

## Kyiv moves closer to grain exports

### Coordination centre to oversee UN-backed deal opens in Istanbul

AFP, Kyiv

Ukraine said yesterday it had restarted operations at its blockaded Black Sea ports as it moved closer to resuming grain exports with the opening of a coordination centre to oversee a UN-backed deal.

Progress towards fulfilling the landmark agreement came as Kyiv's artillery struck a key bridge in Moscow-controlled territory in south Ukraine, damaging an important supply route as Ukrainian forces look to wrest back the Kherson region.

German authorities said Russia's state giant Gazprom drastically cut gas deliveries to Europe via the Nord Stream pipeline to about 20 percent of capacity in a move decried in the EU as revenge for Western sanctions over the invasion.

Ukraine and Russia last week agreed a plan with the help of Turkey and the United Nations to allow grain stranded by Moscow's naval blockade to be exported from three ports.

## BARAPUKURIA MINE

### Coal production resumes after three months

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinaipur

Production at Barapukuria Coal Mining Company Limited (BCMCL) resumed yesterday after three months.

The authorities suspended coal production on April 30 for development work.

Officials hope that coal produced at the mine will be a relief for the 525MW Barapukuria Coal-Fired Power Plant, which has been facing a shortage of coal.

Saiful Islam Sarkar, the new managing director of Barapukuria Coal Mining Company Limited, said production would continue for the next seven days on a trial basis.

Production would bump up after a week, he said, adding that all of the coal would be supplied to the power plant.

Around 2.5 lakh tonnes of coal were at the stockyard when production was suspended. The stock came down to just 60,000 tonnes at the beginning of this month as the power plant has been regularly taking coal from the stockyard.

As coal production was supposed to resume at the end of August, the power plant, which needs over 3,000 tonnes every day, would have run out of coal.



A firefighter works in a field, which burns after a military strike, as Russia's attack on Ukraine continues, in Mykolaiv region, Ukraine, in this handout picture released yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## ROAD CRASH ON HIGHWAYS

### Transport leaders for curbs on bikes

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Transport leaders yesterday called for restrictions on motorbike operations on highways in a bid to reduce the number of road crashes – a major concern over the past years.

Shajahan Khan and Mashiur Rahman Ranga, two top transport leaders, briefed reporters after a meeting at the Secretariat yesterday.

However, the taskforce, led by Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal, did not take a final decision in this regard, meeting sources said.

The taskforce was formed in October 2019 to implement 111 recommendations, given by a committee led by Shajahan Khan, to curb road crashes and bring discipline in the road transport sector.

Yesterday's was the taskforce's fifth meeting.

The proposal came at a time when authorities, citing safety concerns, are taking stricter steps against bike operations.

The Bangladesh Bridge Authority earlier banned bikes on Padma Bridge.

Moreover, bike movement on highways were restricted for a week (from July 7 to July 13), aiming to ensure road safety during the Eid rush.

Besides, a government probe committee has recently recommended banning bikes on national highways as they noticed a sharp rise in accidents involving bikes

ahead of this year's Eid-ul-Fitr.

For the lack of public services and rise in bus fares, many people resorted to using two-wheelers to go home ahead of Eid. But the huge number of bikes caused more accidents, different road safety organisations said.

More than 35 lakh bikes have been registered with Bangladesh Road Transport Authority so far. But many unregistered bikes still operate unchecked across the country.

Many bike riders and users alleged that the decision was taken due to pressure from the bus owners.

After yesterday's meeting, Shajahan Khan, president of Bangladesh Road Transport Workers' Federation, said motorcycles account for around 40 percent of road accidents in the country.

Shajahan, also a lawmaker of ruling Awami League, said ride-sharing services by bikes are also dangerous.

"The number of fatal road accidents will come down if we control motorcycle [movement]."

Contacted, Ranga, president of Bangladesh Road Transport Owners' Association and also a Jatiya party lawmaker, said he has pressed for the non-operation of ride-sharing bikes on inter-district routes.

About how ride-sharing service bikes would be recognised, he suggested having separate number plates and licences for them.

However, at least three participants of the meeting said although they have talked about ride-sharing services by bikes and recent accidents, no concrete decision against bike movement was taken.

Meanwhile, ABM Amin Ullah Nuri, secretary of the Road Transport and Highway Division, said the meeting decided to fix an economic lifeline of commercial vehicles to ensure safety and scrap those after expiry.

Another participant said the meeting mulled over fixing a 20-year lifeline for buses and 25 years for trucks.

"However the decision would become a government order after Buet experts give their opinions regarding it and a guideline is finalised in this regard."

Meanwhile, prominent road safety campaigner Ilias Kanchan, also a member of the taskforce, said the transport leaders often dominate the meeting and talk about their own issues, which are discussed all the time.

