

## ASHRAYAN PROJECT Construction of 88 houses halted over irregularities

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

Brahmanbaria Deputy Commissioner Shahgir Alam has halted the construction work of two shelter projects after finding severe irregularities.

He instructed the authorities to stop the construction works of 88 houses at two Ashrayan projects – at Khalapara and Ghagutia villages in Akhaura upazila – on Thursday after a day-long visit to those project sites.

Talking to The Daily Star, the DC said a three-member probe committee, headed by ADC (revenue) Ashraf Ahmed Rassel, was formed to investigate the irregularities.

“Iron rods used in the constructions were not provided as per the work schedule. Even thin wire was used instead of iron rods. The gap between two rods was not made according to the work order.

Moreover, the quality of bricks, sand and cement were too poor,” said the DC.

**PIO Tapash Chakrabarty said although the UNO was informed about the irregularities earlier**

According to sources, the DC went to those project sites suddenly taking the mason and his assistant with him.

Inspecting the irregularities, he ordered to demolish parts of the buildings.

The DC later ordered to stop the construction of the 88 houses.

He reprimanded the upazila nirbahi officer (UNO), assistant commissioner (land) and project implementation officer (PIO) of the upazila, said villagers and public representatives who were on the spot.

During the DC’s visit, locals and public representatives alleged that UNO Rumana Akter had given the contract of 169 houses to Nuruzzaman Bhuiyan, the upazila unit president of Swechhahasebak League.

At that time, the PIO Tapash Chakrabarty said although the UNO was informed about the irregularities earlier, she did not pay heed to the issue.

Contacted, UNO Rumana Akter said she did not expect the concerned contractors to do such irregularities.

Contacted, DC Shahgir Alam said he had visited several shelter projects in the upazila.

No irregularities will be allowed in this project. If any irregularity or negligence of any officer is found in this regard, departmental actions will be taken against him/her, he warned.



Local resident Vitaly Kudasov, 71, walks with his bicycle near an apartment building destroyed during Ukraine-Russia conflict in the southern port city of Mariupol, Ukraine on Thursday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Russia taking ‘colossal losses’ in eastern battle

Says Ukraine; Moscow admits striking Kyiv during UN chief’s visit; Nato warns conflict could last years

AGENCIES

Ukraine acknowledged yesterday that it was taking heavy losses in Russia’s assault in the east, but said Russia’s losses were even worse, as Nato warned the conflict could last years.

In Kyiv, workers were cleaning up rubble in a residential area after Russia fired two missiles at the capital during the visit on Thursday by UN chief Antonio Guterres, which Ukraine called an attack on the United Nations itself.

Russia’s defence ministry confirmed it had carried out an air strike on Kyiv during the visit by Guterres.

Vera Gyrych, a producer for the US-funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, died when a Russian missile slammed into the house where she lived in Kyiv, the media group said of the strike.

Having failed in an assault on Kyiv in the north of Ukraine last month, Russia is now trying to fully capture two eastern provinces known as the Donbas.

Ukraine has acknowledged losing

control of some towns and villages there since the assault began last week, but says Moscow’s gains have come at a massive cost to a Russian force already worn down from its earlier defeat near the capital.

“We have serious losses but the Russians’ losses are much much bigger...They have colossal losses,” presidential adviser Oleksiy Arestovych said.

By pledging tens of billions of dollars in aid for Ukraine, Biden has dramatically increased US involvement in the conflict.

The United States and its allies are now sending heavy weapons including artillery, with what Washington says is an aim not just to repel Russia’s attack but to weaken its armed forces so it cannot menace its neighbours again.

Zelensky tweeted: “Thank you @ POTUS and the American people for their leadership in supporting Ukraine in our fight against Russian aggression. We defend common values - democracy and freedom. We appreciate the help. Today it is

needed more than ever!”

Russia has said the arrival of Western arms into Ukraine means it is now fighting a “proxy war” against Nato.

