



P5
Bhairab struggling for survival



P10
Winning over the audience, one smile at a time



WR1
Unbearable burden on unemployed youth



WR4
SATIRE Can this new phone erase her memories?



Thick smoke from re-rolling mills fills the sky in Narayanganj's Kanchpur near the Dhaka-Chattogram highway. Public health risks are increasing at an alarming rate in the country as factories remain a major source of air pollution. The photo was taken on Wednesday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Workers' lives on the edge

Low-paid industrial workers find it hard to make a living

MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN and SHAHEEN MOLLAH

Purchasing power of factory workers in the capital and its outskirts has fallen sharply amid surging inflation.

As prices of essentials soar, the workers are forced to buy less and dip into savings to support everyday expenditure.

Moreover, the workers who used to get paid for working overtime are seeing their monthly earnings shrink because small garment factories and other industrial units are producing less due to frequent power outages.

"I used to earn around Tk 12,000 a month with the overtime. We rely heavily on overtime. But due to load-shedding, we have to pause our production for several hours every day. And there is no overtime," said Sharif, a garment factory worker in Gazipur.

He added that his monthly earning has been around Tk 9,000 for the last three months.

"I have stopped buying almost all the non-essential items and am still finding it hard to make ends meet," said the man in his early 30s.

His sister Sumaiya Begum and her daughter live with him in his shanty in Kashimpur area of Gazipur city.

"We recently stopped having breakfast. We take the day's first meal at lunch. I used to give my daughter a glass of milk or an egg every two days. Now, we do this once a week at most. We have also reduced buying medicines for our ailing mother," she told The Daily Star.

Similar stories of hardship were heard from many industry workers.

HUNGER AND UNCERTAIN FUTURE

Kod Banu, cleaner of a printing mill in the capital's

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A forest faces further forays

LGED kept forest dept in dark about its plan to build road thru Ramu reserve forest

SIFAYET ULLAH, Ctg

The Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) has taken an initiative to build a 5km road through the Ramu reserve forest, a move that forest officials and environmentalists say will bring disaster.

LGED's Cox's Bazar office prepared a draft proposal involving Tk 22 crore for the planned road to connect Ramu upazila with Cox's Bazar city at the Marine Drive along the sea beach.

But the LGED neither did an environmental assessment nor obtained permission from the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change to build the road through the heart of the reserve forest.

In a letter, the Forest Department warned the LGED against the move, and the initiative has since been put on hold.

The draft proposal, yet to be submitted for approval,

Municipality mayor, two others shot by criminals

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Three people, including the Bariarhat municipality mayor, were injured after being shot by unidentified criminals in Chattogram's Mirsarai upazila yesterday.

The injured are Mayor Rezaul Karim Khokon, also an Awami League leader, another party leader Ashok Sen and Jubo League leader Shaheed Khan Dukhu.

Their family members said criminals opened fire at the mayor in Muhuri Prakaipa area around 11:30am when he was visiting a site for business purpose. Ashok and Shaheed were accompanying him.

Locals later rescued the three and rushed them to Mirsarai Upazila Health Complex. They were later moved to Chattogram Medical College Hospital.

This newspaper could not reach Noor Hossain Mamun, officer-in-charge of Joraganj Police Station and Inspector (investigation) Khairul Alam for comments as they did not pick up the phone.

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Farmers kick-start a freshwater machine

A ground-breaking research quantifies vast groundwater reservoir across Bangladesh that can revolutionise food production



SYED ASHFAQUH HAQUE

Water is everywhere in and around Bangladesh, yet the lack of freshwater is one of its most pressing concerns.

On the surface of this largest river delta on the planet, the abundance of water is facing serious threats of pollution, river encroachment, flooding, and diversion or obstruction of common river waters by India and China. And beneath the surface, there develops a big hollow due to the overdraw of groundwater for irrigation and

industrialisation.

The scarcity of surface water, especially in the dry season, is gradually pushing Bangladesh to depend heavily on groundwater for supply to households, farms, and industries. While the water outlook for one of the most fertile soils in the world is getting grimmer, a highly-acclaimed research holds out a big hope for Bangladesh, dispelling the commonly-shared fear of the groundwater reserve getting drier every year, and a Jakarta-like

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GAIBANDHA-5 BY-POLLS
 Forced to write down election was free, fair

Allege over a dozen presiding officers

MOSTAFA SHABUJ from Gaibandha

A number of presiding officers have alleged that they were forced by ruling Awami League men to make written statements that Wednesday's voting in Gaibandha-5 by-polls was free and fair.

Some also claimed that local AL leaders and activists compelled them to write in the statements the figure of the total votes cast.

The Election Commission suspended the by-polls as the situation "went out of control" amid various irregularities.

At a press conference on Thursday, the EC held the local administration and presiding officers responsible for the irregularities.

Md Moshir Rahman, presiding officer of the Mathorpara Dakhil Madrasa polling station in Saghatapara upazila, said voting was suspended at the centre around 1:00pm because of the unlawful entry of AL men into secret booths.

He said when he was preparing to return to the Shaghatapara upazila complex, used as the office of the upazila election officer, some 200-300 locals barred him from leaving the polling station and demanded he declare the polls results.

"They started pressing me to write a

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comes only months after the government handed over 20 acres of the same reserve forest to the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) for building a residential training facility.

The handover on July 4 drew heavy criticism from environmentalists, who said the deal with BFF served a fresh blow to the fast-depleting forests in the region.

Now, if the government goes ahead with the road construction, it will mean felling of thousands of trees. It will also cause irreparable damages to wildlife habitats and elephant corridors, forest officials said.

The forest is a corridor and habitat for the endangered Asian Elephant in Cox's Bazar. It is also home to 117 tree species, 286 bird species and 26 mammal species including hoolock gibbon, leopard cat, fishing cat, tiger, Asian black bear, sloth bear and wild boar, according to Cox's Bazar Forest Department data.

"Construction of such a structure is prohibited under the Forest Act. They cannot do it without the consent of the Forest Department," Sarwar Alam, Divisional Forest officer of Cox's Bazar South Forest Department, told The Daily Star.

A joint study by the Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers' Association (BELA) and Youth Environment Society found 45,990 acres of the 260,046-acre forestland in Cox's Bazar have been illegally occupied by 43,568 people and 696 public and private organisations over the last decade.

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