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Packed with passengers, a motor launch heads for Patuakhali as safety concerns take a backseat. AFP photo

## Bad for business

### Eid traffic trims pullers' profits

By Staff Correspondent

Dhaka's notorious traffic jams are cutting into rickshaw pullers' profits, causing some drivers to switch from day to evening shifts.

A rickshaw puller earns between Tk 140 and Tk 200 during a six-hour shift, but high traffic levels before the Eid prevent rickshaws from maximising their profits.

"I make between Tk 150 and Tk 180 a shift, including the Tk 40 deposit I pay the rickshaw owner (mahajan) to rent the rickshaw," said Siddique Ali, an elderly puller from Sherpur's Nalitabari thana. "But in the last couple of days I have not made even Tk 100 per shift. It's very hard to make trips as frequently due to the traffic jams."

Md Yunus, a puller from Munshiganj's Lohajung thana, said the drop in income makes it difficult for him to care for his family.

"I have a family of five. My youngest child is a five-month-old daughter and my wife is

**নতুন সহস্রাব্দ বরণে পর্যটনের অতিথি হোন**

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**বাংলাদেশ পর্যটন করপোরেশন**

# Seed production surges

## Still falls short of demand

By Reaz Ahmad

Private sector seed production in the country has grown rapidly in recent years, with a projected output of well over 12,000-metric tons in 1999.

However, experts said they see no reason to be complacent about the current rate of growth, since private and public producers only supply 23,687 metric tons of seed, just 6 per cent of the country's total seed requirement of 4,21,441 metric tons. Most seed requirements are fulfilled by seeds saved by farmers.

According to a survey conducted by the government's Agrobased Industries and Technology Development Project, seed production by the private sector has more than doubled in the last three years.

The survey sampled 62 producers, 54 of whom provided reliable data. The sample accounts for about 60 per cent of Bangladesh's seed enterprises.

Private sector seed production rose almost 50 per cent, from 3,026 metric tons in 1997 to 4,487 metric tons in 1998. It is projected to hit 7,554 metric tons in 1999. If the rest of the seed enterprises not covered by the survey are taken into account, seed output will surpass 12,000 metric tons in 1999.

Half of the private seed enterprises emerged during the mid 90s, while 30 per cent originated in the late 90s. In the last three years, the number of people employed by the industry has jumped from 3,084 to 4,545.

Experts said the rate of seed replacement is very poor in Bangladesh. The government stated in the 1993 Seed Policy that the country needs quality seed to increase its agricultural output. The government plans to increase seed supplies through formal channels by 100 per cent by 2005.

The main roadblocks in the development of seed enterprises are inadequate financing, inadequate storage facilities, poor technical knowledge, a lack of seed processing facilities and a shortage of breeder and foundation seeds.

Other problems include a lack of transportation, packaging, laboratory and marketing facilities, unequal competition with NGOs, breaking contracts by seed growers, high labour costs, no policy on variety protection and a lack of awareness among farmers of the need for good seeds.

M Hassanullah, feed grain and seed programme coordinator, said an agrarian country like Bangladesh needs to produce more quality seeds locally rather than relying on imports.

"The private sector seed enterprises have to invest more to develop breeder seeds and foundation seeds of their own instead of remaining dependent on limited-level public sector seed developers."

Private enterprises procure breeder, foundation and certified seeds from public sector research institutes, such as the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute, while others import seeds from India, China, Holland and Thailand.

Mohammed Masum, an advisor with the Bangladesh Seed Merchants Association, acknowledged that most private seed enterprises don't have their own breeding or research facilities due to low self investment and poor access to bank loans.

There should be better connections between private and public sector institutions if Bangladesh's private seed sector is to flourish, he said.

"The Bangladesh Rice Research Institute has developed so many good rice varieties, we have to have access to those seeds."

According to the project's survey, roughly a third of enterprises don't package their seeds, and those who do don't label them properly.

Under the 1998 Seed Rules, the label should specify the type and variety of crop, the lot number and the percentage of germination, purity and moisture. However, truthful labelling is not strictly followed.

Masum said the government should ban the sale of improperly packaged and labelled seeds.