Speaking to the BBC, Nato deputy secretary general Mircea Geoană said: “It’s clear that the next few days and weeks could prove decisive, but the war would probably take longer.

“Could be weeks, could be months, could be even years - it depends on a lot of factors. But, in the end, probably this will be fought and won, hopefully, by Ukraine on the battlefield.”

Ukraine said Russia was pounding the entire front line in the eastern Donetsk region with rockets, artillery, mortar bombs and aircraft.

The bloodiest fighting and worst humanitarian catastrophe of the war have been in Mariupol.

Zelensky’s office said plans were in place to evacuate civilians yesterday from the besieged Azovstal steel plant where Ukrainian forces and civilians are encircled by Russian troops in the southern city of Mariupol.

## Jumatul Wida observed

UNB, Dhaka

Jumatul Wida, the last Friday of the holy month of Ramadan, was observed across the country yesterday with due religious solemnity.

Jumatul Wida has special importance as it is a prelude to the departure of the holy month for the Muslims.

On this day, thousands of Muslim devotees attend the Juma prayers at mosques, seeking divine blessings for peace and progress of the Muslim Ummah.

The day’s biggest congregation in the country was held at Baitul Mukarram National Mosque in the capital.

## 2 friends killed as lorry hits motorcycle

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two men were killed as a lorry hit their motorcycle on the capital’s Khilgaon flyover around 2:00am yesterday, said police.

The deceased were identified as Entaruzzaman, 43, and his friend Bidhan Biswas, 42. Both of them were from Khulna, said Farooqul Alam, officer-in-charge of Khilgaon Police Station.

Entaruzzaman lived in Bhatara area. Bidhan came to Dhaka on Thursday to visit him, he said.

Both of them were seriously injured in the accident. They were taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, where doctors declared them dead around 5:00am.

The driver, Abdul Kuddus, has been arrested. The lorry was also seized, he said.

## Two minor girls raped in 2 dists

STAR REPORT

A second grader in Cox’s Bazar and a fourth grader in Tangail were raped allegedly by their neighbours.

Police in Tangail arrested the suspect, Abbas Ali, 25, a carpenter from Govindasi union, yesterday after the mother of the fourth grader filed a rape case with Bhupur Police Station on Thursday night.

The arrestee was produced before a Tangail court, which sent him to jail.

According to the case statement, Abbas raped the girl when she was alone at her home on Thursday noon. Hearing her screams, other locals rescued her but Abbas fled.

She was sent to a hospital yesterday for medical tests, said officials of the police station.

The second grader was raped in Kutubdia upazila of Cox’s Bazar on Wednesday night. She was receiving treatment at the One-Stop Crisis Centre of a hospital yesterday, said police.

The mother of the seven-year-old said Altaf Hossain, a rickshaw puller, took the girl to a secluded place and raped her.

She was rescued and first taken to a nearby hospital from where she shifted to a bigger hospital in the district.

“We will file a case after returning to Kutubdia,” the mother said.

Police are raiding different places to arrest the suspect, who is on the run, said Omar Haidar, officer-in-charge (OC) of Kutubdia Police Station.

## Smoothen than expected Hope back after Covid horror

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Satkhira. But now all the bus operators are asking for Tk 1,000. After bargaining persistently for around three hours, I could buy a ticket for Tk 800,” said Rabiul Islam at Gabtoli.

Although most of the buses operated on time, some ran late. “My bus was scheduled to leave at 11:15am. But it’s around 1:00pm and the bus had not even arrived,” said Sarwar Hossain, who was travelling to Chuadanga.

However, on Thursday night, tailbacks on either side of the Bangabandhu bridge sometimes stretched up to 20km.

The tailbacks forced the bridge authorities to stop toll collection from certain vehicles, said Aatur Rahman, in-charge of Tangail’s Elenga Highway Police outpost.

The situation improved as the day progressed, he said.

