

BANGLADESH UPDATE



3,991
New cases in 24hrs



14,57,198
Total cases



25,143
Deaths



13,55,421
Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE



4,433,556
Deaths



211,887,038
Total cases

NEW LABOUR MARKET BECKONS Migrants fly to Seychelles

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

As many as 121 migrant workers have left the country on Friday for East African nation Seychelles, which emerged as a new market opportunity for Bangladesh in recent years.

The migrant workers, at least 25 of whom were new workers, left Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport (HSIA) in a chartered flight, said Fakhru Alam, assistant director of Expatriates' Welfare Desk set up at the airport by Expatriates' Welfare Ministry.

The new workers have got "approvals" for their employment in Seychelles from the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET), Fakhru told this newspaper by phone yesterday.

On the other hand, most of the old workers had come home on vacation at different times but got stranded due to flight suspensions amid the pandemic, he said.

An archipelago in the Indian ocean, Seychelles signed an "agreement on labour cooperation" with Bangladesh in 2019.

The agreement stipulates the recruitment of skilled workers.

Talking with media at HSIA on Friday, BMET Director General Shahidul Alam said following the agreement signing in 2019, many Bangladeshi workers have gone to the East African country maintaining due government procedure.

Due to shutdown situation, workers' travel to Seychelles remained suspended for about five months, he told ProbashBarta, an online portal.

The DG said to have employment in Seychelles, Bangladeshi migrant

workers do not have to spend money since Seychellois employers provide the necessary costs.

He said Bangladeshi workers have already been employed in Seychelles from earlier.

However, employment opportunities there for Bangladeshis have been strengthened following the 2019 agreement, he added.

He said they have been proactively promoting Seychelles' job market and encouraging aspirant migrant workers to seek employment there.

A process is underway to form a "joint working group" between the two countries. Once the working group is formed, it will be easier to look after the wellbeing of Bangladeshi migrant workers there, he added.

According to Seychelles Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs website, the 2019 agreement is the first of its kind between the two countries. It will be in place for a period of four years and renewable.

Under the agreement, Bangladesh Overseas Employment Services Limited, the state-run recruiting agent, and BMET are entitled to manage the whole recruitment process.

Seychelles imposed a moratorium on the recruitment of Bangladeshi workers there in October 2018, preventing local employers from sourcing their employees from Bangladesh, said a report of Seychelles Nation, a daily newspaper.

More than 1,600 Bangladeshi were recorded to be working in Seychelles as of August 2019, mostly in the construction and agricultural sectors, the report said.



Thanks to dumping of waste by nearby textile and garment factories, the water has turned dark in a canal dug under the Narayanganj-Narsingdi Irrigation Project to help local farmers. The photo was taken recently in Borabo area by the Dhaka-Sylhet highway.

PHOTO:
ANISUR RAHMAN

Do users really need those?

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interesting than Facebook. Otherwise, I'm not sure," he said.

Fahim Mashroor, chief executive officer of popular job-hunting site Bdjobs, said it would be difficult to create value for these local apps when the majority of the users consider platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp their go-to social media platforms.

"... it would be hard for the new apps to form a broader user base," said Fahim.

While making the announcement a few weeks ago, ICT State Minister Zunaid Ahmed Palak touted that entrepreneurs of the country would be able to create their own online marketplaces and groups for information, data and communication via "Jogajog" and "Alapon".

"Jogajog" is in its planning stage. The budget and the timeline for the project is yet to be approved by the planning ministry, said sources working closely with this project.

Subrata Kumar Roy, an official at the Controller of Certifying Authority (CCA), the government organisation in charge of developing the social media platforms, could not give a time frame as to when these might be available to the public.

Sources in the CCA say that the platforms would reduce dependence on foreign social media platforms, protect national and local data and help prop up the local IT sector.

Tarique M Barkatullah, project director at Bangladesh Government's e-Government Computer Incident Response Team, BGD e-GOV CIRT, said his team at CIRT was developing a prototype of "Alapon" from scratch alongside the CCA.

"We hope to have a working prototype ready in three months and then we will present it to the ICT division for consideration. The ICT division can then go forward with our or CCA's version of the platform," said Tarique.

He said they were exploring possibilities of integrating payment systems within "Alapon", like WeChat

has done. "We may also partner with existing MFS [mobile financial services] if an independent integrated payment system proves too difficult to sustain."

EXPERTS ON THE FENCE

As of May 2021, the number of Facebook users in Bangladesh was 47.2 million, nearly 28 percent of the total population, according to NapoleonCat, a Poland-based social media management platform.