**Fragrance of festivity**  
Shoppers purchase prayer beads, perfume and other last-minute items before the Eid at a stall outside the Baitul Mukarram yesterday. —Star photo: A.K.M. Mohsin

## Biman hikes pilots' pay

By Shehab Ahmed

Bangladesh Biman management has given a 7.50 per cent pay hike to its pilots and decided to renew the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) it signed with the Bangladesh Airlines Pilots Association earlier.

Renewal of the MOU with certain amendments is expected to meet the shortage of pilots and relieve them of flying extra flights foregoing a mandatory 48-hour rest after a flight, Biman sources said. The MOU provided for the mandatory rest.

The decisions were taken at a meeting of the Biman management board on December 29.

It also decided to extend contracts with pilots by three years when they reach 57, subject to fitness, service conditions and performance instead of 'auto renewal'.

The Biman management has also decided to hire pilots on contract basis through advertisement at home and abroad and call back the pilots sent on deputation to fill up shortage in cockpits.

Addition of another DC-10-30 and an Airbus 310 last month increased the fleet strength of Biman to 13 from 11. It was already short of nine pilots when the fleet strength was 11. Biman now needs 162

See page 11 col 4

## Spending freeze

### Sluggish clothing sales concern vendors

By Staff Correspondent

Poor and middle-class families are spending much less on clothes this season, despite the pre-Eid rush and plenty of selection at roadside displays.

"I spent Tk 5,000 on clothes, especially warm ones, in a variety of colours," said Badrul Alam, a salesman in the city's busy Farm Gate area. "I'd hoped to make a good profit, but sales have been slow over the last 11 days and I haven't made a good start."

A woolen cardigan costs about Tk 100, while a pair of trousers sells for about Tk 120. A cotton shirt costs between Tk 80 and 130, while a woolen coat sells for about Tk 200. Children's clothes are slightly cheaper, but there is also less demand.

"I sell export quality shirts and ladies gowns," said Alam's colleague, Saifuddin. "The clothes cost less this year, since supplies are good, but sadly we haven't seen that many buyers."

In Mohakhali, roadside vendors said their sales were also slow.

"I expected an increase in clothing sales for two reasons," said a vendor. "First, the Eid is approaching; and secondly, it's winter. It seems obvious people would at least buy warm clothes in the cold season, but they're not buying as much as last year."

Some vendors complained there is too much competition from other vendors.

A garment supplier said excess or rejected clothes from garment factories are also abundant, pushing the prices down.

Vendors also said most customers are only "window shopping."

"Most just ask for the price and then walk away," said one vendor.

A customer from Mirpur said, "I have seen a lot of clothes I like, but I've decided to save my money and buy something for my family."

A customer headed towards his office in Banani said he estimated that he spent Tk 300 on clothes from the extra money he got as an Eid bonus for his family of six.

Many customers said they would wait until the last minute to buy clothes.

## Beam collapse leaves 10 injured

By Staff Correspondent

At least ten people, most of them construction workers, were injured when a beam of an under construction community centre of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) collapsed at North Bashabo yesterday afternoon.

Of the injured, five have been admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital. They are Rabiul, Tajul Islam, Abdul Kashem, Nasir, and Babul, all construction workers, hospital sources said.

According to Sabujbagh police, the 30 feet high beam suddenly tilted and collapsed when construction work was going on at about 5 pm.

Use of substandard construction materials and faulty design may be the reasons, they said after a preliminary investigation.

When contacted last night, local DCC Ward Commissioner Rahamatullah said he was not aware of the incident. He however said DCC had been constructing the community centre for the last two years under the supervision of its engineers.

DCC authorities could not be contacted.

## Shikdar charged with another murder

KHULNA, Jan 6: Police today submitted chargesheet in the court against 14 people, including top terrorist Ershad Shikdar, in labour leader Shahjahan Murder Case, reports UNB.

Investigation officer of the case, Khulna Thana OC Chandra Bhuvan Majumder, submitted the chargesheet to the CM-M's court.