Mohammad Jinnah, a traveller, said, “We reached Tangail from Dhaka, a distance of around 80 kilometres, within two

hours. Then it took us another two hours to travel the 13-kilometer road leading to the Bangabandhu bridge,” he said.

**FERRY SITUATION**

At Shimulia ferry terminal in Munshiganj, several hundred vehicles and several thousand motorbikes were seen waiting for ferries yesterday morning.

“We reached Shimulia around 7:00am. It is 11:30am, and we are still waiting,” said Bappi Sarker, who was traveling in a microbus with his family.

However, the number of vehicles came down around noon.

Many passengers alleged that ferry operators were charging additional money from the travellers.

“We usually travel from Munshiganj’s Muktarpur to Shimulia for Tk 100. But now they are charging Tk 200,” said Azad Hossain, a private jobholder.

[Our correspondents from Manikganj, Munshiganj and Tangail contributed to the report]

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better Eid celebration this year, leaving behind the pandemic-induced economic horror.

Bangladesh saw an increase in inward remittance in March ahead of the Arabic fasting month of Ramadan.

More than one crore Bangladeshis live in over 160 countries, according to government estimates. They send remittance – which is not only ensuring survival of their families but also considered a key pillar of the country’s economy.

The country received \$1.85 billion in remittance in March this year, shows Bangladesh Bank data. The monthly amount is the highest after July last year when \$1.87 billion inward remittance was received.

As of April 21, Bangladesh expatriates sent home \$1.40 billion in remittance, says central bank data. Experts had said the high remittance inflow is likely to continue till Eid-ul-Fitr.

In April last year, the total remittance was \$2.06 billion.

In the first nine months of the ongoing fiscal year, Bangladesh received \$15.30 billion in remittance, which, however, is a decrease of 21.56 percent compared to the same period a year ago.

Noted economist Prof Mustafizur Rahman said usually a spike in inward remittance could be seen in the month ahead of Eid – which was anticipated for this year as well.

“The tendency continues,” he said, adding that the overall remittance

inflow has dropped but there are other reasons for the decline.

The country saw a spike in inward remittance last year after many returnees brought along their savings home. Besides, remittance inflow shifted from informal channel to formal channel amid the pandemic, said Prof Mustafizur, a distinguished fellow at think-tank Centre for Policy Dialogue.

He said Bangladeshis expatriates have more or less come out of the setback they faced amid the pandemic.

In the first three months of this year, 3.22 lakh Bangladeshis have gone overseas for jobs, says Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) data. The government is expecting about a million workers will have overseas employment this year.

Prof Mustafizur said Bangladesh could even receive a higher remittance in 2023-2024 than the \$24.77 billion the country received in 2020-2021 as a large number of migrant workers are going abroad and will start sending remittance in a year after settling down.

MS Shekil Chowdhury, chairperson of Centre for NRB, a non-profit organisation of non-resident Bangladeshis, said to some extent, Bangladeshis expatriates in different Western and Arab countries are “relieved” now compared to their “tensed” situation amid the pandemic in the past two years.

Their income has

increased from what they were earning in the past two years, Shekil said.

He said a large number of expatriates are trying to send money home “as much as possible”. Besides, Bangladesh government’s 2.5 percent incentive on inward remittance plays a vital role in increasing remittance inflow through legal channels, he added.

“Hopefully, we will see a happy Eid this year,” he said, adding Bangladeshis expatriates are hardworking and trying to support their families back home amid global commodity price hike due to the Russia-Ukraine war.

Shariful Hasan, head of Brac Migration Programme, said migrant workers are gradually overcoming Covid-induced challenges and there is a “positive vibe” among them ahead of Eid.

Rural households are the ultimate beneficiaries of remittance and rural economy including trade and business, and social events like wedding ceremonies thrive based on additional remittance sent during the Eid, he said.

After two years, such thrive is apparent in rural areas under districts dominated by migrant households, he added.

Mostafa Hussain, 55, a Bangladeshi boutique shop owner in Malaysia, said he could not run his business during the Eid-ul-Fitr last year.

