

BANGLADESH UPDATE



8,772
New cases in 24hrs



10,09,315
Total cases



16,189
Deaths



8,68,139
Recoveries



GLOBAL UPDATE



4,039,498
Deaths



187,111,019
Total cases

Migrant sues agent, 7 others after being raped overseas

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A female migrant worker yesterday filed a case with police in the capital against eight persons on charges of human trafficking.

She alleged that she was trafficked to Mauritius and raped by her foreign employer and a co-worker there last year.

The case was filed with Rampura Police Station under the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act, 2012 and the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act.

The accused in the case are Akbar Hossain, proprietor of a recruiting agency; Akbar's son Golam Rabbi, Akbar's brother Aktar Hossain, Shah Alam, Forkan, Siddique, Aslam, and Indian national Anil Kohli.

Abdul Ahad, deputy commissioner (Motijheel division) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, said they would take necessary steps regarding the matter.

According to the complainant, she was sent to Mauritius through a recruiting agency on February 5 last year.

She said as a migration cost, she paid Tk 28,000 in two phases to Akbar and his son at their office in Rampura.

She also said she was promised to get Tk 28,000 a month as wage. In Mauritius, she was hired by Firemount Textile Company as a helper.

In a press statement, Shariful Hasan, head of Brac Migration Programme, yesterday said both governments in Bangladesh and Mauritius should investigate the allegation raised by the victim.

Besides, authorities concerned should look into whether other Bangladeshi female migrant workers have faced a similar situation in Mauritius, hoping the concerned ministry and Bangladesh mission in Mauritius will take a prompt step in this regard.

Gunmen kill at least 45 people in Nigeria town

REUTERS, Maiduguri

Militants killed at least 45 people in an attack on the town of Faru in northwest Nigeria, residents and a hospital worker said on Friday.

Such violence has increasingly become a part of everyday life in the region, with the Nigerian government and security forces showing little ability to stem the deterioration of law and order.

"The armed bandits stormed Faru town on more than 100 motorbikes, shooting sporadically on the people at about twelve noon yesterday," said Abubakar Ilyasu, a resident who witnessed the attack.

Another resident, Musa Dan Auta, also said the gunmen killed 45 people, while a local hospital worker who declined to be named for fear of official retaliation said corpses were brought in.

"Yesterday evening, security forces and the local militia vigilantes brought 29 dead bodies and 11 other injured people into the hospital," the worker said.

Raids, killings and mass kidnappings for ransom, particularly of school children, have become commonplace in northwest Nigeria.

The rampant violence has sparked concerns that the region is fallow ground for extremist groups to move in and take advantage of the absence of governance to foment insurgency.

Nigeria is already fighting a 12-year battle with Islamist extremists Boko Haram and Islamic State's West African branch, a war which shows little sign of ending.

