PHOTO: STAR

expansion for employment creation,

agriculture refinance scheme, and

There are 10 packages in this category

and the government allocated Tk

22,125 crore. So far, around Tk 2,237

crore has been disbursed under different

packages that benefited around 3.28

one of the packages. The government

distributed five lakh tonnes of rice and

one lakh tonne of wheat among 2.54

crore people in 496 municipalities and

Around 50 lakh families across the

"As a result, these people did not

But the progress has been slow in

The special honorarium allowance

The government has failed to provide

Free food was distributed under

traders.

crore people.

upazilas.

report.

THIRD CATEGORY



India's development linked with that of its neighbours

Indian foreign secy says wrapping up 2-day Nepal visit

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

India's development and incomplete modernisation are and intrinsically and symbiotically linked to the development and modernisation of its neighbouring countries, Indian Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla said as he wrapped up his two-day visit to Nepal yesterday.

"In our region, our South Asia, we are symbiotically linked. We need each other. India's rise, India's economic growth and India's modernisation are inextricably linked to our region and our geography," he told an event in Kathmandu.

That is why leaders from India's neighbouring countries were invited to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's swearing-in ceremony in 2014 and in 2019, he recalled.

Though made in Kathmandu, the top Indian diplomat's remarks about India and South Asia are seen in New Delhi as aimed at setting the tempo for next month's virtual summit between Modi and his Bangladeshi counterpart

The infection rate started crawling

up from mid-May and shot up to 20

According to the WHO Situation

The report says the number of new

Report, on November 23, the world

stepped into 47th epidemiological

weekly Covid-19 cases was increased by

24.1 percent compared to the previous

epidemiological week dated between

The highest weekly death -- 314

was recorded in the following 27th

Till the third week of August, the

After that the number of new infected

people started decreasing and one stage

June 22 and June 28, the report added.

infection rate remained 20 percent.

percent at the end of May.

epidemiological week.

epidemiological week.

increased by 52.8 percent.

FROM PAGE 1

week

Average daily death 27

Sheikh Hasina.

Shringla said India is on the cusp of the availability of a vaccine for novel coronavirus and assured the people of Nepal that once a vaccine is rolled out, meeting its requirements would be a priority for New Delhi.

works for India is likely to work for Nepal as well. Together, we will recover from the pandemic and together we will protect our people," he said.

India has at least five promising vaccine candidates at advanced stages of trials and dozens of sites across India are conducting vaccine trials on all ages and social groups.

The country helped Nepal in dealing with the Covid-19 outbreak, be it in the form of equipment and supplies, or ensuring uninterrupted flow of goods across the border, the foreign secretary said, adding that it also assisted in repatriating Nepalese citizens from various countries along with Indian nationals.

Yesterday, Shringla handed 2,000 vials of Remdesivir injections to the Nepalese foreign minister.

"Given our genetic profiles, what

39pc disbursed in six months others in terms of fund disbursement. anomalies over the lists of beneficiaries. An interest-free loan of Tk 10,500 On the other hand, some 2.22 lakh crore was given in two phases with firms and beneficiaries got the assistance under the three other packages -- credit

FROM PAGE 1

city hospital yesterday.

"The marginalised people in the slide below the poverty line once again has also been reduced," said the progress report prepared by the finance

The disbursement of the fund also had a positive impact on the business sector's ongoing recovery process and helped retain employment of tens of thousands of people working under different sectors, it said.

the form of low-cost loans to micro, small, medium, large industries, serviceproviders and as food security, social protection and special allowances after the pandemic-induced shutdown paralysed the economy, drying up millions of jobs and creating the new poor

The implementation of the scheme, however, has not been the same in all ctors

For example, fund disbursement rate for the export-oriented and large industries has been quick, but the progress has been slow for small and medium enterprises and farm sectors.

The finance ministry divided the 21 packages in three broad categories -- job retention, restoration of demand and maintenance of supply chain; employment creation and revitalising rural economy; and enhancing social security and food supply.

a service charge of two percent for providing salaries to workers and employees of 1,992 export-oriented refinance scheme for farmers and small industrial units for four months. The full amount was disbursed by June and an estimated 50 lakh workers got the

A police team stages a guard of honour before the coffin of thespian Aly Zaker at Muktijuddho Jadughor in the

capital's Sher-e-Bangla Nagar. The valiant freedom fighter, also an Ekushey Padak recipient, passed away at a

The support in the form of salaries helped save jobs of 50 lakh workers. As a result, the families of those workers have

A significant progress was made in dispensing the Tk 34,500 crore fund to the pandemic-hit large industries at an interest rate of nine percent, which is to be repaid equally by the borrowers and the government as subsidy.