Other social media platforms including Instagram, WhatsApp and LinkedIn are also seeing an increasing user base in Bangladesh.

Experts believe that local platforms will gain little foothold in the country. Fahim of Bdjobs said, "The government can play the role of a patron, but the initiative has to come from the private sector."

Asked whether people would actually move to these local platforms, Tarique of CIRT said, "If people are given access to a superior product, they will definitely switch."

Shantanu Majumder, associate professor at the Department of Political Science, University of Dhaka, said, "If the masses think of these initiatives to be a manifestation of 'big brother is watching you', they will not subscribe to it, and the government cannot force it on them."

"The market is wide open, let there be a level-playing field and the market will decide for itself," he said.

"I think these platforms can play a positive role when it comes to the proper dissemination of information across people of all backgrounds. It would also be undesirable if the government uses these platforms to protect its image. Using these platforms to generate pro-government propaganda would also decrease the possibility of these platforms being accepted in the market," he added.

NOT THE FIRST

Launch of local variants of popular social media platforms is not new in Bangladesh or the world.

The government had launched "Boithok", as an alternative to Zoom and Google Meets, which is being

extensively beta tested in government virtual meetings.

"Boithok" is a repurposed white-label product but its future development is being done mostly in-house.

The government is expecting its roll out for all government offices by September of this year and to the public on the Victory Day.

China has been able to replace Facebook and WhatsApp with WeChat, made by Tencent in 2011, but that is largely credited to the Great Firewall which banned services of Facebook and Google.

However, providers of VPN services that can bypass the firewall have been doing good business in China.

Earlier this year, Mexico's President Andrés Manuel López Obrador also proposed the creation of state-owned social media to "create opportunities for startups".

However, human rights groups criticised the move as a way to suppress political dissent.

State-owned messenger, streaming platforms and browsers are not an alien concept and several countries have implemented them for their citizens.

MORE ON THE WAY

Currently, the Bangladesh government has several other platforms on its agenda. Aspire To Innovate (a2i) programme has proposed the development of a local IPTV/OTT (over the top) platform to compete with Netflix and YouTube under the brand name "Dream Stream".

According to documents that The Daily Star has obtained, the plan is to develop the platform edutainment focused with options for uploading content of local creators. The business model will be similar to Netflix (subscription) and YouTube (Advertisement).

The CCA has also been working on a local search engine as well as a browser since early this year.

The feasibility studies for these projects are almost done and they are waiting for the policymakers' nod to enter the development stage.

Country sees lowest daily Covid deaths in 51 days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The health directorate has reported that 152 people died of Covid-19 in 24 hours ending at 8:00am yesterday, which is the lowest daily death count in the last 51 days.

One hundred and fifteen people were reported dead on June 30, shows data from the Directorate general of health Services (DGHS).

The data also shows that coronavirus deaths this week, ending yesterday, dropped by 27 percent compared to the previous week. The numbers are 1,155 and 1,577 respectively.

During the same period, the number of Covid-19 cases has also declined by around 35 percent. A total of 44,976 patients tested positive for the viral infection this week compared to 68,822 the previous week.

In the 24 hours, a total of 3,991 people tested positive after 23,882 samples were tested. The positivity rate was 16.71 percent -- the lowest in more than two months.

The positivity rate is an important parameter to measure the level of virus transmission. According to the World Health Organization, the transmission will be considered under control if the positivity rate remains stagnant below five percent continuously for at least two weeks.

After this wave of Covid-19 started from the second week of March this year, the positivity rate started galloping and reached the highest 33 percent on July 24.

Since August 2, this rate has been going down steadily.

With the latest counts, the total number of deaths due to Covid-19 rose to 25,143 while the number of confirmed cases to 14,57,194.

In the 24 hours, 7,666 patients recovered from their illnesses, raising the number of recovery cases to 13,55,421, which is more than 93 percent of all cases detected so far.

Of the yesterday's deceased, 69 were males and 51 were females.

Of them, 40 were in Dhaka division followed by 27 in Chattogram, 15 in Khulna, 13 in Sylhet, seven in Mymensingh, six in Barishal and three in Rangpur division.

On March 8 last year, the DGHS reported the first three cases while the first death was reported on March 18.

Fire sparks gridlocks

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were really worried about missing their flight," he told The Daily Star.

Additional Deputy Commissioner (Gulshan) Zakir Hossain of Dhaka Metropolitan Police said traffic police tried to ease the congestion in Gulshan, Banani and Mahakhali by diverting vehicles towards the Badda and cantonment areas.

