

KHULNA-MONGLA RAIL PROJECT
Sad tale of delays, cost escalation
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The Daily Star

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BANGLADESH UPDATE 3,201 New cases in 24hrs | 1,65,618 Total cases | 2,096 Deaths | 76,149 Recoveries | **GLOBAL UPDATE** 538,273 Deaths | 11,639,449 Total cases

Fair price eludes boro farmers

So far, only 1pc could sell at govt-set price, finds a BIGD survey on 2,834 farm households

- ▶ Half the farmers got between Tk 701 and Tk 900 for a maund of paddy.
- ▶ 13% were forced to sell maund of paddy below Tk 600.
- ▶ Production costs increased by 13% this year.
- ▶ 43% of the farmed land not owned by the farmers.

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Only 1 percent of Boro farmers have been able to sell their produce at the government-set purchase price of Tk 1,040 per maund this year, according to a study by Brac Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD).

On average, farmers have received just Tk 765 per maund, found the study, based on surveys on 2,834 farm households across the country.

Year after year, Boro farmers have reported having to sell their paddy far lower than the government-fixed prices. Not getting due prices this year came as a double blow to them as they had to bear increased production costs because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Besides, they earned 40 percent less profit compared to previous years.

A nationwide government drive to purchase Boro paddy from farmers began on April 26. It will continue till August 31.

About half the respondents said they got between Tk 701 and Tk 900 per maund. About 13 percent were forced to sell per maund of their produce below Tk 600, according to the study.

On the other hand, production costs increased by 13 percent this year, it said.

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Floodwater inundated the premises of Nuruddin Matborerkandi Model High School in Kajirsura union of Madaripur's Shibchar upazila after the Padma swelled up a couple of days ago. The mighty river has turned furious and devoured several establishments in the union. Locals fear it might also destroy the school. Inset, a family moving all its belonging to safety on a boat in the area yesterday. Story on page 12.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Two masters, 2 drivers of Mayur-2 responsible

BIWTA probe finds
TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Two masters and two drivers of Mayur-2 launch, which hit a smaller vessel and caused it to sink and drown 34 people in the Buriganga, were responsible for the accident, a probe committee finds.

"They manifested a lack of skill in operating the launch [Mayur-2]," said a member of the body formed by Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) yesterday.

"We did not hold the owner of Mayur-2 responsible as we found the accident happened due to fault in the vessel operations," he told The Daily Star, wishing anonymity.

The committee also made 16 recommendations to prevent such launch accidents in future, he said.

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RISING INFECTIONS AMONG FRONTLINERS

The battle gets even tougher

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

More and more frontline healthcare workers are getting infected, making the country's battle against the deadly coronavirus harder.

At least 5,001 of them have tested positive, and 62 doctors were confirmed to have died from Covid-19 as of Sunday, according to Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA).

Of the infected, there are 1,724 doctors, 1,352 nurses and 1,925 other employees.

Infection of such a large number of frontline healthcare workers is an immense burden on the country's health system, especially since there are too few of them against such a large population, experts said.

As of yesterday, 11 other doctors, mostly senior ones, died with what appeared to be coronavirus, says Bangladesh Doctors' Foundation (BDF).

"Although there are fewer new cases among healthcare workers lately, the total number is still high," said BMA Secretary General Ehteshamul Huq Choudhury.

More health workers got infected in the Southeast Asian countries, compared to other regions. And the number is the highest in Bangladesh, he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Of the total cases in Bangladesh, 3.08 percent were health workers as of Sunday.

This indicates that many health workers still do not have adequate protection against the infection, experts said.

The main causes of infection among health workers are the poor personal protective equipment (PPE) supplied at the beginning of the outbreak and patients concealing their symptoms, according to Ehteshamul.

Delayed introduction of triage at hospitals is also responsible for the situation, he said.

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COVID-19 CASES

Bangladesh may pass France soon

44 more die; 3,201 reported infected

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Another 44 people died of Covid-19 and 3,201 tested positive for the virus in the country in 24 hours till 2:30pm yesterday.

With this, the death toll rose to 2,096 and the number of infected people went up to 165,618, according to data of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

The current fatality rate is 1.27 percent in terms of all confirmed cases, DGHS Additional Director General Dr Nasima Sultana said at its daily health bulletin yesterday.

Among the 44 deceased are 33 males and 11 females. Thirty-five of them died at hospitals and the rest at home.

