

RUPGANJ FACTORY FIRE

Abul Hashem, two sons granted bail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanjanj

A Narayanjanj court yesterday granted bail to Hashem Foods and Beverage owner Abul Hashem and his two sons, who were arrested in connection with the deaths of 51 people in a fire at their factory.

With this, a total of five out of eight accused in the case have got bail and the rest three are now behind bars.

Yesterday, Narayanjanj District and Sessions Judge Anisur Rahman granted bail to three accused after a hearing.

"The defendant's lawyer sought bail for six people, who were in jail. But the court granted bail to Abul Hashem and his two sons -- Hasib bin Hashem alias Sajeb and Tareq Ibrahim. The court sent the other three accused to jail," said Md Asaduzzaman, Narayanjanj Court Police Inspector.

The factory caught fire on July 8, claiming at least 51 lives. Two days after the incident, a police officer filed a case with Ruppaganj Police Station, alleging negligence against eight persons including Abul Hashem.

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When Khulna is struggling to deal with the immense number of Covid-19 patients, while hospital beds are becoming scarcer with each passing day, markets in Khulna city were seen full of shoppers coming from different districts right before Eid. As witnessed in other parts of the country, health guidelines were left largely ignored. This photo was taken yesterday from in front of Khulna Shopping Complex. PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

HASHEM FOODS FACTORY FIRE

Hold govt bodies that permitted it to run accountable

Speakers tell Bapa webinar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Each government authority that gave permissions to keep a factory like Hashem Foods Limited running despite its faulty fire safety and non-compliant condition, should be made accountable and brought under the law, speakers said at a webinar yesterday.

The programme, titled "The Accident of Hashem Foods in terms of Factory's Health, Safety and Environment", was organised by Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon (Bapa), a leading environmental platform.

Prof Mustafizur Rahman, distinguished fellow at CPD; Sharif Jamil, general secretary of Bapa; Dr Mahbuba Nasreen, professor at Institute of Disaster Management and Vulnerability Studies at Dhaka University; Iqbal Habib, joint secretary at Bapa; Prof Dr Md Abdul Alim, member of Bangladesh Food Safety Authority; and Hafizul Islam, member at Bangladesh Trade Union Centre, participated in the webinar.

Termining the incident a 'murder', speakers said after each such incident, numerous probe bodies have been formed, but the reports do not get published and the persons and authorities responsible have remained unpunished.

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Khulna division goes thru' its worst Covid-19 surge

877 die in last 19 days; total infections cross 81,000 mark

DIPANKAR ROY, Khulna

The number of infections and deaths in Khulna division this month has broken all previous records.

In the first 19 days of this month, about 26,000 people were diagnosed with Covid-19 in 10 districts. During this time, 877 people died from the disease; 44.12 percent of deaths occurred in this small period, and total deaths reached 1,947 in the division.

The first infection in the division was detected on March 19 last year in Chuadanga district. Now, total infections since the beginning in that very division crossed 81,000.

Analysing health department's data, it was found that the Covid-19 situation was relatively stable from the beginning of this year till March. However, since Eid-ul-Fitr, infections have been increasing rapidly.

In June, the records kept being broken with each passing day. Doctors believe the number of infections and deaths this month indicates a dire situation. According to the department, the average infection rate from since the outbreak till now is about 23 percent, but the rate in the last 19 days was about 38 percent.

The highest number of total deaths, 518, was reported in Khulna district till yesterday. Kushtia

has the second highest death toll at 423. Besides, 280 people died in Jashore, 166 in Jhenidah, 142 in Chuadanga, 111 in Bagerhat, 101 in Meherpur, 82 in Satkhira, 77 in Narail and 47 in Magura.

At present, there are 26,234 active Covid-19 patients in Khulna division as of yesterday. Of them, 1,158 are receiving treatment at different hospitals in 10 districts. The rest are being treated at home in isolation.

In the last 24 hours till yesterday, 1,165 infections were identified from 4,632 samples in the division, an infection rate of 25.15 percent. A total of 52 people died.

The number of total infections in Khulna district crossed 21,438 yesterday. The district is going through its worst Covid-19 phase till date, said Khulna Civil Surgeon Niaz Mohammed.

"Many patients from Satkhira are coming to Khulna for treatment, while the number of patients from Bagerhat, Jashore, Narail, Meherpur, Chuadanga, Pirojpur, Gopalganj and other districts is also rising," he added.

The three government hospitals -- including Khulna Medical College Hospital (KMCH), and Sadar Hospital -- in Khulna district are struggling

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ROOPPUR POWER PLANT SCAM HC questions bail of 7 former engr

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday questioned the lower court orders that granted bail to seven former engineers of Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant in Pabna.

