

Leaving

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his family rented a pick-up, loaded their household amenities and left for their village home in Shariatpur's Jajira upazila on Wednesday.

"We will come back to Dhaka once the lockdown is over and I can find a job again," he told The Daily Star, while he waited to leave the capital with his family at Munshiganj's Shimulia ferry terminal.

Like him, many have left Dhaka over the last few days before the lockdown began yesterday, fearing unemployment and unaffordability of living in the capital.

The country's two major ferry routes – Paturia to Dauladia and Shimulia to Banglabazar – witnessed a huge flow of home-goers in the last couple of days.

As operations of public transports remain suspended, they were seen travelling on different small vehicles such as private cars, pick-up, CNG-run auto rickshaws, motorbikes and rickshaws.

Ratul Hasan, from Rajbari, spoke to The Daily Star at the Paturia ferry Terminal.

"I work in a tailoring shop in Dhaka. As the shop will remain shut during lockdown, my employer will not pay me wages... If I don't get any money, how will I survive in Dhaka? That is why I am going to back to my village and will return when things are back to normal."

Another such victim of unemployment was Jahid Hossain, who worked at a garage as a mechanic. His employer had to recently terminate as the garage's workload dropped due to the suspension of vehicular movement.

"How will I run my five-member family and pay house rent? So, I have no alternative but to return to my village home."

Jahid was heading towards Faridpur from Shimulia terminal on Wednesday morning.

Another home-goer, Mohammad Sohan, said, "I work in a furniture shop in Dhaka. My employer has let go of me as our shop will remain closed."

Private car driver Sumon said, "As I will not be able to drive during the lockdown, there is no point staying in the city. I would rather return to my family in my village."

GP sued for using

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agency, Forethought PR, said yesterday that the ad is no longer being aired.

Contacted, WCCU Director Jahir Uddin Akon told The Daily Star, "Through this advertisement, Grameenphone violated three sections of the Wildlife Act-2012."

"Every year, people suffer from various serious diseases transmitted from wild birds and animals all over the world. Grameenphone's advertisement encouraged people to collect birds from nature, capture them if necessary, and have them interact with humans and dogs. They also widely publicised it which is an offence," he added.

Md Hasan, head of external communications of Grameenphone, said in the statement, "There have been discussions in social media on portrayal of a native bird in one of our recently circulated advertisements. Although most of the people appreciated the advertisement, a few have expressed concerns. As Grameenphone is respectful to the opinion of the public, the ad is no longer being aired."

"Grameenphone has learned about a case in this regard from media reports. We will be able to comment on this issue after receiving relevant documents of the case."

Govt bans fishing

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of that, from July 1 to 31 August every year, fishing in all rivers and canals of Sundarbans will remain suspended.

Last year, fishing in the Sundarbans was also banned for two months.

The official said that if fishing in the Sundarbans is stopped for these two months, the fishes in the river and canals in the forest will increase and it will play a positive role for all animals and plants.

Until further notice, fishing in the Sundarbans will be banned at the same time every year, he said.

He added that patrolling in the forest area has been intensified so that the poachers could not get into the forest during the period.

Largest comet

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of Pennsylvania's Gary Bernstein, who found and named the comet. "It has not visited the Solar System in more than 3 million years."

The comet originated in the Oort Cloud, a gathering of icy planetesimals – cosmic bodies made of huge amounts of dust. While this cloud is only theoretical with our current understanding of science, it is thought that they surround the Sun between 0.03 and 3.2 light years from it, having been scattered to the far reaches of the Solar System by the movement of Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune billions of years ago.

Comet Bernardinelli-Bernstein is thought to be the largest member of the Oort Cloud ever detected, and it is the first comet on an incoming path that has been detected so far away.

Hassles outweigh remedy they give

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found the report. This meaning a worker or a worker's family has to wait several years before they get their dues.

All this for paltry sums that range from Tk 2 lakh (for injury) to Tk 2.50 lakh (for death).

For cases filed before 2016, when the labour law was amended, this sum was between Tk 1 lakh and Tk 1.25 lakh.

Twenty-eight-year-old Jewel, for example, had to wait four years to get a positive verdict. Even then, he has not been able to get his employer to pay his dues.