As many as 17 of the deceased were from

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Envoy defended lawmaker Shahid

Allegations against him baseless, he told ministry in Feb letter; ambassador protected MP, Kuwait-based journos claimed

PORIMOL PALMA

Shahid Islam, the Laxmipur lawmaker now detained in Kuwait, was defended by the Bangladesh ambassador to the Gulf country in a February letter to the foreign ministry following media reports on his alleged criminal activities.

Besides, several Bangladeshi journalists, who worked as Kuwait correspondents for Bangladeshi media, accused the ambassador of protecting the MP.

On June 6, Kuwait's Criminal Investigation Department arrested Shahid on charges of human trafficking, visa trading, and money laundering.

He has since confessed to bribing millions of dollars to Kuwaiti officials for recruiting Bangladeshi workers and getting contracts for his company.

More information on Shahid alias Kazi Papul, independent MP from Laxmipur-2 and managing director and CEO of Marafie Kuwaitia Group, is surfacing now after the Kuwait Public Prosecution's interrogation.

In February, when local media first mentioned three Bangladeshis, including an MP, involved in human trafficking in Kuwait, Ambassador SM Abul Kalam in the letter to the foreign ministry said these reports were "baseless and motivated".

Arabic-language newspaper Al-Qabas without naming Shahid reported that a Bangladeshi lawmaker was said to have given five expensive cars as gifts to senior government officials of Kuwait to facilitate his company Marafie Kuwaitia Group getting several government contracts.

After these reports were published in Kuwaiti newspapers, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam asked the Bangladesh ambassador to investigate the matter.

In the letter dated February 19, a copy of which has been obtained by The Daily Star, Abul Kalam said he summoned the Al-Qabas reporter to the embassy and asked about his sources of information and if

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PROBE AGAINST LAXMIPIUR MP SHAHID BEGINS -- PAGE 3



ANDREW KISHORE (1955-2020)

GOLDEN VOICE goes silent

ZAHANGIR ALOM

Eminent playback singer Andrew Kishore, who had been battling cancer for months, passed away at his hometown Rajshahi at 7:00pm yesterday, confirmed his brother-in-law, Dr Patrick Bipul Biswas.

Andrew, 64, left behind his wife Lipika Andrew Eti, daughter Minim Andrew Songa, son Jay Andrew Saptok, along with millions of fans who will miss him dearly.

The president, prime minister, Speaker and state-minister for Cultural Affairs expressed shock at the demise of the singer. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had previously financially assisted Andrew with a cheque of Tk 10 lakh for his

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INDIA-CHINA STAND-OFF

Rivals pull back troops

Sources say buffer zone made in Galwan valley to prevent escalation

AGENCIES

China has withdrawn its troops by at least a kilometre in the tense Galwan river valley in eastern Ladakh, where 20 Indian soldiers were killed in a deadly brawl with Chinese troops on June 15, Indian sources said yesterday.

Indian soldiers have also pulled back and a buffer zone has been created between the troops of both sides to prevent escalation. "We will need to wait to see if this is a lasting, genuine disengagement," the sources told AFP.

China's People's Liberation Army was seen removing tents and structures at patrolling point 14, near the place where the clashes took place, they said.

The one-km withdrawal by China came after special representatives of India and China agreed to disengage, "take guidance from the consensus of leaders" and "not allow differences to become disputes," they added.

National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who had a conversation over phone on Sunday, decided that both sides should

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Locals gather near a truck to buy vegetables and other essentials in the capital's Wari area. Since Wari was locked down on Saturday to stop the spread of the coronavirus, several online shopping services have been sending these goods to the area.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

MIGRANT WORKERS

Malaysia offers them new hope amid pandemic

Allows them to switch firms in same sector; many Bangladeshis rejoin work

PORIMOL PALMA

At a time when Bangladeshi migrant workers all over the world are having tough times amid Covid-19 fallout, Malaysia gives good news.

The Southeast Asian country has announced that foreign workers can now switch companies in the same sector as some firms ceased operation or sacked workers while some others need foreign workers.

Besides, many Bangladeshis, who had been without work for around three months, have started rejoining work as Malaysia moves to fully reopen its economy following a drop in Covid-19 cases, say officials.

Talks between Dhaka and Kuala Lumpur are going on for regularising undocumented workers, a Bangladesh High Commission official in the Malaysian capital told The Daily Star on Sunday.

"As recruitment of foreign workers has been suspended from July 1 till the end of this year, there is a strong possibility that Malaysia will announce an amnesty for the

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