

IRAN-SAUDI TIES
Tehran eyes new chapter in ties as Saudi crown prince call for "a good and special relationship"
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"The two-nation theory is really bad... we need to keep that in mind"
PROF. IMTIAZ AHMED
OF DHAKA UNIVERSITY



"Without functioning democratic institutions, Myanmar faces a tragic and avoidable backslide towards levels of poverty not seen in a generation."
UNDP ADMINISTRATOR ACHIM STEINER



"The decision to postpone the planned Palestinian elections, including the legislative elections originally scheduled for 22 May, is deeply disappointing."
EU FOREIGN POLICY CHIEF JOSEP BORRELL

Ravaged by job loss, pay cut



Thousands of RMG workers see reduced income during pandemic in last one year

MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN

Hundreds of thousands of workers in the readymade garment sector have been laid off since last year, despite factory owners receiving a Tk 8,000 crore stimulus package from the government to pay their salaries during the pandemic.

An estimate by Bangladesh Centre for Workers' Solidarity (BCWS) puts the number of workers who lost their jobs in one year, till April, at at least 300,000.

Many received no salary and severance pay and those who retained their jobs, had to take a significant pay cut.

Workers suffered a 35 percent pay cut during the shutdown last year, according to an estimate of a recent report and BCWS.

The report titled "The Weakest Link in the Global Supply Chain: How the Pandemic is Affecting Bangladesh's Garment Workers", launched on Thursday, revealed that RMG factories have sacked or furloughed on average 10 percent of their workers and may let go a further 35 percent of their workers in the future if the current situation -- fewer orders, price reductions on new orders, and delayed payments -- does not improve.

It also referred to data from a survey by the Centre for Global Workers' Rights last year that found 72.4 percent of furloughed workers did not get their due salary and 80.4 percent of laid off workers did not get their severance pay.

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Day labourers wait for work at Mirpur-1 intersection in the capital yesterday. With the country on a "strict lockdown" to ward off the Covid-19 threat, construction work in the city have almost come to a halt, leaving a large number of people jobless. The workers are struggling hard to make ends meet.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

May Day today

UNB, Dhaka

The historic May Day is being observed today as the world battles the coronavirus pandemic which has rendered millions of workers jobless in recent months. The day is a public holiday.

In normal times, the day is marked with a slew of events. But there will be no outdoor event this year as the country battles the second wave of the virus.

May Day, also called the International Workers' Solidarity Day, commemorates the historic uprising of the working class in Chicago for an eight-hour workday.

This year, the theme for this historic day in Bangladesh is: Sramik-Malik Nirbishesh, Mujib Borshe Gorbo Desh (Workers and

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HOLIDAY

The Daily Star offices will remain closed today on the occasion of May Day. Therefore, the newspaper will not come out tomorrow.

RESUMING PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Workers to stage demo tomorrow

Their leaders demand financial aid from govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Road Transport Workers Federation yesterday announced programmes, including demonstrations, demanding immediate resumption of public transport services, which remain suspended due to the Covid-19 restrictions.

The federation came up with a three-point demand taking into consideration the sufferings of thousands of workers in the sector, it said at a press conference at the capital's Jatiya Press Club.

As per the announcement, road transport workers will stage demonstrations across the country tomorrow and submit a memorandum to the deputy commissioner in every district on May 4 to press home their demands.

In the two other demands, they asked for providing financial assistance to transport workers and selling rice at Tk 10 per kg at the bus terminals.

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417 RETURNEE MIGRANT WORKERS

Nearly half of them remain jobless

Study shows 98pc of them are in stress due to unemployment, inadequate income

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A survey by Brac Migration Programme has found that 47.23 percent of 417 returnee migrants do not have any income source now.

As a result, the returnees are living their daily life depending on family earnings, loans, and support from relatives.

The report says 52.77 percent of the 417 respondents to the survey have somehow managed work. Of them, 24.19 percent are working in agriculture, 22.33 percent as day labourers, 35.35 percent opened small businesses and 17.67 percent are working in other jobs.

The survey was conducted in March-April to explore and analyse the socio-economic and psycho-social situation of returnee migrants after one year of their return home during the pandemic.

In a similar survey conducted around the same time last year, Brac found 87 percent of 558 returnee migrants did not have income opportunities, said Brac Migration Programme Head Shariful Hasan.

Copies of the latest report were sent to the media yesterday. The study found that 98.32 percent of participants were under stress and felt tension due to various issues such as unemployment, inadequate income, and inability to re-migrate.

The respondents to the survey were from 30 districts under seven divisions and 88.01 percent of them were from rural areas. Most were aged 31-35 and 95.68 percent of them were men and 4.32 percent women.