The government announced Tk 20,000 crore as the working capital support for such businesses at an interest rate of nine percent -- four percent to be paid by the borrower and five percent by the government as subsidy.

Till last month, Tk 6,345 crore was disbursed for the sector and 41,069 firms and entrepreneurs got the loan support, said the report.

"As the disbursement rate is slower than expected, the government is

Void never FROM PAGE 1

her condolence message, recalled with profound respect Aly Zaker's contribution to the Great Liberation War and the country's art and culture arena.

"Zaker's contribution to the Great Liberation War and the country's art and culture arena will be remembered for long," the premier said.

She prayed for eternal peace of the departed soul and conveyed profound sympathy to the bereaved family.

Besides, members of the cabinet, different cultural, social and political organisations, and civil society members expressed shock at the death of Aly Zaker.

Aly Zaker was battling cancer for the last four years and was tested Covid-19 positive two days ago. Earlier, on November 17, he was admitted to Bangladesh Specialised Hospital due to cardiac issues.

"We are grateful to everyone who kept him in their prayers," his son Iresh Zaker wrote on Facebook.

After his namaz-e-janaza, Aly Zaker was laid to eternal rest at Banani graveyard after Asr prayers.

Earlier, his body was taken to the premises of Liberation War Museum at Agargaon in the city around 11:00am, reports BSS.

There, cultural personalities, friends and admirers paid their tributes to Aly Zaker, who was a trustee of Liberation War Museum, maintaining health guidelines. Family sources said the celebrated

actor was tested positive for coronavirus (Covid-19) two days before his death and that is why his body was not taken to the Central Shaheed Minar, says BSS report.

Cultural personalities Ramendu Majumder, Nasiruddin Yousuff, Ferdousi Majumder and Mamunur Rashid, Liberation War Museum Trustees Dr Sarwar Ali and Mofidul

Hoque placed wreaths at his coffin. On behalf of Awami League, party's Cultural Affairs Secretary Asim Kumar Ukil and Office Secretary Barrister Biplab Barua paid homage by placing wreath on his coffin.

Aly Zaker was born on November 5, 1944 in Chattogram to Muhammad Taher and Rezia Taher.

He was the third among four siblings, and spent his early childhood in Kushtia and Madaripur. His father was a high-ranking government official.

He studied at Notre Dame College and graduated from Dhaka University.

During the Liberation War, Aly Zaker vas trained at Sector-8 under Maj Gen Manzoor. Eminent filmmaker Alamgir Kabir asked him to join at Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra.

During the Liberation War, he travelled to the frontier many times o do interviews. He was an important oart of Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra's English broadcasts.

Aly Zaker not only inspired freedom ighters on the frontier during the Liberation War in 1971 as a Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra artiste and vocalist of Mukti Shangrami Shilpi Shangstha, he also played important role in creating global opinion in support of the Liberation War, Ekattorer Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee said in a condolence message.

division under the ministry.

The number of Covid-19 new weekly Among the 20 dead, 17 were men deaths, according to the report, was and three were women. One of them aged between 21 and The highest number of weekly cases 30 years, one between 31 and 40, one -- 25,481 -- was reported in the 26th

rate started shooting up.

added the press release. All of them died at different hospitals

So far, 5,024 men and 1,520 women

The mortality rate against the total number of cases detected so far stands

A life devoted to beauty other words, he triggered a process that helped to make theatre production in

Save the personal, his life was consumed by two love affairs -- one for Bangladesh and the other for the theatre, and through his work he blended both. He was proudest of his involvement in our struggle for freedom and he was most passionate about his work as an actor. modest personality broke the barriers Through every action of his life he and inspired generations of youngsters tried to bring his pride and his passion to take to theatre or at least become together. It is this coming together of the knowledgeable about this art form. He

days only. At least 2,223 Covid-19 patients have recovered in the last 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday.

