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Your Right to Know

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Pandemic pushed them below the line

New poor created amid outbreak largely from informal urban service sector, including small entrepreneurs and unemployed daily-rated workers



"The people employed in the urban service sectors, in particular, were badly hit. A majority of the jobs in the urban service sector are informal and there is little job security in these engagements."

SELIM RAIHAN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF SANEM

ZYMA ISLAM and SHAHEEN MOLLAH

A 40-year-old woman was sitting in a shared kitchen in Korail Bosti, where a pan of catfish stewed away on the stove. But it wasn't hers -- it was her neighbour's lunch.

Her lunch comprised nine potato wedges, a small pile of coriander, and half a saucy pan of thin yellow water -- supposedly daal. This was for four people -- husband, wife, and their two daughters, one of whom is autistic.

Looking at her neighbour's lunch, Rahima said, "We used to eat quite a lot of fish before. Now we haven't had fish in many months."

Rahima had been working at a ready-made garments factory in Gulshan since 1996, as a senior sewing machine operator. Last year when the pandemic hit, her employers decided to dispense of her

services.

"The factory moved to Uttara and they were providing transport for a while. But then during the lockdown, the factory completely closed down. When it opened, those of us needing transport were not taken back," she said.

Her husband, a daily-rated construction worker, had no work at all during the shutdown. Even now when the economy has been open for many months, he only gets around 10 days of work each month, earning Tk 500 a day.

Her neighbours did not lose their jobs and eat fish for lunch while Rahima is unemployed and will have to share nine potato wedges among four people -- this, in a nutshell, speaks to the kind of destitution faced by those who became unemployed during the pandemic.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3



A young man performs the tricky task of going through the fence while holding his groceries near a construction site by the rail lines in the capital's Tejgaon. There are people walking and on and along the lines too. People would often take risks and go to extraordinary lengths just to save a couple of minutes.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Country's daily infection rate falls slightly

26 more die, 1,868 get infected with Covid

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh's daily Covid-19 infection rate fell slightly to 9.39 percent yesterday compared with 10.04 percent the previous day.

In 24 hours till yesterday morning, the health authorities registered 26 more coronavirus-related deaths and 1,868 new cases.

The latest figures have pushed the Covid-19 fatalities to 8,668 and the total infections to 568,706, according to a handout published by the Directorate General of Health Services.

Meanwhile, the mortality rate stood at 1.52 percent for the second day after remaining static at 1.53 percent for the past week.

Covid-19 infection rate had come down to below 5 percent on January 19. It even fell below 3 percent, but started soaring again on February 9.

So far, 520,718 patients (91.56 percent) have recovered, including 1,577 in the same 24-hour period, according to DGHS.

Bangladesh reported its first novel coronavirus cases on March 8 last year and the first death on March 18.

Authorities have so far tested 4,388,011 samples, including 19,900 in the 24-hour period.

DIGITAL SECURITY ACT

A farmer, far from internet, on the run

STAR REPORT

A rural farmer, who does not have access to the internet, let alone have a Facebook account, has been on the run since he was sued under the Digital Security Act five months ago over a post on the social media platform.

The farmer, Abu Zaman, of Gazaria village of Kishoreganj's Bajitpur upazila, cannot even read or write. He also does not own a smartphone.

The Facebook post was made by someone else, and Abu, 45, is accused of influencing that person to come up with the post, according to the complainant.

Mizanur Rahman Shikder Shamim, a teacher of Katiadi Adarsha Bidya Niketan, filed the case on October 20 last year with Katiadi Police Station. Abu has been living away from home since then to avoid arrest.

The other accused in the case is Md Al Amin, a resident of the adjacent Beelpar village. He is the prime accused, said police.

Mizan in the case alleged that Al Amin defamed Mizan's father Gias Uddin Shikder, a former principal of Gazaria Shikder Model Academy, through a Facebook post. No specific allegation was mentioned in the case.

"Al Amin made the post and he shared it via messenger [App] with some of his [Facebook] friends," Mizan told The Daily Star.

Asked what farmer Abu had done, he said his family members had earlier lodged several cases against the farmer over a land dispute.

He said since his father's death last year, Abu had been badmouthing the deceased in the locality and many people heard that. "Al Amin made the post after being influenced by the farmer, and so he [Abu] was accused in the case as well," said Mizan.

The charges against Abu were brought

under sections 25, 29 and 31 of the DSA. The sections are used to prosecute those who spread or publish false information electronically and those who "abet" the execution of the "offence".

The families of Mizan and Abu have a long history of legal tussles concerning land.

Abu's wife Rehana Khatun said the DSA was being used against her husband as a tool of harassment over the dispute.

She demanded a proper investigation into the incident.

Mizan confirmed

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

MODI'S VISIT Protesters pose no security threats

Foreign minister says

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

There is no reason for any security concerns for the agitation by some people against the visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen has said.

"We are proud to invite Modi to Bangladesh. We will guarantee all necessary protection," he said at a press conference on the occasion of the meeting between Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

HASINA, RAJAPAKSA MEET Agree on improving connectivity

They decide to sign deal on coastal shipping; Bangladeshi carriers to fly to Colombo

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka and Colombo have agreed to improve air and sea connectivity to boost trade and tourism.