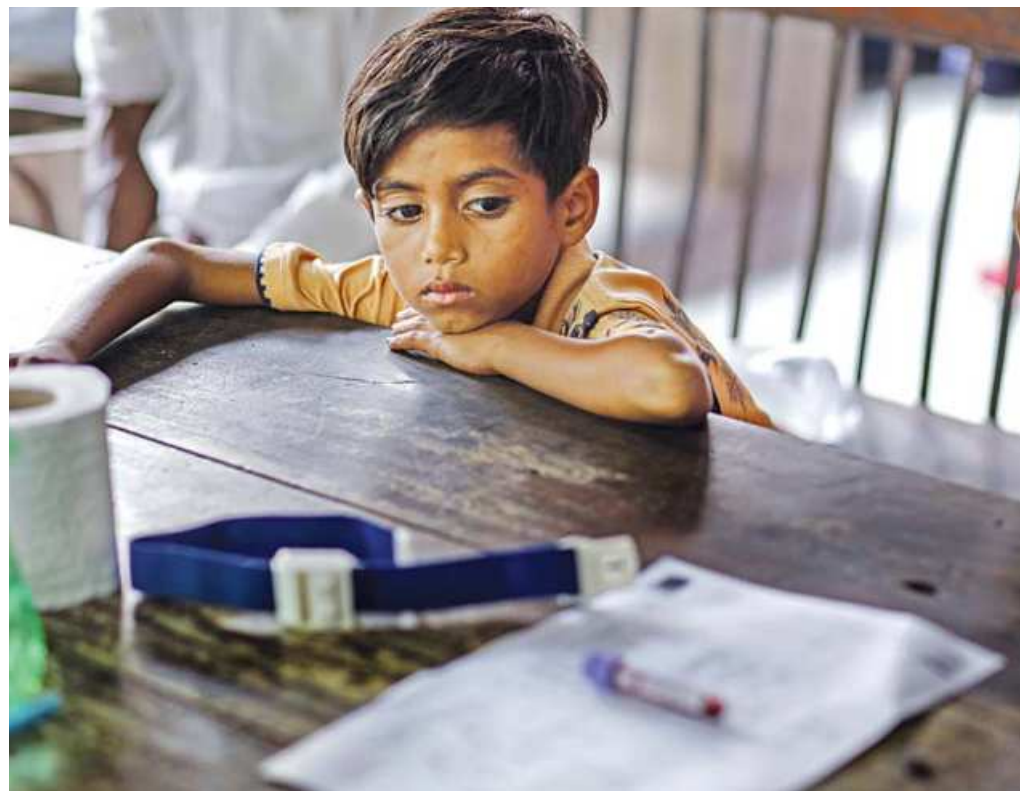
Removal of US Capitol fencing begins six months after riot

AFP, Washington

More than six months after the deadly US Capitol insurrection, authorities on Friday began the process of dismantling fencing and barricades surrounding the iconic Washington building, although some access restrictions will remain in place.

Personnel were seen removing bars connecting sections of the eight-foot (2.4-meter) black metal fencing that had been erected in the days following the violent unrest at the citadel of American democracy.

Removal of the fence itself was to begin early Saturday, workers on the site said, with the deconstruction operation expected to last through the weekend.



Clockwise, a toddler watches in front of Dhaka Medical College Hospital as his mother gives blood for DNA test to identify a loved one who was killed in the Rugganj factory fire. An elderly woman showing her daughter's photo who's missing since the fire broke out at Hashem Food and Beverage Factory in Narayanganj's Rugganj. The lock kept workers trapped inside the factory when the fire burned the whole building.

PHOTO: STAR



It's murder, not accident

FROM PAGE 1

parliamentary seat of Laxmipur-3 in the 2008 general election. He was defeated by BNP nominee Shahid Uddin Chowdhury Annie.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan, while visiting the Narayanganj factory yesterday, said no one would be spared if their negligence was found to be a cause of the tragedy.

"Every responsible person will be brought under trial," he added.

Though the cause of the fire has yet to be ascertained, police suspect that it originated from an electrical short circuit on the ground floor where flammable goods like cartons and paper rolls were stored.

Firefighters on Friday said the total number of deaths was 52. But the police and district administration yesterday said the number was 51.

Bodies of 48 people were found on the third floor where the only exit was locked. The bodies were charred beyond recognition. Most of the victims were women and children. At least 10 others were injured while the firemen rescued 25 from the rooftop of the factory.

After conducting autopsies of 49 bodies at Dhaka Medical College morgue, officials sent 15 to a mortuary of Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College because the one in DMC was at capacity.

The body of Morsalin, 22, who jumped off the second floor, was handed to his family members.

Besides, DNA samples of 51 family members of 36 victims were collected for matching. Some of the families have demanded compensation for their losses.

At the site of the six-storey building, Director (operations) of Fire Brigade and Civil Defense Lt Col Zillur Rahman said, "We didn't find adequate firefighting equipment. Some places in the building were locked. Many could not get out because of the partitions. These can be a cause of the fire and the loss of life."