The total number of recoveries now stands at 373,676 and the recovery rate at 81.46 percent.

between 41 and 50, seven between 51 and 60, and 10 were above 60 years old,

in the country.

have died of Covid-19 in the country.

at 1.43 percent.

Bangladesh a far more professional

good at "guru shishya parampara"

but his warm, inclusive, engaging and

Most talented people are not so

endeavour than it was ever before.

The combined support of more than it went down below 10 percent. Tk 1,21,000 crore accounts for 4.34 From early November, the infection percent of the country's Gross Domestic . Product (GDP). In the last 15 days, the daily Covid-19 cases remained below 2,000 in four

country did not face any shortage of food because of the cash and food aid provided under the stimulus scheme. The possibility that these people would

The support has been provided in

benefit, says the progress report.

been able to overcome the economic crisis caused by the pandemic, the report said.

As of last month, Tk 22,934 crore country were allowed to buy rice at Tk was disbursed and 2,594 firms got the 10 a kg under the OMS of rice package. assistance. The government also helped nearly 18

lakh families in the urban areas to buy However, the scenario over the pandemic-hit micro and small rice at Tk 10 per kg. businesses has not been satisfactory as they were yet to get enough benefit from have to spend days starving," said the

the packages. implementing some packages in this category.

for healthcare professionals is a case in point. frontline health professionals with the incentives after its announcement over

> four months ago. A Tk 100-crore fund was earmarked to this end, but it could not be released

two most powerful forces within him that made Aly Zaker the exceptional patriot and the critically acclaimed actor, director, writer that he was.

His patriotism was of the most enlightened kind. It was far more than loyalty to a political entity. It was the people -- simple, tolerant, openminded, friendly, hospitable and engaging -- that he loved most. His childhood memories of what we call "Gram Bangla" (far more than the term "rural Bengal" signifies), etched deeply in his subconscious from long travels on country boats, horseback and train with his father produced his lifelong love for Bangladesh's natural features to which, he says, he owes the origins of his creativity.

He was most pained to see his "Gram Bangla" exploited both economically -- that we mostly talk about -- and culturally. He strongly believed in the syncretic cultural heritage of Bangladesh and strongly resisted, through his plays, attempts to divide it. In all his television appearances, interviews and writings he tried to warn us against this trend and foresaw the damage that it would do to the future advancement of Bangladesh. Like every freethinker he abhorred prejudice and extremism of all kinds and, as a columnist, relentlessly wrote against them.

His creative work began, as he says, with his involvement with Shadhin Bangla Betar Kendro in Kolkata in 1971, with the invitation of filmmaker Alamgir Kabir to do an hourly English language programme on our Muktijuddho. (I recall with pride my participation several such programmes). Immediately after Bangladesh's liberation, he plunged himself into the world of theatre. Starting with Munier Chowdhury's play "Kobor", he joined Aranyak in 1972 and then there was no stopping him.

Equally important to his acting was his work in adaptation and translation. He chose the greatest of playwrights --Sophocles, Shakespeare, Brecht, Ibsen, to name a few -- to translate and adapt, which itself became a greater source of intellectual exchanges. Nagorik and a few other theatre groups became minicentres of discussion to understand what these great plays meant and how they could stimulate our own intellectual renaissance in postliberation Bangladesh.

Aly Zaker's acting, intellectual stature, directing and his relentless effort to take Bangladeshi theatre to greater heights inspired thousands of young people to take up this art form as writers, directors, musicians, scriptwriters, stage managers, light and audio technicians, etc. In played a leadership role in triggering what later became a movement that created hundreds of theatre groups, thousands of actors and millions of theatre fans in the newly liberated country. In fact, theatre movement became a beacon of hope for the establishment of the ideals of our independence struggle -- a democratic, prosperous and secular Bangladesh.

A tribute to Aly Zaker would be incomplete without mentioning the magic he would bring to stage the moment he would enter it. The first thing that would strike the audience from the word go was his presence. The moment he would step onto the stage, there was no question that he was the centre of gravity. As he would move around the stage so would our eyes, trying to extract all the meanings that were being conveyed with his facial expressions, gestures of his hands, various postures and looks -- oh those penetrating eyes, that would pierce the audience signalling the drama of what was to come. Then came the dialogue with his thundering voice modulated to perfection so that we would not miss a word or a whisper. For the duration of the play he would make a plaything of us, lingering on his every word, every movement and every dramatic entry or departure from the stage.