In December 2013, the construction worker slipped off a flimsy ladder while carrying 60kg of sand. He had been working on the moulding of the rooftop of a house in Badda.

The fall left him permanently paralysed from the waist down. The doctors told him that he would be unable to walk or do any manual labour for the rest of his life -- a form of death sentence for a young construction worker.

Jewel had been working for the house's owner Hazi Liakat Ali when the accident happened. Jewel sued him for compensation in June 2014, seeking Tk 215,000 in damages.

After a drawn-out four-year legal battle, Jewel was handed a verdict in his favour -- but to no avail. The court had ordered Ali to deposit Tk 2 lakh within two months, but as

of 2021, Jewel has still not received a single taka from his former employer.

BLAST then initiated a criminal case against Jewel's employer to recover the money, but the case is still pending in court.

"The Bangladesh Labour Act relies too heavily on the willingness (rather than ability) of employers to pay compensation to claimants. Repeated refusal to pay compensation, including when ordered by courts, appears to be commonplace -- with little to no practical consequences for such non-compliance," stated the report, authored by BLAST's Taqbir Huda.

Major reasons behind courts taking so long to pass verdicts include an inadequate number of judges, backlog of cases, difficulty obtaining documentary evidence and crucially, large distances between the workers and the courts.

"The average distance between the claimant's upazila [subdistrict] and the Labour Court, in which the compensation claim had to be filed, was 201km," found the report.

"In 50 of the 80 cases, the court and the claimant's residence were located in different divisions... Claimants are required to travel hundreds of kilometres, incurring huge transport costs and travel time."

The time and the distance force workers and their families to settle out of court, it added.

Fifteen-year-old Md Rubel was working in the Three Star Fan Factory situated in Mirhajirbagh of Jatrabari in 2007, when a fire broke out, killing the boy.

Rubel's mother filed a case the next year.

During the trial, the employer did not even bother to submit a written statement to contest the case, while Rubel's mother told the court that all the company had paid was Tk 10,000 as compensation.

After two long years, the Second Labour Court Dhaka pronounced a judgment on January 12, 2011, ruling that a remaining Tk 90,000 had to be paid to Rubel's mother within 30 days.

The employer ignored the court order, forcing BLAST to initiate a criminal case.

This prompted the factory to offer Rubel's parents an out-of-court settlement of Tk 60,000.

They could accept this now or the company could continue prolonging the legal battle and keep them penniless. Rubel's parents took the money and withdrew legal action against the employer.

At a virtual launching ceremony of the report, Honorary Executive Director of BLAST Sara Hossain stated, "The findings of the report show that when victims of injustice, such as those of workplace deaths and injuries, seek justice in labour courts, they are subjected to another set of injustices, whereby continuing

the court case becomes an extremely costly endeavour.

"This is precisely why an employment injury insurance scheme is the need of the hour, so victims have a speedy recourse to compensation."

BLAST Chairman Dr Kamal Hossain said, "The Labour Act was thus enacted to ensure workers' rights. However, after all these years, we still see that recovering compensation is not easy. Employers mostly disregard the compensation orders of courts.

"The pendency and delay of cases in courts disappoint the victims in getting justice. We need to amend our existing law by removing the fixed compensation amount, and increasing [the number of] courts and judges."

AKM Nasim, deputy country director of the Solidarity Center Bangladesh, said, "The findings of the report, while harrowing, confirm something we have known for years -- that the compensation framework is miserably failing workers. The labour law requires immediate reform." Wajedul Islam Khan, general secretary of Bangladesh Trade Union Centre and joint secretary general of Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies, said, "The duty to compensate should also extend to those who benefit from the profit derived from the workers' labour, alongside the employer."

Covid cases rising again in Europe

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the Euro semi-final and final take place next week -- infections are soaring despite a strong vaccination drive.

"There will be a new wave in the WHO European region unless we remain disciplined," the UN agency's Europe director Hans Kluge told a press conference.

He warned that the region had seen a 10 percent rise in cases over the past week, "driven by increased mixing, travel, gatherings and easing of social restrictions."

Asked about whether the Euro championship was potentially acting as a "super-spreader" event, Kluge replied: "I hope not... but this can't be excluded."

The coronavirus has killed more than 3.9 million people worldwide, according to an AFP tally.