There is a chance that the fire originated from electric sparks as machineries and raw materials were kept at the same place, he said.

The entire building was full of combustible materials, he said, adding that some sections were locked.

HASHEM FOODS STATEMENT

In a statement issued on Friday, the company said soon after the fire started, the authorities informed the firefighters and also used their own fire hydrants.

The company will provide medical treatment to the injured ones and stay by the side of the families of those who died.

From toil to tail end

FROM PAGE 1

All of the children were locked in and could not escape, said their families. The only children who did survive, managed to do so by jumping off the third floor of the factory.

The number of children recuperating in hospitals could not yet be determined.

In 2006, the Bangladeshi government outlawed employment of anyone below the age of 14. According to the labour law, those under 14 years of age are children, while those between 14 and 18 are adolescents.

"Adolescents can be employed as per the labour law, but cannot work with hazardous labour and cannot work for more than five hours a day in a factory," said Jafrul Hasan Sharif, a labour expert involved in drafting the Bangladesh Labour Act 2006, National Labour Policy of Bangladesh 2012, Bangladesh Labour (amendment) Act 2013, and Bangladesh Labour Rule 2015.

"Thirty-four types of work are classified as hazardous according to the labour regulations, and operating machines with moving parts is one of them," said Jafrul Hasan.

They also cannot work after 7:00pm, says the law.

All of the missing children were working the afternoon-evening shift, and were working between 8 to 12 hours a day, according to testimonials from their families.

Md Salauddin, the factory's admin officer, had previously told this newspaper, "The issue about the age of the workers is wrong. They were hired after reviewing the relevant documents. If the age is less, it is the workers who tampered with the documents."

But no amount of tampered papers can make Shimu Akhter's tiny 12-year-old daughter Shanta Moni look like an 18-year-old. She frantically searched the long corridors of DMCH peering into every single children's ward.

"This was her third day at work.

Her father died seven years ago, and she used to be in class 4 in a madrasa, but stopped studying because it was closed. They were going to give her Tk 5,500 per month for making lollipops. She used to work on the third floor," said Shimu.

Shimu refused to believe that her daughter was dead. "Please take me to where the living children are, she must be there," she implored.

Fifteen-year-old Nazmul used to be a ninth grader before the pandemic struck, and had only been working for a month, informed his brother Mobarok Hossain.

"School is closed, and our father is a farmer, so he thought of earning some money during this time," said Mobarok. "He used to make Nocilla."

Thirteen-year-old Moni broke down while describing how her 16-year-old sister Shahana died.

"We used to work at the same factory compound, just different buildings. She made Nocilla and has

been working at the factory for three years. Because she was young, she was not given the night shift, but rather the evening shift," said Moni. "They locked my sister in and killed her," she sobbed.

16-year-old Hima Akhter was a class five drop-out, and had been working in the factory for three years, said her sister Arjina. "She used to work the chocolate machines, the one that packages chocolates into containers."

According to the labour law, it is illegal to have children operate machines, and for this hazardous work, the girl used to get Tk 5,600 per month.

Hima's cousin, 14-year-old Taktia used to be in the same line as her and is missing.

"Their factory's licence was renewed two months back. How did the authorities renew the licence of a factory employing children?" said Jafrul Hasan.

A chronicle of corporate greed foretold

FROM PAGE 1

There is no fire marshal to take charge. Supervisors, who could possibly help, have been guilty of ordering workers not to leave.

Only under a live fire situation, shrieking workers and children find out that there are no working fire extinguishers, no water or sand are available. Sprinklers are unheard of.

As the fire engulfs them, workers and children try to escape. They find out in horror that the exit door is locked, that the windows are secured with grilles, and that the stairs are inaccessible, each a violation of existing legislation. Finding the heat and billowing smoke unbearable and escape by stairs impossible, jumping to their deaths was inevitable.

The familiar series continues with the quick declaration by the authority that "the building was unauthorised", as if it was built the night before. Many

similar unapproved buildings exist but the government agencies concerned are not interested since they are not on fire yet.