The engineers -- formerly of the housing and public works department -- were given bail in two cases filed over the much-discussed corruption in purchasing furniture and household items for officials.

Issuing seven rules, the court asked the accused engineers to explain in two weeks why the lower court orders that granted them bail should not be scrapped.

The HC bench of Justice Md Nazrul Islam Talukder and Justice SM Mozibur Rahman came up with the rules after hearing seven petitions filed by Anti Corruption Commission (ACC), challenging the orders passed by a special judge's court in Pabna.

ACC lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan said the special judge's court of Pabna granted bail to the seven in June.

However, the Pabna court did not consider the gravity of their offenses and the bail orders were wrong, he said.

Workers victim of 'wage theft' amid pandemic

Says rights body report on 115 returnee migrants; over 1,000 cases at verification stage

JAMIL MAHMUD

At least 115 Bangladeshi migrant workers who returned home untimely amid the pandemic have faced "wage theft" in different host countries, according to a regional migrant rights group's report.

Of them, 99 were regular workers with legal papers while the rest were undocumented workers, said the recently published report "Crying Out for Justice: Wage Theft against Migrant Workers during Covid-19" of Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA).

Wage theft is a term used when money that's rightfully owed to workers gets withheld by their employers.

The Bangladeshi workers returned home at different times since the global Covid-19 outbreak early last year but their cases have been documented by MFA between January and May this year.

Gender-wise, 64 of the Bangladeshi migrant workers are male and 51 are female. The workers may have dues between Tk 60,000 to Tk 70,000 per individual in terms

of wage only as many of them left behind wages for three to five months, said Syed Saiful Haque, co-chair of Bangladesh Civil Society for Migrants (BCSM), which has been collaborating with MFA in a global campaign against wage theft.

"Besides, there are other left behind monetary claims such as benefits and bonuses," said Saiful, also chairman of WARBE Development Foundation.

He said under the campaign against "wage theft", the primary victims of concern are the migrant workers who left the host country without getting due wage, allowance, or overtime bill.

There is another category to a lesser extent which consists of small-scale expatriate investors who made investment in businesses in the host country and later returned home without getting back the invested money, he said.

According to the MFA report, of the 115 wage theft cases faced by Bangladeshi

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Salim Prodhan denied bail in graft case

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday rejected a bail petition of online casino "kingpin" Salim Prodhan in a case filed over amassing Tk 57.79 crore illegally and laundering about Tk 22 crore to Thailand and USA.

Judge Al Asad Md Asifuzzaman of the Special Judge's Court-6 of Dhaka passed the order after his lawyer Shahinur Rahman submitted a petition before the court.

During the hearing, the lawyer said his client has been in jail since September 30 of 2019 and the money laundering charges are false and fabricated.

However, Special Public Prosecutor Mahmud Hossain Jahangir told the court that the charges against the accused were primarily proved, so the petition should be rejected.

Upon hearing both sides, the judge turned down the defence plea, saying that the charges brought against the accused are specific.

On March 21, Judge KM Emrul Kayesh of the Senior Special Judge's Court of Dhaka took cognisance of the charges against the accused and transferred it to the court for trial.

'Bhalo' bridges gap for small cattle farmers

NILIMA JAHAN

Two years ago, Obaidul Huq quit his teaching job at a private school in Dhaka out of frustration and decided to go back to his village home in Kurigram's Buribari union.

At home, the 33-year-old started raising bulls, but making a decent living by rearing a few bulls turned out to be difficult. Even though he tried his best, the cattle did not grow up as expected, and thus failed to fetch expected prices.

This problem extends beyond Obaidul and is faced by thousands of cattle farmers.

A key reason behind is that farmers cannot use high-quality farm inputs like seeds, fertilisers, and essential chemicals due to their unavailability, lack of know-how, and proper guidance.

Obaidul was no exception. After rearing the bulls for nearly a year, he only made a profit of around Tk 12,000 by selling one of them, which was not enough considering his investment and a year's hard work.

This was when he came to know about "bhalo", a social enterprise that offers curated high-quality



Many cattle farmers begin their businesses with expectations of self-sustenance, but these often fall flat due to lack of access to information and quality inputs. This is where 'bhalo' wants to step in. PHOTO: COLLECTED

farm inputs, reliable advisory services, and low-cost credit and insurance facility for various farming needs, like dairy farming and bull fattening.