His love for the theatre was never more dramatically exemplified than by his reappearance on stage after his bout with cancer that was first detected in 2016. He acted as "Galileo" for the last time in 2018 for a full hour and a half, never showing fatigue or lack of stamina for a moment. Those of us in the audience knew well that we are never going to see our most favourite and perhaps the greatest of our stage personalities, ever again on stage.

During his last years, when he was bedridden, he would enjoy receiving friends. When Shaheen (my wife) and I last saw him, he was ever buoyant and talkative. Not for a moment did he refer to his cancer and the challenges he was facing. He talked about the founding days of The Daily Star (he was one of the few trusted friends I consulted before starting the paper; he was most supportive), the wonderful time we passed together, our meeting in various cities of the world, how much our friendship meant to him, and left us speechless with his enthusiastic prognosis of the future. He was acting his biggest role in life -- shunning pessimism and teaching us to win everything with optimism.

It is that ever optimistic Chotlu Bhai, as all of us lovingly called Aly Zaker, that we will remember him as.

FIRST CATEGORY

In the first category, there are seven packages involving Tk 86,750 crore, which are being financed from the banking system.

Of the amount, around Tk 41,153 crore has been disbursed till October 31. As many as 73,28,251 firms and businesses got the loan assistances, the progress report shows.

The lion's share of the beneficiaries, or 72.80 lakh, are the borrowers who benefitted from the Bangladesh Bank's measure to suspend the payment of loan interests for two months -- April and May.

The total amount of interests for the two months stood at Tk 16,549 crore. The central bank will give Tk 2,000 crore in subsidy in this regard. It has already started the process to release a fund of Tk 1,390 crore, the report said.

The export-oriented sector, mainly readymade garments, received support from one of the seven packages in the first category. This sector is ahead of all augmenting refinancing scheme and credit risk sharing facility to boost the disbursement," the report said.

The pre-shipment credit refinance scheme amounting to Tk 5,000 crore for nine export-oriented industries has also not made any progress. As of last month, only Tk 48.58 crore was disbursed.

SECOND CATEGORY

There are four packages in this category that involve Tk 12,458 crore. Of the amount, Tk 4,225 crore was disbursed till October 31.

As many as 37.22 lakh people, firms and beneficiaries got assistance under this category, according to the progress report.

Of the beneficiaries, a large chunk or 35 lakh families received cash incentives -- Tk 2,500 a month -- under a stimulus package named cash transfer to the targeted poor. Of the allocated Tk 1,258 crore, around Tk 880 crore was spent.

However, the government had initially planned to give the cash incentives to each of 50 lakh families under this package. But it had to stop midway following allegations of

BRTC revival plan stumbles

FROM PAGE 1

Winter is the peak season for BRTC, when it rents buses to different organisations for picnic trips. But this may not happen this time due to the pandemic, another BRTC official said. ECONOMIC RUNDOWN

Established in 1961, BRTC provides bus and truck services through its 23 depots across the country. It often made headlines for poor management and corruption.

The government added 600 buses and 500 trucks to the BRTC fleet last year to bail it out from losses. The vehicles were bought through Indian lines of credit.

BRTC now has 1,450 out of its 1,835 buses and 570 out of its 588 trucks in service.

It started to become a losing concern from FY2016-17 when it incurred a loss of Tk 4.73 crore. The loss was 2.92 crore and around Tk 1 crore respectively in the next two fiscal vears.

With losses growing, anger and frustration also grew among the workers at different depots of BRTC over unpaid salaries. The unpaid dues soared up to 16 months in some depots till January last year.

Some 3,300 BRTC employees, including drivers, get salaries

and other benefits like that of a show documents. government employee. But under the current system, the salaries and

It earned only Tk 14.80 crore in April and May against the expenditure benefits of a depot employee has to of TK 27.41 crore. In these two months, be paid from the earnings of that BRTC buses remained off the roads; particular depot. only its trucks were operational.

BRTC staffers staged demonstrations on several occasions last year, even confining the then corporation chairman to his office, to get their arrears. Amid such a restive situation, the government appointed a new chairman in August that year.

