

# Horse-drawn carts key mode of transport in char areas



People living and working in char areas of Kurigram and Lalmonirhat are increasingly turning towards horse-drawn carts as a solution to their need for transportation. Here, a few carts are seen trudging through sand and shallow pools of water in Fuluar Char of Kurigram's Chilmari upazila. The picture was taken recently. PHOTO: S DILIP ROY

S DILIP ROY

Although horse-drawn carts are a thing of the past in most parts of the world, these outdated buggies still facilitate movement across 450 char areas in Kurigram and Lalmonirhat.

There are 20,000 horse-drawn carts that transport goods and carry passengers through char areas of the Brahmaputra, Teesta, Dharla, Dudhkumar and Gangadhar rivers, where a lack of paved roads makes it difficult for heavy vehicles to navigate the region.

So, traditional horse-drawn carts are mainly used to this end and as such, many local families depend on these waggons for a source of income.

"I carry passengers on boats across Brahmaputra river when there is sufficient flow during the monsoon season and then work as a coachman in the char areas for the rest of the year," said Nazrul Mandal of Astomir char in Kurigram's Chilmari upazila.

"We transport agricultural products from char areas to the mainland and also bring back the necessary goods. Sometimes people use our waggons to carry ailing people to hospitals," he added.

Around 30 to 50 horse-drawn carts and carriages are used daily to transport goods in each char area.

"We get Tk 30 to Tk 35 for transporting one maund (about 40 kilogrammes) of goods for four to five kilometres. We can transport up to 15 maunds of goods on each trip," said Idris Ali, a coachman of Char Karai Barishal in Chilmari upazila.

"On average, I earn Tk 1,200 a day and

half of it is spent on buying the horse's feed," he added.

Each coachman tends to have at least two to three horses in their stable.

"I made a horse-drawn cart using old rings, tyres and tubes of motor vehicles, wood and bamboo, spending around Tk 60 thousand," said Mansur Ali, a coachman of Char Gobordhan in Lalmonirhat's Aditmari upazila.

After building his buggy, Ali then



bought a pair of horses for Tk one lakh. After that, he started using it to carry people and goods through the sandy char areas.

"A horse-drawn cart costs around half as much as a bullock cart and can move on the sandy char land much easier than its bull-driven counterpart," Ali added.

Coachmen see satisfactory earnings

during the dry season in November to June as people have to use horse-drawn carts to transport goods as boat services are halted when river levels drop, according to Atiar Rahman, a coachman of Char Shiberkuti in Lalmonirhat sadar upazila.

He went on to say that the use of horse-drawn carts has been increasing day by day, providing more job opportunities for locals.



Jahangir Ala, a grocery store owner in the remote char Shakha in Kurigram's Chilmari upazila, told the Daily Star that he brings goods in from the mainland by boat between July to October but when the river dries up in November to June, he plies horse-drawn carts for bringing goods.

If the horse-drawn carts were not available, it would not be possible to run

businesses promptly in char areas.

"So, our business policy in the char area is dependent on horse-drawn carts," he said.

Surendra Nath Sarker, a businessman from Ulipur upazila town in Kurigram, told the Daily Star that they purchase agri products that are produced in char areas.

"So, horse-drawn carts in char areas have become a part of our business," Sarler said.

Kuddus Bapari, a farmer of a remote char called Parbati in Kurigram sadar upazila, told the Daily Star they hire horse-drawn carts to transport agri products to markets in the mainland to sell them at a fair rate.

"Some years ago, when there was no facility for horse-drawn carts in the char area, we had to use bullock carts but it was not easy. We even carried some goods by hand," he said.

Sirajul Islam, a char farmer at Char Sardob in Kurigram sadar upazila, said that many char people, failing to afford the fare of horse carts, still carry goods themselves, walking miles on end in the sandy land.

"Char people have urged the government to arrange free transport on broughams for ailing and elderly people as well," he added.

Fedous Rahman, district cooperative officer in Kurigram, told the Daily Star that horse-drawn carts are playing an important role in carrying goods and passengers in char areas.

The arrangement of easy-term loans from banks would encourage more people to buy or make horse-drawn carts businesses.

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## NBR's role big in fighting money laundering

Agriculture minister says

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The National Board of Revenue (NBR) has a big role to play so as to ensure that businesspeople can in no way launder money abroad, Agriculture Minister Muhammad Abdur Razzaque said yesterday.