"Sri Lanka has agreed to sign the Coastal Shipping Agreement and Standard Operating Procedure on the feeder services between Chattogram and Colombo soon," Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen said.

Recognising the importance of enhanced air connectivity to promote people-to-people contact, tourism, and trade, both sides agreed to have Bangladeshi carriers launch flights to Colombo, he said.

The minister disclosed this at a press conference at the Foreign Service Academy yesterday following a meeting between Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her Sri Lankan counterpart Mahinda Rajapaksa.

Rajapaksa arrived in Dhaka on Friday to join the celebrations of Mujib Borsho and golden jubilee of Bangladesh's independence. He delivered a speech as guest of honour at the celebration and paid his respects at National Martyrs Memorial in Savar and Bangabandhu Memorial Museum in Dhanmondi.

He also held meeting with President Abdul Hamid before leaving for Sri Lanka last night.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

MAYHEM IN SUNAMGANJ Key suspect arrested in Moulvibazar

Jubo League denies he is its man

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Police Bureau of Investigation yesterday arrested Shahidul Islam Swadhin, the prime accused in two cases filed over the Wednesday's attack on Hindu houses in Noagaon village of Sunamganj's Shalla upazila.

Shahidul, member of Sarmangal Union Parishad in Derai upazila, was arrested from Ghorabhui village in Moulvibazar's Kulara upazila around 3:00am, PBI said.

Meanwhile, seven more people were picked up yesterday from different areas of Shalla and Derai in connection with the two cases, said Nazmul Haque, officer-in-charge of Shalla Police Station.

Later in the day, a Sunamganj court sent the seven to jail.

With them, a total of 30 people have so far been held in the two cases.

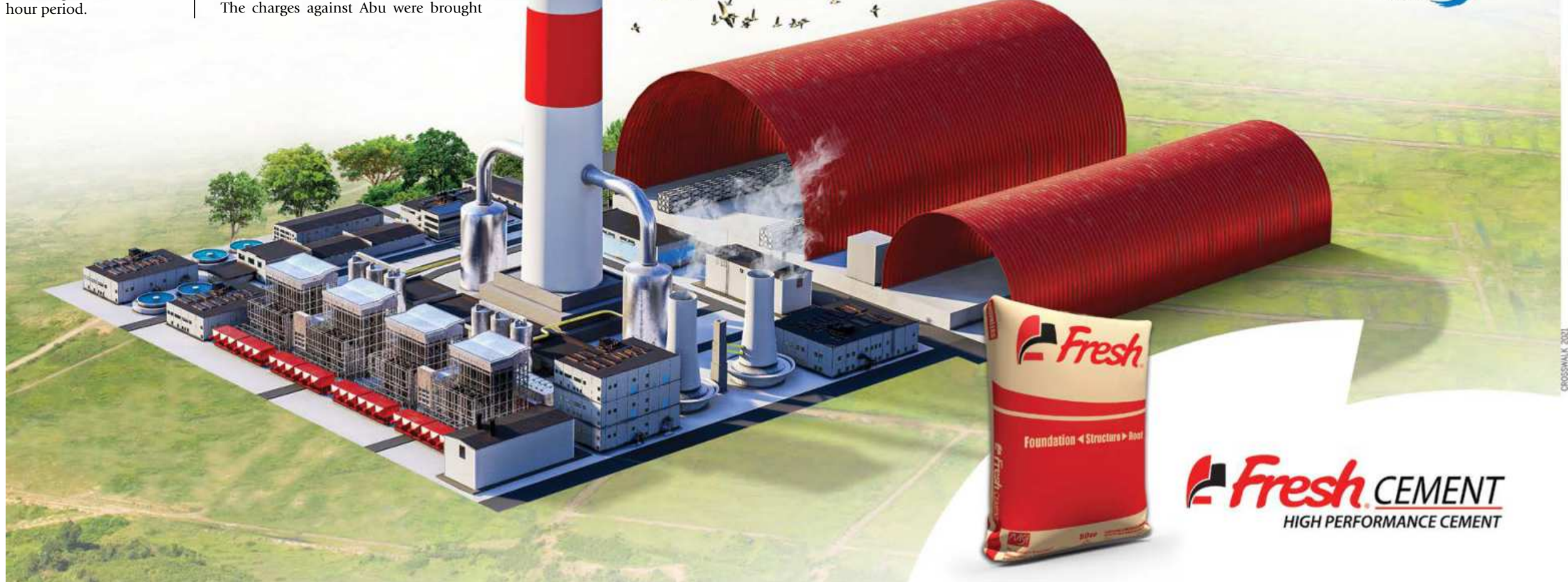
The cases were lodged with Shalla Police Station on Wednesday, hours

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6

RISING BANGLADESH

The major supplier in the construction of Matarbari Thermal Power Station is Fresh Cement.

Matarbari Thermal Power Station is being constructed by Fresh Cement. The light of development is going beyond with full potential and we are proud to contribute to this unique journey of rising Bangladesh. Thank you for keeping faith in us.



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