

Pandemic delays minimum wage for tea, jute mill workers



SECTOR	YEAR OF LAST REVISION	CATEGORY	BASIC PAY (TK)	TOTAL (TK)
Private jute mill	2013	Worker	2,700	4,380
		Employee	3,200	5,400
Printing press	2011	Worker	3,000	4,450
		Employee	4,000	5,800
Tea garden		Worker Tk 102 (daily)		
Security service		Fixation of new wage underway		

SOHEL PARVEZ

The wait for workers of four sectors, including private jute mills and tea gardens, for new wages has gotten longer as the fixation of their minimum wages was halted following the authorities' unwillingness to join physical meetings amid the pandemic.

The minimum wage board under the labour and employment ministry in a notice last week said it could not carry out activities to fix a minimum wage for workers in private jute mills, tea gardens, printing press and security services from March 26 to May 30 due to the general holiday.

"Considering the current situation, members of the board have expressed disinclination to attend meetings. The dates of meetings will be fixed and all will be informed accordingly once the coronavirus situation improves and normalcy returns," the board said in the notice.

This disclosure comes at a time when tens of thousands of workers, including nearly 150,000 employed in private jute mills and 140,000 in tea gardens, are waiting to get new wages.

The minimum wage for workers at the private jute mills is Tk 4,380 per month with Tk 2,700 being their basic pay -- which

is one-third of the minimum wage fixed by the government for workers at state-run mills, including jute.

Meanwhile, tea workers get Tk 102 per day now along with 3,270 grams of rice or wheat flour, said Rambhajan Kairi, general secretary of the Bangladesh Tea Workers Union.

"Workers are living from hand to mouth. We want the government to take a special initiative to declare minimum wages for us," he said.

Kairi, who represents tea workers on the board, said tea gardens were not shut even for a day because of the coronavirus.

"Workers are working amid risk of infection," he said, adding that the issue of fixing a minimum wage could be moved forward by holding virtual meetings as not all members are willing to be present physically amid Covid-19 outbreak.

"A number of big decisions are being taken [by the government] through virtual meetings," said Kairi, demanding Tk 300 as daily wage for tea workers.

Shahidullah Kha, who represents jute mill workers in the private sector on the board, said he is willing to join the meeting of the wage board.

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Smart lampposts in the limelight

Edotco rolls out smart city solutions with DNCC

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

At first sight, it looks like an ordinary lamppost. But what separates it from the rest is that it, apart from lighting the area, offers high-speed telecommunications connectivity and Wi-Fi service, facilitates waste management, gives real-time air quality data and serves as digital signage for the community.

Close-circuit cameras can also be installed on it, beefing up security surveillance. The pole shows how a smart city would look like as Dhaka aspires to become one.

Embarking on making Dhaka a smart city is not just a reverie because multipurpose poles have already been set up under a joint initiative of several telecom companies and the Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC).

Edotco Bangladesh, an integrated telecommunications infrastructure services company, has deployed two such poles in Dhaka -- one in Banani and another in Gulshan-2 DCC market.

"I am committed to converting Dhaka into a smart city and we are excited to be able to deploy smart city solutions like this for the first time, giving our people a new and improved platform for social

and civil services," said DNCC Mayor Md Atiqul Islam while inaugurating the initiative during a virtual programme yesterday.

"This will not only provide excellent connectivity but also improved quality of life. This is an ideal example of PPP."

The smart lamp pole is the result of a public-private partnership (PPP) aimed at developing smart city features on a pilot basis. If the piloting succeeds, more than 200 such solutions will be put up in the DNCC area.

This would allow smartphone users to use free Wi-Fi for 20 minutes with eight megabytes per second download speed within 40 to 50 metres radius of the pole. If a user wants to consume more data, they can purchase additional time slots from internet service provider Sheba using mobile balance.

An internet of things device installed on the 36-foot tower will give information about the filing status of the smart bins located within a 100-metre radius of the pole to the DNCC monitoring centre, saying whether they are full or not.

If required, the city corporation will collect the bins or replace them with fresh ones.

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Pineapple chips, a saviour for farmers in the hills

ANVIL CHAKMA, Rangamati

Pineapple chips, an innovative and nutrition-dense snack, are currently being produced at Naniarchar upazila of Rangamati in a bid to help farmers who often do not get

a fair price because of a production glut. The local horticulture centre is producing the chips on an experimental basis under the Department of Agricultural Extension's 'Development of

nutrition through Year-Round Fruit Production (YRFP)' project. The snack has been branded as YRFP 'Ananas' chips and is being sold at Tk 30 per 50gm pack. The initiative was taken to save local farmers who have been

suffering from overproduction of the fruit in the area, said Mehdi Masud, director of the project.