At that time, officials of the BRTC said the depots had been struggling the corresponding period of the to pay the employees after the government implemented a new pay scale in 2016, but workers claimed that August this year. the corruption of some BRTC officials, including those running the depots, was to blame for their sufferings. irregularities in depots and have taken

SOME POSITIVE CHANGES BRTC Chairman Ehsan-E-Elahi said apart from new vehicles, strict measures, intense monitoring and financial discipline of the depots are also responsible for the boost in earnings.

BRTC earned Tk 349.28 crore in the last fiscal year compared to Tk 258.88 crore in 2018-19 despite the government suspending the operation of public transport for two months from March 26 due to the pandemic,

as the health ministry has not yet sent the list of the recipients.

Similar is the case for handing compensation to the healthcare professionals. The government allocated Tk 750 crore for this purpose, but it could spend Tk 16.25 crore till October 31.

Speaking at Thursday's programme, Selim Raihan, executive director of the South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (Sanem), suggested that the government should come up with an independent evaluation of the packages that have been executed so far.

Finance Secretary Abdur Rouf Talukder said they have a plan to carry out an independent assessment of the packages so that they can make adjustment to those packages whose implementation lags behind.

Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister Ahmad Kaikaus said no initiative can ever be hundred percent successful. He, however, claimed that they have done an assessment of the food and cash supports and found that they have been able to reach nearly 21 percent of the population.

At that time, BRTC had to take a Tk

company

10 crore loan from the government

to pay salaries and Eid bonuses, the

paid Tk 88.65 crore as salary and

other allowances in one year,

which is Tk 23.27 crore more than

immediate past year, according to a

special bulletin BRTC published in

some strict measures to control some

actions against more than two dozen

automation of the depots and training

centres to prevent malpractice fully,

he said, adding that they were going

for central procurement of tires and

profit for the last three months,

adding that if that trend continues,

they will be able to pay all the dues

sooner rather than later.

He said that BRTC has been making

batteries soon for the same reason.

"We are planning for full

Ehsan-E-Elahi said they have taken

state-owned

chairman told this newspaper.

The

staffers.

Besides, Aly Zaker was an important witness" to Shaheed Janani Jahanara Imam-led civic movement Gana Adalat (people's court) launched on March 26, 1992 for the trial of war criminal and the then Jamaat-e-Islami chief Ghulam Azam, the committee said.

In 1972, Aly Zaker joined Aranyak Natya Dal. His first stage appearance was in the troupe's rendition of the Munier Chowdhury play "Kabor".

Later, he joined Nagorik Natya Sampradaya, where his most memorable works--"Dewan Gazir Kissa", "Nuruldin-er Shara Jibon", 'Macbeth", and "Galileo", among many others -- came.

He directed plays like "Baki Itihash", Romonikul", Bidogdho Sankat", "Ei Nishiddho Polli Te" and Achalayatan", among others.

On television, he is known for classics ike "Bohubrihi" and "Aaj Robibar".

Aly Zaker married eminent theatre personality Sara Zaker in 1975. Together, they have a son Iresh Zaker and daughter Sriva Sharbojova.

Aly Zaker was the chairman of Asiatic 3Sixty.

Besides Ekushey Padak (1999) Aly Zaker also received Bangladesh Academy Shilpakala Award, Bangabandhu Award, Munier Chowdhury Award, Naren Biswas Award, among other accolades.

In a condolence message, Road Transport and Bridges Minister and Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader expressed shock at the death of the veteran cultural personality.

"Celebrated actor Aly Zaker was a shining star in the cultural arena, Quader said.

Expressing shock over the death of Aly Zaker, BŇP said he was a glittering star in the cultural arena of Bangladesh.

"People will always remember him for his glorious achievements and contributions to the country's cultural arena," said BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, reports UNB.

Besides, Law Minister Anisul Huq, and Minister Saifuzzaman Chowdhury, Expatriates' Welfare Minister Imran Ahmad, Telecommunications Minister Mustafa Jabbar, Information Minister Hasan Mahmud, Dhaka University Vice Chancellor Prof Akhtaruzzaman, Jahangirnagar University VC Prof Islam, Workers Party of Farzana Bangladesh, Gono Forum, Bangladesh National Awami Party, former president Badruddoza Chowdhury, AOM Sammilita Sangskritik Jote, Sammilita Samajik Andolon, 1971: Genocide-Torture Archive and Museum Trust, Bangladesh Peace Council, Bangladesh Medical Association, and Bangladesh Mahila Parishad in separate messages condoled the death of the thespian.