As in the case of Rana Plaza collapse 2013, when 1,134 people died, despite a warning of the impending danger the day before, the Rugganj factory was reportedly on fire 15 days ago, but no one paid heed.

All warnings, however insignificant, should be taken seriously. Working conditions should first and foremost adopt expert advice. Liability should not be considered. Putting employees in danger due to business people's interests is a culpable offence.

Owners and their responsible representatives, and authorities concerned, manage to escape punishment. That is the reason behind a culture of unsafe working conditions at the cost of sacrificing the needy

segment of our population.

The allegation of underage workers in this factory and elsewhere should be thoroughly investigated, and the guilty charged under the law. Employers should be motivated not to confuse between a commercial undertaking and slavery.

Let investigators unearth the cause of the disaster at Rugganj, and find out the way forward. Equally important is to inspect all other buildings across the country, even by self-checking.

Let local volunteers search for unauthorised buildings and unsafe conditions, fire hazards and unsafe structure, and report to the local elected officials, media and the police. We have to approach the frightening threat on building safety on a war footing.

The author is a practising architect. He introduced Fire Safety as part of a course at BUET in 1988.

Sylhet wakes up to family planning

FROM PAGE 1

Sunamganj, where religious orthodoxy, inaccessible transportation system, illiteracy and social propaganda by rural midwives against family planning reign supreme.

One such example is Mafia Begum of Dariapara village in Madhyanagar of Dharmapasha upazila of Sunamganj.

Last year, at the age of 18, she had a stillbirth at home even though it is widely known that being pregnant as a teenager puts girls at higher risk of complications during childbirth.

She is pregnant again and has not made any antenatal visits to the local community clinic or family welfare assistant due to the reluctance of her husband and mother-in-law.

Similarly, Nazia Sultana of Haripur area of Jaintapur upazila of Sylhet, is a mother of three after she was wedded off at the age of 16 and will most likely have more children given the lack of family planning for reasons pertaining to restrictions from family and religion.

A report last month of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics also revealed that the Contraceptive Prevalence Rate (CPR)

was the lowest (32.7 percent) among the women of the Sylhet division.

The family planning situation is comparatively worse among tea workers, so is the total fertility rate, unmet needs, maternal deaths and stillbirth, said Binoy Sing Rowtia, a health assistant at Sreemangal Upazila Health Complex.

The situation used to be worse in the past, said Rowtia, who has been working on this issue in Sreemangal for the past 10 years.

The tea workers are not interested in hospital delivery, as they consider the arrangements needed for transport, blood, and medicine to be a hassle.

They largely depend on the local midwives, although most of them are not trained.

"When complications arise, they bring them to the hospitals, often with nothing left in our hands," he said, adding that superstition and phobia prevent them from going to health facilities from the onset.

Besides, most of the men have a lack of interest in using condoms, Rowtia added.

"Religious orthodoxy is so prevalent in this area that we cannot go to any house and talk about family planning directly," said Fauzia Begum, family welfare assistant in Hariapur area of Jaintapur upazila in Sylhet.

They try to segue the matter after educating on children's health, vaccinations and so on but are stopped in their tracks.

"They use the excuse of religion," she said.

In terms of haor areas of Sunamganj, Halima Akhter, family welfare assistant at Sreepur South Union Family Planning and Health Centre, said they face huge difficulties in reaching remote villages in Tanguar Haor areas by boat during the monsoon as there is a constant fear of accidents due to the storm surge.

And in the dry season, they need to spend a good amount on transportation from their salaries.

The government should take timely and need-based intervention for people of tea workers, who are ostracised from the mainstream society, and haor areas, said Pulak Raha, team leader at Advance Family Planning initiative.

Air heaviest

FROM PAGE 1

Visiting the factory building yesterday. The Daily Star found that the fire virtually reduced the 34,000 square feet structure to rubble.