Firefighters said owners of the commercial building that caught fire did not follow the fire safety rules.

"The firefighting system in the building is inadequate. There's almost nothing," Lt Col Zillur Rahman, director (operations) of the Fire Service and Civil Defence told reporters at the site.

It is an old building and the National Building Code was not followed. There were no basic arrangements like a water reservoir or fire exits, he added.

The fire originated at the warehouse of Amecon Art Decor on the second floor of the six-storey building. Fifteen fire engines doused it around 4:30pm.

Luckily, no one was trapped inside during the fire as it was relatively empty on the weekend. The fire did not spread to other floors as firefighters contained the blaze.

Lt Col Zillur said the warehouse where the fire broke out contained materials that created heavy smoke that "made our job difficult".

An investigation has been launched to ascertain the cause of the fire.

Ashrafuzzaman, accounts officer at Amecon, said the warehouse employees saw smoke when they came to work and informed the firefighters.

"Electrical short-circuits could have caused the fire," he said.

Visiting the spot, Dhaka North City Corporation Mayor Atiqul Islam said, "It's an old building that used to house garment factories."

He added that trade licences of the businesses housed on the building would be suspended.

Carried out with patronage

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and gave them a safe passage to flee abroad.

Sheikh Hasina made the allegation while addressing a discussion marking the August 21, 2004 grenade attack.

The Awami League organised the event at its Bangabandhu Avenue central office. The prime minister attended the event virtually from her official residence the Gono Bhaban.

"No one dared to dream that there would be a grenade attack [on the rally] attempting to kill [me] in broad daylight," she said.

Recalling the barbaric carnage, Sheikh Hasina alleged that then prime minister Khaleda Zia and her government staged grenade attack as killing is their habit.

She said that Bangabandhu killers Dalim and Rashid were among those criminals while the other two were militant Tajul and one jailer.

After the attack, she said, police lobbed teargas shells and charged baton on the AL leaders and workers instead of rescuing the victims.

Hasina said even BNP-Jamaat-backed doctors did not attend the injured AL leaders and activists at Dhaka Medical College Hospital and no patient was allowed to enter Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Medical University.

Referring to some remarks made by Khaleda Zia before the grisly grenade attack and planting of twin bombs -- one of 76kg and another of 84kg -- in Kotalipara, the prime minister said, "Before every attack, Khaleda Zia used to say the Awami League won't be able to go to power in 100 years. And right

before the grenade attack, she said even Sheikh Hasina would never be the leader of the opposition," she said.

The then government destroyed the evidence of the gruesome attack while an army officer faced trouble as he wanted to preserve an unexploded grenade used in the attack, she said. "They tried to erase all the evidences of the attack."

"And all know about a staged drama by the government," she said, pointing to the Joj Mia issue which was later proved false.

The prime minister said the then ruling BNP-Jamaat government did not allow the AL to discuss the matter in Parliament although many of the injured were MPs and she was the leader of the opposition.

Referring to the ongoing pandemic, she said that the government always remains beside the people of the country as it strictly follows the ideology of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

"Inshallah, we will be able to establish developed and prosperous Golden Bangladesh that was dreamt by the Father of the Nation," she said.

AL presidium member Matia Chowdhury, general secretary Obaidul Quader, joint secretary Hassan Mahmud, AL central working committee member Mostafa Jalal Mohiuddin, organising secretary SM Kamal Hossain, Dhaka South Unit of Awami League president Abu Ahmed Mannafi and Dhaka North Unit of Awami League president Sheikh Bazul Rahman also spoke at the programme joined by senior leaders of the party.

Taliban co-founder

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adds to scattered indications of opposition to the Taliban who swept to power in a lightning campaign that saw them take all of Afghanistan's main cities in a week.

Local television station Tolo News quoted a local police commander who said Bano district in Baghlan was under the control of local militia forces and said there had been heavy casualties.

Former Vice President Amrullah Saleh and Massoud, the son of the late, famed anti-Taliban commander Ahmad Shah Massoud, have vowed to resist the Taliban from Panjshir, which repelled both Soviet forces and the Taliban in the 1980s and 1990s.

People close to Massoud say that more than 6,000 fighters, made up of remnants of army and Special Forces units as well as local militia groups, have gathered in the valley. They say they have some helicopters and military vehicles and have repaired some of the armoured vehicles left behind by the Soviets.

The Panjshir Valley remains the only holdout against the Taliban after the hardline Islamists took control of Afghanistan.

