



They say beauty is in the eye of the beholder. This rather philosophical statement bears much truth during the passing of summer in the days of this hard lockdown. For even though there are not many people to look at them, the beauty of these Krishnachura in bloom does not fade just because of that. This photo was taken earlier this week from the capital's Tejgaon area.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Mugging, extortion increased last year

Overall crime rate fell; police, social scientists blame economic fallout of Covid-19

SHARIFUL ISLAM

Mugging and extortion marked a sharp rise last year from 2019, although the country saw a fall in overall crime incidents during the same period.

An analysis into crime statistics prepared by the Police Headquarters (PHQ) showed that incidents of mugging registered a jump of 67 percent, the highest among all types of crimes, followed by extortion which saw a 36 percent spike last year from the year before.

Social scientists and police pointed at Covid-19 pandemic as the main reason behind the increase in snatching and extortion as it pushed a large number of people into financial hardship last year.

Similarly, the pandemic-induced 66-day shutdown that started from March 26 last year, also contributed to the drop in the crime incidents, they said.

According to PHQ statistics, the total number of crimes fell by around 17 percent last year than the previous year.

The PHQ prepared the report on the basis of the number of cases filed with police stations across the country in the last two years.

According to the statistics, 541 cases were registered for mugging or snatching last year, compared to 323 in 2019.

Some 129 cases were filed for extortion last year. It was 95 the year before.

In 2019, as many as 2,25,684 crime-

related cases were in the police stations across the country. The number dropped to 1,87,926 last year, with narcotics-related cases seeing a major dip, show the statistics.

Dr M Khurshid Alam, chairman of Bangladesh Institute of Social Research (BISR) Trust, said incidents of mugging increased as income of marginal groups dropped due to pandemic.

"In such circumstances, it could be assumed that such cases [of mugging] would increase," he told The Daily Star.

He, however, said incidents of extortion go up when social and political disorder is on the rise.

"Extortion is a manifestation of political disorder," he said.

Mashiur Rahman, deputy commissioner of detective branch (Gulshan Division), gave the example of a trader who turned to crime after his business collapsed in the wake of the pandemic.

Apel Mahmud (26) used to sell clothes and seasonal fruits in the capital's Badda. But as his business went down after the outbreak, he and some of his friends started cheating people, he said. They engaged their wives to trap people in various ways and would then torture the victims to extort money. A man named Sayeed Nagar fell into their trap and was killed later by the gang.

Apel and his wife were arrested on July 12 last year.

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'LOCKDOWN' IN RANGPUR, DINAJPUR Incomes vanish for the vulnerable

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Rafiqul Islam sells kebab from evening to late night every day at Rangpur city's Company area. He used to make around Tk 400-500 per day, but since the April 14 "lockdown", his income has come down to zero.

"I haven't sold anything for the last four days," he said. Talking with this newspaper, Rafiqul said the situation was similar last year, when the government enforced a "shutdown" to curb coronavirus infections.

"I took care of my family with my savings," he said. Besides, there had been support from the affluent," he said. "This year, I have no money. I could've fed my family, if I had any savings left."

Roadside vendors like Rafiqul, and those from non-formal and low income groups in Rangpur and Dinajpur are struggling, as their daily income dropped to nothing or almost zero during the ongoing "strict lockdown".

The situation is worse than last year, as there has been little to no support from the affluent this time.

As there is no record for roadside vendors in Dinajpur and Rangpur, it is impossible to tally them. But there are many low-income people involved with such non-formal businesses, who take care of their families with the daily earnings.

Tea stalls, betel leaf, cigarette and street food shops, and clothes traders are usually involved in roadside business. Besides, there are several hundred people who earn through various jobs like repairing electronic items.

Jorina Begum used to sell "chittoi pitha" at Rangpur city's City Market area. The pitha was a popular item among the low-income group, but her shop also remains closed since April 14.

"I had to take loan to feed my family," she said. Liakat Ali, a betel leaf and cigarette seller at Dinajpur town's Kalitola area, said his daily earnings dropped to around Tk 50-100, which is not enough to feed his four-member family. "I couldn't even arrange for my iftar."

The 67-year-old man urged the government, non-government organisations and the affluent to help people like him, as they did last year.

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'Allow us to open shops in limited scale'

Ctg traders urge govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Traders in Chattogram should be allowed to open their shops in a limited scale amid the coronavirus pandemic so that they can survive, said their leaders yesterday.

The demand was raised during a press conference at Chattogram Press Club.

Addressing the event, Mohammad Abu Taleb, president of Tamakumundi Lane Bonik Samity, said, "More than three lakh small and big traders of several markets -- including Teri Bazar, New Market, Tamakumundi, Chawk Bazar and Riazuddin Bazar -- have lost their business capital."

He said traders have been incurring irreparable loss due to the "lockdown" caused by Covid-19. Most of them restarted their business with loans to recover last year's loss, he added.

Mimi Super Traders Association president Jagir Hossain said, "A large number of traders have stockpiled goods in their stores ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr. Thousands will incur huge losses if the 'lockdown' will continue."