After he contacted them, bhalo took responsibility of two of his unsold bulls and got them ready for the market in just four months. bhalo gave the bulls high-quality nutrition products and ready-feed, and provided Obaidul with

consultations, all at the cost of Tk 16,000. "I was hesitant to avail the package initially, thinking whether the products will be harmful to my bulls. But after getting a positive signal from the local veterinary doctors, I took up the challenge in January," said Obaidul.

Last month, he sold one of the bulls and got a profit of Tk 38,000 after all expenses.

"I'm planning to sell the rest ahead of Eid-ul-Azha. I've already been asked Tk 70,000 for it," he said, adding that he will avail the package for three more cows.

BRIDGING THE GAP

'bhalo' CEO and founder Subrata Kumar said they intend to improve the earnings of smallholder farmers, connecting them to high-quality agro-inputs and services.

Starting in April 2019, the organisation covers 15 unions across three upazilas of Kurigram, one of the poorest districts -- Kurigram Sadar, Ulipur and Chilmari. It has served more than 1,500 farmers and reported a 50 percent increase in their income.

Subrata said over 80 percent of 16.5 million farmers in Bangladesh are smallholders who possess half a hectare of land and two to three cattle on an average.

"These small-holder farmers lack access to high-quality agro-inputs in their neighbourhood, credit facility for buying these inputs, and reliable advisory services to reap more benefits," he pointed out.

This is why when a farmer buys inputs from nearby shops, they

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RAPE, MURDER OF MINOR SC stays HC acquittal of two death row convicts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court yesterday stayed a High Court verdict that acquitted two death row convicts in a case filed over the rape and murder of a schoolgirl, Fatima Akhter Eti, in Mathbaria upazila of Pirojpur district in 2014.

Chamber judge of the SC's Appellate Division Justice Obaidul Hassan passed the order following a petition filed by the state, seeking stay on the judgement.

The apex court's chamber judge also sent the stay petition to its full bench for hearing on August 1, said Deputy Attorney General Dr Md Bashir Ullah.

The reason behind SC decision will be known after the full hearing, he added.

He said nine-year-old Eti, a third grader and daughter of Ful Miah Hawlader of Jhatibunia village, used to live at her maternal grandfather's house at Bandhabpara-Bukhaitala village.

When the child went to a nearby field to bring back a cow -- belonging to her family -- home on October 5, 2014, Mehedi Hasan Swapan and Sumon Jamadder of the village

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FIGHTING LEAD POISONING

Multi-sector approach imperative: speakers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Experts at a virtual workshop yesterday suggested forming a time-bound national framework and proper coordination among government agencies to fight lead poisoning, which has emerged as a global concern for its deadly impact on health and environment.

They also called for enhancing technical capacity and generating awareness among people.

Pure Earth, a New York based organisation working to eradicate toxic pollution in low and middle-income countries, in coordination with the Department of Environment (DoE) arranged the event. It was sponsored by USAID, GAHP (Global Alliance on Health and Pollution), OAK Foundation and Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

A Shamim Al Razi, additional secretary of Environment, Forest and Climate Change Ministry, said the threat arising from lead should not be underestimated. "We have started to phase out the use of

lead. On Sunday, a team of DoE knocked down 16 lead factories in Demra. This is a cross-cutting issue linking commerce, industry and local government ministries. We need a multi-sectoral effort in this regard," said Razi, also the chief guest.

Dr Mahfuzar Rahman, Bangladesh country director of Pure Earth, said children were being poisoned by lead on a massive scale either through lead paint, lead recycling, toys, food spices, traditional medicine, cosmetics, pottery and cookware.

Lead poisoning robs children of their health and potential, he added.

The leading cause of lead poisoning among children living in Bangladesh and similar countries is that they get exposed to recycling of lead-acid batteries, he added.

"The rapidity of the response is crucial here; the longer the exposure continues, the greater the likelihood of disease. We should act accordingly otherwise we will see a major deficit in children's intellectual ability," he opined.

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Large crowds were seen protesting at Dhaka Medical College Hospital yesterday. According to those present there, outgoing migrant workers had registered for vaccination but did not get any text message detailing their centre and date. Worried about missing their flights over inoculation, they gathered there to question the authorities. PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Another 75 hospitalised with dengue

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 75 people with dengue fever were admitted to hospitals in the last 24 hours till 8am yesterday.

With them, a total of 1,282 patients have been hospitalised with dengue this year, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS). Of the total infected, only 38 are from outside Dhaka.

Around half of the total -- 910 -- were diagnosed during the running month, which indicates a fast-rising trend of the disease.

Two hundred and seventy-two people were infected in June, while 43 were infected in May.

Though most patients hospitalised have been released, 403 are undergoing treatment at hospitals in Dhaka, and four outside the capital, DGHS data shows.