

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

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of WCCU, 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 a punishable offence," he added.

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.

Astronomers believe that there may be many more undiscovered comets of this size waiting in the Oort Cloud, far beyond Pluto and the Kuiper Belt.

"This is a much needed anchor on the unknown population of large objects in the Oort Cloud and their connection with early migration of the ice/gas giants soon after the Solar System was formed," said NOIRLab (National Optical-Infrared Astronomy Research Laboratory) astronomer Tod Lauer.

Chris Davis, National Science Foundation Program Director for NOIRLab, added: "Finding huge objects like Comet Bernardinelli-Bernstein is crucial to our understanding of the early history of our Solar System."



Police officers detain a Tibetan demonstrator during a protest against Chinese Communist Party's 100-year anniversary celebrations, outside Chinese Embassy in New Delhi, India, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

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 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.

Physical work to go on amid lockdown

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Railway, following necessary health safety guidelines.

All the people involved with the projects have to keep identity cards with them and the authorities concerned have to submit their lists to the police department, reads the letter, issued following the directives of the Cabinet Division.

The six projects are: Padma Bridge Rail Link Project; Chattogram-Cox's Bazar Rail Link; Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Railway Bridge; Construction of Akhaura-Laksham Double Line; Khulna-Mongla Rail Link; and Dhaka-Tongi Rail Line Expansion Project. Of the six, the first two are among the government's eight fast-track projects.

The BR is now implementing a total of 41 projects.

All the six projects are being implemented with foreign funds and their deadlines have already been extended at least once.

Meanwhile, Road Transport and Highways Division (RTHD) has asked Roads and Highways Department (RHD) to continue eight foreign-aided projects amid the "strict lockdown".

The RHD is now implementing some 200 projects.

Speaking to The Daily Star yesterday, RHD Chief Engineer Abdus Sabur said, "We have been asked to continue eight projects. The other projects will remain halted for now."

The eight projects are: Greater

Dhaka Sustainable Urban Transport Project, under which a dedicated bus line (Bus Rapid Transit) are being implemented from Dhaka airport to Gazipur; SASEC Road Connectivity Project-1 and 2, under which roads from Joydebpur in Gazipur to Rangpur are being expanded to four lanes; Cross Border Road Network Improvement Project (CBRNIP) ; Western Bangladesh Bridge Improvement Project; Payra Bridge (popularly known as Lebukhali Bridge) Project; 8th Bangladesh-China Friendship Bridge in Pirojpur; and expansion of Ashuganj River Port to Akhaura Land Port Road.

All the projects are being implemented with foreign fund and deadlines of all but one -- CBRNIP -- have been extended at least for once, shows documents.

The work of the country's first-ever metro rail, formally known as Mass Rapid Transit Line-6 (MRT Line-6), will continue amid the "strict lockdown". This correspondent found works were going on in Farmgate area yesterday.

"We will continue our works maintaining health safety guidelines," MAN Siddique, managing director of Dhaka Mass Transit Company Ltd, the implementing agency of the project, told The Daily Star yesterday.

MRT Line-6 is being implemented from Uttara Third Phase to Motijheel at the cost of Tk 22,000 crore with Japanese loan.

The project witnessed 67.63 percent progress till June. The original deadline of the project is June 2024, but the authority has a plan for commissioning the project in December this year.

Failing to meet the deadline mainly due to pandemic, the authority is now planning to make first phase -- Uttara to Agargaon -- operational from June next year.

Bangladesh Bridge Authority (BBA) will continue physical works of three projects -- Padma Bridge, Bangabandhu Tunnel and Dhaka Elevated Expressway -- amid lockdown, Bridge Division Secretary Abu Bakr Siddique, said.

They will also continue works of their part in BRT project, he told this newspaper yesterday.

The long-cherished Padma bridge project has witnessed 86 percent progress till May this year and the government has announced to open the 6.15km bridge to traffic in June next year after revision of deadlines several times.

The BBA is implementing the First Dhaka Elevated Expressway project under public-private-partnership method.

After missing several deadlines due to delay in land acquisition and managing fund by the private partner, the works of the project gained momentum in February last year.

The 47km expressway, with 19.73km main line, is being

implemented from Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport to Kutubkhali.

Bangabandhu Tunnel under the Karnaphuli river witnessed 69 percent progress till May this year and is scheduled to be completed within December next year.

Zuma conviction unconstitutional, says his foundation

AFP, Johannesburg

The foundation representing South Africa's ex-president Jacob Zuma, sentenced to 15 months in jail for defying a top court this week, on Wednesday condemned the judgement as unconstitutional.

In an unprecedented ruling, the Constitutional Court on Tuesday convicted Zuma for "egregious" and "aggravated" contempt of court after he refused to comply with an order to appear before graft investigators.

The verdict triggered a show of support from the dwindling numbers of Zuma's still fervent supporters, some of whom made their way to his rural home in the eastern town of Nkandla to express their solidarity.

If Zuma fails to turn himself in by Sunday, police will be ordered to arrest him and take him to prison.

Yahya's plan

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that his party was in a position to form government in all the four provinces in West Pakistan. He told newsmen in Quetta that he was confident his party could form governments in Punjab and Sindh 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.

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.