Yesterday, the European Medicines Agency said two doses of the vaccine appeared to provide protection against the Delta variant, based on real world evidence.

But while some three billion jabs have been administered worldwide, the global vaccine drive has highlighted stark inequalities between countries, with low-income nations having only given an average of one shot per 100 people.

Yesterday, Russia reported 672 deaths over the past 24 hours, setting yet another pandemic high. Saint Petersburg, which is due to host the Spain vs. Switzerland Euro 2020 quarter-final today in front of thousands of spectators, saw the most deaths with 115.

Authorities have introduced minimal restrictions beyond banning food sales at fan zones.

The concerning situation in Europe coincides with the launch of an EU-wide Covid certificate meant to ease travel for those living in the 27 member states.

The document -- essentially a QR code available on smartphones or on paper -- shows whether the bearer is vaccinated with one of the EU's approved jabs, whether they have recovered from an infection or recently tested negative.

But the surge in the Delta variant could put an abrupt end to this, triggering an "emergency brake" provision suspending the certificate's acceptance.

Cases are rising fast in many Asian countries too.

The healthcare system in Indonesia is overwhelmed by a huge coronavirus wave, which has forced the government to impose emergency restrictions from tomorrow. The

curbs, lasting more than two weeks, cover the capital Jakarta, hard-hit Java and the holiday island Bali.

Malaysia too has announced tighter curbs in some parts of Kuala Lumpur and the neighbouring state of Selangor.

Despite the resurgence of the virus and warnings to go slow, many nations are pressing ahead with plans to open up their economies and revive sectors badly hit by the pandemic, especially travel and tourism.

Thailand kicked off its "Phuket sandbox" project on Thursday, under which vaccinated international travellers can visit the holiday hotspot without needing to quarantine.

"After two years of not travelling, I've chosen the Phuket sandbox to change my mood," said 37-year-old Omar Ricalraesi from the UAE, one of the first passengers to touch down.

Experts laud govt move to scrap sub-section

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not by the legal requirement of consent, they said.

BLAST research specialist Taqbir Huda, the author of the research "Between 'Virtue' and 'Immorality': Why Character Evidence Must Be Prohibited in Rape Cases", said the repeal of Section 155(4) of the Evidence Act 1872 promised by the law minister is only the first step towards tackling the courtroom culture of victim-blaming.

Taqbir urged for introduction of specific rape shield laws which prevent defendants from introducing evidence of victims' sexual behaviour, history or reputation.

"Section 146 (3) of the Evidence Act allows questions to be raised about the character of witnesses, so this general provision can act as a backdoor through which victim-blaming continues unless its applicability to complainants of sexual offences is specifically restricted.

"Additionally, the long-awaited reform of Evidence Act should

also establish a specific duty on judges to ensure complainants of sexual offences are not subject to questions about their character and for specific disciplinary action -- such as suspension and fines -- to be taken against defence lawyers who deliberately use character evidence in an attempt to humiliate the complainant," he said.

Mentioning the importance of repealing sub-section 146 (3) of the Evidence Act, Dhaka University Associate Law Professor Taslima Yasmin said if the goal of the reform is to relieve rape victims of humiliation and blame during trial, it is important to take a deeper look into the entire legal system.

"We also need to learn from similar reforms in other countries where not only the character evidence related provisions are deleted, but further rape shield provisions are added to protect victims of sexual offences from facing humiliation during trial," she added.

Welcoming the proposed reform,

eminent human rights lawyer Salma Ali, who is also the president of Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association (BNWLA), said the character of a rape survivor has no relevance in a rape case or in judging whether her allegation is real.

"Even if a sex worker claims that she was raped, she has the right to file a case for rape because the legal element is consent and a lawyer must not justify the rape by questioning her character or bringing up her past sexual life," she added.

"This is why we need proper implementation and monitoring of the reformed law and to establish a women-friendly and gender-sensitive environment in every channel of the justice system," she said.

Rape Law Reform Coalition (RLRC), comprising 17 rights organisations of the country, welcomed the law minister's announcement in a press release.

The repeal of Section 155 (4) of the Evidence Act was one of their key points in their 10-point demand

for rape law reform in October 2020 during the countrywide anti-rape protests and has also been a longstanding demand of many of RLRC's member organisations, the release added.