BARISHAL RIVER PORT Workers hope for a miracle



Amid the lockdown, some workers at Barishal River Port still come to the port, hoping to find work. But their luck hasn't been the brightest.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

SUSHANTA GHOSH, Barishal

"This is the only work we know. When our incomes are cut off from this, we don't have anywhere else to go," said Shamsuddin, a loading worker at Barishal River Port.

Around 400-500 workers like him earn their living working various menial jobs at the port. While the rest of the country is enduring through the second week of the "lockdown", the situation is worse for them, as the river port shut down a week before.

Three weeks into no incomes, the workers are now at the brink of their fears. "Nobody has come to see us, even though we're passing the worst time with our families," one of them told this correspondent on Sunday morning.

Kasem Bhai has been working at the

port for many decades. At 74, he's one of the oldest labourers at Barishal River Port. "I have been carrying load for 50 years. Before me, my father also worked as a loading worker. In all my years, I have never seen such a dire situation. Only Allah knows how all these families are staying alive," the veteran lamented.

Even if there's almost no work at the port, some still come here, perhaps in desperation, perhaps out of habit. "I come here once a day, praying to God there's something for me," worker Abdul Sattar said.

When the port is running in full-swing, a worker usually earns up to Tk 400 to Tk 500. From there to zero earning for three weeks running has left the workers in dire straits.

The workers held launch owners partly

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Take special care of RMG workers amid Covid-19 pandemic

Garment Sramik Sanghati urges owners, govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Garment Sramik Sanghati central committee has called upon the owners and the government to take special care of the RMG workers, who have been playing an important role in the country's export earnings and the economy.

They raised a six-point demand to protect the workers and the industry, adding that if the spreading of coronavirus is not controlled quickly, infection and death among garment workers could increase, which will break the entire health system and the industry will also be threatened.

The workers should be given special recognition, additional incentives, and risk allowance, as they have been working to save the industry at the risk of their own lives, they added.

The organisation mentioned this in a joint statement issued yesterday by its central president Taslima Akhter and general secretary Julhasnayeen Babu.

It also demanded eliminating the sufferings of the workers related to transportation during the "lockdown" and urged the owners and the government to provide clean transportation for long-distance workers.

In addition, it urged the government to do testing and vaccination of all the workers as early as possible and to form a separate committee of labour representatives, doctors, and expert teams to supervise the hygiene in the factory, the statement read.

There must be an assurance that no one can be made to work with symptoms and are allowed paid leaves, it added.

Apart from that, the organisation demanded field hospitals, isolation centres, and health cards for workers and prioritisation in providing special treatment for free in government hospitals and compensation for the death of workers.

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Special train for vegetables begins journey tomorrow

To ply Dhaka-Panchagarh route with three tonnes of produce

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

A special parcel train is operating on the Panchagarh-Dhaka route to facilitate transportation of goods produced by farmers during the ongoing lockdown.

Deputy Commissioner of Panchagarh Sabina Yasmin formally inaugurated the operation on Monday at Bir Muktijoddha Sirajul Islam Railway Station.

The train will officially begin its journey tomorrow (Wednesday).

On the day, a total of three tonnes of vegetables including cucumber, tomato, eggplant, bottle gourd, bean and pumpkin produced in Panchagarh will be carried to different districts including Dhaka.

Station master Masud Parvez said the train will start from Panchagarh at 1pm three days a week -- Saturday, Monday and Wednesday. It should reach Dhaka around 3am.

Four wagons each can contain 40 tonnes of goods.

The state-run transport service is giving 25 percent concession on hire, and revokes all other charges for transporting vegetables, local fruits and other farm products. Transportation of each kilogram costs Tk 1.56 now, while the regular rent is Tk 2.02.

Bangladesh Railway began the operation of this special parcel train to ensure smooth supply of vegetables throughout the country, said Shah Sufi Nur Mohammad, Lalmonirhat divisional manager of BR.



To improve the water supply in Old Dhaka, Dhaka Wasa authorities are installing a 250-inch pipeline in the area. Though this kind of operations are usually a nuisance for commuters, this one is causing less of a disturbance during the lockdown. This photo was taken from North South Road yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

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Seven killed, six injured in road accidents

STAR REPORT

Seven people were killed and six others injured in road accidents in three districts during the last two days, according to reports from our correspondents.

In Pabna, three people were killed and six others injured as a truck overturned when the driver lost his control over the steering at Chorgorigi Alhaj intersection in Ishwardi upazila on Sunday night.

The deceased -- Jobbar Pramanik, Motiar Shah and Shukur Ali -- were banana traders, said police.

Ishwardi Police Station Officer-in-Charge Md Asaduzzaman said the accident took place around 11:40pm while they were going to Dhaka on a truck loaded with banana from Pabna.

The injured were admitted to Pabna General Hospital in critical condition, said the OC.

In Mymensingh, two people were killed as a truck hit a motorcycle they were riding in the city's Mashkanda area on Sunday night.

The deceased were identified as Sujon Mia (28) and Sumon Mia (13). Both were scrap vendors from the city's Muktijoddha Pally, according to police.

Sujon died on the spot while Sumon was declared dead at Mymensingh Medical College Hospital, said Kotwali Police Station Officer-in-Charge (investigation) Md Faruq Hossain.

Police seized the truck but its driver managed to flee the scene, he further said.

Meanwhile, two motorbikes collided head-on in the city's Khagadohor area on