Digitalisation can play a big part in this and though it has been adopted in many areas of customs, the scope is there for further incorporations, he told a seminar organised by the NBR at InterContinental Dhaka marking International Customs Day.

NBR Chairman Abu Hena Md Rahmatul Muneem expressed hope on bringing a change to any negative mindset general people may bear towards customs.

Once customs was considered only a mode for revenue generation but now it is playing a big role in the development of the local industry, he said.

"There are various challenges arising for customs. We are going to solve them and move forward. We will improve in all areas where we are lagging behind. We have to take the economy forward by generating more revenue," he added.

Bangladesh yesterday observed International Customs Day as a member country of World Customs Organization with the theme "Scaling up Customs Digital Transformation by Embracing a Data Culture and Building a Data Ecosystem".

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## Two Monno entities see profit drop

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Two out of three listed companies of Monno Group reported lower earnings in the first half of the financial year owing to increased expenses.

Monno Fabrics said its earnings grew 150 per cent year-on-year in the July-December period. Earnings per share rose to Tk 0.05 from Tk 0.02 recorded in the previous year.

Monno Ceramic, one of the oldest concerns of the group, recorded an 11 per cent decline in net profit, while Monno Agro & General Machinery's earnings dropped 20 per cent, according to the postings by the concerns on the website of the Dhaka Stock Exchange yesterday.

Benoy Paul, company secretary of Monno Agro, said its revenue grew to Tk 5.57 crore in the first half of the financial year from Tk 4.83 crore in the same period a year ago.

"But our operating expenses increased because of higher inventory," he said. Monno Agro sells agricultural machinery and spare parts of jute mills.

Monno Ceramic said despite a 16 per cent rise in the October-December period, net profit declined in the six-month period, falling 11 per cent.

The EPS declined to Tk 0.64 in July-December from Tk 0.72 recorded in the same period a year ago.

The ceramics maker blamed increased operating expenses and finance costs for the EPS drop.

Monno Agro closed 2.99 per cent lower at Tk 564.20, Monno Ceramic was down 0.53 per cent at Tk 112.70, and Monno Fabrics fell 2.08 per cent to end the day at Tk 23.50 on the DSE yesterday.

## IMF slashes global growth outlook

AFP, Washington

The Omicron variant of Covid-19 is creating an obstacle course for the global economy, which will slow growth this year, notably in the world's two largest economies, the IMF said Tuesday.

The Washington-based crisis lender cut its world GDP forecast for 2022 to 4.4 per cent, half a point lower than the October estimate, due to the "impediments" caused by the latest outbreak, although those are expected to begin to fade in the second quarter of the year.

"The global economy enters 2022 in a weaker position than previously expected," the International Monetary Fund said in the quarterly update to its World Economic Outlook (WEO), adding that "the emergence of the Omicron variant in late November threatens to set back this tentative path to recovery."

The outlook remains beset by risks, including geopolitical tensions and a wave of price increases hitting consumers and businesses that is expected to last longer than previously expected.

After the solid recovery last year when the global economy grew an estimated 5.9 per cent, the IMF cut projections for nearly every country -- with India a notable exception -- but it was the downgrades to the United States and China that had the biggest impact.

"These impediments are expected to weigh on growth in the first quarter of 2022," the report said.

"The negative impact is expected to fade starting in the second quarter, assuming that the global surge in Omicron infections abates and the virus does not mutate into new variants that require further mobility restrictions."

The fund once again stressed that controlling the pandemic is critical to the economic outlook and urged widespread vaccinations in developing nations.



Workers weld at a workshop of an automobile manufacturing enterprise in Qingzhou city of East China's Shandong province. PHOTO: AFP

## Oil rises towards \$89

REUTERS, London

Oil rose towards \$89 a barrel on Wednesday, within sight of a seven-year high, supported by tight supply and geopolitical tensions in Europe and the Middle East that raise concerns about further disruption.

US President Joe Biden said on Tuesday he would consider personal sanctions on President Vladimir Putin if Russia invades Ukraine. On Monday, Yemen's Houthi movement launched a missile attack on a United Arab Emirates base.

"Anxiety over potential supply disruptions in the Middle East and Russia is providing bullish fodder for the oil market," said Stephen Brennock of oil broker PVM.

Brent crude rose 61 cents, or 0.7 per cent, to \$88.81 at 0917 GMT. On January 20 it reached \$89.50, the highest since October 2014.

US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude was up 25 cents, or 0.3 per cent, to \$85.85.