"Research conducted as part of our ongoing Rape Law Reform Now campaign has shown how Section 155 (4) of the Evidence Act, and the use of character evidence against rape complainants more broadly, has long perpetuated impunity for rape and obstructed justice for rape survivors," it read.

Nina Goswami, senior deputy director of Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) -- which is part of the coalition -- said the amendment will be one of the 10 recommendations made by the rape law reform coalition.

"In order to ensure justice for rape victims, we are waiting for the government to make the necessary adjustments to the rape law by accepting the other nine recommendations of the coalition," she said.

Yahya's plan

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provinces in West Pakistan. He told newsmen in Quetta that he was confident his party could form governments in Punjab and Sind on its own strength and coalition government in North-West Frontier Province and Baluchistan. "This would certainly get reflected at the centre," he said.

INDIAN STUDENTS PROTEST US ARMS

Nearly 1.5 million school and college students in the state of West Bengal stayed away from their classes today in protest against United States arms shipments to Pakistan.

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Israel PM confirms deal for outpost settlers to leave by today

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett has announced a deal for Jewish settlers to leave an illegal outpost in the occupied West Bank by today, with a possibility of returning.

Settlers had built the Eviatar outpost near Nablus over recent weeks in defiance of both international and Israeli law, sparking fierce protests from Palestinians in neighbouring villages.

Bennett, who previously led a key settler lobbying group, on late Wednesday released details of the deal, which calls for Eviatar's inhabitants to leave by 4:00 pm Friday (1300 GMT).

A letter outlining the terms of the previously reported arrangement confirmed that the settler's homes will remain at the site and the Israeli army -- which has occupied the West Bank since 1967 -- will establish a presence in the area.

Following the evacuation, the defence ministry "will perform a process of land survey on the site as quickly as possible" to determine whether it can be labelled Israeli state land, the letter said.

If the study declares it to be Israeli land, "a religious institution will be allowed to be built and accompanying residential quarters for it and for the yeshiva staff's families," the letter added.

All Jewish settlements in the West Bank are considered illegal by most of the international community.

Palestinians in the nearby village of Beita, who claim Eviatar was built on their land, have categorically rejected any compromise other than a permanent evacuation of the settlers.

Four Palestinians have been killed by Israeli troops in clashes over Eviatar, which lies near the Palestinian city of Nablus and close to several other settlements.

The fracas has stirred tensions within Israel's new, ideologically divided coalition government, which includes right-wing settler supporters like Bennett, centrists, dovish parties nominally opposed to settlement expansion, and a conservative Arab party.

Anti-settlement group Peace Now blasted the Eviatar arrangement.

"Politically, this agreement means that the new government doesn't want to confront even a small (albeit loud and forceful) minority," the group said in a statement.

"Settlers can still do as they please."

Dire fire warnings issued in wake of record heatwave in Canada, US

REUTERS, Vancouver/Portland

The worst heat wave on record that has scorched much of Canada's western territories and the US Northwest eased slightly on Wednesday but officials still braced for more record temperatures and the threat of wildfires.

Deaths soared in the Canadian Pacific coast province of British Columbia in recent days. Cities in the US states of Washington and Oregon shattered all-time highs for temperature for days.

US officials blamed the heat for a handful of US deaths. In Canada, at least 233 people died in British Columbia between Friday and Monday, about 100 more than the average for a four-day period, the BC Coroners Service said.

Lytton, a town in central British Columbia, this week broke Canada's all-time hottest temperature record three times. It stands at 49.6 degrees Celsius (121.28 degrees Fahrenheit) as of Tuesday. The previous high in Canada, known for brutally cold winters, was 45 degrees C, set in Saskatchewan in 1937.

In the US Northwest, temperatures in Washington and Oregon soared well above 100 degrees F (40 degrees C) over the weekend. Portland, Oregon set all-time highs several days in a row including a 116 degrees F (47 degrees C) on Sunday.

The heat dome, a weather phenomenon trapping heat and blocking other weather systems from moving in, weakened as it moved east, but was still intense enough to set records from Alberta to Manitoba, said David Phillips, senior climatologist at Environment and Climate Change Canada, a government agency.