

Labour migration in slow lane

JAMIL MAHMUD

Sending migrant workers abroad continued to remain inadequate amid the pandemic compared to what the situation was during pre-pandemic times, which posed a challenge for the labour migration sector.

About 8.81 lakh migrant workers, with an average of 58,758 per month, were sent abroad in 15 months from January, 2019 to March last year, says Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) data.

But the number of new overseas employment dropped to 2.84 lakh or 16,731 per month in 17 months from April last year to August this year, according to the data.

Bangladesh stopped sending new workers abroad in late of March last year, with closure of international flights, following detection of the first Covid-19 positive cases in the country.

In the next three months -- from April to June last year -- not a single new worker was sent abroad. Later, sending workers resumed in July last year, but the monthly average continued to remain low.

The government has a target to send at least seven lakh workers abroad annually.

Sector insiders said shutdown to contain Covid-19 affected the sector badly, as activities regarding visa processing and

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- Labour migration from country stopped late March 2020 due to Covid-19
- Sending workers abroad resumed in July 2020



JAN 2019 TO MAR 2020
8.81 lakh workers sent abroad
58,758 per month on average
APRIL 2020 TO AUG 2021
2.84 lakh workers sent abroad
16,731 per month on average

- Covid-19 restrictions
- Less demand from employers
- No timely inoculation



The ripples created by larger launches are often a reason why smaller dinghy capsizes in the Buriganga river. Near Sadarghat's Babu Bazar Bridge, these launches rush to the dock at high speeds, often running very close to other vessels, which could lead to disasters at a much larger scale. This photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

BANGLADESH, UK

Two-day strategic dialogue starts today

PORIMOL PALMA

Bangladesh and UK will hold a two-day strategic dialogue beginning today. It will cover political, diplomatic, trade and development relationship between the two countries in the post-Brexit era.

Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen and UK Permanent Under-Secretary of Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) Sir Philip Barton will lead the respective delegations in the meeting in London.

Masud Bin Momen arrived in London last night, while UK High Commissioner to Bangladesh Robert Chatterton Dickson had arrived there

MAJOR ISSUES TO BE DISCUSSED

- Extension of UK's zero-duty GSP facility until 2029
- More foreign investments
- Efficient visa regime for Bangladeshis
- Afghanistan situation
- More pressure on Myanmar on Rohingya repatriation
- Humanitarian assistance for refugees
- Climate change related assistance, compensation

for the dialogue on Tuesday.

This is the fourth Bangladesh-UK Strategic Dialogue, an annual meet of the two countries held alternatively in Dhaka and London. However, this year's iteration comes after a break, as the dialogue could not be held last year due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

In the dialogue, the UK will congratulate Bangladesh on its golden jubilee of independence, according to diplomatic sources.

It will also laud the contribution of British Bangladeshis, especially in the UK's health sector, where a significant number of doctors and nurses are of Bangladeshi origins. There are about 600,000 British Bangladeshis in the UK, making people to people

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'What was his crime?'

Wife of Jhumon, who is still in jail in DSA case, demands justice

DU CORRESPONDENT

Professionals, including teachers, lawyers, journalists and cultural activists, yesterday demanded immediate release of Jhumon Das Apon, who has been in jail for over five months, after being accused under Digital Security Act (DSA).

Udichi Shilpogoshi organised programmes across the country, mainly at the capital's Shahbagh, where they demanded justice for him.

At the event, Jhumon's wife Sweetie Das asked, "Why is my husband not getting bail? What was his crime?"

"He is the only earner in my family. Though I am sick and helpless, I've come here to say that criminals who attacked, looted and vandalised our village are roaming around fearlessly."

Adding that she was going through a hard time with her baby girl, she sought the prime minister's attention in this regard.

Jamshed Anwar Tapan, president of Udichi, presided over the event, where Jashore University of Science and Technology teacher Abhinu Kibria, Barrister Imtiaz Mahmood and Udichi joint secretary Sangeeta Imam, spoke.

Jamshed urged the government to release Jhumon and abolish DSA.

In his Facebook post, Jhumon criticised Hefajat leader Mamunul Haque. The post allegedly led to the mayhem in Noagaon village of Sunamganj's Shalla upazila on March 17, which saw about 90 Hindu houses vandalised and looted.

VACCINATION DRIVE

Are transgender people left out?

NILIMA JAHAN

Getting tested and vaccinated for Covid-19 was no less than a trauma for Tanisha Yasmin Chaity, a young transwoman and a development worker based in Cox's Bazar.