The migrants returned home from different countries, including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait, Italy, the UK, and Malaysia.

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Country sees lowest daily Covid deaths since April 5

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh yesterday reported its single-day Covid-19 death toll of 57, the lowest in 25 days, even though the virus surge remained at a disturbing level.

The new figure that came in the last 24 hours until yesterday morning brought the country's total fatalities to 11,450 while health authorities reported 2,177 new cases during the period.

The infection rate rose to 10.34 percent from Thursday's 9.39 percent while the death rate remained static at 1.51 percent, said the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

The country's infection rate came down below 10 percent on Thursday after over a month, as it reported a 7.68 percent infection rate on March 17 and it

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'Second wife' sues Mamunul for rape

6 more Hefajat men arrested in Sylhet, Brahmanbaria

STAR REPORT

Controversial Hefajat leader Mamunul Haque was sued for rape yesterday by a woman, who he claimed was his second wife.

The 27-year-old woman filed the case with Narayanganj's Sonargaon Police Station under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act.

In the case statement, she alleged Mamunul raped her many times over the past two years after promising that he would marry her, said Jayedul Alam, superintendent of police in the district.

Mamunul was the joint secretary general of the recently dissolved committee of Hefajat-e-Islam, an Islamist organisation.

Locals found him along with the woman at a resort in Sonargaon on April 3. Although Mamunul claimed she was his second wife, the complainant did not mention so in the case statement.

According to the case documents, the woman got acquainted with Mamunul in 2005 as he was a close friend of her former husband.

The woman said she and her former husband were leading a happy married life before they met the accused.

Mamunul used to visit the couple's house frequently and played different tricks to make their marital life toxic, she claimed in the case statement, adding that at one stage, on Mamunul's "evil" advice, the couple got divorced on August 10, 2018.

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COLLEGE GIRL'S DEATH

Family members frustrated as no arrest yet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sister of the college student found dead in a Gulshan flat expressed frustration that Bashundhara Group Managing Director Sayem Sobahan Anvir, who is accused of instigating the woman's suicide, has not been arrested yet.

She filed a case with Gulshan Police Station accusing Anvir of abetting the suicide of the 21-year-old woman on April 26.

Anvir and the woman were in a relationship, according to the complaint.

"Police found evidence of the relationship and of Anvir abetting the suicide of my sister. But police have not arrested him yet," said the victim's elder sister.

Sudip Chakrabarty, deputy commissioner

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Man dies in police custody

Family alleges cops tortured him after arrest

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chapainawabganj

A man died in police custody in Chapainawabganj yesterday after he was arrested in a narcotics case on Thursday night.

His brother alleged that the victim was tortured by police, but police denied the allegation.

The victim was identified as Sanaul Haque Biswas, 44, of Chanshikari village of Bholahat upazila of the district.

His younger brother Masud Rana Biswas told this correspondent that police arrested Sanaul from in front of Sadar hospital on Thursday night when he went out to buy eggs.

Masud said his brother was tortured by police and died because of the torture.

His brother left behind his wife and four daughters, he said.

Masud added that his brother was a drug addict,

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An excavator digs a pond in Nolkhola-Digori beel of Rajshahi's Paba upazila. Over the last two decades, work has been going on to convert a vast tract of land in the northern division into ponds for fish farming, leading to loss of agricultural land and waterlogging. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: ANWAR ALI

Ponds eating up crop fields

Lucrative fish farming leading to loss of land and livelihoods of farmers in Rajshahi division

ANWAR ALI, Rajshahi

A farmer in Rajshahi's Paba upazila, Motahar Hossain sees his land waterlogged most part of the year -- preventing him from cultivating paddy with water even encroaching into his home.

This, however, is not a result of climate change or seasonal flooding. In Rajshahi division, low agricultural land -- including vast stretches of beels -- is being converted into fields of ponds for fish cultivation.

Experts said the high banks of these ponds block natural water flow, leading to severe waterlogging in nearby areas during the rainy season and beyond, affecting crop fields -- mostly three-crop yielding ones -- and delaying paddy cultivation.

"Arbitrarily dug without prior assessment of requirements and environmental aspects, these ponds have put lives and livelihoods at stake," Prof ABM Mohsin of fisheries at Rajshahi University told The Daily Star.

Farmer Motahar said the waterlogging has deprived him of both rice and straw for cattle as he cannot cultivate paddy. "We don't need these ponds. These are the roots of our destruction."

The local administration has turned a blind eye as there is no law against pond digging and influential in the region -- including some politicians -- have investments in these ponds, activists and farmers alleged.

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