He said he and two other Buet experts were asked to join the meeting virtually, while transport leaders were allowed to join in person.

The meeting discussed several decisions taken previously, including taking action against illegal driving schools, giving appointment letters to transport workers, and increasing the number of centres for conducting dope tests before issuing professional driving licences.

## Former JCD leader arrested in DSA case

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

A Sunamganj court yesterday sent a former Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal leader to jail in a case filed under the Digital Security Act.

A local Awami League leader filed the case, accusing Emdadur Rahman Chowdhury Sami, 29, a former vice-president of Chhatak upazila JCD, of defaming lawmaker Muhibur Rahman Manik on Facebook.

Sami was arrested in Sylhet hours before he was sent to jail, said Mohammad Mahbubur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Chhatak Police Station.

The DSA case was filed on Tuesday night by Ishtiaque Ahmed Tanvir, member of the convening committee of Chhatak Municipality Awami League.

Ishtiaque said Sami had made false, derogatory and defamatory posts on Facebook about the MP.

## 5 more die from Covid

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Five people died from coronavirus in the last 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, read a DGHS press release.

According to the Directorate General of Health Services, 626 fresh Covid-19 cases were recorded during this time. The positivity rate was 6.83 percent.

With the latest count, the total number of fatalities now stands at 29,280 and the total cases at 2,003,570.

Of the dead, three were males. One each was aged between 61 and 70, and 71 and 80 while three were aged between 81 and 90.

## Man to walk gallows for killing woman

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

A Thakurgaon court yesterday sentenced a man to death for killing a woman in 2012.

The convict, Mofijul Islam, 33, was also fined Tk 1 lakh.

District and Sessions Judge Mamunur Rashid delivered the verdict.

Mofijul was accused of stabbing his neighbour Jasna Begum, 23, to death in front of her children after the victim refused to have an affair with him.

## Pair of new studies point to natural Covid origin

AFP, Washington

An animal market in China's Wuhan really was the epicenter of the Covid pandemic, according to a pair of new studies in the journal Science published Tuesday that claimed to have tipped the balance in the debate about the virus' origins.

Answering the question of whether the disease spilled over naturally from animals to humans, or was the result of a lab accident, is viewed as vital to averting the next pandemic and saving millions of lives.

The first paper analyzed the geographic pattern of Covid cases in the outbreak's first month, December 2019, showing the first cases were tightly clustered around Wuhan's Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market.

## Family planning paying dividends

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females, there are 98.04 males or the country has 1,634,382 more females than males.

Officials and experts said this could be due to continuous rise in life expectancy and survival rate of women at birth. They also said it is not an isolated case for Bangladesh, rather women population is on the rise across the world.

"The other reason is that maternal mortality rate has declined," Dr Rob said.

Another important aspect of this census is that the population of other religious communities except for Muslims decreased in the country.

The ratio of Hindu population stands at 7.95 percent of the total population, according to the latest census while it was 8.54 percent in 2011.

Compared to the 2011 census, the Hindu population has decreased by 0.59 percent in this census. In the

country's first census conducted in 1974, the Hindus accounted for 13.5 percent of the population.

Asked about the decline in the Hindu population, Prof Mainul said there are two reasons – one is migration and the other is the lower fertility rate in the Hindu community. Lower fertility means Hindu couples have relatively less children.

Dr Rob too pointed out migration as a major reason. "Members of the Hindu community are feeling insecure and migrating to other countries," he said.

The biggest change took place in the urban population size. Of the population, 31.51 percent lives in urban areas while it was 23.30 percent in the previous census.

"Urbanisation is taking place rapidly. People are moving to urban areas but the urban setting, especially the healthcare system, is not ready to accommodate them. So special attention should be given to

this aspect," Dr Rob said.

Project Director Dildar Hossain said features such as declining growth rate, increasing literacy rate and sanitation are very encouraging but special attention should be given to the fact that the aged population is gradually increasing.

Both Mainul and Dildar said the population data will be finalised through post enumeration check which will take a few months to complete.

In the latest census, the percentage of aged population is 5.88.

The Population and Housing Census started simultaneously on June 15 across the country. The census was supposed to end on June 21, but due to floods in the north-eastern districts, the deadline was extended till June 28 in those districts.

The population density has increased to 1,119 people per square kilometre which was 976 in the last census of 2011.

motorcycles and more than Tk 3,000 to cars.

Md Abu Saleh Iqbal, managing director of Padma, said the filling station authorities have been asked to respond to the notice immediately.

At the BPC press conference, ABM Azad said the move to keep fuel pumps closed once a week is also not final. "No decision will be taken until it is confirmed that it [the move] will reduce the use of fuel at all."