A sign on the wall of the factory building read -- "Central Store". But this newspaper found the structure to be more like a "cage" than a store where the authorities used to keep the workers locked at each floor.

"Each of the section was separated by iron grills. This was done so that employees couldn't steal the produce -- juice, vermicelli, chocolates and so on," said a worker of the factory, wishing not to be named.

These correspondents found locks on the first, third, and fourth floors.

On the ground floor, packaging materials were piled up beside machineries. Biscuits used to be produced on the first floor, soft drinks on the second, and lollipops, Nocilla (chocolate spread), and chocolates on the third floor. The fourth floor was used as a store and also for producing semai (vermicelli). Chanachur used to be made on the fifth floor.

All the floors were filled with plastic materials which intensified the fire, according to fire officials.

A team of Electronic Safety and Security Association of Bangladesh (Essab) visited the building yesterday. It was astonished to find that no minimal fire safety measures were in place.

Essab Vice President Mohammad Monzur Alam said, "All the basic safety rules have been violated here. There is no fire safety door, hydrants, and evacuation plan in place. It seems that the authorities did not follow any safety plan. There's a barrier on each of the floors. Each of the section is locked behind grills."

Parvez, who used to work on the second floor, shared his horrific experience with this newspaper.

"We were at work on Thursday evening when the fire broke out. As the fire spread to the ground floor, all started screaming. It was like hell. When we tried to exit the building using the first staircase, we saw fire there. Some of us were very lucky to be able to come out using the second staircase. Many got trapped inside and some later jumped off the building," said Parvez.

"On the third floor, the gate to the second exit was locked. The fire was razing all around within a very short time," he added.

Yesterday, there was no crowd around the factory building as police barred visitors from getting close to it. Only some journalists were allowed in.

Firefighters were still busy pouring water on piles of burnt packaging materials as smoke was billowing from those even 40 hours after the fire broke out.

The walls of the building turned black. From the first to the fifth floor, ashes were the only thing left there.

A portion of the fourth floor has collapsed on the third floor.

Security guard Nur Alam said, "Several hundred people used to come to the factory every day. Now the building stands like a skeleton. Everything has burnt into ashes. For whom will I provide security now?"

Meanwhile, the fire service last evening announced the end of their rescue operation.

"There are no more bodies inside. Moreover, there is no fire or smoke. There are different types of combustible materials in the building. So, if any fire originates again, we will come here and take necessary measures," said Debashish Bardhan, deputy director (operation and maintenance) of the Fire Service and Civil Defense.

He said the building did not have approval from the fire service. "We provide fire safety plan for factory buildings. There was no plan for it."

Nahid Murad, manager (accounts) of the factory, told The Daily Star that they instructed security personnel not to let any outsiders in.

England face Italy

FROM PAGE 1

Wembley, which was also the venue for England's 1966 World Cup triumph, will host around 65,000 fans for the game despite coronavirus restrictions still in place.

England began the tournament as one of several contenders to lift the trophy and have taken advantage of playing all but one of their matches at home.

Southgate's men will be willed on by the vast majority of a crowd that created a crackling atmosphere for England's second-round match against Germany and the semi-final against Denmark.

Standing in England's way are a battle-hardened Italy side who have restored the nation's pride after failing even to qualify for the 2018 World Cup.

England have never beaten Italy at a major tournament, although meetings between the nations have been few and far between.

Italy triumphed in a penalty shoot-out in the quarter-finals of Euro 2012 in Ukraine and won 2-1 when they met in the group stage of the 2014 World Cup, although both sides ended up being eliminated in the first round.

Both teams have been transformed since then.

The Azzurri have lit up Euro 2020 ever since beating Turkey 3-0 in the opening game a month ago.

They are on a national record 33-match unbeaten run under coach Roberto Mancini, who has spent time in England both as a player and as a manager.

Italy had the backing of around 11,000 British-based fans at the semi-final and their supporters will once again be there for the final.