

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.

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.

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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.

The passing of an icon

FROM PAGE 1
demise of Muhith who served as finance minister three times since the country's independence.

In a statement, the foreign affairs ministry said Muhith's first namaz-e-janaza will be held at Gulshan's Azad Mosque at 10:30am today and the second one at 11:30am at the Sangsad Plaza.

His body will be taken to the Central Shaheed Minar at noon for the public to pay their last respects.

Later, he will be laid to rest in Sylhet.

Muhith wore many hats. He was a finance minister, economist, diplomat, freedom fighter, language movement veteran, a writer and a historian.

Muhith, who placed the national budget for a record 12 times – 10 times during the tenures of Awami League government and 2 during HM Ershad's rule – said that Bangladesh's development process was well on track.

"The country is doing better, a lot of works in being done and as a result, development is taking place," said Muhith in an interview with The Daily Star.

He was born on January 25 in 1934 in Sylhet. He joined the civil service in 1956.

Muhith held important positions in the public service and was the first diplomat of the Washington Embassy of Pakistan who transferred his allegiance to Bangladesh during the Liberation War.

He also played a vital role in drumming up the world's support for Bangladesh. Muhith was conferred with Swadhinata Puroskar, the highest civilian award, in 2016 for his contribution to

the Liberation War.

After Bangladesh's victory, he also worked as secretary of planning and secretary of the External Resources Division of the finance and the planning ministry. He took early retirement in 1981 and worked with different international organisations as a consultant.

He served as finance and planning minister from March 1982 to December 1983. A pioneer in environment movement, Muhith was also the founder president of BAPA established in 2000.

Muhith, along with others, also founded a political party, Gano Forum, in the early 1990s. Later, he joined the Awami League in 2001.

He was elected a member of parliament in 2009 and in 2014 from his constituency in Sylhet. He was made finance minister in 2009 and 2014 during the tenures of the AL government.

During Muhith's stint as finance minister, the country witnessed a significant increase in budget size and steady growth.

Smoother than expected

FROM PAGE 1
said Alamgir Kabir, joint director of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA).

The authorities fined owners of four launches Tk 62,000 each for carrying passengers on the roof, he added.

According to transport experts, amid Covid restrictions, around 60 lakh people left Dhaka during Eid in 2020 and 2021. With the drop in Covid cases, the number of people leaving Dhaka this year would be at

Hope back after Covid horror

FROM PAGE 1
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 Bangladeshi 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, Bangladeshi expatriates in different Western and Arab countries are "relieved" now compared to their "tensed" situation amid the pandemic in the past two years.

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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 Bangladeshi 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

to travel from Dhaka to 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 Ataur Rahman, in-charge of Tangail's Elega 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.

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

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

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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.

'Please show him arrested'

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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.

50 killed

FROM PAGE 1
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.