But yesterday, pro-Taliban social media feeds posted a video of Khalil Haqqani of the Haqqani network claiming Massoud's son had "declared allegiance" to the new Islamic emirate.

There has been no statement from Massoud.

The Taliban have promised "positively different" rule from their 1996-2001 stint in power, which was infamous for an ultra-fundamentalist interpretation of Islamic law.

Women were excluded from public

life, girls banned from school and people stoned to death for adultery.

They have vowed not to seek revenge, promising a general amnesty for anyone who worked with the US-backed government.

But an intelligence document for the United Nations said militants were going door-to-door hunting former government officials and those who worked with US and Nato forces.

While searching for a Deutsche Welle journalist, the Taliban shot dead his uncle, the German public broadcaster reported.

Six days after the Taliban swept to power, the flow of people trying to flee continued to overwhelm the international community.

Roads leading to Kabul airport were choked with traffic. Families hoping for a miracle escape crowded between the barbed-wire surrounds of an unofficial no man's land separating the Taliban from US troops and remnants of an Afghan special forces brigade helping them.

Video of a US soldier lifting a baby over a wall at Kabul airport offered the latest imagery of the utter despair, following horror footage of people hanging onto the outside of departing planes.

"Please, please, please help me... where should I go, what should I do," one man, who said he worked for the US embassy in the mid-2000s, wrote on a WhatsApp group for people to share information on how to get out.

Thousands of US soldiers are at the airport trying to shepherd foreigners and Afghans onto flights, but President Joe Biden admitted the troop presence offered no guarantees of safe passage.

Barishal AL, admin at odds

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Sadiq yesterday claimed innocence and demanded a judicial enquiry into the incident.

"We want to see the full video [of CCTV cameras] of the incident. We want a free and fair investigation to find out whether my party men or I did anything wrong," he told a press conference at his home in Barishal city.

Wishing not to be named, a senior AL leader told The Daily Star, "Most of our party men in the city are aggrieved and in fear. As if we were from the opposition party... We have to be on the run although our very own party is in power."

Some ruling party men alleged that police were harassing them.

"Saddam Hussein, a former vice-president of the city unit of Chhatra League, died six months ago. But police have raided his house over Wednesday's incident," said Mizanur Rahman, cultural affairs secretary of the Barishal City Awami League.

BCL activist Abdur Razzak claimed that he was in Dhaka when the violence took place. But he was accused in a case filed by police.

Asked, Barishal Metropolitan Police (BNP) Commissioner Md Shahabuddin Khan said no one was being harassed.

"No innocent will be dragged into the cases," he said.

Police have so far arrested 22 people, mostly AL men, in connection with the violence, said Nurul Islam, officer-in-charge (OC) of Barishal's Kotwali Police Station.

Tension was prevailing in the city as people feared more violence in case the mayor, prime accused in the cases, gets arrested.

"We have been in fear since the violence on Wednesday night," said Shah Sajeda, convener of the Barishal Sacheton Nagorik Committee.

In the last two days, many shops in the city's Hospital Road, C&B Road and adjacent areas were partially closed.

"I have invested several lakh Taka in my business. I can't take any risk by keeping the shutter of my shop open," said the owner of a furniture store in the C&B area.

A rumour spread yesterday that Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) would be deployed in the city, causing further alarm.

Barishal Divisional Commissioner Md Saiful Hassan Badal said the situation did not warrant BGB deployment.

Meanwhile, garbage heaps were seen on the streets as the city corporation had not cleaned them since the violence.

Sources at the city corporation said most of the cleaners were AL activists and they haven't joined work to avoid arrest.

The BCC mayor in the press conference yesterday asked all city corporation staffers to resume work. He also urged police not to harass them.

Around noon yesterday, over 100 BCC staffers formed a human chain in front of Ashwani Kumar Hall

demanding withdrawal of the cases against the mayor.

They also threatened to abstain from work if the cases were not withdrawn.

Meanwhile, mayors of some municipalities and chairmen of some upazila parishads of different districts in Barishal division held two separate press conferences at the Barishal club and demanded withdrawal of the cases against Sadiq.

US Supreme Court temporarily blocks reinstatement of Trump-era immigration policy

REUTERS, Washington

A US Supreme Court justice on Friday temporarily blocked a lower court ruling that would require Democratic President Joe Biden to reinstate a contentious immigration policy implemented by his Republican predecessor, Donald Trump.

The brief order by conservative Justice Samuel Alito puts the litigation on hold while the high court considers how to handle the Biden administration's request seeking to impose a longer-term block on the judge's ruling that would require the government to revive the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) program.