Pineapple was cultivated on 2,130 hectares of land in Rangamati this year with a production target of 55,835 tonnes, according to data of the District Agricultural Extension Department.

In Naniarchar alone, the fruit rich in vitamins, enzymes and antioxidants was produced across over 1,200 hectares of land.

Various varieties of pineapples are grown on the high and low hills of the 330-square-kilometre upazila.

The most popular variety for cultivation is the famous Honey Queen pineapple due to its beautiful appearance and taste.

"We send pineapples to different districts of the country after meeting local demand," said Md Bachchu Mia, a farmer of the upazila's Bogachhari area.



ANVIL CHAKMA

Pineapple chips being made at a fruit processing unit of Naniarchar Horticulture Centre in Rangamati.

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Graduate employability matters more than ever

MD ASADUL ISLAM and ABU NASER MOHAMMAD SAIF

Universities in Bangladesh, especially the private ones, have been quite proactive in their efforts to enrol students in online classes after the University Grants Commission of Bangladesh (UGC) cleared the way for virtual admissions and education platforms.

Enrolment in digital courses was also accelerated after Education Minister Dipu Moni declared that online classes would continue for a while even after the pandemic ends.

Even now, however, most universities, both private and public, would engage in promotional activities rather than discussing their graduates' employability.

It is common in developed countries and even in emerging nations like China, Brazil, Malaysia, Turkey and Vietnam that higher educational institutes promote themselves to potential students by promising possible employment by alumni.

Most countries normally concentrate on ensuring fundamental knowledge among the students at the secondary and higher secondary levels.

However, almost all universities across the globe face pressure from their respective governments and management to create syllabuses, modules, lectures and even practical sessions in a way that prepare students for employment and possibly entrepreneurship.

The demand for skilled graduates has risen significantly due to the recent surge in global unemployment brought on by the coronavirus fallout.

With 37 per cent of the country's male graduates and 43 per cent of the female graduates already being registered as unemployed, the ongoing pandemic could drastically increase the number.

Many universities, policymakers and even academics often blame the country's lack of job opportunities, slow economic growth, government policies, political instability and so on for the high unemployment rate among the graduates.

However, making these excuses is not fair as employment is no longer restricted to



STAR/FILE

The demand for skilled graduates has risen significantly due to the recent surge in unemployment brought on by the coronavirus fallout.

physical work at offices but is now widely computerised.

Considering these changes in the society, a graduate's ability to adjust their skills and knowledge and explorative nature should be examined.

Most graduates are in the dark about the recent technological revolutions such as Industry 4.0, internet of things (IoT), cloud management, blockchain and their implications in the present and future era.

As a result, many graduates remain unemployed for several years and in some cases even end up migrating to different countries for odd jobs.

Many employed graduates are also losing jobs because of low productivity and incapability to adjust to the unexpected changes to the work environment brought on by Covid-19.

The realistic achievement from digital development over the last decades has not

reflected much on the graduates.

Therefore, universities can't deny that they had a hand in producing unproductive graduates.

Universities in Bangladesh must accept their failure to provide students with appropriate tech-based knowledge by adjusting and developing syllabus and lectures.

Producing graduates with contemporary knowledge and skills, especially tech-oriented proficiency, is inevitable for the current and

post-pandemic era.

This is because many national and multinational companies are going or bound to go online and are duly making the working processes more flexible so that any unpredictable situation in the future can be managed and overcome to meet the changed demands of consumers.

Also, companies are being urged to make their operations environmentally sustainable. So, going digital would reduce carbon emissions and pollution in populous cities like Dhaka.

Many industries are about to go digital, directly or indirectly, forcing everyone on the planet to be skilled with digital knowledge.

Microsoft is going to permanently close its retail stores while Twitter already allowed its staff to work from home permanently.

Many companies in Bangladesh are also considering whether to allow employees to stay home and work remotely.

The advancement of click and mortar business model is already under revolution in every country, eradicating the bricks and mortar type of businesses.

In response to drastic changes to economies due to the coronavirus pandemic, developed and emerging nations are concentrating on preparing their workforce with technological and sustainability knowledge and skills.

In this regard, their universities have been playing a significant role in preparing students with the skills and attitude required for a proper career amid a changing work environment.

Those countries, as well as their universities, are enjoying the advantage of skilled graduates. Malaysia is going to develop a pool of 10,000 green entrepreneurs within next two years in line with the sustainable development goals as well as economic aspirations of the country.

Most universities in Malaysia are continuously developing syllabus, teaching materials, modules and lecturers to ensure students get the right and contemporary knowledge and skills.

As a result, graduate unemployment accounted for only 8.4 per cent in Malaysia.

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