



Tobacco leaves being dried in the sun on the ground of Durgapur Government Primary School in Lalmonirhat's Aditmari upazila, putting the health of the students, the teachers as well the tobacco workers, who hardly use any protections, under risk. Children can no longer play on the field, and the strong smell from the leaves has spread. The photo was taken on Thursday.

PHOTO: S DILIP ROY

School ground turns tobacco drying field

S DILIP ROY

More than 500 students and teachers of two government schools have been suffering immensely as local farmers dry and process tobacco leaves on their campus premises in Lalmonirhat's Aditmari upazila.

The educational institutions are Durgapur Government Primary School and Durgapur High School, sharing the same premises.

According to the schools' authorities, farmers forcibly dry and process their tobacco leaves on the playground even after multiple teachers' protests.

The farmers keep the playgrounds occupied from morning to afternoon every day during this season, depriving students of routine sports, they said.

Talking to The Daily Star, the teachers of the schools said this practice imposes students to health hazards.

There are incidents of students falling sick in the classroom because of the stench, said one of the teachers.

According to the students, some of their classmates stopped going to the institutions for the stench.

Sahidul Islam, headmaster of Durgapur High School, said the farmers ignore any protest against them and continue.

"At this point, we are left with no other option but to take help from the law enforcement agencies in this regard," he said.

Razia Parveen, headmaster of Durgapur Government Primary School, echoed Shahidul's statement.

Contacted, Muhammad Habibullah Talukder Ruskin, associate prof and head of cancer epidemiology, National

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22-year drive around the world

Argentinian family comes home

AFP, Gualguaychu

An Argentine family is about to finish the trip of a lifetime: they have covered five continents in a 1928 jalopy on an adventure that began in 2000, while bringing into the world and raising four kids who are now adolescents.

The Zapp family -- Herman and Candelaria and those children -- have driven a total of 362,000 kilometres and have now stopped off in a town on the border with Uruguay before their scheduled arrival Sunday back where they started on January 25, 2000 at the Obelisk, a monument in downtown Buenos Aires.

"I have very mixed feelings. We are ending a dream, or fulfilling a dream," Herman told AFP. "What will come now? Thousands of changes, thousands of options," said the 53-year-old, who is already thinking of sailing around the world.

Candelaria, who was 29 when the trip began and is now 51, said her biggest and best discovery was the people encountered along the way.

She said the family visited no fewer than 102 countries, although sometimes they had to take detours because of wars or other kinds of conflict.

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DIALOGUE ON EC

Political consensus key

Say academics, suggest bringing law enforcers under EC's authority during polls

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

Building consensus among political parties, bringing back people's trust in the Election Commission and reforming the electronic voting machine system are among the vital measures needed for free and fair elections, academics said yesterday.

While attending a dialogue with the Election Commission at the EC conference room, invitees also proposed that "law enforcers" be brought under EC authority during elections and that commission officials, instead of deputy commissioners, act as returning officers during national polls.

The EC's initiative to hold dialogues with a cross-section of people seeking recommendations on how best to hold free and fair elections received an underwhelming response on the first day of the talks yesterday, as just 13 out of 30 invitees joined the dialogue.

Chattoogram University Professor Muhammad Yeahia Akhter said Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibul Awal has already talked about political consensus, without which it will be tough for EC to perform its duties.

"It was tough for the commission to hold an election when there was no caretaker government ... It has been proved on more than one occasion that transparent election cannot take place under a

political government," he said.

"I have seen that under the political government, the Election Commission cannot work without any unannounced dictation. It cannot work independently," he said.

He said the caretaker government system was abolished unilaterally, although it was introduced with political consensus after recommendations of three alliances of political parties during the movement against dictator HM Ershad.

"In the existing system the PM, ministers will remain in power [during elections] as the PM and ministers and MPs also remain MPs ... it will be tough to hold a fair election [in this manner]," Akhter said.

He proposed that field level election commission officials be made returning officers during the national election.

"Do not use EVMs [electronic voting machines] in any constituencies, as it is a high-tech machine and most voters do not have knowledge about technology," he said. "If needed hold a referendum on whether EVMs will be used or not".

He said if someone has a meal at 8:00am, everyone calls it breakfast, but if someone eats at 1:00pm, none will call it breakfast as it is lunch.

"Ballot boxes can eat at 8:00am, but what we have seen in the last general elections is that ballot boxes took sehri [a pre-dawn meal] during

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FIRING OF ACC OFFICIAL

Sharif files writ challenging his dismissal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sharif Uddin, former deputy assistant director of the Anti-Corruption Commission, filed a writ with the High Court yesterday challenging the dismissal from his job.

He was sacked on February 16 under section 54(2) of Anti-Corruption Commission (Servants) Service Rules-2008.

According to the corresponding section, the ACC can terminate any officer either issuing a 90 day notice or paying 90 days' salary in cash.

In the petition, Sharif said the commission violated his constitutional rights by applying the section. He also urged the HC to reinstate him.

Contacted, his lawyer Mia Mohammad Ishtiaque said they were expecting a hearing of the petition within a day or two.

Meanwhile, the HC yesterday deferred issuing an order till March 15 on another writ that sought a directive to conduct an independent

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Jet fuel price skyrocketing

Hiked for 12th time in 16 months; now Tk 87 a litre

RASHIDUL HASAN

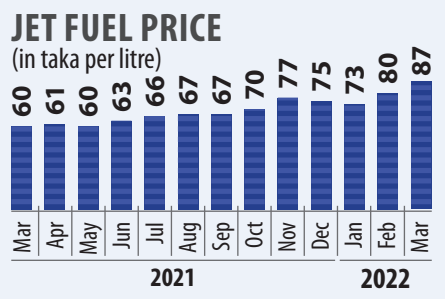
The jet fuel price has gone up for the 12th time in 16 months, in a development that is bound to cause further strain to migrant workers, who are struggling to foot the high airfares, particularly to the Middle Eastern countries.

The price of jet fuel is now Tk 87 per litre after the Padma Oil Company, a subsidiary of Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC), raised it by Tk 7 a litre. In December 2020, it was Tk 48 a litre.

The latest round of hike in the price of jet fuel, which accounts for up to 46 percent of the operational costs of an airline, will invariably be passed on to passengers, said leaders of different manpower recruiting platforms.

"The airlines will have an excuse to hike the airfare further," said Tipu Sultan, president of the Recruiting Agency Oikya Parishad.

In January last year, the lowest airfare on the domestic route was Tk 3,200. In



February this year, it rose to Tk 4,000 for the jet fuel price hike last month.

The airfare will increase by at least Tk 300 for the fresh hike, said Mofizur Rahman, secretary-general of the Aviation Operators Association of Bangladesh.

This can put off many from air travel, which will have a serious impact on the airline industry, said Rahman, also the managing director of Novoair.

The jet fuel price in Bangladesh

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PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Three students enjoy ice lollies from a vendor at a fair in Azimpur Government Officers' Quarters in the capital yesterday. Even though such lollies taste amazing, especially as the mercury rises by the day, they are not always made with utmost attention to hygiene or standards.