The accused are Ershad Shikdar, L M Liakat, Jamal Faruk, Noor-e-Alam, Nasir Khan, Joyanal, Idris Jamal, Feni Mona, Jahangir, Ashraf Boro Mia, Aich Mushi, Yunus, Berek Commander and Babu.

It was, in the chargesheet, alleged that Ershad Shikdar summoned Shahjahan at Ghat Number 5 on the night of May 29, 1998.

Shikdar told Shahjahan that he had no option but to kill him (Shahjahan) as he witnessed the killings of Insaf Ali and Khaleq, two other victims of Shikdar.

Then Shikdar ordered Jamal Faruk to take Shahjahan to the 'Tankikhana' where Shahjahan was killed with sharp weapon.

Later, the body was dumped in the river Bhairab.

## Homecoming Day of Bangabandhu Jan 10

Bangladesh Awami League has drawn up elaborate programmes to mark the Homecoming Day of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on January 10, reports UNB.

Bangabandhu returned home from Pakistan jail on January 10, 1972 ending his nine-month captivity during the War of Liberation.

## Businessman shot dead in Chittagong

From Our Correspondent  
CHITTAGONG, Jan 6: A businessman was shot dead allegedly by a gang of miscreants at Korbaniganj under Kotwali thana at around 12.45 pm today.

The victim, Mohammed Hossain alias Ledu, 45, owner of Hossain Stores had an altercation with the miscreants when they demanded toll.

At one stage, the miscreants shot Mohammed Hossain point blank, killing him on the spot.

Protesting the killing, local people put up a barricade on the road, disrupting traffic in the area for about two hours.

A case was filed with Kotwali thana in this connection, but none was arrested till filing of this report at 8 pm today.

## Fatikchhari gunfight: 12 arrested

From Our Correspondent  
CHITTAGONG, Jan 6: Police in a raid today arrested 12 terrorists from different areas of Fatikchhari thana in connection with yesterday's police-terrorists gunfight at village Rangamati under the same thana.

The arrested are Mohammad Yunus, Mahbulul Alam, Saiful Alam, Rabiul Hossain, Mozzammel Haq, Mohammad Shah Alam, Shahabuddin, Zahurul Alam, Masudul Karim, Saifulah Chowdhury, Bimal Sutradhar and Nizamuddin.

## 11-party rejects CCC polls

By Staff Correspondent

The 11-party alliance has rejected the 'farical' Chittagong City Corporation (CCC) polls held recently and demanded fresh election.

It also demanded election of three other city corporations.

The demands were made at a meeting of the alliance on Wednesday night at Gano Forum office with Dr Kamal Hossain in the chair.

The meeting said the voterless CCC polls have quagmire 'another ugly example of election' in the country and ensured 'victory of mastan-terrorists-mafia gangs' of the ruling party.

## Dhaka, Delhi to sign MOU on goods train service

CALCUTTA, Jan 6: Bangladesh and India would sign a memorandum of understanding (MOU) in the third week of this month on operation of goods train between the two countries through Bongaon border, Railway Minister Mamata Banerjee said yesterday, reports PTI.

Inaugurating a railway reservation office at Belur Math near here, she said that her ministry was examining a proposal for setting up of rail links to Kamarpukur in Hooghly district and Joyrambati in Bankura district.

## BCS psychological test on Feb 4

The psychological test of the examinees who have qualified in the written tests of 20th BCS examination will be held on February 4, an official handout said in the city last night, reports BSS.

The tests will take place at Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna and London centres at 3 pm on the day simultaneously.

Detailed schedule and sitting arrangements for the test will be notified later through national dailies.

The examinees will have to bring their admit cards issued for the 20th BCS preliminary examinations, as no separate admit cards will be issued on the occasion.

None will be allowed to take part in the examination without the card, the handout said.

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Editor: Mahfuz Anam

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**Sehri, Iftar timings**

Ramadan	Jan	Sehri	Iftar
29	07	-	5.31
30	08	5.18	5.31

**Prayer Timings**

January 7

	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-18	5-25
Juma	12-45	1-15
Asr	3-42	4-00
Maghrib	5-31	5-35
Tarabi	7-15	7-45

Source: Islamic Foundation