According to filling station employees in the capital, after the government's decision to introduce load shedding and temporarily stop running diesel-fired power plants on July 18, the demand for diesel for personal generators increased.

"We had to provide 2,000 to 3,000 litre extra diesel to our known users,"

said the employee of a pump that sells around 17,000-20,000 litres a day.

The energy and mineral resources division yesterday issued a clarification to the media, saying that another 2,18,000 tonnes of diesel will arrive in eight vessels in August. A total of 25,000 tonnes of octane and 25,000 tonnes of jet fuel will come in two other vessels the same month.

"We have the next six months' plan to import fuel, with half of the amount under different government to government contracts," said the clarification.

The clarification urged people to use "subsidised" fuel with austerity.

According to the BPC chairman, as the fuel price in the international market is decreasing, the daily loss of BPC is now Tk 67 crore, which was Tk 100 crore a day last month.

## Forex reserves enough for 6-9 months'

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to take steps to grow more crops in order to save foreign currencies and hold the reserves for any emergency.

Noting that the reserve was about \$3.8 billion in 2006 during the BNP's rule, the PM said her government was able to raise the figure to \$48 billion from \$7 billion in 2009.

She said Bangladesh had to spend huge amounts of foreign currencies from the reserve to import materials for development works, capital machinery for industries as well as Covid vaccines, testing kits and other Covid materials.

Taking a swipe at the government's critics over forex reserve and energy, Hasina, also the AL president, questioned why they don't see the development activities.

She said the government continued providing a huge subsidy, raised the per capita income of the people and has been able to retain the GDP growth.

The government also kept its promise of reaching electricity to every house, she said, adding that many developed countries, however, were now taking austerity measures over the use of energy.

"We also have to take precautionary measures so that we do not run into a great danger.... We have taken steps

for limited use of electricity, but it doesn't mean that we don't have any energy or it is running out."

Mentioning that it is true that Bangladesh needs to procure diesel, Hasina said the country doesn't import petrol and octane as these are extracted as byproducts in gas production.

"We've much more petrol and octane than our demands. We can also sell these sometimes."

The AL chief said, "We have some so-called wise men who at times talk about many things. But I don't know whether they have any knowledge about many matters."

She alleged that those people want to mislead the general people talking back and forth.

Hasina said many intellectuals write on many topics and an economist wrote about the Padma Bridge construction saying that it was built unnecessarily as it would not be a profitable one.

She said the economist, in his article, questioned who would use the bridge and also raised an objection to the installation of rail tracks in it as the people of the southern region travel by launches.

"I doubt how much they know Bangladesh and I don't know whether they have ever visited the southern

region."

Hasina said there is an organisation that finds everything bad. The 2007 caretaker government put something in their brain that stops them from liking a healthy democratic trend to continue in the country, and they also don't see the country progressing.

"If an unusual government is there in the country, their values get increased. They think they are wise and they can do everything," she said.

Citing that many conspiracies continue to interrupt the progress of Bangladesh, the PM said she believes that this progress can't be halted no matter how many conspiracies are hatched.

"Bangladesh is progressing at an irresistible pace and In Sha Allah, we'll continue moving forward," she added.

Hasina asked the Swetchhasebak League leaders and activists to highlight the development activities and successes of the government before the people.

She also thanked Swetchhasebak League men for their volunteer works during the recent floods and Covid-19 vaccination campaign.

At the function, a cake was cut to celebrate the birthday of PM's son and ICT affairs adviser Sajeeb Wazed.

## Ex-OC Pradeep gets 20yrs in jail

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concerned to confiscate the assets owned by the couple.

The accused were at the courtroom when the verdict was read out. They multiple lawyers present there. They were sent to jail afterwards.

Public Prosecutor Mahmudul Hasan said under the ACC act, Chumki was sentenced to one year in prison and fined Tk 1 lakh, defaulting which would result in an additional month in jail; under another section

of the same act, both Pradeep and Chumki were sentenced to eight years; under the money laundering act, both were sentenced to 10 years in prison and fined Tk 4 crore, defaulting which would result in an additional two years in jail; under Corruption Prevention Act, the couple were sentenced to two years in jail and fined Tk 10,000, defaulting which would result in an additional two months in jail.

The sentences would be executed

concurrently, he added.

OC Pradeep's lawyer Shamir Das Gupta told reporters that his clients were innocent and he would appeal against the verdict at the High Court.

Earlier this year, a court sentenced Pradeep to death for killing Maj (ret'd) Sinha Rashed Khan.

The corruption case was filed by ACC Assistant Director Riaz Uddin. They were accused of amassing about Tk 3.95 crore through illegal means.