awami League become the de facto authority in East Pakistan. Meanwhile, the concept of Pakistan continues to erode. The Sheikh's tactics, if successful, reduce the chances of open confrontation by exposing only a fuzzy target for the MLA [Martial Law Administration]. At the same time, he keeps the initiative and maintains control of the situation."

American Embassy in Islamabad was more pessimistic in their assessment: "Thus, events of March 6-7 have deferred showdown, but have not altered basic elements. Bengalis appear bent on a degree of autonomy the Pak military (and probably Bhutto) unable to swallow. The question now is whether Yahya or Mujib will blink first -- or whether neither will blink. Showdown cannot be put off much longer."

In their assessment of what does Mujib now intend the US Embassy report wrote: "His goal remains unchanged -- 'Emancipation' of Bangla Desh from West Pakistan domination. This could mean full provincial autonomy' as under six points. It could also mean Mujib has come to believe that the freedom he seeks is attainable only by outright independence."

Shamsudozza Sajen is a journalist and researcher. He can be contacted at sajen1986@gmail.com

MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATORS' REACTION
The general reaction of the martial law authorities to the 7th March speech was that of relief. In a reply to the call of Yahya Khan, a senior officer reported, "This is the best speech under the circumstances." [Siddiq Salik, Witness to Surrender, UPL 1997, pg. 54]

Khadim Hussain Raja, then General Officer Commanding in East Pakistan, terms Sheikh Mujib's speech, in comparison with Yahya

correspondent that they complained to the foreign and expatriates' welfare ministries, but got no justice.

"I have recently complained to the National Human Rights Commission seeking justice. I expect the state to ensure justice for me and other victims of Papul's crimes," Kamrul said.

Hasina among 3
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Bangladesh -- for their leadership during Covid-19 in their roles in their respective countries," the Commonwealth secretary-general said.

"All three leaders alongside so many other women have given me hope for a world that delivers a common future for women and men and serves all of our common good," she added.

Earlier, different countries have lauded Bangladesh for successfully tackling the novel coronavirus pandemic.

Of the total 549,724 coronavirus cases in Bangladesh until March 6, the number of recoveries is 501,966. A total of 8,451 people have died -- one of the low ratios of infections and deaths, though health systems have been affected during the peak months.

Bangladesh's agricultural productivity, as well as foreign remittance, has been robust. The government declared stimulus packages for the people adversely affected by the pandemic.

Papul jailed, but victims in lurch

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They then realised that they were illegally employed under Marafie Kuwaitia Group, where Papul was managing director and CEO, instead of Ali Tawab company.

Farid said he and other Bangladeshi workers at the market had to work 12 hours a day against their will and were paid low salaries, that too on an irregular basis.

"With no iqamas, we were always under fears of detention," he said, adding that if some of them argued for position and wait for others to force the issue. Mujib has, we believe, defused the immediate crisis. ... Little by little the Sheikh and the Awami League become the de facto authority in East Pakistan. Meanwhile, the concept of Pakistan continues to erode. The Sheikh's tactics, if successful, reduce the chances of open confrontation by exposing only a fuzzy target for the MLA [Martial Law Administration]. At the same time, he keeps the initiative and maintains control of the situation."

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10 more die, 540 infected with Covid

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh recorded 10 more coronavirus-related deaths and 540 new cases in 24 hours till yesterday morning, showing a slight fall in daily infection rate.

Some 822 people have recovered from the virus infection during the same period, according to the Directorate General of Health Services.

With the fresh cases, the number of total cases rose to 549,724 in the country.

The daily infection rate stood at 4.13 percent yesterday, down from 4.63 percent the previous day. The overall infection rate slightly fell to 13.30 percent, which was 13.33 percent on Friday.

However, the mortality rate remained unchanged at 1.54 percent for the past few days, the DGHS said in a handout.

So far, 501,966 patients (91.31 percent) have recovered from Covid-19.

The health authorities have so far tested 41,32,113 samples, including 13,082 in the same 24-hour period.

Bangladesh reported its first novel coronavirus cases on March 8 last year and the first death on March 18.

'Gunfight staged'

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allows them to release the seized goods by realising revenues from the loggers. In that case, the revenue goes straight to the government exchequer.

WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED
According to the case filed with Forest Court on January 4, Masum Kabir, the range officer, seized the boat loaded with around 700 cubic feet of illegal logs from the Kamaphuli river at 10:00pm the previous day.

Sources from the Forest Department said after unloading the logs on the evening of January 4, Chiringa beat office staffers moored the boat at Chiringa canal adjacent to the river.

The staffers then left the place. While two guards stayed back, Masum waited at Khetro Bazar, which is a kilometre away from the spot.

Around 8:45pm, Masum Kabir phoned his colleagues to say a group of loggers attacked them at the beat and asked them to come to the spot soon.

When his colleagues reached there, Masum informed them that the loggers snatched away the boat, they added.

There is a tea-stall adjacent to Chiringa beat. An elderly man who was at the stall at that time told The Daily Star that no incident of gunfight took place there.

"I saw a few people come from across the Kamaphuli river. They had a chat with the forest officers and others. They then went away with a boat, which was anchored at Chiringa canal," he said.

Sources at the Forest Department said no staffer was present at the beat office when the so-called gunfight took place. Actually, the trio designed it this way to pocket all of the bribe money themselves, they added.

Mohammad Alam, a local contractor, told The Daily Star that asked by the Forest Department, he first supplied 14 labourers to unload the logs and planks from the boat around midnight on January 3. But they were not experienced in unloading big planks.

The next day, he hired another batch of labourers from Chattogram city and they unloaded the goods till 7:00pm.

"Just 15 or 20 minutes after we left, I got a call from the beat office that loggers attacked. I rushed there but found no sign of such an attack. I informed it to the top boss of the forest division but he shrugged it off," he said.

Mahbub Milky, officer-in-charge of Rangunia Police Station, told The Daily Star that the incident was not like what was stated in the case.

The forest officials had anchored the boat at a canal after seizing it, he said, adding that a few people came later and went away with the boat.

The boat was left in a way so that it can be easily taken away, the OC further said.

Shafikul Islam, divisional forest officer of Chattogram South Forest Division, did not receive repeated phone calls of this correspondent.

Rouful Islam Khan Tuhin, beat officer of Chiringa, said he was not on the spot and can't talk to the media without approval from his top boss.

Range Officer Masum Kabir claimed they fired nine rounds of bullets in retaliation when the loggers attacked them and the gunfight lasted for one hour. He alleged that the police and Khaleque Member were lying.

Shafikul Islam, one of the two forest guards, said they clashed for one hour with the loggers who were around 50 in number. He said the incident took place around 10:00pm.

Debroto Debu, the other forest guard, echoed the same, except that it occurred around 8:00pm.

A villager who often works with the Forest Department and lives adjacent to the beat office told The Daily Star they saw the seizure of the boat on January 3 and they saw the boat being released by the forest guards on January 4. "It all happened peacefully."

"But," he added, "next day in the morning [on January 5], when I went to the tea stall, I heard forest guards talking about a gunfight. Had there been a gunfight for an hour, the whole village would have been terrified. Everyone would have known that."