But this year his income has returned to normalcy and so is the case of many other Bangladeshis including those who run businesses and work in

companies.

“I couldn’t celebrate Eid last year. This year, I will offer Eid prayers at a mosque which was not possible last year,” he said.

In Lebanon, Bangladeshis, however, continued to struggle amid prolonged economic depression.

Babu Saha, a Bangladeshi journalist in Beirut, said there is no festivity among Bangladeshis in Lebanon. Although Bangladeshis can meet their daily expenses from what they earn, many cannot save or send money home.

## 50 killed

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Scores of Afghan civilians have been killed in recent weeks in blasts, some of which have been claimed by Islamic State. The latest attack came on the last Friday in the month of Ramadan in which most Muslims fast, and before the religious holiday of Eid next week.

The Taliban rulers say they have secured the country since taking power in August and largely eliminated Islamic State’s local offshoot, but international officials and analysts say the risk of a resurgence in militancy remains.

Many of the attacks have targeted the Shia minority, however Sunni mosques have also been attacked.

Bombs exploded aboard two passenger vans carrying Shia Muslims in the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif on Thursday, killing at least nine people. Last Friday, a blast tore through a Sunni mosque during Friday prayers in the city of Kunduz, killing 33.

## ‘Please show him arrested’

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at the gate, he was told that an arrest warrant for my husband has been issued against his village address in Bhola,” she said.

Mohasin is facing two cases filed with police stations in Bhola – one was over possessing illegal arms while the other over gender violence. He owns two trucks in Dhaka and trades in fish and fruits.

“My husband and I were asleep when the men came. They told us my husband needs to go with them. He was allowed to change his clothes,” she said.

One of them was carrying an ID card. After Nejhum’s brother took a photo of the card, he was forced to delete it and reset the entire phone, she claimed.

“While taking away my husband, they told us not to take any action and that he would be returned to us in three days. It has been more than 10 days...”

Nejhum said they filed a general diary with Kafrul Police Station. “They refused to file any case over the matter. They agreed to file the GD on condition that no law enforcement agency will be mentioned in the document.”

Contacted, OC Hafizur Rahman of the police station said the missing man was not found till last night.

On the allegation that they refused to lodge any case, he said filing of the GD was enough over the matter.

He declined to comment on the other allegation that they asked the family not to mention any law enforcement agency’s name in the GD.

Speaking at the press conference, Prof CR Abrar asked, “When the

government is engaging with the authorities in foreign countries regarding forced disappearances and responding to their questions, why does it not give any answer to the families like Nejhum’s?”

Human rights activist Nur Khan Liton said the family has learnt from various sources that the trader has been kept under the custody of a law enforcement agency. “He must be produced before a court and shown arrested.”

Maayer Daak, a platform of families of victims of forced disappearance, organised the press conference.

## Accident claims

### woman’s life

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A woman was killed as a truck rammed a CNG-run auto-rickshaw in Nazirhat Bazar area of Chattogram’s Fatikchhari upazila yesterday afternoon.

The deceased was identified as Jharna Bibi, 25, of Maijarteck area of Karnaphuli upazila, said police.

The accident around 2:40pm left Jharna critically injured. After she was rushed to Chattogram Medical College Hospital, doctors declared her dead, said Sadekur Rahman, inspector (investigation) of Panchlailsh Police Station.

The driver of the auto-rickshaw was also injured. He was being treated at the hospital, he also said, adding that the truck was seized but its driver fled.

REUTERS, Colombo

All Sri Lanka’s creditors will be treated equally in a planned restructuring of the country’s debt, its central bank governor said yesterday, adding that he expected progress in talks with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the next two months.

Sri Lanka has already missed coupon repayments on some of its bonds and its bailout discussions with the IMF include a possible bridge loan, Governor Nandalal Weerasinghe said.

## All creditors will be treated equally Says Sri Lankan central bank