Chaity's biological sex is male, and she was registered with the birth name Mamun Mollah in her national identity card, long before the government recognised the third gender in 2013. She now identifies herself as a woman, which creates problems everywhere.

For example, last month, after registering for the Covid-19 vaccine at Teknaf Upazila Complex, she went to get her first dose and stood in the

- No special arrangements for transgender people
- They face harassment when they go for jobs as gender identity does not match the sex denoted in birth certificates, NIDs
- Many do not have NIDs
- Many lack access to education, mobile devices
- Turned away from centres during mass vaccination drive

"Other people in the queue were taunting me, as if I was not a human being and did not have the right to get vaccinated."

TANISHA YASMIN CHAITY, A DEVELOPMENT WORKER

female queue after submitting her card. She felt anxious that something untoward was going to happen, as other women in the queue looked uncomfortable in her presence.

"At one point, I heard the staff calling 'Mamun Mollah', and I went to him to receive my card. But the staffer was very astonished with my female appearance and made me wait for a long time, considering it a special case," said Chaity.

Chaity, an educated transgender youth, who works with more than 500 gender diverse populations of Cox's Bazar, as a mental health and psycho-social counsellor, tried to convince the staff that she is a transwoman, who identifies herself as female.

"But I found the staffer was unaware of the word transgender and asked me what it was. Later, I told him that I belong to the hijra community, and a high-risk group for Covid-19, as I mingle with a large number of gender diverse people regularly," said Chaity.

"After that, he asked me whether I have the permission to get vaccinated. Other people in the queue were taunting me as if I was not a human being and did not have the right to get vaccinated," she recalled.

"After yelling at him, when I finally went to the women to take the vaccine, the scene was repeated. Once again, I felt like an alien. At one point, I had to bring the first person, who explained the whole thing to her and only then was I finally able to get my first dose," she said.

But according to Chaity, if an educated transwoman like her had to go through such a humiliating situation, the ordinary hijras -- who are mostly uneducated and unaware of their rights, and make a living by extorting money from commuters or shopkeepers, performing Badhaai (a custom of conferring blessings on a newborn by singing and dancing) or engaging in sex work or other casual jobs -- will not opt for the vaccine, considering the humiliation and hassle.

Chaity's fear was real, because of the 100 transgender people of Teknaf upazila she works with, only one of them was vaccinated so far, while another just registered for the jab.

It is difficult to know exactly how many trans people have been vaccinated so far in Bangladesh, as the

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Tobacco companies using loopholes to promote products

Says a recent survey

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Taking advantage of loopholes in the law, tobacco companies are providing materials to vendors in different formats to promote their products, according to a recent survey.

Voices for Interactive Choice and Empowerment (VOICE), a rights-based research and advocacy platform, organised a meeting yesterday to disseminate the findings of its study with National Tobacco Control Cell (NTCC) of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

"Tobacco companies take advantage of a provision which does not specifically mention a ban on displaying products at retail shops," said Zayed Siddiki, project coordinator of VOICE, in his keynote speech.

He said the companies strategically pressurise vendors to display advertisement and promotional materials. Financial and non-cash incentives are provided at all levels of distribution.

Promotional materials include stickers, posters, branded lighters, stands displaying

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'Our situation could be like that of Afghanistan'

Warns Shahriar Kabir about dangers of fundamentalism

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh might face dire consequences, if a mass cultural movement cannot be waged against fundamentalism, said Ekattorer Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Committee President Shahriar Kabir yesterday.

"If the influence of 'Taliban culture' cannot be deterred in Bangabandhu's secular Bangladesh, then our situation could be like that of Afghanistan someday," he said, while addressing a webinar.

The cultural squad of Ekattorer Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Committee organised the webinar -- "Cultural Movement against Fundamentalism," said a press release of the committee.

Addressing the webinar, Shahriar Kabir, also a noted war crimes researcher, said the traditional secular culture of Bangladesh and free-thinking have repeatedly been attacked by the fundamentalist group that committed genocide and "legitimised" rape of women during the country's Liberation War in 1971.

This group assassinated Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975 and is now making ill-effort to drive Bangladesh's society, culture and politics towards fundamentalism, he said.

He said their political and ideological successors are the Taliban, Al-Qaeda and IS of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the Middle East.

When the Taliban assumed power in Afghanistan for the first time 25 years ago, they banned everything in Afghan culture including music, dance, theatre, arts and film and encaged Afghan women within the four walls, he said.

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