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Your Right to Know

JAMAILUL AWAL 3, 1442 HURI

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The ship-breaking industry in Chattogram remains extremely dirty and dangerous for workers and the environment. The top ship-recycling country in the world has failed to regulate the clandestine business effectively, for which frequent death, injury and pollution continue to be in the headlines. An investigation by Mostafa Yousuf of The Daily Star and Margot Gibbs of Finance Uncovered in the UK exposes how the weak regulatory system gets exploited for permission to scrap vessels containing asbestos and other hazardous materials.

Toxic ships sail in on FALSE PAPERS

Provision that allows ship-owners to self-certify the waste is up for abuse; environment ministry just not equipped to check toxic materials at scrap-ship yards in Chattogram

In 2018, aged just 43, Mazidul Haque developed severe breathing problems, consulted a doctor and was diagnosed with asbestosis, a potentially fatal respiratory disease which scars the lungs. After more than a decade working in the shipbreaking yards of Chattogram, he lost his job, and the means to support his family.

"I've lost hope for life," he said. The disease is caused by prolonged exposure to asbestos, a material once prized for its insulating properties, but banned in many countries because it is deadly to those who inhale its fibres. Its use, however, remains legal in Bangladesh.

For most of his adult life, Mazidul had been working with asbestos in the shipbreaking yards. A typical merchant vessel might contain around 10 tonnes of the material, hidden away in places like the engine room and fuel lines.

Mazidul wasn't aware of the risks involved when he started work; he was given no training to work with the material, and wasn't provided with

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PHOTO: STAR



With serious questions hanging over the authorities' verification systems, scrap ships like Portland are being dismantled along the Sitakunda beach, littering a vast area with materials that are allegedly highly hazardous to health and environment. *Inset*, an "asbestos oven", made of asbestos sheets from insulating materials on ships, is on sale in a Chattogram shop. Asbestos is a slow poison which causes harm to ship-breaking workers. The photos were taken recently.

COVID-19 DIAGNOSIS

Capacity up, yet testing on decline

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

When Covid-19 infections and deaths were rising in mid-June, about 16,000 people used to get tested every day at the 49 laboratories.

As the number of labs rose to 66 by the end of June, more than 18,000 people got tested for coronavirus each day.

Six months down the line, the number of testing facilities is now 137, but the daily tests have dropped.

A total of 13,191 samples were tested on Thursday, even though the detection rate and death rate have been on the rise since the advent of winter.

Experts and officials of the health directorate said people's growing unwillingness to get tested was the main reason behind such a poor number of tests. They blamed the government's slack awareness campaign for this.

"Earlier, the government used to say if anyone has a symptom, they should contact the IEDCR. But now we don't see such messages," Be-Nazir, former director (disease control) of the Directorate General of Health Services, told The Daily Star.

He also said the asymptomatic cases were another reason why fewer people were willing to get tested. Individuals who have contracted the virus but do have any symptoms are called asymptomatic cases.

Currently, Covid-19 tests are now being done at RT-PCR labs in 112 government and private hospitals across the country. Genexpert machines are used in 16 hospitals and antigen kits are used in 10.

As of yesterday, the officially confirmed death toll from Covid-19 was 7,192 since March 18 when the country

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COUNTRY	TESTS PER MILLION PEOPLE
Bangladesh	17,398
India	106,639
Italy	382,729
USA	625,164

Defrauded online

Pyramid scheme-like cyber scams with fake job offers target young women on Facebook groups

NILIMA JAHAN

"Do you want to earn Tk 20,000 per month working from home for only two hours a day?"

This is a common catchphrase in job offers for young women cropping up on Facebook, especially for those who are part of various groups formed by and for young women on the social media site.

Such seemingly lucrative job offers often generate significant interest among young women looking for a job they can do from home, unaware that these are posted by fraudulent groups to siphon off a small amount of money each from a

large number of people.

Interested in one such job offer, 20-year-old undergraduate student in Dhaka, Samira Jannat, posted from another Facebook account she had under the name "Adiba Noor", asking for a job description.

Almost instantly, she got a reply that said to secure the job she needs to pay Tk 60 through a mobile banking account number, as an "add fee", after which she will be added to a training group on Facebook Messenger.

Samira's key responsibilities would be writing

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EDN INSTITUTIONS Govt extends closure till January 16

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has extended the closure of all educational institutions, which remain closed since March, until January 16 amid a steady rise in the number of infections and deaths from Covid-19.

The education and the primary and mass education ministries issued separate statements in this regard yesterday.

However, Qawmi madrasas will remain

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Protect farmers from Covid-19 fallout

Experts from 6 Asian countries for implementing adequate agrarian, social security reforms

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Experts and researchers from six Asian countries have called for implementing agrarian and social security reforms to protect farmers from the adverse impacts of Covid-19.

They made the call at an international webinar yesterday. The event, titled "Ensuring land and food rights at a time

of Covid-19 and beyond", was organised jointly by Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD) and The Daily Star.

In his keynote presentation, eminent researcher Antonio B Quizon touched upon issues like increased rural indebtedness forces small farmers to sell off their homes and farmlands; agrarian reforms have slowed down as government's priorities

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